Early Career School Counselors' Training Perspectives:

Implications for School Counselor Educators

Christopher D. Slaten
Purdue University

Dominick A. Scalise
University of Maryland-College Park

Krystle Gutting and Thomas W. Baskin
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Abstract

The current study examined early career professional school counselors' experiences related to their work as mental health professionals in schools. Nine individuals participated in qualitative interviews that were analyzed using consensual qualitative research methods (Hill, 2012). All individuals were professional school counselors trained in accredited programs and had three or fewer years of post-degree experience in their schools. Implications for school counseling educators that train school counselors and suggestions for future advocacy are presented. This study provides important information for both training programs and school systems to better understand the unique skills of school counselors and the emerging needs of the students they serve.

Keywords: school counseling, training, consensual qualitative research, mental health

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The importance of providing counseling within school districts has gained more attention recently (Huang et al., 2005; Tolan & Dodge, 2005; Weisz, Sandler, Durlap, & Antan, 2005). While one out of every four children has a diagnosable psychological disorder, only 25% of those children ever receive treatment (Tolan & Dodge, 2005). These statistics are startling, considering research has consistently shown the value of mental health services for youth (Baskin, Slaten, Crosby, Pufahl, Schneller, & Ladell, 2010; Kazdin & Wassell, 1998; Weisz, Thurber, Sweeney, Proffitt, & LeGagnoux, 1997; Whiston & Quinby, 2010). Baskin, Slaten, Sorenson, Russell-Glover, and Merson (2010) found that counseling provided in schools not only tended to improve mental health, but also improve academic outcomes for youth. With empirical support that counseling interventions result in observable improvements in both mental health and academic performance, why are today's youth still not receiving the services they need within schools? To date, few studies have examined the qualitative experiences of school counselors entering the field to give pre-K-12 youth mental health interventions that support their academic performance.

Given that counselor educators are connected to, and responsible for, the training of school counseling professionals, they have a unique ability to influence school counselors' eventual work. The importance of training professional school counselors and assisting them in utilizing their therapeutic skills in school districts has been addressed in the counseling literature (Forrest, 2004; Gysbers, 2005; Pope, 2002; Romano & Kachgal, 2004; Walsh, 2002). With school counselors trained by well-

informed counselor educators, it is troubling that students are deprived of mental health services that could effectively address their social and emotional needs.

Although many school counselors are trained by certified or licensed counselors and psychologists, few have the opportunity to fully employ their therapeutic skills with students (Akos & Galassi, 2004; McCarthy, VanHorn-Kerne, Calfa, Lambert, & Guzman, 2010). Professional school counselors spend a small percentage of their time implementing the counseling interventions that they were trained to conduct (ASCA, 2005; McCarthy et al., 2010). Instead, school counselors are continually asked to be responsible for many other tasks in schools that occupy a significant amount of their time (McCarthy et al., 2010). These tasks include administrative assistant duties and system support obligations, often leaving school counselors with a reduced sense of purpose (Curry & Bickmore, 2012). Frequently, this means that school counselors are asked to be responsible for coordinating state testing, student class schedules, substitute teaching, class or club sponsorship, student discipline, and a multitude of other tasks (Akos, Shuldt, Walendin, 2009; Bagerly & Osborn, 2006; McCarthy et al., 2010). These duties are typically not part of their graduate training, but often consume a significant portion of their workweek, conflicting with their role as a mental health services provider (ASCA, 2005). Thus, attempting to complete all of these tasks and attend to the mental health of today's youth is a daunting job description for a professional school counselor.

Role of the School Counselor

In order to advocate for the effective utilization of school counselors, a school counseling implementation model was created by the American School Counselor

Association (ASCA). This model is known as the ASCA national model and is utilized by most graduate programs across the country (ASCA, 2003; ASCA, 2005; ASCA, 2012). The model is a nationally recognized school-counseling model that advocates for school counselors to have the opportunity to provide direct services to *every* student. The model suggests that in doing so, school counselors will also be assisting school administrators in the school's overall mission (ASCA, 2012). The delivery of the model is divided into four main areas: responsive services, individual student planning, system support, and guidance curriculum (ASCA, 2012). Although the ASCA model has gained attention, the integration of the model throughout the country has been slow-moving (Walsh, Barrett, DePaul, 2007). In addition, there has also been concern about the model for its lack of attention to diversity, social justice, and attention to counseling/psychotherapy (Galassi & Akos, 2007). Scholars have also suggested that the core principles of the model may lead to limited long-term effects for meeting the developmental needs of at-risk and urban youth (Green & Keys, 2001; Keys, Bemak, & Lockhart, 1998). Further, others have argued that the model is not broadly applicable across the range of cultural backgrounds represented by students (Lee, 2001). Collectively, these critiques suggest that the ASCA model has a rather broad focus that serves a large percentage of students, but may neglect the more vulnerable ones (Galassi & Akos, 2007). Those training school counselors need to be aware of the possible limitations and strengths of the model's application in the schools. To date, little research has explored school counselors' impressions of how the ASCA model is applied in practice using qualitative methods.

Rationale for Current Study

School counseling faculty have a role to play in training, advocating, and promoting counseling services and professionals that work in the K-12 environment. Research and discussion about the collaboration between professional school counseling and counseling faculty has been underutilized and under-referenced (Forrest, 2005; Pope, 2002). Although previous research has illuminated the frustration among school counselors, there has been little research that has examined the perspectives of school counselors who have recently been trained in the ASCA model. That is, the perspective of individual school counselor's experiences has been neglected in the development and implementation of school counseling training.

The current study addresses the call for the counseling profession to produce additional research directly related to counseling training and services (Scheel, Berman, Friedlander, Conoley, Duan, & Whiston, 2011) and to promote the utilization of counseling services in schools (Pope, 2002; Tolan & Dodge, 2005). In order to capture the depth of these unique perspectives, a qualitative research design was implemented, consistent with others' call for increased qualitative analyses in the counseling field (Ponterotto, 2005; Yeh & Inman, 2007). In this study, we sought to capture the subjective experiences of school counselors in the field. We focused on early career school counselors, as they have the freshest perspective regarding the relationship between the training that they have received from counseling faculty and are likely to have the most exposure to the ASCA model both in training and practice. Further, they will have a current perspective on the day-to-day realities that they face working within a pre-K-12 school. The overarching research question was: What is the experience of

early career school counselors as they transition from graduate school to the

profession?

Method

Participants

School counselors that graduated within three years from two Midwestern

universities in the United States were sent E-mail invitations via academic listservs

using a "snowball" recruiting methodology where participants were encouraged to pass

the invitation on to colleagues. Interested potential participants responded via E-mail to

the primary author with their interest in being interviewed. In addition, prospective

participants were recruited at a regional school counseling conference in the

Midwestern United States. On the inclusion criteria and the recruitment procedures, 25

individuals expressed interest in the study; however, a total of nine individuals (one man

and eight women) met criteria and successfully completed an interview. All responses

were included in the analysis.

The inclusion criteria for participants in the current study were: master's degree

in school counseling, training received from counseling faculty and in counseling skills

as part of the graduate program, and three or fewer years of work experience in the field

of school counseling. Because of the emphasis on the application of training and

bridging the gap between student and professional, we wanted participants who had

recently completed their academic program to ensure that the participant perspectives

were closely related to phenomena of interest (transitioning to their professional role).

Active recruitment took 4 months before finally reaching the point of saturation of

information, which is a frequent indicator that sampling can cease in qualitative methods

(Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Consistent with the Hill (2012) review of consensual qualitative research (CQR), a sample of 9 fits within the typical 8-15 size. All participants were employed in full-time school counseling positions in mid-western cities. Participant ages ranged from 24-45 at the time of the interview. All participants identified as European-American; in regard to sexual orientation, one participant identified as lesbian and the other eight identified as heterosexual.

Procedures

The first author's institutional human subjects review board approved all procedures. Hill, Thompson, & Williams (1997) developed a qualitative methodology to examine "language" versus numerical data, in a way that organizes the information in a useable format. This methodology, consensual qualitative research (CQR), was utilized in the current study due to the many protections for boosting qualitative rigor as well as its application of more objective "measures" used to identify the frequencies of common threads in participants' data (e.g., a "typical" label for a category means that it was found among most but not all participants, providing relative context). Furthermore, CQR's use of a research team coming to consensus is helpful when exploring phenomena that have not been given much attention empirically, which fits this topic (Hill et al., 2005). CQR analysis stages will be briefly described, however readers are encouraged to view the original documents outlining the work in detail (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005; Hill, 2012).

Biases. As indicated in the CQR procedures (Hill et al., 1997; Hill, Knox, Thompson, Williams, Hess, & Ladany, 2005; Hill, 2012), the researchers spent time discussing their a priori biases, assumptions, and expectations of the phenomenon prior

to the data collection and analysis. This process was revisited during meetings throughout the analysis process as recommended by the CQR guidelines (Hill et al., 2005). One team member was a former school counselor, and noted a personal bias for the purpose of the study given his own difficulty adjusting to the expectations placed on him at work being different from his anticipated roles based on his graduate work. In addition, his perspective was from a white male school counselor's which was notably different than the largely white female participants given that there are fewer men in these positions. Given their contact with school counselors professionally and during academic training experiences, other more general biases identified by the research team were suspecting that first year school counselors' would report: (1) feeling frustrated by being asked to do tasks that were not included in or related to their graduate training; (2) difficulty finding ways to apply the ASCA model with limited resources in the schools. The two other research team members had training experiences in community counseling. The combination of their more removed personal knowledge of these struggles and the use of CQR to reach consensus in data interpretation were used to help ensure that no single personal biased interpretation would influence the work.

 Measures. Classic works discussing qualitative research methods were studied and discussed by the team to ensure that the interviewing procedures would elicit depth of information. Studies and works of primary importance to the team included Creswell (1998), Hill (2005; 2012), Wertz (2005), and, Yeh and Inman (2007). The first author created a number of questions, then the others provided recommended feedback, edits, and alternative questions. This resulted in a final list of fifteen open-ended questions

targeting school counselors' experiences early in their career transition, four of which were added specifically to explore how the ASCA model in particular was related to their adjustment given that very few peer-reviewed articles assess how these models relate to actual experiences for school counselors. Specifically, the three main content areas focused on participants' graduate training preparation, their work responsibilities, and their ability to integrate the two given the ASCA national standards (ASCA, 2012). The interview itself was semi-structured, meaning that interviewers (the first three authors) asked follow-up questions related to participant experiences when indicated, but all interview questions were generated by the same protocol.

Data collection. Participants were given options for face-to-face or over the phone meetings, depending on their schedule and availability. Hill (2012) discussed the utilization of both in-person and over the phone interviews having benefits and shortcomings, concluding that both are useful and are considered to be valid forms of conducting interviews. Five participants opted for in-person interviews of the nine. Interviews were all audiotaped and lasted 51 minutes, on average. The interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist familiar with interview data and then checked for errors by interviewers. Any identifying information was removed from the transcripts and the audio files were stored in a password protected electronic folder on a password protected university computer in a locked office of the primary investigator.

Data analysis. In the interest of protecting the validity of the data, per the CQR guidelines (Hill et al., 1997) the following checks were implemented 1) Cross-checking transcribed data with interviewees for errors; 2) The consensus process in and of itself allowing for multiple perspectives on the data to be included; 3) The use of an external

auditor (someone who was not present in any of the data analysis meetings) at two different stages of the analysis to confirm the direction of the analysis matching the original narratives.

Once the transcripts were verified for errors, the first three authors engaged in the first phase of data analysis for CQR: identification of content domains within the narratives. Although Hill's (2012) most recent recommendation was for the members of the research team to perform this task separately, Hill et al. (2005) previously suggested one advantage of a group arrangement being able to protect against one team member feeling his or her idea or interpretation to be more accurate than another's. Given the different levels of power and status (one member was more junior than the other two professionally) and differing experiences with qualitative data, the team read through the first transcript as a group in order to ensure that all team members had adequate time to ask questions of each other when implementing the CQR protocol, brainstorming ideas about domains and ways in which the narrative stood out for each member. After the first transcript was done this way, the remaining transcripts were analyzed separately allowing for divergent thought, before coming back together as a group. As Hill et al. (2005) explained, there are acceptable variations for this stage, using small groups or individual review from the start. Once individual reviews were completed, the primary team regrouped and discussed differences in domains until a consensus was reached per the CQR guidelines.

The next step involved the extraction of "core ideas" within each domain (see Hill and colleagues 1997 for in-depth review). The goal was to capture the essence of ideas without sacrificing meaning, editing extraneous verbiage (making jokes, unrelated

material, etc.). Consistent with Hill's recommendations (1997; 2012) CQR procedures were followed with the integration of an auditor. The auditor provided feedback related to some statements being cross-listed across domains, and also made a suggestion for a more parsimonious division of domains. This feedback was discussed by the team, then retained and integrated into the analysis with full consensus. Next, the research team conducted the cross-analysis, whereby domains and thematic categories were inspected to ensure that they were consistent with individual transcripts. (Hill et al., 1997).

Domains and categories, or sub-domains, were identified per the CQR consensus guidelines. Labels advocated by Hill et al. (1997) were adopted to help integrate a quantity of each category (see Table 1). Once again, the external auditor reviewed the analysis, and made suggestions, which were implemented through consensus among the team.

Table 1

Summary of Domains, Categories, and Frequencies

Domain/Category	Frequency
Graduate Training	
Unrelated Coursework	General
Lack of administrative training	Typical
Appreciation for practical application	General
Networking being helpful	Variant
Other professional experiences	Variant
Work Setting	
Core tasks outside training	General
Overwhelmed by tasks	Variant
Student contact as a precious commodity	Typical
Managing role conflict	Typical
Expectations met or exceeded	Variant

Domain/Category	Frequency
Ideas for Improvements	
More direct counseling time	General
Congruence between training and practice	Typical
Fewer non-counseling tasks	Typical
School Counseling Model Applicability	
Model needs revision	Typical
Satisfaction with the model	Variant

Results

The overarching ideas within participants' narratives are called domains. As per CQR protocol (Hill, 2012), these can either follow the topics of questions asked in the interview and/or become evident once the group has the opportunity to read through transcripts. In this case, the team used the expected three domains related to the interview questions (training, current work, and school counseling models) and found that all participants also added ways in which things could be improved, so agreed that the data pointed to an additional domain related to ideas to improve their frustrations. Once domains were verified and the core ideas of each statement were agreed upon, the cross-analysis of the narratives was conducted, which involved looking for commonalities or "categories" common among two or more participants.

Analysis of the interview transcripts resulted in four major domains: (a) graduate training; (b) work setting; (c) ideals for improvements; and (d) school counseling model applicability. Each of the four domains yielded a number of within group categories which varied in frequency across participants. Based on the CQR methodology (Hill et al., 1997), three frequency descriptors for these categories were utilized to help provide a sense of how shared or divergent categories were: "general," "typical," and "variant."

"General" indicates that the category was found among all participants in the current study. "Typical" indicated that the category was found among more than half of the participants (i.e., five or more participants). Finally, "variant" indicates that at least two but not more than half of the participants referenced the category. See Table 1 for a summary.

Domain 1: Graduate Training

Participants all discussed their graduate training as playing a key role in their transition to work. Five major categories emerged throughout the interviews: (1) unrelated coursework; (2) lack of training in administrative tasks; (3) practical application of training; (4) networking; (5) other professional experiences.

Unrelated coursework (general). A number of participants mentioned that they were required to take courses in graduate school that had little or no real bearing on their work. Participants varied in the types of courses mentioned, but many tended to emphasis that theory-based courses and courses which included counseling in community and/or adult settings as being irrelevant. For example one participant, who was a graduate of a Masters' program that trained both community and school counselors, stated her frustration with being "lumped together in all but two classes, taught by community counselors who aren't in the schools... I didn't get school counselor training."

Lack of training in administrative tasks (typical). Participants tended to reflect upon being asked to perform tasks that they were not trained to do in their graduate work. Many of these tasks tended to be administrative in nature (e.g., student discipline, lunch duty, etc.). All participants except one commented that at least half of their work

time was spent with non-counseling related tasks required by their administration. One participant described her experience by saying,

Honestly, I was very frustrated with the last couple of months… because we don't have a lot of resources, I do a lot of secretarial work. So it's been difficult to manage my time between what has to get done and what I think the needs of the school are.

Appreciation for practical application of material during training (general). Participants were united in expressing an appreciation for training that emphasized practical components of their work. They sometimes referred to practicum experiences, counseling courses, and classroom management experiences. Participants varied in the depth of their practical experiences, but all seemed to believe that being in the schools and learning from active school counselors was an essential part of their graduate training once they were on the job. One participant reflected that, "I think that having to do practicum within school settings is where I feel I received the most preparation. That is where you are going to learn all the different little things that a class can't teach you."

Networking was helpful (variant). Some participants noted the importance of networking opportunities, which were facilitated by their graduate programs. Other participants noted a desire for increased networking opportunities prior to their transition to work. Participants seemed to believe that networking opportunities helped provide them with a pre-existing set of consultants or peers who have already struggled through the transition from graduate school. One participant reflected on her graduate program offering networking opportunities, "As far as transitioning from school to job, I think it went pretty smoothly. If I had a question I knew where to go for guidance ...There were

people ready and available to help and that is a good feeling."

Other professional experiences were helpful (variant). Some participants noted that they were grateful for their own personal experiences (e.g., previous teaching) in transitioning to work. Among these, some felt that they had gained more from their previous years of experience in schools in other roles, than in their counseling masters training.

Domain 2: Work Setting

Six categories emerged when participants discussed their works tasks: (1) Core Tasks; (2) Feeling Overwhelmed; (3) Student Contact as a Precious Commodity; (4) Managing Role Conflict; (5) Expectations; (6) Ideas for Improvement.

Core tasks outside of school counseling training (general). Participants noted that they engaged in activities that had little or nothing to do with their training and expertise. Participants' consistent message emphasized the importance of clinical work over other tasks. The message was that their preferences were to avoid duties including monitoring recess, lunch duty, substitute teaching, and scheduling classes, which dissolved hours of their day that could take away from their primary duties. One reflection noted, "my job is not just school counseling, I also am the curriculum coordinator, I also do special education, I also am involved in club advising, so I'm not just the school counselor. It's difficult to manage all the roles." Participants offered suggestions to be able to do away with the extra duties so they could focus on student needs, which were unmet. While some participants seemed to make peace with the addition of these other duties, others seemed to long for a different scenario.

Overwhelmed by work tasks (variant). Participants reflected that they felt overwhelmed by the amount of work that they faced upon starting the school counseling position. At times, they reflected that they had to diminish their expectations to meet each student's need holistically to accommodate the demands of their position. While one participant mentioned feeling that the work was "busy but rewarding," other participants noted that they learned to work "smarter not harder" in order to accommodate the demands of the job. Another participant mentioned that,

I feel like part of it is individual counseling and....then I feel like the other part of my job is a lot of paperwork. It was just too much. I couldn't do all of it effectively [when I started the job].

Student contact as a precious commodity (typical). Participants largely reported feeling a sense of surprise that their actual work experience included time spent away from student needs. As a group, they tended to share a sense that their work as a school counselor was not exactly as they imagined, largely due to the required time doing work that was not directly related to their school counseling background. In one case, the participant indicated that she never was given a job description, which made it difficult to discuss whether her surprise was valid, or not. One participant discussed how she processed the tension created by being asked to fill her time with non-counseling related tasks, "Pretty much they expect me to do my job first off. They are confident that I know what I am supposed to be doing."

Managing role conflict (typical). Many of the participants noted some role conflict or confusion for both themselves and their co-workers. Participants indicated that they struggled when other staff (teachers or administrators), or students and their

guardians, seemed to have pre-conceived notions about school counseling that did not fit with their own impressions of what their work would be. Some participants discussed dismay at needing to educate teachers or administration on what they believed their role to be in the school system. One participant noted this dismay by saying, "Resistance from the staff has been really difficult. I don't always have a bunch of staff support. So it is more of choosing which battles I want to fight and which people." In some circumstances, they reported feeling pulled to be a liaison for the school rather than an advocate for the student. One participant mentioned, "Parents are hard. It is difficult because a lot of times parents are disappointed in teachers or administration and they come to me with their problems asking me to make things right. That is not really my position."

Expectations met or exceeded (variant). Three participants pointed out that their expectations were largely met and, in two cases, exceeded. While this was not a dominant theme, it is important to note that some experiences were relatively positive. One participant mentioned that because her school allowed her to have student contact the vast majority of the day, she felt that she was doing exactly what she had hoped to do. She mentioned the fact that she knew of her peers who were at schools that were not structured the same and that she realized her school was "special." She did point out that she still had to juggle some administrative duties which was difficult at first but, overall, she reported feeling very fortunate to be able to spend a great deal of her time with students. This perspective supports the general idea that direct work with students is valued and appreciated by participants, while administrative or non-counseling related tasks were viewed less desirably.

Domain 3: Ideas for Improvements

Participants all discussed their desires for how their role as a professional school counselor would ideally look to them, given their assessment of student needs and their impressions of the school counseling profession. All participants discussed some variation of this, given a direct question asking something to this effect in the interview guide. Three subcategories emerged within this domain: (1) more direct counseling time; (2) congruence between training and practice; (3) fewer non-counseling tasks.

More direct counseling time (general). All participants agreed that their preference would be to do as much counseling and/or student contact as their schedule allowed. As mentioned earlier, one participant noted that her current school (which was her second position since graduating) provided this, but all others (8/9) noted that their job missed the mark for this hope. An implicit tone in the narratives was frustration with their job requiring numerous non-counseling activities with the students. One participant mentioned that her average time spent counseling students was "an hour a day," due to her other demands. Another participant discussed how she finds time to counsel students; "I think a lot of the day is spent counseling students and then it is after hours where I try to catch up on all that other work."

Congruence between training and practice (typical). Many participants mentioned that their transition to work would have been smoother if there were more congruence between their graduate training and the actual work tasks done. Participants noted that they were trained to treat students from a comprehensive perspective, but noticed that there was little support, and energy available for them to do this. One student believed that part of her struggle was that graduate instructors

were largely not school counselors or former school counselors which may have contributed to some of the disconnect. Another participant noted that her training did not embrace the ASCA model, which she believed might have helped her. Lastly, one participant mentioned, "I feel like the bridge between theory and practice, when you get out of graduate school to when you get into your job, is so far."

Fewer non-counseling tasks (typical). While the administrative tasks are necessary for the school, the participants agreed that these tasks tend to take away from their primary mission to serve students. One participant reflected:

> I just have to accept that I have to do menial work in addition to my counseling duties or the counseling duties that I feel that I need to be doing and offering to the students…like the secretarial duties and printing certificates and planning things that easily could be delegated.

Domain 4: School Counseling Model Applicability

All participants were asked directly about the role school counseling models played in their adjustment to work. Some participants offered information related to these models before being asked. All participants reported knowledge of their own state's school counseling model as well as the ASCA national model. Two categories emerged after reviewing participants' reflections of the role school counseling models played for them: (1) models need revision; (2) satisfaction with the model.

Model needs revision (typical). When discussing costs of the model, a number of participants indicated that while the model was the best they had it still could use revision, particularly after they transitioned to the full time work of a school counselor and noted the expectations and responsibilities of their schools. Participants varied on

their impressions of what the models lacked, but consistently pointed to the need for more work to be done.

One participant reported that the national model could be improved by lowering the amount of time allocated to administrative or system support, "If the support is overwhelming and there's not time for it, the expectations that come out of it are extremely high, but at the same time do I feel that it is attainable?"

Satisfaction with the model (variant). Two participants noted that the national model needed minor or no revision after their transition to work. These participants noted that their transition had been made easier given that the model provided them a type of plan to which they could refer when considering how to devote their energies. Participants making these comments reported that the model was comprehensive in its attention to student academic, emotional, and career needs while emphasizing both preventative and remedial action. One participant reported that:

> It helps break it down into the three domains so that we are helping the whole
>
> child. The emotional and social pieces do play into the academic realm and what
>
> we are trying to help the child achieve in the school.

Discussion

The current study provided an opportunity for professional school counselors to reflect upon their experience of being an early career professional. This research addresses the concern of counseling educators regarding counseling services in schools (Pope, 2002; Tolan & Dodge, 2005) and continued research efforts related to counseling and training (Scheel et al., 2011). The CQR analysis yielded data that can help shape the future of school counseling training and advocacy by the field of

counseling. One of the most prominent meta-narratives was that school counselors often felt confused and frustrated regarding their role(s) in the school. Many participants mentioned that this confusion stemmed from a discrepancy between the way in which they were trained and their school district's expectations for them. In all but one case, participants indicated that other professionals in their school district (i.e., administrators, teachers, support staff) did not fully understand a school counselor's role. This finding led to additional information from participants expressing frustration with both their training programs and the school districts in which they were employed. These results are alarming, given the ASCA objective to promote a greater awareness of the profession, and less confusion about the role of school counselors (ASCA, 2012).

Implications for Counselor Educators

The depth of information provided by the research participants allows for some important implications regarding the future of school counselor training, which has direct implications for counseling faculty invested in this training.

Courses (not just practica) should involve an emphasis on the applicability of material to school counseling. Every participant mentioned some frustration with coursework that they deemed to be irrelevant to their current job description. For most participants this meant courses that were theoretical in nature, or more closely related to counseling adults. Further, participants mentioned the importance of having additional coursework on the practical application of working with children in schools. Counseling faculty may consider adjusting the structure of counseling coursework in order to better prepare these students for their work environment. For example, in required career development coursework, it is essential that school counseling graduate

students not only understand the relevance of career development, exploration, and assessment with youth, but are given active ways to apply and process its applicability.

Counseling faculty as advocates for counseling in school settings*.* Consistent with previous research, participants reported concerns about completing "non-counseling" related activities. More specifically, they were being asked to do things that were unrelated to their training, such as: student discipline, scheduling, coordinating state achievement testing, and lunch or bus duty. These non-counseling activities have been noted as a problem in previous literature and were echoed by the school counselors in the current study. In other words, school counselors frequently do not have the opportunity to complete the work that they have been trained to do. Counseling faculty have an opportunity and responsibility to advocate for the importance of mental health work in pre-K-12 schools through public policy initiatives and informative research (Constantine, Miville, & Kindaichi, 2008). The power of this advocacy work could lead to a greater opportunity for school counselors to spend more time in mental-health related work.

Adjust training model to accommodate professional school counselor suggestions. Most participants mentioned frustration with the current ASCA model as it related to two areas: (a) the need for additions/revisions to the model, and (b) need for more ASCA model training for school counselors. These findings are consistent with a body of research calling for additional adjustments to the current school counseling models utilized by training programs and state education departments across the country (Galassi & Akos, 2004; Galassi & Akos, 2007). Galassi & Akos (2007) discussed the importance of utilizing school counseling models to reach marginalized

and traditionally under-served student populations. In addition, they suggested that school counseling models need to be adjusted to focus on strength-based counseling as a primary objective. Counselor educators have insight and expertise to offer in strength-based approaches to counseling, multicultural awareness, and social justice (Constantine et al., 2008; Lopez & Edwards, 2008; Speight & Vera, 2008). These areas of expertise can continue to add value to school counseling training and could promote revisions to the current school counseling training model. Finally, counseling faculty can increase the integration of the best aspects of the current ASCA model into the curriculum for school counseling graduate students.

Provide support and continuing education to school counselors. Throughout the narratives told by these participants, it was evident that they were overwhelmed by the work tasks. During graduate training, it is imperative that, as educators, we are clear about defining the role of school counselor for trainees. In addition, counselor educators can train school counselors to advocate for their role as a mental health professionals. Further, it would be valuable for counselor educators to reach out to school counseling professionals to make them aware of the continuing education opportunities provided by the field, to provide support beyond graduation. Having some involvement and awareness of critical school counseling issues from all counseling faculty would benefit school counseling students.

Counseling faculty as research collaborators in pre-K-12 schools*. The results of the current study illuminate an issue that has been addressed in the field of counseling previously, namely, increased research production in pre-K-12 schools (Gysbers, 2002; Pope, 2002). Counseling faculty could support and advocate for

professional school counselors by collaborating with them in examining what makes their work most efficacious in terms of supporting students faced with a variety of different challenges.

Limitations

Although the current study provides important information regarding the training of school counselors by counseling faculty, it has methodological limitations as well. The rich data that was obtained does not represent all possible feelings or reactions given by school counselors during their first few years in the field. Although the participants in the current study were homogenous in many ways, congruent with qualitative research (Creswell, 2007; Wertz, 2005), it is important to note that future research should emphasize different and more diverse populations of school counselors. Although there are limitations to the study, this research provides a needed voice for professional school counselors.

Conclusion

These findings have implications for future research and training in the area of school counseling. Researchers are encouraged to integrate these initial findings with additional homogenous groups of early career school counselors (i.e., diversity in race, ethnicity, religiosity, sexual orientation, groups with previous teaching experience, etc.) as well as designing qualitative inquiries that are solely focused on one particular school-level (elementary, middle, high school) or school setting (public, private, urban, rural, suburban). As counselor educators continue to train the next generations of school counselors they must be willing to adjust training through listening and integrating their training suggestions after applying their learned skills in the schools.

We believe this attention would enable professional school counselors to be more satisfied in their work, more confident in their roles, and better prepared to think creatively about providing direct service to youth in schools. Lastly, these voices affirm our responsibility as advocates for school counselors to be better prepared to meet the needs of their students.

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Biographical Statements

Christopher D. Slaten, Ph.D., is an assistant professor and co-director of the school counseling program at Purdue University. His research and publications have focused largely on advocating for school counselors to conduct more mental health services in K-12 settings, specifically related to counseling interventions that have a strong emphasis on marginalized youth and social justice initiatives. In addition, Dr. Slaten has published papers that address the issue of belonging and how it impacts career and academic outcomes for youth and college students.

Dominick A. Scalise, Ph.D., is a staff psychologist at the University of Maryland-College Park's Counseling Center specializing in veterans' issues, working with student athletes, existential approaches to therapy, and career development. His research interests have focused on counseling process and outcome broadly, with particular attention to areas of cultural competence, spirituality, and career development. In addition, he serves on the Early Career Professionals (ECP) Committee for Division 17 (Counseling Psychology) within the American Psychological Association, emphasizing programming to help ECPs improve their transitions to work.

Krystle Gutting, M.S., LPC-IT, SAC-IT is currently working as a mental health and substance abuse counselor in training at Connections Counseling. She has vast experience counseling teens and adults struggling with a wide range of mental health and substance use concerns. From a holistic and person centered approach, Krystle recognizes barriers that may be present when counseling individuals from diverse backgrounds. She believes it is within the context of a person to person connection that each client experiences growth. Her research interests are related to the access of

mental health counseling services for youth, specifically within school settings.

  Thomas W. Baskin, Ph.D., is currently an associate professor of counseling psychology at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. His research interests include how belongingness relates to academic achievement for K-12 students in multi-cultural schools, how angry students can benefit from learning to forgive, and showing how the principles of psychotherapy can serve as an effective basis for school counseling.