QUASI-SCHOOL LEADERS: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF HIGH SCHOOL

COUNSELING DIRECTORS AND THEIR ROLE IN SCHOOLS

by

Andrea Cherice Simon
BS May 2008, Old Dominion University
MSED December 2011, Old Dominion University

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND FOUNDATIONS

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
August 2020

Approved by:

_____
Karen L. Sanzo (Director)

_____
William A. Owings (Member)

_____
Tim J. Grothaus (Member)

ABSTRACT

QUASI-SCHOOL LEADERS: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF HIGH SCHOOL
COUNSELING DIRECTORS AND THEIR ROLE IN SCHOOLS

Andrea C. Simon
Old Dominion University
Committee Chair: Dr. Karen L. Sanzo

The aim of this study is to explore the lived experiences of high school counseling director's and how their principal and district school counseling supervisor shape their experiences as leaders. The role of high school counseling director's is increasingly complex, unique, and oftentimes misunderstood. They are often viewed as leaders and change agents in student's overall success due to their unique skill levels in advocacy and collaboration (Kaffenberger, Murphy, & Bemak, 2006; McMahon, Mason, Daluga-Guenther, & Ruiz, 2014; Young, Millard, & Kneale, 2013). However, principal's and district school counseling supervisors are key players in defining the role and responsibilities of a high school counseling director (Perusse, Goodnough, Donegan, & Jones, 2004). Therefore, this study examined the experiences of high school counselors as directors to understand how their leadership role is actualized within schools by their two supervisors: the principal and district school counseling supervisor. Utilizing two rounds of semi-structured interview questions, the study revealed high school counseling director's experiences as leaders guided by the subsystems where they work and by the people they interact with in the subsystems. These findings add to a growing body of literature on school counselor leadership in education as well the development of leaders within schools.

First and foremost, I would like to give thanks, glory and honor to God for purposing this dream within me. Without God, I would not have had the wisdom, strength, focus, and perseverance to see this program and research study to completion. Because He is, I am. My faith in You has stretched me beyond what I could have ever dreamt or imagined.

To my family, thank you for your endless love and support as I pressed through this program. You continuously support me, and it is truly appreciated. Thank you for your words of encouragement and being my cheerleader when I needed it the most. Especially to my parents and grandparents, you are the giants who's shoulders I stand on. It is because of what you saw in me I am unstoppable in the pursuit of my goals.

Several people played an integral role in helping me complete the program and research study. I'd also like to thank my friends, co-workers, and cohort 3 classmates. Thank you for your encouraging words and prayers.

I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to Dr. Sanzo. Thank you for guiding me not only through the study but also through the program. I am grateful for your dedication, patience, time, and expertise. You were an integral part of me being able to make it to the end.

To my committee members, Dr. Owings & Dr. Grothaus, thank you! Thank you for your willingness to take this journey with me. I appreciate your time, wisdom, and support.

And finally, to my husband, thank you for all of the sacrifices you have made to help me achieve my dreams. You have been by my side from the beginning and for that I am extremely grateful. Your continued love, support, encouragement, and prayers is what helped me finish. I am truly blessed to have you as my partner and best friend.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter 1

As educational reform movements have shifted over the years, the role of school counselors has moved from a service provider to full partner in the educational process (Dollarhide, 2003). The development of this role has consistently highlighted how valuable the position contributes to leadership within schools. Subsequently, high school counseling directors are viewed as school leaders within a building who hold the responsibility of developing and implementing a school counseling program based upon the needs of the students and staff (ASCA, 2019). This position serves as a critical role, yet, there is an absence regarding the position it serves in schools as a leader in education literature. In contrast, there is a range of literature regarding the role of teacher leaders and/or department chairs whose role can portray similar attributes as the high school counseling director. Also, the collaboration between principals and school counselors is crucial for students to succeed both academically and socially. The greatest influence on the responsibility of school counselors lies with district supervisors and school principals (Dahir, Burnham, & Stone, 2010). More importantly, the issues identified as critical to successful implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs have been successfully resolved through effective leadership (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). Therefore, this dissertation investigates how high school counseling director's roles are actualized through the influence of the principal and district school counseling supervisor as it translates to how the role is understood in schools.

Statement of the Problem

School counselors work extends across multiple levels of working with individual students, small to large groups of students, and collaborating with staff and community stakeholders. Likewise, in the high school setting, the high school counseling director is the

individual who develops and implements a school counseling program based upon the needs of the school (ASCA, 2019). However, the role of a high school counseling director is solely dependent upon the principal and the district school counseling supervisor (Perusse et al., 2004). These two key individuals are directly involved in the daily functions of the high school counseling director. Furthermore, looking at how the high school counseling director and its two supervisors influence this role can lead to a better understanding of how high school counseling director's roles are actualized in schools.

In addition, the role of school counselors is increasingly complex, unique, and oftentimes misunderstood. Due to their unique skill levels in advocacy and collaboration, they are often seen as leaders and change agents in students' overall success (Kaffenberger et al., 2006; McMahon et al., 2014; Young et al., 2013). Educational reform initiatives are now incorporating the school counselor in how he/she can improve academic achievement for all students to help close the gaps for disadvantaged student groups (Janson, 2009). Consequently, researchers have positioned that effective leadership is important and necessary for school counselors to be active constituents in school reform efforts (Dollarhide, 2003). The influence between high school counseling directors and their two supervisors can help principals, counselors, and educators examine their schools in a way to determine how they can work together more effectively to improve the educational outcomes for all students (Collegeboard, 2009). Unfortunately, there are few education leadership dissertations that look at the high school counseling director's role as well as its lived experiences as it relates to principals and district school counseling supervisors. This in of itself suggests the need for understanding the lived leadership experiences of high school counseling directors.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand how the lived experiences of high school counseling directors and how the principal and district school counseling supervisor shape their lived experiences as directors. Specifically, the focus is on this triad relationship to understand leadership through the lens of the high school counseling director and how it is portrayed, managed, and shaped by its supervisors. This dissertation delves into the relationship between these positions through an ecological framework to understand the interactions between one another and how it shapes the leadership position of high school counseling directors. In addition, this study will contribute to the literature on school counselor leadership development, how it's formalized, and the contribution of this role in educational leadership. This study is guided by the following research questions:

Research Questions

1. What are the lived leadership experiences of high school counseling directors?

2. How do the interactions with principals and district school counseling supervisors shape high school counselors lived experiences as directors?

Rationale and Significance

The significance of this dissertation study will be to understand and help frame the role of high school counseling directors. Due to the lack of literature and research on high school counseling directors in education literature, this study will explore the role of lead teachers and/or department chairs to gain a better understanding of this role. Therefore, the goal of this study is to contribute scholarly educational literature on the high school counseling director in the profession. Findings of this study will guide the recommendations for the practice of high

school counseling directors regarding school counselor leadership and the relationship this role

serves between its principal and district supervisor.

This study will help inform school counselor educators aid in the training of graduate

students in the skills necessary to become leaders within the schools they work and become

better collaborators with their supervisors. Also, the results of this study will provide guidance

to current principals and district school counseling supervisors on how to collaborate, support,

and advocate for the leadership of this position to help plan and implement an effective

comprehensive school counseling program that will have an impact on student achievement.

This study promotes a better understanding of the role of the high school counseling director as a

leader within schools by providing recommendations for the future practice of this position.

Finally, an understanding of how the principal, district school counseling supervisor, and high

school counseling director collaborate to create a program and supervise a team of counselors

can provide a foundation for best practices of program implementation and supervision of staff.

Key Terms

The following key terms below will be used throughout this study. Some of the terms

may be defined differently within some school districts. The terms provided will be defined to

provide a common language and understanding throughout this study:

- **American School Counselor Association (ASCA):** ASCA is the national association
  that supports school counselor efforts to help students focus on academic, career and
  social/emotional development so they achieve success in school and are prepared to lead
  fulfilling lives as responsible members of society. The association provides professional
  development, publications and other resources, research and advocacy to school
  counselors. It has developed national standards for all school counselors.

- **Department Chair/Lead Teacher:** Are individuals who occupy a formal and unique position within the departmental structure. They are situated between school administrators and teachers and are considered experts of the content in which they lead. Department chair and lead teacher will be utilized in this study interchangeably due to variation of the term utilized by different schools and/or districts.

- **District School Counseling Supervisor:** For the purpose of this study, the district school counseling supervisor oversees the school counseling program for the district and serves as the supervisor for high school counseling directors.

- **High School Counseling Director:** Serves as the department leader and school counseling supervisor within a school. Develops, implements, and assess' the counseling program within a high school to help promote student success.

- **Professional School Counselors:** "Professional school counselors are certified/licensed educators with a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling making them uniquely qualified to address all students' academic, personal/social and career development needs by designing, implementing, evaluating and enhancing a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes and enhances student success" (ASCA, 2009).

- **School Counselor Educators:** Develop individuals who will carry out the implementation of a school counseling program. This role delivers relevant content within the program study for school counselor candidates (ASCA, 2019).

- **School Leaders:** Individuals within a school who are given more responsibility to help drive the school's mission, vision, and goals.

Organization of the Study

The proposed research study will be organized into five chapters beginning with an introduction to the research study in chapter one. The research purpose, research questions, and definitions of key terms will be provided in chapter one. Chapter two will provide a literature analysis to further explore how the role of high school counseling directors are actualized in relation to principals and district school counseling supervisors. Then chapter three will seek to explain the research design of the proposed study. Following chapter three, chapter four will discuss the ways in which the data are organized and analyzed to draw conclusions in the findings outlined. To conclude the proposed study, chapter five will provide an overview of the findings and discuss implications for future research and practice.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Overview

Chapter two will review literature that focuses on the historical context of the school counselor's role, the role of a high school counseling director, high school counseling director and leadership, and the high school counseling director's relationship with its two supervisors. In this section, the theoretical framework will be presented. The historical context of school counselors will be discussed to assist with understanding how the role of high school counseling directors evolved throughout its profession. Then, the roles in which high school counseling directors play in the school setting according to ASCA will be discussed. Literature on the influence of one's supervision is presented to understand the complex dynamics of the connections made between this triad association. Lastly, the utilization of an ecological theoretical framework is designed to explore the interconnectedness of systems and subsystems.

Historical Context of the School Counselor Role

The development of school counselors as leaders within their organization can be understood through knowing the history of their roles as it has shifted throughout the years and continues to take shape (Dollarhide, 2003). Historically, the profession of school counselors has evolved due to societal changes (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). Challenges to the profession have occurred due to the inconsistencies in school counselor's roles and functions (Amatea & Clark, 2005). Many years ago school counseling was a position in schools with a list of duties to be performed (Gysbers & Stanley, 2014). Several models have developed over the course of the profession to help solidify the professional identity of school counselors (ASCA, 2012). Nevertheless, school counselor's specific roles in the educational system have continued to be

debated and questioned (Amatea et al., 2005). The common goal was to strengthen and clarify the professional identity of school counselors (ASCA, 2012). Below is a review of the development of school counseling models that have progressed into what is seen today in schools. Looking at the historical narrative of how school counselors came to be will provide a defining portrait that constructs the lens through which the profession is interpreted and understood.

Vocational Guidance

Vocational guidance was the initial term of the school counseling profession and it was developed to supplement learning that took place in the classroom (Campbell & Dahir, 1997; Cinotti, 2014; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). These programs were crafted by the National Vocational Guidance Association in 1913 to address careers, academics, and the personal/social development of students (Cinotti, 2014). At that time, teachers were facilitating vocational guidance in addition to their other duties even though vocational guidance was recognized as requiring special qualifications and training (Cinotti, 2014). In contrast, districts who did hire specific individuals to carry out the vocational guidance programs were overloaded with administrative and clerical duties that inhibited their effectiveness (Cinotti, 2014). Also, it is noted that oftentimes, principals would assign many administrative duties to the counselor until he/she became a quasi-assistant principal (Cinotti, 2014).

As the profession developed its primary role was to prepare students for the world of work (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Cinotti, 2014). As a response to this change, administrators reacted by expanding vocational guidance to include more of a focus on education (Cinotti, 2014). Moving into the 60's and 70's, concerns of the perception of the school counseling profession continued to exist as the increase to provide counseling services was determined as

their primary role (Cinotti, 2014). Therefore, due to the ambiguity of the school counselor roles and responsibilities, the position was seen as more of a supportive role or service to teachers and administrators (Cinotti, 2014). As a result of this perception, it was easy for administrators to continue to add duties as they saw appropriate to school counselors' roles (Cinotti, 2014).

Then, in order for the United States to continue its competition amongst other nations to be the first to have an individual travel out of space, the National Defense Education Act of 1956 (NDEA) increased its federal funds for education (Campbell et al., 1997; Lambie et al., 2004). These funds were also used to increase the number of secondary school counselors who were required to have knowledge in college admissions and therapeutic skills to support and help students overcome barriers to academic success (Campbell et al., 1997). The primary purpose during this time was to increase the number of student desire to attend college. This meant fewer attention on student's personal needs and more attention to student's post-secondary plans for junior and high school students. Plus, some scholars in the field argued that school counselors should be spending time counseling students on their individual developmental needs (Campbell et al., 1997). As a result, in the shift of the needs in society, school counseling programs were encouraged more at the elementary level to provide developmental counseling programs (Campbell et al., 1997).

Professional School Counselor

The beginning of the school counseling profession developed in 1920, formerly known as vocational guidance (ASCA, 2019). During this time the position was occupied by administrators and teachers (ASCA, 2019). Then, the school counseling profession began to change and take shape due to mental hygiene, psychometric, and child study movements (ASCA, 2019). The result of this shift caused the focus of the profession to move from economic issues

to psychological issues (ASCA, 2019). Concerns began to take place regarding personnel

selection, responsibility, and assigned duties of school counselors during the 1930's (ASCA,

2019). This led to the development of a new organizational structure called pupil personnel

services where the list of duties was organized by guidance services under the structure of the

organization (ASCA, 2019).

An expansion in school counseling within schools occurred in the 1940's and 1950's

(ASCA, 2019). During this time the focus became more on ways to improve the services

provided by counselors in schools (ASCA, 2019). Then, the Vocational Education Act of 1946

and the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 helped provide support for the

selection and training of school counselors (ASCA, 2019). Following these two pivotal acts, the

American School Counselor Association was established in 1952 as a division of the American

Personnel and Guidance Association (ASCA, 2019). The profession developing a national

organization helped create a platform where school counselors would have a voice in national

affairs (ASCA, 2019).

The 1960's and 1970's brought about an awareness regarding the concerns of school

counseling. Questions arose regarding the nature of counseling and if it should be more

psychological or educational with the interventions (ASCA, 2019). At this time a distinction was

made between elementary school counselors and secondary school counselors (ASCA,2019).

The 1970's brought about an increase in the development of service models for school

counseling programs (ASCA, 2019). The concept of a program made way for school counseling

to organize and manage the profession in schools (ASCA, 2019; Gysbers et al., 2014). During

this time training programs were developed to help school districts, states began implementing

state models, and the design and implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs

were initiated (ASCA, 2019). The traditional position of school counselors were viewed as

scattered, disconnected which included a list of duties that were no longer adequate to

characterize the work of school counselors (Gysbers et al., 2014). The 1970's also recognized

the role confusion and conflict causing many to view the profession as an ancillary and

marginalized service (Gysbers et al., 2014). A program concept helped identify and describe

school counseling as having "content, structure, organization, and sequence" (Gysbers et al.,

2014, p. 25). Also, the word program was chosen to meet all students' academic, career and

person/social development needs through content, activities, interventions and services (Gysbers

et al., 2014). The structure of the program model provides direct and indirect services to all

students and helps provide common language connecting school counselors K-12 (Gysbers et al.,

2014). Therefore, school counselor's duties and evaluation should be derived directly from the

program's content and structure (Gysbers et al., 2014).

In the early 1980's the role and responsibilities of school counselors began establishing a

clear definition of its role. The responsibilities of school counselors were expanded to include

program requirements in career development, identification of students with special needs,

attendance intervention, and academic counseling (Campbell et al., 1997). On the other hand,

after the publication of "A Nation at Risk," testing and accountability moved to the forefront in

the school counseling profession (Campbell et al., 1997; Lambie et al., 2004). In contrast to Campbell et al. (1997), Cinotti (2014) noted the list of school counselor duties grew to include more administrative duties such as scheduling, record keeping, and coordination of tests. However, it was during this time when states began to drop the term "guidance" from the job title of school counselors to reflect the growth in their counseling functions and the concept of a comprehensive school counseling program emerged (Campbell et al., 1997; Cinotti, 2014; Lambie et al., 2004). The new name, school counselor, was used to help identify counselors who worked in a school setting. It was these changes that led to the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) governing board to adopt a new definition of school counseling:

> Counseling is a process of helping people by assisting them in making decisions and changing behavior. School counselors work with all students, school staff, families, and members of the community as an integral part of the education program. School counseling programs promote school success through a focus on academic achievement, prevention and intervention activities, advocacy and social/emotional and career development.

(Campbell et al., 1997, p. 17). Then another shift occurred after the School to Work Opportunities Act of 1994 was implemented. This act reinforced the importance of career guidance and counseling services to support students transitioning from school to employment (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Lambie et al., 2004). This shifted school counseling from the sole delivery of career counseling skills to life-long learning.

In 2003, ASCA published the National Standards for School Counseling Programs to merge the role of school counselors with educational reform movements (Astramovich, Hoskins, Gutierrez, & Bartlett, 2013; Burnham et al., 2000; Campbell, 1997). Now, school counseling

programs are more comprehensive to include crisis intervention, individual student support, and proactive programs for all students (Campbell et al., 1997). As changes in society continued to occur, the school counseling developmental model emphasized more individual and small group counseling services, guidance lessons, individual planning, and system support duties (Astramovich et al., 2013). In 2005, the shift on the role of school counselors became more focused on prevention and supporting the academic achievements of students (Astramovich et al., 2013). As their roles continued to be shaped, ASCA then updated their National Model in 2012 to bring forth the school counseling curriculum, individual student planning, and responsive services (Astramovich et al., 2013). This shift included individual, group, and crisis counseling.

Overall, a central theme can be seen through the development of the school counselor's role; that is their role has expanded with every decade (Lambie et al., 2004). And even though the school counselor's role has been expanded over the years, it is important to note that no services have been removed from school counselor's responsibilities (Lambie et al., 2004). Further, their list of duties make school counselors appear as administrative assistants where they are often seen as office people and not program people (Gysbers et al., 2014). Nevertheless, the historical context in which school counselors evolved has continuously changed throughout the years. The profession has morphed from vocational guidance, assessment, and academic placement, to providing personal and social counseling services while servicing the whole student, toward supporting special education services, consultation, coordination, and accountability duties (Lambie et al., 2004). And even though non-counseling duties have been removed from the school counselor role, its evolution has called for standards of practice to be developed in order to help solidify the professions identity (Astramovich et al., 2013). As the

school counseling field continues to define and shape the role of school counselors, the

inconsistencies in the professions roles and functions have continued to challenge the field

(Astramovich et al., 2013).

Role of the High School Counseling Director

Figure 1 School counseling domains.

A well-developed school counseling program requires leadership and collaboration in

order to help drive the school's mission, vision, and goals towards achieving student academic

success (ASCA, 2019). The role of the school counseling director helps provide leadership,

advocacy, and collaboration at the school, district and state levels (ASCA, 2019). School

counseling directors help ensure the development, implementation and assessment of the school

counseling program benefits all students (ASCA, 2019). Based upon the identified needs of the

students within the school, district or state, the school counseling director's responsibility is to

put in place support efforts to fill in the gaps of student needs (ASCA, 2019). Depending on the

district and its needs, this role can be seen at the district level and/or secondary level within

schools.

The educational level is defined by the state but at minimum requires a master's degree

or higher in school counseling and/or meet licensure and credentialing requirements in school

counseling (ASCA, 2019). Typically, the school counseling director will have advanced training

in supervision and school counseling programs (ASCA, 2019). Some states require this role to

have an administrative and/or supervisory licensure in addition to having a school counseling

licensure; this is often seen with positions held at the district level (ASCA, 2019). Leadership,

advocacy, and collaboration are the basis for this role which will be described below. However,

they also provide feedback and support to school counselors to develop and implement a school

counseling program (ASCA, 2019). School counseling directors can also be seen providing

direction to school administrators if these administrators supervise school counselors (ASCA,

2019).

Leadership is the first domain that will be explored as it relates to the school counseling

director's role. School counseling directors provide leadership to help ensure that the school

counseling program integrates with the educational curriculum of the school, district, and/or state

(ASCA, 2019). They hold the responsibility of hiring qualified, diverse school counselors who

can carry out the school counseling program within the building (ASCA, 2019). The director is

responsible for supervising and evaluating the performance of school counselors to ensure their

duties are appropriate and aligned with the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2019).

The second domain, advocacy, is seen to stand in the gaps for student's needs based on

the school and district data (ASCA, 2019). Sometimes there are educational barriers to access

and equity for all students and it is the role of the school counseling director to eliminate these

obstacles (ASCA, 2019). Advocating for equitable policies and procedures that impact students

as well as the implementation of policies that support the school counseling programs is also

found in this professional role (ASCA, 2019).

Lastly, the third domain for the role of school counseling directors is collaboration.

School counseling directors collaborate with school staff, community members, educational

stakeholders, school counselor professional associations, and college and university personnel to

name a few (ASCA, 2019). Their collaborative role is to ensure consistent professional

development for school counselors, continuous improvement of the school counseling program,

crisis response efforts, professional membership, and to develop partnerships with the

community and state leaders (ASCA, 2019). Research has shown that when school counseling

programs follow the ASCA National Model, which is facilitated by the school counseling

director, a positive impact is made on student achievement, career and social/emotional

development (ASCA, 2019). The three domains graphically depicted above, in Figure 1.1.

High School Counseling Director & Leadership

There is an unsounded assumption that school counselors already possess the skills

necessary to be effective leaders of programs and personnel (Curry & DeVoss, 2009; Curtis &

Sherlock, 2006). As a result, little has been written about the skills and practices needed to be an

effective leader in a school counseling setting (Curtis et al., 2006). However, more recent

literature states there are five characteristics of a school counselor leader: resourceful problem-

solving, systemic collaboration, interpersonal influence, social justice advocacy, and professional

efficacy (Young, 2013). As mentioned previously, the duties of a school counseling director

may include completing performance reviews, addressing colleagues' performance problems,

promoting positive team camaraderie and productivity; which researchers note is not taught in

traditional counseling programs (Curtis et al., 2006). Leadership practices of school counselors

should also include believing in students, utilizing data, seeking partnership, advocating for all

students, and seeking equitable outcomes (Young, 2013). In addition, school counselor leaders

are viewed as trustworthy, confident, intelligent and organized (Young, 2013).

School counselors typically serve as horizontal leaders where they "lead change efforts

within their current role to improve outcomes for all students by initiating services or programs,"

(Young, 2013, p. 40). Horizontal school counselor leaders, similar to directors, serve as change

agents in their current settings (Young, 2013). However, there are challenges school counselor

leaders face. For example, the perceptions of stakeholders regarding school counselor's role in

education reform and their role as leaders continues to be a barrier (Young, 2013). Articulating

the rationale for a school counseling vision, its alignment with the instructional vision, and how

it translates to strong student outcomes are leadership beliefs of school counselors (Young,

2013). As a school counselor leader, one should help eliminate barriers and increase access to

rigorous courses to help close the achievement gap for students (Young, 2013). Data should also

be utilized to inform their decisions and actions (Young, 2013).

Titles in educational administrative structures continue to vary and the organizational

pattern of school counseling leaders has not been established (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001).

This has led to the variation in school counselor leadership responsibilities and placement in the

structure of the school system (Gysbers et al., 2001). Gysbers et al. (2001, p. 2) identifies six

major leadership functions for high school counseling directors to carryout in order to fulfill their

leadership roles:

(a) empowering school counselors to carry out program roles and responsibilities; (b)

advocating for the guidance program and staff; (c) defining school counselors' jobs

within the guidance program and, thereby, promoting maximum use of their

competencies; (d) promoting professionalism of school counselors; (e) supervising; and

(f) evaluating school counselors' performance.

High school counseling directors can also be viewed as serving in various leadership capacities

such as, administrative, supervisor, management, and professional (Gysbers et al., 2001). The

success of their role requires strong district and building leadership support for the

implementation, advocacy, and program development (Gysbers et al., 2001). High school

counseling directors take on an administrative role when they have the primary responsibility

and authority for the program and its staff (Gysbers et al., 2001). The researcher contends that in

this role, the high school counseling director establishes a system of accountability for its staff

members, helps organize and evaluate the implementation of the program (Gysbers et al., 2001).

When a high school counseling director takes on an administrative role, he/she assess the

appropriateness of the program within the context of the school and district it works within

(Gysbers et al., 2001).

A supervision role is perceived as improving the job performance of the school

counseling staff members by helping them learn new tools and strategies to help enhance their

professional skills (Gysbers et al., 2001). When a high school counseling director facilitates

observation and provides direct feedback, it is considered a supervisory role (Gysbers et al.,

2001). In addition, the supervision role involves helping school counselors increase their

competence in carrying out their jobs through an evaluative performance system (Gysbers et al.,

2001). The supervision role of school counseling leaders is similar to the supervision carried out

by department leaders for their professional staff (Gysbers et al., 2001). In contrast, the

management role high school counseling directors ensure appropriate resources are utilized

efficiently in the program (Gysbers et al., 2001). The management role consists of ensuring the

school counseling department's goals and objectives are achieved (Gysbers et al., 2001). The

last role defined by Gysbers et al. (2001) is professional leadership in which one influences the

behaviors of the school counseling staff members in a way that enhances their competence and

commitment to the program. However, due to the lack of literature specifically on the leadership

of school counseling directors in education literature, the next section will explore the shift in

leadership within schools and look at department chairs and/or teacher leaders as it relates to the

role of school counseling director's serving as leaders in schools.

Shift of Leadership in Schools

Leadership can be known as a flow through the networks of roles that comprise the

organization (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). Leadership shapes the organizational system in ways

that produce meanings for the participants to attach to the organizational events (Ogawa et al.,

1995). Also, researchers have shown that depending upon the nature of leadership within any

given school correlates to the effectiveness of schools in educating students (MacNeill,

Cavanagh, & Silcox, 2003). In the 21ˢᵗ century school model principals were known as the

leaders or authority figures in executive positions (Ogawa et al., 1995). In addition, research has

proposed that other professionals within schools play a vital role in leading instructional

practices (Janson, Stone, & Clark, 2009; MacNeill, et al., 2003; Mason & McMahon, 2009;

Wingfield, Reese, & West-Olatunji, 2010). Traditionally, leadership within schools is governed

by school administrators who have completed specific licensure that exemplifies their

qualification to lead a school. This was in part due to the executive and managerial hierarchies

common in schools (Mason et al., 2009). More recently, most schools portray a combination of

formal and informal leadership by other staff members, such as teachers, assuming responsibility for certain programs (MacNeill et al., 2003).

Many models of school leadership have shifted from a 'leader role of separation to one of collaboration' (Mason et al., 2009). This shift in leadership explores the role of being a school change agent and advocate of a comprehensive program to promote positive student outcomes (Mason et al., 2009). The causation of changes in school leadership is very similar to the changes in the school counselor role over the years. The nature of leadership in schools has changed due to the needs of society at the given time (Williams & Johnson, 2003). Over the years we see leadership defined in many different categories including transformational, strategic, instructional, and distributed leadership (Williams et al., 2003).

In the 1980's, the profession of principals was shaped around becoming curriculum and instructional leaders in order to better coordinate school improvement (MacNeill et al., 2003). Instructional leadership was birthed out of the demands of new accountability systems; a push from policymakers and the public to hold schools responsible for improving student learning (Halverson, Grigg, Prichett, & Thomas, 2007). However, many researchers have argued that instructional leadership is predicated on a position and that one person cannot give adequate attention to both instructional and non-instructional tasks (MacNeill et al., 2003). Instead, researchers contend that principals should empower others to assume and exercise leadership roles within their schools (MacNeill et al., 2003).

Unlike instructional leadership, transformational leadership is where group members of an organization operate in an egalitarian framework where power is shared, and the goal of the group is to achieve ongoing, large-scale transformation (Mason et al., 2009). Distributive leadership is where other designated leaders within the school take responsibility for leadership

routines and functions (Spillane & Orlina, 2005; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001).

Depending on the school, leaders may work separately but interdependently work together in

pursuit of a common goal (Spillane et al., 2001). Lastly, strategic leadership is referenced as a

framework for the various leadership styles seen over the years (Williams et al., 2003). Leaders

who incorporate a strategic style are known to have a clear vision of where the organization is

going, can communicate the vision to others, and can motivate others to embrace it (Williams et

al., 2003).

Researchers have noted that the role of the 21st century school counselor should be that of

a leader within his/her school (Wingfield et al., 2010). Some note that school counselor's

collaboration with stakeholders to promote school-wide initiatives is of leadership practice

(Mason et al., 2009; Wingfield et al., 2010). School counselors can be seen as transformational

leaders in which they serve as a change agent and advocate who uses the comprehensive

program to promote positive student outcomes (Mason et al., 2009). With a new distributive

approach seen in schools, many scholars have identified the need for school counselors to lead

program design and advocacy, take on organizational roles within schools, and participate in

school reform movements (Dollarhide, 2003; Wingfield et al., 2010). With the growing

developments of leadership changes within schools, school counselors can be seen within these

constructs as attributing to helping school's close achievement disparities, building community

partnerships, and managing a school counseling program.

Teacher Leader & Department Chair

The paradigm of distributed leadership has redefined leadership practices generated

through collaboration of leadership activities (Feeney, 2009). Teacher leadership, defined by

Feeney (2009), states that the location of leadership is in the processes among people, rather than

in particular skills or characteristics of one leader. Therefore, "the thinking and work of teacher leaders exists organically in a web of activity" (Feeney, 2009, p. 213). Over the years, teachers have been pulled into the work of leadership in order to improve teaching and learning (Feeney, 2009). Others have noted that teacher leaders were developed due to the complex and increasing array of responsibilities associated with being a principal (DeAngelis, 2013). Scholars often refer to teacher leaders as a role that lies somewhere between a teacher and an administrator (Feeney, 2009; DeAngelis, 2013; Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2015; Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2008). The establishment of teacher leaders gives principals the ability to enable others to assume some administrative and supervisory roles within their school (DeAngelis, 2013).

Department chairs are commonly seen in high schools and are known as teacher leaders in positions that occupy a formal and unique position within the department structure (DeAngelis, 2013; Feeney, 2009). Their role is oftentimes selected by a committee through a competitive, formal interview process or selected through a process of appointment by the principal (Feeney, 2009). Department chairs mentor colleagues while teaching alongside them and are sometimes expected to manage a variety of administrative tasks in addition to their classroom teaching responsibilities (Feeney, 2009). Other responsibilities may include overseeing the budget, allocating resources and communicating with teachers and administrators, writing reports, securing substitute teachers, and completing work assigned by administrators (Zepeda et al., 2008). These leaders, like school counseling directors, possess a semblance of authority, but no formal power (Feeney, 2009; Gaubatz et al., 2015). Although they do not have formal power over their department, they are expected to be the content area experts and "master" teachers within their building (Zepeda et al., 2008).

Department chairs and teacher leaders are presented to help build a foundation for how leaders are actualized in a school outside of the principal and assistant principal role. Looking at the role of department chairs and teacher leaders can potentially help scholars understand the tasks and responsibilities of school counseling directors. As discussed earlier, there is a lack of literature regarding the role and work of school counseling directors within the education field. The roles in which teacher leaders and school counseling director's function within schools is very similar. However, many researchers have mentioned little is known about those who hold the position of a department chair, how this role plays in schools, and that literature lacks emphasis in how this role impacts instructional supervision and teaching (Feeney, 2009; DeAngelis, 2013; Gaubatz et al., 2015; Zepeda et al., 2008). Zepeda et al. (2008) shares that a common theme of department chairs in current literature speaks to the misunderstanding of the role and its ill-defined job description. Even though there is a growing support for distributed leadership practice in schools, little is known about department chairs (DeAngelis, 2013). Equally, little is known about school counseling directors. Both school counseling directors and department chair's role is critical in supporting the work to enhance student achievement and push the school's mission, vision, and goals.

Supervision of High School Counseling Director's

Students today have a myriad of needs to help them develop into productive contributors to society. School counselors are expected to fulfill many roles in a comprehensive school counseling program in order to help meet the needs of all students. In order to assist and support school counseling in implementing a comprehensive school counseling program that closes the achievement gap of students, it is the responsibility of principals and district school counseling supervisors to lead them. These two leaders are influential in the way high school counseling

directors supervise and implement a systemic and comprehensive school counseling program (Gysbers et al., 2001). This next section will explore how these two supervisors influence high school counseling directors and the implications this has on how the role is actualized.

In general, school counselor's roles are constantly changing which necessitate the importance of ongoing supervision to help improve skills, develop new areas of competence, and provide needed support (Somody, Henderson, Cook, & Zambrano, 2008). There are many benefits to school counselors receiving appropriate supervision. Outcomes of sharing new ideas, various strategies, and developing meaningful goals are a few benefits school counselors can gain from supervision (Somody et al., 2008). Supervision can also provide school counselors with feedback to assist with their comprehensive school counseling program (Somody et al., 2008). Research has shown that when school counselors have a positive and supportive relationship with principals, the school counselor and the counseling program will be more successful (Leuwerke, Walker, & Shi, 2009). Other researchers have noted that it takes a strong district and building leadership for program development, implementation, and advocacy for school counselors and their program (Gysbers et al., 2001). Further, more recent literature states it takes the support of school administrators, commitment from counselor educators, state school counselor organizations and state department of education personnel to adopt the common vision of schools having a fully implement and accountable school counseling program (Gysbers et al., 2014). However, recent studies suggest school administrators do not fully understand the value of the programmatic concept of school counseling and its benefits to students and the school community (Gysbers et al., 2014).

However, questions about the nature, structure, position and leadership of school counselors still exist as they did over 100 years ago (Gysbers et al., 2001). This may be

attributed to a lack of knowledge of the ASCA National Model that clearly defines the role of

school counselors, personal views of school counselors, the consistent transformation of the role,

or other demands and/or needs of the school and lack of staff to help meet these needs.

Furthermore, these supervisors are essential in determining the role of high school counseling

director's in schools (Perusse, Goodnough, Donegan, & Jones, 2004). In addition, the school

principal is associated with directly influencing the role of school counselors, regardless of

whether the defined role is recognized by a professional association, like ASCA (Perusse et al.,

2004). Researchers place great emphasis on the development of the relationship between

supervisors and school counselors shared understanding of the appropriate roles and activities

that the counselor performs (Leuwerke et al., 2009). When counselors feel supported by their

supervisors and assigned appropriate duties, there is an increase in career satisfaction and

commitment (Leuwerke et al., 2009).

Clinical Supervision vs. Administrative Supervision

There are two distinct structures for providing data-based feedback to assist school

counselors in evaluating their work as it relates to the ASCA National Model standards: clinical

supervision and administrative supervision (Gysbers et al., 2001). When a leader focuses on the

development and improvement of clinical skills, the leader is taking on a clinical supervisor

approach (Somody et al., 2008). More specifically, clinical supervision helps provide school

counselors with feedback through observation of time-defined micro performances and specific

counseling activities (Somody et al., 2008). In contrast, administrative supervision is when a

leader provides feedback on the delivery of the counseling services in alignment with the

school's mission and goals (Somody et al., 2008). Administrative supervision is more

commonly given by principals and district school counseling supervisors. This type of

supervision focuses more on the macro performance of school counselors, such as observed

patterns of behavior over time (Somody et al., 2008). Administrative supervision's purpose is to

ensure school counselors are providing an 'efficient, effective, and culturally responsive service

to diverse clients' (Gysbers et al., 2001; Somody et al., 2008).

The Ecological Leadership of School Counselors and their Supervisors

The evolution of professional school counseling has moved more towards an ecological

approach as the profession is being asked to work more systematically using leadership and

advocacy skills to serve all students (McMahon, Mason, Daluga-Guenther, & Ruiz, 2014). This

is a result of their training in advocacy and collaboration skills, and their ability to think and

work systemically (McMahon, 2014). Researchers believe school counselors may be in a unique

position to help change schools from a linear, factory system (McMahon, 2014). Therefore,

McMahon et al. (2014) constructed a theoretical framework that aligns with the ASCA National

Model to offer a conceptual framework for researchers and practitioners which will be used to

frame this study. McMahon et al. (2014) describes ecology as:

> Ecosystems include all aspects of the environment (e.g. organisms, geography,
>
> climate), and everything within an ecosystem is interconnected. Because
>
> everything is connected a change in any aspect of an ecosystem will create a
>
> ripple effect in all other aspects of the ecosystem; those effects will in turn affect
>
> everything else, including the original change agent. Second, ecosystems are
>
> made up of smaller ecosystems and are also nested within larger ecosystems. (p.
>
> 460)

Since school counselors focus on the relations and interactions between students and their school environment, they seek to reduce the effects of environmental and institutional barriers that impede student success (McMahon et al., 2014).

In this study, looking at the high school counseling director's relationship with its two supervisors will help the researcher better understand how this role is actualized in schools. For example, McMahon et al. (2014) states that no ecosystem can be understood separately from its larger system. Changes to any part of an ecosystem can be observed throughout the larger and smaller systems (McMahon et al., 2014). Another aspect of ecosystems is that it seeks sustainability (McMahon et al., 2014). It is described that ecosystems must maintain balance where energy and matter flow through the ecosystem (McMahon et al., 2014). In order for the ecosystem to maintain balance it utilizes feedback which communicates information letting the system know if it is becoming unbalanced so that it can correct itself (McMahon et al., 2014).

Ecological models, as seen here, can be used to understand the interconnections between humans and their multiple contexts (McMahon et al., 2014). In terms of human life, ecology stands on the premise that people are a part of a constantly changing dynamic with other living and nonliving things (Cook, 2012). In contrast, Cook (2012) defines ecosystems as:

> The sum total of interactive influences operating within an individual's life in varying degrees of proximity, ranging from his or her biologically determined characteristics to the broader sociocultural context structuring human interactions. Every human life is influenced by factors and processes common to all humans, unique to the members of a particular context or group, or idiosyncratic to that individual (p.5).

The situations that happen to an individual don't occur in a "vacuum" but are shaped by the confluence of events, propensities, relationships, memories, and other features of a life over time

and across settings (Cook, 2012). The ecological perspective can help answer the research

questions by giving a model for understanding human behavior that is based on the premise that

human life is primarily connected with the world around it (Cook, 2012). The following figure

defines the flow of Cook's (2012) ecological perspective.

1.

Human behavior is influenced by characteristics of both the individual and life contexts.

2.

Human behavior is the product of an individual interacting with his or her life contexts, or environments.

3.

Human behavior is shaped by meaning making.
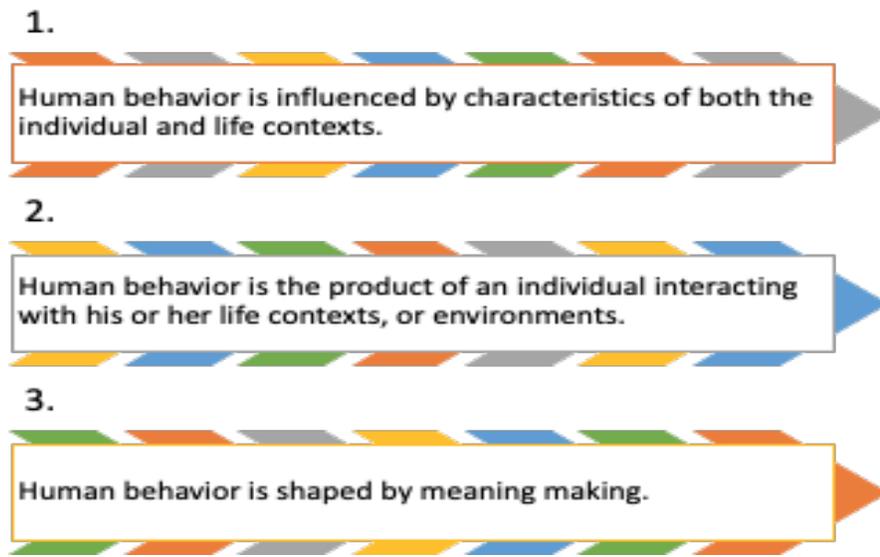
Figure 2 Cook's ecological model

The connections between the high school counseling director, the principal, and district school

counseling supervisor can be understood by their interactions with one another and the

environment (Cook, 2012).

The ecological model can help the school counseling profession understand the various

political and social contexts in which they perform their work (McMahon et al., 2014). In fact,

McMahon et al. (2014) proposes that using an ecological perspective to better understand can

help inform the work that school counselors do. In relation to ecosystems, schools can be seen

as complex systems that are viewed within a larger community system and made up of numerous

subsystems all impacting one another (McMahon et al., 2014). By using an ecological

perspective, further research can be made to identify and understand the complex interaction that

occurs between principals, district school counseling supervisors and the high school counseling

director (McMahon et al., 2014). By understanding the complex role and position of the high

school counseling director, principals and district school counseling supervisors can more

accurately provide the necessary leadership support to help this position facilitate a

comprehensive school counseling program.

Ecological Systems of School Counseling

Applying ecological systems to the profession of school counseling enables school

counselors to be leaders, advocates, collaborators, and team members who help contribute to

transforming a school environment by breaking down barriers to academic success and helping

to close the achievement gap (Cook, 2012). As schools have become progressively complex, so

have the unique systems within it (Cook, 2012). Individuals within the subsystems, such as

school counselors are influenced by their school's environment (Cook, 2012). The interactions

between school counselors and their environment create the context through which they

experience support and challenges (Cook, 2012). In this next section, ecological principles will

be applied as it relates to school counselors in the school setting.

The interdependence between people and environments, influencing one another is the

premise for which ecological counseling is founded on (Cook, 2012). This ecological

perspective incorporates individuals' experiences within its systems (Cook, 2012). Some

researchers employ that a school is a microsystem in which influence is applied by the ecosystem

through school or governmental policies, organizational authority, and the social relationships of

other members within the system (Cook, 2012). Macrosystem factors such as politics,

economics, and technology increasingly influence schools and the systems within it (Cook,

2012).

Ecological Systems of Leadership

The ecological perspective views organizations as complex systems where positional leader's behavior influences adaptation (Wielkiewicz & Stelzner, 2005). Positional leaders are used to describe individuals in positions of leadership such as principals and district school counseling supervisors who are directly responsible for an organization's success and adaptation (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). In order to understand leadership, one cannot view it in isolation from the rest of the organization (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). Therefore, leadership will be explored through its interconnectedness with its system, organization, and environment.

Wielkiewicz et al. (2005) states there are interdependent network systems that generate leadership: families, organizations, subgroups within organizations, communities, the natural environment, the economy, etc. It is also important for these leaders to take advantage of the various capacities of other leaders within the organization (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). An ecological perspective of leadership views it as a developmental, ongoing, long-term basis denying the belief that positional leaders should dominate leadership processes (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). There are many variables including the positional leader's behavior that influence and create tension causing organizations to be complex systems (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005).

Leadership Influence

Illustrated by Wielkiewicz et al. (2005), researchers who observe the behavior of another person often overestimate the importance of personality factors and underestimate the importance of situational factors. Conclusively, this idea has been titled as the fundamental attribution error (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). Researchers have also argued that positional leaders can manipulate the context and constructions of their factions due to the idea of leadership being a social construction (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). Positional leader's goal should not be to control

its follower's behavior, but to lead them to commit to the positional leader (Wielkiewicz et al.,

2005). In addition, people tend to attribute the performance of the organization to the positional

leader (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). As a result, "attribution error is a likely contributor to a

tendency to attribute organizational outcomes to leadership and the actions of positional leaders"

(Wielkiewicz et al., 2005, p. 328). Thus, it is difficult to measure the causal influences of

organizational leaders due to attribution errors (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005).

It is also expected for the behavior of others within an organizational group to adjust by

reinforcing and fostering the positional leader's role or conform to the expectations of the person

in the leadership role when a person is identified as the leader (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). In

addition, individuals may project their anxieties and fears onto the positional leader which can

cause them to withdraw from their personal responsibilities for contributing to the organization

(Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). This is called "deskilling," a process of taking away one's personal

skills and ability to influence the organization (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). Positional leaders also

have the ability to influence subordinates to adopt their vision for the organization through

elevation of the leader's position (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). Attributional biases such as

deskilling, consequently cause positional leaders to experience difficulty in influencing the larger

part of members participation in leadership processes (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005).

The Ecological Premises of Leadership

The ecology of leadership is defined as "an influence relationship among leaders and

collaborators who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes" (Wielkiewicz et al.,

2005, p. 330). While most leadership theorists conclude the paradigm for leadership is of

unidirectional influential process from leader to follower, the ecology of leadership emphasizes

the collaborative relationship (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). The context of ecological systems is

suggested in order to better understand leadership (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). Wielkiewicz et al.

(2005) presents six premises of ecology leadership theory: (a) leadership is an emergent process;

(b) the cognitive task of adaptive organization members is to optimize the tension between the

industrial perspective and the ecological perspective; (c) leadership occurs in a web of

interdependent social and biological systems; (d) adaptability is determined by the richness and

variability of feedback loops allowed to influence leadership processes; (e) tension exists

between the need for human and social diversity within the organization and single-minded

pursuit of common goals and objectives; (f) leadership process needs to be evaluated in how

adaptively an organization responds to its long-term challenges (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). The

following premises will be presented to understand the leadership process between high school

counseling directors and its two supervisors. The term positional leaders will be utilized in this

section to represent leaders such as principals and district school counseling supervisors who are

key to the process of ecological systems.
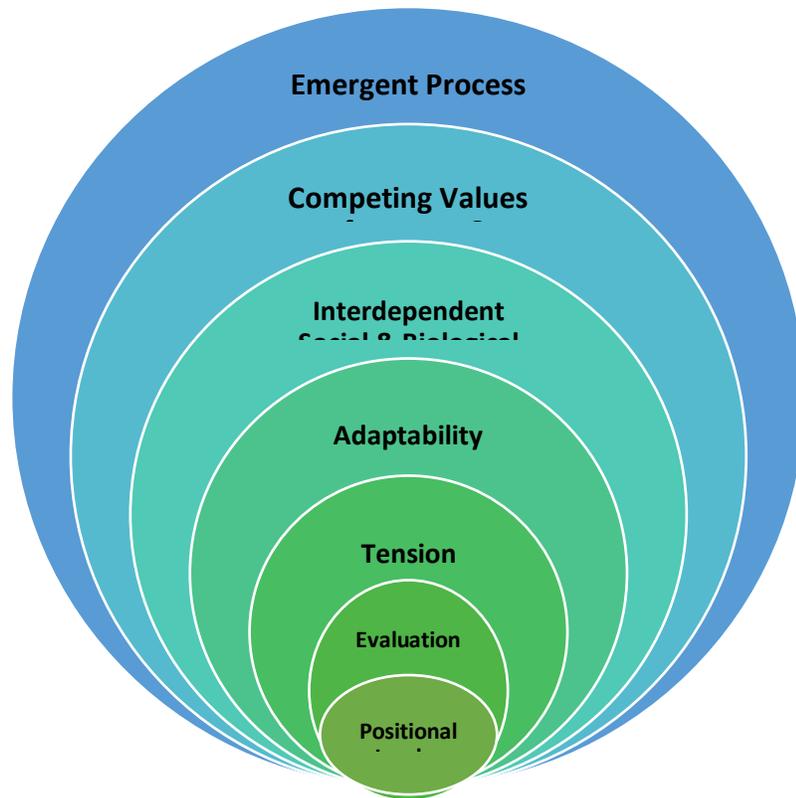
Figure 3 Wielkiewicz & Stelzner's Six Premises on the Ecology of Leadership

The first premise defines leadership as an emergent process that develops from the

interactions of individuals within the ecological system (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). Hence,

contextual variables should be used to correlate positional leader's behavior and the

organization's performance (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). The leader's decision making is

encouraged to focus on the process (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). Furthermore, the ability to

influence decisions should be distributed among the organization's members, which can be

viewed as a key issue of positional leaders (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). The role of the leader

should be to develop an understanding of the organization's culture and utilize its various parts to

promote change (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). The ecological context of the positional leader's role

is to develop processes that assist the organization to be more adaptive (Wielkiewicz et al.,

2005). The development of change facilitated by positional leaders should be assisted through

the emergence of leadership and not through executive orders and decisions (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005).

In this first premise, leadership is viewed as an emergent process and is defined as properties of a system that develop from the interactions and relationships among its parts (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). Therefore, leadership does not consist of actions of individuals, but leadership emerges from the interactions among individuals (Allen, Stelzner, & Wielkiewicz, 1998; Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). This results in adaptive decisions and executive processes (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). Leadership is then defined as the emergent process that results in either improvements or declines in the adaptiveness of the organization (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). The significance of this process should be to the degree in which the organization is able to adapt to changes within the surrounding ecology (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). For this reason, the positional leader's decisions and their effects should not be the focus (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). Instead, the focus should be on the way decisions emerged from the interactions of positional leaders with the members of the organization (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). Wielkiewicz et al. (2005) states that positional leaders are completely dependent on organizational members to carry out decisions and the surrounding ecology to respond in the way that the leader expects (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). The ecological perspective presumes the association of finding balance between power and control in the positional leader and having a diverse group of organizational members who help influence the leadership process will affect the long-term adaptability of an organization (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). For this reason, the performance of the organization should be correlated to the member as well as the positional leader's behavior (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005).

The second premise focuses on a balance between industrial perspectives and ecological perspectives in order for effective adaptation to occur (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). For example, researchers have found that too much structure can inhibit adaptation and focusing on process to the exclusion of structure or hierarchy can cause the loss of cohesion (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). This is similar to competing organizational values. When an organization observes one organizational value while excluding others, it limits the organization's ability to adapt (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). As a result, the failure of an organization is its inability to balance its competing values (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). The idea of process and decisions involves tension between the organizations competing values (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005).

This leads to the third premise that leadership occurs in a web of interdependent social and biological systems (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). Authoritative expertise and adaptive challenges can help solve the problems organizations face (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). Additionally, a shift in organizational expertise and the development of new ways of adapting to a constantly changing environment is the process of adaptive challenges (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). Adaptive challenges involve and place more emphasis on an ecological approach (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). This perspective concludes that strategies need to be provided to enable leaders and others to respond flexibly to dynamic environments (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). To do this, one must develop "a deeper understanding of the interdependent systems context within which organizations exist" (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005, p. 332). Furthermore, the organization's ability to deal critically with complex events is grounded in the analysis and reflection of the organization's issues (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005).

The fourth premise relates to the organization's ability to adapt based upon the variability and productivity of feedback loops allowed to influence the process of leadership (Wielkiewicz

et al., 2005). Wielkiewicz et al. (2005) describes feedback loops as the mechanism through which adaptation occurs. When organizations respond to relevant feedback loops, it is considered adaptive (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). In contrast, when organizations rely solely on the positional leader, it can cause the organization to focus on a smaller number of feedback loops, making it less adaptive (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). The fourth premise also presents the belief that an increase in organizational adaptation occurs when employees are empowered (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). Therefore, it is believed that all members of the organization can equally make contributions (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). Group decision processes are also more beneficial for the organization because it maximizes the number of feedback loops influencing the leadership process (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). The importance of diversity in the leadership process and feedback loops is a key element of the ecological theory of leadership (Allen et al., 1998; Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). Thus, the effectiveness of any organization is based upon its ability to recognize that decisions are made within the context of many systems interacting in complex, interdependent ways (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005).

Next, premise five speaks to the idea that a tension exists between the need for human and social diversity within an organization, as well as, single-minded pursuit of common goals and objectives (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). The ecological principle seen here is adaptability of an organization is attributed to the diverse groups within the organization (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). Diversity within the organization enhances the ability of the system to generate a variety of adaptive strategies (Allen et al., 1998; Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). It is also implied that positional leaders should have the belief that they are equal to the other members of the organization (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). Conversely, if positional leaders do not have this belief, they will exclude themselves from participating in the leadership process (Wielkiewicz et al.,

2005). However, the belief in equality is associated with positive organizational outcomes because it encourages participation in the leadership process amongst the organization's members (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). Similar to how leadership structures are seen in schools today, a strong hierarchical structure with most of the decisions made by the positional leaders, can decrease the diversity of thinking applied to adaptive challenges (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005).

Lastly, the sixth premise states that an evaluation of the leadership process will help identify the strength of an organization's ability to adapt in its response to long-term challenges (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). Viewing organizations and leadership from an ecological approach suggests having a mechanism for detecting the possibility of disruptive trends in order to be successful (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). Since organizations belong to the larger community, it's important for it to give attention to environmental feedback loops in order to adapt (Allen et al., 1998; Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). Wielkiewicz et al. (2005) states that adaptability requires an organization to be aware of feedback loops that provide information about the environmental sustainability of its practices. In contrast to the need for this tension to exist, the absence of it will leave organizations without the knowledge and diverse ideas needed to respond to the adaptive challenges (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005).

Summary

The ecological premise of leadership can be applied to understanding how leaders understand the individuals that help develop the system within the organization. It also helps contribute to understanding the members of organizations actions and interactions within the system. Utilizing an ecological framework is applied to this study to gain a critical understanding of leadership, organizations, and how roles are conceptualized. Also, using this framework provides a powerful resource to understand the influences of a positional leader and

how it influences other parts of the organization. Applying an ecological model can also help

with understanding and seeing the complexity of the systems and the challenges within an

organization (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005).

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter outlines the process for conducting the qualitative research study. The problem, purpose, research questions and design of the research study will be discussed. Identifying participants, the theoretical framework for the instrument that was utilized for the study and how the data were collected and analyzed structures this chapter. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of high school counseling directors and understand how their leadership role is actualized within schools by their two supervisors: the principal and district school counseling supervisor. The problem lies between the discrepancies in the role and in the preparation of high school counseling directors (Walsh & Gibson, 2019). An important part of school counselor leadership is their collaboration with supervisors (Walsh et al., 2019). Hence, the exploration of the triad dynamics between high school counseling directors and its supervisors is important. The study specifically sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived leadership experiences of high school counseling directors?

2. How do the interactions with principals and district school counseling supervisors shape high school counselors lived experiences as directors?

Research Design

This study was designed to explore how high school counseling director's leadership roles are actualized in the school setting. Qualitative research overarching goal is to begin with assumptions, an interpretive/theoretical lens, and the study of research problems that explore the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2013). A qualitative approach is appropriately applied to a study when the problem of a research study needs to be explored, when a detailed understanding is needed, when the researchers want to

write in a flexible style, and when the researcher seeks to understand the contextual settings of participants (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, qualitative methods were applied to the study to obtain a detailed understanding of high school counseling director's perspectives with how their leadership role is actualized in schools and how their principals and district school counseling supervisor shape their role. According to Creswell (2013) "this detail can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature" (pg. 48).

The intentionality of qualitative research is to understand the contexts or settings in which participants address a problem or issue in a study (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research supports the need to explain the linkages in causal theories or models (Creswell, 2013). Theories only provide a general picture of trends, associations, and relationships (Creswell, 2013). Further, theories do not tell us about the processes of people's experiences, why they responded the way they did, the context in which they respond, and the person's deeper thoughts and behaviors governed by their responses (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research can be used to develop theories when existing theories do not adequately capture the complexity of a problem the researcher is examining (Creswell, 2013). Sometimes, qualitative research is used when quantitative research does not fit the problem (Creswell, 2013). The influence of principals and district school counseling supervisors on the leadership role of high school counseling directors, for example, are difficult to capture utilizing quantitative methods (Creswell, 2013).

Phenomenology

A qualitative study drawn from a phenomenological foundation was used to understand the research of this proposed dissertation study. Drawing from a phenomenological foundation, the researcher transcended past knowledge and experience to understand a phenomenon at a

deeper level (Creswell, 2013). The researcher's pre-understanding and background was essential

in helping to inform how the study unfolded (Crowther, Ironside, Spence, & Smythe, 2017).

Phenomenology attempts to elicit rich and descriptive data through lived experiences (Creswell,

2013). It describes what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon

(Creswell, 2013). Also, phenomenology is an interpretive process where the researcher makes

an interpretation of the meaning of the lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). Drawing attention to

the multiple meanings within a phenomenon and drawing the reader into new understandings is

the premise for which phenomenology uses data (Crowther et al., 2017). The researcher's pre-

understandings is what initiates the facilitation of inquiry for a study (Crowther et al., 2017).

Phenomenology was introduced by Edmund Husserl who sought to develop a new

philosophical method that would lend to disintegrating civilization (Groenewald, 2004).

Researchers describe phenomenology as a discipline that aims to focus on people's perceptions

of the world in which they live in and what it means to them (Kafle, 2011). Utilizing a

phenomenological method helped the researcher understand the participants' lived experiences

(Groenewald, 2004). Phenomenological methodology yields for openness to flexible methods

and the possibilities of how meaning and understanding evolve (Crowther et al., 2017). In the

phenomenological model, researchers attempt to understand the meaning of events and

interactions to ordinary people in particular situations (Bogdan & Giklen, 2007). The methods

for this study attempted to gain entry into the conceptual world of high school counseling

directors and how their roles are conceptualized (Bogdan et al., 2007). Phenomenology was

fitting for this study because it utilized multiple ways to interpret the experiences of the high

school counseling director (Bogdan et al., 2007; Crowther et al., 2017). Understanding several

individuals' common or shared experiences of a phenomenon is the desirable approach of why

this method was applicable to the proposed dissertation study (Creswell, 2007; Milsom &

Moran, 2015). Therefore, a phenomenological approach of the methodology helped investigate

the research questions (Crowther et al., 2017).

Role of the Researcher

As a high school counseling director, I became interested in how school counselors are

being pulled away from counseling students and into more leadership or administrative roles in

schools. When thinking about my role in the study as a researcher, it is important to understand

my own personal biases that could influence the study. However, a researcher's thoughts,

feelings, and reactions to interpretations of the data are all a part of the research process (Hays &

Singh, 2012). In addition, researcher reflexivity is coined as one of the benchmarks for how

credible and trustworthy a qualitative research design is for its audience (Hays et al., 2012). As

such, I recognize the intentionality needed to put aside my own personal and professional

experiences, knowledge, and biases regarding the topic of study in order to understand the

phenomenon in which I am seeking to learn.

Research Team

A research team was developed to assist with the analysis and coding of the data. This

team consisted of two additional members. The team was chosen based upon prior knowledge of

coding and analyzing data. Selected members contained a diverse background within the

education field in order to have varied perspectives. Utilizing a research team can help ensure

the data collected are correctly interpreted and can also help build new insight (McAlister, Lee,

Ehlert, Kajfez, Faber, & Kennedy, 2017). One research team member was a recent PhD graduate

in educational leadership who is currently a school principal. The other research team member

was a current doctoral student in the educational leadership program. Both members took a qualitative research course as part of their program study.

The primary researcher identified two individuals who have experience and a knowledge base for analyzing and coding data. Upon agreement to participate on the research team, the individuals were asked to share their thoughts, perceptions, and biases regarding the research topic. They were then given the context of the study, research questions, and copies of the interview transcripts to analyze and code. The research team members were asked to record notes, questions, and observations about the transcripts. Upon completion of coding, the research team met to compare notes, discuss emerging themes and discrepancies. The research team challenged any biases in order to increase trustworthiness of the research. In addition, I shared my findings with the research team. They helped frame the findings and identify any biases I may have elicited through the findings. As the primary researcher, I was the only individual who collected the data and transcribed the interviews.

Participant Selection

The participants of the proposed study were a part of a purposive snowball sample of high school counseling directors who came from the same southeastern state. Purposive snowball sampling is a technique used in qualitative research to inquire select individuals because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study (Creswell, 2013). Participants represented school districts in the same southeastern state. Participants were from school districts of various sizes and represented at the secondary school level. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants. Participants were invited to participate in the study via email.

Participants selected met the following criteria: employment as a full-time high school counseling director who oversees a school counseling program and a team of school counselors and currently hold a professional school counseling license. In a phenomenological study it's essential that all participants have experience of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013).

Table 1

Study Participants

Counseling Director	Gender	Age	Race	Years Counseling	Years as a Director	Leadership Training	Member of School Leadership Team
Abigail	F	50-55	W	10-15	1-5	No	Yes
David	M	50-55	AA	15-20	10-15	Yes	Yes
Elizabeth	F	50-55	AA	10-15	1-5	Yes	Yes
Faith	F	45-50	W	15-20	1-5	No	Yes
Hannah	F	40-45	W	15-20	1-5	No	Yes
Hope	F	35-40	W	1-5	1-5	Yes	Yes
John	M	40-45	AA	15-20	1-5	Yes	Yes
Leah	F	40-45	AA	15-20	1-5	Yes	Yes
Martha	F	45-50	AA	20-25	10-15	No	Yes
Mary	F	50-55	AA	15-20	10-15	Yes	Yes

Michael	M	45-50	AA	15-20	1-5	Yes	Yes
Rachel	F	50-55	W	30-35	10-15	Yes	Yes
Sarai	F	40-45	AA	5-10	1-5	No	No
Vashti	F	35-40	AA	10-15	1-5	Yes	Yes

Data Collection

Interviews were used as the qualitative research method to understand how a high school counseling director's role is actualized within schools given their connection with one's principal and district school counseling supervisor. Interviewing allows you to understand what inferences you observe (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Interviewing in qualitative inquiry can provide strength in this study because it gives the researcher an opportunity to learn about what is not seen and to explore alternative explanations of what is seen (Glesne et al., 1992). Brooks et al. (2015) state the way people manage, inspire or communicate with each other is influenced by the way leadership is practiced within its context. For the interest of this study, the focus was on high school counseling directors and their lived experiences regarding leadership and how it relates to their principal and district school counseling supervisor.

Interviews

Interviews are often used in educational settings for unexplored and underexplored social phenomena (Hays et al., 2012). Currently, little is known about the role of high school counseling directors. Interviews were useful in this study to allow participants the opportunity to describe what is meaningful or important using his or her own words (Hays et al., 2012). There was also an opportunity to uncover interesting and unexpected ideas and themes from

participants by using interviews in a study (Hays et al., 2012). Utilizing interviews as part of the data collection allowed the researcher to ensure the participants are interpreting the questions as they are intended and to probe for more details (Hays et al., 2012).

Two rounds of semi-structured interviews were facilitated with selected participants who were invited and agreed to participate in the study. Hays et al. (2012) notes that Creswell (2013) suggests a sample of up to ten people in a phenomenological study but given the exploration of the triad connection between the high school counseling director and its two supervisors, fourteen participants were utilized for this study. Each participant was given a consent form and demographic form to sign before the interview was scheduled. An explanation of what the consent form meant was also explained at the start of each interview. Confidentiality was also explained to each participant and the usage of a pseudonym to protect any personal identifying information within the study.

Interview questions were created to capture high school counseling director's lived experiences and how their supervisors shape their experiences as directors. The interview questions were developed with the intention to align responses to the theoretical framework and research questions. The purpose of the interviews was to gain an in-depth understanding of how the participants conceptualize the role of a high school counseling director as it relates to the systems in which they work within (i.e. the principal and district school counseling supervisor). Understanding this foundation for the purpose of the interviews helped facilitate a series of questions to which the participants were asked to respond honestly and thoroughly. Due to COVID-19 each interview was facilitated via zoom to adhere to the quarantine guidelines. Each interview was recorded using a handheld voice recorder; permission for recording was noted on the consent form and confirmed again prior to starting each interview. All interviews were

conducted in an environment free of distractions and where both the participant and interviewer are comfortable. All interviews were fully transcribed using Temi software at the completion of each interview. During the interviews, field notes were taken to journal observations, thoughts, and ideas. I reviewed each transcript and corrected any recording errors to match it to the audio recording. Then each transcript was shared with the participants to review for accuracy, to clarify, or add any additional thoughts to the interview. This process helped to add validity to the accuracy of the interviews. Member checking was used to help maximize trustworthiness amongst participants (Hays et al., 2012).

Data Analysis

Phenomenologically informed data analysis focus is to understand the depth and meaning of participants experiences (Hays et al., 2012). Moustakas (1994) describes an influential phenomenological data analysis approach to qualitative studies which will be utilized in this study to analyze the data collected (Creswell, 2013; Hays et al., 2012). In relation to this study, the first step consisted of the researcher beginning with a full description of one's own experience of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Hays et al., 2012). This assisted with allowing the researcher to set aside one's personal experiences in order to focus directly on the participants in the study (Creswell, 2013).

Secondly, the researcher developed a list of significant statements from the interviews and documents regarding how the participants are experiencing the role of a high school counseling director (Creswell, 2013). These significant statements, also known as horizonalization of the data, were treated equally to develop a list of non-repetitive and non-overlapping statements (Creswell, 2013; Hays et al., 2012). Following the list, themes from the statements were grouped into larger units of information (Creswell, 2013). A textural

description of the participants' experiences of what happened was reviewed and analyzed (Creswell, 2013). Then a description of how the experience happened and reflections on the setting and context was given (Creswell, 2013). Finally, structural descriptions of the meanings and essences of the experience was analyzed to represent the phenomenological study (Creswell, 2013; Hays et al., 2012). Structural descriptions helped identify relationships and understanding of its complexity and/or tension between variant themes examined for its meaning (Hays et al., 2012). Units of information, phrases, and concepts were pulled to support each of the research questions. To organize the data, NVIVO was utilized to develop a codebook to assess and manipulate the data.

Trustworthiness

In order to establish trustworthiness with the study, credibility was established in multiple ways: member checking, pseudonyms for participants, and a research team. Member checking is noted as the key strategy to establish trustworthiness within a study (Hays et al., 2012). Member checking allowed the participants involved to accurately portray their intended meanings when the overall themes will be outlined (Hays et al., 2012). Pseudonyms were assigned to all fourteen participants. Leadership titles and some work details were shared, the names of the schools or any other identifying information were not used in the reporting process. Identifying information that was mentioned during the interviews were removed during the review of transcripts and replaced as necessary. Transcripts and audio-recordings were stored on a personal computer and storage account with limited access. Audio recordings and transcripts were discarded upon the completion of the research study and the data that have been reported in the findings section of the dissertation. Also, due to my shared experiences with the participants as a high school counseling director, the utilization of a research team helped identify any biases

or preconceived notions on my part. McAlister et al. (2017) notes "trustworthiness gauges how well the evidence presented supports the value of the results, while quality measures of how likely systematic error and bias have been prevented through the design of the study."

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenologically informed qualitative study was to explore and understand the lived experiences of high school counseling directors. The findings were extrapolated from semi-structured interviews which were reviewed, coded, and analyzed by the research team and myself. The research questions guiding my inquiry were: 1) What are the lived experiences of high school counseling directors? and 2) How do the interactions with principals and district school counseling supervisors shape high school counselors' lived experiences as directors? In this study I sought to give voice to and illustrate the lived leadership experiences of high school counseling directors. The findings are organized thematically as follows: contextual factors that influence one's experiences, leadership conceptualization and development, and supervision.

Theme 1: Contextual Factors
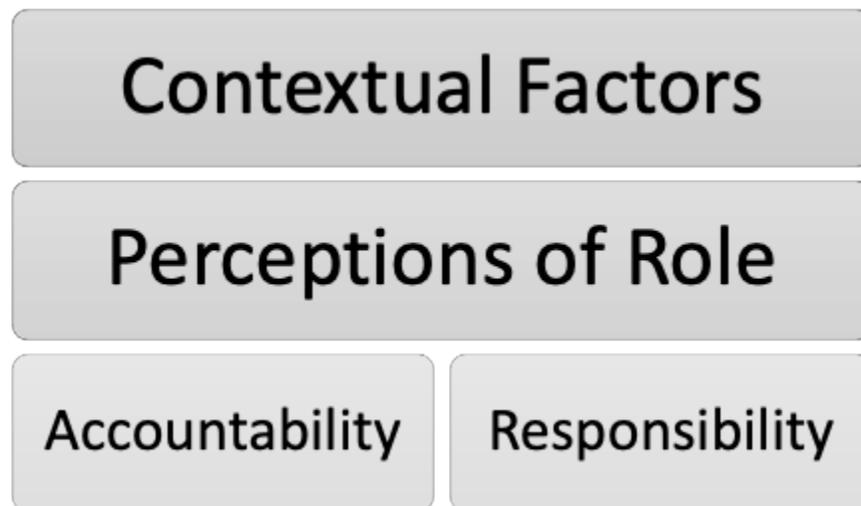
Figure 4. Contextual factors influencing one's experiences.

The findings showed certain contextual factors shaped the participants experiences as high school counseling directors. Participating high school counseling directors spoke to a

variety of experiences that shaped their perspective as leaders. These contextual factors were unique and help provide characteristics of the directors who participated in the study. Contextual factors emerged through the interviews and help give a better understanding of the lived leadership experiences of the participants. All of these factors play a role in how each participant leads, interacts with their two supervisors, conceptualizes leadership, and defines their own leadership style. Also, these contextual factors indirectly or directly influence the participants experiences and behavior. The following themes emerged from the study: participants' perception of their role and how others view their role, accountability, and responsibility.

Self-Perceptions of Role & How Others View the Role of a High School Counseling Director

The role of school counselors has shifted over the years and continues to take shape (Dollarhide, 2003). This has resulted in many conversations regarding the specific roles of school counselors in the educational system (Amatea et al., 2005). As part of the semi-structured interviews, I asked participants to share their experiences of how they view their role within their department and school. Participants naturally believe they serve as leaders not only as a director, but also in their role as a school counselor. Ten participants believe their role in schools enhances student relationships with staff and administrators. Other's viewed themselves as facilitators or liaisons between school and community stakeholders. Collaboration, shared leadership, and trusting relationships were common words that came from how the participants viewed their role. As part of the school community, the directors stated they are instrumental in the development and success of students. Eight high school counseling directors viewed themselves as the caretakers of students when it comes to scheduling their classes, making sure

they're on the right track and helping students emotionally and socially. Participants shared they

work collaboratively with administrators to help plan activities for students. One of their roles is

to help students grow socially, emotionally, and academically to also include finding one's

career. They engage in many different roles within their school and department. Leah states:

> So, this role that I'm currently in, is a lot. I feel like it is a split role of being a school
>
> counselor, a school counseling director, and almost an API (Assistant Principal of
>
> Instruction). So, a big part of my role really is I'm sitting in my office and I feel like I'm
>
> responding. I'm responding to a lot of hey we got this kid, hey we got this, hey we have
>
> this. So, a lot of it, I don't want to necessarily say it's putting out fires, but a lot of it is
>
> responding to situations as they come up. And I feel like a lot of it is also being
>
> protective of your school counselors time. Keeping the school counselors feeling valued
>
> and supported. Helping the mission and vision of the school district and then helping
>
> people to understand our role. You have to be used to being the only one. What I mean
>
> by that is, you're the only one that holds that position in the building. I really feel like
>
> my role for the most part is to take the hit when something goes wrong within the school
>
> counseling department.

Continuing to look at how the participants viewed their role Sarai had a similar answer. Sarai

states, "so my job as a director sometimes includes being the registrar...being the counselor, the

principal, assistant principal, [and] director." Participants saw themselves juggling different

roles within their school. These roles sometimes aligned with what they believed was a part of

their job duties, while there were other roles they did not believe aligned. David believes his role

is to oversee his department, yet he identifies himself playing a dual role, merging the gaps

between administrators, teachers, students, and community stakeholders. David notes:

I look at myself as a facilitator in terms of overseeing programs and executing those

programs. Financially managing the budget within the department and just being that go

to liaison between the counseling team, staff, administrators, central office, community

and other stakeholders. Oftentimes, we're everything to everybody all the time.

Thus, participants view themselves as the liaison between counseling and administrators,

between students/parents and teachers, and sometimes between teachers and administrators. For

the participants, this meant having a clear understanding regarding the view of teachers and

students, but ultimately making the best decisions that would help students. Being a liaison also

meant effectively communicating with teachers, administrators, and parents. Participating in

community events was also how they viewed themselves as liaisons between their school and

community. Participants viewed themselves as leaders who build collaboration and relationships

within the school and community. This can be viewed as leading from the middle, which

emerged from the study. Leading from the middle speaks to having a top supervisor, the

principal whom the directors answer to, but also leading a group of individuals. The responses

represent a multidimensional role where participants view themselves as being whatever is

needed by their department and school. All of the participants spoke to a balancing act between

being a school counselor and a leader. In comparison, Rachel states:

But now I do wish I would've had my administrative endorsement because now this

job, you are an administrator. I do everything but discipline. I call parents probably

more than they [administrators] call parents. I deal with teachers not doing what they're

supposed to do, probably more than they do. And I'm not saying anything bad about

them, I'm just saying that's kind of the role that it's taken.

Other experiences the participants spoke to is feeling like they are the only one, because they are the only individual who holds the school counseling director position in the building. Participants stated there are multiple administrators and teachers within the building, but similar to a principal, there is only one school counseling director. Directors further shared being the only person in a school with this position can sometimes feel lonely. However, having a strong relationship with other directors in the district is beneficial to their leadership and decision making. In addition, when participants felt supported by their supervisors, they felt more confident as being the only leader with this position. In contrast, other participants didn't speak to their role as being lonely but spoke to being a part of a team. This team was either their administrative team within their building and/or a division wide high school counseling director team. To further illustrate this, Hannah states:

> So, I think that's the key to it all, you can't do this job by yourself. But you're going to feel by yourself a lot because you're not just a counselor, but you're also not an administrator. So, where do you fit in the scheme of things? And then that's different from school to school too.

While some participants felt their role is lonely, nine participants view themselves as the expert in counseling, and needing to have the answer to everything, even if they don't. Hope states:

> I'm the go to for questions, concerns, anything; if they run into a situation [they] don't understand something or they don't know what to do in [the] situation, or whatever the case is, I'm like the go to person. So I ended up being the expert on all things counseling, which again, I think in my role I should be. And being the expert on every subject that could potentially ever be related to counseling at all. And sometimes that extends to teachers as well. It's a lot of working with a lot of different stakeholders and just being

expected to have all the answers all of the time, whether I have it or not.

A lot of how they view their role is to just manage all of the pieces. Various forms of leadership emerged from the interview question of how directors view their role. They spoke to having a multidimensional role as a school counseling director. Although their main purpose is to oversee the operations of the school counseling department, they also spoke to providing the necessary resources and service to all stakeholders (i.e. parents, students, teachers, and administrators). Another view of how the directors see their role is by keeping their counselors well informed and ensuring they have what they need to be successful. The belief that keeping students as the main focus and building meaningful relationships with students was also an important aspect of their role.

When discussing their experiences, seven out of the fourteen participants shared their belief of how others view their role. David states, "because unfortunately the counselors have a stereotype that we just sit in our offices and drink coffee and wait on the work, that's possible; but again, no one knows who you are unless you're where they are." Elizabeth shares, "a lot of people outside of school counseling don't think we do all the things that we do." In comparison, Hannah shares:

> I feel like as a school counselor you're constantly trying to prove your worth and people
>
> don't really understand what we do. And so, they think we sit around with our feet on the
>
> desk all day just waiting for somebody to walk in and so we can help somebody and it's
>
> just not the case. I think that serving as an advocate in situations like that and helping
>
> people to understand exactly what we do and to see our value....like what's actually
>
> happening right now (COVD-19), this is another time that people think that we're not
>
> doing anything because we don't have any classrooms to teach, so what could we

possibly be doing while we're at home? But I feel like I'm working more now than I was

[before quarantine].

Participants stated perceptions of how other people viewed their role. Many of these perceptions

contrast with how directors view themselves. Due to these perceptions, the directors took on the

role of advocacy to better inform staff exactly what their roles are. Many spoke to their

frustrations of having to change these misconceptions of what school counselors actually do.

Leah, a fifth-year director states her experiences of other staff members perspectives on her role:

I think that people do not understand what it is that we do and at times that can be

frustrating. They do not understand what it is that we do. They do not understand how

impactful we are. And I believe like every school counseling director that I know, we do

our job so well that we make it look easy. And that is why people don't know what we

do, because if we stopped doing what we did, it all would fall apart. I think that people

should understand that leading from the middle.

To further illustrate this theme, Hope gave her belief on how staff members view her role:

I think a lot of people still just think that we do the same old thing and that we're

probably on Amazon shopping most of the day. But that's obviously not the case. You

don't sit on Amazon all day. And so, advocating for the profession...just more

awareness. I feel like no matter what I do, some people are just still stuck in that

mentality.

Even though ASCA has clearly laid out the job duties of school counselors and the role they play

in schools, the directors shared they have to define their role. Participants believe there is a false

stereotype they are not key players in helping the school community. There is a belief that there

is a misunderstanding of school counselor roles. As a result, participants are constantly trying to

prove their worth and value. The belief of not having a classroom equates to questioning exactly

what a school counselor's role is emerged. Although, participants do feel they are embraced by

administrators and teachers, yet they are constantly educating them on their role. Having to

remind or explain the role the directors and school counselors have within their building is a

reoccurring challenge for the participants. Vashti discusses how the changes with ASCA has not

necessarily changed the views of people who are not in the school counseling field:

> And even though 40 years ago, the American School Counselor Association changed the
>
> dynamic of what guidance counselors were. You're fighting, you're fighting an
>
> entrenched identity with people who have had experiences with counselors, so they can't
>
> see beyond what you do as far as academic record keeping. So, when I became a
>
> counselor, I was adapted under the ASCA model. With that it gave us the format. It
>
> gave us the foundation and the tenets, the foundation to become more than an academic
>
> record keeper. When we look at the social emotional development with children, on all
>
> levels, we also have to understand how our role is facilitated in those settings.

Further highlighting the participants advocacy regarding their role, Rachel states:

> Some people in some very high places do not like school counselors because of their own
>
> personal experience, 35 to 40 years ago. And I always say, why should we be punished
>
> for the sins of few? That's the reality. And you know, we have to change that. We have
>
> to change that culture.

Therefore, participants have taken a responsibility to shape and define their role based upon the

current ASCA model. Breaking old traditions, views, previous experiences and roles of school

counselors is something the participants have taken on as a duty. How others view their role has

positively and negatively shaped their experiences as leaders in their school. Wanting people to

understand how impactful their role is correlated to how directors believe other's view their role.

It is the belief that they are so impactful, if they stopped doing their job, things would fall apart.

Consequently, there is a fighter spirit to combat the perception that school counselors don't do

anything and replace it with the perspective they are essential to students' overall academic,

social and emotional success.

Accountability of Job Duties

Several participants spoke to the pressures of their role and being held accountable.

There were various forms of accountability the participants spoke to. Three participants viewed

accountability as being able to clearly define one's role in comparison to teachers. Since

teachers have classrooms, Standard of Learning tests and more explicit duties, directors felt the

need to explain or justify what they do for accountability purposes. For example, one participant

referenced how teachers are logging and emailing their work to show principals what they're

accountable for. In fear of not being able to clearly demonstrate one's work, the same participant

shared she began listing all of the things she does throughout the year to show her principal what

she does on a day to day basis. When asked to share further details regarding this document, the

participant explained that six years ago her department was asked to explain exactly what they

do throughout the school year. Due to COVID-19 and being quarantined, four participants felt

the need to explain and/or show their supervisors what they're doing since they are unable to

meet with students face to face. There was an overwhelming sense that directors had to

demonstrate exactly what their department was doing. Another form of accountability emerged

as participants spoke to being held accountable when a counselor makes a mistake. David notes:

If something were to not go right. The central office administrator, they're not going

to care who the individual counselor was, they're going to want to talk to me directly

about what went wrong and what could've prevented this from happening.

The directors felt accountable for the mistakes of their counselors. They believed they represent

the school counseling department and any mistakes made by their counselors is an error on their

part. Rachel states, "you always have to be thorough; you always have to be concise and upbeat

no matter who it is that you're talking to." Seven participants felt they were accountable for the

accuracy of the information relayed to staff and ensuring their counselors met deadlines on time.

The directors took ownership for any actions or results that were contributed by the school

counseling department. For example, one director spoke to a counselor making a scheduling

mistake, the director took full accountability for the error and for fixing the error. They view

accountability as part of overseeing the school counseling department and program.

In addition, the directors spoke to pressures with SOL scores, accreditation, the master

schedule, AP testing, transcripts, special programs, etc. Two counselors stated, "you can't mess

up or you'll be sorry if you do" and "you can almost never make a mistake." There was also an

urgency for director's to meet deadlines. Six participants believed a lot of their work was time

sensitive and needed to be completed immediately and correctly. Many of the directors used the

word pressure to describe how to handle accountability in their role. All of the participants are

held accountable for the school's graduation rate. They're accountable for students who dropped

out of high school, finding them and helping them earn their high school diploma. Elizabeth

adds:

When I first got to [name of high school], I'm the drop out coordinator. There are

 [students] dropping out, you can't let that happen. Most of my evaluation is set around

retention, graduation rate, and dropout rate, because that was the biggest issue when I got

there. I think I've helped to influence [the decrease in the dropout rate] since I've been

there.

Participants believed all of their duties were a major responsibility they were being held

accountable for. Constant and clear communication with parents was another way participant's

felt they demonstrated accountability. Directors correlated communication with keeping

stakeholders informed and keeping their department running smoothly. The participants also

shared their supervisors don't micromanage their work but show a level of trust that they are

getting things done and follow up later. However, the inability to never make a mistake was a

consistent response amongst the participants.

Leadership Responsibilities

School counseling programs are more comprehensive to include crisis intervention,

individual student support, and proactive programs for all students (Campbell et al., 1997). Ten

view their school counseling programs as a responsibility of their role as the director. Leah

remarks the responsibility she has as a high school counseling director:

I think it is important for us to always be knowledgeable of the ever-changing guidelines

and how things change from the Department of Education. We are the ones who I feel

are responsible for interpreting that to our school counselors. I would say that it is very

rewarding, but it's also exhausting at times. So, you cannot be a school counseling

coordinator and not believe in the counseling process. So like record keeping. I don't

think people understand how many records...we're the keeper of the academic records

and what that looks like. And then they don't understand that we're not only responsible

for school counselors. Essentially, we're responsible for every student in that building.

The expectation is that we know every student. I'm responsible if there's an error on the

student record. Dual enrollment...crisis counseling...AP testing, I am the SSD

coordinator for students with disabilities when they need accommodations for testing for

ACT, AP, and also the SAT. So, I do that. I'm responsible for the PSAT for the entire

tenth and ninth grade. I feel like all of them are major. Academic counseling, scheduling

and master scheduling, that's a huge responsibility. So anytime there is an issue with a

schedule, that's automatically the school counseling director. Any student that's in crisis,

huge responsibility for us. We do threat assessments, the suicide assessments. I serve on

the administrative team. A huge responsibility is really taking direction from the

administrators and being able to communicate that to school counselors. Also, a major

responsibility is the same when I meet with my [district school counseling supervisor],

then me being able to communicate those responsibilities.

In addition to the director's responsibilities, Sarai adds, "now what I do affects 2,200 students

and 200 plus faculty." Unlike lead teachers whose decisions may only impact their department,

the decisions, participants believe their role can impact an entire school building.

Along with having a responsibility to lead a department, participants have a strong sense

of responsibility to serve students. However, time plays a major role in how directors are able to

serve their student population. Time is invaluable and is of great essence to high school

counseling directors who juggle many hats on a daily basis. Time appeared to be an obstacle that

hindered the participants from effectively carrying out all of their responsibilities and duties.

How participants allocated their time was dependent upon the needs and demands of the various

stakeholders within and outside of the school. High school counseling directors want to spend

more time with students and advocate for them. Participants believe time is the key to finding

balance between being a leader and being able to see students. Participants viewed time as the

gap between getting things done and being an effective advocate for students. It is perceived

squeezing in more time for students would compromise another responsibility. David states:

> Having the time to get in front of the kids as much as we can. That's important, but time
>
> is of the essence. That's something that is lacking. I don't know how we can squeeze
>
> time out [to meet with students more] without compromising something.

Participants believe it is difficult to get everything done they're supposed to and effectively

advocate for students. The notion that every day was different and driven by various things was

spoken by many participants. One participant spoke to her day being driven by her email while

others said their day was shaped by their supervisors or the needs of their teachers. Balancing

being available to students, teachers, and administrators was also shared. Participants felt an

obligation to be available and to always say yes. Hannah states:

> It's a hard balance just because there are such deadlines and such expectations on us as
>
> leaders within the building to make sure we're getting everything done that we need to.
>
> So, I would say that it's an interesting balance to try to maintain. But I try to still find as
>
> much time as I can with students because they sometimes get pushed aside because of
>
> that paperwork and those deadlines unfortunately. And I try to work hard to make sure
>
> they're still getting everything that they need.

Participants feel they are responsible for a lot of different things and it can be challenging finding

balance. Their most important priority is helping students; however, the administrative

paperwork demands can sometimes get in the way. The perception all of their duties are major

responsibilities creates a challenge of finding balance between their duties and tasks. Taking

direction from the administrative team and clearly communicating the information to counselors

was another responsibility the directors spoke to. Making appropriate decisions that impact

students and staff was mentioned in relation to the participants responsibilities. There was a

sense of being able to stop what they were engaging in during the day to handle any situation that

arises. Keeping up with the changes in the field was important to participants as well.

Some of those processes include gathering and disseminating information to not only their

department, but also to administrators, teachers, students, and parents. Participants believe it is

their responsibility and there is an expectation to know everything about all students. They hold

the responsibility to ensure their counselors are seeing students, are actively engaged in

committees, share the school's vision, and help carryout and execute the school's vision through

their school counseling program.

Theme 2: Leadership Conceptualization & Development

Leadership Conceptualization	Leadership Development
• Filling in the Gap • Solid Team • Power • Stakeholder Demands	• Experiential Learning • Professional Development • Perspective & Relevance • Mentorship

Figure 5. Leadership conceptualization & leadership development.

Leadership can be defined as formal or informal. High school counseling directors

maintain a level of informal leadership within their department and school. This informal

leadership provides them leverage as a leader. The second theme, leadership conceptualization

and development, is discussed in this section and contributes to the participants experiences as

leaders. Within these themes, sub-themes emerged from the findings: experiential learning,

filling in the gap, having a solid team, power, stakeholder demands, professional development and director's perspective and relevance regarding training, and mentorship.

Leadership Conceptualization

All fourteen participants identified themselves as leaders within their department and school. Some even viewed themselves as an administrator or as a quasi-administrator over their department. To capture the participants' view of their own personal leadership, a semi-structured interview question asked what does being a leader mean to you, and how do you conceptualize it? Findings from this interview question resulted in a consensus the participants conceptualized leadership through modeling. Whether it is a certain behavior they want to see from their counselors or a level of work ethic and responsibility, they lead through modeling. Six participants mentioned utilizing a servant leader approach as their style of leadership. The results showed an overall consensus the participants would never ask their school counselors to do anything they weren't willing to do. To further understand high school counseling director's informal leadership Hope states, "I see myself as the leader, but leading from within and providing as much support, fairness, and equity as I can." In addition, Rachel describes her view of leadership as leading by example. Leading by example was a recurring phrase when the directors spoke to how they conceptualize leadership. Hannah states:

> I try to lead by example, meaning kind of helping them [school counselors] to find
> different ways to work smarter, not harder, and just make the most of our time without
> feeling completely overwhelmed. And then also reminding them that you can't pour
> from an empty cup, that we need to take care of ourselves because self-care is so
> important, but so absent in education in general, I think. So that's part of what my role, I
> feel is as a leader within my specific department.

In contrast to the other participants, Abigail was the only participant who mentioned modeling leadership to her students.

Participants view leadership as mutual respect and being willing to get your hands dirty. David said this meant arriving at school before your staff does and being the last one to leave. Twelve participants spoke to working alongside their counseling team and being in the trenches. When asked how participants conceptualize leadership, Abigail concludes:

It's so vague as to the things that we're expected to know and do [as leaders]. You touch every part of the building, there isn't a single area that you don't touch. So, you are seen and needed by all departments of the school.

When asked to further share her experience in conceptualizing leadership, Abigail states:

I think students need to see that you're a person that will do anything for them, anything. You know probably better than I do. It's anything. It could mean driving them home after an activity, if they're stuck at school, bringing them a book if they are home with COVID and they don't have their tools, getting them lunch, getting them breakfast cause they haven't had anything in the morning.

Continuing to look at how directors conceptualize leadership, David adds:

We have to be everything all the time. You can never take a day off. Sometimes I feel as though I am the principal, because they come to me and [ask] how do you answer this question [or] I'm not sure how to address this issue. And a lot of it has to do with our relationships and as a director, we have to build and engage that relationship.

Participants view effective leadership as being able to listen and be compassionate. Further, viewing oneself as an informal administrator were common responses from the participants. Sarai describes her view of leadership as an administrator:

A lot of times admin may come up with things, but who has to implement them? That would be the counseling department. So, it's kind of like we go hand in hand with administration. So maybe not as direct with the leadership, more of an indirect role, but still a role, nonetheless. The leadership role as a director is literally like admin to me. Because my principal and my admin team recognize it, I'm on every admin meeting because they know they need me, they need my input for the things that they're going to do.

Eight participants referred to themselves as administrators even though they do not have an administrative title. They believe they are an administrator over their department. In addition, the participants spoke to their skill set and ability to understand the culture of their building and community is what helps them be a leader. The findings spoke to leadership conceptualization as looking beyond curriculum and instruction to meet the overall needs of students and parents through collaboration with teachers and administrators.

The directors also believed having a clear understanding of how one views leadership will help guide their own leadership characteristics. In relation, it will also help them to know how to respond to various situations and problems that may arise as a leader. In addition, participants viewed leadership as picking up the slack where someone else can't. Being willing to take on extra work when someone isn't available to. Participants' view of leadership also related to recognizing their school counselors' strengths and weaknesses. Recognizing who on their team is going to struggle with a task and providing them with support. Further, participants spoke to leadership being a service, leading from within and doing the work with their counselors instead of delegating everything to them. To further explore how the directors

conceptualize leadership, the following sub themes emerged: filling in the gap, having a solid team, the construct of power, and the demands of stakeholders.

Filling in The Gap When Others Won't. Due to the structure, dynamics, and/or organization of a school, there may not be human resources available to fulfill certain needs of a school. For example, this may include a school resource officer, a cafeteria monitor, a testing coordinator, an individual to distribute tardy passes, or monitor bus duty. The high school counseling directors who participated in the study mentioned various situations where they were either called to or naturally stepped in to fill a need for their principal. Participants referenced helping to build positive staff relationships, monitoring the cafeteria during lunches to maintain appropriate student to adult ratio, and financially supporting students as filling a need. They also mentioned assisting teachers with filing a child protective services (CPS) report even though teachers are also mandated reporters, as well as gather data for their supervisors even though secretaries have access to run the reports were also noted as ways they help fill a need. Many of the participants recognize that by fulfilling these needs they are stepping outside of their role; however, if there's a need they're willing to step in. Sarai describes if you're an aspiring high school counseling director it's important to be flexible because there will be times you will have to fill in the gap. Sarai recounts:

> You'll be tasked to do things that aren't even your job. And if you're not the type of person that can kind of be willing to just be a team player and just do whatever needs to be done, then you're going to have a hard time in this position. Because sometimes I have to be my secretary. I have to be my own counselor. I have to be an admin[istrator] sometimes. So, if you're not the person who could go with the flow, you can do this job, but you will have difficulty.

In contrast, Leah discusses creating boundaries so you're not the person who has to take on extra responsibilities:

> And sometimes you have to allow things to happen, so people will understand. A lot of times as the school counseling director we take on more that we should because we want to do what's best. What's in the best interest of students, what's in the best interest of the school. But sometimes when we're doing that, we're taking on other people's roles and responsibilities.

Two participants shared they are asked to facilitate lunch duty due to not having enough support staff in the building, such as a School Resource Officer or a cafeteria monitor. Other's shared they felt if they didn't step in, no one else would complete the task or the task wouldn't be completed correctly. Therefore, the high school counseling directors felt the need to step in to prevent any negative outcome of "hurting students."

The Value of Having a Solid Team. Also, the findings showed having a strong school counseling team played a part in how they viewed their leadership as a director. Nine participants spoke to the effects of the makeup of one's school counseling department. Having a strong staff resulted in less worry about team members completing their duties. The strength of the participants' leadership was correlated with the strength of their department. Leah shares, "I feel like I'm only as strong as the people I lead." Similarly, directors felt the need to ensure their counselors were knowledgeable, confident, and equipped with the tools to perform their job effectively. Leah spoke to how the dynamics of the school counseling department influenced the relationships with students and other staff members. She states:

> I can tell you what else can make or break your counseling program is how competent your school counselors are. So, they can make or break you because you could be doing

double work. Because you're spending so much time trying to clean up, trying to keep

up, and trying to make sure that they are on it.

For others, they described understanding the makeup of their team. Understanding each

individual's strengths and weaknesses in order to know how and where to support the members

of one's team was emphasized. While others heavily relied on one or two individuals who have

tenure and experience in the field to help them as leaders carry out certain tasks and

responsibilities. The importance of having at least one strong counselor was expressed by Leah.

It should also be noted participants felt if the member's relationship within their department was

good, then the counselors were more willing to help their director. Although participants spoke

diversely in their experiences with their department, the impact of their experience as directors

speaks to the strength of their school counselors.

Informal Leadership Power. Results also revealed, even though these participants have

a title and responsibility of overseeing a department, few maintain power over its members.

There is this notion that high school counseling directors are the leaders and facilitators of the

school counseling department and its program. However, they do not hold the same formal

power as an assistant principal who also oversees departments. The findings reveal high school

counseling directors' informal power is leveraged based upon the support or lack of support from

one's principal. Rachel's principal has empowered her to be the sole leader over her department.

She shares how her principal looks to her to address any issues or concerns with her department.

Rachel also identifies her position as being one with power and the importance of using it for

good. In contrast, other participants discussed the challenges they have of leading. Hope shares:

For my school I'm considered to be part of the admin team. I think the way [district's

name] has a structure where we're more like admin, which definitely has its pros and

cons. But I don't have any role in their [school counselors] evaluations. Which makes

things really tricky...it's the expectation that I oversee a department, but I don't really

have much of a leg to stand on in terms of [evaluations or reprimands]. I'm over a

department in terms of you need to make sure that they're doing this, but I have no leg, if

that makes sense. I sit on the admin team in terms of, we have meetings every week, and

I'm asked for input. As with anything, I think sometimes that input goes in one ear and

out the other. But that's also my personal view, not necessarily my professional view.

When asked to further share her experiences as a leader over her school counseling department,

Hope states:

There have been times where I have flat out seen or heard my counselors really just not

doing the right thing and I have no ability to do anything about it. Other than go to them

and say, this is what I saw, this is what I heard, and I just don't appreciate it.

Leah also expressed similar concerns, "I'm also the one who's responsible for going to the

school counselor and figuring out what's going on; although, I don't have the power to write

anybody up, I'm still responsible for them in that vein." In addition, Sarai shares how she is

unable to write up a counselor or provide input on their evaluation, but she has support from her

principal and administrative team. Sarai states:

Because I've seen and heard the struggles in our directors' meetings from other directors

where they get no information, they're out in the dark. They get no say in anything. It is

what it is and they're just miserable...You're given tasks of admin, but you're not given

the label. So, you want me to do certain things, but I don't have the backing per se. My

role isn't perceived in the same way, but through my principal, they know I'm in good

with admin. So y'all better listen. It makes all the difference in the world, absolutely.

Similarly, participant Vashti shared she recognizes she cannot force her school counselors to do

anything, therefore she tries to lead by modeling and practicing what she preaches. Participants

have a challenge of leading without any formal power due to their position within the

organizational structure. The directors have no formal organizational authority to influence their

school counselors, therefore, they must possess special skills to influence and lead their school

counselors within their department. This can be seen through modeling the desired behavior the

directors expect from their counselors.

      Stakeholder Demands. The findings also revealed due to the structure of the high

school counseling director's role, they are oftentimes given tasks that do not align with their

professional responsibilities. The majority of high school counseling directors expressed

developing a plan for their day and it never happens or just being in the trenches every day

because no day is ever the same. David expresses what his day to day operations as a director

looks like:

> Everything, you have to be everything all the time to everybody. Having a schedule
>
> coming in is virtually impossible because things change without a moment's notice.
>
> That's why really for me I come in early a lot of time to get things done on the front end.
>
> In a perfect world, I would be on a schedule. It's not uncommon for us to have
>
> individually, probably four hours a week, five hours a week around duties.

Elizabeth also expressed the same sentiments; her days are unpredictable and there's no such

thing as a routine day. Leah also admitted:

> On a daily basis, I just feel like I'm the go to person. So, it's like you're putting out, it's

really hard to describe, but you feel like you have your plan for your day. You look, you

write things down, you have your whole day planned. And then you're at your desk and

things just come, come, come, come. And so just being able to say, this is my role. A lot

of it can be blurred. Being able to define my role is something I'm still working on.

Four participants shared you have to plan for your day, but to be flexible because you could be

given a task. Hope expressed her frustrations with her position and how her administrative team

will give her a task, but never take anything off her plate. She states, "they always say no,"

when she tries to advocate for not being given additional tasks outside of her role.

The findings also revealed collateral duties whether forced or not are given to high school

counseling directors. Collateral duties can be defined as tasks or duties given that do not align

with one's job description. For example, Abigail shares how she was forced to be completely

responsible for creating the master schedule every year. In the same way, Michael encountered a

few situations where he was pulled from meeting with students to monitor the cafeteria. Other

participants discussed how they were "voluntold" to take on other responsibilities such as being

the coordinator of testing. The results demonstrated a consensus of high school counseling

directors being tasked to facilitate duties unrelated to their specific job duties.

Further, eleven of the participants share duties they believe do not align with their

leadership role as a high school counseling director. Six participants noted they have lunch duty

and/or tardy duty for students who arrive to class late. Michael expressed his frustration with

engaging in these misaligned tasks:

> My principal wants us to be cafeteria monitors and go and stand in the cafeteria just to
>
> make sure there isn't a situation going on. Or a lot of times they try to pull us to do some
>
> things, that I won't say we don't have the time to do, because we're working on

something else, but he thinks it's more important than what we're doing at that time. So

definitely like being a monitor in the cafeteria, sometimes even dealing with stepping into

a class and then being that teacher until the teacher can get there.

Abigail stated, "meeting with kids is our goal, that's the primary thing we try to do; a lot of

things get in the way of that." David couples this response with "we're asked to do some things

that're not aligned with the ASCA model." Hope expands on what other duties look like for her:

Proctoring Standards of Learning (SOL) tests are something that we are responsible for

doing, which definitely doesn't align. Even just the AP tests that we've proctored, that

really doesn't align either, but I don't know who else would do it. So, I definitely always

voiced my opinion. Sometimes it's heard, sometimes not, but I definitely always make

sure that they know [administrators] that I'm advocating for what I think is right in our

profession as far as our roles.

In comparison, Hope shared how she had to advocate to a previous principal why it was not

valuable for her to take notes for the principal during meetings. When asked to further share her

experiences with role alignment, Hope stated:

I don't think that 504's should be on counseling plates at all. That's a big one for me.

Unfortunately, it goes with the territory and I'm not winning that war on my own. I'm

not even fighting the battle, because I know it's not one that I can fight on my own.

There are other duties that seem very much like a registrar or data tech duty that have

been in other divisions or schools for me. Like entering course history. I don't believe

that's my job. I firmly believe that my job is to review transcripts, to make sure that

things are input correctly and that students are getting everything counted for their high

school credit, that they deserve to have counted. But does that look like me sitting at my

desk until six o'clock on a Friday night and putting in transcripts from another school, because we have a ton of transfers in my school. No, it doesn't. And doing things like that are keeping me from other essential functions on my job.

In attempts to try to circumvent being assigned collateral duties, Rachel advised the following:

I would tell you first that you have to have a plan or a plan will be made for you. It's very important to keep data because it's very easy since you aren't in a classroom and directly responsible for students for you to get the additional duties that are not counseling duties like lunch duty, hall duty, and the like. So, you have to have a really detailed plan and you have to have your data to support that. But that being said, you also have to be very flexible with that plan and know that each day brings its own new challenges and you're constantly navigating and re-prioritizing at all times.

Furthermore, some directors were asked to help develop positive staff relationships. For example, Hope commented:

I meet with every department in the school and talk about what [their] needs are. What do you need from us in terms of counseling? What can we provide to you that we aren't? What are we providing to you that you don't need? And just rework those collaborative relationships. And then likewise, this is what would really help us to know or to have on our end of things. And just have those conversations because a lot of times there's just a lot of assumptions that they aren't doing this or they're doing this and that's why this is happening. And just trying to take those assumptions off the table, being the person that champions that collaborative work. I think is a big part of my job too.

Principals, assistant principals, teachers, students, parents, district school counseling supervisor, and other central office personnel are all stakeholders who influence or have a direct impact on

high school counseling directors. The participants spoke to the importance of building

partnerships with these stakeholders and how this impacted their role. These individuals hold the

participants accountable for their actions and influence the tasks they're responsible for.

Participants spoke to how their day is influenced by the individuals stated above. Whether it is

setting up teacher visits, visiting a classroom, receiving direction from a central office personnel

or from your administrative team, these stakeholders are connected to the role of the participants.

How Directors Develop their Leadership

Table 2
Participants Leadership Development

High School Counseling Director	Leadership Training	Years of Leadership
Abigail	None	1-5
David	Ed.S. in Educational Leadership PreK-12	5-10
Elizabeth	Annual Leadership Conference, Monthly Director Chair Meetings	1-5
Faith	None	1-5
Hannah	None	1-5
Hope	Additional master's level coursework, Leadership Seminars & Training	1-5
John	Leadership Conference	1-5
Leah	School Counseling Leadership Cohort	1-5
Martha	Workshops	5-10

Mary	Workshops	10-15
Michael	VCA Leadership PD	1-5
Rachel	Professional Development	15-20
Sarai	None	1-5
Vashti	Graduate course & PD	1-5

There is an assumption school counseling directors will have advanced training and supervision in school counseling programs (ASCA, 2019). The findings suggested with the exception of two participants, they were not given any leadership training prior to stepping into the role as a high school counseling director. Table 2 speaks to participants leadership professional development after becoming a school counseling director. Leadership development opportunities were made available to some of the participants after they were already in the position or if they sought out leadership training on their own. These opportunities were noted as committees or focus groups where they came together and discussed leadership styles. All of the participants shared the view one cannot prepare to be a high school counseling director, but one must experience it to learn it. Vashti shared in her previous school district they offered a leadership program, but it was more aligned for individuals who want to become an assistant principal. However, the program was available to counselors. Vashti further explained, "you don't get leadership development as a professional school counselor; and I say you don't get leadership development in its traditional sense, meaning there is no pathway to it, it's something you happen upon."

Ten out of the 14 participants had over three years of experience as a director and all of them spoke to their lack of leadership development prior to becoming a director. Two

participants didn't want to become the director but received pressure from the department and

principal to accept the position as a result of not knowing who would be hired. Although

participants believe it is not something you can prepare for, Hannah notes, "it would've been

nice to have a breakdown of what exactly my responsibilities are that are different from when I

was just the school counselor." Time within the profession was also a recurring theme that

transpired in the interviews regarding the participants leadership development. Even though

many of the participants did not have prior leadership training, they currently seek and try to

participate in leadership development.

      On the Job Leadership Training. All 14 participants recognized they did not engage in

any formal preparation to become a high school counseling director. Observing the previous

director and seeking the help of other directors within the district were common threads that

helped the participants transition into the director position. The participants found it helpful to

observe other leaders and previous supervisors to help shape what type of leader they would

become. When asked what learning experiences the high school counseling directors had in

order to prepare to become a high school counseling director, Abigail said, "it's all experiential,

on the job training." In particular, Hannah noted:

> There is no class, there is no instruction book. So, you just kind of get in there and do the
>
> best you can. So, it's very important to have those positive role models and mentors
>
> available. I know I keep talking about him, but I'm very fortunate to have such good
>
> backing downtown in our central office so that I feel I can go to him and ask questions
>
> and I'm sure every division isn't like that.

Faith correlated her previous managerial experience she had in college as preparation for

becoming a high school counseling director. She stated, "I would say some of that, for me, came

from past experiences as well, not just in counseling and not even in education; I was a manager

at McDonald's when I was in college." Other participants noted they viewed themselves as

leaders when they were school counselors and through experience they were able to prepare to

step into a leadership role. However, the findings consistently from the participants determined

the day to day operations they engaged in as a director resulted in experiences that helped build

them into leaders. David shared:

> There's no book on how to be a director of school counseling. There's not a perfect
>
> model. There are no answers to the test and honestly, I wouldn't change a thing because
>
> the most difficult years will be [your] first and second year. And without those first two
>
> years I don't feel as though I would be where I'm at now, finishing my eighth year.

In addition, David commented that the day to day experiences is what has shaped him to become

the director he is today. Further, only four participants stated they wish they had some type of

preparation prior to becoming a director. One out of the four wished they knew the duties of a

director in correlation to their previous role as a school counselor. Whereas, the other three

participants wish they had some type of training on how to manage and supervise people. The

idea of a high school counseling director internship opportunity was discussed. Others shared

being able to lead a small team of people would've been helpful preparation. Participants

believe their role as a school counselor, taking on initiatives, and facilitating programs has

helped prepare them to be leaders. Another participant noted, speaking with other school

counseling directors helped them develop as leaders over their department and program.

Conclusively, high school counseling directors gain leadership experience and development

through the day to day activities of the role.

Professional Development & Relevance of Training. The results also revealed varying

degrees in which the participants engaged in professional development to improve their skills

and knowledge as a leader. This was due to availability to attend professional developments,

available financial resources from either their principal or district school counseling supervisor to

attend workshops, and participant perception on if the training they attended was leadership

focused in relation to school counselors. Time played a factor in many of the participants ability

to participate in professional development. The participants even described staying at school so

other members of their department could attend professional development workshops. Some

participants stated their principal provided professional development focused on leadership, but

it was not applicable to their role as a high school counseling director. In contrast, one

participant sought out professional development in order to stay abreast of changes within the

field. All participants agreed professional development was important and has been useful in

developing their leadership skills.

Two participants spoke to the difficulty of participation in professional development due

to the demands of their role, having financial resources to pay for attending workshops, or

allowing the counselors on their team to attend training while they stayed in the building to cover

the department. When asked about the type of professional development opportunities, Abigail

states, "they're not the ones that get you engaged and motivated to want to go back and do your

job, they're the nuts and bolts." In comparison David notes, "professional development

opportunities should help us become better school counselors and better leaders; I really think

those opportunities have to be relevant, not just checking a box." Forward thinking and job

specific professional development are two common suggestions the participants shared they wish

they had. Two participants spoke to being forced to attend a professional development that did

not align with their role.

In contrast, one participant shared she attends training all year round. The participant

identified the district school counseling supervisor as the facilitator of these trainings in their

monthly department meetings. The district school counseling supervisor provided guest speakers

each month to discuss various school counseling related topics, such as: counseling LGBTQ

students, scheduling students appropriately, and working with students who are at risk for

suicide. Elizabeth shares, "my district supervisor provides training every month to make sure

counseling directors have the tools to lead our department." On the other hand, a participant

within the same district said their division provides a lot of professional development but

believes it is not leadership focused.   One participant seeks professional development through

webinar series provided by ASCA, College Board, and Pearson to stay abreast of counseling

trends. Even though some participants are engaged in professional development, few mentioned

opportunities for leadership development.

Mentors Shape Leadership Style. Access to mentors can help shape one's leadership

experiences in a positive way. Results revealed all fourteen high school counseling directors

identified a mentor, whether formal or informal, as someone who helped shape their leadership

style. When asked if there were any influences that helped shape the participant as a leader,

David stated, "I had a good example of a director in my department that I model some of my

leadership style after; but not only that, from my principal, assistant principal, program directors

and central office folks." Similarly, Rachel described her supervisor's having an impact on her

leadership style, "their [principal, assistant principal, and district school counseling supervisor]

leadership and administrative skills have helped me hone my leadership and administrative

skills." Further, Hannah stated:

> I think I've been really lucky in the divisions I've been assigned to. In my division here
>
> and in my first division, I have had mentors, you know the division assigned mentors,
>
> that have been really good for me. Who have been in the profession for obviously a
>
> number of years and who I've always felt comfortable going to when I had a staffing
>
> [issue] I didn't know how to address or if I felt frustrated. I've had the option and the
>
> opportunity to say to my mentor, how have you dealt with this? What support have you
>
> given to your counselor's so they feel they have what they need to do the task, whatever
>
> it is? What have you said to them that's motivated them? What do you do when you
>
> have someone who just doesn't want to do it or doesn't think it's important? Or feels
>
> they need to tell you they don't agree with that. I've gotten really good advice from both
>
> this mentor and the mentor I had at my first position as a school counselor. And in all of
>
> my other roles I sort of adopted somebody as my mentor. Whether they knew it or not.

Participants utilized these formal or informal relationships to help develop their own leadership

style. Through these relationships they were able to identify what they perceived as either good

or bad leadership to either model or not model after within their own department. These

relationships helped provide advice and guidance to one of the participants in particular. The

directors believed working with other administrators helped build their leadership and

administrative skills.

Theme 3: Supervision
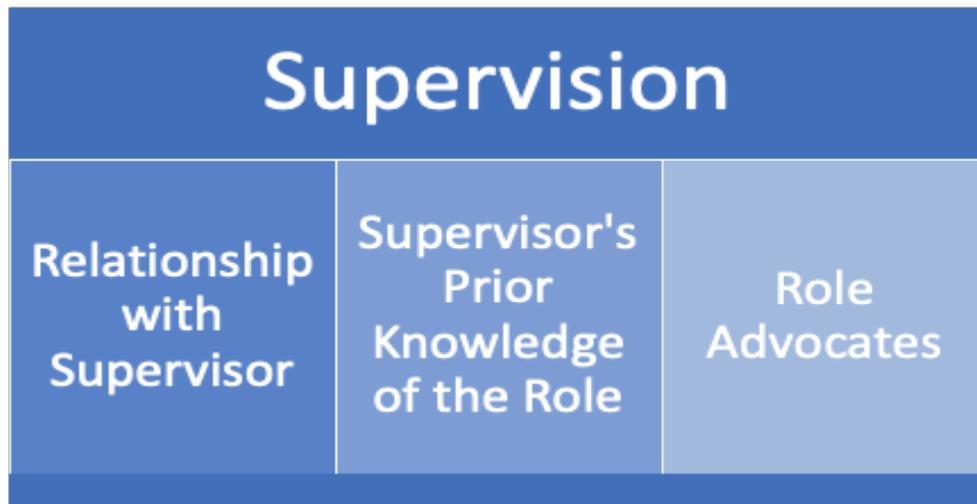
Figure 6. Supervision

Relationship with Supervisor

When exploring high school counseling director's lived leadership experiences, participants were asked to share their relationship with their two supervisors: their principal and district school counseling supervisor. Participants were asked how their supervisors have impacted their specific job duties. Findings showed there was a need for principals to understand school counselors are a valuable asset to the school community. The belief school counselors are the individuals within a high school that hold everything together or being a bridge that closes the gaps within a school resonated with the directors. Being set apart from other department chairs and being included as a member on the administrative team was impactful to the participants. Participants also shared how their supervisor can have a direct influence on the level of engagement they can have within their school community. Abigail stated:

> I think [district school counseling supervisors] can make or break who you are and what
>
> your role is in school. Same thing with the principals. Some of them bring you onto the
>
> school leadership team, some don't. Some make you a part of the admin team, some

don't. So, it does affect your level of engagement and involvement in school.

Directors also correlated the support they received from their principals to the support principals

give their students. A supportive principal allowed the directors to provide resources to meet the

needs of their students. Having support from one's principal, district school counseling

supervisor, and the assistant principals was important to the high school counseling directors.

Leah commented:

> Principals and assistant principals don't hear [directors] unless they will, and it's not
>
> personal. It is just they have so many priorities. So many things on their plate. And if
>
> you're not talking about how your work is going to make the school shine or make the
>
> school grow or help bring resources into the school, they're going to have to put you on
>
> the back burner for a while. So, I think it's important for me to have, to be able to speak
>
> to how, if you had this, this, and this in your department, then this is how the school will
>
> grow. And sometimes that's a conversation. Sometimes that's a presentation with data.

Findings showed when a participant had a positive relationship with their supervisors, they

believed it was easy to engage in work. The level of knowledge from not only the principal, but

also the administrators was impactful in how directors support the work administrators do as

well. Also, participants believe the principal's relationship was the most impactful on the

success of the school counseling program. Leah stated:

> I would say the strongest, the best relationship or the most impactful relationship will be
>
> the relationship that you have with your administrators, particularly the administrator that
>
> is directly over you. A strong relationship with your administrator and also your
>
> principal will really make or break your school year.

Leah also admitted:

If you don't have a strong relationship with your API (Assistant Principal of Instruction)

or your principal, you will not have a good year as a high school counseling director.

That's just it. Like they drive [how well your school counseling program will be],

because it can really make or break your school counseling department because they can

insinuate or make it look like you don't know what you're doing. And that's not the

case. Particularly with the master schedule piece. If that isn't tight, your whole year is a

mess. And then if they don't respect your role or your input and they just go make

decisions, not understanding how all of that stuff snowballs. So, the relationship with

administrators, unfortunately, drives your school counseling program.

The directors believe not only their principal, but also the entire administrative team has a strong

influence on the perception of their department with staff members and students. The findings

also revealed high school counseling directors' input is important because decisions that are

made from administrators impact their duties in some capacity. In some buildings, the principal

may designate an assistant principal to oversee or supervise the school counseling department, as

you see mentioned above. Since the goal for both administrators and directors are to help

students find success, collaboration with each other is essential.

Participants felt their supervisor was most impactful when their principals acknowledged

and supported their position in front of staff members and administrators. If the high school

counseling director puts something out to the staff, the backing and support from one's principal

was vital. Sarai shared:

I think the best way that he goes about that is just telling any and everybody, "look if

Mrs. Sarai says it, it is so." He gives me the baton, but he doesn't just do it behind

closed doors. He's asked me where it counts and because he backs it where it counts,

then it makes it easier for me to get things done.

Findings also showed when a principal collaborates and communicates effectively with high

school counseling director's, it positively impacts their school counseling program and its

members. Collaboration and communication make the directors feel supported and included.

Further along the lines of effective communication, participants also shared the need for open

discussions with their principal. The directors shared they are more privy than other members of

the school community to receive information about students, parents, teachers, and things that

occur within the community. The ability to discuss these matters with principal's was essential

to high school counseling directors. When principals kept their high school counseling directors

informed about things, it allowed the participants to share critical information to its team

members to keep things abreast that would be coming down the pipe.

When asked how participants' district school counseling supervisor impacts their role as a

leader, similar responses of wanting to be supported were found. All of the participants felt as

though their positive relationship with the district school counseling supervisor also contributed

to their leadership role in their school. Asking for the director's input on guest speakers or topics

they are interested in learning more about for professional development was also correlated with

the director and supervisor's relationship. Other participants appreciated the autonomy their

district school counseling supervisor provides them. The participants also believed having

autonomy when assigned new initiatives or programs allowed them to shape the program to fit

the culture and dynamics of their school community. Findings also showed their supervisor

provided support when assistance was needed to address school counselor issues within the

department. It was also valuable when the supervisor served in the role as a director and/or

understood the role and responsibilities. At times there were situations where the supervisor was

an advocate for directors and school counselors when addressing their other supervisor, their

principal. Hope shared:

> In terms with my school counselors, he is very much vocal with the person over high
>
> schools and with the principals in the division, that no, this is not the school counselor's
>
> responsibility. And he made it very clear to us as directors that he let the principals and
>
> secondary admin leadership know, "hey, you can't add this to school counselor's plates
>
> without taking something else off; so, if you want to take something else off so they can
>
> be SEL (social-emotional learning) leaders in your school, great; if you don't, you
>
> cannot." So, I like in those ways with the higher up/leadership division, he's been a
>
> really big advocate. So, I think in those ways, he really influenced how we do our jobs in
>
> our schools. In those ways he's informed how things happen at the school level and how
>
> that ultimately impacts my department.

A district school counseling supervisor that promoted growth in the area of leadership was also

important to the participants. District school counselor's recognition of how important school

counseling is within schools was another finding that came out of the study. In contrast to

having a supportive relationship with one's district school counseling supervisor, directors felt if

they weren't able to have open communication and support it would negatively impact their

school counseling program. This sometimes resulted in seeking the support of their principal in

order to carry out or support any initiatives or tasks that were previously denied by the district

school counseling supervisor.

Supervisor's Prior Knowledge of the Role. Findings showed a district school counseling supervisor and principal's prior knowledge and/or experience of being a director greatly influenced the participants' experiences as a leader. For example, in a positive way, Abigail has been able to define her leadership and role with her principal and district school counseling supervisor due to high principal turnover rates and her supervisors lack of knowledge and experience in school counseling. Many of the participants look at their district school counseling supervisor as the one who can guide them and answer school counseling related questions. When a district school counseling supervisor has never served as a school counselor, let alone a director, it can make the process more difficult to receive guidance and answers. Abigail further shares, "it does make a difference when they don't know your role; I think it's so helpful when they get it." There was a correlation of lack of prior knowledge of the counseling role and processes to misunderstandings of application directed by supervisors. Participants also felt it was a disadvantage if their principal and district school counseling supervisor didn't understand their role and processes because they would like to be challenged and have a different set of eyes to bring in fresh perspectives. Abigail further shared her experiences regarding her supervisor's lack of prior knowledge of the school counseling director role:

New people, new staff without experience. We would be at central office meetings for the program of studies let's say. And I'm sitting next to [district school counseling supervisor] and she doesn't have any clue what they're talking about with course codes and prerequisites. And you're the one that has a pretty good breadth of information and knowledge that they come to rely on you and count on you at that point. And trust what you're doing and how much you know. So, although it's a disadvantage for us to have someone so inexperienced, it also gives you an opportunity to shine a little bit and let

people know. Otherwise, I probably would've sat there and let them do all the talking.

But because it was necessary, you chat more, you share more, and people realize you

know what you're talking about, so it can be helpful.

In addition, the participants felt if a supervisor did not have a breadth of prior knowledge

regarding the role, then it was their responsibility to inform them. Also, it was common to

inform one's supervisors of your role and the role of school counselors. Similarly, a few

participants' supervisors were a previous school counselor but due to their new lens, the directors

felt they have to remind them of what is going on in the building when their supervisors try to

add new tasks to their plates. Mary stated:

> I think sometimes the sight of a supervisor may be a little different than the sight of a
>
> school counseling director. It's like we're in the trenches. So sometimes you have to
>
> remind [them]. For example, during a time where we're doing program planning, this is
>
> a time that we are seeing a large number of kids in a small amount of time. Can you kind
>
> of chill on the emails? Can you kind of chill on the demands? So sometimes you have to
>
> say, "hey, we're doing this, this and this." I sometimes feel like I'm torn because I have
>
> so many responsibilities to my building and then at the same time, I have a lot of
>
> responsibilities to my [supervisor]. So, it's like being pulled in two different directions,
>
> by two different types of leadership. It can be a little demanding for a director.

The findings also spoke to the challenge of answering to two supervisors. Some participants

viewed whoever facilitates their evaluation as one's true supervisor. There was this notion your

principal is your immediate supervisor, the person you answer directly to and your district school

counseling supervisor is there to support you. While others viewed both their principal and

district school counseling supervisor as their immediate supervisor. There lacked consistency

amongst participants regarding the role their two supervisors play.

Further, when one's supervisor has prior knowledge and experience in the school

counseling field, directors felt equipped and knowledgeable to lead their department. Rachel

viewed this as rare due to previous experience with other district school counseling supervisors

who she perceived as not being equipped or knowledgeable in the school counseling field. Four

participants shared the same supervisor and spoke to him being heavily involved in their state's

School Counseling Association, the directors stated, "we never feel like we didn't know

something." A supervisor who is involved in the work of school counselors led to the directors

feeling prepared. In addition, participants believed because their supervisor had once been a

high school counselor and a director, he understands their fight and helps advocate at the district

level on their behalf. Hannah noted:

> [District school counseling supervisor] is the biggest advocate for school counseling in
>
> general, he is really helpful. He is the epitome of a leader and someone you can go to if
>
> you need to. And that's helped me feel confident in my role because I've always known
>
> that he kind of has my back and I'm able to go to him and ask questions. And he's very
>
> accessible and he wants us to do that. And sometimes with those types of district level
>
> supervisors…. you can't talk directly to them. But he's not like that at all. He's just a
>
> really big advocate for us. I think he was largely responsible for getting our caseloads to
>
> be lower because he advocated for us to get additional counselors at the high school level.
>
> So, he's just really very instrumental and plays a big role in what I feel comfortable and
>
> capable of as a leader.

However, when a supervisor's prior knowledge is limited in school counseling, the directors want their supervisors to ask them for input. This may include having the director attend meetings with the supervisor to ensure the information collected is accurate. Sarai states:

> [District school counseling supervisor] has worked with the school counseling program, but [district school counseling supervisor] has never been a counselor. So, it's kind of one of those things where you're supervising people, but you've never really done what they do. So sometimes [district school counseling supervisor] has to have someone who does it, especially for those big meetings to make sure what she's hearing is going along or that she's hearing it correctly because we run this stuff all day, every day. And by her not being at any level, especially high school with all that goes with that, a lot of times at that meeting, she's like, what does that mean?

The findings demonstrated the supervisor's prior knowledge of director and school counselor roles shaped the participants leadership experiences. Whether it was through helping to shape one's role for a new supervisor or being a soundboard to gain a better understanding of the field, directors had to adjust to meet their supervisors where they were. Participants viewed helping their supervisors understand their role as a form of leadership.

Directors Advocating the Role of their Profession. The third subtheme speaks to the need for participants having to educate and train their supervisors regarding their role as well as the system of high school counseling programs. Seven participants explicitly expressed their version of this experience. Abigail shared:

> Our principals have not been very knowledgeable in the high school requirements for graduation courses. They all came from middle school, elementary school, and basically we're training them as you were asking questions. So, I haven't seen a whole lot of

support there to be honest with you. And just because we've had administrators that have

not had high school experience, you just spend a lot of time educating those

administrators on what high school's all about and why we do things the way we do.

You can't ask a question unless we educate them before we ask our question. So, we find

they're in my office all the time, just asking questions.

Additionally, David spoke to having to catch an administrator up with the work that he does

within the school. Other participants viewed themselves as the expert of all things counseling. It

speaks to the advocacy part of the role and profession. Participants believed it is a part of their

professional duty to advocate and teach their supervisors about school counseling and how it can

positively impact a school. Hope shared her passion for advocating to help ensure her role is in

alignment with ASCA:

As a school counselor, I really need to advocate for the profession. Like, no I'm not

really here to take your notes at a meeting and type them for you. I bring a lot more to

the table than that. And I understand that's what you're used to, and I can appreciate

that's a difficult transition for you, but I am a counselor. I'm here to support student's

social wellbeing, their academic growth, their career and college achievements. That's

what I'm here for.

Advocacy was viewed as part of their leadership role as a director within their school. Along

with advocacy, responsibility was another reason director's felt the need to inform others of their

role. Expanding beyond their immediate supervisors, directors sought to inform teachers and

other staff members to help them better understand the role of a school counselor and what it is

they should be doing. Furthermore, communicating these things with data added to the

credibility of what they were advocating for.

In addition to having a sense of advocacy and responsibility for helping administrators and teachers understand the role, participants believed this also helped protect their time. If participants did not share what they were doing and how it was benefiting the school, there was a concern, counselors would be tasked with duties outside of their role. Mary stated:

> We have to almost let people know all the time because if you don't, our time servicing students and servicing parents will be taken over with other little tedious activities of other things in the building that need to be done. Like signing kids in for passes when they're tardy. So, I think it's very important that you say, "I understand you need this done, but we need to be taking care of this, this and this." I think making sure that people know what it is that you're doing, what it is that you're working on, being very transparent can sometimes assist in informing what a school counseling director does.

Directors believe they work extremely hard for students and ensuring their supervisors are aware of what they're doing at all times is important. Similarly, Martha speaks to helping her principal and administrators understand her role when they try to have her take on other administrative duties:

> To me as a school counseling director it's kind of that thin line between administration and it's a thin line to me. I know it's different in some buildings. I think sometimes that line can be crossed, and I try to make [my principal] understand that I'm not an administrator. I'm the school counseling director. These are my responsibilities. I am not an AP (assistant principal). So, I do not do busses, I don't have times where I have to go to games and different things like that. I kind of had to speak up and just share my role as a director. And although I was on the administrative team, those other responsibilities really were not under my job description as a school counseling director.

I had to constantly let them know our role and why I'm here for kids. That's

[administrative duties] not part of what I'm supposed to be doing.

Seven participants spoke to educating their supervisors on their role as directors within their

school. One participant noted it was her professional obligation to better inform others of what

school counselors do. Participants believe they should be the expert in all things related to

school counseling and have a responsibility to advocate for the profession.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived leadership experiences of high

school counseling directors and understand how their leadership role is actualized within schools

by their two supervisors: the principal and the district school counseling supervisor. This chapter

presented findings of 14 high school counseling directors as participants from six school

districts. As a result of the data analysis, three themes emerged: contextual factors, leadership

conceptualization and development, and supervision. In the following chapter, these results are

discussed.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Overview

This study explored the lived leadership experiences of high school counseling directors and how their leadership role is actualized in schools by their two supervisors: principal and district school counseling supervisor. There are two research questions I proposed in the first chapter: 1) What are the lived experiences of high school counseling directors? 2) How do the interactions with principals and district school counseling supervisors shape high school counselor's lived experiences as directors? As noted earlier the literature review provided the conceptual framework that was used for this study: historical context of the school counselor role, role of the high school counseling director, supervision of high school counseling directors, and the ecological leadership of school counselors and their supervisors. This phenomenologically informed qualitative research study included semi-structured interviews with 14 participants. Participants engaged in two rounds of interviews. In short, the purpose of this chapter is to summarize the findings of the research and present implications for practice and future research.

Summary of Methodology

This phenomenologically informed qualitative study collected data from 14 participants from six school divisions. All 14 participants are currently high school counseling directors. Three of the participants in the study are male, and 11are female. Participants have a wide range of experience as a high school counseling director, ranging from one year to approximately 15 years. Two rounds of semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. Each interview lasted an average of forty-five minutes to an hour and was audio recorded. The

interviews were transcribed and shared with participants to confirm the information gathered was represented accurately. Following, the data were then analyzed through NVivo to facilitate the coding process. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect their anonymity. Codes were examined and analyzed to identify themes and subthemes from the interviews. These themes and subthemes revealed the findings from the research. Lastly, a research team analyzed the transcribed interviews and findings to help ensure validity of the data.

Limitations of the Study

Phenomenological design in qualitative research has various strengths, however, there are still limitations. For one, there is a concern for biases in the interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2013). This is a result of the researcher incorporating his/her own assumptions within the findings (Creswell, 2013). Extra precautions were taken to minimize biases such as utilizing a research team throughout the process of analyzing the data and developing the findings. Secondly, the participants were limited to one geographical location. The experience and factors may be different in other areas therefore the findings cannot be generalized beyond the breadth of this study. The study also focused only on high school counseling directors while seeking how their two supervisors influence their role as leaders. This limits the study only to the experiences of the high school counseling director. Also, the diversity of the sample was based upon availability and willingness to participate in the study. Due to COVID-19 all interviews were facilitated virtually through Zoom. Lastly, there were 14 participants, however there was a disproportion of quotes from the participants. The disproportion of quotes was done purposefully due to the articulation of certain participants experiences over others. Recognizing these limitations helps to understand the context of the findings.

Discussion of Findings

High school counseling directors' role has developed over the years. They are viewed as school leaders within a building who hold the responsibility of developing and implementing a school counseling program based upon the needs of the students and staff (ASCA, 2019). Further, the collaboration between principals and school counselors is crucial for students to succeed both academically and socially. The lived experiences of high school counseling directors and how their supervisors impact their role was studied to understand how participants conceptualize leadership. In addition, the role of a high school counseling director is solely dependent upon the principal and the district school counseling supervisor (Perusse et al., 2004). An important part of school counselor leadership is their collaboration with supervisors (Walsh et al., 2019). Therefore, the relationship of the two supervisors impacts the role of school counseling directors, but through collaboration school counseling directors can serve as leaders within their school.

Through data analysis of the interviews conducted, three themes emerged from the study: contextual factors, leadership conceptualization and development, and supervision. Within each theme, subthemes were developed to illustrate high school counseling director's lived experiences as leaders and how their interactions with their two supervisors (principal & district school counseling supervisor) shape their experiences as directors. There is a relationship between three of the sub-themes in this study. Stakeholder demands, responsibility, and advocacy influence each other and help shape or impact the experiences of the participants. It is believed stakeholders within the participants subsystems influence their responsibilities within schools which lead to advocacy of their role. Findings were developed from consistent responses in the interviews from the participants. Each finding was reviewed and discussed by

the research team to ensure reliability of the study. This chapter is organized into four sections: findings categorized by theme and connected to the literature, implications for practice, implications for future research, and conclusions as related to the research questions presented.

Summary of Findings

Table 3

Overview of Themes and Findings

Theme	Findings
Contextual Factors	Finding 1: The Continued Fight for a Professional Identity
	Finding 2: Multidimensional Leaders
Leadership Conceptualization & Development	Finding 3: Ill-defined Title
	Finding 4: Influence of Microsystems
	Finding 5: Leadership & Development
Supervision	Finding 6: Leadership Matters

Theme 1: Contextual Factors

As reported in chapter four, contextual factors was the first theme to emerge through the data and supported by the literature. With further analysis the subthemes: perceptions of one's role and how others view it, accountability, and responsibility also emerged. The findings showed the perception of one's role and how they believe others perceive it, how they are held accountable in their role, and the responsibility they take on in their role shapes their leadership experiences. These findings helped me understand how the participants experience leadership through their role as directors, as well as how their interactions with their two supervisors shape their experiences as directors.

Two findings emerged from the theme, contextual factors. The first finding, the continued fight for a professional identity, is a result of how the participants view their role and how they believe other's view their role. Next, the second finding, being a multidimensional leader, is a result of the participants wearing many hats in their role as directors. The findings are explained in detail below.

Finding 1: The Continued Fight for a Professional Identity

The role of school counselors has developed and expanded with every decade (Lambie et al., 2004). The historical context in which school counselors evolved has continuously changed throughout the years. Although the school counseling profession has defined the role of school counselors, the field continues to face challenges regarding its roles and functions (Astramovich et al., 2013). Therefore, the first finding was developed through semi-structured interview analysis data and is strongly connected to the historical context of school counselors and the role of high school counseling director literature.

Results from the data concluded there was a difference in how the directors viewed their role versus how others perceived their role. This may be a result of the continuous changes within the profession in terms of the defined roles and responsibilities of school counselors. Evidence of this finding was present when participants were asked to share their role as a high school counseling director. Each participant's answer was found to be consistent. Participants spoke to being leaders, collaborators, and advocates within their school (ASCA, 2019). Each participant was well informed of their role and believed it was their responsibility to help educate others on their role. In addition, even though literature clearly defines their role, participants consistently spoke to having to clarify or educate other staff members of their role. Participants

also spoke to the misunderstandings and stereotypes of their role by other staff members (Zepeda et al., 2008).

Finding 2: Multidimensional Leaders

Literature states school counseling directors provide leadership to help ensure the school counseling program integrates with the educational curriculum of the school, district, and/or state (ASCA, 2019). They also noted their role is to enhance student and staff relationships, be a liaison between the school and community, collaborate with administrators, etc. Similar to the literature, directors view their role as helping students grow socially, emotionally, and academically (ASCA, 2019). The directors consistently responded to viewing themselves as leaders within their school (Wingfield et al., 2010).

Directors also viewed their role as multidimensional, taking on any role that is needed within their department and school. School counseling director's responsibility is to put in place support efforts to fill in the gaps of student needs based upon what has been identified within the school (ASCA, 2019). However, participants spoke to taking on responsibilities that were not aligned with their role. Evidence also revealed directors took on administrative duties and viewed themselves as a type of administrator (Gysbers et al., 2001). The variation in school counselor leadership has resulted in the variation in their responsibilities and placement in the structure of the school system (Gysbers et al., 2001). The directors spoke to juggling different roles within their school. Those roles either aligned or did not align with their job duties. Moreover, directors mentioned being administrative like in their role as they oversee their department and have similar interactions like a formal administrator would with teachers, parents, and students. They also noted identifying themselves as playing a dual role merging the gaps between administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community stakeholders.

Theme 2: Leadership Conceptualization & Development

Leadership conceptualization and development reflects how directors view themselves as leaders and the leadership training they've participated in. This second theme, leadership conceptualization and development, as reported in chapter four, was revealed through the data. The second theme speaks to the director's experiences as leaders. The second theme answered the first research question: What are the lived experiences of high school counseling directors? Further, when I sought to answer the second research question, sub-themes emerged from the findings: experiential learning, filling in the gap, having a solid team, power, stakeholder demands, professional development and director's perspective and relevance regarding training, and mentorship. These sub-themes helped me understand the experiences school counselors have as directors, how they conceptualize their leadership, and their professional development experiences that have helped shape them as leaders.

Three key findings: ill-defined title, microsystems, and leadership and development were uncovered from the second theme and sub-themes. Finding three, ill-defined title, focuses on how the directors viewed themselves as a leader within the organization. The influence of microsystems is uncovered as the fourth finding. Microsystems is a result of the immediate and direct impact of the system on high school counseling directors. Lastly, the fifth finding, leadership and development, highlights the lack of professional training and leadership development the school counselors experienced in preparing to become directors. Below findings three, four, and five are discussed.

Finding 3: Ill-defined Title

The third finding was also revealed through the data analysis. As previously mentioned, directors were asked what does being a leader mean and how do they conceptualize leadership.

Participants were also asked what leadership looks like in the work of a high school counseling director. The directors spoke to administrative like qualities of leadership. The directors mentioned viewing themselves as having some form of administrative leadership within their department and school. However, they are not given the title and same authority as administrators. Literature speaks to the role of school counseling directors providing leadership (ASCA, 2019. In addition, Gysbers et al. (2001) states high school counseling directors can be viewed as serving in various leadership capacities, but little is known about the different types of leadership capacities directors serve in. Titles in educational administrative structures vary and the organizational pattern of school counseling leaders has not been established (Gysbers et al., 2001). This variation in school counselor leadership contributes to the discrepancies between their leadership responsibilities and placement in the structure of the school system (Gysbers et al., 2001). For example, the directors shared taking on responsibilities of building staff relationships, monitoring the cafeteria, financially supporting students, and providing secretarial support to their principal.

Subsequently, the literature utilized to support this study speaks to the misunderstanding of the role and its ill-defined job description (Zepeda et al., 2008). There is a support of distributed leadership in schools, however, little is known about department chairs (DeAngelis, 2013). Current school leadership models portray both formal and informal leadership by other staff members outside of the formal administrative role (MacNeill et al., 2003). In comparison to the data analysis, participants noted having a responsibility of overseeing a department, but few maintained formal power over their school counselors. Participants spoke to the inability to evaluate their counselor's performance. In contrast, ASCA (2019) states, the director is responsible for supervising and evaluating the performance of school counselors to ensure their

INFORMAL LEADERSHIP   102

duties are appropriate and aligned with the ASCA National Model. Participants also stated that

when they have the support of their principal, they were able to influence the work of their

school counselors (Gysbers et al., 2001). Also, the literature mentions directors taking on an

administrative role when they have the primary responsibility and authority for the program,

which was found in the data analysis (Gysbers et al., 2001).

Finding 4: Influence of Microsystems

The fourth finding, microsystems, illustrates the ecological leadership of high school

counseling directors. The data uncovered the director's experiences as leaders being shaped by

their two supervisors and other stakeholders within the school organization. Findings showed

the role of directors was influenced either directly or indirectly by students, teachers, parents,

administrators, or central office personnel. In these circumstances, participants were given

duties that they believe do not align with their role. In the literature, Cook (2012) references

schools being a microsystem where influence is applied by the ecosystem through school or

governmental policies, organizational authority, and the social relationships of other members

within the system. However, building partnerships with these stakeholders was important to the

directors. The directors spoke to their day being influenced by these individuals. Participants

shared being flexible with their daily schedules was helpful when they had to go in a different

direction from what they originally planned. Wielkiewicz et al. (2005) perceives this as a

necessary strategy for leaders in order to adapt to challenges and a constantly changing

environment. High school counseling directors belong to a larger community which shapes and

influences their experiences as leaders (McMahon et al., 2014; Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). The

directors also shared their two supervisors and the stakeholders mentioned earlier hold them

accountable for their actions and are influential in the tasks they are responsible for.

Findings also showed directors leading by modeling the expectation and desired behavior of their school counselors. Participants shared their work cannot be done by themselves, it takes the entire department to help the school counseling program be successful. This supports the literature, the ecology of leadership which emphasizes the importance of collaborative relationships (Wielkiewicz et al., 2005). The participants spoke to the strength of their leadership in correlation to the strength of the counselors within their department. As well as working alongside their counselors as a team player.

Finding 5: Leadership & Development

Leadership and development are the last finding for the second theme of leadership conceptualization and development. The fifth finding uncovers the participants leadership learning and development experiences. The directors spoke to holding leadership skills and qualities prior to becoming a director which is supported by the literature (Curry et al., 2009; Curtis et al., 2006). Participant's perspective of what they believed to be leadership training shaped whether or not they believed they participated in leadership professional development. Findings revealed twelve out of the fourteen participants did not engage in any type of formal leadership training prior to becoming a director. In contrast, ASCA (2019) noted school counseling directors have advanced training in supervision and school counseling programs.

The leadership training participants spoke to were experiential or on the job training. The directors shared leadership opportunities were either presented after they became a director, or these opportunities were sought after by the participants themselves. Participants stated you cannot prepare to become a school counseling director, but you must instead experience it to learn the role. Leadership development was illustrated through modeling of previous leaders and trial and error through their experiences. Little is known regarding leadership development of

high school counseling directors. The data also revealed some participant's experience with

leadership development was not applicable to their role. Nevertheless, the directors believed

professional development in leadership was important and useful in developing their leadership

skills.

Theme 3: Supervision

The theme supervision came from the semi-structured interviews and analysis data and

revealed the final finding, leadership matters. This last finding answered the second research

question: How do the interactions with principals and district school counseling supervisors

shape high school counselors' lived experiences as directors? Participants were asked to share a

time where their relationship with their two supervisors impacted their specific job duties and

where their two supervisors influenced their role as directors. Participants were also asked to

share times where their two supervisors had a clear understanding of their role and a time these

two supervisors had an influence on their role as a leader within their school and over their

department. Cook (2012) states the connections between the high school counseling director, the

principal, and district school counseling supervisors can be understood by their interactions with

one another and the environment. The data revealed one's relationship with their supervisor and

the supervisor's prior knowledge of their role had an impact on their experiences. Directors

advocating for the role with their two supervisors also emerged from the study. The sixth

finding, leadership matters, illustrate how director's interactions with their two supervisors shape

their lived experiences as leaders.

Finding 6: Leadership Matters

The director's having a supportive and positive relationship with their two supervisors

was revealed through the analysis. This is supported in the literature, directors create the context

of their environment through which they experience support and challenges (Cook, 2012). There

was an overwhelming sense that principals can make or break a director's school counseling

program. In relation to the literature, Wielkiewicz et al. (2015) argues positional leaders, such as

principals, can manipulate the context and constructions of their factions (departments) due to

the idea of leadership being a social construction. Further, researchers note when counselors feel

supported by their supervisors and are assigned appropriate duties, there is an increase in career

satisfaction and commitment (Leuwerke et al., 2009). It was impactful for the participants to be

included as a member on the administrative team, but to be set apart from the other department

chairs/lead teachers. The director's spoke to the level of their supervisor's support equated to

their ability or the level in which they could engage within the school community. Director's

experiences as leaders are shaped by the relationships in which they encounter with their

supervisors (Cook, 2012).

Secondly, leadership matters in the sense of a supervisor having prior knowledge

regarding the role of a high school counseling director. Research supports the development of

the relationship between supervisors and school counselors shared understanding of the

appropriate roles and activities counselors perform (Leuwerke et al., 2009). However, little is

known to what extent principals and district school counseling supervisors are knowledgeable of

high school counseling director's roles. Some participants have a district school counseling

supervisor who has never been a school counselor before. These participants spoke to the

supervisor's misunderstandings of the director's roles and school counseling processes.

Participants also highlighted when their principal and district school counseling supervisor did

not understand their role they were at a disadvantage as a leader. It should be noted, these

supervisors are essential in determining the role of high school counseling director's in schools

(Perusse et al., 2004). More specifically, the principal is associated with directly influencing the role of school counselors even though the role is defined by a professional association, which is seen in the findings (Persusse et al., 2004). Participants spoke to their principal being their direct supervisor, whereas the district school counseling supervisor serves as a guide to help with school counseling related situations and support them. In addition, leadership matters in the sense that participants discussed the challenges of having to answer to two supervisors. There lacked consistency amongst participants regarding the role their two supervisors played based upon their supervisor's prior knowledge of the role.

Lastly, due to some participants supervisor's lack of prior knowledge regarding the role of director's, the findings uncovered the need for directors to educate and define their role to their two supervisors. There was a sense of having to catch their administrator up on the work they do within the school. This goes back to having clear communication with one's principal and district school counseling supervisor. It is important for directors to help their supervisors understand their role, so they aren't pulled away from students to engage in other activities that do not align with their role. Participants spoke to the belief it is their professional duty to advocate and teach their two supervisors about school counseling and how a well-organized program can positively impact their school. When school counselors have a positive and supportive relationship with principals, the school counselor and the counseling program will be more successful (Leuwerke et al., 2009). Furthermore, it takes strong, supportive leadership from both supervisors for program development, implementation, and advocacy for school counselors and their program (Gysbers et al., 2001). Advocating for the role to their two supervisors was viewed as part of leadership by the directors. By helping their two supervisors better understand their role, the participants believed it would help protect their time from being

tasked with duties outside of their role. Also, participants mentioned they should be the expert in

all things related to school counseling and therefore have a professional responsibility to

advocate for their role and the role of their school counselors.

Theoretical Implications

An ecological perspective was utilized to frame the research. Utilizing an ecological

perspective framed the study because it helps us understand "that human life is fundamentally

connected with the world around us" (Cook, 2012, p. 6). As stated earlier, the school

counselor's lived experiences as directors are guided by three propositions:

1. Human behavior is influenced by characteristics of both the individual and life

   contexts.

2. Human behavior is the product of an individual interacting with his or life

   contexts, or environments.

3. Human behavior is shaped by meaning making.

(Cook, 2012, p. 6). By seeking to understand the contexts, the environment in which participants

work in, and how their behavior is shaped, helps us understand their experiences as directors.

Their connection with their two supervisors also gives meaning to their experiences as leaders

within their school.   The usage of an ecological perspective was utilized to help better

understand and inform the experiences of school counselors as directors (McMahon et al., 2014).

Ecological perspective is based upon a metaphor of ecology within the physical world in which

schools can be seen as a complex system that are viewed within a larger community made up of

numerous subsystems that impact one another (Cook, 2012; McMahon et al., 2014). The

findings from the study challenge us to consider how we understand school counselor's

experiences as director's, as well as how the connection with their two supervisors impacts their role.

Whether recognized or not the directors were influenced by the systems and individuals in which they work in and for. Cook (2012) states school counselors are individuals within a subsystem that are influenced by their environment. For example, the role of a high school counseling director is to lead, advocate, and collaborate to develop, implement and assess a school counseling program that benefits all students (ASCA, 2019). However, the findings illustrated participants were utilized as the principal's note taker in meetings, cafeteria monitor, tardy pass sweeper, the builder of staff relationships, and helping teachers file CPS reports. Participants responsibilities were influenced by the subsystem in which they work in. Due to the lack of human resources, participants were utilized to meet the needs of their school instead of developing a school counseling program that helped meet the needs of students and the school. Interconnections between people and environments, influencing one another is the premise for which ecological counseling is founded on (Cook, 2012). As seen from the findings, participant's connections with their supervisors, staff, and the system influenced their leadership role. In addition, the director's daily activities were heavily influenced by the microsystems applied by the ecosystem of the school (Cook, 2012). Role experiences were influenced by students, teachers, parents, administrators, or central office personnel.

Further, the interactions participants have within their environment create the context through which they experience support and challenges (Cook, 2012). In relation to the study, the findings uncovered participants having to educate their two supervisors on what their role should be. This created challenges for some of the participants because they were unable to receive support from their supervisors simply because they were not knowledgeable of the role. Another

challenge the directors experienced was the inability to evaluate their program and school

counselors, even though they oversee their department and supervise the counselors within the

school. Within this context, the directors are limited in their position to lead and facilitate their

school counseling program. In contrast to the challenges they experienced, participants felt

supported within their environment when their principal sought their advice on things related to

school counseling and included them in administrative meetings and initiatives. Some

participants experienced inclusivity with their principal and administrators while others did not.

This was based upon the principal's view of the director's role.

Lastly, the third proposition of ecological perspective relates to how humans make

meaning through their behavior. Participants viewed themselves as administrators, took on

administrative roles, but are not given the same title as an administrator. They naturally viewed

themselves as skilled leaders even though they did not have any type of formal leadership

training prior to becoming a director. Even though the system and environment in which the

director's work in do not view them as administrators, this is how they perceive themselves.

Ecological perspective emphasizes meaning making based upon how a person responds to events

as he/she perceives and understands them (Cook, 2012). It is unknown what events directors

have experienced that elicits the perception and understanding they are administrators even

though the system in which they work in says differently. Ecological perspectives give insight to

the findings as it helps us understand participants are influenced by factors and processes unique

to high school counseling directors (Cook, 2012).

Practical Implications

Findings from this study have implications for principals, district school counseling

supervisors, school counselor educators, administrative licensure programs, and future

researchers as it pertains to high school counseling directors. The research explored the

leadership experiences of directors and how their interactions with their two supervisors shaped

their experiences as directors. Through the data analysis process, six findings were uncovered.

In this section I discuss implications for practice to improve the preparation of leadership for

high school counseling directors.

Graduate level programs could provide training in the area of administration for school

counselors to develop formal leadership development in the education field. This would assist

with equipping potential school counseling directors with learning formal skills to be a

successful leader. There is an assumption school counselors already possess effective skills to be

leaders of programs and personnel (Curry et al., 2009; Curtis et al., 2006). In addition, ASCA

(2019) states typically, school counseling directors have advanced training in supervision and

school counseling programs. However, the results from this study suggest otherwise.

More importantly, administrative licensure programs could provide cross training in the

area of school counseling for potential administrators. This might assist educators seeking to

become assistant principals and principals in understanding the school counseling profession and

their roles. It may also include teaching administrators about the ASCA National Model to help

ensure their school counseling program aligns with its standards. Building this bridge between

school counseling and administrative graduate programs could help build more collaborative and

effective working relationships and help ensure school counselors roles are aligned with ASCA.

Subsequently, providing training for district level supervisors who oversee school

counselors within a division and do not have a school counseling background is also needed. It

is important for school districts and district supervisors to understand the role of counselors in

order to supervise them appropriately. For instance, with better knowledge and understanding of

the role, district school counseling supervisors can utilize director's skills and ability to help

improve student success and performance. By having an understanding of the role, district

school counseling supervisors can help advocate for appropriate job duties within the schools.

They can also help provide the support and knowledge needed to help guide high school

counseling directors.

Another essential point is to assess and address the misalignment of school counselors

and director's roles. ASCA (2019) presents a framework for school counselors and school

counseling programs. Conversely, it is not recognized in some schools and districts, even though

ASCA is a recognized professional organization. Also, there was an astounding response from

participants who wished their role aligned better with the model. Participants spoke to wanting

to work more with students, being proactive instead of reactive, to be as important as instruction,

developing their school counselors, teaching staff about social/emotional learning, and having

appropriate student to counselor ratios. This also included removing inappropriate tasks from

their plates. Ensuring school counselors and school counseling directors roles are appropriate

and aligned with the ASCA National Model is the desired outcome.

Furthermore, districts should provide professional development that better aligns with

school counseling and educational leadership. Once school counselors become directors, it's

important they learn the necessary skills of how to supervise personnel and evaluate a program.

School districts and school sites need to include school counselor interests in terms of

professional development instead of grouping them with teacher professional development.

Training should be continuous and facilitated by experienced school counselor leaders or experts

in the field. My recommendation is in contrast to what the participants shared in regards to their

belief about training.

Principals should meet with the school counseling director and department to align the school counseling program goals with the school's mission and vision. Opening a dialogue with how the school counseling program could contribute to the growth of the school could help build the principal-school counseling director relationship. It would also create an equal partnership in the functioning of the school.

As leaders over their department, school counseling directors need to have the ability to evaluate and assess their counselors and program. School counseling directors know the strength and weakness of their department and program. They directly oversee the functions of the department daily. Having the ability to evaluate their counselors and program

Recommendations for Future Research

Further research may contribute to the findings of this phenomenon. There are a variety of ways future research might be developed and these opportunities could assist in learning more about high school counseling directors. Specifically, the more that is understood about high school counseling directors and their experiences as leaders, the more we can inform district level and school level supervisors, school counselor educators, and develop leadership preparation training. The following recommendations for future research emerged from this study.

1. First, researchers could explore principal's and district school counseling supervisor's experiences and views of high school counseling directors. This could give the study more depth in understanding the triangular connection between high school counseling directors and it's two supervisors. Interviewing the principal and district school counseling supervisor may garner additional information.

2. Secondly, I would recommend observing high school counseling directors to see what their day to day role looks like within the school and their interactions with their environment and two supervisors.

3. Further exploration into school counseling programs and how they do/do not incorporate leadership training could also contribute to the study.

4. Compare high school counseling director's whose supervisors were previous school counselors and/or have a deep understanding of the school counseling profession to high school counseling director's whose supervisors do not have prior experience or knowledge of the role could further help us understand how they experience being a director.

5. Facilitate a longitudinal study where some directors are given leadership training and others are not given leadership training. This could further illustrate how directors experience leadership based upon leadership development or the lack of it.

6. It should be noted culture was not presented in this study. Only one participant felt comfortable discussing how culture plays a part in his/her role as a director. To further the study, future research could look at how culture plays a role in how high school counseling director's roles are actualized. One might consider participants age, ethnicity, gender, etc. and how their cultural background influences or shapes the participants experiences as leaders.

7. To further discover the appropriate roles of directors, a Delphi study could be facilitated. In addition, a quantitative instrument could be developed to measure the congruence between the optimal and actual roles of district school counseling supervisors.

8. Lastly, it is also my recommendation to replicate this study on a larger scale, as well as conducting the interviews in person. This study was limited in size and participant accessibility due to COVID-19 and it would be interesting to hear the voices of school counseling directors at large.

Thus, understanding how high school counselors experience being a director and how their two supervisors shape their experiences as directors can further contribute to educational leadership literature. School counseling directors can be instrumental in the achievement of a school. Understanding their experiences and hearing their voices can give way to supporting them as leaders and contributors to their school.

Conclusions

The significance of this study was to understand the lived experiences of school counselors as directors and how their two supervisors shaped their experiences as leaders. An ecological perspective was utilized to frame and understand the interactions between the director's experiences and the interactions between their two supervisors to better understand how it shapes the leadership position of high school counseling directors. Two research questions guided this study: 1) What are the lived leadership experiences of high school counseling directors? 2) How do the interactions with principals and district school counseling supervisors shape high school counselor's lived experiences as directors? Through a phenomenologically informed qualitative study, 14 participants were interviewed. Each participant described their experiences as a director and how their two supervisors influence their role as leaders within their school. The study revealed high school counseling director's experiences as leaders are guided by the subsystems where they work and by the people they interact with in the subsystems.

This study revealed high school counseling directors conceptualize themselves as leaders. However, further consideration regarding leadership development should be explored to further advance this leadership role in schools. The professional identity of school counselors is still taking shape within schools as counselors advocate to define and solidify a professional identity. The principal and school counselor relationship showed great importance to the level of support and challenges the directors experienced. While district school counseling supervisors showed an impact on the director's experiences, the most direct impact was seen with principals. While there are many different informal leadership roles within schools, high school counseling directors teeter the line between the role of an administrator and the role of a lead teacher/department chair. In order to better understand these informal leaders, such as high school counseling directors, it is important the work continues to learn about their experiences to align educational leadership and the school counseling profession.

References

ASCA: The Essential Role of School Counselor Educators/Practicum and Internship

    Supervisors. Retrieved from schoolcounselor.org

Allen, K.E., Stelzner, S.P. & Wielkiewicz (1998). The ecology of leadership: Adapting to the

    challenges of a changing world. *The Journal of Leadership Studies*, *5*(2), pp. 62-82.

Amatea, E. & Clark, M.A. (2005). Changing schools, changing counselors: A qualitative study

    of school administrators' conceptions of the school counselor role. *Professional School*

    Counseling, *9*(1), pp. 16-27.

American School Counseling Association. (2012). *ASCA national model: A framework for*

    school counseling programs. Retrieved from www.schoolcounselor.org

American School Counseling Association (2019). *The Essential Role of School Counseling*

    Directors/Coordinators. Retrieved from

    www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/Careers-Roles/WhyDirectorCoord.pdf

Astramovich, R.L., Hoskins, W.J., Gutierrez, A.P., & Bartlett, K.A. (2013). Identifying role

    diffusion in school counseling. *The Professional Counselor*, *3*(3), pp. 175-184.

Bogdan, R.C. & Biklen, S.K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to*

    theories and methods. New York: Pearson.

Brooks, J.S. & Normore, A.H. (2015). Qualitative research and educational leadership: Essential

    dynamics to consider when designing and conducting studies. *International Journal of*

    Educational Management, 29(7), pp. 798-806.

Burnham, J.J. & Jackson, C.M. (2000). School counselor roles: Discrepancies between actual

    practice and existing models. *Professional School Counseling, 4*(1), pp. 41-49.

Campbell, C.A. & Dahir, C.A. (1997). Sharing the vision: The national standards for school

counseling programs. *The American School Counselor Association.* Retrieved from

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309767487

Carlson, R. (1989). School counselors and school organizations: What is the nature of their

connection? *The School Counselor*, *37*(1), pp. 7-14.

Cinotti, D. (2014). Competing professional identity models in school counseling: A historical

perspective and commentary. *The Professional Counselor*, *4*(5), pp. 417-425.

College board: A Closer Look at the Principal-Counselor Relationship: A Survey of Principals

and Counselors. Retrieved from www.schoolcounselor.org

Collins, K. & Frels, R. (2013). Foreword: Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to

frame quantitative, qualitative, and mixed research. *International Journal of Multiple

Research Approaches, 7*(1), pp. 2-8.

Cook, E.P. (2012). *Understanding people in context: The ecological perspective in counseling.*

Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five

Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Creswell, J.W., Hanson, W.E., & Plano Clark, V.L. (2007). Qualitative research *designs*:

Selection and implementation. *The Counseling Psychologist,* 35, (*2*), pp. 236-264.

Crowther, S., Ironside, P., Spence, D., & Smythe, L. (2017). Crafting stories in hermeneutic

phenomenology research: A methodological device. *Qualitative Health Research*, *27*(6),

pp. 826-835.

Curry, J. & DeVoss, J. (2009). Introduction to special issue: The school counselor as leader.

Professional School Counseling, *13*(2), pp. 64-67.

Curtis, R. & Sherlock, J.J. (2006). Wearing two hats: Counselors working as managerial leaders

        in agencies and schools. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, *84*(1), pp. 120-127.

Dahir, C.A., Burnham, J.J, Stone, C.B., & Cobb, N. (2010). Principals as partners: Counselors as

        collaborators. *NASSP Bulletin*, *94*(4), pp. 286-305.

DeAngelis, K.J. (2013). The characteristics of high school department chairs: A national

        perspective. *The High School Journal*, *97*(2), pp. 107-122.

Dollarhide, C.T. (2003). School counselors as program leaders: Applying leadership contexts to

        school counseling. *Professional School Counseling*, *6*(5), pp. 304-308.

Feeney, E.J. (2009). Taking a look at a school's leadership capacity: The role and function of

        high school department chairs. *The Clearing House*, *82*(5), pp. 212-218.

Gaubatz, J.A. & Ensminger, D.C. (2015). Secondary school department chairs leading successful

        change. *International Journal of Education Policy & Leadership, 10*(6), pp. 1-21.

Gill, M.J. (2014). The possibilities of phenomenology for organizational research.

        Organizational Research Methods, *17*(2), pp. 118-137,

Glesne, C. & Peshkin, A. (1992). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An Introduction.* White

        Plains, NY: Longman. Chapter 4.

Grissom, J.A. & Loeb, S. (2011). Triangulating principal effectiveness: How perspectives of

        parents, teachers, and assistant principals identify the central importance of managerial

        skills. *American Educational Research Journal*, *48*(5), pp. 1091-1123.

Groenewald, T. (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated. *International Journal of*

        Qualitative Methods, *3*(1), pp.42-55.

Gysbers, N. & Henderson, P. (2012). *Developing & managing your school guidance &*

        counseling program. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association

Gysbers, N. & Henderson, P. (2001). Leading and managing comprehensive school guidance

    programs. *Eric Digest*, *11*, pp. 1-2.

Gysbers, N.C. & Stanley, B. (2014). From position to program. *ASCA School Counselor*, *51*, pp.

    22-27.

Halverson, R., Grigg, J., Prichett, R., & Thomas, C. 2007). The new instructional leadership:

    Creating data-driven instructional systems in school. *Journal of School Leadership*,

    17(2), pp. 159-194.

Hays, D.G. & Singh, A.A. (2012). *Qualitative Inquiry in Clinical and Educational Settings*. New

    York, NY: A Division of Guilford Publications, Inc.

Janson, C. (2009). High school counselors' views of their leadership behaviors: A q

    methodology study. *School Counselors and Leadership*, *13*(2), pp. 86-97.

Janson, C., Stone, C., & Clark, M.A. (2009). Stretching leadership: A distributed perspective for

    school counselor leaders. *Professional School Counseling*, *13*(2), pp. 98-106.

Kafe, N. (2011). Hermeneutic phenomenological research method simplified. *An*

    Interdisciplinary Journal, *5*, pp. 181-200.

Kaffenberger, C.J., Murphy, S. & Bemak, F. (2006). School counseling leadership team: A

    statewide collaborative model to transform school counseling. *Professional School*

    Counseling, *9*(4), pp. 288-294.

Lambert, V., Lambert, C. (2012). Qualitative descriptive research: An acceptable design. *Pacific*

    Rim International Journal of Nursing Research, *16*(4), pp. 255-256.

Lambie, G.W. & Williamson, L.L. (2004). The challenge to change from guidance counseling to

    professional school counseling: A historical proposition. *Professional School Counseling*,

    8(2), pp. 124-131.

Leuwerke, W.C., Walker, J. & Shi, Q. (2009). Informing principals: The impact of different

    types of information on principals' perceptions of professional school counselors.

    Professional School Counseling, *12*(4), pp. 263-271.

MacNeill, N., Cavanagh, R., & Silcox, S. (2003). Pedagogic principal leadership. *Management*

    in Education, *17*(4), pp. 14-17.

Mason, E.C.M. & McMahon, H.G. (2009). Leadership practices of school counselors. *ASCA*,

    13(2), pp. 107-115.

Mayers, R. S. & Zepeda, S. J. (2002). High school department chairs: Role ambiguity and

    conflict during change. *NASSP Bulletin*, *86*(632), pp. 49-64.

McAlister, A.M., Ehlert, K.M., Kajfez, R.L., Faber, C.J., & Kennedy, M.S. (2017). Qualitative

    coding: An approach to assess inter-rater reliability. *American Society for Engineering*

    Education. Paper presented at 2017 ASEE Annual Conference & Exposition, Columbus,

    Ohio. https://peer.asee.org/28777

McMahon, H.G., Mason, E.C.M., Daluga-Guenther, N., & Ruiz, A. (2014). An ecological model

    of professional school counseling. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *10*(92*),* 459-

    471.

Milsom, A. & Moran, K. (2015). From counselor to counselor educator: A phenomenological

    study. *Counselor Education & Supervision, 54*, pp. 203-220.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE

    Publications, Inc.

Ogawa, R. & Bossert, S. (1995). Leadership as an organizational quality. *Educational*

    Administration Quarterly, *31*(2), pp. 224-243.

Perusse, R., Goodnough, G.E., Donegan, J., & Jones, C. (2004). Perceptions of school counselors and school principals about the national standards for school counseling programs and the transforming school counseling initiative. *Professional School Counseling*, *7*(3), pp. 152-161.

Somody, C., Henderson, P., Cook, K., & Zambrano, E. (2008). A working system of school counselor supervision. *Professional School Counseling, 12*(1), pp. 22-33.

Spillane, J., Halverson, R., & Diamond, J. (2001). Investigating school leadership practice: A distributed perspective. *Educational Researcher*, *30*(3), pp. 23-28.

Spillane, J. & Orlina, E. (2005). Investigating leadership practice: Exploring the entailments of taking a distributed perspective. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *4*(3), pp. 157-176.

Walsh, R. & Gibson, D.M. (2019). "What don't we do?": The experiences of school counseling directors in relation to leadership and job satisfaction. *Professional School Counseling*, *23*(1), pp. 1-11.

Wielkiewicz, R.M. & Stelzner, S.P. (2005). An ecological perspective on leadership theory, research, and practice. *Review of General Psychology*, *9*(4), pp. 326-341.

Williams, H.S. & Johnson, T.L. (2003). Strategic leadership in schools. *Education*, *133*(3), pp. 350-357.

Willis, D.G., Sullivan-Golyai, S., Knafl, K., & Cohen, M.Z. (2016). Distinguishing features and similarities between descriptive phenomenological and qualitative description research. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, *38*(9), pp. 1185-1204.

Wingfield, R., Reese, R., & West-Olatunji, C. (2010). Counselors as leaders in schools. *Florida Journal of Educational Administration & Policy*, *4*(1), pp. 114-130.

Young, A. (2013). Building-level leadership. *ASCA School Counselor*, *50*(6), pp. 35-40.

Young, A.A., Millard, T., & Kneale, M.M. (2013). Enhancing school counselor instructional

      leadership through collaborative teaming: Implications for principals. *NASSP Bulletin*,

      97(3), pp. 253-269.

Zepeda, S.J. & Kruskamp, B. (2008). High school department chairs – perspectives on

      instructional supervision. *The High School Journal*, *90*(4), pp. 44-54.

APPENDIX A

PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT EMAIL INVITATION AND INFORMED CONSENT

SUBJECT: Research Study for High School Counseling Directors, High School Principals, & District School Counseling Supervisors

INTRODUCTION: You are invited to participate in a research study conducted at Old Dominion University (ODU) for the Educational Leadership Department. The investigator of the study is Andrea Simon. Approximately nine participants will be enrolled in this study.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to understand how the role of the high school counseling director is conceptualized and enacted, and how the principal and district school counseling supervisor influence the actualization of this role through leadership. The findings from the study will serve as data for Ms. Simon's dissertation requirement towards completion of the PhD Program at ODU. Responses will be completely anonymous; your identity will not be linked to this study in any way.

YOUR PARTICIPATION: If you participate in the study, you can expect the following as a **principal** and **district school counseling supervisor:** a single interview lasting approximately 30 minutes to one hour. As a **high school counseling director** participating in this study you can expect the following: a single interview lasting approximately 30 minutes to one hour and a one day observation. The interview will be audio recorded to help the researcher accurately capture your experience in your words. The recording will only be heard by the researcher for the purpose of this study. Participation in this study is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any time. There is no compensation for participating in the study. There is no penalty or negative consequence for discontinuing participation.

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: It may be inconvenient for you to participate in the interview and observation activities.

BENEFITS: The potential benefit to you for participating in this study is reflection on how your principal and/or district school counseling supervisor help shape the role in which you uphold within your building; an opportunity to begin a conversation regarding how the high school counseling director role is actualized in schools.

ANONYMITY: Records of information that you provide for the research study and your personally identifying information (name, school, or other characteristics) will not be linked in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study.

QUESTIONS: You are encouraged to ask any questions, at any time, that will help you to understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. You may contact the investigator, Andrea Simon at asimo008@odu.edu or the investigator's faculty advisor, Dr. Karen Sanzo at ksanzo@odu.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about this study or your

rights as a study participant, you may contact Adam Rubenstein, Director of Compliance, Office of Research with the Human Subjects Research Office at ODU.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT
By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then the researchers should be able to answer them:

Andrea C. Simon
asimo008@odu.edu, 757-329-1792

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should call Dr. Laura Chezan, the current chair of the Darden College of Education and Professional Studies Human Subjects Review Committee at 757-683-7055 or lchezan@odu.edu.

And importantly, by signing below, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

Subject's Printed Name & Signature	**Date**
Parent / Legally Authorized Representative's Printed Name & Signature **(If applicable)**	**Date**

INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT
I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask

additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

Investigator's Printed Name & Signature	**Date**

APPENDIX B

HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELING DIRECTOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW I

PROTOCOL

Date of Interview:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:
Location: Zoom
Interview Start Time:
Interview End Time:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of the interview is to gather information about how high school counseling directors view their roles and how the interactions with principals and district school counseling supervisors shape their experiences as a director. The information collected will be recorded, transcribed, and stored in a secure database. This interview will be confidential and will not be shared with anyone. There may be follow up questions after the conclusion of the interview at a later date. And there will be an opportunity for you to review the transcript to clarify and/or add any additional thoughts to the interview. As a reminder, if you are willing, this interview will be recorded.

Questions:

1. Please share with me your professional background.

2. Tell me about your experiences preparing to become a high school counselor?

   a) Can you further share with me your experiences preparing to become a high school counseling director?

   b) What types of learning experiences did you have to prepare for the role?

   c) Can you describe how others – such as your principal, assistant principal, and central office coordinators have helped you prepare to be a high school counseling director?

   d) What experiences do you wish you had before you became a director? Why?

3. Share with me your role as a high school counseling director.

   a) What are your major responsibilities in your role as a high school counseling director?

b) Tell me about how these responsibilities look in your daily practice.

4. Share with me how you serve as a leader in your counseling department.

5. Share with me how you serve as a leader in your high school.

6. What does being a leader mean to you? How do you conceptualize leadership?

7. Describe what leadership looks like in the work of a school counseling director.

8. Can you share a time where you were influential in determining your role as a school counselor?

   a) What about as high school counseling director?

9. Tell me about times when you were given opportunities for professional development to improve your craft and augment skills/knowledge as a leader?

   a) Were these opportunities provided by your principal, district school counseling supervisor, or both?

   b) What did you gain from these opportunities that you utilize in your daily practice? What do those leadership practices look like for you?

10. Share a time where your relationship with administrators has impacted your specific job duties within your school.

    a) Can you further share your relationship with the district school counseling supervisor and how its impacted your specific duties within your school?

11. Describe a time where you have seen your principal have a clear understanding of your role.

    a) Describe a time where you have seen your district school counseling supervisor have a clear understanding of your role.

12. Describe what your day looks like.

13. Tell me about a time you had to engage in activities that you believe were not aligned with what your role is as a high school counseling director?

    a) What did you do?

14. What are some ways you've participated in leadership development activities to help prepare you for being a high school counseling director?

15. Tell me about a time where your principal had an influence on your role as a leader within your school and over your department?

    a) Tell me about a time where your district school counseling supervisor had an influence on your role as a leader within your school and over your department?

16. In a perfect school setting, describe what your role would look like.

    a) What would this look like in relation to your principal and district school counseling supervisor?

    b) What experiences might you have?

17. Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX C

HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELING DIRECTOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW II

PROTOCOL

Date of Interview:
Interviewer: Andrea Simon
Interviewee:
Location:
Interview Start Time:
Interview End Time:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of the interview is to gather information about how high school counseling directors view their roles and how the interactions with principals and district school counseling supervisors shape their experiences as a director. The information collected will be recorded, transcribed, and stored in a secure database. This interview will be confidential and will not be shared with anyone. There may be follow up questions after the conclusion of the interview at a later date. And there will be an opportunity for you to review the transcript to clarify and/or add any additional thoughts to the interview. As a reminder, if you are willing, this interview will be recorded.

Questions:

1. I am interested in getting more information on some of the topics you discussed in the first interview we had.

    a. Are there any more details you would like to add at this time?

    b. Anything you would like to correct?

2. If you wanted to teach me how to be a high school counseling director, what would you tell me?

3. Describe how your experience as a school counselor impacts your role as a leader.

4. Can you share with me what leadership experiences you've encountered in this role?

5. Can you speak to any influences that have shaped you as a leader?

6. Have there been any task or responsibilities that you've been able to shape as a leader in your role?

7. Is there anything else you can tell me that would help me understand your experiences as a high school counseling director?

APPENDIX D

Demographics Questionnaire

1. How many years have you been a school counselor? _____

2. How many years have you been a high school counseling director? _____

3. What is your race/ethnicity? _____

4. What is your gender? _____

5. What is your age? _____

6. Highest Degree attained?

    _____Bachelors   _____Masters   _____EdS/Advanced Certificate

    _____Doctorate   _____Other (please list): _____

7. Are you apart of a leadership team/group? _____Yes   _____No

8. If yes, please list the leadership team/group(s) you are a part of:

    _____
    _____
    _____

9. Have you received leadership training? _____Yes   _____No

10. If yes, please list the leadership training, leadership professional development, and/or leadership classes in which you've participated in:

    _____
    _____
    _____