Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences Consulting with School Counselors: A Qualitative Study

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES CONSULTING WITH SCHOOL COUNSELORS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

School counselor–teacher consultation is an efficient strategy for school counselors to indirectly serve students on their caseload. Teachers' perceptions are crucial in examining this consultation process. This qualitative study examined elementary school teachers' perceptions and experiences of school counselor–teacher consultation. The researchers identified three themes: (a) school counselors prioritizing relationships, (b) school counselors taking initiative, and (c) school counselors' specialization. The researchers discuss implications for school counseling practice, including strategies for facilitating consultation with teachers.

lthough the recommended student-to-school-counselor ratio is 250:1 (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012a), the national average is closer to 491:1 (Glander, 2015). School counselors report not having enough time to serve their students directly given their numerous assigned responsibilities (Carlson & Kees, 2013). However, school counselors can maximize their ability to reach more students in less time by consulting with teachers: indirectly reaching students through the teacher (Baker, Robichaud, Dietrich, Wells, & Schreck, 2009; Dinkmeyer, Carlson, & Michel, 2016; Stone & Dahir, 2016). Further, consultation is a key component of comprehensive school counseling programs, including the ASCA National Model, and is a strategy to impact students' academic and personal/social development (ASCA, 2012a; Gysbers & Henderson, 2012).

Nationally, school counselors reported engaging frequently in consultation with teachers (Goodman-Scott, 2015; Perera-Diltz, Moe, & Manson, 2011). However, the authors found only two studies that examined teachers' perspectives and experiences of school counselor–teacher consultation (i.e., Beesley, 2004; Warren, 2013); both studies lack a detailed description of the general consultation process. Teachers are integral in school counselor–teacher consultation, and

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understanding their perceptions may provide school counselors with insight to enhance their consultative work with teachers. In this article, the researchers present a qualitative thematic analysis (*N* = 17) examining elementary school teachers' perceptions and experiences consulting with school counselors.

SCHOOL COUNSELOR CONSULTATION

School counselors consult with adult stakeholders, including parents/care-givers, teachers, and administrators, to facilitate student achievement and systemic change, and to promote equity (ASCA, 2012a; Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). Consultation is a process between (a) a consultant with a specialty and (b) a consultee requesting help regarding a work problem aligned with the consultants' specialty area (Caplan, 1970). In the last 20 years, there has been a shift in the school counseling profession from expert consultation models to more collaborative consultation. The latter views the consultant and consultee as co-experts with shared responsibility and decision making (Dinkmeyer et al., 2016; Keys, Bemak, Carpenter, & King-Sears, 1998). Through consultation, school counselors facilitate change at the individual, classroom, and school level, and impact student success (Erford, 2015).

al Model identifies consultation as an integral indirect service within the delivery system of a comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2012a), and several ASCA school counselor competencies address consultation activities (ASCA, 2012b). The CACREP 2016 school counseling standards also emphasize preparation in school-based consultation theories, approaches, and strategies, and specify consultation with P-12 teachers (CACREP, 2015).

Teacher Consultation

As part of a comprehensive school counseling program, teacher consultation is an efficient, systemic strategy for school counselors to impact students' academic and personal success (Sink, 2008; Stone & Dahir, 2016). In fact, teacher consultation enables school counselors to reach more students than individual or group counseling (Brigman, Mullis, Webb, & White, 2005). Through consultation, school counselors utilize their problem-solving, behavior management, and communication skills, and their understanding of students with social/emotional issues, to assist teachers with classroom management and teacher–student interactions (Dinkmeyer et al., 2016; Sink, 2008). The compounded effect of school counselor–teacher consultation can result in teachers acquiring knowledge, skills, and awareness to prevent or more effectively facilitate future challenges (Brown et al., 2011; Stone & Dahir, 2016). Thus, by consulting with one teacher and equipping him or her

teachers (Goodman-Scott, 2015; Perera-Diltz et al., 2011). According to Perera-Diltz, Moe, and Mason (2011), 79% of the school counselors in their sample reported engaging in consultation; of those who consulted, 79% indicated often or always consulting with teachers. Similarly, in a national study of school counselors, Goodman-Scott (2015) found that participants rated consultation with school staff concerning student behavior as their most frequent job activity in running a comprehensive school counseling program. In comparison to numerous professional counseling skills (e.g., individual or group counseling), school counselors reported having the highest confidence in their consultation skills compared to all other skills (Carlson & Kees, 2013).

School counselor consultation is particularly important at the elementary school level. Historically, school counselors report perceptions and job activities varying by educational level (e.g., elementary, middle and high; Dahir, Burnham, & Stone, 2009; Rayle & Adams, 2008). For example, a sample of elementary school counselors reported spending greater time in teacher consultation/collaboration activities, compared to middle and high school counselors (Rayle & Adams, 2008). Thus, examining school counseling consultation at the elementary level may provide especially salient examples of the phenomenon.

Teacher perceptions. Although an important stakeholder group, minimal research exists on teachers' perceptions of school counselor consultation. Beesley (2004) found that 71% of teachers rated school counselor consultation as *somewhat adequate* to *extremely adequate*, and half of the participants listed consultation as one of their school counseling program's strengths. Warren (2013) qualitatively explored teachers' reactions to their experiences in a six-session, Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) school counselor-led group consultation. As a result of the consultation, the teachers reported that they felt improvements in their personal and professional relationships, as well as increased well-being.

> SCHOOL COUNSELOR—TEACHER CONSULTATION CAN RESULT IN TEACHERS ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND AWARENESS TO PREVENT OR MORE EFFECTIVELY FACILITATE FUTURE CHALLENGES.

A number of professional organizations emphasize the school counselor's role as consultant, including ASCA (2012a, 2012b) and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP; 2015). For example, the ASCA Nation-

with a new skill set, school counselors can potentially impact all students in that teacher's classes (Stone & Dahir, 2016).

School counselor perceptions. The limited research suggests that school counselors frequently consult with

As consultation includes collaboration, some research on collaboration and teaming also relates to the current study. For example, teachers ranked teaming and collaboration as the most important of the five domains of the Education Trust's Transforming School Counseling Initiative (Perkins, Oescher, & Ballard, 2010). Clark and Amatea (2004) conducted a qualitative study of teacher's perceptions of school counseling services, delivery methods, and teacher's expectations of working with school counselors; they found that teachers valued a strong counselor relationship with good communication and collaboration. Similarly, Wood's (2012) phenomenological study exploring K-12 gifted teachers' and coordinators' experiences collaborating with school counselors found participants acknowledged school counselors' unique training, and emphasized good relationship based on communication. Of the existing qualitative studies on teachers' perspectives of school counselor consultation or collaboration, only one study addresses consultation specifically (Warren, 2013), and the others do so tangentially through collaboration.

School counselor–teacher consultation is a strategy to efficiently serve students and is particularly prevalent at the elementary level (Rayle & Adams, 2008). As such, elementary teachers' perspectives on school counselor–teacher consultation are imperative. Although numerous scholars discuss counselor–teacher consultation conceptually (e.g. Brigman et al., 2005; Brown et al., 2011; Dinkmeyer et al., 2016), little research exists regarding teachers' perceptions and experiences of school counselor–teacher consultation. Thus, the purpose of this study was to conduct a qualitative inquiry examining elementary teachers' perspectives on school counselor–teacher consultation to provide school counselors with insight to enhance their consultative work with teachers. The study was driven by the following research question: What are elementary teachers' perceptions and experiences of school counselor–teacher consultation?

METHOD

In alignment with qualitative traditions, we followed a social constructivist framework, a structure that emphasizes the subjective nature of reality and the importance of individuals' experiences and perceptions (Hays & Singh, 2012). In social constructivism, the researcher's goal is to "make sense of (or interpret) the meaning others have about the world" (Creswell, 2013, p. 25). Therefore, we used interviews to examine how participants understand and construct knowledge about counselor–teacher consultation based on their experiences (Creswell, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012). Further, the research team (the first three authors) utilized thematic analysis to identify and present patterns across participant data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Scholars assert that thematic analysis can be used as a standalone qualitative method, particularly for descriptive qualitative studies (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013).

which 89% of teachers are female and 81% are White (Goldring, Gray, & Bitterman, 2013). Participants ranged in age from 27 to 60 (M = 38 years). Participants ranged from 2 to 38 years of teaching experience (M = 15 years). Each was assigned a pseudonym.

Research Team
The research team consisted of three school counselor educators. The primary researcher was a 35-year-old, White female of European descent with 7 years experience as a counselor educator. The second researcher was a 35-year-old, White female of European descent with 2 years experience as a counselor educator and experience as an elementary school counselor and teacher. The third researcher was a 57-year-old, African American female with 20 years of experience as a counselor educator and as an elementary school counselor. The research team met prior to data analysis to bracket their assumptions (Hays & Singh, 2012) and discuss their interest in school counselor–teacher consultation. Some of these assumptions included the researchers' beliefs about the positive

PARTICIPANTS VALUED COUNSELORS ESTABLISHING RELATIONSHIPS WITH TEACHERS; THE ABSENCE OF SUCH EFFORTS COULD HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT.

Participants
The research team developed a purposeful convenience sample of participants who met the following inclusion criteria: elementary school teacher with at least 2 years of full-time teaching experience. The present study included 17 elementary school teachers employed in 17 different elementary schools across six school districts in the Mid-Atlantic United States. Of these schools, 10 were located in areas classified as rural, four as city/urban, and three as suburban/town. All participants were female and identified as White/Caucasian (94%) or African American/Black (6%); this is comparable to national averages of elementary public school teachers in

value of counselor–teacher consultation, concerns about its underutilization, and perceptions that teachers may lack understanding about how consultation with the counselor might be helpful. The researchers' varied experiences and perceptions regarding consultation led to rich conversations and challenging biases throughout the process, and strengthened the data analysis.

Data Collection and Procedures
The research team modeled the current study's data collection procedures after a study conducted by Clark and Amatea (2004) in which graduate students interviewed teachers as part of a class assignment. In the current study, recorded interviews were col-

lected by master's level school counseling students (*N* = 17) as part of a consultation assignment in the primary researcher's *Counseling Children and Adolescents* course; the primary researcher trained the student researchers and supervised data collection. To increase consistency across interviewers, student interviewers participated in a training regarding the research process, informed consent, and qualitative interviewing. Training included didactic information, instructor role modeling, student role playing, and feedback to ensure students had information and practice regarding informed consent and data collection. This training built upon the student interviewers' preparation the previous semester in a course taught by the third author, in which students conducted interviews and were required to probe for interviewee expansion.

After Institutional Review Board approval, the interviewers collected data through demographic forms and audio recorded individual interviews. The interview protocol included questions such as, "There are a lot of ways to define consultation. How do you define consultation? "Tell me about your experiences consulting with a school counselor," "For what type of reasons have you sought consultation with a school counselor?" and "What do you see as the most important characteristics of a successful consultation process?" Interviews were transcribed by a secure transcription service and then checked for accuracy to ensure interview protocols were followed.

To ensure uniformity across interviews, and as suggested by Patton (2015) when using multiple interviewers, students utilized a standardized, open-ended interview protocol.

Bordonada, Griffith, & Sherrell, 2016). Similarly, according to Kvale (2007), qualitative interview length depends on the topic and purpose of the interview, and there is no appropriate or ideal interview form: "if one knows what to ask for, why one is asking, and how to ask, one can conduct short interviews that are rich in meaning" (p. 79). Jacob and Furgerson (2012) encouraged researchers to consider participants' context when setting interview protocols and interview length. Elementary school teachers are required to be efficient with their time due to multiple demands, thus shorter interviews were deemed appropriate.

Data Analysis

The research team utilized Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach to thematic analysis: (a) immersing oneself in the data, (b) producing initial codes, (c) identifying themes, (d) reviewing and refining themes, (e) defining themes, and (f) presenting the results. Given the limited research surrounding teachers' perceptions of consultation with school counselors, the research team aimed to identify themes directly connected to the data through inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data analysis corresponded with the team's social constructivist framework, insomuch as the researchers allowed the themes to emerge based on the participants' experiences with consultation. This process aligned with the team's aim to synthesize and present an array of perceptions of the phenomena, not a singular, objective, or predetermined truth (Creswell, 2013).

To begin, the research team engaged in the first two steps of Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach. We independently familiarized ourselves with three transcripts by reading them repeatedly and then coded the transcripts. Next, we met to discuss codes and reach consensus on code application. The team developed initial code definitions and started a codebook depicting the data, noting how codes related to each other. Then we completed a similar process for the resulting 14 transcripts, in

SCHOOL COUNSELOR AVAILABILITY AND VISIBILITY LED TO TEACHERS INITIATING AND REQUESTING CONSULTATION.

The average age of the interviewers was 24; 82.4% identified as female and 17.6% as male; 76.5% identified as White, 11.8% identified as Asian/Pacific Islander, 5.8% as African American, and 5.8% as Latino/Hispanic. Simultaneous with data collection, the students were enrolled in practicum at an elementary school. Thus, students identified one teacher at their practicum site who met the participant inclusion criteria. The inclusion criterion helped increase the likelihood that potential participants had an opportunity to consult with a school counselor during the two-year period. Consequently, the sample was both purposeful, given the criterion, and convenient, given the graduate students' practicum placements. Students recruited teachers via email or personal contact by the site supervisor and/or the graduate student. Teacher participation was voluntary and master's students' participation in the study was also voluntary, without penalty to their course grade.

Interviewers asked the participants all questions in the same order, and used limited probing (Patton, 2015). Standardization helps focus interviews in situations where it is only possible to conduct qualitative interviews for a "short, fixed time" (Patton, 2015, p. 441), such as a busy school setting. Similarly, Rubin and Rubin (1995) noted that focused interviews allow interviewers to gain information from those "who may have limited time for an interview" (p. 200). The majority of the interviews averaged approximately 20 minutes, in which participants were given the opportunity to exhaust their description of school counselor–teacher consultation. With regard to interview length, thematic analysis is a flexible approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) that has been used in a range of school counseling-related studies, including with brief interviews of 10-20 minutes in length (Davis, Pereira, & Dixon, 2015), for open-ended survey questions (Berger, 2013), and for high school seniors' essays (Ohrt, Limberg,

which at least two research team members read and coded each transcript independently, reached consensus on codes together, and discussed discrepancies. Halfway through this process, an external auditor reviewed the codes, the excerpts and notes on the potential relationships among the codes, and the audit trail. The auditor provided feedback, noting weak or unclear codes, and offered alternative interpretations (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

Congruent with Braun and Clarke's (2006) third and fourth steps, the team continued searching the codes for themes and patterns, and grouped codes into themes and subthemes. Correspondingly, the research team organized the excerpts by codes and themes to ensure themes were true across multiple participants. We reviewed and modified codes and themes, and discussed the relationships among larger themes. In the fifth step, the research team assigned final definitions to themes and subthemes, creating a codebook that included definitions for codes, subthemes, and themes reached through consensus. After this, the auditor reviewed the codebook and provided feedback on themes and codes, and on the corresponding definitions and excerpts; the team made adjustments accordingly. The research team members met over 28 times throughout the data analysis process. The sixth and final step was writing the results.

Trustworthiness
The research team employed several trustworthiness strategies to increase the rigor of the study. Specifically, we maintained an extensive audit trail detailing the study's development, data collection, and analysis, as well as themes, subthemes, codes, and teacher excerpts (Hays & Singh, 2012). An external auditor reviewed the audit trail and codebook three times to verify systematic data analysis (Creswell, 2013), posing clarifying questions and ensuring that excerpts matched the codes, that codes aligned with the themes, and that the themes related to the research question. The research team incorporated the feedback into

the analysis. We utilized investigator triangulation through the use of a research team, engaged in many in-depth research meetings, and built consensus regarding the description of the participants' experiences (Hays & Singh, 2012). Finally, we routinely engaged in bracketing our assumptions individually and as a team, completed reflexive journals, maintained meeting memos, and reported the methods and results using a thick description (Hays & Singh, 2012).

FINDINGS

We determined three themes that described participants' perceptions and experiences with school counselor–teacher consultation: (a) school counselors prioritizing relationships, (b) school counselors taking initiative, and (c) school counselors' specialization.

School Counselors Prioritizing Relationships
The participants emphasized the value of school counselor relationships and how such relationships set the foundation for and facilitated the success of school counselor–teacher consultation. Specifically, the teachers described the intentionality of establishing (a) counselor–teacher relationships (b) counselor–student relationships, and (c) collaboration and communication.

Establishing counselor–teacher relationships. Participants appreciated positive interpersonal interactions between themselves and the school counselor, highlighting the impact of the counselor "developing personal relationships with the teacher" (Carla). Samantha noted how an existing relationship can enhance the likelihood of consultation, "I think building a relationship…

so that when something does happen, the teacher is able to say, 'Hey, wait a minute. I know where to go.'" She continued, "You have to know the person. You've got to trust the person." Beyoncé indicated that school counselors' establishing these relationships is not easy, "You need to have conversations with people one on one. That's how you get to know anybody. It can take a while… that's the hard work." Overall, participants valued counselors establishing relationships with teachers; the absence of such efforts could have a negative impact. As Grace noted, "not feeling a connection with the counselor" could impede her desire to consult.

Focusing on counselor–student relationships. According to participants, the school counselors' prioritization of students influences teachers' perceptions and experiences of school counselor consultation. Participants stated that it is crucial for counselors to create strong relationships with students and "make themselves very available for students" (Regina). For example, Beyoncé described, "Positive rapport with children goes a long way towards how I view the relationship between myself and the counselor." The centrality of the student extended to the consultation itself, as participants indicated they valued child-centered consultation. Specifically, Kate emphasized "both hav[ing] the same goal, to help the child," while Lynne stated almost identically, "all of us working together for

the success of the child." In summary, teachers appreciated when school counselors emphasized student relationships and demonstrated that "they are really, truly concerned and want to know how the child's doing" (Janelle).

Collaboration and communication. Participants described specific school counselor actions that enhance their relationship and consultation success:

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collaboration and effective communication, including validation. Participants shared that successful consultation often consists of mutual collaboration in which the school counselor and teacher "help each other and help the child" (Desiree). Carla reported that successful consultation occurred when the teacher and school counselor "both identified, 'here's the problem' and then just being on the same page with here's where we want that kid to go and here's the route that we're gonna go to get there." In conjunction with collaboration, the teachers emphasized school counselor–teacher communication. Kate described aspects of communication, including "just listening and feedback, and I guess willingness to hear each other out." Other participants noted the importance of the school counselors having "clear and consistent communication with the staff" (Regina) and for counselors to "keep us [teachers] in the loop" (Carla).

ment in consultation through school counselors' (a) being available and visible, (b) offering services and education, (c) equipping the teacher, and (d) following through and following up.

Being available and visible. One of the most prevalent actions emphasized by participants in relation to consultation was the school counselor being available to teachers by "just having an open-door policy" (Ann). Janelle shared the significance of the school counselor conveying, "an open-door policy type thing. Whenever you need to come in, come in." Grace said that successful consultation is timely, "I don't expect someone to be available to me right when I need them to be, but for it to happen within a timely manner." The school counselors' availability also included his or her presence and visibility within the school building. Elizabeth noted, "It's important that his [school counselor] presence is seen, that people know him…it's not this mystery person in a room down the

to sit down and talk about this child.' It's just been whenever there's been an opportunity." Thus, while participants recognized that school counselors are busy, they valued when counselors were "easy to contact" and as "easy to be found as possible" (Whitney); this availability often facilitated teachers initiating impromptu consultations.

Offering services and education. Participants preferred to engage in school counselor consultation when school counselors proactively offered services and education. As Beyoncé noted, offering services could be as simple as "putting it out there that you're [school counselor] willing to be of support" or, as Samantha stated, "Just stopping in… reminding teachers that, 'Hey, you're not in this alone.'" Participants shared that offering services also involved "offer[ing] to work with that child" (Rachel) or informing teachers of group counseling options. Further, participants suggested that school counselors educate teachers on the school counselor's role. For example, Regina recommended the school counselor "initiating with teachers, especially if it's a newer teacher," and "share[ing] with them about how they can assist them." Kate named strategies, such as "presenting at a staff meeting and saying, 'These are the ways I can help you.' Or even making a Word document that says, 'This is how I can help you.'"

Equipping the teacher. During consultation, school counselors equipped teachers with valuable perspectives, resources, and information. Ann shared, "She [school counselor] always has like a new or fresh outlook." Regina described her counselor as "a good resource for teachers to use, especially helping with strategies to discuss with students." Often, school counselors and teachers discussed interventions; for instance, Brandi explained how she asked the school counselor, "What other strategies can we do with them so they can be successful with friends and to settle down to get their work done?" Also, Clare noted how, for a struggling student, "I talked to the counselor about that and then we worked together talking to her."

"I THINK THE COUNSELOR IS BETTER TRAINED AND EQUIPPED TO LOOK AT THOSE SOCIAL ISSUES AT HOME AND HELP THAT FAMILY IN A WAY THAT I CAN'T."

As an extension of effective communication, participants shared that they appreciated school counselors validating teachers. First, participants relayed that the counselor's listening and validating facilitated a positive relationship. Ann said that it starts with the counselor being "willing to take the time to listen to you," while Grace expanded that "the helpfulness is her [the school counselor] validating my frustrations or the things that I'm upset about." Like some of the other participants, Clare stressed validation when talking about successful consultation, "Feeling validated or feeling like your concerns are being heard…and not a burden."

School Counselors Taking Initiative
In the second theme, participants perceived that school counselors proactively encouraged teachers' engage-

hall." Whitney shared, "she's [school counselor] present. You can find her in the hall…in the cafeteria. She's working with the kids. She's always around."

School counselor availability and visibility led to teachers initiating and requesting consultation. For example, according to Desiree, "Mr. XX [school counselor] comes around every morning and says hello…you could always grab him if you wanted to." Other participants shared examples of how they initiated consultation. Grace conveyed, "I usually just open the door and take a seat," whereas Whitney would often "send an email…'I have a question. How could you help me with this?'" Similarly, participants communicated that many of their consultations tended to be impromptu and "on the fly" (Desiree) or a "catch up at the end of the day real quick" (Kate). Janelle stated, "It's not a formal, 'Let's schedule a time

Following through and following up. The teachers in the sample underscored the significance of school counselors' follow-through and follow-up with teachers, particularly during the consultative process. Beyoncé stated the importance of "following through with whatever you said you were going to do." Janelle shared, "I think follow-up on consultations, also, is a big one [feature]." Samantha stated, "Both sides need to follow through," and discussed the importance of following up and together asking, "Is this working? Are we doing what we're supposed to be doing?" Similarly, participants described school counselors' inaction as negatively impacting the consultation process. Clare summarized this sentiment: "If we report something or tell something, we don't always get to see if something comes of it. So it's kinda hard to feel like, well…did they [school counselors] do anything about it?" Likewise, Janelle shared that a barrier is "feeling like nothing happens when you do [trust the school counselor]."

School Counselor Specialization

The third theme highlights the participants' perception that school counselors possess a unique skill set, including (a) school counselor knowledge, and relatedly, participants' (b) preferred consultation topics and (c) non-preferred consultation topics.

School counselor knowledge. According to participants, school counselors possessed a range of knowledge unique to their profession. Regarding school counselors' expertise and training, Beyoncé shared, "They have a background that a regular classroom teacher doesn't have… I don't know what's mentally and developmentally appropriate for a third grader." Also, school counselors gave teachers a distinctive perspective. Samantha noted, "I think it's good to have another set of eyes. I think a counselor is good at seeing the emotional side of things." Similarly, Elizabeth shared, "I think the counselor is better trained and equipped to look at those social issues at home and help that family in a way that I can't."

School counselor knowledge included their longitudinal knowledge of, and ongoing relationships with, students and their families. Elizabeth emphasized that the school counselor's knowledge of the students' history can "paint [a] picture a little more clearly for me." Jane talked about her counselor's knowledge related to working with families, stating, "She's good at being able to talk with the families and dig into maybe a little bit more [about] what may be going on with the child." Sandy also noted, "Our school counselor has done an amazing job of reaching out to those families."

Preferred consultation topics. In light of their perceptions of school counselors' unique knowledge base, participants reported consulting with school counselors on a variety of topics, including student social/emotional, behavioral, family issues, and abuse and neglect. Most frequently, participants described consulting with the counselor on individual and class-wide social and/or emotional issues, namely anger management, self-esteem, emotional regulation, friendship, bullying, and stress. Brandi noted, "I think it's the social, emotional side that would affect me more to pull to collaborate with her." Kate shared relying on the school counselor because "if they're [the students] not in the right social or emotional state, then we can't expect the student to learn." Furthermore, the majority of participants indicated they had or would consult with the school counselor on behavior concerns. Ann stated, "I would probably seek out more behavioral concerns. That's what I usually seek her [school counselor] out for." Grace described consulting regarding challenging behaviors: "I go to [school counselor] to talk to her about ways I can deal with students who are challenging or frustrating me or are difficult."

Participants also mentioned consulting with the school counselor regarding students' challenging family situations,

such as "death in the family, divorce, someone moving or having moved in or moved out [of the home]" (Desiree). Furthermore, participants reported consulting about students' families and communicating with family members. For example, Elizabeth mentioned she leans on the school counselor when difficulties surface within students' families, "I know something's happened in the family, a father's been incarcerated, the child is arriving late every morning because there's a drinking problem in the home. And that's where I really need that extra support." Rachel said, "I feel like the teachers run to the counselor

MOST TEACHERS INDICATED THEY WOULD NOT CONSULT WITH SCHOOL COUNSELORS FOR ACADEMIC CONCERNS.

like, 'Help me. How do I do this [communicate with students' parents]? How do I approach it because we don't want to offend anybody?'"

Participants indicated that they depend on school counselors as their "go-to" for student abuse and neglect. Sandy stated, "If we notice any kind of neglect or child abuse…that's [school counselor] our first 'go to.'" Likewise, Janelle shared that in her school, "there's been a lot of suspected abuse of certain students. So I sit down and discuss that with [the school counselor]."

Non-preferred consultation topics. While acknowledging school counselors' specialized skill set, there were times participants sought out professionals other than the school counselor or relied on themselves to address academic and, at times, behavioral issues. Most teachers indicated they would not consult with school counselors for academic concerns. In fact, when asked specifically about consulting with the school counselor regarding academics, many responded with statements like "not really academic so much" (Lynn) or "probably less on the academics" (Brandi). Some teachers explained they relied on their own knowledge when it came to academics. For example, Regina stated, "most of the time I take care of academic concerns," and Rachel noted,

"Not so much for academic because… that's my realm first." However, when teachers did seek academic assistance, they chose other stakeholders rather than the school counselor. Rachel noted, "We have other things set aside for academic [issues]," and Jane stated, "We'll deal with those [academics] through the intervention team."

Although most participants indicated they would consult with school counselors regarding behavioral concerns, some teachers expressed handling behavior on their own or seeking assistance outside the school counselor. When talking about behavior problems, Elizabeth shared, "I don't need to go the counselor because we've worked it through." Others reported relying on other stakeholders: "If it's just strictly behavioral, it's usually administration that is called," (Whitney), or "We also have committees and programs among our county where we have interventions for behavior" (Rachel).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide a qualitative description of participating elementary teachers' perceptions and experiences of school counselor–teacher consultation. Participants described three themes: (a) school counselors prioritizing relationships, (b) school counselors taking initiative, and (c) school counselors' specialization. Such findings are noteworthy, as there has been limited qualitative research seeking teachers' voices regarding school counselor consultation. Specifically, the only qualitative consultation study involved a specific teacher REBT consultation group (Warren, 2013). To date, the profession relied on conceptual recommendations of renowned scholars in school counseling and consultation (e.g., Brigman et al.,

2005; Brown et al., 2011; Dinkmeyer et al., 2016; Stone & Dahir, 2016). This study adds empirical research and greater depth to the profession's knowledge on school counselor consultation, emphasizing the perceptions and experiences of a sample of elementary teachers.

School Counselors Prioritizing Relationships

In the first theme, participants perceived the school counselors' relationship with teachers and students as critical. Conceptual literature generally suggests the relationship is foundational to the consultation process (e.g., Brown et al., 2011; Dinkmeyer et al., 2016); the current study corroborates this but also provides more specific information about the relationship. For instance, participants noted that an existing relationship with the counselor served as a precursor for participants to consider school counselor consultation. Thus, according to participants, a strong counselor–teacher relationship prior to consultation could increase teachers' willingness to consult. Likewise, the participants noted an absence of such a relationship hindered their willingness to consult. Similarly, participants were more willing to consult when school counselors prioritize student relationships; this finding has been absent from prior related literature, and suggests a new counselor–teacher consultation dynamic to consider.

Next, participants described the importance of collaboration in order for successful school counselor–teacher consultation to occur: working together as a team to identify problems and corresponding interventions. Although there are several consultation models, school counseling scholars describe the benefits of a collaborative approach (e.g., Dinkymeyer et al., 2016; Keys

et al., 1998); however, this study is the first to assert teachers also prefer this collaborative approach. Further, participants value school counselor validation and effective, frequent communication, consistent with Clark and Amatea's (2004) and Woods' (2012) findings. At the same time, the current findings demonstrate these variables relate specifically to consultation, expanding prior knowledge. Hence, the school counseling profession now has greater insight into a sample of teachers' preferences regarding a collaborative approach to school counselor–teacher consultation, and the significance of two-way communication and intentional validation.

School Counselors Taking Initiative

The second theme highlights the teachers' perceptions of the specific proactive actions school counselors take to set the foundation for the consultative process. First, in previous studies, teachers reported valuing school counselor visibility and availability, generally (Clark & Amatea, 2004; Wood, 2012). In this study, participants noted the importance of visibility and availability in regard to consultation, specifically. They indicated that school counselor visibility and availability encouraged their desire to consult, a finding unique to the present study. This finding was evidenced further through the nature of teachers' consultation: teacher-initiated, informal, and spontaneous (e.g., a conversation when seeing the school counselor in the hallway). According to participants, school counselors' availability to meet when needed and to respond promptly enhanced the likelihood of consultation and participants' perception of successful consultation. Consequently, these findings extend the current literature by suggesting that school counselor visibility and availability was important, in a sample of elementary teachers, to facilitate counselor–teacher consultation.

When discussing consultation, many of the participants shared that teachers were unclear of the school counselors' role. This lack of clarity corresponds to

the traditionally varied role of school counselors, and recent efforts to provide a unified school counseling identity through the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012a; Stone & Dahir, 2016). The participants reported a greater willingness to consult when counselors proactively approached them to offer services and communicate their role. Hence, according to participants, there continues to be a need to educate teachers about the school counselor's role and how school counselors can assist teachers, as in consultation.

Finally, the participants described counselors' actions to equip teachers and how counselors need to follow through and follow up on teachers' and students' progress after consultation occurs. Participants explained that successful consultation included school counselors' follow-through with commitments/responsibilities and updating the teacher on school counselors' actions. Overall, the ASCA National Model (2012a) and comprehensive school counseling programs in general (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012) recommend school counselors offer proactive and preventative services; this aligns with participants' stated needs and desires, in regard to school counselors taking initiative.

School Counselor Specialization
The final theme provides valuable and novel information related to the teachers' perceptions of school counselors' knowledge and teachers' preferred and non-preferred school counselor–teacher consultation topics. Participants valued school counselors' expertise in student development and social/emotional knowledge, and their ongoing relationships with students. Participants also appreciated school counselors' longitudinal knowledge of students, their families, and their specialized skills for engaging families.

Participants' perceptions of school counselors' skills and knowledge base appear to influence the topics on which they prefer to consult. Overwhelmingly, participants indicated they would or had consulted with school counselors regarding students' social/emotional concerns; however, participants re-

ported varied preferences regarding consultation with the school counselor for behavioral concerns. This finding conflicts with Goodman-Scott's (2015) study, in which a national sample of school counselors reported that their most frequent job activity was consultation about student behavioral concerns. Participants commonly cited consulting with school counselors regarding family engagement, abuse and neglect, and helping students navigate family issues. Although Clark and Amatea (2004) also found school counselors assisted students with family issues, the findings regarding family engagement and abuse and neglect are original to the present study.

While participants enthusiastically described consulting with school counselors regarding social/emotional and familial issues, most participants were reluctant to consult regarding academic issues. This perspective conflicts with leading professional organizations that strongly emphasize school counselors' role in individual and school-wide student academic development (ASCA, 2012a; CACREP, 2015). Furthermore, the findings are incongruent with literature emphasizing the importance of school counseling consultation to improve student academics (Baker et al., 2009; Sink, 2008). Hence, the perceptions and experiences of the teachers in this study regarding academic-focused counselor consultation are in direct opposition with recommendations from several stakeholders in the school counseling profession.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings suggest several implications for school counseling professionals. First, school counselors can intentionally develop and nurture relationships with teachers and students. Specific to teachers, school counselors

could take steps to proactively build rapport with teachers before engaging in consultation; facilitate open communication and purposefully validate teachers' experiences and concerns; and follow up and follow through with teachers on agreed-upon responsibilities. When engaging in teacher consultation, school counselors might consider a collaborative, egalitarian approach, in which the counselor approaches the teacher as a co-expert and together they cocreate student action plans and interventions. School counselors also can continue to prioritize and develop relationships with students, demonstrating their commitments to directly and indirectly serving the students on their caseload.

Given participants' reports, the authors propose specific actions elementary school counselors may consider when interacting with teachers. School counselors could consider strategies to increase their visibility and availability throughout the school building to encourage consultation opportunities. For instance, school counselors could regularly spend time outside their office, engaging with school staff and students; schedule time to consistently conduct brief, informal check-ins with teachers; and routinely attend grade-level and department meetings. Moreover, school counselors can convey their availability through purposefully communicating an open-door policy; setting "office hours" to meet with teachers before, after, and during school; and being accessible through a two-way radio, email alert system, texting, and online platforms (e.g., teachers requesting consultation through Google forms). School counselors might consider collecting teacher perception data through opinion surveys (ASCA, 2012a) pertaining to teacher availability, outreach, and perceptions of the school counselors' services to students and teachers. School counselors also could request

feedback from teachers serving on the comprehensive program advisory council (ASCA, 2012a).

School counselors can take proactive steps to educate stakeholders regarding their professional role and services. For example, school counselors could conduct staff presentations on the school counselor's recommended role and responsibilities, highlighting comprehensive school counseling programs such as the ASCA National Model (2012a) and providing information on the school-specific counseling program, such as their mission and vision, direct and indirect student services, data-driven programs and results, and the like. Further, school counselors could utilize resources provided by ASCA, such as the numerous role statements listed on their website. Such presentations could be held at the start of the school year during staff meetings and professional development days, and when meeting with individual teams of teachers. School counselors can also specifically market their consultative services to teachers through means including websites, brochures, newsletters, and social media. These outlets could include links to perception surveys, consultation requests, and the school counselor's schedule and avenues for communication. As part of these efforts, school counselors might consider highlighting their unique training and areas of expertise they can offer teachers.

and demonstrate the impact of their academic interventions through student outcome data, which could be shared with teachers. They may also showcase their academic knowledge base by co-presenting with teachers on topics related to pedagogy, such as academic accommodations, learning preferences, and school counselor standards blending.

The findings also have implications for school counselor preparation. Specifically, when preparing school counseling master's students, school counselor educators could describe how to create strong relationships with stakeholders, particularly teachers, and how to market school counseling services, particularly academic services, to teachers. Counselor educators also could provide opportunities for consultation role-plays and engage in supervised consultation practice in practicum and internship experiences.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

As with all studies, the findings must be examined within the context of the limitations. First, multiple, novice researchers conducted the interviewers; as a result, the researchers used a standardized, open-ended interview protocol to minimize this limitation

interviewers were practicum students at the schools where the teachers worked, participants may have been predisposed to speak positively about school counselors, thereby providing a positive orientation to the findings. Finally, the gender and racial/ethnic demographics of the sample are homogeneous and may not reflect the perceptions of a more diverse sample of teachers. However, the sample is only slightly more homogeneous than the state's teacher demographics (i.e., gender: 100% versus 79% female; race/ethnicity: 94% versus 85% White; National Center for Education Statistics, 2013a, 2013b), and is diverse in representing six school districts and 17 schools.

The researchers make several research recommendations as a result of this study. First, as the focus of this research was the experiences of elementary school teachers, it may be beneficial to explore how secondary school teachers experience consultation compared with findings from the present study. The findings around the lack of consultation on academic topics also warrants further exploration to gain a more nuanced understanding of teachers' hesitation in this area and how they perceive counselors contributing to students' academic development. Similarly, because there was incongruence regarding behavioral issue consultation, research is also warranted in this critical area. Moreover, in addition to understanding teachers' experiences, it is also valuable to understand school counselors' experiences consulting with teachers.

THERE CONTINUES TO BE A NEED TO EDUCATE TEACHERS ABOUT THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR'S ROLE AND HOW SCHOOL COUNSELORS CAN ASSIST TEACHERS.

When advertising their school counseling services and program to teachers, school counselors may want to emphasize their specific training and expertise to serve students' academic, career, and social/emotional needs, specifically highlighting their role impacting students' academic outcomes. Thus, school counselors could offer academic-related individual, small group, and classroom student services,

(Patton, 2015), and implemented interviewing techniques training over two semesters. The first researcher checked the transcripts to ensure interviewers followed the protocol; in one instance she found that one interviewer failed to ask one question on the protocol. Nonetheless, a structured protocol and with interviewer inexperience may have restricted how much each participant shared. Furthermore, given that the

CONCLUSION

School counselor–teacher consultation is a frequently used, efficient strategy to indirectly serve students. This study provides a glimpse into one sample of elementary school teachers' perceptions and experiences with school counselor–teacher consultation. This glimpse can provide school counselors and educators with knowledge to better understand and guide school counselor–teacher consultation. Further,

the findings may aid school counselors to better serve students as they assist teachers who serve students directly. Through school counselor–teacher consultation, school counselors can be critical in assisting teachers in meeting students' needs, as stated by Ann: "I can't imagine doing my job without her [school counselor]." ■

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