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## The experiences of first-year school counselors from novice to expert

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THE EXPERIENCES OF FIRST YEAR SCHOOL COUNSELORS  
FROM NOVICE TO EXPERT

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska at Omaha  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Under the Supervision of Dr. Martha Bruckner, Ph.D.

by

Ann E. Luther

University of Nebraska at Omaha

Omaha, Nebraska

December, 2002

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DISSERTATION TITLE

The Experiences of First Year School Counselors

From Novice to Expert

BY

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THE EXPERIENCES OF FIRST YEAR SCHOOL COUNSELORS  
FROM NOVICE TO EXPERT

Ann E. Luther, Ed.D.

University of Nebraska at Omaha, 2002

Advisor: Dr. Martha Bruckner

This study described the common lived experience of 10 first year school counselors. This study explored the experiences within four areas: relationships with staff and students, graduate program training, skills implementation, and relationships with building and district administration. The phenomenology relied on an initial structured interview after eight weeks on the job as the main data source. Other data sources included participant journal entries, non-participant observations, veteran counselor contact logs, and a follow-up interview at the end of the school year. The data triangulation and constant comparative analysis resulted in common themes that described the essence of the common lived experience. There was a level of thoughtful processing and intentional behavior, requiring energy and effort, used to build relationships with staff. The congruence of the counselors' vision of the role with student expectations provided rich opportunities to meet students' needs. The graduate program provided a solid level of preparedness, but could not simulate the reality of the job. The participants identified a wide variety of counseling skills needed in the role and believed they were prepared. The counselors recognized the importance of the principals' understanding and support of the

comprehensive guidance program for implementation. The participants appreciated a high level of support and accessibility from several sources for responses to their questions, information, and a sense of “being on the right track.” The generalization of the described common lived experience of these participants is not the expectation of a phenomenological study. A further limitation may be the size of the district studied and the utilization of a comprehensive guidance program. The dual role of researcher as supervisor may have influenced the responses of participants, although the member check suggested that the study captured the essence of their experience.

Recommendations for practice included structured support for the novice counselor, the opportunity for an informal reflection process with the guidance supervisor, and well-defined program communication. Further research could enable other districts to determine the common lived experience of first year school counselors and add to the body of literature.

## Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Martha Bruckner for her expertise and encouragement in supervising this project. My sincere thanks is extended to Dr. Laura Schulte for her tireless efforts and enthusiasm throughout the research design class. The time and positive support shown by fellow committee members Dr. Tommie Radd and Dr. Larry Dlugosh resulted in this project being a professionally rewarding experience.

I am forever grateful to the 10 first year school counselors who allowed me to join with them in their first year counseling experience. Their trust, candor, dedication, and additional personal time provided the data that became the essence of their common lived experience. The veteran counselors who took time to serve in the role of contact are also appreciated. This project was undertaken in recognition of the demanding, yet crucial, work accomplished by all school counselors.

This work is dedicated to my parents, family, and friends who have always believed in me and supported me throughout this process. Their encouragement and love helped me complete this dissertation, and sustain me each day.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

It's not like I hadn't been warned. "There is no lonelier job in education." "You are the only one of you." The voice of my university professor echoed in my head – she had never seemed so right. I wandered around the building, I sat in my office, I listened to the buzz of first day of school activities going on in adjoining classrooms. My loneliness intensified as I remembered 19 first days of school in my various fifth grade classrooms. But this was my 20<sup>th</sup> year in education and my first day ever as an elementary school counselor. It was my Birthday – minus the Happy. I was the only one of me in the building. I felt alone. I was alone. Why had I ever left the classroom?

This describes my first day as an elementary school counselor in 1991. Fortunately the experience grew to become a professionally rewarding one, yet I wondered over the years how unique or universal my first day and year experience had been as I moved from novice to expert in the field of school counseling. Questions about the importance of the sense of isolation because most elementary counselors are the only person with that role in a building, whether a more defined counselor induction program would help, or simply what is it that first year counselors really need, had occasionally crossed my mind as new colleagues joined my district each year. The group was getting larger and it seemed, strangely enough, that increased the sense of isolation for those attempting to enter the group.

Seven years later I repeated my experience of a first year counselor, this time as a secondary school counselor. Some of the same frustrations of skill inadequacy were present, yet there was something uniquely different about the experience. I had six colleagues right beside me ready to assist or answer any question that I had. My mind wandered back to my initial experience in 1991 and the sense of loneliness that I had felt. How important is the isolation factor for elementary counselors? How different is the first year experience of elementary and secondary counselors? What is the impact of the number of years in education? Are the needs of first year counselors similar, or a very unique individual experience that would make an effective induction program difficult to develop?

School counselors are faced with increasingly complex situations, and are expected to immediately assume full responsibility for the counseling program in a school. This experience often occurs in isolation and with little support, and can lead to counselors feeling alone, and unhappy with the role (Anderson & Reiter, 1995; Boyd & Walker, 1975; Matthes, 1992; Napierkowski & Parsons, 1995; Peace, 1995; Shoffner & Williamson, 2000; Van Zandt & Perry, 1992).

### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to describe the themes that emerged from a phenomenological study of the experiences of novice school counselors. The purposeful sample included first year counselors working in a large metropolitan school district that had implemented a comprehensive-competency based

guidance program. The themes that emerged from this study may be used as the framework for the development of a counselor induction process.

The phenomenological tradition can be traced back to the work of Husserl and focuses on the search for the “essential, invariant structure (or essence) or central underlying meaning of the experience” (Creswell, 1998, p. 52).

Researchers conducting a phenomenological study approach the work with the suspension of all judgments about what is real, and also set aside all prejudgments by bracketing their experiences. The goal is to use all available information and observations to obtain a picture of the experience (Creswell, 1998). The heart of this research is finding the common themes within the lived common experiences of the purposeful sample. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) provide a postulate for this paradigm that suggests that there are multiple realities and that these realities can only be understood when an interconnectedness is recognized.

In this study the experiences, feelings, and thoughts of first year counselors as they moved from novice to expert became the “intentionality of consciousness” (Creswell, 1998, p. 53) that enabled the researcher to focus on the experience of others who lived the first year counselor experience. The intention of this study was to expand a knowledge base that enables counselor educators, counselor supervisors, and counselors themselves to enrich the experience of being a first year counselor. The preliminary review of the

literature suggested that the experience of isolation and uncertainty may not be uncommon.

The tasks of the researcher in a phenomenological study according to Creswell (1998) include:

- a. understanding the philosophical perspectives and the approaches of studying people experiencing a phenomenon.
- b. writing research questions that explore the meaning of that experience and asking the participants to describe their everyday lived experience.
- c. collecting data from individuals typically using long interviews.
- d. analyzing the data to create clusters of meanings or themes which are then tied together to make a general description of the experience.
- e. reporting an understanding of the experience recognizing a unifying meaning or essence.

The task of the researcher in this study was to remain objective and to maintain the concept of **epoche** throughout the study. Because this was a lived experience, my own preconceived ideas about the phenomenon of being a first year counselor remained bracketed (Creswell, 1998).

### Research Questions

The research question that guided this study was: What is the experience of a first year counselor? Due to the preliminary review of literature

and the experience of the researcher, the study evolved to include the following sub-questions:

- a. What would a description of your relationship with staff and students include?
- b. What is the impact of the graduate program in terms of preparation for the role?
- c. What are the skill sets needed to perform the job of school counselor?
- d. What would describe the types of support received from the administrator/supervisor?

### Theoretical Perspectives

Fuller's and Brown's (1975) theory of developmental stages suggests that all professionals move through a series of developmental stages. The initial developmental stage of a novice counselor is described using words such as isolated, frustrated, and confused. The available studies suggest that new counselors do move through the described developmental stages (Matthes, 1992; Peace, 1995; Stickel & Trimmer, 1994; Van Zandt & Perry, 1992).

The career stages theory of Schein (as cited in Peace, 1995) calls this the impressionable stage and states that the novice's initial influences and identifications have important consequences that impact the remainder of that person's career development. Many of the descriptors such as isolated, insecure, and frustrated are included in the "induction stage" of Schein's work in the field of career stages theory.

Scholars and theorists do agree that there are specific needs of novice counselors that are connected to the theories of developmental stages and career stages theory. An article on mentoring for new counselors suggests that “after the initial excitement of gainful employment, terror set in” (Stickel & Trimmer, 1994, p.102). These authors suggest that counseling is a field that lacks a systematic induction process and that novice counselors receive little support. Boyd and Walker (1975) compare a school counselor’s career to a cactus, stating that “both survive on a minimum of nutrients from the environment” (p.103). This reviewer believes that research needs to be conducted to determine the current state of new school counselors, and to determine what forms of induction strategies can be a source of “nutrients” for them. Therefore, this study endeavored to: (a) describe the experience of a first year counselor, (b) describe the process of moving from novice to expert, and (c) determine the salient features of effective counselor induction support.

### Definition of Terms

This study described a beginning counselor as a novice. A novice counselor is one new to the occupation, yet expected to assume the same responsibility as experienced members of the profession. Induction programs include supervision, demonstration, coaching, and corrective feedback by practitioners in real life situations. Counselor induction programs are designed to continue for the first 3 years of the school counselor’s employment.

A comprehensive school-counseling program is developmental, systematic, sequential, clearly defined, accountability driven, proactive, and preventive. It is aimed at helping students acquire and apply life-long learning skills in the areas of academic, career, and personal/social development.

### Limitations

A limitation of this study was the fact that I served both as researcher and supervisor of the participants. This dual role was openly discussed with possible participants prior to the beginning of the study. The protections provided for human subjects, with the emphasis that none of this was to be used for formal appraisal, should have minimized this limitation. The Comprehensive Guidance model is rather unique nationally. This may limit the generalizability of this study, however the conclusions were valuable in the development of a counselor induction program for our district. It was with excitement and enthusiasm that the phenomenological study of the first year experience of school counselors was undertaken.

### Significance of the Study

The review of literature found that little research had been completed on the first year experience of school counselors. Available data suggest that for many this is an experience defined as "trial by fire" including difficulties with relationships, feeling inadequate, and believing that they are unprepared for the job (Peace, 1995). The personal experience of this researcher was confirmed by these studies. The sense of isolation and "finding the way" created a desire to

be able to describe the first year counselor experience, find the common themes that mark the journey from novice to expert, and finally to develop an effective counselor induction program. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) suggest that the ultimate test of the trustworthiness of a study is whether we believe the findings strongly enough to act on them. It is my hope and desire that the themes that emerged from this study become the framework and foundation for a systematic and effective counselor induction program.

Schroeder (1998) reported that national counselor organization profiles of members show that many counselors are nearing retirement. This is particularly true in the area of secondary counselors. The themes that emerged from this study could prove significant for other districts that choose to provide an induction program for their new counselors. The limited research on counselor induction cites cost of time and funds as a component of an effective program. Building an effective program or process based on the real experiences and needs of beginning counselors described in this study may offer support to policymakers and those who seek approval for new programs within a district. Finally this study provided an opportunity for the needs of new counselors to be heard and addressed. The emotional toll of working in isolation and feeling ineffective lessened, the first year experience no longer a "trial by fire".

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

This literature review describes the current knowledge about the experiences of novice counselors and the induction programs to meet the needs of this group. The theories of developmental career stages, experienced by professionals, provide a perspective for the discussion of the issues confronting novice counselors and the important consequences of this career stage. The experiences of the novice counselor are organized around the complex situations and job expectations, the unique needs of novice counselors, and the feelings experienced during the first year on the job. The counselor induction program literature focuses on the examples of induction programs, support and supervision, and implications for administrators and supervisors.

#### The Experiences of a Novice Counselor

Anderson and Reiter (1995) describe school counselors as indispensable, and yet historically they have been asked to assume responsibilities and duties beyond their training and expertise. The school counseling profession has been referred to as an "invisible" one because teachers and administrators do not see much of the work that is done behind the scenes (Harrison, 1993, p.188). This section of the literature review discusses information about the various responsibilities expected of new counselors, their unique needs, and the feelings expressed. This literature is reviewed in the context of the developmental career stages theories.

### Developmental Career Stages

Fuller's and Brown's (1975) theory of developmental stages suggests that all professionals move through a series of developmental stages that include role confusion, professional isolation, and interpersonal conflicts. Counselors move from their preservice program, and often immediately assume full responsibility for the counseling program in a school. This process is described as a "precarious trial by fire experience" by Peace (1995, p.177). The counseling literature is just beginning to discuss issues pertaining to the adjustments and accommodations confronting novice counselors. Matthes (1992) provided an important contribution in directing attention to this professional development phase by analyzing the problems reported by new counselors. In an attempt to adjust to a new role that is frequently in conflict with their previous role as teachers, novice counselors sometimes experience ambivalence and uncertainty.

Schein's (as cited in Peace, 1995) career stages theory suggests that the impressionable stage, including the novice's initial influences and identifications, has lasting impact on the person's career development. New counselors, often in isolation, are thrust into situations in which they must professionally assert their skills and independence, yet only privately admit insecurities and need for support (VanZandt & Perry, 1992). Research suggests that the more assistance helping professionals receive in addressing their developmental needs, the less likely they might become victims of burnout (Cherniss, as cited in VanZandt &

Perry, 1992). In an attempt to adjust to a new role that is frequently in conflict with their previous role as teachers, novice counselors sometimes experience ambivalence and uncertainty (Matthes, 1992). Matthes' research of counselor induction suggests that for many new counselors the primary source of assistance is the principal. The research of the counselor induction in Maine by VanZandt and Perry (1992) suggests that the majority of the principals studied have little or no training related to counseling programs. This study states that many school counselors interviewed feel guilty about imposing on other school counselors, or fear they might be judged incompetent if advice is sought outside of a formal mentoring program. The induction period is typically a vulnerable time in any profession. The counseling literature is just beginning to discuss the developmental issues of novice counselors.

The developmental stages theory of Fuller and Brown proposes that common beliefs, feelings, and reactions may be experienced by novice counselors. Schein's career stages theory suggests long-term, career-impacting effects from the experiences during this impressionable stage. A review of the literature on novice counselors describes these experiences and results.

#### The Expected Role of a Novice Counselor

Counselors are faced with increasingly complex situations, and are expected to immediately assume full responsibility for the counseling program in a school. There has been a concerted effort to define and develop guidance and counseling programs at the graduate level that train school counselors in a

comprehensive guidance model (Gysbers & Henderson, 1994). Well-established program models are used to train school counselors to assume roles in guidance instruction, small group and individual counseling, consultation, and system support (Myrick, 1993). School administrators and teachers often have different views and expectations of the school counselor. Sometimes schools define the counselor's role as that of "quasi-administrator" (Napierkowski & Parsons, 1995, p. 365). Burnham and Jackson (2000) reported in a recent study that school counselors can spend from 1% to 88% of their time on nonguidance duties, depending on how the program is defined within the school system. Anderson and Reiter (1995) suggest that counselors, often defined as helpers, willingly join a staff and accept many non-guidance tasks. New counselors assume non-guidance duties too readily, and then express frustration and dissatisfaction when the reality of the job does not match their training (Miller, 1988).

School counselors are encouraged to emerge from the supportive and quasi-administrative roles and dynamically demonstrate the importance of guidance and counseling for the academic success of all students (Burnett, 1993). At the same time there has been little coursework devoted to teaching counselors how to implement the desired comprehensive guidance program. A school resists change and a new counselor is often faced with a "culture of maintenance" (Napierkowski & Parsons, 1995, p. 365). When a new counselor arrives at a school that does not embrace the well-defined comprehensive

guidance model, the counselor must find creative ways to implement the desired changes in his or her role, and yet remain supportive of the goals of the school. For many new counselors the idea of effecting change within a school building or system may be frustrating and upsetting (Napierkowski & Parsons, 1995). The authors suggest that new counselors must become knowledgeable, skilled, and ethical in the process of defining and implementing an effective school counseling program.

Anderson and Reiter (1995) report that beginning counselors must establish and work from a strong guidance program base. This well-defined program along with seven suggested personal characteristics are essential for the counselor to be effective in contributing to the academic success of all students. The seven characteristics include humanness, professionalism, expertise as a program creator, team player, facilitator, public relations expert, and futurist. The authors view these characteristics as essential if counselors are to meet the demands of students and society during the 21<sup>st</sup> century. School counselors should be prepared to implement a program that addresses student concerns and school problems, and also be equally skilled in working in a collaborative manner with school principals (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000).

Although the role of the school counselor to provide individual counseling to students consumes only about 10% of the counselor's time in the comprehensive models, the skill sets required are important (Myrick, 1993). Patterson (1988) suggests that a counselor must have competence to listen and

build relationships, collect information, generalize responses, and help the student to formulate a goal or plan. This can be a difficult adjustment for new counselors who, prior to being hired as school counselors, have only practiced these skills in a laboratory situation. The beginning counselor learns that a real counseling session is different from the interview stages practiced in graduate school classes. New counselors must learn to attend automatically, to habitually listen with empathy, to focus on goals naturally, and to problem-solve with ease (Patterson, Rak, Chermonte, & Roper, 1992).

The literature review finds that the novice counselor enters a complex situation no matter what the expectations or current situation. The counselor may need to define a program where expectations are more quasi-administrative, or automatically and professionally assume the varied roles and characteristics demanded in the comprehensive competency based guidance model. For either extreme, and the many possibilities between, the novice counselor is expected to fully assume the responsibilities of the guidance program within the school. With this unique role comes several unique needs.

#### The Unique Needs of the Novice Counselor

The limited research on beginning counselors suggests that there are unique needs within this group. These needs include supervision while implementing the guidance and counseling program, and the opportunity to develop a positive working relationship with the building principal.

The literature suggests that there is a lack of sustained and systematic assistance available for novice counselors after they leave their preservice training (Roberts & Borders, 1994). The authors explain that school counselors need ongoing supervision to help them define their program, refine their skills, and learn to deal with difficult student issues. Boyd and Walker (1975) noted that "supervision for the school counselor is in short supply, and much of what passes for supervision is actually administration" (p. 103). Twenty years later the literature suggests that little has changed. Coll and Freeman (1997) reported that role confusion is an issue for counselors and principals, especially when a counselor arrives at a school that has defined perceptions related to various counselor roles.

School counselors want and need regular and organized supervision, yet this is rarely a reality (Roberts & Borders, 1994). The authors report that counselors spend a majority of their time in counseling and consulting within a comprehensive competency based program, but receive the least amount of supervision for those activities. Some counselors report seeking supervision and input for professional development on their own. The results of the Roberts' and Borders' study indicated that novice school counselors' preferences for supervision are often not in alignment with their job reality. The authors concluded that more effort needs to be given to finding innovative ways to provide ongoing supervision and support for beginning counselors.

Supervision for many novice counselors is provided by well-meaning administrators who have little or no training related to guidance and counseling (VanZandt & Perry, 1992). The authors proposed a possible answer to the challenge of meeting the personal and professional development needs of novice counselors by suggesting a state-wide mentoring program. VanZandt's and Perry's work states that the first year for most counselors is often marked with incidents that cause them to lament that the graduate program did not fully prepare them for the reality of the job. Matthes (1992) suggests that the reality is that the beginning counselor is confronted with a "sink-or-swim situation" no matter what the focus or quality of the graduate program (p. 245).

Brock and Ponec (1998) state that the teamwork among professionals in a school, and especially the relationship between the principal and the beginning counselor, is critical for the successful implementation of a comprehensive guidance program. They summarize the results of a later study by suggesting that the development of mutual trust and communication, maintenance of support, and a clear understanding of the counselor role by the principal and the counselor are necessities (Ponec & Brock, 2000).

The literature suggests that little support is given to counselors as they confront and adapt to their new role. At a time when supervision is most critical for the implementation of a program and refinement of skills, there is little in the way of formal supervision from a professional with counselor training. The principal is often thrust into the role of supervision with little or no training. This

situation may complicate and confuse the critical relationship that the literature reports needs to develop between the principal and the counselor. Education is one of the few professions in society in which novice members are expected to assume the same responsibilities as experienced members of the profession. Novice counselors are expected to assume these responsibilities without the support and supervision that the literature suggests that they need.

### The Feelings of a Novice Counselor

New counselors are thrust into situations in which they must professionally assert their skills while feeling insecure and in need of support. Many new counselors feel guilty about imposing on other school counselors with questions that they believe must be trivial. Sometimes novice counselors do not seek assistance because of a fear that they might be perceived as incompetent (VanZandt & Perry, 1992). The authors state that many new counselors begin their careers in isolated surroundings and, therefore, do not have a readily available source for questions or requests. The concept of isolation is a common theme in the literature about the feelings of the novice counselor.

The isolation of the novice counselor stems from the fact that in many situations, especially in elementary schools, the counselor is the only one in the building with that particular role. It is generally accepted that counselors, like other professionals, move through a series of developmental career stages (Fuller & Brown, 1975). Many of the needs of novice counselors are developmental in nature, and in the beginning stages of role development and

implementation of a program counselors are often dependent and imitative (VanZandt & Perry, 1992). There are no adjustments in the responsibilities; and frequently no mentors assigned, no colleagues available, no supervisory assistance in place (Matthes, 1992). Novice counselors experience both internal conflict about their ability to perform the job, and feelings of confusion about what that job really is. External conflict can arise as they strive to become independent of what supervision does exist. These early stages are critical for new counselors because the more assistance received in addressing their developmental needs, the less likely they are to leave the profession (VanZandt & Perry, 1992).

The literature states that often supervision for novice counselors is provided by administrators who have little or no formal training in guidance and counseling (Matthes, 1992; Peace, 1995; VanZandt & Perry, 1992). Matthes (1992) provided the most definitive study of the isolation factor for novice counselors. Novice counselors in isolation reported a greater number of problems in implementing the program and performing their duties than those counselors receiving professional support. The stress that novice counselors experienced was frequently magnified by professional isolation. The conclusion of Matthes' study stated that the contributions that a school counselor might make by implementing a comprehensive guidance program are diminished by professional isolation. When the primary sources of support and developmental imitation are administrators and teachers with little understanding of a

comprehensive guidance program or the role of the counselor, the graduate program training can be negated after 1 year. The novice counselor, instead, adopts teachers and administrators as his or her primary professional referents and the school counselor's role becomes redefined and segmented.

This lack of supervision and clearly defined support during the impressionable stage of the novice counselor has many negative effects on the individual. Peace (1995) identified magnified counselor stress, high attrition rates, and eroded skill development acquired during counselor preparation as possible effects of novice counselor isolation. Crutchfield and Borders (1997) found that lack of supervision increases stress and that workloads, that in reality are difficult, can become overwhelming. Novice counselors then begin feeling overworked, alone, and unhappy with the decision to become a school counselor.

Boyd and Walker (1975) provided the analogy of the novice counselor and the cactus as both surviving on minimal nutrients. Roberts and Borders (1994) reported that many authors over the years have echoed the same warning, yet little organized and ongoing support for or supervision of novice counselors exists. As a result many novice counselors are left in a state of confusion, frustration, and isolation. Logan (1997) captured some of the questions being asked by many novice counselors each day:

So the question becomes, where do we go for our guidance and support? What do you do when you need material on subjects you have never presented before? . . . What do you do when you have tried everything you can think of with a student without results? Who is your sounding board for legal and ethical questions? Where can you go when you want feedback without fear of reflection on your job performance evaluation? (p. 4)

The literature suggests that the negative feelings of the novice counselor can have a direct and negative impact on the quality of the guidance program implemented within the school. The sense of professional isolation and lack of supervision from a professional counselor are two key components that are often identified problems in guidance and counseling programs within schools or districts. The literature suggests that it is very difficult for a novice counselor to function effectively in isolation with minimal support or quality supervision.

### Summary

The developmental career stages theories suggest that the novice counselor, as any other professional, experiences both personal and professional needs during this first critical year. This impressionable stage requires a source for imitation and assistance, yet this does not exist for many novice counselors. Instead they are expected to fully assume the responsibilities of the school counselors and fully implement the program with the skills of an expert counselor.

The majority of novice counselors are completing graduate programs that embrace the comprehensive competency based guidance program model. The counselors are graduating with skills to deliver comprehensive programs, yet still need support and guidance during the implementation stage. Instead many novice counselors are thrust into situations where administrators and teachers have very different perceptions of the school counselor's role. Little is provided in the way of support or assistance to novice counselors as they seek to implement the program they have come to understand and embrace into a school culture that might be resistant to change.

One of the most unique needs of the novice counselor is in the area of supervision. Even though years of literature suggest that school counselors need ongoing supervision from a trained professional counselor, this void still exists for many novice counselors. Often the supervision comes from the school principal who has little or no training in guidance and counseling. This lack of understanding of the counselor's role in a comprehensive guidance program, and the promoting of a more quasi-administrative counselor role, may create a dilemma for the new counselor. The literature states that a solid working relationship with the principal is important, yet at what cost. Should the novice counselor hold firm to the professional beliefs about what a counseling program can be? Should the novice counselor become a team player and allow the role to be defined by administration and staff? How can the counselor instead

articulate the role of the counselor in a comprehensive model and develop a solid working relationship with administration and staff?

The literature suggests that novice counselors have difficulty answering these questions while working in isolation. This creates both internal and external conflicts for the novice counselor. Stress increases along with a belief that the job of the school counselor is simply too overwhelming. The result can be that within 1 year the skills developed during the graduate program of studies are negated, and the counselor instead assumes a variety of disconnected roles and services.

The Boyd and Walker (1975) article is referenced in the works of other authors in the 25 years that followed. The guidance and counseling profession recognizes the demands placed on novice counselors and the unique needs of this group. The question, "How as a counseling profession can we continue to allow novice counselors to face an identified difficult situation?", has caused some counselors and school districts to develop more systematic and effective counselor induction programs. The review of the literature that describes current induction and supervision efforts summarizes the progress being made to assist first year counselors as they move from novice to expert.

### Novice Counselor Induction Programs

Although new counselors state the need for support and supervision, the research provides limited examples of induction programs that include these components for novice counselors. This section of the literature review includes information about the most common counselor induction programs. These include mentoring programs, clinical supervision, and peer consultation. The literature review concludes with implications and considerations for administrators and supervisors working with novice counselors.

#### Mentoring Programs

The initial developmental stage of a novice counselor is described using words such as isolated, frustrated, and confused. The literature suggests that if professional support and supervision are not available, then novice counselors adopt teachers and administrators as their primary role referents. Professional counselors and supervisors are developing and implementing counselor induction programs within a more deliberate process. Mentoring programs, most often used in education for beginning teachers, are cited in the literature as one method for counselor induction.

Mentoring program components. Mentoring is not a new concept. Lasley (1996) recalls that Odysseus, King of Ithaca, required his friend, Mentor, to raise his son Telemachus so that he could assume the throne. During this relationship, Telemachus grew in wisdom and ability as Mentor was able to influence and be influenced. Although there appears to be a consensus on what

a mentor is, Pollack (1995) suggests there has been no consistency in the way mentoring is defined. Morzinski and Fisher (1996) use a definition that captures the components of the reviewed mentoring programs, "... more experienced employees are paired with those less experienced to pass along certain skills or help the new employees understand written and unwritten codes of organizational behavior" (p. 43). A mentor can help the mentee learn about the organization's culture and better understand the workings of the organization.

Based on an extensive review of the literature on formal mentoring programs Morzinski and Fisher (1996) provide a four stage outline for successful formal mentoring programs. These stages include:

1. *Pre-program context stage*: involves the assessment of local needs, objectives, and organizational support.
2. *Program design stage*: includes the clarification of the characteristics of mentors and protégés with careful consideration given to the pairing, the assessment of program duration, expected activities, and the decision about recognition and rewards.
3. *Implementation stage*: involves the evaluation and monitoring of program activities and costs, and the obtaining of feedback from the stakeholders regarding needed program revisions.
4. *Product evaluation stage*: involves the collecting of descriptions and judgments about the program's planned and unplanned outcomes.

This review of literature finds three current studies on mentoring programs in Dissertation Abstracts International. Montesano (1998) suggests that there are four key variables in the design and implementation of formal mentoring programs. These include the structure of the program itself, the school/district environments, the people selected to become involved in the program, and the support the program receives. The need for a large number and diversity of mentor functions to maintain mentor interpersonal flexibility for the duration of the program is a finding of Weinstein (1998). The third dissertation abstract, which focuses on the mentor/mentee relationship component, suggests that the relationship is a richly complex interaction between two individuals and is a key factor to consider in program development and ongoing evaluation (Lewis, 1998).

The conclusions of Morzinski and Fisher (1996) about formal mentoring programs include the statement that these programs appear to present promising opportunities for new employee training and organizational development. The article further reports that the number of formal mentoring programs has increased during this decade. Jacobi (as cited in Morzinski & Fisher, 1996) shows that formal mentoring programs have little in common. Some favor training of mentors while others do not, some assign mentors/mentees while others do not, some programs prescribe expected meeting frequency while others do not, and some have evaluation while others presume agreement on goals and process.

This review of literature does include some articles that focus on informal mentoring, and compare and contrast it with the formal mentoring approach. Scandura (1998) suggests that any formalized mentoring program should allow for both mentor and mentee input into the matching process and some mechanism for exit if the assigned mentoring relationship does not work. Vande Merkt (1997) reports in studying business organizations that the selection procedures for mentoring processes range from unstructured to forced matching. The results of the study state that both formal and informal mentoring relationships should be encouraged, but that no participation should be required.

Morzinski and Fisher (1996) suggest that there is a need for evaluation during the implementation stage and also product evaluation at the conclusion of the mentoring program. During the implementation stage, evaluation can include program monitoring, input for program improvement, assessment of those revisions, and cost monitoring. During the analysis of 18 reported formal mentoring programs, these researchers reported that none of the studies included all of these evaluation components. Product evaluation was used to gather and report both the intended and unintended outcome measurements to determine what the program had accomplished. This evaluation stage can include measuring participant reactions, learning behavior change, impact on the career development of participants, and impact on the organization. The findings on this type of evaluation showed that only one study included all components.

Mentoring programs for counselors. The literature review includes descriptions of mentoring programs for counselors and factors that impact the success of mentoring programs. Patterson (1989) described a North Carolina school district's attempt to meet the needs of novice counselors. The article reported that mentoring had become widely accepted and practiced in educational settings. However, research on mentoring programs for novice counselors is limited (Matthes, 1992; Peace, 1995; VanZandt & Perry, 1992).

Peace (1995) describes a comprehensive counselor mentor model in use in North Carolina. The article presents a detailed description of the program components. Each of the components has research based activities and training models, and objectives are clearly stated. This program actually begins while the novice counselor is still in practicum and continues after employment. Some of the components are:

- *Differential Supervision Course* – Mentors, in this case experienced counselors, are taken through a series of training modules on guided reflection and skill sharing. The importance of relationship building is also included.
- *Reviewing Effective Counselor Behaviors* – Mentors review effective counseling skills and behaviors and analyze their styles in sharing those with others.

This article emphasizes the training and supervisory role of the mentor more than the actual mentoring that could occur during the first year of employment.

Matthes (1992) reported that early in the decade 77% of novice counselors in a study of 31 counselors in Iowa had no assigned mentor. A conclusion of that research was that "the novice counselor frequently functions in isolation without support of a colleague with similar preparation and perspective" (p. 248). Schlechty (as cited in Matthes, 1992) identifies eight elements of the induction process common in other professions including supervision, demonstration, coaching, and constant corrective feedback. The Matthes study suggests that these are not common elements of counselor induction.

The research of VanZandt and Perry (1992) describes a state-wide counselor mentor program in Maine. The purpose is described as an attempt to meet the identified needs of first year counselors. A major focus of this project is on mentor selection and mentor training. Details of the goals and activities of this training are provided in the article. An interesting concept is the very informal structure of the interaction between mentor and mentee. A goal of the program is to let the relationship develop and the two participants to determine the parameters of the relationship. The role of the mentors is loosely defined to allow for individual differences. Much of the mentor training is focused on relationship issues. It is assumed that the mentor is a person who cares deeply about the development of his/her protégé. Major areas of training focus on the mentor's self-awareness, developmental aspects of counselor growth, roles mentors play, goal setting, and project coordination. Evaluation is the final goal

of the program and is based on the beliefs and feelings of the participants. Mail surveys and follow-up telephone interviews provide the data for evaluation. The novice counselors report in this study that the "... knowledge that there was someone to call for support is the biggest benefit of the program" (p.161).

The data from VanZandt and Perry (1992) resulted in the following list of suggestions for a counselor mentor program:

1. Promote mentoring as an aspect of one's professionalism.
2. Generate the list in ways other than by volunteerism alone; solicitation of excellent counselors is encouraged.
3. Ensure that all regions of the state are served.
4. Assume a fairly sophisticated skill level of the mentors. Do not treat them as neophytes.
5. Consider the use of reward and recognition. Certificates can be a way of recognition.
6. Utilize the single most important training activity identified by mentors, "visual imagery", to get in touch with their own feelings of being a new counselor. (p.162)

The opinion research provides only one article that addresses a counselor mentoring program. This article focuses on one component of a mentoring program, which is reflective journaling. Stickel and Trimmer (1994) suggest that the reflective process used as a component of mentoring for new professionals is tied to theory. Cognitive psychology provides evidence that

experienced practitioners over time store automatic scripts that allow them to handle common routines almost without conscious thought. Novices, on the other hand, have few of these automatic routines and must consciously think through every decision, which becomes an energy-draining process (Colton & Sparks-Langer, 1993). Using the reflective work of Smyth (as cited in Stickel & Trimmer, 1994), the authors present a four part reflective model that can be helpful during the mentoring process. The steps include reflection around four questions which are:

1. Describing – What do I do?
2. Informing – What does this mean?
3. Confronting – How did I come to be like this?
4. Reconstructing – How might I do things differently? (p.104)

This article provided a summary of one novice counselor's writing during her first year of work. In this particular situation this counselor actively sought mentors to provide a bridge between graduate school and the job. The counselor reported that once found, these mentors provided a wealth of ideas and support.

Factors that impact mentoring programs. According to research findings there are several critical issues that can determine the success of the formal mentoring program. Programs need to reflect the needs and goals of local stakeholders. Beginning with the simple question of "What are the needs of the hires in this department?" can provide a clear structure for the program (Morzinski & Fisher, 1996, p.53). This article further reinforces the need to be

willing to revise the program to meet the emerging needs of the stakeholders.

The findings of Montesano (1998) suggest that a key factor in the success of the New Jersey beginning teacher program is the interaction of the program with the existing district and school environments.

A common theme throughout this literature review is the importance and ongoing consideration of the fact that mentoring is a relationship between unique people. Although suggestions and research results can provide important information about structuring the program, several articles focus on the critical issues of the relationship development between mentor and mentee. VanZandt and Perry (1992) report about the positive impact from a mentoring model where new counselors can find support during the critical first phase of their professional development, and experienced counselors can share their insights, experience, resources, and enthusiasm. The communication between the mentor and mentee can affect the relationship. Fagenson (1994) reports that the more mentors communicate with their protégés the more counseling and support the protégés receive. According to Simon (1997) the three most important benefits of a formal mentoring program all deal with relationship issues. These benefits include: the confidentiality of the protégé's remarks, the presence of mutual respect between mentor and protégé, and the comfort of having a mentor listen to the protégé's problems and ideas.

A comprehensive look at dysfunctional mentoring relationships by Scandura (1998) concluded that it is important to remember that mentoring

relationships are as “fragile as any personal relationship that one enters into” (p. 464). This article describes some very destructive behaviors that can arise in mentor/mentee relationships. Kram (as cited in Scandura, 1998) found that despite dysfunction some mentoring relationships continue and do not reach the termination/redefinition stage. Scandura found that dysfunctional mentoring relationships do not exist often, yet cautions that when this happens the results can be extremely negative on both the mentor and mentee. Planned evaluation during the stages of the mentoring program helps the participants and planners to allow a beneficial program to unfold. As a program matures, evaluators can focus evaluation on the program's contributions to the institutional development (Morzinski & Fisher, 1996).

The opinion literature reaches similar conclusions about the factors that impact mentoring programs. Lindenberger and Zachary (1999) believe that the companies that are most successful see mentoring as a process that grows and evolves rather than a set program. The article provides a list of 20 questions, the answers to which can help focus on factors that impact mentoring success. It is suggested that whenever possible, one should build a formal mentoring program that supports informal mentoring relationships that are already in place. Communication is seen as key. Suggestions such as enlisting program champions, scheduling mentoring briefings, and providing training and recognition for mentors are included. Another suggestion from these authors is to create a mentoring program that is customized to the organization's culture.

Benabou and Benabou (1999) provide a list of mentoring pitfalls that can occur because the mentoring process is so tied to relationships. It is suggested that during a formal mentoring program the following situations can arise:

1. The relationship may elicit resentment among others in the workplace.
2. Some talented individuals may be excluded from the program.
3. The mentor may provoke a conflict with the protégé's immediate supervisor.
4. The mentor may become too possessive of the protégé.
5. The mentor may become an unconditional admirer of the protégé and lose objectivity. (pp.12-13)

Rowley (1999) reports that in education the matching of mentor and mentee often occurs before they meet and establish a personal relationship. This presents special challenges which can be magnified when mentors do not receive adequate training for the role. Rowley further cautions that schools should take necessary precautions to avoid using veterans who do not possess a positive outlook.

A factor to consider in counselor mentoring programs is suggested by Cohen (1995). Counselors possess credentials and preparation as trained helping professionals. They possess the needed skills Cohen describes in his mentoring model. A caution is that there are some differences in the mentoring model. For example, more self-disclosure is considered a component of the

mentoring model. The counselor needs training to create a comfort level with the length, depth, and frequency of the mentor/mentee interactions.

Summary of mentoring programs. The review of research literature on the use of formal mentoring programs for novice counselors is limited. Several studies from the past decade still stand as the most current research on the subject. Studies in other areas of education and professions suggest that formal mentoring programs are beneficial for new employees. The limited research available on school counselor mentoring programs makes it difficult to determine the impact of a systematic induction process for novice counselors. This is an area where more research could be beneficial.

The opinion literature is more recent than much of the research literature, and is rich in detail of program components. Additionally the importance of the mentor/mentee relationship is developed in great breadth and depth in this literature. Experienced school counselors are retiring. In some locations, elementary counseling positions are being added for the first time. Counselors are being asked to assume positions of leadership and actively define and market the guidance and counseling program. At this time the opinion literature can only suggest that "mentoring is effective in integrating new employees, and enhances their career success and work satisfaction" (Benabou & Benabou, 1999, p.14).

### Clinical Supervision

School counselors need ongoing supervision as they implement a guidance program, refine their counseling skills, and learn to deal with difficult relationship issues (Roberts & Borders, 1994). Roberts' and Borders' (1994) study results indicated that novice counselors' preferences for supervision are not in keeping with the type of supervision that is the reality of the job. The literature provides examples of similar conclusions about the supervisory support needed for school counselors (Crutchfield & Borders, 1997; Peace & Sprinthall, 1998). In contrast to the type of supervision received by many novice counselors, the Roberts' and Borders' study lists the requests of novice counselors. These include:

1. Novice counselors believe they need less administrative supervision and more program and counseling supervision.
2. Novice counselors want to work with a person who has a counseling background.
3. Novice counselors express a preference of supervisors with advanced graduate degrees.
4. Novice counselors want counseling supervision that helps them enhance their professional growth and that provides professional support for their work.

The literature review describes current induction programs and their efforts to meet some of the expressed needs of novice counselors.

Clinical supervision models. The literature describes clinical supervision as a set of activities that encourages counselor self-awareness and growth, skill enhancement, professional development, and enhancement of the school counselor's role (Crutchfield & Borders, 1997). Roberts and Borders (1994) reported that although school counselors spend 44% of their time counseling and consulting, they received little or no supervision in these areas. The lack of supervision is often attributed to a school system's limited funding and support for trained supervisors. Traditional clinical supervision that requires time away from the building is sometimes in conflict with the school administration's desire for the school counselor to spend time in direct service to students (Crutchfield & Borders, 1997). The authors suggest that, because of both time and budget constraints incurred with an individual clinical supervision model, group supervision models are more efficient and possibly more effective.

Borders (1991) described the components of a structured peer group supervision model, including a specific format for group supervision sessions. The goal of developing divergent thinking was promoted by assigning diverse roles, using various theoretical approaches, and a variety of techniques.

Agnew, Vaught, Getz, and Fortune (2000) describe a similar peer group clinical supervision program now in its sixth year. The authors cite lack of supervision training and a clear structure as early problems for the program. The school system now employs a licensed practicing counselor and a credentialed supervisor to organize and facilitate the program. Some of the

activities used in this model include videotape feedback sessions, role playing simulations of counselor/counselee interactions, and structured peer feedback sessions. A unique feature of this program is the fact that, now in the sixth year, the original group of counselors still meets every other month for a 2-hour session without external supervision. The counselors themselves, now with years of experience, still request feedback and case consultation from their peers.

Gains attributed to structured group supervision models. Crutchfield et al. (1997) reported the results of a research study based on the structured peer group supervision model. The counselor-educators supervised and facilitated the voluntary group of novice counselors. The hesitancy about receiving peer feedback for audio and video tapes lessened as the group norms developed. In addition to reporting an increased level of professional skill development, the counselors listed the power of networking and the lessening of the sense of isolation as important factors for them.

Agnew et al. (2000) reported that 97% of participants attributed positive counseling skills, professional gains, and personal gains to the peer clinical supervision program. The predominant themes in their report include increased confidence, comfort with job, and feeling validation as a professional. Again, peer support was mentioned as reducing the sense of isolation. Key factors necessary for program success are administrative support, structure of the

sessions, adequate time to meet, and the opportunity to develop group cohesiveness.

Summary of clinical supervision. The literature abounds with the message that lack of sufficient supervisory support increases stress, intensifies the workload, and impacts the effectiveness of the novice counselor. Time and budget constraints minimize the feasibility and effectiveness of individual supervision of the novice counselor by a credentialed supervisor. The structured peer group supervision models are a way to provide a regular, systematic means of support for novice counselors. The literature and preliminary research suggest that participants view these programs as beneficial for their professional and personal development.

#### Peer Supervision and Consultation

The literature consistently reports that novice counselors desire and need systematic supervision. Peace and Sprinthall (1998) suggest that there is a need for the creation of systematic training for experienced counselors to serve in the role of peer supervision or consultation. Recent studies indicate that supervision or consultation from trained peers is a rare occurrence for school counselors (Roberts & Borders, 1994). The literature is limited in the area of peer supervision and consultation for novice counselors. This review describes those programs that provide peer supervision or consultation models.

Peer supervision models. Graduate school programs in guidance and counseling require an internship or practicum experience in which a graduate

student is under the supervision of a practicing school counselor. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) requires a 600 hour internship under the supervision of a certified school counselor to refine and enhance counseling skills, and to integrate professional knowledge and skills (Nelson & Johnson, 1999). Barret and Schmidt (1986) reported that providing supervision is often an expected role for the experienced counselor, yet rarely is any formal supervision training provided by either a university or school district. Nelson and Johnson (1999) found, nearly 15 years later, only one article addressing the role of the school counselor as a supervisor for interns. Experienced school counselors have the potential for performing effective, on-site supervision to meet the needs of novice counselors, yet the systematic training to reach this potential is lacking (Peace & Sprinthall, 1998).

An integrated approach model for training school counselors to serve as supervisors for interns or novice counselors is described by Nelson and Johnson (1999). The model includes four stages: (a) orientation, (b) working, (c) transition, and (d) integration. The first three stages encompass the role of supervision while the graduate student is still completing the internship. The integration stage continues into the first year or more of the newly hired novice counselor. Goals for this stage include improvement of skills, increased sense of personal and professional confidence, and the ability to deliver the components of a guidance program. The supervisor's role becomes one of

consultant and the relationship is more cooperative and collaborative. This final stage of supervision is marked by the growing ability of the novice counselor to work more independently and to develop competent school counseling skills.

Peace and Sprinthall (1998) reported the results of a study including 11 experienced counselors who completed a year long in-service training in peer supervision. The qualitative results described a belief among participants that they had renewed counseling effectiveness and had acquired useful supervisory skills. An example response demonstrated the increased sense of competency gained by the experienced counselors. "I learned more about adult development and learning and how to really tailor my supervision to the individual needs of the person" (p. 6). The authors suggested that the natural extension of this type of training is peer supervision or coaching of novice counselors.

Peer consultation model. Peer consultation differs from peer supervision in that consultation stresses and provides opportunities for supportive peer feedback, and de-emphasizes evaluation. Benefits of peer consultation include improved counseling and consultative skills, increased self-confidence and self-direction, and independence for the novice counselor (Benshoff & Paisley, 1996).

Logan (1997) describes the following organizational components for a peer consultation group. These include: "(a) case consultation, (b) solution-focused problem solving, (c) peer support, (d) constructive feedback without concern for evaluation or necessity for change unless the member chooses to do

so, and (e) access to needed materials and resources" (p. 4). Logan proposes a peer consultation model that is based on a voluntary group of individuals coming together for the purposes listed. This group can be a mix of veteran and novice counselors, across grade levels, and from different school settings. The group norms and goals are established at the beginning of the sessions, and ongoing informal evaluation of group effectiveness is considered essential. Logan suggests that these types of groups tend to form when novice counselors choose to reach out to others rather than trying to exist on the minimum assistance that may formally exist in their school district.

Summary of peer supervision and consultation. School counselors are often asked to supervise graduate students in guidance and counseling. A natural extension of this can be a model that continues this supervision into the transition from student to beginning counselor. The literature suggests, however, that often the veteran counselor is not provided with adequate training to effectively work with the novice counselor in all aspects of this transition. The models provide a structure for formal peer supervision or less formal peer consultation. In either case these are alternatives to the clinical supervision from a certified supervisor or school administrator. The literature suggests that with proper in-service training, peer supervision and consultation can be very helpful. The removal of the evaluation component attached to clinical supervision allows the novice counselor to more freely seek help and input from a more experienced counselor.

### Administrative Implications

The novice counselor is expected to assume full responsibility in the role of the school counselor. The literature suggests that the ability to articulate the counselor's role and the purpose of the program is sometimes difficult for the novice counselor. This section summarizes key findings about the importance of the relationship between the novice counselor and the school principal. Implications for supervisors of novice counselors are also provided.

The novice counselor and the school principal. The addition of elementary school counselors and the prominence of the comprehensive guidance model are still relatively new in some school districts. Research indicates that the support of the school principal is critical as the novice counselor attempts to establish a comprehensive guidance program (Coll & Freeman, 1997). Teamwork is important among all professionals in a school, and this is especially true in the relationship between the principal and the counselor (Brock & Ponec, 1998). The literature review includes some recent studies that describe this unique relationship, and states implications and considerations for administrators.

Ponec and Brock (2000) summarize the current literature on the relationship of the school principal and the counselor by identifying key factors to successful program implementation. These include: (a) the principal's support of the counseling role, (b) a clear understanding of the counselor's role, and (c) trust and frequent communication between the counselor and the principal. The

results of their qualitative study about the relationship between the school principal and the counselor provide an outline for the type of bond that the principal and novice counselor can seek to implement. Counselors who clearly define their role and remain visible, principals who know and understand the role of the counselor and inform all publics, and counselor and principal teams who establish frequent communication receive the benefits of an effective guidance program.

The training, responsibilities, and visibility of school counselors and school principals often lead them to have similar responsibilities with certain students and families. The professional preparation of administrators and counselors, however, may lead them to have different philosophies and approaches to working with students and adults. This can add an additional challenge to the development of the working relationship between the school counselor and the principal (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). These authors describe a unique program that engages graduate school counselors and principals in dialogue to better understand each other's role. Additionally the program provides opportunities for these novice professionals to practice collaboration in a laboratory setting with the feedback from veteran counselors and administrators.

Rowley (2000) suggests that a strength of counselors, expert or novice, is their understanding of the importance of collaboration. In an effort to increase the opportunity for collaboration, and to lessen the sense of isolation, Rowley

proposes expanding the collaborative partnership among school counselors and school psychologists. He proposes that administrators at the school and district level must see the value of these professionals working together and seek ways to facilitate this collaboration.

The literature suggests that the relationship between the school counselor and the principal is critical for the implementation of a comprehensive guidance program. Administrators need to have an understanding and acceptance of the role of the counselor. It is important that the novice counselor enters the profession with the ability to articulate the role of the counselor, and the impact of the program on the academic success of all students.

The novice counselor and the supervisor. The literature suggests that ongoing supervision of the novice counselor by a trained counselor/supervisor is lacking. A seamless model for professional development that includes on-site supervision by a trained, qualified counselor is the model proposed by Peace and Sprinthall (1998). There are implications stated in the literature that are important for the supervisor of a guidance and counseling program to consider. Novice counselors do prefer supervision to come from supervisors with advanced degrees. When the total responsibility for supervision of novice counselors is not possible for the supervisor, Roberts and Borders (1994) suggest that at least principals need training in evaluating counselors on their role and not an extension of teacher evaluation. This training responsibility may be part of the responsibility of the guidance supervisor.

Barret and Schmidt (1986) state that more effort needs to be given to find innovative ways to provide graduate programs that educate counselors and administrators in the art of counselor supervision. Roberts and Borders (1994) suggest that changes in state certification structures for supervisors, followed by sound training, could be one way to increase the availability of experienced counselors to serve as supervisors. They include this same type of supervisory training for mentors.

The literature describes a few mentoring programs for novice counselors. In these programs there are suggestions for supervisors contemplating mentoring programs as a means to better support beginning counselors. The authors provide some insights for administrative consideration as counselor mentoring programs are planned and implemented.

Some considerations from Kelly, Beck, and Thomas (1994) include:

- Have a climate in which individuals are encouraged to learn and develop their full potential.
- Provide continuous organizational support.
- Support the development of the specific skills needed by successful mentors.
- Pay particular attention to the selection method of mentors and protégés.
- Establish a valid method to plan for and monitor the cost of the program.

- Develop ways to handle the affective issues of mentoring, including confidentiality. (pp. 255-258)

Rowley (1999) emphasizes the importance of supervisors providing adequate time for the mentor and mentee to work together. The participants need time and the opportunity to participate in conferences, activities, and observations. Rowley suggests that without time for observation the mentor is much like a coach attempting to improve a player's golf swing without seeing the athlete – the result is not very effective. Benabou and Benabou (1999) state that when time is provided for the mentor/mentee relationship to unfold, other training becomes more likely to transfer to on the job behavior. The time becomes very cost-beneficial when evaluated from this perspective.

Crutchfield et al. (1997) note that if consistent supervision is supplied, school counselors may miss a couple of hours of direct student contact. However, they can gain insight into the strengths and areas of growth, and from enhanced skills are better equipped to work with students and staff. Peace (1995) concludes that lessons learned indicate the administrative support for release time, collaboration opportunities, and adjustment of novice counselor responsibilities are crucial.

Summary of administrative implications. The ability of the novice counselor to work effectively with the building principal is critical for the successful implementation of the comprehensive guidance program. Communication and the mutual understanding and support of the program by the

counselor and principal provide the opportunity for a highly successful program. The ability of the novice counselor to articulate the program goals and to effectively work with administration and staff can be enhanced when supervision by a qualified peer exists. The literature states that the novice counselor seeks the supervision of a trained and qualified peer, while at the same time seeking a sound working relationship with the school principal.

### Summary

The needs of the novice counselor are described in detail in the literature. The number of articles describing comprehensive induction programs to meet these needs, however, is not nearly as abundant. The many questions that the novice counselor has about what to do, where to get resources, and how to promote the guidance program may be answered in the formal mentoring process that is described in this literature review. Several articles describe the components of a mentoring program, yet the single most important consideration appears to be the relationship. Determining the best counselor candidates to serve as mentors is very important. Additionally, once selected it is important to provide a comprehensive training program for the mentors. Providing time for a confidential and collaborative relationship to develop is a consideration for administrators involved with the guidance program.

This same emphasis on training appears in the literature describing clinical supervision models. Novice counselors are requesting more supervision from trained guidance counselors or supervisors that can assist them with the

implementation of their program. Many districts do not employ a full-time guidance supervisor. Even in districts where a supervisor is available, the individual one-on-one supervision of novice counselors is not the most effective or efficient program model. The literature suggests that clinical supervision by counselor educators in peer groups is one model for better meeting the needs of the novice counselor. The literature is just beginning to describe results of structured peer supervision programs. Given time to develop, the research supports the notion that this model of supervision results in increased confidence and comfort with the job for novice counselors. Adequate training for those facilitating the peer groups is critical for their success (Nelson & Johnson, 1999; Peace & Sprinthall, 1998).

Peer supervision models are a natural extension of the site supervisor role during the practicum experience of a graduate student. The model includes four components, the last of which is integration. The extension of the peer supervisor role into this first year of work provides the novice counselor with a support system and the opportunity to model the behavior of an experienced counselor. Peer consultation, a more informal concept, at least provides a level of support and lessens the feeling of isolation for the counselor.

Among all the relationships described in the literature, the key relationship for the successful daily operation of the guidance and counseling program appears to be the building principal and the novice counselor. The level of common understanding of the counselor role, the degree of trust and

cooperation, and the support of the administrator greatly impact the degree of program implementation and level of stress experienced by the novice counselor. The key role for the supervisor of the novice counselor is to provide a systematic and effective means of support and supervision during the initial year on the job. The literature suggests that an attempt to provide this individually for every new counselor is neither practical or effective. The supervisor may find it more beneficial to provide ways to support the needs of the novice counselor through the development of a sound counselor induction program.

This literature review provides details of the complex situations faced by novice counselors, the unique needs of this group, and the often unspoken feelings experienced during the first year of employment. The limited number of articles available describing counselor induction programs suggests that this is an area that is still in need of attention. Further research to describe the experience of the novice counselor, and create an induction program process to meet these needs can serve to improve the quality of professional support provided for new counselors.

## Chapter 3

### Methods

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of first year school counselors. The literature suggests that factors such as isolation, professional relationships, administrative support, and skill readiness impact the ability of a new counselor to implement a guidance program. The answers to the grand tour question, "What is the experience of a first year school counselor?", have the potential to influence the development of an effective counselor induction process.

The questions took on a more permanent place in my mind as I had become the supervisor of guidance and counseling. Now I am responsible for the induction of and assistance for the new counselors hired in our district. The answers to my grand tour question grew from a very personal experience to a professional desire to assist new counselors as they move from novice to expert. Additionally, this study provided information that may potentially benefit counselor educators, counselor supervisors, practicing counselors, and aspiring counselors. It was important to study this phenomenon to assure that my answers were not based on my experience alone.

#### Qualitative Design

Approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB #314-01-EX), the focus of this study on the experiences of first year school counselors implementing the

comprehensive competency based guidance program in an urban school setting provided the most useful results by using the qualitative research design. The first year school counselors brought with them varied backgrounds. Some had relatively few years of experience in education while others were veteran teachers. They came from various university programs, were assigned to buildings with anywhere from eight to zero counselor colleagues, and had unique personal needs. The qualitative research design was appropriate in the process of seeking the common themes upon which to develop a counselor induction program from the unique individuals who made up the new counselors in the district. The heart of the phenomenological tradition is finding common themes within the lived common experience of a purposeful sample (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

The richness and depth of information gathered from multiple methods helped to ensure the suspension of my judgement, since I had also lived the experience. The goal of this qualitative design was to use all available information and obtain a picture of the common theme experiences of the participants (Creswell, 1998). The importance and impact of the needs, feelings, and relationships that occurred during the first year experience as a school counselor could become the themes that drive the development of an effective counselor induction program. The strengths of qualitative research, focusing on situations and people, emphasizing words rather than numbers, and

understanding the meaning of events and situations were best suited for this study (Maxwell, 1996).

### Phenomenological Tradition

"A phenomenological study describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept for the phenomenon" (Creswell, 1998, p. 51). This qualitative tradition has its roots in the work of Husserl during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with a focus on the essence or central underlying meaning of an experience. Creswell suggests that the result of a phenomenological study leaves the researcher and the reader with a richer understanding of the essence of the experience, recognizing that a "single unifying meaning of the experience exists" (p. 55).

Maxwell (1996) states that using existing theory in qualitative research has both advantages and dangers. Theory is a set of concepts and the proposed relationships among them. The theoretical framework, described in an earlier chapter of this study, is a statement about what is going on with the phenomenon that is being studied. Maxwell calls it a "story" about what the researcher thinks is happening and why (p. 32). Creswell (1998) provides a continuum that details the extent to which theory is used in each of the qualitative traditions. The phenomenologist makes a conscious decision to examine the meaning of experiences for individuals. The study begins with a strong orienting framework, usually more philosophical than social science theory in nature, although the researcher accepts that both provide explanations

for the experience. A strong reliance upon a social sciences theory is not a component of a phenomenology.

The goal of this study was to determine the common experiences of first year school counselors. The theoretical work of Fuller and Brown (1975) in developmental career stages suggested that common needs and behaviors would appear in the analysis of the information gathered during this study. The goal of this study was to allow the themes that revealed these needs and behaviors to naturally emerge, rather than to do a study that supported a predetermined list of expected needs and behaviors generated from a theory. The goal of phenomenological studies, including this one, is to focus on understanding the meaning events have for persons being studied. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) summarized the paradigm of the phenomenologist to include the discovery of multiple realities shaped by multiple events.

The phenomenological tradition attempts to understand the meaning of events for ordinary people placed in a particular situation. The tradition has been particularly influenced by the philosophers Edmund Husserl and Alfred Schutz (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Other authors cited in the literature as pioneers of the phenomenological tradition include Merleau-Ponty, Polanyi, and Prosch (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). An emphasis was placed on the subjective aspects of people's behavior. The researcher believed that multiple ways of interpreting experiences were available through interactions with participants.

### Role of the Researcher

Researchers in a phenomenological study attempt to understand the meaning of events in the lives of ordinary people. A key role of the researcher is to remain silent so as to hear the experience of the participants (Bodgan & Biklen, 1998). The tasks of the researcher in a phenomenological study according to Creswell (1998) are detailed in Chapter 1 of this study. In summary, throughout each of the actions taken by the researcher, the major responsibility of the researcher is to remain objective and to maintain the concept of epoche throughout the study.

As indicated in the introduction of this study, my education and professional experiences were a lived experience similar to the purposeful sample. In 1991 I began my career as an elementary school counselor. This career change came after 19 years as a fifth grade classroom teacher. My graduate program mirrored the expectations for a counselor hired in my district. Even though the coursework prepared me to know what to do, the reality of the job was something for which I was not prepared. The sense of loneliness, the shock that not all teachers taught the way I taught, and the instant credibility that I needed were unanticipated challenges. I worked with an excellent administrator and was provided with a level of trust that enabled me to implement and grow the program. The first year experience was, however, a vivid memory. Yet was this the common experience of my colleagues?

Shouldn't a counselor induction process be based on more than the supervisor's experience a decade ago?

To further enrich my counseling experiences I took a job as a high school counselor in 1998. The lack of technical skill sets needed to register students proved to be the biggest barrier. During the first week I strongly regretted my decision on several occasions. Yet the great part of the experience was having colleagues available to answer questions, share a joke, or solve a problem. The sharp contrast between my two first year experiences led to a new set of questions. How different is the first year experience of an elementary and secondary school counselor? Would a counselor induction process need to be different for the two groups?

Until 2000 these questions merely crossed my mind from time to time. Now as the supervisor of guidance and counseling I have a professional responsibility to provide support for new counselors. Because this is one of many responsibilities, being effective and efficient are very important. Most important to me is my desire for everyone who has chosen to become a school counselor to be in an environment that maximizes his or her opportunity for a successful career working with young people.

My role as supervisor of guidance and counseling provided me access to a purposeful sample. This relationship could have been uncomfortable for some eligible counselors and it was made clear in the initial contact that it was perfectly legitimate not to participate in the study and that no negative

consequences were incurred. For the purposes of the project, efforts to ensure the protection of human subjects included: (a) informed consent documents signed by each participant, (b) written offer and signed agreement by participants for access to the analysis of qualitative data through member checks, and (c) written documentation that no part of the data was used for informal or formal appraisal of the participants.

Maxwell (1996) defines bias as what you bring to the research from your background and identity. Maxwell defends this connection as a valuable component of qualitative research. To separate the lived experience of the researcher from the research “cuts you off from a major source of insight, hypotheses, and validity checks” (p. 28). My lived experience brought insight and understanding to this study. Because this had been a lived experience, my own preconceived ideas about the phenomenon remained bracketed (Creswell, 1998). The research method included ways to minimize negative effects that could have arisen from researcher bias.

### Key Participants

Ten first year counselors from an urban school district participated in this study during the 2001-2002 school year. The purposeful sample, defined as a research procedure that ensures that a variety of types of subjects be included in the study (Bodgan & Bilken, 1998), was important for the categorizing of themes and generalization of the experience. The participants included both elementary and secondary counselors, those who had 5 or more years of

teaching experience and those with less than 5 years, and participants who completed different graduate programs. This sample provided the opportunity to analyze the experiences of first year counselors who represented a broad distribution of personal characteristics that influenced the experience. Entry was gained due to the fact that the researcher was also the supervisor of the counselors. In addition, a copy of the research proposal was presented to the urban school district's research department and research approval committee for acceptance and conditions of completion.

### Types of Data Collection

Interviews. The participants were interviewed after the first 8 to 10 weeks of their initial counseling experience. An interview was repeated 7 to 8 months later. The use of the formal interview technique is the primary method of collecting data in a phenomenological study (Creswell, 1998). The review of literature revealed several common characteristics of the first year counseling experience. An interview guide (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) was developed based on the category findings in the literature review. All interviews were transcribed and coded for themes. In the initial work with interviewing, the researcher was reminded of the suggestion from Bodgan and Bilken (1998) that the parts labeled "subject" should be long and those labeled "interviewer" should be short.

Interview questions were what the researcher asked people in order to gain understanding. The questions were not judged by whether they resembled

the research questions, but by whether they provided the data that contributed to answering the research questions (Maxwell, 1996). With that goal the following questions were used during the initial interview (see Appendix A). The constant comparative analysis of data led to the modification of interview questions for the second interview.

### **Initial Interview Questions**

#### **1. Tell me about your relationship with the staff so far.**

- In what ways have you connected with the staff?
- With whom do you talk and collaborate?
- What is helping you build a relationship with staff?
- What, if any, are barriers to building a relationship?
- Describe the staff's expectations of you.
- What, if any, misconceptions of your role by staff members have you experienced?

#### **Rationale:**

The first question and follow-up probes were based on Schein's (as cited in Peace, 1995) career stages theory that labels this the impressionable stage. The novice counselor's initial influences and relationships have a lasting impact on the person's career development. Matthes (1992) suggests that elementary counselors, often the only counselor in a building, may feel a sense of isolation that could result in closer relationships with teachers than those experienced by secondary counselors. The literature suggests that when novice counselors rely

on staff as their primary referent the school counselor's role can become redefined and segmented. This line of questioning helped describe the relationship themes with staff and impact of those relationships on first year counselors.

**2. Tell me about your experiences working with students.**

- What are some ways you are making a difference with students?
- What do students expect from you?
- What are some of the feelings you experience working with students?
- Tell me more about the \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in a feeling or experience).
- What have you learned from the students so far?

**Rationale:**

The literature review suggests that novice counselors experience ambivalence and uncertainty while implementing a program. This is a vulnerable time as counselors adjust to a new role in working with students. New counselors are expected to assume full responsibility and skillfully work with students in all components of the guidance program. How equipped they feel to work with students may affect their level of confidence and job satisfaction (Matthes, 1992). This line of questioning assisted in assessing how novice counselors felt about their working relationship with students.

**3. Describe how your graduate program prepared you for this job.**

- What are the most relevant components of your training?

- What has been the biggest surprise so far?
- For what situation have you felt most prepared/unprepared?
- What advice would you give graduate students in counseling?
- What suggestions would you give to graduate faculty?

Rationale:

The review of literature finds a concerted effort to develop guidance and counseling programs at the graduate level that train school counselors in a comprehensive guidance model (Gysbers & Henderson, 1994). There is still the gap between training and job reality. VanZandt and Perry (1992) state that the first year for most counselors is often marked with times that find them lamenting that their program did not prepare them for the reality of the job. Matthes (1992) suggests that no graduate program can fully prepare a new counselor for that first year on the job. The themes that emerged from these questions may assist both the district supervisor and graduate faculty to better understand this gap. This line of questions helped to determine the impact of the graduate program in terms of preparation for the role of school counselor. These themes could help determine necessary components of ongoing counselor induction.

**4. What are the counseling skills used in your daily job?**

- What counseling skills do you use most often?
- Describe, if any, situations in which you feel a skill deficiency.
- Tell me about any counseling skills you possess that you feel are under used.

- What are you doing to hone your counseling skills?

Rationale:

Novice counselors are faced with a new and complex role within the school setting. Skills that they used as a classroom teacher are either enhanced or replaced by the skill sets practiced in the graduate school setting. For secondary counselors in particular the job expectation includes computer skills to deal with scheduling and student information. All counselors must be skilled in active listening and group facilitation. The literature suggests that negative feelings and self-perception can have a direct and negative impact on the quality of the guidance program implemented in the school (Logan, 1997). This line of questions helped to determine the counselors' perceptions of the skill sets needed and their current skill levels. These themes may be useful in the development of a counselor induction program process.

**5. Describe your feelings and beliefs regarding your level of skill competence.**

- Tell me about a situation you handled skillfully.
- Describe an event you would like to "do over" because . . .
- Explore the concept – "When it comes to doing \_\_\_\_\_, I feel like a rookie."
- How do you feel about your performance to date?
- How do you know when you have done a "good job"?

Rationale:

The recognition and understanding of skills needed are important. The literature review finds that even more crucial is the novice counselor's perception of his or her skill ability. This question and the follow-up probes focused on how novice counselors felt and what they believed to be the truth about their effectiveness. VanZandt and Perry (1992) suggest that novice counselors are often thrust into situations where they professionally assert their skills, yet only privately admit insecurities and need for support. These authors further suggest that they feel guilty asking questions that they believe must be trivial. Sometimes they do not seek assistance fearing they will be viewed as incompetent. The themes that emerged may help to assess whether too much is expected too quickly with too little ongoing support.

**6. Tell me about your relationship with your principal.**

- Describe the communication between the two of you.
- How would it feel to find a note requesting that you come immediately to his or her office. What comes to mind? What would you do?
- What is one request you would like to make of your principal?
- What is something for which you would thank him/her?

Rationale:

The literature review cites several authors who suggest that the single most important relationship for the first year counselor is with the principal. Shoffner and Williamson (2000) state that the counselor must be skilled in

working in a collaborative manner with the principal. The opportunity to develop a positive working relationship with the building principal impacts program implementation. Brock and Ponec (1998) suggest that the teamwork between the principal and beginning counselor is critical for the successful implementation of a comprehensive program. The development of mutual trust and communication, maintenance of support, and a clear understanding of the counselor role are necessities (Ponec & Brock, 2000). This line of questions helped to determine the need to support new counselors and principals as they develop a working relationship.

**7. How has the principal impacted the implementation of your program?**

- Describe your principal's level of understanding of your program.
- What have you done to increase the level of understanding?
- Describe the types of support you receive from your principal for program implementation.
- How do you think your principal might describe your program implementation so far?

**Rationale:**

The literature review suggests that the primary source of assistance for a novice counselor is the principal (Matthes, 1992). The research suggests, however, that the majority of principals studied have little or no training related to counseling programs (VanZandt & Perry, 1992). A frustration for a new counselor, ready to implement a comprehensive program, is to be thrust into

non-guidance or quasi-administrative duties by the principal (Napierkowski & Parsons, 1995). Anderson and Reiter (1995) suggest that new counselors often accept these duties because they have received little training in how to articulate the importance of the guidance program implementation. This leads to frustration and job dissatisfaction. The lack of understanding of the counselor's role in a comprehensive program and the promoting of a quasi-administrative role may create a dilemma for the novice counselor.

Early in the program implementation in this district, time was spent with each principal to explain the program and the role of the guidance counselor. With changes in building leadership this program introduction had not occurred to the same degree or consistency. This line of questions helped to determine the types of support and understanding received from the principal. The themes defined the role of the district supervisor in working with principals at the time of counselor placement, and as an ongoing part of counselor induction.

**8. Describe the types of support you have received other than at the building level.**

- To whom do you talk for advice or consultation?
- How do you feel when seeking assistance?
- What words would you use to describe the level of support as you began your job?
- What, if any, would be the benefits of ongoing supervision?

- What components would you include in a program of district supervision/support?
- How do you feel about the level of district support you receive?

Rationale:

The questions about the support received from the supervisor of guidance were included because the literature suggests that there is a lack of sustained and systematic assistance available to novice counselors (Roberts & Borders, 1994). These authors state that counselors want and need regular supervision. They conclude that more effort needs to be given to finding innovative ways to provide ongoing supervision. Crutchfield and Borders (1997) suggest that lack of supervision increases stress and workload.

These questions were asked by the supervisor of guidance and counseling. This may have been awkward for some novice counselors, and other data collection methods were used to further explore these questions. Time to provide supervision is limited. The themes that emerge could assist in determining the most critical needs, and the most effective role of the supervisor during this induction time.

### **9. How would you summarize your counseling experience so far?**

Rationale:

This final question provided the opportunity for each counselor interviewed to summarize and discuss any part of his or her first year experience. This general question was designed to be broad in nature. A

phenomenological study is more interested in “hearing” the experience than “recording” answers to questions determined by the researcher. It was interesting to recognize the common themes that emerged from such an open-ended, single question.

Contact logs. Each novice counselor was assigned a veteran counselor resource partner. The requests and questions from the first year counselor were recorded by the veteran counselor on a contact log (see Appendix B). These logs were reviewed monthly by the researcher and coded for themes. The intention was to capture the daily “on the job” questions and needs of first year counselors. This process and data collection method were explained to participants.

Observations. Once each semester the researcher observed the counselor performing one of the daily job tasks. The observation lasted approximately 30 minutes with the researcher in the role of a non-participant observer. During these observations field notes, both descriptive and reflective in nature, were made. The aspects of descriptive and reflective field notes discussed in Bodgan and Bilken (1998) were regarded as the means to ensure that these observations added to the “richness” of the data.

Reflective journaling. Stickel and Trimmer (1994) provide the basis for a reflective journaling process used as a component of counselor induction. It is described in some detail in the review of literature included in this study. Journaling, as a data collection method, was intended to have the participant

focus on reflecting upon the daily events of being a counselor (see Appendix C). Each journal entry was included in the analysis process of seeking common themes or categories of the experience of being a first year counselor.

### Data Recording

The interview guide, which included broad interview questions to explore and probe with the interviewee (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994), provided one part of the data collected. Using the format suggested by these authors, the interview draft was practiced with people similar to those in the research sample. Each interview was tape-recorded and the guidelines for transcribing interviews (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) were followed. A coding system was used in the upper corner of every page of the transcript. The model presented in Creswell (1998) dividing the field notes into two columns of descriptive and reflective was used during the observations of the first year counselors. The contact logs and journal entries were coded for anonymity and stored with the other data by participant. Interview questions for the interview guide were revised for the second interview as the themes emerged. Each participant was given a special code and all materials and transcribed data were stored in a computer and hard copy files for each participant.

### Data Analysis

The constant comparative method was the data analysis method for the multi-data sources and began early in the process. There was constant comparison and movement between data collection and data analysis (Bodgan

& Bilken, 1998). Glaser (as cited in Bodgan & Bilken, 1998) provided steps for a constant comparative analysis that were used in this study. These included:

1. Begin collecting data.
2. Look for key issues and recurring themes that become the categories of focus.
3. Collect data that provide many incidents of the categories of focus.
4. Write about the categories being explored in memos or other writing and describe all these incidents while continuing to look for new incidents.
5. Work with the data and the emerging model to discover basic social processes and themes of the first year counselor experience.
6. Continue working through all the interviews, contact logs, observations, and journals to focus and develop the key categories of importance in the first year counselor experience.

#### Verification Steps

The trustworthiness and credibility of this study was enhanced by triangulation of the data collection. The use of four different sources of data, all being subjected to the constant comparative analysis, produced categories or themes of the first year counselor experience based upon the information gained from the participants. Researcher bias and past experiences were bracketed and discussed in journal entries that were analyzed throughout the process. In

addition, to strengthen trustworthiness the research design included member checks. An auditor was presented with materials to verify the audit trail.

### Qualitative Narrative

Once analyzed, the results of this research study were presented in narrative with many examples of the voices of the participants through the use of interview responses and journal quotations richly embedded in the written report. The outcomes of this study were presented in the form of a doctoral dissertation.

### Summary

The review of literature finds that little research has been done on the first year experience of school counselors. Available data suggest that for many this is an experience defined as "trial by fire" including difficulties with relationships, feeling inadequate, and believing that they are unprepared for the job. The personal experience of this researcher was confirmed by these studies. The sense of isolation and "finding the way" created a desire to be able to describe the first year counselor experience, find the common themes that mark the journey from novice to expert, and finally to develop an effective counselor induction program.

Maykut and Morehouse (1994) state that the ultimate test of the trustworthiness of a study is whether we believe the findings strongly enough to act on them. It was my hope and desire that the themes that emerged from this study would become the framework and foundation for a systematic and effective counselor induction program. The use of the constant comparative analysis

method, however, helped me to remain “open” to unexpected information. Member checks increased credibility of the categories and themes developed from the data analysis. A clear audit trail was established and maintained to increase accountability (see Appendix F).

The limitation of this study was the fact that I served both as researcher and supervisor of the participants. This dual role was openly discussed with possible participants prior to the beginning of the study. The protections provided for human subjects, with the emphasis that none of this was to be used for formal appraisal, should have minimized these limitations. This study was submitted to the IRB and was conducted upon receiving research approval (see Appendix D). Each novice counselor had written assurance that none of the data collected was shared with the building principal responsible for counselor appraisal (see Appendix E).

The Comprehensive Guidance model has been rather unique nationally. A recent increase in states implementing the Comprehensive Competency based model may make this study more useful to other districts utilizing the model. The match of graduate program with expected skills and job description themes might prove to be useful. Not all districts would mirror the one studied in terms of size or district level of supervisory support committed to the guidance and counseling program. This may limit the generalization of this some portions of the study, however the conclusions could be valuable in the development of a counselor induction program for our district. It was with excitement and enthusiasm that

the phenomenological study of the first year experience of school counselors was undertaken. It was with gratitude for 10 first year school counselors, who allowed this access into their first year counseling experience and provided the inspiration to tell the story that became their common lived experience.

## Chapter 4

### Results

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe the themes that emerged from a phenomenological study of the experiences of novice school counselors. The theoretical work of Fuller and Brown (1975) in developmental career stages suggested that common needs and behaviors would appear in the analysis of the information gathered in this study. The goal of this study was to allow the themes that revealed these needs and behaviors to naturally emerge, rather than to do a study that supported a predetermined list of expected needs and behaviors generated from a theory. The phenomenological tradition seeks to understand the meaning of events for ordinary people placed a particular situation.

The purposeful sample included 10 first year school counselors working in a large metropolitan school district that has implemented a comprehensive competency based guidance program. The participants were both elementary and secondary counselors, 7 who had 5 or more years of teaching experience and 3 with less than 5 years teaching experience. The 10 participants had completed or were completing graduate programs in two local university programs. The participants were placed in a school with the expectation that they would fully implement the guidance and counseling program and fulfill their assigned role.

The multiple data sources and triangulation of data helped to ensure the suspension of judgement of the researcher who had also lived the experience. A goal of this qualitative design was to use all available information and obtain a picture of the common theme experiences of the participants (Creswell, 1998). This researcher found that time spent with the data blended the personal experience of 1991 into the first year school counseling experience of the participants. This researcher's journal entry read, "I found the longer I cut and pasted, reading again, the less clear my own experience – the less need to bracket. The 10 participant interviews are becoming one common first year counselor experience." Creswell (1998) described an "intentionality of consciousness" (p.53) that enabled the researcher to focus on the experience of others who lived the first year counselor experience.

The research question that guided this study was: What is the experience of a first year counselor? The review of the literature led the study to include the following sub-questions:

- a. What a description of the relationship with staff and students includes?
- b. What is the impact of the graduate program in terms of preparation for the role?
- c. What are the skill sets needed to perform the job?
- d. What describes the types of district support received from the administrator/supervisor?

Data sources included two interviews, four participant reflection journal responses, two non-participant observations, and monthly veteran counselor logs. In this phenomenological study a structured interview served as the major data source in determining the essence of the common lived experience of the participants. The data triangulation was accomplished through the additional data sources of the participants' journal entries, the non-participant observations, and the veteran counselor log. The constant comparative analysis and triangulation of the data provided common themes that addressed the questions posed in the phenomenological study. This chapter describes the common lived experience of 10 first year school counselors.

### Analysis of the Data

#### Relationship with Staff

Initial structured interview. The following analysis of data for the overall question, "Tell me about your relationship with the staff so far", and six additional probes describes the experience of first year school counselors as they developed a relationship with staff. The first question and the follow-up probes were based on Schein's (cited in Peace, 1995) career stages theory that labeled this the impressionable stage. The novice counselor's initial influences and relationships could have a lasting impact on the person's career development.

The first year school counselors suggested that the relationship with staff for the most part was good. "Good" was experienced along a continuum from "it's improving", "coming along pretty good", "is developing", to "they love me."

Recognizing a willingness to help and support and to suggest that “anytime I need help they do it”, served as a reassurance and positive experience during those days when a new counselor was not quite sure what to do. The welcome and initial conversations might have been somewhat expected. Those interactions were more appreciated and unexpected when they continued into the busyness of the school year.

Some first year counselors had proactively worked to meet staff and establish relationships. “One of my goals—to become a part of the staff right away, to be really friendly, to meet people, to let them have some say in when their guidance classes were.” Another novice counselor made a conscious effort to associate names and faces at the mailbox or on hall duty. The intentional behavior to build staff relationships emerged as a theme.

The common experience was tempered by several unique circumstances among the 10 first year school counselors. One came to a building where a veteran counselor had established a strong program for many years. “They had a counselor who had been at the school for many years. She was very beloved.” This participant “worked on the strengths and it’s improved.” Another first year counselor had known the staff for quite a few years. This close relationship provided an initial relationship experience that already felt like family. Two of the counselors joined staffs having some morale issues. Quickly the relationship became one where, “They came to me right away at the beginning of the year telling me some issues.” “They stop in quite a bit and take up a lot of time.” The

impact of specific building situations on the counselor's experience emerged as a major theme throughout the study.

Making connections with the staff ranged all the way from "idle chit chat in the hall" to a calculated plan for dealing with the "new kid on the block" syndrome. "I felt like everybody was kind of watching me to see if I was going to mess or how many times I was going to be asking questions." This novice counselor spread questions around, remembering not to go to just the same person. Another participant described connections ". . . as pretty much work related." "It's been professional." The themes of building specific situations and counselor character traits emerged throughout the study.

Intentional connections, demonstrating a caring for and understanding of staff, resulted in first year counselors providing the staff with "pick-me-up" things. Initial connections that resembled common courtesy types of interactions became "kind of like a personnel connection people to people", as noted by the "new kid on the block" planner. Reaching out and making connections through guidance lessons or discussing common concerns about students were described as "student-wise" connections. A first year counselor noted, "As things get more hectic for me, I think I have tended to withdraw a little bit to complete my work. I made a mental note to start opening the office door, reaching out, and connecting in different ways."

The experience ranged from superficial teacher lounge conversations to some very intentionally planned behavior to make connections with the staff.

The common theme among the counselors was the thoughtful process used to make connections with staff members. Although different levels of intentional behavior created different degrees of connection, the process that each described was thoughtful and demonstrated that counselors were seeking to establish connections with staff.

The list of with whom first year school counselors talked and collaborated was varied. In some cases a differentiation was made between talk and collaborate, others simply provided a list. In terms of really getting to the “how” first year school counselors experienced the phenomenon, it was helpful to consider not only with whom they talked and collaborated, but why. Although not directly asked in the question, several participants elaborated on their responses and a picture of “why” the talking and collaborating existed became a part of the analysis.

One reason identified for talking to the teachers was, “I think it’s the commonality of being here for the first year.” Seeking personal comfort and reassurance, another first year counselor talked with “. . . somebody else who is in the counseling program who has a real good handle on what the class load is for counseling.” The encouragement of what to try, and just to empathize with what was feeling like “an overwhelming load” to this first year counselor, was what she needed to share. This participant was replacing a “beloved counselor” and found staff in the building with whom to talk that had known her from

previous work. This served as a reminder of a previous level of competence and brought reassurance.

Other counselors described talking and collaborating around job related issues -- weekly meetings with the administrator, talking with domain counselors about specific questions, talking with faculty about student issues. Much of the collaboration and talking centered around seeking answers to questions, sharing the common experience of being new, or “. . . sometimes I just need time to blow off and it works to go to the same person that is basically in the same boat as I am.”

The majority of the first year school counselors made reference to talking with or collaborating with a fellow counselor. This ranged from the desire to have a professional question answered by a counselor, to just needing to talk with “someone in the same boat.” In either case it was a fellow counselor who shared the same knowledge and experiences. Ten of the 15 references to fellow counselors were from those who had other counselors in the same building. The other participants listed teachers, administrators and others. Matthes (1992) suggested that when there is only one counselor in a building, the isolation could result in closer relationships with teachers.

The impact of counselors' personal character traits on staff relationships emerged as a major theme. Truly believing one had something to offer provided a strength and courage during this adjustment time. The self-confidence continuum that evolved ranged from confidence in individual personality to build

the relationship, reliance on past experiences of being new, to the focus on the role of the counselor and the ability to provide a program and assistance to students and staff. The counselors recognized the importance of being visible and demonstrating their "value add" to the staff.

A participant knew the majority of the staff in a teacher role. Yet within a short sentence probe, she was able to discern the importance of building a relationship based on the counselor role. That was intentionally developed "by being accessible, going to their room rather than waiting for them, and delivering the guidance curriculum so that staff saw her working with all students too." A relationship based upon competency and a "value add" to the business of the school appeared to be how several first year counselors were building a relationship with the staff. A participant stated, "I think they've kind of like built a trust in me and feel confident that I'll do what I'm supposed to do."

The participants were asked what barriers, if any, to building staff relationships they had encountered. The responses included the "what" they were experiencing in terms of barriers such as, "size of the building and staff", "building climate", and "adjustment to a new counselor." Again, it emerged that the "how" of the experience was the determination to seek solutions and methods of working through the barriers. This group was not asked what they were doing about the barriers, yet several offered insight into what they were doing. The "how" was to recognize and understand the situation, and then go to work to resolve or leverage it depending on the situation. "You don't get to meet

people unless you honestly make an effort. I've done that." "Thought it was me . . . find it's the environment, so I changed my lessons a bit." Two counselors, who recognized barriers and offered no solutions, described being in a place of "frustration". The themes of thoughtful consideration and solution-focused behavior impacted the first year counselors' experience.

All of these first year school counselors came to buildings that had an established guidance program. However, the initial response to the question about staff expectations ranged from the counselor not sure what they expected, "I don't really know what their expectations are and I'm not always sure that they know exactly what my role is," to "The staff was very well trained in comprehensive guidance."

A participant suggested that the expectation struggle might be partly due to the previous counselor's program emphasis. "They're expecting what they had last year. I have different priorities right now. My priorities are on the classroom guidance component as opposed to the resource component, and that's an adjustment for them." How this difference was addressed, how the counselor met people where they were, how she led the transition were key to the relationship with staff and her satisfaction with the role. At the other end of the spectrum, a novice stated that the staff was well trained. "They were used to the way it is. My job is very protected." The ease of bringing in a model and counselor role expectation presentation was vastly different for these two first year school counselors. What would be the appropriate and helpful information

to provide a first year school counselor regarding the previous program? What questions or insight seeking skills do first year school counselors bring to the position in terms of determining staff expectations and facilitating adjustments or changes?

Some responses to the question indicated that teachers do have some expectations that first year school counselors recognize that they can't meet. A general theme that arose was a teacher's desire to have a problem or student "fixed" by the counselor.

It's almost like the expectation is "I've put it down on paper. I've given it to you and now you need to fix this and let me know how you fixed it." It's not possible for one thing. It's just not going to happen. It's not our job. It's not what we're supposed to do.

A participant suggested that teachers understood the role of the counselor as helping students to overcome their problems. However, she noted that, "They want us to see students right away, and a lot of time we can't do that, so we have to express that." Other responses included ". . . they think we're more of a therapist. I think that is the biggest problem." "I think some of them think I can fix all the problems and you can't obviously do that."

The sense of frustration flowed from the words of responses to this question to a greater degree than some others. There seemed to be fewer responses that included ways to overcome or solve these misperceptions of the counselor's role. Responses included "it's not our job", "you obviously can't do

that”, and “I think that’s the biggest problem”, suggesting this was a frustrating and perhaps surprising reality.

How prepared the first year counselors were for expectations not aligned with the counseling role, how flexible and resilient they were to this reality, and how skillfully they facilitated a new understanding of the role while honoring the needs of staff determined how this component of the first year experience was lived by the counselors. The common experience seemed to be one of joy, and perhaps not even fully appreciated simplicity, when the role and expectations of staff and counselor were the same. The experience of frustration, and to a large degree a lack of solution-focused response, described the experience when expectations were incongruent.

The follow up question concerning staff misconceptions provided three general themes of misconceptions of the role of the counselor. These were very consistent with the literature regarding the misconceptions of the counselor role experienced by first year school counselors. Two of the 10 participants stated that they had encountered no misconceptions of the program and credited the role of the previous counselors for setting a clear expectation. “I think my predecessors have very well defined their role here. I really do think it is very well defined.” Four of the eight counselors who did mention encountering some misconceptions referred to the “fix it” mentality. “Like being able to fix a child immediately and that’s that. They have to come into our office two or three times and then everything’s going to be fine.” “Oh that you can work magic.” Three of

the 8 mentioned the need to explain or “guard” counseling time. A misconception is that “you spend a lot of time in your office, which I don’t. Even when I am here, I am always doing something like scheduling an individual or working on a small group . . . making sure that they know you are not wasting time.” “Just because I am here by my phone necessarily doesn’t mean I have time to do that.”

One time issue for a counselor involved the staff misconception about the time distribution of a comprehensive competency based program. “They want a basic community counselor to do lots and lots of individuals and some small groups.” This counselor followed a previous program where a veteran counselor had not implemented a program that honored the time percentages of a comprehensive program. Three out of the 8 also mentioned disciplinarian as a misconception. “We are not just going to take them out of their classes and we have some that think that is what we should do.” “Some, I think, think that I’m a disciplinarian or maybe that I should help out maybe even once in a while with that.”

Counselors who experienced some misconceptions, when asked, suggested solutions to address them. One novice actually saw these misconceptions as an interesting part of the job. “Actually I think part of the challenge is letting them know exactly what we do here.” These misconceptions were probably things that each participant had heard about during their graduate program. How those experiences felt and how counselors reacted became the

“how” of this experience. The common experience suggested that counselors recognized the staff expectations and misconceptions, could find ways to clarify the role, and even saw it as a challenging component of the job.

Participant reflection journal. The participants were asked to select one event from a randomly selected date four times during the course of the year of data collection. From the total of 40 journal entries collected throughout the study, six entries referenced staff and only one entry focused on the staff relationship. During the December entry a participant described an interaction during a Student Assistance Team meeting that demonstrated the feeling of being a “value add” to the staff. The participant described the meaning of the experience as, “It means that teachers want my input during meetings about students.” The participant believed this had occurred “by forming good relationships with the staff.”

Non-participant observation. The observations conducted during classroom group guidance provided the researcher the opportunity to observe first-hand the importance and impact of the relationship with staff on program implementation. In the first interview of a participant the observer noted that the teachers left the room. The researcher questioned how could they reinforce the lesson. During a follow-up discussion the participant noted that most teachers left during the lesson. That had become the habit during the tenure of the previous counselor. The participant seemed to be frustrated with teachers who

did not stay for the lesson and then complained about students or not understanding the issues being presented.

During the second non-participant observation of this same counselor, the teacher remained in the room. The counselor had the opportunity to model an excellent problem-solving strategy with three students. The teacher paid very close attention to the process. Classroom lessons where teachers remained provided some assistance to counselors, provided the opportunity to generalize the lesson, and enabled the counselor to model effective strategies for working with students.

An observation of a novice counselor demonstrated the impact of the outgoing and engaging personality of the counselor. The participant was reviewing books that had arrived and was discussing how these could be used to assist staff working with students on specific issues. The participant later discussed reviewing health information with the nurse. The observer noted that this was “another important relationship to establish for the first year school counselor.” This intentional relationship building took planning and energy on the part of the novice.

Veteran counselor contact log. Some of the entries from veteran counselors describing the participants’ questions referred to concerns that the first year counselor had with staff relationships and how to handle specific situations. For example, one participant had “. . . a question/hesitation about asking a guidance para to make copies for her.” Another wanted to know if “. . .

a teacher requesting that a student go to a counselor for a few days rather than go to class or study hall" was a normal practice.

Of the 16 building specific questions reported during the month of September, all were made to on-site veteran counselors. To whom does a counselor alone in a building go for answers to building questions, especially those referring to relationships with staff? As the year progressed, fewer and fewer entries referenced relationships with staff members. By January only one of the 66 veteran counselor log entries referred to a situation with a teacher. The April/May log also indicated just one reference to "dealing with various staff members."

Follow-up interview. The general question asked during the follow-up interview concerning the relationship with staff was, "Tell me how your relationship with staff has evolved this year." A key theme that emerged during the first interview that was triangulated by comments during the final interview was that staff relationships were important to counselors and impacted program implementation. "I love the staff. They have been very welcoming and I really feel at this point that I am one of them." "With the staff I feel very comfortable. At the beginning of the year I didn't know anybody and now I am really attaching well." "I think the teachers work pretty closely with me, they let me know if things are going on." "So I think overall the building atmosphere is a lot better. And that makes my job a lot easier." "We have got a dynamic staff. They are easy to work with, they are a joy to work with really."

The follow-up interview reinforced the theme that the degree of understanding the staff has of the counselor's role and staff expectations impact how the counselor feels about the relationship with staff.

I think they really value the program. I have been very consistent in getting into guidance classes on time, being reliable, getting to kids that are referred to me as soon as possible . . . So they feel very supported and I think they are enjoying the guidance lessons. I did the surveys and the feedback from the surveys was very positive.

"So I think they have seen lots of the benefits from it. So they are very willing to give me kids when I need them." "A lot of them have felt free to come down and talk to me about seniors, which is really good. I am glad to see that."

The common themes that emerged concerning the first year counselors' relationship with staff included:

1. Relationship with staff was important and impacted greatly by unique building situations and levels of staff support.
2. There was a level of thoughtful processing and intentional behavior used to build relationships.
3. New counselors talked and collaborated with those with whom they had something in common.
4. A belief in self as a person and professional developed the image of the counselor as a "value add" to the school.

5. Intentional relationship building and role clarification took effort and energy on the part of the new counselor.

The responses sifted down to the following lived experience “essence”. There was a level of thoughtful processing and intentional behavior, that required energy and effort, used to build relationships with staff. These relationships were important and impacted program implementation. The relationships with staff members developed throughout the year, and were seen by most participants as a positive by the end of the first year experience.

#### Relationship with Students

Initial structured interview. The literature review suggested that novice counselors experience ambivalence and uncertainty while implementing a program. This is a vulnerable time as counselors adjust to a new role in working with students. New counselors are expected to assume full responsibility and skillfully work with students in all components of the guidance program. How equipped they felt to work with students affected their level of confidence and job satisfaction (Matthes, 1992). This line of questioning assisted in assessing how novice counselors felt about their working relationship with students.

The responses to the question, “Tell me about your experiences working with students”, suggested differences between the secondary and elementary counseling role. Each of the secondary participants described or reflected upon experiences directly correlated with the domain responsibility. The experiences of the personal/social counselor were described as varied. “I have probably

seen more, a larger variety, of situations in the last two weeks than I have in the last few years. . . It's the clientele." The counselor's responses were about the situations of the job rather than a relationship interaction. The students were referred to as "clientele."

The academic domain counselor talked about going to classes and getting to introduce herself to many of those students she had seen in the hallway. There was a recognition that the initial relationship most likely would occur due to domain questions. "Okay, she's academic so if you want to talk to her or they know according to the domains." Another academic domain counselor focused the response on the beginning of the year "registration and schedule changes." There was a sense of frustration as she described the reasons and expectations students have for wanting a schedule change. This counselor had recognized that when you take the time to work with students you quickly experience them on a more relationship level. "It was kind of interesting to work that way to see some kids who just don't really seem to care. Until you work with them longer and then maybe you find out that it is just an act."

This level of trust, providing an environment for risk taking, seemed to happen much more readily with elementary students. They appeared to be less guarded, and the richness of the elementary counselor responses were evident throughout each interview. "You can tell by the look on my face that I'm really enjoying it." "Students are wonderful." "They love me. I love them." "You just want to pick them up and hug them and take them home with you but. . ."

“They’re good. That’s the part I love.” “I get my strokes or perks from the students. They are wonderful.” “They are so delighted to see me even if I’m crabby. They are just so happy to see me all the time.” This generalized apparent love of an elementary counselor permeated throughout each interview.

Two counselors described plans that had been implemented in the hallways because students were getting out of line to talk with them. “We have this little pinkie wave and they know they didn’t keep their voices quiet in the hallway, and so they’ll just pinkie wave.”

In the hallways, it’s almost as if I’m a disruption if I’m walking down the hallways. Everybody is trying to get out of line and we had to make some rules to make sure everybody stays in line so teachers can maintain their classroom management.

Elementary counselors also described experiences with students related to the roles of the guidance counselor. “They are very good at discussion. They raise their hands. They give comments. They interact with guidance lessons.” A participant demonstrated an understanding of the reality of experiences with students in classroom group guidance by noting, “I’ve had a couple older boys . . . are a little less responsive to guidance in general.” Another shared that classroom group guidance was the part that she loved. “I thought that would be the part I would like the least, but it’s the part I like the most because it gives me a chance to see all the kids and it gives me a chance – it gives me a breather – from all the individuals.” Two of the counselors appeared to be pleasantly

surprised that students self-referred and were very comfortable talking individually with a counselor. “Some kids just want to talk.” They just want to tell me about their families and their brothers and sisters and what life is like. Some kids come in with some pretty serious issues.” Even as a rookie, however, one recognized the “other” reason students came to a guidance office. “Most of the time it’s for a reason – sometimes it’s just to get out of class.”

The experience with students was described commonly as a positive one. For some counselors, particularly elementary, the experience had been one of a special relationship and acceptance that seemed to come with the role of a counselor. All of the participants connected with students and were experiencing the various counseling roles in action with students. Exploring the feelings around these experiences further defined and described the “how” of this experience.

A common theme among all participants was an immediate response to the question probe, “What are some ways you are making a difference with students?”. The responses were grouped into three clusters of focus: classroom group guidance, individual student work, and general student response. The responses were largely positive in nature and represented the results of the counselors implementing a plan of action to meet a goal. The differences for students that resulted from classroom group guidance were described as “going into the classrooms and going over things that they might not know how to do. Some of them don’t really know how to listen so modeling it

and role-playing it has really helped.” “Obviously the classroom group guidance lessons. We have worked a lot on getting along with others. You see little steps whether it's with individuals or classrooms.” This counselor had also experienced the transference of skills taught in classroom group guidance to individual situations. “. . . a couple of kids go from not being friends to being very good friends which is really a delightful thing to see.” A first year counselor described a classroom setting when students start to relate to the concept as the “Eureka effect or light bulb going on when talking to some of them.”

This common theme of intentional process planning was evident in the responses within the individual student work as well. The idea of ongoing reinforcement was described as a key component in making a difference. “They’re not going to continue to change behavior unless they’re reinforced with that. Talking to them and helping them work through their problems and changed behaviors. . .” A novice was not waiting for students to come to the office. “Putting myself out there. Showing them that they aren't the only vulnerable ones in the building – they’re not the only ones dealing with issues and concepts.” A participant whose responsibilities included Student Assistance Team meetings believed, “. . . after doing them is not just this is done – it is over with – but carrying through, calling the students back in, checking with them from time to time. Checking with their teachers. Just trying to keep tabs on them.” General student response techniques such as “being visible”, “just listening”,

and “saying hello in the morning” were recognized by participants as making a difference with students.

This intentional and thoughtful processing and planning became the “how” counselors made a difference. The experience of the first year school counselor was the realization of how powerful an impact one can have on another's life individually or collectively by knowing his or her role, having the skills to implement, and caring deeply about young people.

All the graduate school role-playing in the world did not, however, prepare them for dealing with children in violent situations. The only participant who first responded to the question, “How are you making a difference?”, with the words “well it's difficult” went on to describe the sense of helplessness that can occur when dealing with domestic violence.

A lot of things are beyond my reach. A lot of the things I've dealt with thus far like domestic violence and things like that in the home and those are things beyond what I can do with the kids at home besides talking to him about safety and what environment is safe and explain to them. It's not their fault when stuff like that happens.

The rambling sentence, the personalization of the story to the pronoun him, and the realization things were beyond control were frustrating.

A participant was striving to reach a place that enabled the counselor to press on with a purpose and plan.

I hope and I believe I see that since I can't change the system and the environment entirely for the child to my value (laugh) – I say that in jest because a safe environment is really what I'm looking for – resilient skills would be the direction that I'm clearly going and is to help develop resilient skills in these kids since we can't change the environment, we can change how they are operating within that environment.

Understanding the counselor role and implementing intentional and thoughtful processes on behalf of young people were how these first year school counselors were experiencing making a difference with students so far.

Each participant quickly articulated a list of what they believed students expected from them. The most striking theme was the congruence of students' expectations with the counselors' expectations of themselves. Unlike the question regarding staff expectations, where often counselors were describing incongruent situations, one counselor suggested students expect “that big smile when they come around the corner and I expect that of myself too.”

A participant was asked to further explain the response of “they expect magic.” “Someone came in the other day and sat down and said, ‘I'm just unhappy. Make me happy.’ Actually he came back the next day and said, ‘I'm happy.’ It wasn't anything I had done, but maybe just listening.” The common experience and how counselors often found the energy for other parts of the job were described as, “basically all those little personal needs that everyone has

and for whatever reason are not getting anywhere else.” This was the experience of working with students as a counselor.

In addition to being able to clearly articulate the expectations of students, first year school counselors were very aware of the feelings they experienced when working with students. “They run the whole gamut.” Within any given day a first year school counselor experienced any number of feelings. The total frustration of working with a girl who was pregnant when “every time you turn around she seems to be cutting off her nose to spite her face.” The total frustration of seeing things you couldn’t fix. The total frustration because students were doing the same things over and over, having problems with the same issues day after day. The total frustration of “when you feel like you are just not getting anywhere or there is no movement going on or growth going on.” The feeling of disappointment because “you work with a student who sometimes has some real promise to change and then just gives up.”

Yet out of that frustration came hope and a great feeling because, “even if I make the smallest difference, that’s a difference in their life. Even if I can make one day better, that’s one day that’s better.” The feelings of excitement, fun, and joy and happiness “when a kid looks at me and says, ‘Hey that makes sense, or I never thought of it that way’.” The feeling of excitement and happiness “when they come in and then they leave feeling better about themselves.” The feeling of great joy “when you see a child change or grow.” “I love the energy they give. I feel their unconditional acceptance. They have made the difference in my job

this year.” Those were the extremes that described how first year school counselors felt each and every day.

How counselors dealt with these feelings varied with the situation. Sometimes a frustrating situation was handled in a way that brought satisfaction to both the counselor and the student.

I had a little girl in here that her mom and dad were fighting at home and she was worried about mom and we . . . I went over that fighting is going to happen but when mom and dad fight, that's between them and I know that makes you feel sad but what are some things that you can do. And so together we came up with some things that she could do. She just felt more prepared to go home. She felt more in control when she left. She had that smile on her face when she left the office.

The full range of emotions and the realization of the counselor's impact on individual student's life situations were captured in the summary comments of a participant.

It is so encouraging and so heartening while at the same time it's very disheartening, it's never discouraging but it's disheartening. You have to admit you can't change the entire system for the job. You can't change the family. You can hope to expect some changes but you can't just go out and make it happen.

Sometimes situations were not resolved and counselors were left with a feeling of sadness. The “how” a counselor might deal with these emotions was powerfully described by a novice counselor becoming an expert.

I'm an internal processor. I think about it. I view my brain (this is scary) like a chest of drawers and every drawer has a label on it and I just have to make sure and put everything where it belongs. And when I'm really upset or sad after I've worked with a kid, generally I take some time and just kind of process it through there and I have to realize that I didn't do that. The kid doesn't necessarily do that to himself or herself. I can't take it away. The kid can't take it away right away. We can have him just looking for that, for that little – the cliché says “silver lining in the cloud”. We just have to keep looking for that little piece of silver in there and so then it's okay. It got tucked in its drawer, shut the drawer until the next time I come across it again.

When counselors paused to appreciate and learn from the students with whom they worked, the depth and breadth of the counseling experience increased several fold. The empathy for became the energy from the students that they served. Things learned by first year school counselors included patience. “I've learned that I always thought I could be a very patient person, but there have been times that I came real close to losing my patience and you have to go one step farther.” “Patience and patience again. It does take time to

establish trust. You can't rush things. Slow down, taking the time to get to know them."

Gaining a respect for and recognition of students' internal capacity were wonderful lessons for first year school counselors. "They all look at things or perceive things differently and you have to look at the way they're seeing things before you even start taking them in any direction. Have to look at what they're seeing." What a comfort and freeing notion to realize, "I'm learning that they really do have the answers. I don't need to give it to them if I just listen to them." The counseling jargon of genuineness was provided a real life context once the first year school counselor realized, "Students are the best crap detectors in the world. What have I learned? Always to be honest, always to be straight up, not to hide my own values, but not to press them on others." Gaining this insight and learning from students provided enrichment to the counseling experience. Again, it took thoughtful consideration to see and accept those life lessons.

When the experience was not what was expected, when counselors wondered if they could really do the job, when discouragement was overpowering confidence, then the most important lesson to be learned from students was what kept them going for a while.

The biggest thing I learned, because this was my first year as a counselor, was because of all the adjustments you have at the beginning of the year. You question whether or not you're in the right field. They gave me, I don't know if it's inspiration or the security, one of the two.

Yes, this is what I need to be doing because they're responding to my lessons or my contact with them, has made me realize that this is what I do fairly well. This is what I can do and that's a really good lesson for somebody who's nervous about what they're doing. . . .I'm making a difference and that's what they've taught me. Yes, this program does work. It's a matter of you instituting it to work.

Participant reflection journal. Of the 40 journal entries collected during the study, nine entries described a situation where the novice worked with an individual student. The responses demonstrated that counselors understood their role with students and employed a variety of strategies and techniques when working with them. One participant described a mediation session that provided an opportunity for students to problem solve. A first year school counselor described a small group for boys working on study skills. The counselor commented, "I feel the boys have the 'right answers', but haven't really changed any habits. Not internalized yet, but seeds planted!" This counselor recognized the role of creating the opportunity for student growth, and the responsibility that lies within the students.

The reflection entries provided several counselors with the opportunity to consider and articulate the emotions they experienced while working with students. A participant worked on attendance issues with a student and parent for several days and learned "I also have a caring manner that allows students to trust me. . . I am thrilled and very proud that R. is coming to school." Another

participant described a strategy to help a student overcome shyness. A novice sensed that the timing was right because “this student was comfortable with me and the relationship was built. So the next step was to bring someone else in.” One participant described being frustrated because a student was “off task, asking for repeat directions, and behind others.” The participant recognized that “I get easily frustrated when kids are off task.” The resolution was to “skip the frustration level and get right to being understanding. . . most kids expect the frustration and are often surprised to make an ally.” These examples demonstrated that these first year counselors utilized strategies for working with students and learned a great deal in the process as well.

Non-participant observation. The non-participant observations provided the researcher with the opportunity to see the counselor/student relationship in action. Each of the common themes listed below was richly reinforced with examples from classroom lessons, small groups, and individual sessions. In particular, the positive relationship with the counselor was evident through hugs, active participation by students, and the one-on-one interaction that occurred even within a classroom of 28 students. The participants utilized a wide array of strategies such as open questions, group work, and problem solving. A high level of energy and personal satisfaction was observed during each of these observations.

Examples of reflection comments written down while observing an individual session demonstrated the skills of the first year counselor. “Counselor

had good rapport with students. Leaned forward and used humor. Student was very willing to share. . . counselor dealing with real issues – no shock response.” During an elementary classroom observation the observer reflected, “Respect for student decisions. Time for them to talk and decide. Gave students time to experience discussion and do group work.” Another observation occurred in a high school guidance office where the novice sought the opinions of students who had participated in a small group. The participant “described the role of counselor as helping students . . . student discussion is important because we come from a different generation.” These examples demonstrated the skill and confidence levels of first year counselors working with students.

Veteran counselor contact log. Throughout the year the majority of questions asked by the first year counselors were related in some way to working with students. In many cases the questions sought information about how to access agencies or district support in cases such as suspected abuse. Several questions related to the delivery of the guidance program components, such as “have you started small groups . . . and how do you access students?” The novice counselors asked veterans for suggestions for lesson plans and lesson delivery. In February a log question that demonstrated the many situations that impact the delivery of the guidance program, “Valentines Parties – do you have guidance? The kids are so worked up.” The common theme of counselors seeking a variety of strategies to work with students on a variety of issues was triangulated by the data from the veteran counselor contact logs.

Follow-up interview. The comments of the participants when asked to describe how the relationship with students had unfolded during the year were filled with confidence and joy. “It’s been intriguing because I am getting a reputation . . . ‘I was told if you can’t do it, nobody can.’ And I thought, ‘Wow’.” “Wonderful. I mean there have been some situations that have been kind of sad but overall the kids here are awesome.” “I love the students and they love me. When I come into the classroom, they are really excited.”

In addition to these expressions of positive interactions, the participants also expressed an understanding of the work needed to sustain solid relationships with students. “With elementary kids you have their trust immediately and if you do anything to break that trust it is gone, but you don’t have to earn it. They just give it freely.” “The frustrating part is that there just doesn’t seem to be enough time. I find the kids very open. I find them sometimes frustrated – your door is open, you should be willing to see me.” “A little overwhelming now because I know the students and they feel comfortable coming to me now. So it is a little overwhelming trying to schedule them all in. I feel guilty.” “Some of them, there are some that don’t feel comfortable coming to me yet. I think over time they might.” One participant summed up the year and working with individuals saying, “Nothing could have prepared me for this. The working with the students is probably one of the best parts. . . the part of the job that gets me up in the morning and anxious to come.”

The common themes that emerged concerning the first year counselors' relationships with students included:

1. The experiences of working with students were positive. The relationship focus varied by counselor level and domain.
2. Counselors worked with students with various issues and experienced their own emotional responses.
3. Counselors understood their role with students and used a variety of intentional strategies to meet the individual and group needs of students.
4. Counselors demonstrated the ability to see and articulate the results of student decisions.
5. Students' expectations of counselors were consistent across levels and congruent with characteristics counselors saw in themselves. (Also characteristics sought in counselor candidates).
6. Counselors experienced the entire gamut or spectrum of feelings working with students.
7. Counselors learned about students, yet the depth and breadth of the experience came when they paused and learned from students.

The common lived experience or essence of working with students could be summarized as follows: The congruence of the counselors' vision of their role with student expectations of the counselor provided rich opportunities to meet the individual and group needs of students. Counselors experienced daily

the entire spectrum of emotions as they worked with, learned about, and learned from students. The role required a high level of mental stamina daily.

### Graduate Program Training

Initial structured interview. The review of literature found a concerted effort to develop guidance and counseling programs at the graduate level that train school counselors in a comprehensive guidance model (Gysbers & Henderson, 1994). VanZandt and Perry (1992) stated that the first year for most counselors is often marked with times that finds them lamenting that their program did not prepare them for the reality of the job. Matthes (1992) suggested that no graduate program can fully prepare a new counselor for that first year on the job. The questions and sentence probes helped to determine the impact of the graduate program in the preparation of participating school counselors.

Of the 10 participants in the study 8 were working on degree completion and were provisionally certified. A common theme that emerged from the answer to this question, "Describe how your graduate program prepared you for this job.", was the positive and detailed depth of responses. Program preparation was described as excellent, good, and "prepared me very thoroughly."

The relevancy of course work provided a level of confidence for the first year school counselor. "Every project we did in the classes was relevant." "I think all the particular classes, you're hitting all of the specific areas and having those classes I think is essential to understanding our role here in the school."

The preparation and level of understanding of the program was described by a participant, "I was prepared for coming from the university but they're (staff) not prepared . . . we've spoken about just how do we get across to the staff that this is beneficial to them also." This level of confidence, believing that the program "prepared me just personally to bring out the skills and traits that I already have", was a sound testimonial for the university preparation. Although the graduate program could not simulate how busy and full the day in the life of a counselor was, "there is not much down time – constantly on the go doing something", the level of confidence in their preparation was high.

Specific examples of the pertinence and relevance of the graduate program preparation were related to the day to day tasks of being a counselor. Completing relevant projects raised a level of appreciation for the hard work of graduate school projects, and perhaps a hint of surprise that things were actually being taken out of three-ring binders and used. "If you need a confidentiality statement, you could pull it out of your individual counseling packet or your parent/staff stuff." "I've already gone back to these different projects and different resource files. One time it was just an address and a telephone number. One was a collection of journal articles." "I've used some of my small group materials that was kind of handy when I started. I just went to the folder and pulled them out." "I started my first group yesterday so that was interesting for me. That was a helpful class because we were able to lead groups while we

were in there and talk about different icebreakers and different activities. So that was helpful too.”

A first year counselor had less than a day to go from novice to expert in the area of schedule corrections. The big surprise for one participant was the ability to step right into the job expectations.

I’m actually prepared. That I’m actually prepared. I don’t have my masters and that frightened me but I see that doing the internship along with this pretty much works perfectly. On the first day they gave me 40 schedule changes and said, “Here.” And I was prepared.

Practical and applicable were common expectations of the counselors in graduate programs. Useable materials and information outweighed theories in practical application at this stage of the first year experience. “I would say up until summertime all the theories and methods and all that were interesting to learn about but not all that helpful in school counseling. Practicum and internship in elementary counseling probably prepared me the best.” A participant set a standard for the application of the program. “Underlying role or rule for the program has been make it something that you are interested in. Make it something that you can see yourself using. . . and I like that because to me that’s not memorizing facts.”

As practical and applicable as graduate program work could be, there still was no way to create the opportunity to experience the full reality of the job in a

laboratory setting, or even in every practicum or internship assignment. One novice described the least relevant component of the program.

The least relevant was practicum – taped individual sessions that were critiqued – to me everything was too phony. It was too set up. When I work with a student – the student takes the lead. In that particular class we were supposed to kind of take the lead to do the direction. And I think in the real counseling world, the client, in this case the student, is the one that takes the lead because you can ask all the questions you want. You can keep trying to go deeper and deeper and deeper, but if that person doesn't want to go, it's not going to happen.

Even though the program prepared students with confidentiality forms, it could not fully prepare them for the real issues of confidentiality within a building. A novice described a common experience.

I think I would say confidentiality because in training they told me everything is very confidential and there are a lot of situations in the actual school where it becomes a teacher referral. They already know what's going on and granted you don't go back and tell them what you talked about in the session. You're kind of on the same . . . You kind of both know what's going on. You know the family and you know the child. I think in a community setting it's a little bit different. So I think confidentiality in general is not nearly as . . . It's harder to draw the line in a school I think than it was - would be in a private setting.

A participant, working as a provisionally certified counselor and without practicum experience, described it this way, "It gave me a foundation, but there is nothing that can prepare you for this job. Just gave me the foundation but it didn't prepare me for the kinds of things I would be dealing with at all." "Nothing can prepare you for telling students that they're going to foster care because mom is going into the hospital."

It was hard to role-play the day to day expectations of a novice counselor. One counselor stated, "I think I was still idealistic when I went into it." Another noted collecting a lot of information during the program course work, but "to know exactly how to use them comparatively would have been helpful." A possible option to improve this area of preparation was doing agency visits. "It gives you so much more background into what is available out there. I probably would not have known otherwise." A novice noted, "I would have liked a little bit more training probably with assessment because when somebody brings those things up, I'm not quite sure what those are although there are people here to help me."

The solution-focused spirit arose. along with the understanding that it would be unrealistic to prepare every counselor for the specific domain assignment in a particular school district. A wonderfully rich example of the impossibility of being prepared for everything was a response to the question about the biggest surprise so far in light of graduate school preparation.

Pregnancy. Something that has never really been approached in any of the classes and I told them they needed a class on pregnancy. My first one, it was just scary because she wanted to drop a weight conditioning class. "You have to drop a point and you can't do this and blah, blah, blah, bark, bark, woof, woof." And we so just kept dancing around, dancing around, and finally the girl looked at me and she said, "Well, I'm pregnant and I can't take the class." Okay, whoa, okay stop! It's opened up a whole new can of worms. I mean it's a whole area where I had very little background. When this happens, what do you need to do?

Fortunately, again, the solution-focused theme of this group was realized as the counselor went to the mentor, and fellow personal social counselor, for guidelines and feedback.

These first year school counselors felt prepared for the job to a large degree. Believing that they were part of a relevant and pertinent program that was preparing them for "all components of the job", created a more confident basis for experiencing the first year. One counselor described a program, that was so correlated to her job, that there had been few surprises in the experience so far. "The first class with my professor and it just kind of clicked things together. I was like 'Oh, yeah! Okay! I'm doing that.' So, if anything, there haven't really been any surprises. It's just supported what I'm doing here."

Another described the most relevant class being the overview class where all the components and the total program came together.

It lays out, this is how you make a schedule, this is how you pull your classes, small groups, together. It has allowed me to understand the whole picture. The administration class gives you the whole picture and all of a sudden you say, "Oh, this is how it all fits together." That was a really valuable class for me.

This connection was expanded into the application when a counselor said, "I've been given such freedom to implement the program. Just implement the program as I know it. Continue the program that was here." The work of the graduate program was fulfilled. The confidence of preparedness created a humorous response to the question about most relevant course work.

"Classroom guidance, individual, small group, staff development, what am I leaving out (laugh)?" The programs appeared to meet the needs of first year counselors by "taking all of it and realizing it's all interconnected and making it work for yourself."

Even with very positive responses about the level of preparation they received from the guidance programs, however, these participants had the common theme of parallel experience as the basis for how they responded to situations for which they feel most prepared. A secondary counselor referred to being most prepared for SAT's, a district specific program not covered in graduate work. The reason for the comfort, "I think I have been most prepared for SAT because I had participated in them from the teacher's side – going to the counselor's side being more familiar with that probably than any other area."

Most of the elementary first year counselors stated they felt most prepared for the classroom guidance teaching component of the program. This even included a participant who had not yet taken classroom group guidance coursework at the university level. Parallel experience was cited several times. "Probably classroom guidance because being a teacher that aspect of it hasn't been overly difficult."

I'm learning it because I was a teacher beforehand which I think is invaluable in school counseling. You need to have had those teaching courses and understand how to teach kids. That's what I do best because that's what I have the most experience at. I have practiced being a teacher for 9 years. I know how to do that.

The participants recognized to some degree that parallel experience did not always translate to same skills application. A novice was already anticipating and planning for this shift to lesson facilitator. "I wish I had more time to refine my lessons and prepare some new lessons, but I think I'll get that time over the summer and as I go next year I know I will be just knowing everything." Another worked to develop appropriate lesson delivery across grade levels. "With the younger kids it was new because I was used to older kids. I'm still trying to get used to coming to their level when I speak to them and when I use words they don't understand. But I'm learning." This recognition of novice skills, and a desire to move to expert in this component of the school counseling program, again demonstrated the theme of "thoughtful processing."

A part of how the first year counseling role was experienced was clinging to those areas of commonality with previous work as a way of feeling competent, and refining counseling skills throughout the year.

The participants' responses to a question about the situations for which they have been least prepared were a combination of specific components of graduate school training, and some that were district specific. The review of literature suggested that although the individual counseling component of a comprehensive school counselor's role is a relatively small portion of time, it could be one of the most difficult for the counselor. The reason suggested is the difficulty in simulating the reality of dealing with individuals and sensitive issues in a laboratory setting (Patterson, 1988).

Several first year counselors cited being least prepared for situations that dealt with individual counseling. "The individual. They all have different issues. Learning how to talk with kids at all different levels. What I discussed with a student and then it offended the teacher." "Individual, simply because of the lack of actually carrying on individual caseloads throughout the year. I did a lot of listening but as far as strategy and so forth even short term, I really didn't do it."

Even if the individual session went well, the area of confidentiality with adults was difficult to plan for and practice.

Difficulty dealing with parents who are uncomfortable with confidentiality components. I try to explain it. Before a parent came in – we made kind

of a list of the things that the child wanted to say to the parent. So we kind of got around that confidentiality by having the child give all the information.

The other situations that first year school counselors cited as times of feeling unprepared were categorized as more district level specific. For example, the secondary counselors had no more than a few minutes in some cases to move from novice to expert when it came to the massive numbers of schedule corrections required at the beginning of the year. "We didn't get a specific list of this (schedule change requests) you can correct and this you really can't. I was forever asking, 'Is it okay to do this?'" "You can't do it that way. There are certain things in the building, that's the way it's run."

Coursework at the graduate level provided some skill building on working with abused students. There was still no way to totally prepare counselors for that first time they worked with a student and wondered if this was a case of abuse. Wishing for a magic wand with an answer didn't work.

Situations of abuse in general I still don't feel like I'm all that prepared and when I have encountered anything, I've always talked to the other counselor to kind of see what they think. I still don't feel all that comfortable and I don't know the exact procedure. I know we just received a thing on it so I have an idea now but that's probably the area I feel least comfortable making my own decisions. I kind of like the help of an administrator or the other counselor to kind of help me in those

situations.

The solution-focused common theme that developed for how these participants experienced their first year as counselors was apparent. Collaborating with fellow counselors and administration was an ongoing and developing partnership necessary for all counselors.

One sign that someone was moving from novice to expert was having an answer to the question about what advice they would give students in a counseling program. The answers provided additional insight into just how these first year school counselors were feeling about themselves in their current role. The role of a school counselor and the course work that one must take to become qualified were both very demanding. The participants recognized this and shared some specific advice for anyone considering becoming a counselor. One participant provided a checklist for a potential counseling program candidate.

Check out the program. . . look closely at the amount of applied work and actual work in it. . . look closely at the classes and what the content of the classes is. Check out the faculty and so forth in order to know what the program is going to be all about. And probably just to get in, do everything and do it.

Experience in education did not provide a clear picture of what being a school counselor in a comprehensive competency based guidance program was going to be like. Unlike first year teachers, who have watched teaching daily for

their entire educational career, the role of the counselor was not as visible and may have been more of a response or therapy model in some settings. The advice from these "experts",

Maybe to go out into the different setting and really see which area you're really interested because I went into it in the community. I thought I was going to be community counseling and once I found and spoke with some elementary counselors and middle school counselors. Then my mind changed. So I think it's important before you know or decide for sure because you could go into that track without really going out and having to talk with someone.

"The more exposure you can get into, get into the counseling office, I think would make a big difference. And then also, maybe especially on the high school level, come up during the summer when they are doing registrations."

Completing a program that provided the skill sets, enabling these participants to confidently describe their skills for doing their job, necessitated a demanding program. The first year school counselors, eight of whom were still in programs, knew how much of a commitment it was. They advised others to expect to work and take advantage of opportunities. "Get in there and practice and see what it's like. I've worked in the schools, but I wasn't prepared." "Be prepared to have to spend enormous amount of time getting to the place you want to get as far as your classroom time. There's a lot of work. Get to know the expectations of the professors." Additional professor advice included, "I

would start off with some of the classes that the core professor teaches and get your feet wet with her first." "I'm advising one person already – one of the guidance teachers – on what classes to take when and which ones are prerequisites for this and that. I think one of the hardest things starting out is knowing what professors expect."

The majority of the participants were both first year school counselors and current graduate school students. The practice of hiring provisionally certificated counseling candidates was the result of a current guidance counselor shortage in the area of this study. The responses of the participants would not necessarily be enough to sound a ringing endorsement of this practice. The responses did, however, speak to the importance of practical and experience based graduate work that placed students in the field to practice the craft they were learning. Even though a first year full time job and graduate school were a huge time commitment, the value was noted.

I think when we're going through our program and especially way back in the beginning, when they said you need to do all this, some of us went home and cried. We were scared to death and yet we have some excellent instructors, we have excellent support there and I think my main concern was I'm still doing my internship and taking this position. But as I said, it just works perfectly. I am prepared to do the internship in this position. If I were working with somebody else, I would still be doing the same job so the support is still there although I think it's different for

secondary people and elementary people. I don't know how they do it. They're being there in a building by themselves or with one other person. In secondary, we're really fortunate to have a large staff there to support us.

An elementary participant shared the value add of doing an on-the-job internship. "I think taking a paid internship, if you feel prepared, is a better idea because you're getting a lot more experience." The advice for graduate faculty was "make the program relevant and get us into the field."

The recognition of the participants that a practical and applicable graduate program was necessary was further evidenced in the responses to the probe asking for suggestions to give graduate faculty. "Give your students as much opportunity to get into different buildings as soon as possible. I mean we did do some visitations in different areas, but I think getting into an actual setting sooner. As soon as possible." "Even job shadowing or something in all different ethnicity. The counselor where I worked wasn't nearly this busy, and she didn't have near the issues that I've been dealing with. It is fun but it's challenging." "I think having more field trips or going out to different sites would be helpful too, because we didn't do really any of that in the training. I think knowing the agencies and knowing what's out there with agencies would be really helpful."

Other requests of professors got to the heart of how first year school counselors experienced the task of moving from novice to expert. Some days it was needing to be more of a professional expert and the request became, "I

would say they should offer a class in ethics because I still don't feel like I know all the . . . I don't know the laws behind everything all that well so sometimes you feel like you get into a situation that you're libel for something." Other days it is feeling more vulnerable and the request became,

Teach us how to, even if we're having bad days or whatever, to not show it. We fake it real easy because people are counting on you. Self-esteem is a big issue. Where you think that you can bring your problems in, that's not so because everyone is almost counting on you to help them make it through the day. I think professors should prepare us in the area of how do you deal with the overload of everyone coming to you with problems and then how do you handle all those problems with your own as well.

On graduate school class day it was feeling overwhelmed and the request became,

Probably the biggest one is to remember we're all doing the best we can. We have full-time jobs, families, and this. It would be nice if we could all just go to graduate school and they would pay for it and we wouldn't have to have a job but that's not going to happen. You shouldn't have to feel guilty or like you're disappointing somebody because you're taking care of your own family. We're supposed to understand those kinds of things and I don't think that they always take those into account because so many of them, their life is the university.

Most days it was loving the job and the request became, "Work us. There is no reason in making it easy because I think when you get in it and know it's right for you and love it, it isn't work. It's just a matter of putting one foot in front of the other and keep going. Not to water it down." A common theme among the first year counselors moving from novice to expert, while in most cases still completing their course work in guidance and counseling, was resolve. Resolve to engage in a relevant and applicable graduate program and use that knowledge daily. The resolve to find answers or make suggestions when a situation found them unprepared was a common theme in the study.

Another common theme that described the graduate program training, in which these first year counselors were able to move from novice to expert, was quality. These participants represented two local universities that provided coursework and training in the comprehensive competency based guidance model described in the literature review, and implemented in the metropolitan school district in which the participants worked. The participants articulated specific skills learned that they were applying daily. The description of the graduate program training was very positive. "Well, I think, overall I've been very pleased with everything there." "I think it's a great program." "I just think I've been real fortunate to be in a small group with staff members who are really supportive plus my colleagues of course."

Even with the quality program, there was the chasm crossed when moving from graduate school training to a job counseling. How was that experienced by

first year school counselors? A novice, providing advice to graduate students, painted a vivid picture.

Don't put yourself on that pedestal. Cause you're not as good as you think you are. You really don't know what you're doing until you're in the middle of it and you've gone through a year at least. The profession is one of those you can do all the training and everything you want but you really don't know what you're getting yourself into until you're up there in front of the class or you're in that office and you're doing the response of the day, you're doing your small group work. It's the same process you are in charge of putting it all together and trying to disseminate the information and trying to teach them and you're working with so many different types of people and personalities, you don't know what you're doing until you've worked for at least a year. A lot of people come out of college thinking, I'm prepared. I know what I'm doing. I can handle this. And they get in there and it's like wham! It hits you in the face. They've been knocked off the pedestal. Don't get yourself knocked off the pedestal. Don't put yourself up there.

The first year school counselor took the blows of the day, sought assistance or independently found solutions, and returned the next day to move one step further from novice to expert.

Participant reflection journal. Several reflections described situations that could not have been replicated in the graduate school setting. Counselors

seemed positive about their ability to apply skills and “figure out” what to do. The first journal entry from an elementary participant detailed a situation involving information shared in a small group about a student having a gun. The participant reflected the steps taken were learned by “dealing with experiences as they arise. I can never know what to expect. In this situation I would not have done things differently.”

In another November entry another participant decided to disregard the planned lesson and do a guidance lesson on cooperation and following directions when the students did not settle down for the teacher or the counselor. The participant noted, “Flexibility is the name of the game in education and I often changed plans when teaching, so changing as a counselor wasn’t a big deal.” This type of situation was one that would be hard to replicate in a graduate program. The counselor drew confidence from knowing flexibility was a skill used in teaching also.

During the journal entry for April a first year school counselor reflected upon a large group extension activity provided for the primary grades. Applying what had been taught in a comprehensive guidance program the participant noted, “I believe it is important to supplement the guidance curriculum with outside resources.” The participant, upon reflection, determined that the activity was “too baby for third graders” and would change the grade levels attending. This reflection was an example of applying skills learned for large group extension opportunities and the thoughtful processing needed for improvement.

Non-participant observation. Classroom group guidance lesson observations provided examples of specific skills learned in graduate school, and areas that needed improvement. A common observation was the need of the first year school counselors to “facilitate” the lesson experience with the students. A reflection comment from the researcher noted, “. . . again the need for facilitation skills to support risk of answers that might not appear right.” Lesson pacing was also an area that required daily practice for improvement that would not have been a large component of the graduate program. The observer wrote, “. . . seems to need some additional work on lesson pacing and student involvement. Needs to develop the ‘eye’ for the room with the ‘ear’ for the individual.”

There were also examples of the application of skills that had been acquired during graduate school training. One participant did an excellent job of weaving a self-concept series, a key component of a graduate school program. Particularly during the second semester, counseling lesson activities were experiential in design. A group of first graders worked in small groups to experience peaceful cooperation as they made a peaceful caterpillar. The opportunity to apply graduate school skills for an entire year was an important part of the experience of moving from novice to expert.

Veteran counselor contact log. The questions recorded on the veteran counselor contact logs most commonly were about building or district specific situations that would not have been covered in a graduate program. An average

of 13 questions per month related to building issues such as schedule changes, curriculum guide meetings, support group scheduling, parent teacher conferences, and graduate requirements. There would be no way for a graduate school program to address these building and district specific questions.

The data showed that all building specific questions during the month of September were asked of on-site veteran counselors. The January entries included 23 building or district specific questions mostly about second semester building and district policies. Only one off-site veteran was contacted, while 29 entries were recorded by on-site veteran counselors. To whom did the counselor alone in a building go to for advice?

Follow-up interview. The follow-up interview provided rich examples of the first year school counselors recognizing and describing the relevancy of their graduate course work in their daily role. "It is very helpful that what we learn is what we actually do in practice. . . you modify for your building, but it is an awesome program and it has taught me what I needed to know." "Now that I have done . . . quite a few small groups, I don't feel that fear any more. . . I think that had to do with the classes, plus just getting in there and experiencing it first hand." "Those activities were things that I could use on the job."

Several participants noted that there were things that occurred during the first year for which a graduate program could not prepare them. "The frustration comes from the classroom and the theory and the textbook not always working in reality." "I don't think the university can prepare you for that. I mean you got to

have first hand experience, every student is different. You don't know what those kids are going to do once they get in your office." ". . . time is so short. I think that is what made this more than I ever expected. Trying to get some sort of documentation." "There are always things you think about. Why didn't they ever talk about this? But you can't hit everything. I realize that."

The congruence of the graduate program training with the expectations for implementation of a comprehensive guidance program were appreciated by the participants. "I think the positive is our district is competency based and so is the university program. I want my academic work to actually tie into what I am doing." "It is very helpful that the program taught at the university is the program that the district wants implemented in the schools." "I think the university has really well prepared me for this job."

The common themes that emerged concerning the first year counselors' graduate program experience included:

1. The counselors described a relevant program that prepared them with materials and resources.
2. A graduate program could not prepare a counselor for all the daily realities of the role.
3. The relevancy of these acquired skills became apparent when they were practically implemented into a program.
4. The surprises ranged from being more prepared than expected to feeling the pressures of daily busyness and interactions.

5. The participants expressed a level of confidence in their acquired skills to do the job.
6. Novice counselors felt most prepared for role components most closely related to previous professional work.
7. The major theme of thoughtful processing was utilized in analysis of graduate school skills application.
8. There were building and relationship specific situations that could not be fully simulated in graduate course work.
9. The graduate school program's workload and time commitment were enormous, yet very much worth the effort.
10. The participants requested a rich exposure to field experiences, varied coursework, and several professors.
11. The participants understood the need for and appreciated a rigorous and applicable program of study.

The common lived experience of first year counselors relative to the graduate program was a solid level of preparedness. The rigorous course of study provided participants with skills, materials, and strategies needed for the job. Graduate programs, however, could not simulate job reality or prepare novice counselors for district specific expectations. The workload and time commitment were enormous, yet the rewards were experienced daily.

### Skills of the Novice Counselors

Initial structured interview. Novice counselors face a new and complex role within the school setting. Skills they used as classroom teachers are either enhanced or replaced by the skill sets practiced in the graduate school setting. For secondary counselors in particular, the job expectation includes computer skills to deal with scheduling and student information. All counselors must be skilled in active listening and group facilitation. The literature suggested that negative feelings and self-perception have a direct and negative impact on the quality of the guidance program implemented in the school (Logan, 1997). This line of questions, along with the reflection activity data, helped to determine the counselors' perceptions of skill sets needed and their current skill levels.

The first year counselors provided a rich list of counseling skills that they used in their daily job. As they experienced being a first year counselor they recognized and articulated the specific counseling skills learned in their training. Although not stated directly, these were skills that were either new or had further developed since entering a counseling program. For example, 9 of the 10 counselors mentioned listening as a counseling skill used every day. The explanations and descriptions of an active and reflective listening process, developed in their answers, demonstrated that they have learned to become active listeners and used the listening process.

I use these things so many times, I mean it's like over and over and over.

There are certain cues that just automatically click and I go into a mode

and it's a listening, and then we take a break and I ask them and I rephrase it first just simply so I can make sure I'm understanding correctly, and then we go through the reframing.

"Just actively listening to see where they're perceiving themselves at a given time." Counseling skills such as reframing, reflecting, paraphrasing, and self-disclosure were included as the skills used daily by these novice counselors.

The use of counseling skills to establish rapport and build relationships with adults and students was apparent throughout a counselor's day.

Even a counseling skill is to greet a child and handle a situation in a hallway if they want to talk with you. "Well, sweetie, I really don't have time right now. Can I come back and get you later on?" That's a counseling skill.

"Just being empathetic to children and their situation. Try to make a child special or feel good about themselves -- build relationships."

You do a lot of empathy and letting people understand that either you've been there and understanding their feelings, or you can appreciate how they are feeling. That's probably the biggest thing you do because there's not a lot of people who care what others think or feel.

The four components of a comprehensive competency based guidance program require specific counseling skills for implementation. Participant responses indicated that this implementation occurred with recognition of the skills used daily. "Individual counseling process on a daily basis. To use

curriculum has been really great.” “. . . the skill of working with a kindergartner vs. a sixth grader.”

Being able to speak with children at different levels. Know how to be excited and jolly for the smaller children, and then to be matter of fact and astute with the older students, so that they can understand exactly what is expected of them in life. The whole thing revolves around communication.

Other counseling skills used daily as the participants moved from novice to expert included: working with groups, interviewing skills, collaboration skills, and program organizational skills. “. . . all of the strategies that we worked through as far as techniques, and classroom strategies, classroom organization.” “Being approachable, open, and visible when you are working with one faculty member versus another and their different personalities.” The first year school counselors used counseling skills daily to implement the comprehensive competency based guidance program in a relationship building process with adults and students in their settings. “You do have to have people skills – especially for the job that I am in – to work with parents and students and work with faculty and not just working, you know, in one specific area.” The common theme was application of skills learned to competently do the daily job.

Responses to the question regarding any situations in which they felt a real skill deficiency provided a rich picture and common themes around the journey from novice to expert across the various components of a

comprehensive competency based guidance program. A common theme was the gap that existed between graduate school coursework and real job expectations. How was this gap experienced and narrowed by a first year school counselor? The gaps fell into the areas of building/district processes, individual counseling, other program components, and role in the overall guidance program. The building level or district procedures that were not a part of a graduate program became skill deficiency areas. A participant described it as an "information deficiency" rather than a skill deficiency.

A skill deficiency? NO. Information deficiency? YES. Everything for me so far has been so building oriented. I had no clue what the process for a GED was. I had absolutely no clue. So I told her that, "I'm done here cause there's nothing else I can honestly tell you." So I said, "I don't want you to feel like I'm passing you off onto somebody because I'm not. We need to pick this up tomorrow." And she looked at me and said, "Why?" "Because I don't know all the ins and outs and prerequisites and the little hoops you have to jump through or I have to jump through for the GED process. I need to find those out before I can pass that information to you and you deserve somebody else, but I don't want to do that because I don't want you to feel that I'm passing you off. Let's schedule an appointment for tomorrow that gives me a little bit of time to check on all the information so I can get all the stuff that I need to know."

Particularly on the secondary level district expectations within individual student planning were experienced from a deficit position. "It goes back to working with registration and schedule changes. I think that is more technology." "Maybe how to interpret CAT scores and things and that might even go back to something that needs to be covered in graduate school classes. I think a lot of time that is building specific." What could be done by the district and buildings to provide an induction program that narrowed this information deficiency gap?

The practicum and internship experiences with individual tapes and role-playing situations simply did not provide the "real" experience. Many counselors recognized the gap almost immediately. Half of the participants' responses vividly described this reality in how they had experienced individual counseling so far.

The first couple of individuals, and that, I hadn't fully admitted that you need to listen and not manage with individuals. That I felt like . . . I didn't do it, I listened but I kept feeling that afterwards that I should be able to facilitate. I don't know the difference, but more of an understanding and it was for me I realized. It was for me. It wasn't for the child. The child is doing fine.

The amount of time a counselor actually had with a student was usually so much less than the time devoted to an individual counseling tape for a graduate class.

The individual. I just don't feel like there's enough time. The skill deficiency would be naming the problem, naming the issue or just doubting the issue that I think it might be. Is this child acting out due to fear? Why is that child angry? He can't name why he's angry and I suspect why he's angry and it's far beyond me why he's angry. So there's something where I think I lack, I wish I had more experience.

The really tough issues, such as abuse, were situation specific and often in that ethical gray area. It was hard to simulate in a graduate class.

I think abuse is the only thing. I just had one student who came and had been hit by her mother and there were no marks and that was real tough. You know it's such a fine thing. Then it was helpful to have a panel there for Curriculum Day. But I really didn't know how exactly to help her or ethically. It was the ethics. I had already told her everything was confidential unless she had been harmed. But that's so gray that I had my own opinion but I thought of it and yet who knows what would happen on down the . . . I had to follow what the rules were.

In a real life individual counseling session there was always the chance that the presenting problem touched very close to a personal experience of a counselor. The experience of talking to a child going through a divorce was emotional if the counselor had lived through personal pain in that area as well. "In some individual counseling sessions, I feel overwhelmed with that.

Uncomfortable for me to deal with family dynamics, divorced families, and because I have experienced that myself.”

A difficult critique during the graduate program left a novice counselor with doubts about individual counseling techniques or skills.

I guess I would say that in working with young kids sometimes you try to be kind of a problem solver with them, and I know in counseling at least when I was in practicum the teacher said about one of my tapes I helped a kid do a little too much problem-solving. Maybe I helped him a little too much. . . .When you work with someone who's 8-years-old . . . you have to give them a lot of options or a lot of choices I guess. I feel like I give them maybe too many prompts, but then again you can only sit and listen and you have to somehow get to the end of it and come to some sort of closing and try to get them out. I don't know as a school counselor, I feel like it's kind of necessary sometimes to help them problem-solve.

What could be done to address the skills deficiency gap in the individual counseling skills of novice counselors?

Other program component implementations presented skill deficiency gaps. “The small groups – I just don't have a good solid background.” In some cases the skill competency was available, but time to employ it prevented the narrowing of the gap.

I like to incorporate games and hands-on things when it comes to presenting lessons, and then I want to follow the curriculum. It's just

sometimes when the curriculum doesn't present it the way or ask the way I want to . . . I know I can incorporate my own things, but I don't have the time to actually do that so when they have kind of like a dry lesson and thinking of some different things I can do. But I seem to make it through.

What were things that just needed to be learned through experience? What were ones to eliminate or support through the gap narrowing process?

Which were part of the professional journey, with the journey providing the avenue for growth?

Whatever the answers to these questions, the other common theme of how this skills deficiency reality was experienced was that the gap was not a fun place. Words that described it included: "no clue", "frustrates the 'bajeebers' out of me sometimes", "overwhelmed", "uncomfortable", "should be able to." This gap left participants questioning personality and suitability for the job.

I sometimes think because of my own personality and this may be a personality deficiency for all I know. . . my ability to be diplomatic in situations, I don't feel like I'm always as diplomatic or as clear as I could be when I communicate to the adult population of the school. I don't think of all the bigger picture until I've gone back and thought about it. When I'm there at that moment, I don't always realize the bigger picture and then it's too late to make somebody understand because they've already got a misunderstanding of the program or what my role is or whatever. And I don't know if I'm as prepared with the answers that I need to have

to see the program all the time.

This actually described a major professional growth from novice to expert in the recognition of the ramifications and importance of thinking "big program" over a building or situation. The feeling and belief that they needed to "sell" the program, but lacked the skills to do so, frustrated and left the counselor questioning personal abilities. The gap and the feelings of doubt that resided there were the common themes. Where did the gap filling responsibility lie? How important was the gap filling professional and personal journey in the growth from novice to expert?

Half of the participants responded that there were specific skills they possessed that were being underused. The common theme of district or building program design appeared to be the source of this situation. The secondary program in this district made a long transition from a response services model to a comprehensive competency based model taught in the local university programs. At times of the year the office bound history still existed, and it left a novice counselor feeling that skills were being underused.

I think sometimes how often I see students. There are a lot of days when I don't see them frequently. And I certainly keep busy. That's a real conflict. There's so much to do as far as preparing my curriculum and getting ready to go out there or handling phone calls but it's frustrating not . . . I think I would somehow like to be able to see more students.

In cases, where the percentages of time for program components were not honored by the building administration, counselor skills went underused and created a sense of frustration. "I wish I had more time for group guidance. I have lots of materials that would help teachers, but I don't have time to deal with that." When it was perceived that the principal did not embrace the program or the role of the counselor, the novice counselor vividly described skills being underused.

I think that some of my organization skills are underused within the school because of the kind of administration we have. I think I could be more helpful than they're willing to allow me to be. . . I have some knowledge that could be helpful to the school and to the students and to the administration that isn't being used.

The common theme was when graduate program of study matched desired and honored district implementation, the novice counselor experienced a reality of skill match and utilization. The district attention to hiring, position design, and ongoing dialogue with building administrators could seemingly have positively impacted how novice counselors experienced skill implementation.

Throughout this study of the first year counselor experience, the common themes of thoughtful processing and solution-focused had been evident. The various ways that counselors approached the development and honing of counseling skills were no exception. In addition, the responses once again provided the opportunity for thoughtful processing by graduate programs and

district administrators. As one participant noted, "I think experience is the best teacher." Another counselor stated,

I notice when I'm in the classroom . . . things just come into my mind where I become creative and I do things I hadn't planned on doing. I might have taught a lesson to another grade level and we get on that area and I might think of something I did in another class that this class might enjoy.

Additional responses that demonstrated the honing of counseling skills included:

"On a particular day I might just . . . listen. Constant practice. I just keep that as one of my goals to listen and when it comes to practice, it's really not tough to work on." "I give them (students) more time for processing and things like that. I try to stop myself, and it's hard because it seems like I'm always rushing out and I've always got a kid in here when I've to a class coming up." "Like time management. I have calendars all over the place. I make lists of things I need to do. And I think the listening skills. I think I, we, can always work on that."

Most of the participants were provisionally certified counselors and attending graduate classes. Honing their skills was a function of ongoing class assignments. "I've been reading some journals and . . . also going to the university and sitting in classes." Course work coupled with a real position had changed a participant's view about sitting in class.

I go to class. This year has put it in a different perspective to me. Before I went to class, jumped through the hoop, and did what I was supposed to

do. I prepared and made whatever assignments I needed to do, and I got the grade. Now that I'm in the counseling field, it has a different perspective for me because I need to use what I've learned and quite frankly in the class I'm in right now, the last project I did I actually did it saying, "Okay, I could use this. I could use this." But I didn't have that perspective before I was actually in the role.

Another response described a possible template for ongoing professional counselor development in an induction program. "Practice, working with other counselors, maybe observing individual counseling sessions. I don't know if there's any workshops or maybe just more reading, workshops on different topics/issues that I could ground myself better." A final response epitomized the thoughtful process and picture of the novice counselor moving to expert through continued professional growth.

I ordered from three different places this week to get a whole bunch of books. Some activity books, some strategy skill books, some research books or theoretical books, and some things about counseling. I just wanted, coping skills and things like that for working with certain types of children – research.

The common themes of thoughtful processing and the work of professional development were how these novice counselors were becoming experts.

The recognition and understanding of skills needed were important. The literature review found that even more crucial is the novice counselor's

perception of his or her skill ability. Questions and the follow-up probes focused on how novice counselors felt and what they believed to be the truth about their effectiveness. VanZandt and Perry (1992) suggested that novice counselors are often thrust into situations where they assert their skills, yet only privately admit insecurities and need for support. These authors further suggested that counselors feel guilty asking questions that they believe must be trivial. Sometimes they do not seek assistance, fearing they would be viewed as incompetent. The themes that emerged helped to assess whether too much was expected too quickly with too little ongoing support.

For 8 of the 10 participants the initial response to the question contained positive descriptions of their beliefs and feelings about their skills. "Prepared" and "confident" were adjectives used by six of the participants. Others used the words "qualified", "natural", "adequate", and "competent" to describe what they believed regarding their level of skill competence.

As the positive initial responses concluded, the first year school counselors recognized and described areas of the program in which they sought skill growth.

In a sense there were certain parts of the program that I'm still working out in my mind, but I do have a firm grasp on certain aspects of the program like classroom group guidance and the scheduling part, and meeting with kids individually.

"I know there's a lot of things I still have to learn. I think as I build up my curriculum, and I have all of that underway, I think it will be a lot smoother like next year."

There were situations and times when the reality of the importance of real life experiences demonstrated the learning curve in skill development. Small groups class discussion about open and closed groups was important. The reality of personality mix in small group implementation was quite another experience.

I think that small groups are coming along, but I'm learning as I go. Just last week, I had done one small group and there was a student missing, and then another student came in last week and it totally just threw the whole small group off.

The visuals of a roller coaster experience or being on a pendulum swinging from extremes were described by two participants. "Roller coaster would probably be the visual. It goes up and down as far as my feeling competent."

I feel sometimes that I'm very adequate and sometimes I'm very inadequate. And it just depends on the skills that we're looking at. It's either a sense of, "Gosh, I really got this down" or "What in the world am I doing?"

The resiliency and determination of these participants to succeed were found in their words. "I'm working to better myself and be more of a, I don't want

to say pillar, more of a resource for kids." A participant described preparing for small groups.

I'm going to have to start small groups before the small groups class gets over . . . I have contacted my mentoring counselor that I had last year and I've talked to the counselor here so that will kind of give me some type of background and then I'll take it from there.

The problem solving and solution-focused themes were evident in these responses.

The sense of confidence, that was the initial response of several of the participants, came from many sources. Two of the participants cited their age and years of experience as helpful in the transition from teacher to counselor. "Having my own children, having life experiences, and I really feel like this is a natural fit for me." "I think it was a natural progression for me to go into the counseling field when I was ready to leave the classroom." The encouraging words of others helped to even out the "pendulum swing" of skill competency.

I've heard that I have confidence in myself and I've heard from the students and from the teachers as well that they don't even know this is my first year of being a counselor. So that makes me feel that I'm competent in their eyes and I feel confidence in myself.

Confidence came from feeling a sense of community within the counseling group. "We have such a good support system that even when I'm saying, 'What in the world am I doing?', there's an elementary counselor out there willing to

say, 'Okay, this is what I do' to help you through it." The words of a veteran counselor helped a novice counselor.

When I get really stressed out, that old tape comes back that I'm not doing things right or that I'm going to be criticized for what I'm doing. And then somebody very wise last year told me, "Just go ahead and do it. If you're not on the right track, they'll let you know." That's terrific advice, and I haven't forgotten it.

The first year school counselors had a sense of confidence and a level of preparedness. As one participant summarized this section, "Personally I don't think I've ever been happier with the job that I've had." This first year opened their eyes to program components in which they were finding ways to improve. A novice summarized the essence of the responses, "No, I'm not fantastic. Twenty years from now maybe I might be fantastic, but I think the skills are there."

When asked to describe a situation that they handled skillfully, 6 of the participants described the results of an individual counseling session. During graduate school the individual taped sessions were most often around fictitious events with predicted outcomes. The exhilaration that came from seeing real life positive results from the use of counseling skills was shared by several participants at the conclusion of the description of the events. The how of the experience was the "sense of surprise" that this actually works. There were counseling skills being utilized to assist a person through a real situation.

And then finally, this just happened on last Friday I think it was, he came into my office after school and he was just beaming. "What's going on? Good day? Yea, yea, yea. Staying out of trouble?" All this stuff and he looked at me and said, "I did it." He said, ". . . I did some of those things you told me. Take a deep breath, I looked around. It was difficult. I think I kept it from happening." I'm sure there were some skills in there somewhere, but exactly which ones they were I couldn't tell you. But it was a positive experience and I mean I really think I benefited that kid. A very meaningful and emotional session with a father and son was described by a participant.

They were trying to rebuild his relationship with whatever this feeling was that the kid had that the dad had kind of threatened him. I almost cried. The dad sat here and said, "I love you so much and I would never hurt you." It was just an awesome session.

Occasionally, a counselor was just the person a child needed at a particular moment to help him move through something. The finality with which students can move through a situation was described by a participant who had spent time in the morning with a sobbing child, extremely worried about his mom. After assisting him with some locus of control strategies, he went back to class. When she checked in on him later the signs of a successful session were evident. "I told him later on we would call to make sure his mom was okay and when I went to get him, he looked like he had forgotten all about it."

Recognizing the ability to assist students using a counseling process was certainly a confidence builder. At the conclusion of a session with two fifth grade girls, a counselor noted, "It's a process. It's not going . . . I can't snap my fingers and say, 'It's going to be good tomorrow. You have to work at it. It's going to be a while.' But, I thought I handled that skillfully." The majority of reflections submitted by the participants throughout the year described individual work with students. Participants concluded that they believed they handled the situations well.

Several novice counselors listed abuse cases as the most difficult issue in individual counseling. One novice in the study described the feeling of satisfaction, and to some degree relief, that she stuck with her "gut feelings" and continued working with a student in a suspected abuse situation. "It felt skillful in that I went and got back up and we went in again and I didn't let it go because I could tell there was something going on." The results of individual sessions were truly rewarding in the daily life of a school counselor.

The literature suggested that one of the most frustrating experiences for beginning counselors is to have a clear understanding of the role of a school counselor, and to find that is not shared or respected by the adults with whom they work (Miller, 1988). Three of the 10 participants described an opportunity to articulate the role of a counselor to another adult as a time they handled a situation skillfully. Two of the participants had the opportunity to define the role of a counselor for a staff member who saw the counselor in the role of

disciplinarian. Assuming this role left counselors feeling better about themselves and the fact that there was a clearer understanding of the program. "I think it was important for me to let her know that I wasn't going to let her dictate how we handle things. I was being honest with her."

Through the discussion . . . I said that is not part of my job, I do not do that. I do not decide who stays and who goes. But I will work with the child, talk to the child, and I gave her some things that she could possibly do with the student to try and help her out.

In both cases there was a desire to assist, yet to ensure that the assistance came within the role of the school counselor.

The literature suggested the relationship with the principal and role congruency are critical for the successful experience of a beginning counselor (Brock and Ponec, 1998). One participant felt much better about the situation and her skillful explanation of her role to the administrator. "And I guess she needed to see that in print because since that point we don't collide as much and she gives me explanations if she is asking me to do something that's not necessarily guidance-related." The participant, who handled the situation with the administrator, suggested beginning the counselor/administrator relationship differently the next time. "I would like to do my initial meeting with my administrator over because I would have been more specific about the program and the program goals, and I would have been more specific about my personal style."

One day counselors felt very competent with a serious individual situation. The next day when a student was depressed and talking about harming herself, the sense of skill level swung the other direction.

I think I handled it o.k., but first off I went and got somebody else who had more experience in that area and who deals with that area. I felt very uncomfortable. That is why I would like to do it over again and maybe I think that is something that comes with time – being more comfortable with it and knowing the steps to follow for sure.

Some days the individual counseling strategies just didn't seem as effective. "I would like to do over an individual counseling that I had with a student because the teacher was offended I think by the way I handled it. And I have been handling it differently since." Some days the magic wand to discern the truth was not so handy.

I think now – not that I don't believe kids when they tell me things like that – but it's just . . . You've got to ask more questions and be more . . . Get more information because I really didn't ask her much. She just kind of told me. I took it for the truth.

The common theme embedded in the responses was the theme of solution-focused. As the participants described events they would like to do over, it was with a focus on a solution or thoughtful process for becoming a better counselor – to move from novice to expert. "There's a girl in the fifth grade class – she just likes to come in and talk about whatever. Sometimes I

feel like I'm a little impatient with that. So I guess I need to work on being more patient . . . try to take it to a deeper level." One counselor, working on lesson pacing, determined,

A lot of times I do too much talking and then once the activity gets started, I have like 10 minutes and the activity goes for 20. If I would do that over, I would cut back the first part because I always start with the self-concept series.

The confidence to openly discuss situations that hadn't gone well, and then to quickly focus on the growth was another example of how the first year counselors experienced their daily job. "I just think that there are so many possible things I can experience yet."

The final sentence probe for the questions around skill competency was, "When it comes to \_\_\_\_\_, I feel like a rookie." The responses provided a summary of the common themes and questions raised throughout the section on skills and how the first year counselors experienced the job. The responses fell into the two main categories of program component competency and district / building procedures competency. The secondary participants all described vividly the trial of scheduling and paper trails to function effectively within the district and building practices and procedures. "Now it would be the schedules just because I'm not quite sure. . . sometimes I feel like I'm floundering."

The first day of scheduling caused one participant to momentarily question her sanity for leaving the classroom.

It is like the first week I was going down the hallway, “Excuse me I have a questions about ESL . . . Excuse me I have a . . .” Let me go back to the classroom. That thought crossed my mind the very first day of the school with registrations, but by the end of the day it was like – no – this is where I belong. Quick learning process.

The paper trail picture was painted as a tangled web by a novice.

When it comes to doing the paperwork, I really feel like a rookie because that’s when we’re back into some of the building specifics. I’ve got A right here on my desk or in my office, but I’ve got to get them to E but I don’t know all those little steps in between the filing this with this person and that with that person. And at least in our office the paper channel changes periodically. The paperwork stuff is kind of irritating.

These procedure and policy situations were a problem for elementary counselors as well. “The reporting – when to report, when not to. Mixed signals.” What could be done to assist new counselors in the process of learning the procedures and practices of a building and the district?

The other participants each mentioned some component of the comprehensive competency based guidance program with which they were charged to fully implement regardless of their novice status. The graduate phrase of “it takes three to five years to fully implement your program” had a hollow echo to the individual student who needed help, to the classroom teacher who expected quality lessons, to the families who needed understanding, and to

an administrator who wondered why there weren't several small groups up and running.

Novice counselors, struggling with skill competency in specific program components and feelings of floundering, found general program definition and implementation difficult.

I know some of the things that I'm supposed to do, but I don't know where I'm crossing the line in some areas and no one is going to tell me that because they want me to do those other things. So that's why I feel like a rookie in just knowing the dynamics of where my job begins and ends. It's just a fine line.

A solid graduate program certainly helped with the learning curve. The question remained, What can be done to assist counselors in implementing the components of a comprehensive competency based guidance program, and what experiences were simply a part of the learning process?

Participant reflection journal. Several of the participants selected a particular guidance lesson or activity for a journal entry. They reflected upon the wide variety of skills and strategies being used. "I taught a review lesson on different roles we play in our lives. Last time we discussed, but this time we focused on the project." "We talked about how each student is a piece of the class – like a puzzle piece . . . Students worked together to assemble the puzzle."

The impact of building expectations and district program design were also topics chosen for reflection. A participant wrote in November about attending a first Student Assistance Team meeting. "I attended my first formal SAT, because typically my schedule interferes with my ability to attend. I would like to offer more input in future SAT meetings now that I understand the format."

The belief that skills improved with practice was noted by several participants. ". . . have students get in groups and actually create a playground on paper – to do this I would shorten some other things down." "I could also bring in props and act out different roles that I play in my life and have students guess. It would liven the lesson." These examples demonstrated the growth in novice counselors' ability to create experiential guidance lessons.

Non-participant observation. The participants applied a wide variety of skills and strategies to implement the guidance program. These included: checking for understanding, defining vocabulary, connecting to previous learning, and experiential activities. The skill improvement observed by the second observations was apparent for each of the participants. Comments noted during a second semester observation were, "Made connection from previous lesson to new – paused to provide students' think time. . . nice job of keying off student response and comment." "Counseling skills – taking turns to speak and checking for understanding." "Lesson and student activity organized and helped to ensure student success."

There were still some skill deficiencies evident during the second semester observations. These included components within a guidance lesson such as using more closed than open-ended questions, missing opportunities to link student responses, or lacking a closure that provided for students' application of the skill. These are skills that take practice as the novice moves to expert in the ability to facilitate rather than teach a guidance lesson.

Veteran counselor contact log. The total number of veteran counselor contact log entries number just over 200. Of those entries, nearly 50% were questions related to guidance and counseling skills. Some examples included: child abuse procedures, lessons for a kindergarten class, what to do when dealing with a troubled parent, and how to organize counseling paperwork. During the second semester skill questions still topped the list of categories. Topics included: child protective procedures, grade appropriate lessons for primary, and appropriate action to take with a fifth grader stating she wants to kill herself. The majority of these questions were asked of on-site veterans.

Follow-up interview. The follow-up interview at the end of the year provided the participants with the opportunity to describe how they were feeling about their skills at the end of their first year as counselors. The common theme concerning the impact of the time and pace of the day on the utilization of skills was developed during the second interview. "How do I get things done? Just my mail. When do I get it? When do I read it? What should I do about it?" "Planning lessons. There is not a lot of time. I would love to have more time to

develop those lessons.” “Multi-tasking . . . being able to stay calm enough when there is so much going on at the same time – to prioritize it in your mind. For me that means making lists.” Some of the additional skills that counselors described during the second interview that helped them to implement the guidance program included time management, organization, prioritization, and flexibility.

The participants believed they were prepared, had developed skills throughout the year, and expected to become even more skilled with experience. “I have expanded a lot. I have experienced a lot of different things both in the classroom, in the office, through visits to agencies. I can experience growth within myself by helping other people.” “I just feel so much more comfortable dealing with the student one on one.” “Probably the biggest thing would be the individual. Just the comfort level and being alone with kids.” “I feel calmer. I feel calmer about what I do.”

The common themes that emerged concerning novice counselors’ skill sets included:

1. The participants identified a wide variety of skills they used in the process of implementing the guidance program.
2. Skill deficiencies were in areas where either the information was not included in the graduate program, or in areas that were difficult to replicate.
3. The time and pace of the day forced the novice to adjust skill strategies.

4. The impact of the district program design or building expectations created some under utilization of participants' skills.
5. Counseling skills improved through practice and the application of graduate course work.
6. The participants believed they were prepared for the job and expected to become even more skilled with experience.
7. Situations that were difficult, such as individual counseling or role articulation, were also memorable when successfully handled.
8. The same situations, individual counseling and role articulation, were mentioned as the areas that counselors would like to "do over."

The participants identified a wide variety of counseling skills needed in the role of a school counselor, and believed they were prepared for the job. Individual counseling and role clarification were the most rewarding and frustrating skill areas, yet counselors fully expected to improve with experience and practice.

#### Relationship with Principal

Initial structured interview. The literature review cites several authors who suggest that the single most important relationship for the first year counselor is with the principal. Shoffner and Williamson (2000) state that the counselor must be skilled in working in a collaborative manner with the principal. The opportunity to develop a positive working relationship with the building principal impacts program implementation. Brock and Ponec (1998) suggest

that the teamwork between the principal and beginning counselor is critical for the successful implementation of a comprehensive program. The development of mutual trust and communication, maintenance of support, and a clear understanding of the counselor role are necessities (Ponec & Brock, 2000). This line of questions helped to determine how to support new counselors and principals as they develop a working relationship.

For many of the responses during the interviews of the participants there was almost a melting of responses into the common experience of one. The first exception to that was the series of questions about the counselors' relationships with staff. Those responses fell more onto a continuum of relationship characteristics. This same phenomenon occurred in the analysis of the descriptions of their relationship with the principal. The prompt requesting that participants discuss their relationship with the principal brought initial responses ranging from "excellent" to a request "not to answer that prompt." The initial descriptor and relationship keys found in the details, presented the wide spectrum of relationships experienced by these first year school counselors. Further probes explored the impact of these relationships on program implementation and how the counselors experienced the day to day interaction with an administrator.

How the novice counselor experienced the first year on the job was very different depending on the level of the relationship and support from the principal as perceived by that counselor. Two responses demonstrated the

extremes. "The relationship with my principal is very good. He's very caring, willing to answer any questions you have, very open – he's always got his door open." "Distant. The principal and I have a distant relationship."

Personality differences were to be expected, even though in this particular urban school district the principal interviewed counselor candidates and a match between the two was attempted in every situation. Even if a principal's style was not a preferred one, a positive working relationship did, in some cases, still exist.

I believe it's good. I believe it's positive. I think "no news is good news" at least that's how I see this particular principal and I think he trusts me. I think he thinks I am capable. He has not indicated in any way that I have seen that he doesn't believe that, basically that I'm good. It's a good one. I enjoy working with him.

The four participants experiencing a negative relationship described a setting that left them with additional isolation and confusion. "It's not really a close one like I would have expected." This novice counselor had a perception and vision of a counselor/principal relationship. During the first interview these participants did not bring forward the common theme of solution-focused responses.

The descriptions of the means of communication between the novice counselor and the building principal were aligned with the original positive and negative responses concerning the relationship. The six participants with a

positive relationship with the principal, described a communication process that built on the relationship, or at least maintained open communication for program implementation. A secondary participant described a formal chain of command communication method that assisted with program implementation. "On the secondary level, the building principal is going to go directly to the department heads and the guidance director, and then it will come down to the individuals. That's the general process. Once in a while we'll have direct memos."

At the other end of the continuum of positive interaction was an elementary counselor who described a very informal communication process. "We don't have any set time when we sit down and talk. I just go in there when I need to talk to her. Or she comes in here when she needs to talk to me. It's very informal." The communication was described as "open, very open; communication is very open."

A common theme that emerged from this prompt was the importance and appreciation of personal contact between the building principal and the counselor. A level of importance and appreciation enhanced situations in which the principal actually came to the counselor's office to discuss a concern.

If there's a student that he feels he needs to tell me about, he'll tell me not in a note, but he'll come down to my office and sit down at the table here and discuss that student and we'll dialogue about something. He'll fill me in on what's going on with that student.

The novice appreciated the personal interaction, rather than a note.

Even a participant who described the relationship as “not good”, shared the positive impact of a principal coming to the counselor’s office to discuss an issue. “It’s good when she wants to talk to me about something. Like she’ll come into my office and she sits down and talk to me about something.” It appeared that a principal could go a long way in building a solid professional working relationship by simply on occasion going to the counselor’s office to discuss an issue.

A participant, who described the communication as more impersonal, responded that the communication was,

A lot of notes. I would say either they usually seem too busy or they have someone in their office so I don’t usually talk to them one-on-one except for the meeting which is every couple of weeks. So it’s pretty much notes and occasionally asking a question in passing, but nothing formal.

An additional probe, concerning counselor reaction to receiving a note from the principal, was included to further explore the counselor’s feelings and confidence concerning the relationship. The reactions to a note from the principal fell into two major themes – simply a part of the day to be addressed or a wonder of “what did I do wrong?”. A participant, who described an excellent relationship with very open communication, responded to this probe by saying, “That little voice would always still say, ‘What did I do wrong?’ But knowing that it is probably not right at all that I think so many times that is our first initial

reaction and then it is like, 'No, it can't be that.'" A participant labeled her reaction as one of self-doubt. "I had a note and of course you're like 'Oh, my gosh, what did I do?' There's a sense of panic . . . and self-doubt rather than, 'Oh, this could be just another issue.' You immediately think, 'Oh, gosh, what did I do?' Particularly as a first year counselor."

Rational thinking helped the counselor to realize that even if a mistake had been made, a positive working relationship with the principal helped.

I would immediately be thinking, "Uh, oh! What did I do?" If I'm in trouble, I've done something incorrectly or a parent has phoned or something, I still have always had the experience that the principal is always willing to listen to see what I . . . maybe the rest of the story and supportive to help me change that. I think it is hopefully an opportunity for some growth there – besides I'm new.

If that relationship did not exist, or if the note seemed very out of character, then the nervousness or uneasiness with the situation continued. "What would come to my mind is what needs to be done or what have I not done or what have I done that was wrong and I would just do exactly what she said."

I guess I'd be concerned because I've never had anything like that happen thus far. I would assume if something like that happened, it would be a parent calling about something I'd done or something a child had told them or something to that effect. It would make me nervous. I guess

it would be shocking for me to get a note like that. Go and see him and see what's going on.

All of the participants stated that they would definitely go see what was "going on." Three of the elementary participants mentioned the consideration of honoring the classroom group guidance schedule in when and how they would respond. Hopefully, the administrator was aware and supportive of this practice, yet these novice counselors considered the classroom schedule as they pondered their response. "Something's come up and I would go immediately to her office. I have my guidance lessons 10 minutes apart so I usually have time in between for things like that. I wouldn't assume it's anything bad. I would assume something came up."

One participant, who had mentioned that the principal always left notes, responded in a way that demonstrated that any communication method can lose its impact when used repeatedly. "I'd go when I had a chance. I'd think, 'What's going on?' If I had a classroom guidance lesson, I would go do that first."

Participants responded to a probe concerning things they would request from their principal. Novice counselors' requests of their principals ranged from program to personal to practical. Program requests included, "I was required to do some disciplinary things like call parents about a kid who was using some inappropriate language. That was my first contact with the parent and I didn't feel like that was a good first contact. I've been asked to do a few disciplinary

things, but it has not become a pattern or problem.” Two of the participants did mention wishing that there was a time to meet with the principal on a regular basis. The reasons varied from program to personal. “I would like to see us meet at least once a month. Just to sit down and talk about some of the kids in the building that may need extra help. That would be awesome.” “I’d just like to sit down and have a cup of coffee. I’d just like to sit and visit with her.”

Four of the participants' requests of principals were more staff oriented than counseling program or personal. “Be nicer to the staff.” “Probably to be more visible through here. Throughout the building.” “Probably from my principal the biggest would be you need to communicate with not just me but your entire staff. Staff needs to know the big picture and they don’t and I don’t always. This communication issue is a real difficult thing for me.” “I would never do it, but that she treats the staff kinder. She not be so hot and cold, but I don’t know if she can control that.”

The phrase “I would never do it” was not aligned with the common theme of solution-focused behavior among the participants. One participant had issues around program accountability and confidentiality, but had chosen not to address them with the principal. Another had concerns about respect for the counseling office space, but was concerned that a request could be seen as complaining.

People tend to be slightly disrespectful as far as walking in my office all the time, using my computer. Maybe it's just something that they're

accustomed to doing but I think if I made a request, it would probably be that. At the same time then I feel like I don't want teachers thinking I'm a big complainer.

Two very practical responses, that may or may not have been shared with the principal, included having "shorter meetings" and "getting the copier fixed." From program theory to meeting daily practical needs, these were the types of requests that novice counselors made of their principals. In each case the common theme was sensitive consideration, be it for the program integrity, the relationship enhancement, or the concern for the staff well-being in the building.

The final probe asked the participants to share things for which they would thank the principal. Participants thanked the principals for their role in establishing the building climate. "Thank him for his support of the students and staff." "I would thank her for in a crisis she takes over." "Supportive of the building. Wanting the best for his building. He wants a good reputation and he wants to hold on to what we've worked for." "She's very positive. I don't know how she always does that. She has lots of positive energy and that's something I appreciate. . . I would thank her for that." "I'd like to thank him just for his style. He is a very delegating principal which I appreciate."

The other half of the participants made more direct "thanks" to the principal for supporting the implementation of the program and demonstrating a level of trust. "Thank him for being caring and open and not questioning my judgement which is nice." "For her support, her support of the program, her

valuing my time. I am pretty much free to implement the program.” Even in a couple of cases where the relationship between the principal and counselor had not gotten off to a positive start, there was appreciation. “I don’t know – just having the opportunity to come and to work at this building. . .” “I guess at this point because it’s been such a distant relationship, the fact that we’re now to a point . . . she’s allowing me to do my job. I didn’t feel like I was being allowed to do my job.”

Participant reflection journal. Only one reflection journal entry referred to an interaction with the building principal. The counselor was asked on very short notice to speak at kindergarten round-up. The participant’s response to how things could be done differently was, “I would like to know of this date in advance that I might provide tangible information (packets) coupled with my information.” This reflection supported the request that communication from administrators to counselors be ongoing and timely.

Non-participant observation. During a first semester observation the principal stopped by and made several positive comments about the program and the work of the first year school counselor.

Veteran counselor contact log. There was only one question or contact made with a veteran counselor to discuss an issue concerning the principal. In the October log was the entry, “Support from principal. Fight in small group – dispute with principal over a write-up.” The contact entry did not elaborate on the situation or the comments made by the veteran counselor.

Follow-up interview. In some cases the relationship developed throughout the year and an entirely different relationship was described during the second interview.

I think that all of the foundation is the rapport. If you don't get the rapport, you are not going anywhere. So that is where I had to start in, was building rapport with the principal. She made the comment one day to me as she was walking by, "I am so glad that we are able to work together." So that is what I believe that principals are looking for. . .

Several comments of the first year school counselors during the final interview demonstrated their understanding of how important the relationship with the principal was on program implementation. "I was doing everything kind of quietly and behind the scenes. Maybe I should have been more out there and communicating with her on what I was doing." "I think the last time I talked a little bit about feeling like I was being micro-managed a little bit. I don't feel that was any more. I do feel, though, that there is still a misunderstanding on how this program is in the 'big picture.'"

The participants, in general, appreciated the leadership of the building principal. "I have found the principal here to be very supportive and very helpful both to me individually in trying to achieve my goals, but also to the department as a whole." "The relationship is awesome." "It is wonderful. He is extremely unique as a principal."

The common themes that emerged during the exploration of the relationship with the principal included:

1. The counselors appreciated the accessibility and support of the principal for program implementation.
2. The relationship, positive or negative, greatly impacted program implementation and the morale of the novice counselor.
3. The communication tended to be unscheduled and based on the “need” of the counselor and principal.
4. Counselors requested for themselves and staff ongoing communication and support.
5. Counselors appreciated a principal’s leadership in creating a positive school climate.

The lived experience of working with the building principal included a recognition of the importance of accessibility, communication, and program support for successful program implementation and personnel morale.

Counselors appreciated the impact of the principal’s leadership style in creating a positive school climate in which to implement a comprehensive competency based guidance program.

#### Principal’s Impact on Program Implementation

Initial structured interview. The ability to form a solid professional working relationship between the counselor and principal is important in determining how the novice counselor experienced the first year on the job. The literature review

called it the single most important relationship for a new counselor. In addition, the principal's understanding of the program, the art of providing a climate where the counselor is "free to implement the program" is also critical. The literature review suggests that the primary source of assistance for a novice counselor is the principal (Matthes, 1992). The research states, however, that the majority of principals studied had little or no training related to counseling programs (VanZandt & Perry, 1992). A frustration for a new counselor, ready to implement a comprehensive program, is to be thrust into non-guidance or quasi-administrative duties by the principal (Napierkowski & Parsons, 1995). Anderson and Reiter (1995) suggest that new counselors often accept these duties because they have received little training in how to articulate the importance of the guidance program implementation. This leads to frustration and job dissatisfaction.

Early in the program implementation in the district studied, time was spent with each principal to explain the program and the role of the guidance counselor. During recent changes in building leadership, that time with the principal to discuss the program had not occurred to the same degree or consistency. This line of questions helped to determine the types of support and understanding received from the principal. The themes determined the role of the district supervisor in working with principals at the time of counselor placement, and as an ongoing part of counselor induction.

Each of the participants was assigned in a building that had an established guidance program. The sentence probe was neutral in simply asking about the impact of the principal on program implementation. Positive impacts included a belief in the program and a protection of counselor time. The sense that the principal was extremely supportive and trusted the counselor and the program was important. "He's extremely supportive of it. He's very trusting of it. I believe that he believes it's going in a direction which is certainly comprehensive and developmental and proactive as well as responding to needs that we have." The presence of the principal in support of the counselor initiated program was seen as having a positive impact. ". . . he presents with us. The kids see him with us so in a way they know he supports us."

Even a novice counselor, still seeking an understanding of the building structure, recognized that the ability to access students weekly for classroom group guidance needed the support of the building administrator.

I guess with their scheduling of the specials, I'm not exactly sure who's in charge of that to tell you the truth, so I guess they made it possible for us to go in once a week and do our guidance curriculum. I guess if anything it would be planning adequate time for us to get into the classrooms. Most of the participants entered a program with tradition and the support of a principal, who had experienced the success of the program. "He has always been a strong supporter of it even, you know, when we first started it."

Four participants mentioned negative impacts on the program implementation, ranging from specific belief differences to participants who believed that the principal had a different mindset concerning the counselor's role. Confidentiality and the degree of information that should be shared with the building administrator were mentioned.

A couple of things in confidentiality because he wants, he's one of those people, it's his building and he feels that he needs to be in control of his building and know what's going on. My response to him at that point was I understand that, but being the principal doesn't mean that you need to be involved in every single thing.

The novice counselor had a firm conviction about the need for confidentiality and discussed that with the administrator.

The other examples of negative impact occurred with participants who had previously identified the relationship with the principal as not being good. For them the daily experience was more frustrating and confusing.

At first I thought she was pretty supporting, but I've been hearing things that make me question that. You have to miss recess because you have guidance. You know, stuff like that, so it makes me think how much does she support the program.

The frustration of attempting to implement a guidance program in a school climate that did not appear to value the role was clearly demonstrated in the

words of a participant who sensed a negative impact upon the program from the administration.

From my perspective, I'm sure not from hers, but from my perspective, she stifled it and more importantly, that first month or so she pulled off a lot of my enthusiasm. I was so anxious to get out in there and do this job and it was like being deflated. And maybe that was the idealism in me and maybe it was just because of the lack of communication and lack of understanding for the program on her part.

There was certainly a contrast between that perception and one which suggested, "She's impacted it tremendously because she believes in the program and protects my time."

The participants' perceptions of the principals' level of understanding of the program mirrored the responses concerning the impact the principal had on the program implementation. The level of understanding described was often expanded with an example that directly tied to program support. "He's never interrupted a class that I know of. Financially, he's extremely supportive."

I think he understands it well. He doesn't ask us to do things that he knows we're not supposed to do. He really doesn't have us do non-counseling things like the cafeteria duty or after-school duties. He knows we need to be in our office helping parents. He might also say we're there to help the teachers also with consulting and parent involvement. Basically being there for the kids.

A level of understanding that translated into professional trust went a long way in bolstering the confidence of a novice counselor. "I think she just assumes I am doing my job and I think that's probably the best kind of principal to have." "But I think right now she is real trusting that we're doing what we should be doing. . . We're really treated like a professional."

Novice counselors who had or were completing a graduate program in the comprehensive competency based model recognized a particular area of the program where the principal's level of understanding was questioned.

I know the principal made a comment about not really worrying about pre-K and K at the beginning, and I realized of course that you include them because they're part of the comprehensive guidance program.

So I guess the principal not being fully aware that it's inclusive of all grades.

"As for all aspects . . . I am not really sure, but I think for a lot of things that affect me he has a good understanding. But I can't say for the whole total program."

Two participants described situations where the level of understanding of the program was acceptable. From the participants' perspective, however, the administration did not support or promote the comprehensive model in their buildings. "I believe that my principal has a high level of understanding. It's the compliance area." "I think in print she understands it, but I don't think she's internalized it . . . in daily life of being there. I get pulled out and classroom

guidance doesn't get done because of other things. So she understands it, but it's not necessarily practiced."

The literature review described this lack of support and congruence as devastating for a counselor, new or veteran. What are the district expectations for program support from administration? What is the role of the central office staff in garnering the support of all building principals for sustaining the comprehensive competency based guidance model in all schools?

A role of a school counselor is to clearly articulate the comprehensive competency based model and increase understanding at every opportunity. For the majority of the participants the need to increase the principal's level of understanding had not been given much priority. In some cases the fact that another counselor was there, or the program was clearly understood and supported, had not made program articulation a priority. "Since the other counselor's been here, I haven't really done anything." "I can tell from the way that she speaks at the meetings that she does know a lot." "I don't know if I have really done that much. To be honest, that is probably something that I need to work on."

For the participants who described working in an environment where the program model was not understood or supported the common theme of solution-focus was evident. Even though novice counselors in these settings dealt with higher levels of frustration and doubt, they described efforts and assertive stands being made on behalf of the program. "I'm having problems reading her.

I think individual's important to her. I think that's the way the previous counselor ran it, and then you do the small group as needed. But I'm not doing it that way." "I've . . . redefined what I'm supposed to do to my knowledge of what I'm supposed to do and in certain areas where I was not supposed to do those things, I would make it known." "The things I've given staff I've also given administration, and to be real honest I've probably done it for both reasons so that administration knows and so that staff knows making them believe that it's because staff needs to know." What is the role of the novice counselor in serving as an ambassador and advocate for the program? What types of support from the district level would assist?

There did not appear to be much direct feedback from the principal to the novice counselor. When asked how they thought the principal would describe their program implementation so far, only one participant noted a specific example of feedback received from the principal, and that took some second thoughts. "I haven't received any feedback from her directly or indirectly. Actually, directly I get positive feedback. In fact, the other night we had parent night and she did say that, 'I heard that your session went very well.'"

It appeared that the feedback participants received had been second hand in nature, or from a source other than the principal. "To be honest, I haven't heard much feedback at all. I heard them say like, 'Thank God you're here.' I guess if anything I hear more from the teachers – compliments or reinforcement, but not from the administration." "In just getting some feedback,

which wasn't told to me, but I heard some praise reports that I'm doing a good job and that she likes the things that I'm doing, but that's from someone else's mouth. I haven't heard it from her."

When asked to describe the level of support being received from the principal, one participant did refer to the possibility of a formal meeting time. "It probably would be good to have the weekly time, but the note passing is going okay like when I need to, but it would be nice to have a weekly. I don't know if we'd have the time to do it though."

The novice counselors categorized professional freedom to implement the program as a level of support. "He treats us as professionals. He believes we know what the guidance and counseling program entails and he lets us go with it. There's no reporting or anything to him." "I think the biggest support was that he recognized hopefully that I had the skills and that it was 'go ahead and do your job'. I will be here to back you up, but it is up to you to do your job.' I don't think you could ask for much more than that as far as that he is, he is there for the program."

What I do is fine. She didn't tell me how she wanted small groups run. I'm supposed to have my plans . . . go over my plan with her and everything, my yearly goals. She couldn't be at the meeting. She just said pretty much, "Just give me your guidance plan, you know what you're doing."

An additional theme surrounding types of support from the principal was the theme of administrator directives and decisions that supported the program

implementation in terms of staff support and understanding. A novice counselor summarized the uncomfortable spot of influencing program understanding with staff with the words, "I'm not a very good confronter. I don't want people in the school to be against me." Some situations in terms of the guidance counselors' schedules and classroom expectations were misunderstood by staff. The leadership of the building principal to address those issues and maintain staff unity was greatly appreciated by the novice counselor. "The principal was made aware that teachers were leaving during guidance and she did put something in the bulletin about making sure you stay in the classrooms."

Funding. Time. Any type of training we need to be doing. I think he has certainly helped with the staff expectations that they know that we need to be trained in certain areas. That means we're going to have to be gone for training or whatever and sometimes that's a problem when they don't understand you have to be gone for half a day or something.

In contrast the participants struggling with the relationship with the principal provided no evidence or recognition of a level of support for the program implementation. "For the program itself, for the guidance, and the small groups and that kind of thing, that I've gotten a great deal of support. . . I don't know that I've gotten it." The experience of being a novice counselor and how that felt varied greatly depending upon the relationship with the principal. What are the roles of the counselors, principals, and district supervisor in providing a more equitable and professionally rewarding experience?

Participant reflection journal. There were no journal entries that focused upon an event that included reflection about the impact of the principal on program implementation.

Non-participant observations. None of the non-participant observations provided the opportunity to experience the impact of the principal on program implementation.

Veteran counselor contact log. There were no veteran counselor contact log entries that specifically addressed questions concerning how to handle situations related to the principal's understanding of and impact on program implementation.

Follow-up interview. As the participants neared the end of their first year experience, they could clearly articulate the importance of the principal's understanding of and beliefs about the counseling program. "She has never been exposed to the comprehensive program that we have. It is harder for her to understand the program. She has a whole lot to deal with. So in this case maybe it is really our job to help her to understand what is going on." "I thought she was understanding of the program. She expressed to me that the two counselors before me did things totally different than I do. I am implementing the program the way I am being told to implement it and the way I believe it should be."

One participant, who was extremely pleased with the support of the principal for program implementation, provided an example that demonstrated the positive impact of the building leader.

He was taking a parent around and showing them the school. He stopped by my office and introduced her to me. He explained the program to her in front of me beautifully. I am like, "Yeah, this is what I do." So he does understand it and he supports it greatly. We don't have extra duties. We don't have lunch duty, we don't have the bus duty. He really does.

The common themes that emerged during the exploration of the impact of the principal on program implementation included:

1. The principals' understanding of and beliefs about the counseling program impacted implementation.
2. Counselors felt supported and treated professionally when the principal entrusted the program implementation to them.
3. Principals' understanding, but not supporting the program, was particularly frustrating.
4. Counselors sought most effective ways to communicate with principals to maintain or advocate for program implementation.
5. Counselors believed principals approved of their performance, but had received little direct feedback.
6. Counselors felt like professionals when a balance of freedom and feedback, coupled with program support, existed with the principal.

The common lived experienced included participants' recognition of the importance of the principals' understanding and support of the comprehensive guidance program for implementation. They sought ways to maintain or advocate for the program with ongoing communication. The participants felt like "professionals" when the principal balanced program implementation freedom and feedback with program support. When this program support was not apparent, the experience was frustrating, particularly when the novice believed the principal understood the program goals.

#### District Support and Supervisor Role in Program Implementation

Initial structured interview. The questions about the support received from the district and supervisor of guidance were included because the literature suggests that there is a lack of sustained and systematic assistance available to novice counselors (Roberts & Borders, 1994). They concluded that more effort needed to be given to finding innovative ways to provide ongoing supervision. Crutchfield and Borders (1997) found that lack of supervision increased stress and workload. The themes that emerged could assist in determining the most critical needs, and the most effective role of the supervisor during this induction time.

The description of the types of support received other than at the building level fell into three categories: people, professional opportunities, and resources. The longest of the three lists included other people who supported these novice counselors during their first year experience. These interactions

with others provided an emotional support that was described with several phrases. "I feel a lot of support from other new counselors as well as support from the veteran counselors. They've all been so welcoming and open. They've all been so helpful."

I think just being new that you all are accessible and we know who you are if we need something. I feel confident that no matter what it might be, if it's ethics or anything, just whatever that's confidential or something real basic, I could still come to anyone of you and get the support that I would need. The supervisor made me feel like I would be a good candidate and willing to work with me so just coming from the supervisor personally made a difference.

"When I need information, I call one of the central office staff." "The unit of elementary counselors is wonderful. I have called people I don't even know and they have helped me and I've called people that I have known for years and they've helped me." "It was supportive and almost comforting to know . . . to talk with those folks because they were positive, they were real, they didn't whitewash anything, they had answers, they're very knowledgeable, very prepared."

The professional opportunities and meetings provided the next highest number of responses. The value of these opportunities centered around the support and feeling of professionalism that they provided. Agency visits were

coordinated through the central office staff. The value of these visits was expressed by several participants. "The agency visits are great."

It shows that the district wants to be involved in the outside community as much as possible, the outside community and agencies want to be helpful and involved. I feel like I'm being treated as a professional. I think that's very important to have a feeling of being a professional.

The various meetings, specifically for new counselors, and those with the entire counseling staff were listed as types of support for the new counselors. "I love that we are treated as professionals – we actually go to conferences." "New counselor meetings are awesome. They really give you a sense of okay we're not out there alone. There's somebody there that's going through the same thing that I am."

Other professional resource support included: curriculum materials, notebooks, communication sources such as e-mail or phone. "Well I often use the e-mail and just send out to everybody. 'Help! What should I do?'" As one participant summarized this probe, "So there's a lot of support there if you're willing to ask for help."

The probe asking to whom participants talked for advice or consultation focused on which of these groups they actually sought out when it came to seeking advice. Despite the long list of people participants saw as supportive, the list of those experienced professionals from whom they would seek advice or consultation was short.

Two participants mentioned the supervisor or guidance specialist. One participant mentioned the guidance secretary. Two other participants mentioned a mentor site supervisor, and one of those relationships had been established the previous year. Another participant mentioned a fellow counselor from the district because of personal connections. "I talk with another counselor just because we go to the same church and I see her every Sunday." Spouses were listed among those from whom advice was sought by two participants. The only other veteran counselor mentioned was actually from another district. "A counselor in another school district and it was just, 'I remember you worked on something like this once before and what did you do with it?' I didn't like everything they said, so I kind of tailored it to fit me and my situation."

A common theme of whom these novice counselors were seeking for advice and consultation turned out to be fellow colleagues in the program. "My friend that's in the counseling program at the university with me. We all kind of support each other and ideas. Mostly the one friend." "Colleagues from the university, and that could be elementary or secondary since we've been through this together for so long." The reliance on colleagues who were also novices for advice and consultation, rather than the many veterans listed in the previous probe, seemed to align with the literature concerning the discomfort of the novice counselor seeking advice. "I almost called the supervisor on Thursday night. Then I thought, 'This is something I need to sort out myself.' I just was not quite certain how to voice it and I realized there was no other way to voice

it." An additional probe was included to determine how a novice counselor felt when seeking advice or consultation.

Seven participants responded to this probe with an actual account of how they felt when seeking assistance.

A lot of times it depends on who I'm seeking it from, but sometimes I think that maybe I shouldn't call or maybe I should just figure this out on my own. Then I think, "No, you don't really understand the whole concept of it." Most of the time it doesn't really bother me. The biggest thing is I don't want to interrupt what's going on. I know they're busy and stuff but I think that's just being courteous. When wondering if I should call, I feel anxious – not quite sure if I should or not. But once I do, then I feel a lot better.

Another admitted feeling uncomfortable at first and then through self-talk determining that it would be good to reach out for assistance. "Initially, it's the sense that, 'Gosh, I wonder if I should know how to do this already?' And then it's, 'I know I need to get this job done.'" Feeling "not bad" about seeking assistance was couched in the fact that the new position made seeking assistance a smart thing to do, although this participant would normally not seek advice if expected to be knowledgeable.

I don't feel bad because it's a new position for me. Typically if I'm knowledgeable about something I feel awkward asking people for help, but in particular position I feel fine because there's a lot of things I

don't know and there's a lot of things I don't want to mess up doing. I feel pretty comfortable asking people . . . seems like a smart thing to do.

One of the participants who felt "real comfortable" relied on e-mail for seeking advice. "I feel real comfortable about that and probably because thanks to the e-mail. You don't even have to use the phone." The participant had also created a "standard" that made it okay to contact fellow new counselors. "We've been supportive all along and it's a mutual thing. I know people will come and ask me for help, and so I can go and ask them also."

The final three respondents described feeling "lucky", "good", and "okay" when seeking assistance. One noted, "I feel okay when I'm seeking and trying to find out things. I would feel frustrated if I didn't get answers, but I do." In reference to central office staff a participant noted, "I would feel equally comfortable with the supervisor or guidance specialist." The common theme appeared to be the existence of two themes – either feeling like a nuisance/ needing to be an expert, or feeling quite comfortable and smart for seeking assistance.

A series of probes explored how the novice counselor perceived the level of district support, what they would include in ongoing supervisory support, and how they felt about the level of support received. The participants described the level of support with words that elaborated upon the common theme of "I always felt supported – very much so." These words included "caring, knowledgeable,

candid, and efficient” from one participant. Another participant stated, “People were very enthusiastic to be helpful.”

A participant, who in a previous probe had mentioned feeling anxious about calling on a veteran counselor, had a very positive response which was seen as a high level of district support.

There’s not been a counselor that I’ve met so far that has not been helpful. They’re all very, very helpful. They’re always willing to give you things or give you advice or whatever. I just got off of the phone with a counselor this morning. She said, “You call me anytime you need me because I’m always willing to talk to you.” That always makes you feel good. Materials for one and then just verbal support. A lot of times you need that pick-me-up. “You’ll get through this. It’s just a process.” You say that to yourself, but then when somebody says it again supports your thinking.

The meetings at the beginning of the year, facilitated by the district guidance supervisor, were mentioned as providing a high level of support.

The meetings before school were helpful, and then I felt like I wasn’t the only one. It was nice to meet with people and see that I wasn’t the only new counselor who would be in this type of position so that was helpful.

The constant activities or things that are going on in meetings where you can kind of throw ideas around and talk about different issues. A school district this size is very supportive.

In addition to a very positive response, one participant noted that the district information did not, at the time, make a solid connection. "When I began everything outside of the building was more introductory . . . at that point in time I had no clue what was going on and it was introductory type things that I didn't really know where I was going to need the support or the assistance." For another participant, a process not explained in great detail during the opening orientation, turned out to be just the specific information that was needed very early in the year. "The only thing that I hadn't been given that I didn't know would be pertinent such as mandatory reporting. That was a big issue for me. And maybe knowing the different resources, just having a list available to me right away so I don't have to dig. It is such a big district."

The two references to "big district" suggested that an orientation to departments and services was of value. The content and timing were major considerations. The general value of this type of support was supported by a participant who had not attended the first new counselor meeting due to registration back at the building. "I had to miss that one meeting. I think that hurt me, and I mean that is no reflection on the support that I could have had."

The literature review suggests that beginning counselors desire to have ongoing supervisory relationships with other counseling professionals (Roberts & Borders, 1994). Participants were asked what, if any, they saw as benefits of ongoing supervision or consultation as the year progressed. Each of the 10 participants, in keeping with the common themes of thoughtful processing and

solution focused, provided rich insight into and support of ongoing supervision or consultation outside of the building level.

Someone to provide direction and support, who knows counseling, was a common theme in responses.

Just to help keep me on track, kind of know where I should be and the benchmarks and everything that I'm not familiar with that I'm still trying to figure out. It's just kind of helpful to keep you on track and feel like you're doing your job. I guess because there's a possibility that that could kind of get away from you at times and could be thrown into other kinds of roles at school.

The assistance with role protection and clarification was especially critical when the novice counselor was not experiencing a particularly positive relationship with the principal.

I think the most important role that I have gotten from either of the two supervisors is "you're on the right track." Whenever you're forging a new path, you have all this insecurity about, "Am I doing this right?" But to have somebody higher up and, particularly because I have such a distant relationship with my principal right now, have somebody in another role who's been doing this for years say, "This is working really well. Good for you and this is another way to work this situation whatever it might be", would be very helpful while you're getting your feet wet into this position.

There were a variety of ways in which this ongoing supervision role could occur. "Supervisor at counseling meetings, agency visits, and Curriculum Day represent a connection. I felt I could pick up the phone and call (supervisor) and I think if that disappears, that's a difficulty for a first-year counselor. That fact that I felt I could call the person in that position was a good feeling."

Wonderful to talk, talk over things with the supervisor who is there to answer questions that we may have that none of us know the answer to or to let us know that what we are experiencing is normal. So I think it is wonderful and I wish that I would have had that type of supervision when I was a new teacher. I think it would be great if we could meet more often to tell you the truth.

Suggested ongoing supervision included the supervisor simply stopping in to see how things were going. "Assist with any questions, see if that schedule is okay, talk about what's going on, what can be improved upon, are you doing okay, am I meeting the expectations of the program." "I think beyond the building, I think the support needs to be kind of centered in that area of specific concepts, specific groups, specific ideas."

The ongoing supervision and consultation support from a fellow counseling professional were seen as a "must-do in counseling."

That's just a thing that I believe ought to take place because when you have to do mental things and then you're dealing with a lot of people, you should have someone that you can talk to, you can get information

from, that you can bounce things off on. I think it should be a buddy system going on all the time. I don't think anyone can go solo in counseling.

The descriptions and reasons given by participants for their proposed components of an ongoing supervision and support program for new counselors validated several of the earlier common themes of the experience of the first year school counselor. These included:

1. Isolation factor for elementary counselors . "What I would like to see at the district level and just get together for coffee and being able to visit. I see elementary people and I don't know how they do it. I can see that they have more frustrations than I do, because they don't have the support."

. . . I think that personal contact because, particularly in the elementary program, there's only one person there that understands your job. You need somebody from the outside to come in who understands your job because it's unique and it's different than anybody else's role in the building. Because we work on confidentiality so much, it's not like you can share with people in your building. So who do you have to share with? That's probably one of the hardest things for me is how to get rid of the emotion and the frustration without coming off unprofessional.

2. Graduate school training vs. job reality -- "Training prior to starting about child abuse and the things that are kind of like the most scary you deal with as a counselor. More training in that area . . .because we talked about it in

graduate work but not to the degree that I knew precisely what to do in each situation and what the rules were for this particular school district.”

3. Principal’s program support -- “Get the supervisor in sooner, to see how it’s going. I think that the communication of what the building principal tells or knows is misconstrued.”

4. Role confusion -- “Supervisor needs to contact you at least once a week just to see how you’re doing, and if you’re in need of anything or if they just call you over the phone. Just more information. . . . be proactive in our getting to know what we’re doing as opposed to us having to call and say, ‘What do I do about this?’ Because sometimes we don’t know what to ask.”

5. Personal toll on the novice counselor -- “I think that sometimes we tend to forget about ourselves. We are too busy taking care of others, tending to others. Something on stress reduction . . . how to relax. So when you walk in the door (at home) you can carry on a normal conversation. So you can go in there without going over the gripes or whatever of the day. How to leave your work at work.”

The literature states that the first three years of a counselor’s experience are defined as novice and suggests that a counselor induction program should consider support in some degree throughout this period of time. The comment of a participant supported those statements. “I mean once you’ve been there for two-three years, you just start spitting this stuff out and you know exactly where

to go and what to do and where this form is and everything else like that.” What is the ongoing role of the supervisor in counselor induction?

The experience of the first year counselors provided several worthy suggestions. Words used to summarize the district level of support for novice counselors included: good, great, excellent, and empowered. Some references were to program support and the theme of the importance of role clarification. “We know what we’re supposed to be doing, and how we’re supposed to be doing it. It’s always nice to know your job description.” “The district gives you a lot of support if you’re somebody who doesn’t understand the importance of certain things in your job.”

The frame of reference for participants in the form of a comparison was the level of support they had received as teachers in the same or another district.

A lot more than I got in (teacher role). I feel so supported and cared for and valued in the counseling department. There were years in (teacher role) that I didn’t even know who my supervisor was. There you only see your supervisor if you’re not doing your job or you’re in trouble. I’m a person who wants to do it right. I want to do a good job and if you’re not given clear direction on what they want, it’s really hard to know how to do it – do your job.

The theme of a relationship and connection with the supervisor impacted how the novice counselor experienced the job. It wasn’t always needing

something, but just knowing that the support was there. "I can't imagine how you all do it in a system this size. It's dedication and abilities I'm sure because this is a large system and to have the kind of communication . . . the direct communication and that close contact . . . that's incredible."

Participant reflection journal. The final new counselors' meeting happened to be on the date that participants completed their final journal entry. Two participants selected that activity as their journal reflection. "The school year is almost over and I wanted to have one last opportunity to meet with other first year counselors. I like the social interaction and the sharing of ideas."

I listened and shared about "delights" and "concerns" pertaining to this counseling year. I also shared future projections in counseling. This allows new counselors to hear from one another and veterans about their present counseling assignment. Thus, providing us with info to draw from and to gain a clearer perspective. This is one of the "kudos" of being a new counselor.

Non-participant observation. One participant used a lesson that she had observed and adapted from her mentor counselor during the guidance teacher program. The observer noted, "This is the sharing we need to foster." Another observation was of a novice team teaching with a veteran counselor. A reflection from the observer included, "Two counselors were able to plan lessons across domains. Another potential benefit for a first year school counselor on the secondary level."

Veteran counselor contact log. The current “mentoring” program was simply the assigning of a veteran counselor to each novice counselor. There was no formal meeting arranged for them and no training for the mentors. The monthly veteran counselor log data collected throughout the study suggested that, although “mentor” was mentioned in the interview by three participants, the overall use of the veteran counselor as a resource was very inconsistent.

The veteran counselor log data analysis showed that participants whose veteran counselors were on-site used this form of assistance much more than those with an off-site partner. A total of 186 contacts were recorded by on-site veterans, while only 28 requests were recorded by off-site veteran counselors. Particularly early in the year, the majority of questions recorded were building specific in nature. All of the building questions were asked of on-site veterans. During the last month of the year, questions centered around end of year central office expectations. Twenty-one on-site entries were recorded, while only three off-site veteran entries were noted.

Veteran counselors' comments suggested a desire to establish a better relationship and communication support for the novice counselor in other buildings. “I feel bad that this log is so sparse, but (participant) has never contacted me. . . There have to be questions that come up, but maybe she isn't comfortable contacting me.” “She has no questions. I've talked to her several times, but she said she had no questions. Is there something else I should be doing?” “I called her off and on, but she always seemed to be doing fine.

Maybe she confided in someone else!" What could be included in a mentoring component of a new counselor induction process?

Follow-up interview. Responses from the participants concerning the level of district support throughout the year suggested that counselors felt a high level of support and found most information to be timely. Several of the participants had learned to rely upon e-mail as a way to stay connected. "Well, I often use the e-mail and just send out to everybody." "It is always helpful to get messages and reminders and ideas sent through the e-mail." "For the most part I look through the e-mails and see what is going on as people communicate."

The participants also recognized several people outside of their buildings as sources of support. "I had a mentor counselor and I talk to her quite a bit. I will e-mail her or call her." I know that the new counselor meetings have been very helpful. It gives me a chance to network and be with other counselors that I have known throughout teaching." "I have talked to a lot of the counselors that I hadn't known before last year. They are just real open. I just honestly feel I could call any counselor."

The participants also welcomed the ongoing support from and contact with the supervisor and central office staff. "I think the most valuable thing that I have learned from the central office is to stay focused on the program. The office staff sent out those messages of "don't forget.' I would say just keep doing everything you have done." "If there are problems or concerns we are allowed to

bring that up. That is wonderful.” “. . . I have found the office to be very helpful, very beneficial.”

The common themes that emerged from the participants' responses regarding support other than at the building level included:

1. The participants recognized several people outside of their buildings as accessible, supportive, and willing to respond to their questions.
2. Counselors had a short list of whom they would consult for advice.
3. There was some sense of discomfort when seeking advice, wondering if they should know the answer, or if they were a bother.
4. Counselors felt a high level of support from the central office staff and found most information to be timely.
5. Counselors welcomed ongoing support from and contact with the supervisor around specific issues or just reinforcement of “being on the right track.”
6. Participants felt district support and empowerment to do the job.

The participants recognized a high level of support and accessibility from several sources outside of their building for responses to their questions, information, and just the sense of “being on the right track.” There was sometimes a feeling of awkwardness seeking assistance, believing somehow that they should have the answer. The openness and positive responses from veteran counselors, central office staff, and the supervisor alleviated that feeling.

That led to counselors welcoming ongoing support and contact with the supervisor around specific issues, and for reinforcement of “a job well done.”

### Summary of the Common Lived Experience

The central purpose of a phenomenology is to study the common lived experience of a group. The question is how the common experience of being a first year school counselor is lived on a daily basis. The researcher sought all possible meanings and divergent perspectives, to construct a description of how the phenomenon is experienced. The final question in both the initial and follow-up interview provided one last opportunity for participants to describe the experience.

Initial structured interview. The most divergent frame of reference was the one participant who filled half-time positions in two schools. This unique perspective created a different type of stress than that experienced by other participants.

I would say the most stressful part is the traveling and I think as a .5 (half-time) . . . not so stressful but between two schools. It's just taken me that much longer to get to know staff and just policies and procedures in schools. The thing that's the most tiring and stressful for me just the back and forth.

Even with the stress the experience was described as a “good experience.” Two common themes emerged. The theme of positive and thoughtful processing led this novice to conclude about traveling between two

buildings, "Sometimes it's a positive because it's nice to have a change." The other common theme was the positive response to working with students. "But overall I really like the job and I like working with the kids. The job itself I like."

Two other participants shared the common theme of a difficult working relationship with the principal. Again the theme of positive determination was apparent. "I know that it's not the way I would want it to be an ideal, but I love the challenge." "I think that it's been a growth experience. I think that I've learned a lot about myself in the process. I think that it's been difficult – more difficult – than I ever imagined it would be because I thought I was going into a situation that was much different than what I actually went in to."

A new job brings the theme of anticipation and wonder about skill competency for the tasks. The common theme emerging during the interview was that, for the most part, these participants felt equipped to do the job of a counselor. There were still adjustments and learning that took place when moving from university classes to actual counseling.

I did feel prepared. My coursework at the university, my individual counseling class and all those other classes, so I did feel prepared and supported in a way. But there are still some things that I'm not quite sure about yet and that I know will eventually get worked through. My professor says, "Trust the process."

"Scary at times. At the very beginning, I had not dealt with children that present some of the situations they do here and a tremendous sense of responsibility in

sharing that information with them – them sharing it with me until I realized I was pretty much a repository for that information.”

I think your first year is going to be tough no matter what. Hopefully it will get easier as it goes. It's gotten easier already. Don't call my mentor nearly as much. I'm not taking home stuff so much. At first it was like, “Oh my goodness, these kids.” I'd think about it all the way home. I don't do that as much anymore. I'm able to separate now and . . . it's good.

The common theme of the joy of working with students was at the very core of the essence of the experience. For a counselor facing difficult adult relationships, the students made the difference.

When you're a counselor, you know everybody and probably one of the biggest challenges I've had is to learn names. I can't tell you how many “hons” and sweethearts I have. I know them. I just can't remember their names. The children have made all the difference for me and thank goodness you get into the classroom early. You don't have a big span of time because had it not been for that, I would have had a lot harder than I've had.

“The kids . . . are so open and willing to learn and excited about learning. I'm real comfortable talking with kids who do have the occasional behavior because that's where my expertise is. I think I made the right decision. I miss the classroom sometimes, but now I feel that all the kids are my kids.”

For several of the participants becoming a school counselor was a mid-career change. Career stage theories described educators in their mid-career years as bored, burned out, and essentially going through the motions. Not so with this group. The common theme of enjoyment, satisfaction with the decision, and a new found sense of professionalism marked their responses.

There really is magic in this room or in the building. I love it. I enjoy teaching. When I got to that point when I knew I needed a change, this is it. When I came on that first day, my knees weren't even really shaking. I wasn't sure of how it was going to be, but it just fits. This is where I want to be.

"It's just been a wonderful experience. I have one regret that I waited so long to do it. Hopefully I'll have many years to continue."

This new sense of professionalism was accentuated by having an office and the materials needed to do the job. "I just love it. I love the counseling job. I love having my own office, my own phone, my own computer. That's probably part of the feeling like a professional – actually I have the equipment you need to do your job." "It's been a positive experience. I've enjoyed being in that particular office. I've enjoyed the domain. I've had a good time with it."

The common theme of really enjoying the job despite the frustrations, the child abuse, the anxiety about leaving the work at school was evident in how the novice counselors experienced the job.

I think it's important that we take care of ourselves and that we enjoy our work. Because if we enjoy our work, then it's not really work. It's someplace that we're going and being productive and having a good time with it and that feeling is good to translate to other people you work with also." The experience was "extremely rewarding", "fun, plain old fun", a "very positive experience."

Follow-up interview. The summary comments of participants at the end of the second interview included humor, optimism, and a sense of joy about the job. "Well, I am ready for next year. Next year I will know everything (laugh). "I just love this." "I like it. I do. I like the job a lot. I want to continue doing it." "I always had thought that I had loved counseling. Now I know that I love counseling." "Seek forgiveness rather than permission and have fun."

The year had been a learning experience as well. "There is really only one word to describe it. It is overwhelming. It is overwhelmingly wonderful. At moments it is overwhelmingly overwhelming (laugh)." "On the whole it has been a great year. Sometimes it has been frustrating, and that is just making sure I know what I am doing."

Intriguing, fun, developmental. Fun because I have been able to expand myself in different ways. Intriguing because I have learned a lot about this particular school, student body, and people in general. As long as the contract is still there, I am coming back.

## Chapter 5

### Summary, Conclusions, and Discussion

This chapter begins with a short summary of the study, presents the common themes or essence of the first year counseling experience, provides responses to questions raised, and closes with a list of limitations and recommendations for practice and further research.

#### Summary of the Study

School counselors are faced with increasingly complex situations, and are expected to immediately assume full responsibility for the counseling program in a school. Little research has been completed on the first year counseling experience. Available data suggest that for many this is an experience defined as “trial by fire” including difficulties with relationships, feelings of inadequacy, and beliefs that they are unprepared for the job (Peace, 1995). This phenomenological study was undertaken to determine the essence of the common lived experience for the 10 first year school counselor participants.

The research question that guided this study was: What is the experience of a first year school counselor? The preliminary review of the literature led to the inclusion of four sub-questions and areas of focus: relationships with staff and students, graduate program preparation, skills used on the job, and the relationship with building and district-level administration.

The data sources included a formal interview after the first 8 weeks on the job. An interview guide was followed during each of the interviews (see

Appendix A). Data triangulation was accomplished with the inclusion of a veteran counselor contact log (see Appendix B), a reflective journaling experience (see Appendix C), two non-participant observations completed by the researcher, and a follow-up interview. The study endeavored to: (a) describe the experience of a first year school counselor, (b) describe the process of moving from novice to expert, and (c) determine the salient features of effective counselor induction support.

### The Essence of the First Year School Counseling Experience

The data analysis process resulted in common themes within each of the sub-areas of focus. These themes were reduced to the essence of the common lived experience of the participants. The essence of the common lived experience and possible interpretations are presented and discussed for each of the sub-questions explored in this study.

#### Relationship with Staff

Essence. There was a level of thoughtful processing and intentional behavior, that required energy and effort, used to build relationships with building staff. The participants recognized that these relationships were important and impacted program implementation. The common experience seemed to be one of joy when the role and expectations of the staff and counselor were the same, and frustration when incongruence existed.

Possible interpretations. Schein's (as cited in Peace, 1995) career stages theory suggests that initial influences and relationships have a lasting impact on

a person's career development. At the time of the first interview the relationship with the staff was described along a continuum from "it's improving" to "they love me." The relationship status ranged from "needs for acceptance not being met" to "a relationship that went beyond professional to include personal connections as well." Even though the district has implemented a common comprehensive competency based guidance program, the unique building situations and levels of staff support may have contributed to the wide range of responses and experiences in developing relationships with staff. In this study nearly half of the participants described staff expectations as "varying from staff member to staff member", while the remaining described expectations as "congruent between staff and counselor." The energy and effort needed to establish relationships and the program may be very different within these unique settings.

When a novice counselor encounters staff not embracing the comprehensive guidance model, the counselor must find creative ways to implement the desired changes, and yet remain supportive of the goals of the school (Napierkowski & Parsons, 1995). The authors suggest that new counselors must be knowledgeable, skilled, and ethical in the process of defining and implementing an effective program. Although different levels of intentional behavior created different degrees of connection, the process that each participant described was thoughtful and demonstrated that counselors were seeking to establish connections and program articulation with staff. Comments included "make connections around the program" and "start opening

my office door and ask them in." This suggests that the participants possessed the program implementation knowledge and skills, understood the importance of staff cooperation, and found ways to build the relationship with staff.

### Relationship with Students

Essence. The common lived experience of working with students emphasized the congruence of the counselors' vision of their role with students' expectations of the counselors and provided rich opportunities to meet the individual and group needs of students. Counselors experienced daily the entire spectrum of emotions as they worked with, learned about, and learned from students. The role required a high level of daily mental stamina.

Possible interpretations. Matthes (1992) found that how equipped new counselors felt to work with students could affect their level of confidence and job satisfaction. The participants confidently described the differences they made with students in the areas of classroom group guidance, individual student work and general student responses. Each participant joined a building where students had experienced a comprehensive program that was congruent with the program training of these first year school counselors. It is the opinion of the researcher that this congruence provided an environment that resulted in the participants feeling equipped for the assigned job and feeling a level of confidence. Well-established comprehensive guidance program models are used to train school counselors to assume roles in guidance instruction, small group and individual counseling, consultation, and system support (Myrick,

1993). The participants either had completed or were completing a graduate program at one of two universities that emphasizes the comprehensive competency based guidance model.

The high level of daily mental stamina and energy required was a common theme for these participants. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the comprehensive guidance model emphasizes the delivery of a guidance and counseling program to all students. The first year counselors identified the areas of attention, assistance, and positive personality as three things that students expected from them. This type of personal connection to provide “a listening ear”, “a helping hand”, and “a caring attitude” required that the counselors engaged with students on an emotional level. It is the opinion of this researcher that the level of intensity experienced when dealing with the serious issues faced by students was something that could not be simulated in graduate course work. The first year school counselor may be surprised by this. Efforts to support counselors during this adjustment could help to avoid the high attrition rate referred to in the literature (Peace, 1995).

### Graduate Program Training

Essence. The common lived experience of first year school counselors relative to the graduate program was a solid level of preparedness. The rigorous course of study provided participants with skills, materials, and strategies needed for the job. Graduate programs, however, could not simulate job reality or prepare novice counselors for district specific situations. The

workload and time commitment were enormous, yet the program implementation rewards were experienced daily.

Possible interpretations. The literature suggests that there has been a concerted effort to define and develop guidance programs at the graduate level that train school counselors in a comprehensive guidance model (Gysbers & Henderson, 1994). The participants all described their programs with positive and detailed responses. Program preparation was described as excellent, good, and "prepared me thoroughly." It is the opinion of this researcher that the two universities attended by all participants are both examples of programs that have made the concerted effort to develop graduate programs that train counselors in the areas needed to implement a comprehensive program. Van Zandt and Perry (1992) suggest that novice counselors experience both internal conflict about their ability to perform the job, and feelings of confusion about what that job really is. The data of this study did not suggest these feelings of confusion about what the job "really is", but rather a very clear ability to articulate the application of graduate work to the daily job.

The literature suggested that new counselors are thrust into situations in which they must professionally assert their skills and independence, yet only privately admit insecurities and need for support (VanZandt & Perry, 1992). The interviews provided several rich examples of participants very willing to share the areas of program implementation causing them the most difficulty. For example, participants who had yet to complete all graduate coursework

encountered the responsibility of small group implementation without the graduate coursework. Several participants noted that the individual counseling tapes in graduate coursework with fellow students could in no way simulate a session with an elementary student talking about abuse or a high school student sharing that she was pregnant. Perhaps the opportunity of participation in the study provided the environment to reflect upon and voice the most difficult program implementation components.

### Skills of the Novice Counselors

Essence. The participants identified a wide variety of counseling skills needed in the role of a school counselor, and believed they were prepared for the job. Individual counseling and role clarification were the most rewarding and frustrating skills areas, yet counselors fully expected to improve with experience and practice.

Possible interpretations. The quality of the graduate programs attended and the professional dedication of the participants, in the opinion of the researcher, may be the key reasons that the common themes of ability to articulate the role and the feeling of preparedness appeared in this study. Anderson and Reiter (1995) reported that beginning counselors must establish and work from a strong guidance program base. Perhaps the fact that each participant filled a position where a strong guidance program base had been established was a factor in the successful implementation. The frustration

described by participants who followed counselors less dedicated to the comprehensive model would support this interpretation.

Skill deficiencies described by participants were in the areas where either the information was not included in the graduate program, or in areas that were difficult to replicate. There are several unique job requirements within a given district's implementation of the comprehensive guidance model. This is particularly true in the secondary level with the use of technology for the individual student planning program component. Patterson, Rak, Chermonte, and Roper (1992) state that new counselors must learn to attend automatically, to habitually listen with empathy, to focus on goals naturally, and to problem-solve with ease. These are skills that take practice and multiple applications. The participants were able to readily identify a wide variety of skills that they used, and shared that there were some skill deficiencies. Provided the opportunity to discuss these deficiencies, however, each participant began to articulate ways to improve and the belief that they were improving each day. Perhaps this opportunity to reflect and discuss enabled them to see growth and come to expect improvement.

#### Relationship with the Principal

Essence. The lived experience of working with the building principal included a recognition of the importance of accessibility, communication, and program support for successful program implementation and personnel morale. Counselors appreciated the impact of the principal's leadership style in creating

a positive school climate in which to implement a comprehensive guidance program.

Possible interpretations. The literature review suggests that a sense of teamwork between the principal and the counselor is a key factor in successful program implementation (Brock & Ponec, 1998). The data from the study suggested that, although there was recognition of the importance of this teamwork approach and communication, not all participants shared that common experience. The probe about the relationship with the principal brought initial responses that ranged from "excellent" to one participant who requested not to answer.

The perception of the participants concerning the level of confidence, communication, and collaboration appeared to be a key factor in the feelings about the relationship early in the year. In some cases the principal's leadership style might not be one of preference, yet a solid working relationship developed between the counselor and the administrator.

The follow-up interview at the end of the year found that the relationships with principals, described negatively during the first interview, had improved by the end of the year. The first year counselors described very intentional efforts undertaken to improve the relationship. This effort may have been made because the counselors recognized the importance of establishing, at the very least, a solid working relationship.

It is the opinion of the researcher that the principal's beliefs and comfort with the similarities and differences of the two roles are critical in relationship development. This interpretation is supported by Shoffner and Williamson (2000) who suggest that the professional preparation of administrators and counselors may lead them to have different philosophies and approaches to working with students and adults. A participant who had been uncomfortable even discussing the relationship in the first interview worked throughout the year to separate personalities from the program "entities." "I think in my showing and doing and consulting with her as opposed to staying away from her, showed her that I was a caring person and who I really was as a person." This example demonstrates the overall theme of solution-focused and problem solving approaches used by the participants throughout the first year experience.

A common theme that emerged from the probes about the relationship with the principal was the importance and appreciation of personal contact between the building principal and the counselor. Participants were particularly impressed with the times when the administrator actually came to their office to discuss a student issue. Ponec and Brock (2000) found that trust and frequent communication are key factors in successful program implementation. Although accessibility and ongoing communication were recognized by participants as extremely important in the relationship with the administrator, none of the participants in the study referenced a set meeting time. Perhaps a set meeting time that developed communication and collaboration could have enhanced

already positive working relationships, and helped to develop more quickly and richly those that early on were described as “not good” and “distant.”

#### Principal's Impact on Program Implementation

Essence. The common lived experience included participants' recognition of the importance of the principals' understanding and support of the comprehensive guidance program for implementation. They sought ways to maintain or advocate for the program with ongoing communication. The participants felt like “professionals” when the principal balanced program implementation freedom and feedback with program support. When this program support was not apparent, the experience was frustrating, particularly when the novice believed the principal understood the program goals.

Possible interpretations. The review of the literature suggests that the support of the school principal is critical as the novice counselor attempts to establish a comprehensive guidance program (Coll & Freeman, 1997). The research further states that the majority of principals studied had little or no training related to counseling programs (VanZandt & Perry, 1992). The four participants who mentioned negative impacts on the program implementation were the same ones who expressed concerns with the relationship development early in the year. It appeared that the relationship with the principal and program implementation were very much connected. A component of the district level support of the program had been a session with principals to explain the program and solicit their support. Perhaps over the years attention has not been

given to ensure that new principals have this information and opportunity for dialogue concerning the program. Also, perceptions may change over the years depending on the relationship between the principal and a previous counselor.

The majority of participants described positive impacts of the principals' understanding and support of program implementation. Positive impacts included a belief in the program and a protection of counselor time. The fact that many of these principals have had a counselor implementing the comprehensive guidance program for several years may explain why the majority of participants described positive impacts.

Throughout graduate school course work students are told that they will need to be advocates for the program. During the first interview, when asked what they had done to increase the principal's level of understanding or support of the program, the majority of participants stated that they had done very little. Once hired within the district of this study, novice and veteran counselors are encouraged to hone an "elevator speech" in which they can clearly articulate the program components and importance in a relatively short period of time. Counselors are also encouraged to take stock of their individual buildings and prioritize their focus of energy. For the majority of the participants the need to increase the principal's level of understanding had not been given much priority. In the opinion of the researcher the role of the novice counselor in serving as an ambassador and advocate for the program needs to be developed to a greater degree.

At the time of the first interview only one participant recalled receiving direct feedback from the principal concerning program implementation. It is the opinion of the researcher that the common theme of lack of direct feedback from the principal deserves attention. It appeared in this study that the feedback participants had received had been second hand in nature, or from a source other than the principal. At the time of the first interview no formal meeting for communication between the principal and the novice counselor was utilized at any site. It may be that, particularly in the settings where the relationship had not gotten off to a great start and the perception was that the program was not supported, direct feedback during a specified meeting time would have improved the counselor/principal relationship. Strong considerations could be given to establishing this as a priority early in the first year experience.

#### District Support and Supervisor Role in Program Implementation

Essence. The participants recognized a high level of support and accessibility from several sources outside of their building for responses to their questions, information, and just the sense of "being on the right track." There was sometimes a feeling of awkwardness seeking assistance, believing somehow that they should have the answer. The openness and positive responses from veteran counselors, central office staff, and the supervisor alleviated that feeling. That led to counselors welcoming ongoing contact with the supervisor around specific issues, and reinforcement of "a job well done."

Possible interpretations. Roberts and Borders (1994) found that there is a lack of sustained and systematic assistance available to novice counselors. They stated that counselors need and want regular supervision. Because the researcher also served as the supervisor of these participants, the additional data sources of veteran counselor logs and participant reflection journals were included to add to the depth of this data. The classical study of Boyd and Walker (1975), which compared a new counselor to a cactus saying “they both survived on a minimum of nutrients”, was to some degree refuted by this study.

All the participants described several types of support they had received other than at the building level. Some of the forms of assistance in place for new counselors in the district studied included: a veteran counselor phone contact for elementary counselors alone in a building, five new counselor meetings during the year, scheduled agency visits, e-mail system for all counselors, and site visits by the supervisor and guidance specialist. It is the opinion of the researcher, based on responses to interview probes, that these opportunities helped counselors to develop a network of support and to recognize that their feelings were shared by others.

During the first interview it became apparent that many of the participants were reaching out to fellow novice counselors with whom they took graduate coursework. VanZandt and Perry (1992) found that sometimes novice counselors do not seek assistance because of a fear that they might be viewed as incompetent. Responses from some participants during the first interview

supported their findings. At the time of the second interview, however, all participants described experiences throughout the year where they had reached out to a veteran counselor and received a great deal of support. The counselors within the district studied have always prided themselves in being a family and really meaning it when they say, "Call me anytime. I would be glad to answer any question." It is the opinion of the researcher that the participants experienced this as the reality, and became more comfortable in seeking assistance. By the end of the first year this had become more of a collaborative relationship and part of the process of moving from novice to expert.

The Matthes study (1992) reported a greater number of problems for novice counselors who received little professional support. Each of the 10 participants provided rich insight into and support of ongoing supervision from or consultation with the supervisor of guidance and counseling. Several commented that the level of supervisory support far exceeded anything they had experienced as teachers. Participants marveled at the amount of support found in a large district. Beginning with the first supervisor of guidance and counseling, the role of the central office has been to support counselors in any way needed to assist them in delivering the comprehensive program to all students. This has included the continuation of formal observations by the supervisor of guidance, even as supervisors in other curricular areas have stopped doing observations of teachers. It has included a series of counselor meetings and informal gatherings throughout the year to maintain the sense of

team. These traditions and expectations have continued to the present and may be a reason that district supervisory support was experienced and welcomed by the participants.

### Summary

The analysis of data led to the common lived experience themes in the areas of relationship with staff and students, graduate program preparation, counselor skills, and administrative support at the building and district level. In some cases these themes supported the results of earlier research found in the review of literature. In other cases the results of this study did not support or align with previous studies. Some possible interpretations or suggestions for these results were provided. During the data analysis and development of the themes the initial study questions were answered. New questions arose throughout the data analysis process.

### Responses to Questions Raised From the Study

The formal interview guide was used as the major source of data collection in this phenomenological study. The other data sources served to triangulate and verify the results. The constant comparative method of data analysis led to patterns and a common lived experience of 10 first year school counselors.

In addition to the common themes of the lived experience of being a first year school counselor, several additional questions arose for the researcher as the experience unfolded through the rich reporting of the participants. Bogdan

and Biklen (1998) describe qualitative research as constructing a picture that takes shape during the collection and analysis of data. The specific themes that appear at the end of the process help the researcher to learn what the really important questions are. These questions and concerns develop from the process with participants, not from assumptions held prior to the study. The common themes and questions generated as a result of the study are provided. The opinion of the researcher serves as a response to some of those questions raised.

### Relationships

One common theme was that the positive and thoughtful processing with staff and administration enhanced the overall program implementation. An additional theme was that specific building situations impacted relationship development and program implementation. Some questions that arose during the analysis of these themes included:

1. What would be the appropriate and helpful information to provide a first year school counselor regarding the previous program?
2. What insight seeking skills do first year school counselors bring to the position in terms of determining staff expectations and facilitating adjustments or changes?

The answers to these questions would vary depending on one of the many situations that might exist. If the previous counselor had professional difficulties with administration or the central office, the information shared would

be tempered by the need for confidentiality. A counselor following a "legend" may not need to hear what a tough position he or she is being asked to fill. Often information is colored by personalities and interpretations.

The process of thoughtful reflection that developed as a result of the formal interview process may be a more effective approach. Much like what was done during the study, the supervisor could, in a group or individual setting, ask open-ended questions that might engage the novice counselor in considering the strengths and challenges of working with staff and administration at a given site. The question and reflection design would provide the opportunity for the beginning counselor to develop insight seeking skills to assess the environment, and determine what to do to enhance or improve the important relationships.

#### Skill Competency

A common theme that developed through several question probes was that these participants felt equipped to do the job of a first year school counselor. The graduate programs were described as providing a solid level of preparation. Further probes and opportunities for reflection and processing led to the additional theme of the "gap" between graduate program training and skills implementation on the job. Skill deficiencies were described by all participants, yet with a clear belief that skills were developing during the experience. Some questions that arose during the data analysis and theme development included:

1. What could be done to address the skills deficiency gap in the individual counseling skills of novice counselors?
2. What were things that just needed to be learned through experience?
3. What were things to eliminate and support through the gap narrowing process?
4. Which "gap" experiences were part of the professional journey, with the journey providing the avenue for growth?
5. Where did the gap narrowing responsibility lie?
6. How important was the gap filling professional and personal journey in the process of moving from novice to expert?

It is the opinion of the researcher, both as a person who experienced being a first year school counselor and now as supervisor of the program, that many things must be experienced for the most lasting personal and professional growth experience. At the same time there are types of support that can be provided during this journey. The opportunity to debrief after an individual session both for skills utilized and emotions experienced is an example of needed support. This is easier to provide in a secondary setting where a team of counselors is available. In an elementary setting it would be important to facilitate the development of a solid relationship with a veteran counselor to provide the novice with someone with whom to consult. Professional resources and information that are district and building specific need to be provided to the novice at the beginning of his or her experience.

The gap narrowing responsibility lies, in the opinion of the researcher, with the novice, the district and building administration, and the graduate program personnel. This process requires an ongoing and open communication that focuses on providing professional support rather than fixing any blame or responsibility for the “gap.” Based on the recognition that the gap does exist, collaboration to eliminate unnecessary confusion or skill deficiencies can be the goal of all involved. This communication can be enhanced by providing opportunities for face to face discussions and solution-focused sessions.

The importance of the personal journey and the gap filling process was illustrated by the rich responses of counselors during the final interview when they were asked to describe their skill development during the year. Reflections that included phrases such as “I feel that in the beginning I was just frantic” to “I believe I can pat myself on the back” suggest that the journey does provide the avenue for professional growth and personal reward.

#### Impact of Principal on Program Implementation

A common theme was the recognition by participants of the importance of the principal’s support and understanding of comprehensive competency based guidance for the successful implementation of the program. The overall theme that thoughtful processing and solution-focused activities impacted communication and developed program advocacy was apparent across responses. Some questions that arose during this data analysis and theme development included:

1. What are the district expectations for program support from administrators?
2. What is the role of central office staff in garnering support of all building principals for sustaining the comprehensive competency based model in all schools?
3. What is the role of the novice counselor in serving as an ambassador and advocate for the program?
4. What type of support from the district would assist?
5. What are the roles of counselors, principals, and the district supervisor in providing a more equitable and professionally rewarding experience?

The district in which this study was conducted has adopted, with school board approval, the comprehensive competency based model. The expectation of the district guidance and counseling office is that building principals understand and support the role of a guidance counselor in this proactive model. Responses from the interview portion of this study, along with other experiences, suggest that this expectation is not the reality at every site. Particularly in elementary buildings where the principal is the only administrator or where money for adequate supervision of students does not exist, counselors sometimes feel pressed into “quasi-administrative” situations.

It is the opinion of the researcher that the district guidance and counseling office needs to more intentionally and thoroughly provide the history, rationale, and expectations for support of the comprehensive guidance model to all new administrators. Ongoing dialogue with the few resistant administrators

may provide the avenue for common understanding and support of the counselors' role. This dialogue might be conducted by guidance participation in central office training sessions for new administrators. It can be further enhanced by one-on-one conversation with the supervisor of guidance and counseling visiting each building site.

It is the further opinion of this researcher that the novice counselor needs to be the one interfacing with the building principal to resolve building specific issues whenever possible. The role of the supervisor may be behind the scenes in the form of consultation and problem-solving with the novice to determine the reality of a situation and possible alternatives or solutions. The year spent with the participants supports this approach. Each of the participants experiencing a negative and frustrating beginning with the building administrator was able to improve that relationship and program implementation during the year. Several conversations between the participant and district supervisor or guidance specialist occurred. The communication and actions that led to improvement, however, occurred between the novice and building principal.

The roles of counselors, principals, and the district supervisor in providing a more equitable and professionally rewarding experience begin with a clear understanding and acceptance of the philosophy of a comprehensive competency based guidance model. Where incongruence exists, honest and open dialogue are required. When all adults involved remember that the program exists to assist students in experiencing an academic and socially

rewarding school experience, it may be easier to set aside personal biases for program purpose. The fact that this relationship is so important for successful program implementation is reason alone to ensure that attention and effort are given to these themes and questions raised.

#### Level of Support from the District Guidance Staff

A common theme among all participants was the feeling of a high level of support and accessibility to several district level resources, and specifically to the supervisor of guidance and counseling. Rather than feeling awkward about seeking assistance, which had been a theme in the literature review, participants welcomed ongoing support and contact with the district supervisor and guidance specialist. One important ongoing role of the central office staff is to sustain an atmosphere where seeking support from and consultation with the district supervisory staff is seen as the "thing to do."

One component of this study endeavored to determine the salient features of effective counselor induction support. An underlying question that the researcher "listened" for during the answers from participants remained constant throughout the data collection and analysis process.

1. What is the ongoing role of the supervisor and central office in counselor induction?

A sentence probe, included in the interviews regarding the specific components to include in a counselor induction program, provided excellent suggestions from participants. The responses fell into the categories of

maintaining and/or enhancing opportunities currently in place, providing district specific informational material, and creating additional professional and personal growth opportunities.

The researcher welcomed the suggestions provided by participants and the ideas that came to mind during the various interactions with the novice counselors throughout the year. These suggestions and ideas are discussed in more detail within the section “recommendations for practice.”

### Limitations

#### Study Design

Qualitative researchers value context, that is, understanding a phenomena in all its complexity and within a particular situation and environment (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The phenomenological tradition, in particular, examines human experiences through the detailed descriptions of the people being studied (Creswell, 1994). This phenomenological study of the first year counseling experience of these participants resulted in a rich description and determination of their “common lived experience.” The generalization of the essence of this experience to all first year school counselors is not an expectation of a phenomenological study.

#### District Studied

This study was conducted in a large urban school district that has had a comprehensive competency based guidance model in place for 12 years. There are over 150 counselors in the district program. A supervisor and guidance

specialist, along with central office staff support, provide support and assistance for counselors in the implementation of the guidance program at a single building site. First year school counselors in suburban or rural areas, in districts without defined supervisory support, and in districts that do not endorse a comprehensive competency based guidance model could have a very different common lived experience than the participants studied.

### The Dual Role of Researcher and Supervisor

A phenomenological study may actually be enhanced if the researcher has also lived the experience being studied. This was true for the researcher, who had been a first year school counselor a decade earlier. The bracketing of the researcher's experiences and feelings continued throughout the study, yet the influences of the shared experience are a part of the study.

The current role of the researcher as the supervisor of the participants might also be considered a limitation of this study. The written consent form provided assurance that no part of the study would be used for counselor appraisal. Every effort was made to provide a confidential setting for the sharing of the lived experience. Some participants might, however, have still felt some degree of discomfort in disclosing information to the researcher.

It is possible, however, that the additional time and attention afforded these first year school counselors by the supervisor of the program may actually have enriched their experience. The opportunities for reflection and issue resolution created by the interviews and other data triangulation sources may be

an explanation for the fact that the common lived experience of these novice counselors was different than that described in the review of literature.

### Recommendations

#### Recommendations for Practice

The summary of this dissertation proposal included a reference to Maykut and Morehouse (1994) where they defined the ultimate test of the trustworthiness of a study as being whether the researcher believes the findings strongly enough to act on them. The following recommendations for practice are the result of the constant comparative analysis of data and responses to the questions raised within the various areas of focus. Those suggestions provided by participants when asked what components they would include in a counselor induction program are included in the recommendations for practice. Some of these recommendations have actually been put into practice within the district studied in the school year following this study.

Support for the novice counselor. During the adjustment to the role and the emotional toll, it is important to ensure that the novice counselors feel there are other counselors with whom they can talk and collaborate. One recommendation is for the continuation of the new counselor meetings and agency visits that provide the opportunity to become better acquainted with the other new counselors and some veterans.

Another recommendation is to create opportunities that provide for a more developed relationship between the novice and the assigned veteran counselor.

Rather than assuming that contact is made between the veteran and novice counselor, an introductory meeting early in the school year assures that a personal connection has been made.

At the suggestion of a participant, a recommendation for practice includes the opportunity to observe the veteran counselor on site with a time for discussion and collaboration. Further recommendations for practice suggested by the participants included stress reduction and relaxation workshops, sessions on “how to leave your work at school”, and just time to get together and visit with counselors.

The participants in the study who had earlier been provided a mentor counselor as part of the guidance teacher program within the district studied each spoke highly of the relationship that developed and the comfort in knowing there was a person with whom they could consult. It is recommended that this mentoring program be expanded to include first year school counselors. Mentoring program components, such as those mentioned in the literature review, may provide for a more consistent and structured induction program and movement from novice to expert.

Reflection process. Throughout the data collection process the researcher noted the common theme of the reflection and solution-focused behavior of the participants. Perhaps this was due to the fact that quality people who understood the importance of a quality guidance program were hired. It is also possible that the interview process itself provided the participants with the

opportunity to pause to consider such things as relationship and skill development, speak alternatives out loud, and then choose the next steps to reach a solution.

It is recommended that the supervisor and guidance specialist spend time with each new counselor throughout the school year and provide the same opportunity through the use of open-ended questions and a reflection process design. This might also be expanded to include groups of experienced counselors together with the novice for discussion, as was suggested by a participant in the study.

Program communication. It is recommended that the district guidance and counseling supervisor ensures that new administrators are provided the opportunity to understand and support the comprehensive guidance program. Participating in the new principals leadership meetings and visiting on site are two ways to increase this understanding through open communication.

It is further recommended that opportunities for dialogue with the graduate program professors, students, and the guidance supervisory staff be established. This forum would provide the opportunity to discuss the strengths of the current programs of study, and also those areas that became the "gaps" for participants between the graduate school training and the job reality.

The single most important program advocate at any building site is the assigned counselor. Recommendations to increase a counselor's ability to articulate the district specific program include focused domain meetings for new

counselors and guidance program materials that describe the program. Additionally, it is a recommendation for future practice that the importance of an established and honored meeting time between the principal and the counselor be emphasized during the new counselor orientation session. This established meeting time provides the opportunity for communication.

### Recommendations for Further Research

Bogdan and Biklin (1998) caution that it is a dangerous cliché to make a call for further research because this trite conclusion can substitute for a definitive statement of what the researcher has come to understand and why the work is important. The work presented is a detailed narrative that describes the common lived experience of 10 first year school counselors in a urban school district that has implemented a comprehensive competency based guidance program. Chapter 4 provides a definitive statement of what the researcher has come to understand through the constant comparative analysis process. Chapter 5 lists recommendations for program enhancement because the work is deemed important.

The reasons to suggest further research are connected to the limitations of this study. A phenomenology seeks to find the common lived experience of participants rather than supporting a generalized hypothesis. The district studied is a large urban school district that may not provide a representative experience. The dual role of the researcher as the supervisor might leave some people with questions about the authenticity of the data.

The shortage of counselors and the need to support and maintain those qualified professionals hired within a district could be a reason that rural, suburban, and districts without this level of supervisory support or commitment to a comprehensive competency based model of guidance might want to replicate this study to determine the common lived experience of first year counselors within these various environments. The Boyd and Walker (1975) historical quote, comparing the first year counselor to a cactus in terms of lack of "nutrients" or support, is still referred to in most of the limited research on the experience of novice counselors. Further research would enable other districts and programs to determine their level of "nutrient support" for new counselors and add to the body of recent literature.

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## APPENDIX A

### Initial Interview Protocol

Project: First-Year School Counselor Experience Study

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

### Opening Statement:

I would like to interview you concerning your first year school counseling experience so far. I am interested in hearing about your experience and describing the common themes among the experiences of first year school counselors. These themes may become the framework for the development of a counselor induction program that meets the needs of first year school counselors in our district.

I want to assure you that all responses provided by you are held in strictest confidence. Nothing you say will be shared or used in any way in the appraisal of your performance as a school counselor. Your identify will be held in confidence. For the purpose of this interview, would you choose a name other than your own so that I can refer to you by the pseudonym in the discussion of findings.

### Initial Interview Questions

#### 1. Tell me about your relationship with the staff so far.

- In what ways have you connected with the staff?
- With whom do you talk to and collaborate?
- What is helping you build a relationship with staff?
- What, if any, are barriers to building a relationship?
- Describe the staff's expectations of you?
- What, if any, misconceptions of your role have you experienced with this staff?

**2. Tell me about your experiences working with students.**

- What are some ways you are making a difference with students?
- What do students expect from you?
- What are some of the feelings you experience working with students?
- Tell me more about the \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in a feeling or experience).
- What have you learned from the students so far?

**3. Describe how your graduate work prepared you for this job.**

- What are the most relevant components of your training?
- What has been the biggest surprise so far?
- For what situation have you felt most prepared/unprepared?
- What advice would you give graduate students?
- What suggestions would you give to graduate faculty?

**4. What are the counseling skills used in your daily job?**

- What counseling skills do you use most often?
- Describe, if any, situations in which you feel a skill deficiency?
- Tell me about any counseling skills you possess that you feel are under used.
- What are you doing to hone your counseling skills?

**5. Describe your feelings and beliefs regarding your level of skill competence.**

- Tell me about a situation you handled skillfully.

- Describe an event you would like to “do over” because . . .
- Explore the concept – “When it comes to doing \_\_\_\_\_, I feel like a rookie.”

**6. Tell me about your relationship with your principal.**

- Describe the communication between the two of you.
- How would it feel to find a note requesting that you come immediately to his or her office. What comes to mind? What would you do?
- What is one request you would like to make of your principal?
- What is something you would or have thanked him/her for?

**7. How has the principal impacted the implementation of your program?**

- Describe your principal's level of understanding of your program.
- What have you done to increase the level of understanding?
- Describe the types of support you receive from your principal for program implementation.
- How do you think your principal might describe your program implementation so far?

**8. Describe the types of support you have received other than at the building level.**

- Who do you talk to for advice or consultation?
- How do you feel when seeking assistance?
- What words would you use to describe the level of support as you began your job?

- What, if any, would be the benefits of ongoing supervision?
- What components would you include in a program of district supervision/support?
- How do you feel about the level of district support you receive?

**9. How would you summarize your counseling experience so far?**

(Interviewer's final comments thank the interviewee for his or her participation. An assurance of confidentiality and that no part of the interview is to be used for appraisal is provided. Close with a statement that further participation in a follow-up interview later in the year will be greatly appreciated.)



## APPENDIX C

A Day in the Life  
of a  
First Year School Counselor

A Reflective Journaling Experience  
by

---

November - December, 2001

**Note to Participant:**

Your personal reflection is requested for two random dates during the months of November and December. The comments will be read by the researcher with the goal of describing themes that encompass a "day in the life of a first year school counselor." The journal entries will be coded for anonymity and will be kept confidential. The coded themes will be shared with you during a member check to increase validity of the study.

At the end of the day for each randomly selected date choose one activity or event from that day and respond to the four questions.

**November 6, 2001**

Activity or Event \_\_\_\_\_

1. What did I do? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

2. What does this mean? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

3. How did I come to be like this? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

4. How might I do things differently? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

**December 13, 2001**

Activity or Event \_\_\_\_\_

1. What did I do? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

2. What does this mean? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

3. How did I come to be like this? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

4. How might I do things differently? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

At the conclusion of this reflective journaling experience please send this packet to the researcher. Be assured that your identity is protected through the coding of this information. Any responses included in the dissertation will use your pseudonym.

A Day in the Life  
of a  
First Year School Counselor

A Reflective Journaling Experience  
by

---

April - May, 2002

**Note to Participant:**

Your personal reflection is requested for two random dates during the months of April and May. The comments will be read by the researcher with the goal of describing themes that encompass a "day in the life of a first year school counselor." The journal entries will be coded for anonymity and will be kept confidential. The coded themes will be shared with you during a member check to increase validity of the study.

At the end of the day for each randomly selected date choose one activity or event from that day and respond to the four questions.

**April 12, 2002**

Activity or Event \_\_\_\_\_

1. What did I do? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. What does this mean? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. How did I come to be like this? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. How might I do things differently? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**May 9, 2002**

Activity or Event \_\_\_\_\_

1. What did I do? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What does this mean? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. How did I come to be like this? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. How might I do things differently? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

At the conclusion of this reflective journaling experience please send this packet to the researcher. Be assured that your identity is protected through the coding of this information. Any responses included in the dissertation will use your pseudonym.

## APPENDIX D



Institutional Review Board (I  
Office of Regulatory Affairs (O  
University of Nebraska Medical Ce  
Service Building 3  
987830 Nebraska Medical Ce  
Omaha, NE 68198-7  
(402) 559-6  
Fax: (402) 559-3  
E-mail: irbora@unmc  
<http://www.unmc.edu>

August 15, 2001

Ann Luther  
Omaha Public Schools  
3215 Cuming St - 68131

IRB#: 314-01-EX

TITLE OF PROTOCOL: The Experiences of First Year School Counselors--From  
Novice to Expert

Dear Ms. Luther:

The IRB has reviewed your Exemption Form for the above-titled research project. According to the information provided, this project is exempt under 45 CFR 46:101b, category 2. You are therefore authorized to begin the research.

It is understood this project will be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines. It is also understood that the IRB will be immediately notified of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project.

Please be advised that the IRB has a maximum protocol approval period of three years from the original date of approval and release. If this study continues beyond the three year approval period, the project must be resubmitted in order to maintain an active approval status.

Sincerely,

*Ernest Prentice PhD/MDK*

Ernest D. Prentice, Ph.D.  
Co-Chair, IRB

gdk

## APPENDIX E

### Informed Consent for Participation in The Experiences of First Year School Counselors Study

You are being asked to participate in a study of the experiences of first year school counselors that I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation. You were selected as a potential participant because you will be a first year school counselor for our school district during the 2001-2002 school year, and you will add to the richness of the study based on your professional background and current guidance assignment. From this study I hope to describe the common experiences and themes of first year school counselors. This research will add to what we know about first year counseling experience and may assist in the implementation of a counselor induction process in the future.

If you decide to participate, I will interview you two times during the 2001-2002 school year. Each of the interviews will be tape-recorded and last approximately 45 minutes. I will observe you once a semester in one of the roles of a guidance counselor. I will ask you to journal on four dates during the school year in response to four specific questions. Finally I will ask that your assigned counselor resource submit a contact log summary.

Your identify will be held in confidence. No part of the information discussed or observed will be used in the appraisal process of your job performance. You will be asked to read the narrative of the interview as a check for accuracy. You will be asked to review the themes that emerge from the other data sources. If you decide to participate, you are free to change your mind and may withdraw from the study at any time with no repercussions. You may keep a copy of this form.

I have decided to participate in the study of the experiences of first year school counselors. I have read and understand this form. I agree to be interviewed, observed, and to complete the journaling experiences. I further agree that the contact log of my interactions with the assigned counselor resource may be part of the data collected. My signature indicated that I have agreed to participate. I may withdraw from the study at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Counselor's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX F

### Letter of Attestation for Qualitative Research Done by Ann Luther

Ann Luther requested that I conduct an educational audit of her qualitative dissertation entitled: The experiences of first year counselors: From novice to expert. The audit began in October, 2002, with initial review of materials, and was concluded in October, 2002. The purpose of the audit was to ascertain the extent to which the results of the study are trustworthy.

The researcher maintained and provided concrete and clear evidence of a detailed and complete audit trail. The auditor was provided with a copy of the proposal, materials related to the proposal, IRB forms, evidence of permission for the study, participant consent forms, various stage copies of the dissertation, 20 audio tapes, transcriptions of all the tapes, observations and reflections from the researcher, participants, and non-participants, and a veteran counselor contact log. The auditor was further provided with a comprehensive collection of cards that provided evidence of constant comparative analysis of the data by the researcher, using a variety of coding systems.

The task of the auditor was to determine whether it was possible to follow the researcher's trail from conception, through implementation, to conclusions; and whether those conclusions were warranted by that process.

Initial credibility was established by the adequacy of the study design. It was well done, thorough, and consistent.

Reliability was established by determining that confirmable strategies were used such that the coding was grounded in the data, the patterns were grounded in the coding, and the themes were grounded in the patterns. This confirms that the conclusions bear close relationship to the data; and establish design and procedural evidence of credibility.

I conclude that the focus of the study and the research methods described in the dissertation are in evidence through the analysis of the data provided. Trustworthiness of the study can be established; findings are grounded in the extensive and triangulated data.

Auditor:



Mary K. Smith, Ed.D.  
Westside Community Schools