

**Factors Associated With Programmatic Orientation
and Supervision in Schools**

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Abstract

Programmatic orientation is the level of intentional implementation of school counseling program components that are based on data and are proactive in nature. To explore relationships between school counselor supervision and programmatic orientation, 188 school counselors answered questions regarding the presence of supervision elements and programmatic orientation levels. Results indicated that higher levels of programmatic orientation were associated with higher presence of supervision elements.

Keywords: programmatic orientation; school counseling, school counselor supervision

Factors Associated With Programmatic Orientation and Supervision in Schools

Using data to inform a school counseling program's operation is an ongoing phenomenon at the local, state, and national levels (Paolini & Topdemir, 2013; Whiston, Tai, Rahardia, & Eder, 2011). Programmatic orientation is the level of intentional implementation of school counseling programs that are proactive and data driven rather than programs that are a compilation of reactive services (Clemens, Carey, & Herrington, 2010). The focus of these programs should be intentional and data driven. Young and Kaffenberger (2011) noted that the implementation of data-based school counseling programs increased school counselors' beliefs and practices about the use of data. One of the main functions of the school counselor is the development and implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2014). Despite this professional expectation, school counselors have been slow to transition to a programmatic orientation (Studer, Diambra, Breckner, & Heidel, 2011). Professional development efforts sponsored by district and school counseling associations have been somewhat effective in assisting school counselors with understanding the importance of using data but have not necessarily increased their actual use of data (Holcomb-McCoy, Gonzalez, & Johnston, 2009; Wilkerson, Perusse, & Hughes, 2013). For example, in one survey of accountability practices in schools, only about one-third of over 1,000 school counselors reported that they sometimes collect data or use accountability measures (Paolini, 2012). In an effort to increase school counselors' use of data, decrease role confusion, and promote clear program responsibilities, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) developed a national model, which is a

framework used in many school counseling programs. However, despite this resource, implementing best practices continues to be a challenge for school counselors (Astramovich, Hoskins, Gutierrez, & Bartlett, 2013). In recognition of ongoing professional issues, many professional organizations have worked to address the challenges faced by school counselors.

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) created a set of standards to ensure school counselors receive education and training in developing evidence-based practices for diverse populations, emphasizing academic outcomes, and identifying and removing personal and systemic barriers to academic achievement (CACREP, 2016). In addition, the Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI) was created to restructure school counselor education and training in some university training programs (Martin, 2002). TSCI was established as an articulation of the attitudes, skills, and knowledge that professional school counselors need to successfully transition from pre-service to practice (Dahir & Stone, 2006). Although ASCA, CACREP, and TSCI have been providing direction and unification in school counselor training and role functionality, practicing school counselors need support in post-degree professional development and professional practices that reflect intentionality. Systematic transformation requires intentional articulation between stakeholders (Dahir & Stone, 2006). Counseling education programs may not be enough to help newly graduated school counselors implement their school counseling programs with intentionality. A period of post-degree counseling experience and supervision (typically two years) is required for counseling professionals working toward professional certification to practice in other specialty areas of

counseling except school counseling (National Board of Certified Counselors [NBCC], n.d.). Furthermore, research continues to emphasize the importance of supervision in any counselor's professional development, yet school counselors seem to be behind other groups within the counseling profession in integrating supervision into their professional routine (Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2012). Therefore, counselors' duties are often incongruent with the framework of the ASCA model (Ross & Herrington, 2006), which is built on the use of data to drive school counseling programs. Despite this best practice, school counselors have reported feeling uncomfortable analyzing data (Paolini, 2012). It has been noted that supervision can be an effective means to strengthen school counselors' skills and enhance their competence (Herlihy, Gray, & McCollum, 2002). Although ASCA does not mandate school counseling supervision, it outlines the integration of effective supervision in the implementation and continuous improvement of comprehensive school counseling programs (ASCA, 2017).

Three types of supervision are available for school counselors (Dunn, 2004). Counseling (clinical) supervision, provided by trained counseling supervisors, focuses on counseling topics such as case conceptualization, interventions, and the counseling processes. Administrative supervision, provided by a school administrator, focuses on compliance with laws and policies, attendance, inter-departmental cohesion, and job performance. Program management supervision, provided by district coordinators, focuses on program topics such as program development, management, and accountability. All three types of supervision are important for school counselors because they collectively address the nature of the school counselor's job (Dunn, 2004; Dollarhide & Miller, 2006; Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2012). Of the three types of

supervision available to school counselors, administrative supervision has been identified throughout research as the most common type of supervision that school counselors receive (Roberts & Borders, 1994; Page, Pietrzak, & Sutton, 2001; Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2012). In a recent survey, over half of school counselors (62.8%) reported that they receive administrative supervision (Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2012). However, given that administrators are educated from a different professional background, administrative supervision may be a source of frustration and confusion for school counselors. Administrative supervision is needed and is an important part of professional development for counselors (Herlihy et al., 2002). Because administrative supervision is typically the only source of supervision provided to school counselors, it has the potential for promoting the use of data in designing school counseling programs; however, there does not appear to be any research that studies whether administrative supervision enhances school counselor use of data.

Demonstrating the effectiveness of school counseling interventions is important in this era of evidence-based practices (Whiston et al., 2011). Furthermore, school counselors should ensure that they create a data driven, comprehensive school counseling program (Dollarhide, Smith, & Lemberger, 2007). Becoming more programmatically oriented to using data more often and more effectively can impact professional practices of school counselors (Topdemir, 2013) and supervision might help school counselors in that regard (Paolini, 2012). There have been many proposed school counseling supervision models over time (Borders, 1991; Henderson & Lampe, 1992; Luke & Bernard, 2006) and although researchers rarely agree on how counselors are supervised, most counselors and counselor educators accept that it should be

continuous (Dollarhide & Miller, 2006; Oberman, 2005). To explore this further, frequency of supervision as well as the presence of supervision elements were factors of this study.

Purpose of the Study

An effective school counselor meets measurable objectives and skills through the implementation and development of the school counseling core curriculum addressing all students' needs based on student data (ASCA, 2014). However, many school counselors seem to have difficulty in this area. Much of the literature relating to school counselor accountability has cited the lack of school counselors' ability and interest to evaluate their counseling services (Young & Kaffenberger, 2011; Paolini, 2012).

It is essential for school counselors to demonstrate their direct impact on student development so that they may be valued as critical to the educational process. Although accountability is at the forefront of the counseling profession (Dahir & Stone, 2006; Whiston et al., 2011), studies indicate that school counselors currently practicing in school settings continue to face many challenges and barriers against fostering student development such as lack of clinical support, high student to counselor ratios, and the burden of non-counseling responsibilities (Paolini & Topdemir, 2013). Despite these challenges, school counselors are expected to deliver a multifaceted school counseling program that consists of a school guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and system support (ASCA, 2014). With such a diversity of delivery mechanisms, supervision may be helpful to the practices of accountability and the provision of school counseling services to all stakeholders (Herlihy et al., 2002). Therefore, the author of this study sought to determine the relationship between the

frequency of supervision, supervision elements, and programmatic orientation levels of practicing school counselors.

Method

Participants

Participants were part of a random national sample selected from the ASCA emailing list. A total of 188 participants completed all questions and their data were used in all subsequent analyses. Participants ranged from 24-55 years of age ($M = 40.80$, $SD = 9.95$) and most were women (88.8%). In terms of ethnicity, the majority of participants reported Caucasian (83.0%). Other ethnicities reported were African American (9.57%), American Indian (9.57%), Hispanic (5.32%), and other (2.13%). Most participants reported earning a master's degree (85.64%) while other degrees earned were specialist degree (8.51%) and doctoral degree (5.85%). Years of experience as a classroom teacher ranged from zero to more than 5 years and 40% of the participants had zero years of teaching experience. Years of experience as a school counselor ranged from less than one year to more than 20 years, while most of the participants had two years of experience as a school counselor. Consequently, most participants were beginning school counselors. In addition, most participants reported employment in a suburban setting (39.36%), with the remaining reporting employment in rural settings (34.04%) and urban settings (26.60%).

Procedure

After approval from an institutional review board (IRB) was granted, the survey was initially sent out electronically to ASCA members via an on-line email with a link to an anonymous data collection service. Upon linking to the survey, all participants

provided informed consent. One week later a reminder was sent, and a second email was also sent to solicit participation from additional ASCA members. Upon initiation of the survey, participants were required to self-report that they were currently employed as a school counselor. If they were not, they were not eligible to proceed with survey completion.

Measures

The School Counseling Program Implementation Survey (Clemens et al., 2010) was designed to assess different aspects of the ASCA National Model, including program implementation, programmatic orientation, school counseling services, and school counselor use of computer software. Participants rate 20 statements related to their school-counseling program (1 = *Not Present*, 2 = *Development in Progress*, 3 = *Partly Implemented*, 4 = *Fully Implemented*). The programmatic orientation subscale used in this study, consisted of seven items related to the participants' intentions to use data when implementing school counseling programs. Items are summed so that higher scores indicate more programmatic orientation and Cronbach's alpha for the subscale was .79.

The Dunn Supervision Scale (DSS) for school counselor supervisors and supervisees (Dunn, 2004) is structured as 43 items with 16 additional demographic questions. The three subscales assess frequency of elements of counseling (clinical supervision, administrative supervision, and program management supervision (e.g., supervisor includes ethical and legal issues in discussions of student problems)). With Dunn's permission, the 5-point rating scale descriptors were modified from importance to frequency (1 = *Always Happens*, 2 = *Occasionally Happens*, 3 = *Sometimes*

Happens, 4 = *Rarely Happens*, 5 = *Never Happens*) for clarity across instruments. Items are summed, so that lower scores indicate higher presence of supervision elements. To determine reliability and validity, the survey was administered to 70 school counselors in a pilot study. Cronbach's alphas for the three subscales were .91, .85, and .87, respectively (Dunn, 2004). Present Cronbach alphas are .98, .95, and .97 for counseling (clinical) supervision, administrative supervision, and program management supervision, respectively.

In the demographics section, participants reported how they acquired formal training of the ASCA National Model. They also reported how frequently they use ASCA National Model components (1 = *Always*, 2 = *Almost Always*, 3 = *Sometimes*, 4 = *Almost Never*, 5 = *Never*), and how frequently they receive the three types of school counselor supervision (1 = *Daily*, 2 = *Weekly*, 3 = *Biweekly*, 4 = *Monthly*, 5 = *Quarterly*, 6 = *Semesterly*, 7 = *Annually*).

Results

Descriptive statistics were used in this study as well as a Pearson product-moment correlation to determine the relationships between supervision frequency, supervision elements, and levels of programmatic orientation. Data screening was also conducted to determine whether there are any missing or invalid data. SPSS was used to report frequencies for all variables.

ASCA National Model Training and Utilization

Most participants (86.7%) reported receiving some sort of formal training on the ASCA National Model. How they got this training varied. Over half (108; 57.45%) of the participants received training as a part of their master's program (See Table 1).

Table 1*How ASCA National Model Training was Received*

How Received	Frequency	Percentage*
I have never received formal training	25	13.30
State conference	66	35.11
ASCA conference	43	22.87
School-based professional development	56	29.79
Post degree supervision	05	2.66
Master's level course content	108	57.45
Workshop or seminar	56	29.79
Peer consultation and collaboration	52	27.66
Research and reading	73	38.83

Note. *Participants could select more than one answer; therefore, percentages total more than 100%.

Although participants indicated receiving training, Table 2 shows that utilization of the ASCA National Model components were reported as only sometimes, or almost never (42.02%).

Table 2*Sample Population Frequencies, ASCA National Model Utilization Frequency*

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Always	32	17.02
Almost always	74	39.36
Sometimes	67	35.64
Almost never	12	6.38
Never	3	1.60

Note. N= 188

Programmatic Orientation

Programmatic Orientation scores ranged from 7 to 28 ($M = 18.17$, $SD = 5.72$). Thus, participants typically said that their school counseling program implementation was *in progress* to *partially implemented*.

Supervision Frequency

Programmatic orientation had a low but statistically significant correlation with frequency of receiving administrative supervision, $r(N = 188) = .14$, $p = .05$, but not with frequency of receiving counseling (clinical) supervision or program management supervision (see Table 3). As would be expected, the three types of supervision were highly correlated with each other ($r_s = .81$ to $.94$).

Supervision Elements and Programmatic Orientation

In the analysis of the relationship between counseling (clinical) supervision and programmatic orientation, there was a moderately positive correlation between counseling (clinical) supervision experiences of practicing school counselors and programmatic orientation ($r = .46$, $p = .00$), indicating that as favorability of counseling (clinical) supervision experiences increased, programmatic orientation moderately increased.

Additionally, in the analysis of the relationship between administrative supervision and programmatic orientation, there was a low moderate positive correlation between administrative supervision experiences of practicing school counselors and programmatic orientation ($r = .38$, $p = .00$), indicating that as favorability of administrative supervision experiences increased, programmatic orientation moderately increased.

Lastly, Table 3 shows that in the analysis of the relationship between program management supervision and programmatic orientation there was a moderately positive correlation between program management supervision experiences of practicing school counselors and programmatic orientation ($r = .46, p = .00$). This indicates that as favorability of program supervision experiences increased, programmatic orientation moderately increased.

Table 3

Correlations of Programmatic Orientation, Supervision, and Frequency

Correlations	Supervision				Frequency			
	Program Orient (PO)	Counseling (CC)	Admin (A)	Program Mgmt (P)	Using ASCA	Rcvd CC	Rcvd A	Rcvd P
Program Orientation (PO)	1	-.459*	-.38*	-.46*	-.58*	-.09	-.07	-.14**
Counseling (CC)		1	.81*	.94*	.33*	.44*	.39*	.43*
Admin (A)			1	.82*	.19*	.40*	.40*	.39*
Program Management (P)				1	.32*	.45*	.38*	.39*
Frequency Using ASCA					1	.02	.06	.13
Frequency Received CC						1	.32*	.39*
Frequency Received A							1	.50*
Frequency Received P								1
<i>M</i>	18.17	71.51	28.47	33.27				
<i>SD</i>	(5.72)	(27.27)	(10.09)	(13.73)				

Note. $N = 188$; PO = Programmatic Orientation; * $p = .001$; ** $p = .05$

Discussion

The results of this study were similar to previous studies conducted over the past 25 years (Roberts & Borders, 1994; Page, Pietrzak, & Sutton, 2001; Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2012), so that supervision seems to be consistent across time from before to after training and implementation of the ASCA National Model. Supervision frequency of any type did not drastically impact programmatic orientation. Most of these school counselors indicated that they were currently receiving some administrative (86.7%) and program management supervision (63.3%). About half indicated that they were receiving counseling (clinical) supervision (44.15%). However, as found in earlier research results, supervision of any type was infrequent, with any type of supervision happening once per month or less.

There are several possible explanations for the finding that any type of supervision frequency did not drastically impact programmatic orientation. First, time restraints in the school setting may mean that school counselors have very little time that would allow the incorporation of frequent supervision. For example, the school counselors in this study reported, on average, receiving counseling (clinical) supervision and program management supervision as seldom as once per semester or once per year. Second, school counselors in this study may have no perceived need for supervision. In one survey, counselors indicated no need for supervision (Page, Pietrzak, & Sutton, 2001). In another, Herlihy et al. (2002) suggested that many school counselors see their skills as adequate and therefore are in no need of improvement. School counselors may gain knowledge through other educational means. For example,

school counselors in this study reported learning about program intentionality from a variety of sources (e.g., workshops, conferences, professional development).

Although supervision was infrequent among these practicing school counselors, programmatic orientation increased as the presence of supervision elements increased. This association held regardless of whether the supervision was counseling (clinical), administrative, or program management. As noted by Dunn, (2004) all three types of supervision are important for school counselors and are necessary because they comprehensively address the nature of the school counselor's job. This study demonstrated a positive correlation ($r = .46$) between the experiences of all three types of supervision and intentionality in school counseling program implementation. Consequently, the results suggest that the *presence* of any type of supervision has more of an effect on programmatic orientation than the *frequency* of supervision.

Implications for Counselor Educators

The findings from this study suggest several important implications for school counselor preparation programs. The results imply that graduate-level counseling programs should continue to incorporate the ASCA model in school counseling course content. Professional development opportunities provided by school districts and school counseling associations have been somewhat helpful in assisting school counselors to understand the importance of using data, but they have not necessarily increased their actual use of data (Young & Kaffenberger, 2011). Of the school counselors surveyed in this study, 57.45% indicated that they received formal training in the ASCA model in graduate school course content; however, 43.62% of the participants reported *never* to *sometimes* using the components of the ASCA model. These results indicate that

although graduate programs are training new counselors to be programmatically oriented, there is still inconsistency with actual implementation and maintenance of intentional data-driven programs in schools.

Implications for the School Counselor Supervisors

School counselor supervisors should be encouraged to fulfill supervisory roles. This study showed that when support is available for school counselors, it is sometimes provided by school counselors with no specialized training as counseling supervisors. Of the 44.15% of the participants in this study who reported receiving (clinical) counseling supervision, 32.45% reported that supervision was provided by a fellow school counselor. Additionally, program management supervision is commonly provided in conjunction with counseling (clinical) supervision. To ensure continued enhancement of program management skills, supervisors should focus on assisting school counselors on collecting, interpreting, and implementing data. Findings indicated that 63.3% of the respondents were receiving program management supervision. Section two of the DSS asked participants to rate 11 items related to program management and professional development supervision (Dunn, 2004). When used in the current study:

- In response to Item 1, 37.23% reported that the supervisor rarely to never *provides time for reflection about school counseling program goals in the supervisory relationship;*
- In response to Item 6, 42.55% reported that the supervisor rarely to never *knows the district school counseling program and integrates the program into the supervision process;* and
- In response to Item 10, 47.34% reported that the supervisor rarely to never *guides me in understanding the impact of national and state laws on the practice of counseling.*

Although program management supervision is the second highest form of school counseling supervision provided in this study, school counselors rarely to never receive support in areas that focus specifically on developing and managing school counseling programs.

Implications for School Counselors and Future Research

Although administrative supervision was the most prevalent type of supervision provided, the results of this study indicated that it had the smallest impact on the intentionality of school counseling program implementation. In this study, 55.85% of the respondents reported never receiving counseling (clinical) supervision and 36.70% reported never receiving program supervision. Since administrative supervision is often the only type of supervision provided, school counselors may need to advocate for and gain access to additional opportunities for supervision. Therefore, supervision may be more effective and have a larger impact on school counselor intentionality related to program implementation. Although the ASCA National Model provides a framework for school counselors to implement intentional counseling programs, the question remains as to whether counselors and administrators can agree that this model provides the best way for counselors to function within the school setting.

Future research should assess supervision in a comprehensive manner that includes all three forms of supervision, and the impact that appropriate supervision may have on school counselor identity development. It may be beneficial to compare the accountability practices of school counselors who graduated from a TSCI graduate program with those who graduated from graduate programs unaffiliated with TSCI. It would also be helpful to study the school counseling program implementation factors

and accountability practices of new school counselors. Understanding these factors and practices would help prioritize ways to improve school counselor supervision and supervisor training. Finally, future research could focus on exploring the transition of new counselors from the training to the profession, especially as it relates to accountability practices and the continuation of supervision.

Limitations

Like all studies, this study has its limitations, particularly related to the sampling procedures, the attitudes of participants, and generalizability of the results. The researcher had to rely on self-report data from participants. Therefore, survey results are reflective of personal beliefs and interpretations. Online survey completion may have been subject to distractions and interruptions. As a result, survey results may have been affected. Although the researcher tried to sample populations from diverse groups/organizations, not all groups are represented. Those school counselors who chose to complete the survey may have responded to the survey differently than those ASCA school counselors who did not choose to complete the survey. Many school counselors do not belong to the ASCA, nor did every ASCA counselor member list his or her email in the member directory. Therefore, this survey was sent to those school counselors who had their emails listed in the ASCA member directory.

This study excluded feedback from retired counselors, school counselors who are no longer working as school counselors, and graduate students completing their internships. Attitudes toward and the accuracy of self-reporting were additional limitations because responses may have been biased to reflect a respondent's perceptions rather than actual practice. Furthermore, the format of the survey was a

limitation. For example, two potential participants emailed to clarify if they should participate because they did not experience supervision. It is safe to assume that other potential participants may have believed that having current supervision experience was required to participate in the survey, which may have led to a reduction in participation. Therefore, future surveys should clearly state what qualifies for participation in the directions section. Although it was stated that the survey was for practicing school counselors, there seemed to be slight confusion about qualifying for this research study. Despite the limitations, the school counselors responding to the survey had a wide range of years of school counseling experience, exposure to supervision, and ASCA model training.

Lastly, the length of the survey was a limitation. Out of 371 participants who attempted to complete the survey questions, 188 fully completed the survey. Therefore, it may be assumed that survey length was cause for smaller population sample size. Consequently, these limitations challenge the generalization of the study's finding to the larger population of school counselors.

Conclusion

This study revealed that although the frequency of supervision has little to no significance, the presence of supervision elements increases programmatic orientation. This finding supports the notion that all three types of supervision are important for school counselors because they comprehensively address the nature of the school counselor's job (Dunn, 2004; Dollarhide & Miller, 2006; Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2012). Although not a mandate for school counselors, supervision is considered a necessary

service that prevents deterioration in counseling skills, strengthens professional identity, and promotes ethical school counseling practices.

As the profession continues to evolve, school counselors must effectively accomplish a multitude of tasks in a comprehensive manner with or without the support of trained supervisors. This is best accomplished through the implementation of data-informed school counseling programs. Failure to do so may lead to unfulfilled expectations and role conflict. Therefore, in order to clarify their role as school leaders and to establish themselves as critical stakeholders, it is imperative for school counselors to demonstrate program effectiveness and to advocate for the acquisition of effective supervision and support.

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