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A Study Exploring Elementary School Counselor's Experience of Self-Efficacy

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A Study Exploring Elementary School Counselor's Experience of Self-Efficacy

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Counselor Education

by

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Abstract

School Counselors are vital to a healthy school system. However, due to the multifaceted nature of the work, the role of an elementary school counselor can be challenging to define. This increases the likelihood for role ambiguity in the workplace which can lead to a lowered sense of efficacy. Because not much research exists on the internalized process of efficacy with elementary school counselors, the purpose of this study was to explore how elementary school counselors manifest self-efficacy in the workplace. Findings suggest that the efficacy of the elementary school counselors interviewed was primarily based on the quality of the relationships between the counselor and stakeholders within the school system such as: teachers, children, administrators, and parents. Efficacy was also affected by the overall school climate, the level of perceived support and trust from administration, and the counselor's sense of professional respect from the other school agents. Efficacy for those interviewed was also affected by negative mental health stigmas from outside and within the school system. It is the hope that such information can be used to inform the practice of school counselors as well as inform the training of future school counselors. Recommendations for further research are included.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the fantastic school counselors who give without the expectation of return to countless numbers of students on a daily basis. It can be a thankless job, but it is one that is truly needed and valued. In that light, this work is also dedicated to the many school counselors who positively impacted my life.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my husband, Matt, and my son, James.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this study is to explore elementary school counselors' perceptions of how self-efficacy is experienced and manifested in their work. Due to the multifaceted nature of the school counseling profession, the role played by a school counselor in a P-12 school setting can be difficult to define, especially considering the uniqueness associated with each school system. According to the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) (2009), school counselors are required to have a Master's degree from a counseling program and are qualified to address academic, personal/social and career development needs. They are agents of the school that serve as advocates for students, staff, and community, and they deliver their services through a school guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and system support. In essence, the elementary school counselor serves as the liaison between the school, the parents, and the community at large. However, such responsibilities are subjective in nature and can lead to the role of the school counselor viewed as being ancillary to the overall mission of a school (House & Hayes, 2002) which, in turn, can lead to scrutiny as to the overall effectiveness of the school counselor.

Elementary schools are very unique organizations depending on location, school demographics, and administrative leadership. These factors, in turn, affect the needs of a school and the emphasis of the role of the school counselor (Lieberman, 2004). Although ASCA has set standards for professional school counselor identity, research suggests that the school counselor's role is typically defined by the principal (Curry & Bickmore, 2013; House & Hayes, 2002), parent's with special interests, and teachers (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). Due to the somewhat limited knowledge of the school counseling profession by principals and other

agents of the school system, school counselors either have to be strong advocates for their professional role within the school or else they are assigned a role of best fit (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). Because of this ambiguous nature associated with the role of the school counselor and issues that arose from the lack of professional identity for the profession, the American School Counseling Association in 2003 developed guidelines that not only defined the role of the school counselor based but also delineated tasks that should represent the work of a school counselor that encompass an effective, comprehensive guidance model (Schimmel, 2008).

As defined by the ASCA model, school counselors have distinct guidelines and purposes for their role within their respective schools, however, because the idea of comprehensive guidance is relatively new, it is not uncommon for many duties that do not fall under ASCA's definition of the school counselor, or "non-guidance" activities to be assigned to the school counselor by the school leadership as their assigned role within the school system (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). Such non-guidance activities can be viewed as the counselor pulling their "fair share" of responsibilities within their school system, however, such activities typically deter from other, more pertinent services, that the school counselor is trained to perform (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). Such assignment of non-guidance activities leads to the question of: does the leadership team truly understand the effective use of a school counselor? Research suggests that limited knowledge about the school counseling profession by other school agents leads to some confusion between administrators as to the optimal role of a school counselor (Campbell & Dahir, 1997; House & Hayes, 2002; Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005; Lieberman, 2004) and leads to the school counselor being assigned to tasks that take away from their optimal strengths.

Because of this role ambiguity, school counseling jobs are sometimes conceptualized incorrectly or viewed as unnecessary by the administration (Curry & Bickmore, 2013; Lieberman, 2004), which can result in inappropriate use of the school counselor's position for non-guidance activities (i.e. disciplinarian, substitute teacher, programmers, administrative assistants, etc.) that do not pertain to the training or the expertise of the school counselor. This misalignment of role expectations and training can lead to a low sense of self-efficacy for the counselor (Sutton & Fall, 1995). This misalignment of role and training also leads to issues in regards to performance evaluation. Because of the subjective nature of the school counselor's job and the counseling curriculum, performance evaluations on the work of the school counselor are somewhat challenging to perform by personnel who do not have a clear understanding of what the job entails, and it is not uncommon that a counselor is evaluated by their principal based on standards applied to teachers (Curry & Bickmore, 2013). Because a source of job efficacy is attributed to external evaluations by superior positions (Bandura & Wood, 1989; Curry & Bickmore, 2013) and efficacy in performance leads to more stability and greater satisfaction (Bandura & Wood, 1989; Sutton & Fall, 1995), the question arises as to how school counselors experience whether or not they are doing a good job in their schools and what factors are the most influential in manifesting a sense of self-efficacy as a counselor.

Most research on counselor efficacy approach outcomes from a quantitative perspective that summarizes the counselors' feelings of efficacy with numbers. In addition, not much literature exists that describes the experience of counselor efficacy in rich terms. Also, because elementary, middle, junior high, and high school settings contribute to a difference in the focus of work performed by the school counselor and it is difficult to cross compare the

different grade levels, it was decided that for the purposes of this study exploration of efficacy would begin with the elementary school counselor where more time and energy is focused on guidance lessons and responsive services. The climate of the elementary school counseling profession is colored by so many external as well as internal, individualized factors and constructs, therefore, the research question posed is: how do elementary school counselors experience and manifest self-efficacy for the school counseling profession?

Research Goals & Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore elementary school counselors' perceptions of how self-efficacy is experienced and manifested in their work. Based on the purpose of this study, the goal was to gain more insight as to how work efficacy is experienced for an elementary school counselor. This study helps to inform other school counselors as well as school counselors in training as to methods and ways to self-evaluate their working performance. Knowing this perspective contributes to the literature by providing a written account of something that can be considered an internalized process for an elementary school counselor that is not always quantifiable—as most research on this topic area would suggest. Having this insight also provides more information as to more feasible and useful methods of quantifying outcome evaluations for elementary school counselors and to add to the research.

In order to meet the goals for the proposed study, the following logic was used as a guide. Literature suggests there exists some ambiguity and vagueness associated with the defined role of a school counselor within a given school system (Curry & Bickmore, 2013; House & Hayes, 2002; Lieberman, 2004; Schimmel, 2008), and Bandura and Wood (1989, p.34) state that there is a distinct relationship between defined job roles and job efficacy. In

addition, higher job-related self-efficacy in school counselors is linked to higher levels of satisfaction and stability (Sutton & Fall, 1995). Therefore, if the likelihood of role ambiguity exists from leadership and other agents of the school and the elementary school counselor is acting as the only building counselor within a school, what factors are the most influential in the elementary school counselor's experience of doing a good job and assist them in manifesting self-efficacy in the school? Some additional research questions that may be answered are: to what degree does the level of administrative support relate to a school counselors sense of efficacy, what specific aspects of the job contribute more significantly to a school counselors efficacy, and what uncontrollable factors (population, location, grade level) have the most effect on a school counselors' sense of efficacy?

Subjectivities

The sensitivities and subjective positions I bring to this research include my personal and professional interests as a licensed school counselor as well as my person-centered theoretical orientation as a counselor. In my counseling theory, based on the work of Carl Rogers, I view human nature as generally good and that all people have a natural inclination towards self-growth and desire to be the best they can be in life and in work. In this light, I think that all people desire to belong, to be loved, to make others feel good, and to be valued for what they do- personally and professionally. I believe that personality development is a continuous process that is socially constructed and occurs throughout the course of one's life in which biological, psychological, and social factors influence and guide a person to perceive their world. These reciprocating influences also affect the world of work and, in turn, influence an individual's perception of their daily routine. I believe that each individual is the

“expert” in their world and reality is merely an individual’s perception of “the way things are”. In other words, I believe that we view the world through our epistemological lens and that lens colors our perceptions, thoughts, feelings and efficacy which, in turn, affects our personality and how we present to the world- be it personally or professionally. Based on my theory, I believe that dysfunction in living occurs when a discrepancy exists between who an individual is and who they feel they should be. This discrepancy results in an individual not living in manner that is conducive to the individual’s potential. In the world of work, a discrepancy between who an individual perceives them to be and who others perceive them to be can seriously affect one’s sense of work efficacy. Although this is my theory of counseling, I feel that this source of dysfunction in living can be easily integrated to an individual’s efficacy in the workplace and the individual’s experience of doing a good job. For example: when a person is unsure of their performance in a task, such as being a school counselor, and evaluators are not be the most qualified to evaluate the task, how will working efficacy be affected? Will the school counselor really be able to do their best work? How do they sustain at their position?

My experience as a school counseling intern at the elementary and high school level brought a lot of awareness into the unique, individualized nature associated with the work of a school counselor. Through my internship experience at an elementary school, I discovered that there the school counselor was an autonomous and somewhat isolated entity within the school system. In my experience, I observed the school counselor to autonomously make decisions and to independently take action when it came to the needs of the students and parents. Although it seemed as though the principal was supportive of the school counselor’s

position, it was apparent that the principal did not understand all of the inner workings of the school counselor's role and the school counselor was often stating that she had to "explain" what she does. I found this particularly interesting because the principal was the external evaluator of the effectiveness of the school counselor and reported such assessment directly to the superintendent; and this evaluation was only performed once a year. I observed this phenomenon of independence from the other school agents more so at the elementary level where there existed only one school counselor for the building than at the high school level where there existed a team of four counselors for the school. With the team counselor experience, I noted multiple collaborations throughout the day with other counselors whereas at the elementary level, there was little collaboration, if any. This observation led me to wonder what external or internal process helped the elementary school counselor determine her efficacy because she was, in my opinion, a great school counselor which, in turn, leads me to the current study.

Although school counselors are trained through the ASCA model that outcome measures need to be performed regularly in order to determine the effectiveness of the guidance program, I would argue that we are not necessarily trained how to determine if we are truly doing a good job. I would argue that this is an internal process. Through my observations of school counselors in internship, I learned that each counselor I met seems to have their own way and methods of determining whether or not they are successful at their position. This led me to believe that efficacy for a school counselor is an internalized process and that it has much to do with the school environment/ climate of the teachers and

administrators and perhaps the ability of the school counselor to have the freedom to do their job.

For the purposes of this study, it was decided that the focus of the research would be placed on the elementary school counselor. According to the ASCA (2003) comprehensive guidance model, elementary school counselors should spend most of their time in responsive services and guidance lessons as compared to the upper grade levels. Because guidance is such a strong component, elementary school counselors are afforded more class time, thus “face time”, with the students, and sometimes have more opportunities to work directly with the students, teachers, and parents. Because of the younger age and need for more services and based on the population and resource availability of the school, an elementary school counselor can assume many different roles within the school system. From 504 coordinators to testing coordinators as well as areas of social work, an elementary school counselor’s job can be challenging to define which in turn leads to the aforementioned questions on efficacy especially considering the likelihood of being the only counselor in the building.

Theoretical Perspective & Research Approach

Unlike teaching staff who can quantify student performance and show teaching practices, school counselors’ work is subjective and sometimes private in nature and does not provide for a highly visible outcome measures (such as grades or standardized tests) that can determine job performance. With limited job tasks that are observable or quantifiable, the role of a school counselor does not lend itself for an administrative leader to provide specific feedback; and oftentimes, due to limited opportunities to observe and limited knowledge of the profession, the likelihood for confusion by school administrators in regards to the role of a

school counselor is high (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Curry & Bickmore, 2013; House & Hayes, 2002; Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005; Lieberman, 2004; Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008). Therefore, with the subjective, unique, and private nature of the work of a school counselor and job performance evaluated by leaders with limited knowledge, how do school counselors experience working self-efficacy?

Theoretical Perspective. Self-efficacy plays a major role in job satisfaction and performance. According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy is a person's set of beliefs in his/her capabilities that organize and drive action to a given attainment, and self-efficacy beliefs are constructed through a reflection of social interactions based on personal beliefs, physiological states, and previous experiences. In Social Cognitive Theory of Organizational Management (1989), Bandura and Wood explain self-efficacy beliefs in the workplace as a product of reciprocating behavioral, personal, and cognitive factors in which "people are both products and producers of their environment" (p.362) and it is strengthened through mastery experiences, modeling, social persuasion, and physiological states. Thus, performance feedback in the workplace can be considered a strong contributor to self-efficacy through all four measures. In the job of a school counselor, feedback on job performance can be gathered from administrators, teachers, and students as to their specific interactions and vested interest.

According to ASCA (2009), school counselors who participate in a comprehensive guidance plan should have some accountability piece provided through programmatic evaluations that can be linked back to school wide improvement. These evaluations include behavioral surveys and open ended feedback and can provide good insight as to job

performance for the school counselor. Examples of such types of counseling program evaluations can include observing the effects of student success groups on attendance or the effects of a study skills group on achievement for end of course exams. However, such programmatic evaluations are typically performed once per academic term and do not lend themselves for regular or reoccurring feedback throughout the year. Such evaluations are also reactive to work that has already been done and not formative or ongoing. In addition, not all school counselors are trained to perform program evaluations (Astramovich, Coker, & Hoskins, 2005) so not all school counselors do them or know they are necessary to the role of the school counselor- as ASCA (2009) would suggest.

As per ASCA (2009), school counselors deliver services to students through four main components: school guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and system support. However, research suggests that administrative leaders do not always understand the distinctions of such services (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005; Lieberman, 2004) and what assigned responsibilities account for non-guidance related activities that deter from the four main components associated with professional identity. This lack of clarity can result in inappropriate job assignments and tasks that are non-counseling related (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). Hence, personal capabilities are impeded and thus affect the school counselors' sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Efficacy in the workplace can also be affected by one's sense of support from administration and leadership positions (Bandura & Wood, 1989) which, in turn, affects the overall school climate.

School climate is an integral factor in determining the satisfaction of its employees (Lieberman, 2004). According to Sutton and Fall (1995), a school climate that was supportive

and demanded fewer non- counseling related task assignments were strongly related to high levels of self-efficacy for school counselors. They also found the quality and quantity of the exchanges between the school counselor and the school administrator to be positive contributions to the effectiveness of the school counseling program. Because the job of a school counselor depends greatly on many factors, such as the location, grade level, number of counselors, and type of program, an in depth exploration as to the personal contributing factors that create the sense of self-efficacy can be helpful in developing training models for future school counselors in counselor education programs.

Research approach. The purpose of this study is to explore school counselors' perceptions of how self-efficacy is experienced and manifested for their profession and what significant thematic factors emerge between the participants through a constructivist approach. Hatch (2002) describes the constructivist paradigm as one in which reality is constructed through an individual's perspective and is experientially based. According to Hatch (2002), "constructivist science argues that multiple realities exist that are inherently unique because they are constructed by individuals who experience the world from their own vantage points" (p.15) Because of the individualized nature of the work of a school counselor, self-efficacy in the workplace comes from factors that are more subjective and hidden within the context of the job and are constructed by their experiences (Bandura & Wood, 1989). When approaching this research question of exploring the factors that assist in a school counselor's experience of self-efficacy, the constructivist approach seems well suited to the internal and external workings that manifest the construct.

By using the overarching theoretical lens of constructivism, which is based in one's perspectives and experiences, the grounded theory approach, which includes the use of theory and data to guide the research, will be used in order to gain further insight to the nature of school counselor's experiencing of self-efficacy. According to Charmaz (2006), "Data form the foundation of our theory and our analysis of these data generates the concepts we construct" (p.2). To clarify the purpose of this research, an interactive model is provided (See Appendix B). By beginning this research with a strong theoretical base for understanding the role ambiguity associated with as school counselor, the climate associated with a school, as well as what constructs can influence self-efficacy in the workplace, it is the hope that the study will begin from a strong vantage point to be knowledgeable about the context of the data but with an awareness of my own sensitivities to the subject. However, it is the intention, and a tenant of grounded theory, to remain open to the process and do not force preconceived knowledge and the pursuit of personal interest upon the data.

Significance

The purpose of this study was to explore elementary school counselors' perceptions of how self-efficacy is experienced and manifested for their profession. It is the hope that this study will add to the current body of literature on efficacy related to school counselors in a more individualized and personal interpretation from rich data. It is also hoped that such knowledge can assist in developing better methods of culminating awareness and knowledge of efficacy in training for Master's programs in school counseling for counselor educators. This information assists in providing new thoughts, perceptions, and awareness to practicing school counselors as to methods and techniques that could bolster efficacy in their current school

setting. In addition to assisting counselors and counselor educators, this information holds significance for stakeholders in school systems such as administrative workers and leadership teams as to how the school counselor can work at their most optimal within their given school system.

Definition of Terms

Comprehensive Guidance Program: A counseling program in a school that integrates the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Standards that address the elements of program foundation, delivery, management, and accountability.

Non-Guidance Activities: Tasks and roles assigned to a school counselor that are not considered a part of the activities associated with a comprehensive guidance program.

Role Ambiguity: When roles and expectations perceived by an employee to be associated with a specific job in the workplace are unclear.

Self-efficacy in the workplace: An individual's belief in their abilities associated with an assigned role in the workplace.

Summary

This chapter served as a brief overview to the study. The following chapter 2 will address a more detailed literature review and conceptual framework based on the research and literature surrounding the role of the school counselor, self-efficacy, and role ambiguity. Chapter 3 will present the methods associated with the study while Chapter 4 will explore the findings. Chapter 5 will discuss the finding as well as address implications and limitations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore school counselors' perceptions of how self-efficacy is experienced and manifested for their profession. In seeking to understand the underlying mechanisms and constructs that manifest as self-efficacy in school counselors, school counselor professional identity (historical and current), an operational definition of self-efficacy, and a review of role ambiguity will be explored.

Historical Beginnings of the School Counselor's Professional Identity

The role of a school counselor is ambiguous and individualized due to many internal and external factors. Elementary counselors' roles can be need-based due to the uniqueness associated with schools in regards to population and location. In addition, the role can be defined by what roles/ tasks/ jobs the counselor has assumed previously as well as how the administration of the school defines the role. Considering the historical roots of the profession, it is not surprising that school counselors have assumed roles of filling needed places within the school system that have a great deal of impact on student success. Because of the multiple stakeholders involved with the profession, it is logical that the perception of the role of the school counselor would change according to differing stakeholders (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). In a brief overview of the history of the school counseling profession, the evolution of the school counselor's role will be discussed in the order as it historically occurred: roles such as vocational guidance, nonacademic services, psychological assessments, post-secondary recruitment, and diversity coordination, and professional standards.

Vocational Guidance. The beginnings of school counseling were rooted in vocational guidance (Baker, 2000; Erford, 2011; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). At the close of the Industrial

Revolution in the 19th century, the nation was changing from an agricultural based economy to a more complicated industrialized nation. Due to the rising need for workers to be more educated to the industrial arts, the state of education was in reform on how to accommodate the influx of more students into the school system as well as how to best produce educated workers. The industrial jobs were diversifying and growing, and the information related to jobs also grew more comprehensive. Whereas information about jobs had traditionally been obtained through local or family sources, the information was growing in complexity and becoming more regionally spread across cities. Vocational information and availability required someone within the school to have individualized knowledge of the students as well as contact with the community at large, hence the emergence of the vocational counselor with such knowledge which was the first and most influential step towards what we now know as the school counselor (Erford, 2011). Interestingly, the people initially hired into these positions were typically teachers with no formal training, and it was commonplace for many non-academic duties outside of vocation but within student services to fall to this position (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001).

Nonacademic Services. Due to the changes to the school systems through the industrialization, immigration, and urbanization movement in the 1900's, student populations were growing in diversity, numbers, and the need for resources, thus secondary schools began to have a need for someone to fill the role of handling students' non-academic needs: needs such as financial aid, campus services, community support/ resources, etc. In order to handle the volume, secondary systems influenced by higher education institutions, incorporated the handling of nonacademic services to students to the position of the vocational counselor

(Erford, 2011). This also resulted in a long-standing pattern of school counselors handling administrative-clerical duties associated with student information because of their knowledge of the students (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001). However, the work was still primarily subjective and lacked scientific credibility. Fortunately, other professionals began to emerge into education at this time such as psychologists, psychological researchers, and social workers with tools to assist the vocational counselor in assuming a more scientific role in the nonacademic services (Erford, 2011; Lambie & Williamson, 2004).

Psychological Assessments and Training. As more measures for assessing human behavior were being produced such as psychological assessments, aptitude/ achievement tests, and diagnostic tools, more instruments were now available to vocational counselors which helped to make their work more scientific and impactful, and thus more valuable. In addition to measurements related to aptitude and achievement, more specialized services were also being provided to students who were experiencing specific learning and/or behavioral problems due to an emerging interest of behavioral health relating to school. These interests also lead to an abundance of research in the field of student behavioral services as well as new methods of training all professionals, including counselors, who worked with those students (Erford, 2011). At this time (1930s and 1940s), the field of social work was also working towards developing a professional identity. Because of truancy and home issues that related to school and overall success of the student, social workers became the liaison between schools and home (Erford, 2011), however, not all schools employed social workers even though there was a need. So in their absence at certain schools, those duties also fell to the vocational counselor.

Post-Secondary Recruitment for Talent. Until the 1950s, there were few school counselors in the US and limited training opportunities (Erford, 2011; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). In 1950, the American School Counselor Association and the American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA) were founded. Because of the scarcity of working professionals and lack of understanding of the work, the term “guidance” – not counseling- was still commonly used to describe the school counseling profession. However, the profession was evolving and gaining more recognition for the supplemental support counselors bring to the academic environment— especially related to their individualized and personable knowledge of the interests and academic abilities of the students (Erford, 2011).

In the declaration of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958, school counselors became involved in the Cold War through the government requiring schools to submit plans on how they intended to identify and push academically talented students towards the fields of math, science, and engineering so that the United States could compete in the space race with Russia (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). With this requirement, many school counselors were hired at the secondary level, not for personal growth and emotional support of the students, but to test, identify, and encourage students to continue onto post-secondary institutions (Erford, 2011). This act also resulted in more funding to provide resources and education/ training to school counselors as well as more funding to universities to develop better programs to train school counselors for such a role. In addition, this act also required school counseling services for all students, which also led to the impetus and funding for more elementary school counselors (Erford, 2011).

Diversity. Additional support from the government came with the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. This act provided more funding for guidance and counseling as a part of the movement to use education as a method to restructure society at a time when many societal ills such as rising unemployment, poverty, and racial tensions were rampant. As the government became involved with the racial desegregation of schools, the responsibility was designated to many professional school counselors to create plans to incorporate more diverse populations into the school climate by offering counseling services such as group, classroom lessons, and individual services (Erford, 2011; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Such services assisted in easing tensions within the schools. With the Civil Rights Movement, Women's Liberation, and the integration of special needs students into the classroom, school counselors were now being utilized more for the services that the role symbolizes today such as agents of diversity and advocates for underserved populations with the focus more on counseling. In the 1970s, the introduction of developmental counseling and guidance began to change the focus of the profession into a more comprehensive program that supplemented the developmental, continuous approach of education across the life-span and moved school counseling away from being viewed as ancillary and unnecessary (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001).

Drug Education/ Child Abuse/ Drop-Outs. With the 1980s and 1990s, the government began to focus more-so on societal issues that were prevalent in the schools. School counselors became more involved with drug prevention education in the classroom, assisting with recognizing and reporting child abuse, and prevention of students dropping out of school (Erford, 2011). There was also a revitalized push for career guidance with the Carl D. Perkins

Vocational Act of 1984. This push affected elementary school counselors because of the movement towards developmental guidance and the integration of the career component into early education (Baker, 2000). With the focus of these two decades being more on indirect counseling services rather than the more focused and direct approach with individual counseling, school counselors began to lose touch with the growing student population. The increased numbers of students in schools brought more interpersonal issues, and the ratio of school counselors to students was unmanageable (Lambie & Williamson, 2004), and at this time, counseling was not accessible to all students.

With the Elementary School Counseling Demonstration Act of 1995- reauthorized in 1999- the ratios were reduced and the focus shifted to making school counseling services more accessible to all students, and the act provided more schools the funding and opportunity to employ more school counselors (Erford, 2011). This act also sought to expand the elementary school counseling programs to be more preventative and developmental in programmatic design, and it required the collaboration with psychologists and social workers. Lastly, this act also addressed the growing trend of school counselors time being utilized for non-counseling services and thus required 85% of the counselor's time be in direct services to students (Baker, 2000). This act helped to assist in the implementation of ASCA's call for professional standards. However, the climate of education was changing. The push for accountability and the call for at-risk student success led to the act that impacted the school counseling profession even further: No Child Left Behind (NCLB; 2002).

NCLB. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB; 2002) Act of 2001- reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002a) was a

federally funded plan designed to hold schools accountable for all student learning, including at-risk groups that were low performing in achievement as well as graduation rates. With this mandate funding was contingent on adequately yearly progress which observed the achievement testing scores of subgroups that include: race, ethnicity, gender, English language proficiency, migrant status, disability status, and low income status. This mandate ensured transparency of schools to the general public in regards to teacher qualifications, safety statistics, as well as achievement scores so that informed decisions could be made for stakeholders involved with schools that were not making adequate yearly progress goals and so that the education system was being held accountable.

This renewed interest in education and the resulting changes to the school systems also resulted in changing school counseling programs (Dollarhyde & Lemberger, 2006). A renewed interest emerged in school counselor accountability and resulted in a larger role within the schools' testing process. Many school counselors became testing coordinators: a role that demands time away from direct student contact. With the passing of NCLB, the responsibility of accountability was placed on all stakeholders involved with the school system. This responsibility combined with the rising need for accountability for school counselors resulted in a high risk for school counseling programs to be viewed as an ineffective use of resources and funding (Dahir & Stone, 2009), and the risk of many school counseling jobs to be cut.

With the need to respond to the focus on accountability, the school counseling profession referred back to the project initiated by the Education Trust in 1996 called Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI). The Education Trust is a national non-profit

advocacy organization dedicated to eliminating the gaps in educational achievement due to race and income (Education Trust, 2015). In this initiative, the goals were to transform the school counseling profession to align with standards based education reform by turning the focus of the school counselor on elimination of the achievement gap through strategic interventions that created an explicit connection between school counseling and school reform (Dimmit, Carey, & Hatch, 2007).

Where school counseling paradigms were historically more service driven with the focus on counseling, consultation, and coordination, the TSCI challenged school counselors to redefine the profession with more focus on roles that encompassed leadership, advocacy, use of data collaboration and teaming, and unyielding support in student achievement. Through the use of quantitative data skills, the TSCI called for counselors to be able to track students' academic performance, to use student data to plan interventions, to be advocates for systemic change in school policies in order to effectively participate in educational reform (Dimmitt, Cary, & Hatch, 2007). These themes were later merged into ASCA's 2003 National model.

Professional Standards. Although the need for professional standards was evident with the emergence of the multifaceted nature of the work of vocational counselors in the 30s, accountability for the profession really emerged with the advancement of technology. In 1964, the first set of professional standards was published by the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) titled *ACES Standards for Counselor Education in the Preparation of Secondary School Counselors*. As technology and knowledge increased, the profession began to organize and become more systematic about the services provided within a guidance program. In 1997, ASCA published *The National Standards for School Counseling*

Programs which broadly defined the role of the school counselor and the emphasis areas of work with students through the emphasis areas of: academic development, career development, and personal/social development. It also addressed the need for different specific professional roles for counselors working at different developmental levels i.e. elementary, middle, and secondary. In 2003, ASCA published the National Model for School Counselors as the set of standards for a comprehensive guidance program, which were updated in 2005 and again in 2012. The 2012 ASCA Model sets the stage for the current description of the role of the school counselor.

In Summation. From the historical perspective, the school counseling profession evolved based on the ever changing needs of the school systems. The role of the school counselor shifted from initially focusing on vocational guidance and connecting students to the working world to developmental counseling which focused more on the personal, social, and emotional growth of the student. Then, the changing school system and society demanded accountability, consultation, assessment, and coordination. As expressed by Lambie and Williamson (2004), it is important to note that although more was being demanded of the professional school counselor over the years, no services were ever removed from the list of expanding duties. This historical perspective makes it understandable as to why the likelihood for role ambiguity with the school counseling profession is high, and it helps to support the reasoning that what constructs contribute to the self-efficacy of a school counselor may be hard to uncover.

Current Thoughts: What is an Elementary School Counselor?

According to Brott and Myers (as cited in Lambie & Williamson, 2004), professional identity development is a continuous process that is produced by various external influences such as training, administrative perspective, location/population as well as internal influences such as motivation, attitude, self-efficacy. With ASCA's (2003) National Model for School Counselors, more definition was given to the professional identity in order to keep a common professional language, however, the role was still defined in a broad manner to account for the unique need associated with each individual school system. This model helps to keep services offered by school counselors congruent across the profession and provides guidelines for what counselors ideally should be doing.

The roles of the school counselor via ASCA Model (2012). Currently, school counselors are viewed as agents of the school that serve as advocates for students, staff, and community. According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2009), school counselors are "certified/licensed educators with a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling, making them uniquely qualified to address all students' academic, career and personal/ social development needs by designing, implementing, evaluating and enhancing a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes and enhances school success". According to ASCA (2015a), school counselors should be focusing 80% of their skills, time and energy on direct and indirect services to students with a recommended school counselor to student ratio of 1:250. School counselors should be active participants in the promotion of systematic change through leadership, advocacy, and collaboration, and comprehensive school counseling programs should be driven by student data and utilized to enhance the educational experience

for all students while promoting student achievement. As per the ASCA comprehensive guidance model, school counselor's implement a comprehensive guidance program through four areas of service to their school: foundation, delivery, management, and accountability.

Foundation. The four areas are distinctly defined, yet often overlap. In the service area of foundation, school counselors create programs that focus on student outcomes through the creation of a vision statement that aligns the school's mission with that of the school counseling program. Through the use of ASCA Standards, the counselor develops and implements a programmatic structure that encompasses the academic, career, and personal/social domains of learning and growth. In foundation, the school counselor is also responsible for awareness of and adherence to professional competencies and standards that drive the profession and ensure that ethical standards are being met in order to protect the student as well as the school counselor (ASCA, 2015a; Erford, 2011).

Management. In the area of management, the school counselor incorporates organizational tools that help to manage the time utilized by the school counselor to best meet the needs of the school. Management also helps to establish a line of communication about programmatic expectations between the school counselor and the administration (Erford, 2011). Through management, school counselors utilize assessment and tools that accurately reflect the needs of the school. Such assessments can include: programmatic assessments, self-reflective assessments, use of time assessments, annual agreements with administrators, advisory councils, educational team meetings, and shared calendar functions (ASCA, 2015). Through effective management, a school counselor can ensure that time and resources are be utilized for the best purposes and that the overarching goals of the

comprehensive program are realistic and on target with the foundation service area. Effective management also means identification and removal of barriers that stand in the way of such goals (Erford, 2011).

Delivery. The delivery system is the “how” of the school counseling program often referred to as program components (Erford, 2011). Through delivery, the school counselor provides services to all agents associated with the school (students, parents, staff, and community). These services can be direct (in-person interactions) and indirect. Delivery can involve direct services such as: school counseling curriculum through guidance lessons, individual student planning, and responsive services. As per ASCA (2012), the use of time in the delivery of services ideally should be 80% or more of the school counselor’s time. In delivery at the elementary level, 35%-45% of the time should be in guidance curriculum, 5%-10% in student planning, 30%-40% in responsive services, and 10%-15% in system support. Then, 20% of the counselor’s time should be in indirect services. Indirect services are support services provided on behalf of students and can involve: referrals, consultation and collaboration, community resources/ networking, and systems support. The delivery service areas are typically driven based on the needs of the school and based upon the developmental levels of the population. However, the indirect service of systems support, which encompasses “fair share” responsibilities, creates the opportunity for counselors to also be at risk to be given non-counseling related tasks. Some examples of non-counseling related tasks, according to ASCA (2015a) are provided below in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Examples of Counseling and Non-Counseling Tasks

Counseling	Non-Counseling
Individual student academic program planning	Coordinating paperwork and data entry of all new students
Interpreting cognitive, aptitude, and achievement tests	Coordinating cognitive, aptitude, and achievement tests
Providing counseling to students who are tardy or absent	Signing excuses for students who are tardy or absent
Providing counseling to students who have disciplinary problems	Performing disciplinary actions or assigning discipline consequences
Collaborating with teachers to present school counseling core curriculum lessons	Teaching classes when teachers are absent
Ensuring student records are maintained as per state and federal regulations	Keeping clerical records
Providing teachers with suggestions for effective classroom management	Supervising classrooms or common areas

*Note. Table based on ASCA (2015a) Appropriate/ Inappropriate activities for school counselors

Accountability. Lastly, the area of accountability encompasses measuring the effectiveness of the school counseling program and linking the results back to the overall mission of the school. Through analyzing school and school counseling program data, school counselors can determine the impact of their program as well as identify how students are different as a result of the program (ASCA, 2015). Accountability can be provided through outcomes measures, results reports, performance standards, and programmatic audits that provide a means of comparison to goals outlined in foundation as well as through the National Model. The ultimate goal of the service area of accountability is to have some sort of an

evaluation measure that can allow for data driven decision making in regards to continuously improving the quality of the school counseling program (Erford, 2011).

The Roles of the Elementary School Counselor

Although the ASCA model is divided into four components, elementary school counselors spend most of their time in delivery providing direct service to students, which is the most observable function. According to the ASCA website (2015) titled *Why Elementary School Counselors*, comprehensive developmental school counseling programs are designed to provide education, prevention, and intervention services at a time where students are building their academic self-concept as well as decision making, communication, and life skills. Through an early intervention and prevention approach to academic, personal, and social barriers in school, school counselors are able to promote well-being and a healthy love of learning that will carry over into the next phases of school.

Elementary school counselors implement school counseling programs through providing curriculum and direct services on: academic support, goal setting, career awareness, education/ understanding of self, peer relationships, communication (problem solving and conflict resolution), substance abuse education, diversity, and individual student planning. In addition to providing specific direct and indirect services to students, elementary school counselors also spend a large portion of time in consultation and collaboration with parents, teachers, administrators, and students. See Table 2.2 below.

Table 2.2: Elementary School Counselors Collaborate with:

Parents	Teachers	Administrators	Students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent Education • Communication/Networking • Academic Planning • College/Career awareness programs • One-on-one parent conferencing • Interpretation of assessment results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom guidance activities • Academic support, learning style assessments and education to help students succeed academically • Classroom speakers • At-risk student identification and implementation of interventions to enhance success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Climate • Behavioral Management Plans • School-wide needs assessment • Student data and results • Student assistance/team building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer Education • Peer Support • Academic support • School climate • Leadership development • Community • Job shadowing/service learning • Crisis interventions • Referrals • Parenting classes • Support groups • Career education

***Note. Table 2.2 Based on ASCA’s (2015) Why Elementary School Counselors**

In providing direct services, school counselors: a) develop the core curriculum that is integrated school-wide at all levels, b) they assist students in individual planning, c) they provide responsive services that include crisis assistance and counseling, and d) they provide indirect services on behalf of students that can include referrals to outside agencies as well as collaboration/ consultation with educators and administrators. Ideally, delivery is the area where elementary school counselors have the opportunity for direct impact with the students and where most of the working hours of the school day should be spent. However, because of other duties associated with the role of the counselor this is not always the case.

Ambiguous Roles of the School Counselor

The role of the school counselor is comprehensive to the school system in nature, and it is in constant transformation (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). In addition to the overarching roles described by the model, Erford (2011) describes other roles that embody the title of school counselor. These other roles include: diversity coordination, advocacy and social justice, developmental specialist, school and agency consultant, school reform and accountability, at-risk specialist, and advocate for students with special needs. He states, "The job of a professional school counselor is complex and involves a complicated interplay of what the school community's needs are and the strengths and weakness of the individual counselor" (p. 42). In considering the multiple listed needs associated with the profession at large, it is understandable that school counseling can be challenging to define at an individual level, which in turn makes it hard to have a set job description. Ultimately, the role becomes defined by the leadership of the school.

School counselor's role based on leadership. Based out of a need for clarifying the roles and practices of a school counselor, the ASCA model does a thorough job of delineating the job and boundaries of a licensed school counselor. However, in reality and regardless of outside national standards, most principals in schools hold the power to define roles within a particular building (Curry & Bickmore, 2013; House & Hayes, 2002). In their qualitative study on school administrator's conceptions of the role of the school counselor, Amatea and Clark (2005) observed four types of role conceptions that emerged from interviews with 26 school administrators, 11 of which were at an elementary school. The four types of roles and values found were: the innovative school leader, the collaborative case consultant, the responsive

direct service provider, and the administrative team player. Interestingly, the most common perception of the role of the school counselor by elementary school administrators was the role of the collaborative case consultant. In this role of the counselor, the administrators perceived the counselor to have a specialized knowledge about social and emotional needs/ interventions for the students as well as the ability to work with all key adults in the student's life to accomplish the needed goals for success in the academic environment. The authors also found that this role was also seen as one in which the counselor shared/ taught their specialized knowledge to other stakeholders (parents, teachers) who work with the child.

Although the sample in this study was relatively small, it discusses the importance of the communication between the administrator and the counselor to be focused on how the school's changing needs may reflect a need for the changing of roles within the system. They express that although counselors may place responsibility on administrators to define their role, it is vital that they be a part of the conversation of expectations. This is vital for principals that lack knowledge about the profession. Although this study described the administrators view of the role in a parallel view of role as per the ASCA model, the day-to-day duties given to the counselor may not reflect that view and be more non-counseling related (Curry & Bickmore, 2013; House & Hayes, 2002).

Non-counseling duties. Unfortunately, principals with limited knowledge about school counseling have a lack of understanding in their conceptualization of the role of the school counselor as compared to the role described in the ASCA model (Curry & Bickmore, 2013). This can result in the school counselor being assigned roles and jobs within the school system that do not have any association with their training or their optimal utilization (See Table 2.1 for

examples of non-counseling activities), which can affect self-efficacy and career satisfaction (Lieberman, 2004). Such lowered self-efficacy also can deter the counselor from seeking a leadership role within their school system. As stated by Amatea and Clark (2005), “Many experienced school counselors have been trained to assume the relatively invisible role of the helper in the school rather than the leader” (p. 16). This type of attitude places the counselor in a passive position that compromises working within the defined role that would be suggested by ASCA and increases the likelihood of non-counseling duties, which in turn, affects efficacy. According to a study by Baggerly and Osborn (2006), school counselors who tended to perform inappropriate or menial duties reported lower levels of efficacy and lower levels of career satisfaction. Therefore, efficacy may play an integral role in career satisfaction (Bandura & Wood, 1989).

Self-Efficacy

In line with considering the role of a school counselor and job effectiveness is Bandura’s (1986) concept of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined as “the belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations” (Bandura, 1995, p. 2). From Bandura’s (1986) perspective, people are considered self-organizing, proactive, self-reflecting, and self-regulating, and human functioning is viewed as a reciprocating mechanism of personal, behavioral, and environmental influences (Pajares, 2002). In this light, behavior is not determined by outside forces but rather by people reflecting on their own subconscious through introspection and making sense of the interactions.

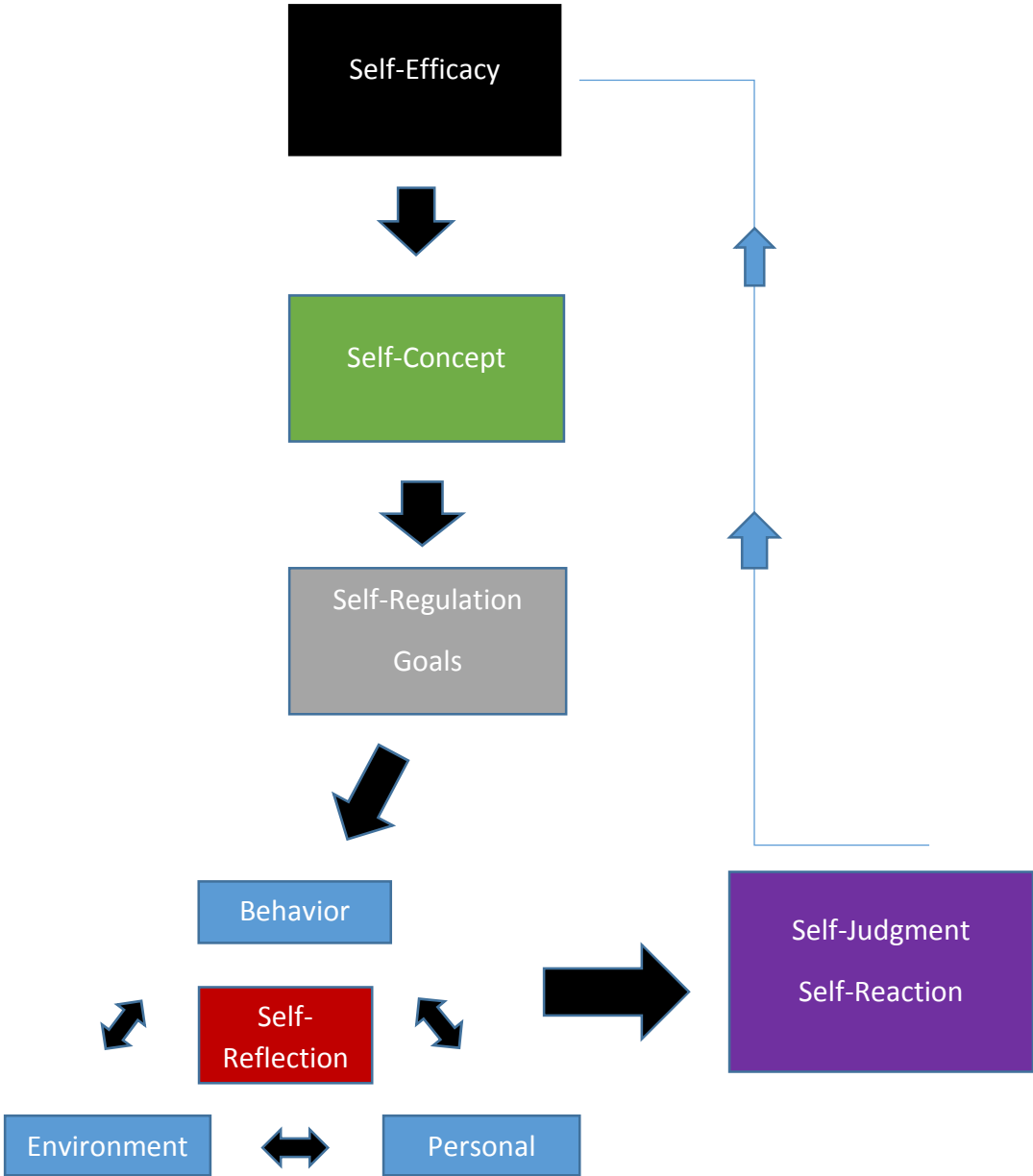
Through developing self-beliefs, individuals are better able to have personal agency over their thoughts, feelings, and actions (Pajares, 2002). Because individuals are not isolated, Bandura included in his social cognitive theory the notion of collective agency where shared beliefs become an integrated factor that affects one's self-efficacy. Self-efficacy affects choices, effort, and the amount of persistence that will be attributed to a task in a given domain. It also encompasses an individual's willingness to overcome barriers as well as feelings of accomplishment. According to Bandura, self-efficacy is derived from four sources-- mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states, and all four factors tie into an individual's sense of self, or self-concept. Self-concept affects goals and self-regulation of behaviors that lead to completion of goals.

Similar to Bandura's (1986) Reciprocal Determinism, self-regulation is considered cyclical in nature because behavior is adjusted from feedback of prior performance. According to Boerkarts, Pintrich, and Zeidner (2000), a social cognitive approach to the self-regulation process includes three self-oriented feedback loops: behavioral, environmental, and person. In this model, accurate self-monitoring is the key component to the feedback loop that affects self-regulation and, in turn, personal goals. In order to effectively set goals based on performance, self-observations and self-feedback must be accurate and require a self-reflective process. Going further into the process, Bandura (1986) stated self-reflection is made up of self-judgment and self-reactions. Self-judgment includes the component self-evaluation which is the process of self-monitoring actions based on a preset standard or goal. By self-evaluating behaviors within the three component feedback process, an individual can

effectively attribute the significance of the behavior. This significance contributes to the individual's self-efficacy of their performance in a given task. See Figure 2.1 below.

Figure 2.1: Pathways of Self-Efficacy through Collective Agency

Pathways of Self-Efficacy through Collective Agency



Within this social construction model, the concepts of self-efficacy, developing self-beliefs, and self-regulation of behavior towards goals are all contingent on the feedback process associated with the collective agency. In Social Cognitive Theory of Organizational Management (1989), Bandura and Wood explain self-efficacy beliefs in the workplace as a product of reciprocating behavioral, personal, and cognitive factors in which “people are both products and producers of their environment” (p.362) and it is strengthened through mastery experiences, modeling, social persuasion, and physiological states. Thus, performance feedback in the workplace can be considered a strong contributor to self-efficacy. According to Bodenhorn, Wolfe, and Airen (2012), school counselors with higher self-efficacy are set higher goals, be more persistent, and be more likely to utilize alternatives in order to meet those goals. However, if role ambiguity is high, it can affect how other agents’ (administrators and staff) perceive the role, and differing perceptions can contribute to a misunderstanding of the duties associated with the school counselor’s job. Such misperceptions can result in an unfair evaluation of work and lowered self-efficacy.

Studies on school counselor self-efficacy. As suggested from the proceeding information, an individual’s levels of self-efficacy can greatly impact working performance within the workplace which in turn impacts an individual’s ability to persevere in the face of challenges and adversity. In considering the role of an elementary school counselor, self-efficacy can have substantial impacts not only to the personal/ career development of the counselor, but it can also greatly impact all stakeholders within the school system. Some factors that play into feelings of self-efficacy may include: adherence to ASCA guidelines,

perceptions of roles, and experience. The following section will highlight some of the previous research performed in the areas of self-efficacy and school counselors.

Adherence to ASCA guidelines. In a quantitative study on Examining elementary school counselors' perceptions of self-efficacy in relation to the roles defined in the ASCA model, Sesto (2013) found that school counselors sometimes find difficulty in aligning the roles that ASCA would suggest with student achievement. Though the use of the electronic survey that incorporated the use of the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (SCARS) and the School Counselor Self-Efficacy (SCSE) Scale. The SCARS was developed by Scarborough (2005) and is used to describe what activities the school counselor is performing in order to identify non-counseling and counseling roles. The SCSE Scale was developed by Bodenhorn and Skaggs (2005) and is used to assess levels of self-efficacy based on the roles defined by the ASCA model. Based on a sample size of 67 elementary school counselors, this study found a significant positive relationship between using the ASCA National Model and self-efficacy. In addition, the author posits that higher levels of self-efficacy were evident for the counselors who had a clear understanding of their role within their defined comprehensive program, and those counselors with higher self-efficacy and support from their administration are more likely to meet their career goals.

In another quantitative study on self-efficacy, attachment, and school counselor service delivery, Ernst (2012) explored self-efficacy beliefs and their relationship to elementary school counseling implementation. Using electronic surveys that included the SCARS, SCSE, and an attachment inventory, the author found that higher self-efficacy beliefs predicted more activities that were consistent with the ASCA National model. These findings were consistent

with Clark's (2006) findings. Interesting in Ernst's (2012) study, highly efficacious school counselors appear do not discriminate between non-counseling and counseling duties- they simply do them. Similar results were found when taking role conflict and role ambiguity into account. In a study on role conflict, role ambiguity, and ASCA functions as a predictors of school counselor job satisfaction, Cervoni (2007) found that elementary school counselors who spent more time outside of the ASCA recommended areas, and those who experience higher levels of role ambiguity, and higher levels of conflict were less satisfied with their jobs.

ASCA adherence and achievement. Some researchers believe that in addition to a strong relationship between highly self-efficacy of school counselors and their adherence to the ASCA Model is a direct relationship with other success oriented programs school wide. In their study of 860 ASCA members, Bodenhorn, Wolfe, and Airen (2010) explored the relationship of school counselor self-efficacy and their perceptions of the achievement gap and achieving equity in their schools. Through the use of the SCSE and questions about perceived achievement gap status and equity, the authors found that school counselors who reported higher levels of self-efficacy were more aware and knowledgeable about achievement gap data.

Perceived Roles. Windle (2009) performed a multi-case qualitative study that explored six high school counselor's perceptions of their real and perceived roles that contribute to their self-efficacy within the high school community. The researcher found that the high school counselors felt as though their roles were not clearly defined, their caseloads were too high, and the size of the caseload plus a heavy load of other duties impacts the direct time they have

with students. Although the counselors expressed frustration with some of the day-to-day work, they overall viewed themselves as effective counselors, and they loved their jobs.

Experience. In a study that observed school counselors' perceived self-efficacy for addressing bullying at the elementary level, Charlton (2009) found that all 126 participants reported high levels of efficacy for overall self-efficacy and provision of bullying interventions. However, the only significant variable that predicted efficacy expectations and outcome values relating to bullying interventions were years of experience of the elementary school counselor: the more years of experience the more efficacy the counselor experienced for bullying interventions.

According to the Social Construction Model, self-efficacy is supported through the interaction of internal and external processes—specifically the development of the self-concept, the ability to self-regulate through observing the feedback process, self-reflecting, and creating realistic self-judgments. However, if the likelihood for role ambiguity is high, the self-efficacy feedback process will be affected, and thus, the greater likelihood for lowered job efficacy. Historically, the role of the school counselor has been individualized per school yet at the same time held to hopeful national standards. However, research would suggest that role ambiguity for school counselors happens within a specific school system (Curry & Bickmore, 2013; House & Hayes, 2002; Leuwerke, Walker, & Shi, 2009; Thompson & Powers, 1983), therefore, making the greater influence on role perception and role definition of the school counselor a more localized affair regardless of national standards.

Role Ambiguity

Roles are defined as patterns of behavior perceived by an employee to be associated with a specific job in the workplace whereas role ambiguity is associated with expectations of behavior. Role ambiguity occurs whenever the expected set of behaviors for a specific job task are unclear (Tubre & Collins, 2000). According to Jackson and Schuler (1985), role ambiguity encompasses a lack of knowledge of the most effective job behaviors and this can be related to the job type. Jobs that are more complex and lack formalization of tasks increase the likelihood of role ambiguity (Tubre & Collins, 2000). This concept is important in the workplace because organizations are considered “systems of roles and work behaviors that are guided by social interactions” (p. 157) and in a system such as a school that is dependent upon those interactions to function optimally, role ambiguity can have negative consequences on the system as a whole.

In their meta-analysis, Tubre and Collins (2000) found that role ambiguity is negatively related to performance and that perceptions of high role ambiguity influence perceptions of performance. Being that perceptions are linked to self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986), it could be argued that role ambiguity affects workplace self-efficacy. In their study on the correlates of role conflict and role ambiguity among secondary school counselors, Thompson and Powers (1983) found that role conflict was positively correlated with role ambiguity and negatively correlated with job satisfaction. In addition, there was also a positive correlation between job related tension and propensity to leave the job with role conflict.

Because the nature of the work of the school counselor is dependent on the organization (school) (Curry & Bickmore, 2013; House & Hayes, 2002) , it could meet Tubre and

Collin's (2000) description of a complex job which lends itself to a higher likelihood for role ambiguity. School counselors can be described as the "glue" in a very complex organization of the school system, and it can be challenging to articulate everything that the role demands. Being that the role of the school counselor is typically defined by the principal (Curry & Bickmore, 2013) and confusion exists between principals and school counselors as to the role of a school counselor (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005; Lieberman, 2004), the likelihood of role ambiguity for the school counselor increases which, in turn, can impact the overall effectiveness of the school counselor.

Administrative influence. Role ambiguity of school counselors is an issue that is greatly influenced by the school principal (Lieberman, 2004). "Personnel factors, such as clarity of role and function, clearly important to school efficiency, are all influenced and shaped by school leadership" (Lieberman, 2004, p.554). Hence, clarifying the role of the school counselor helps to increase efficiency of the school and ensures that skills and available resources are being used optimally. Lieberman (2004) further states that clarifying roles and decreasing ambiguity of expectations can result in a movement towards efficiency and school success, and that all movement hinges on the influence of the principal in that school setting. When roles are considered diffuse and vague, the result is that school counselors will be utilized ineffectively. For example, role ambiguity can often lead to "dual roles" and role conflict where a counselor is forced into the role of a disciplinarian, which negates the purpose of the profession.

In their article on the impact of different types of information on the impact of the principal's perception of the school counselor, Leuwerke, Walker, and Shi (2009) express that a

positive and supportive relationship of the school counselor requires a shared understanding of the appropriate roles and activities of the school counselor. In their study, the researcher found that when given information related to the national standards and appropriate time allocation for counselors (ASCA model) that principals' perceptions of the roles and time spent to those roles were impacted. Interestingly, only 73 of the 337 principals surveyed were knowledgeable about the model prior to the study. This study adds validity to the question of how do counselors assume their identity within a school system, especially if the likelihood for role ambiguity amongst administration is high. Because role definition of the school counselor can be very specific to the school in which the counselor works as well as the counselor's training model, it is important to also explore the induction process.

Training and orientation. Roles in schools are defined by the principal and begin in the process of induction post-hire (Curry & Bickmore, 2013). Induction and orientation into a school is a vital piece for a new school counselor and can set the tone for working performance and expectations. In a study on principals' perceptions of novice school counselors, Curry and Bickmore (2013) examined how principals conceptualize, engage, and induct new school counselors into the work setting of the school. The authors state that although much literature exist on the induction of teachers by principals into the school setting, not much exists in regards to other school personnel like school counselors. Because induction into the work setting has been shown to increase factors such as job satisfaction, retention and effectiveness for teachers, the researchers postulated that due to most states not requiring teaching certifications of school counselors, most new school counselors are entering into a system to which they are unfamiliar. Therefore, without the opportunity for

induction into the new environment, new school counselors face a steep learning curve. This lack of conceptualization on behalf of the administrator and the incongruence of the counselor's skills with the expectations can lead to the administrator potentially viewing the counselor as ineffective. The incongruence of expectations can be attributed to the lack of conceptualization and understanding of the role of the counselor all potentially stemming from differences in training.

The training of school counselors closely resembles that of mental health clinicians with a few differences in regards to coursework. School counselors, especially CACREP graduates, are typically trained from a model that encompasses process and theory and application of counseling skills. This training looks different than other school agents that come from a teaching background and are effectively molded to the school climate (Curry & Bickmore, 2013). This difference in professional training can cause some issues in regards to administrative understanding of the needs of the profession, especially in regards to induction into the school system as well as in evaluating efficacy. According to Scarborough and Culbreth (2008), "School counselors are expected to maintain their identity and perform their role in an environment in which their colleagues and administrators operate from different philosophical and methodological approaches" (p.447). This can be problematic in terms of school counselor efficacy because other agents of the school are trained to operate from an educator standpoint and they come to the school pre-conditioned to the climate.

School climate. School climate is also an integral factor that can affect school counselor's efficacy. According to Sutton and Fall (1995), school climates that were supportive and demanded fewer non- counseling related task assignments were strongly related to high

levels of self-efficacy for school counselors. They also found the quality and quantity of the exchanges between the school counselor and the school administrator to be positive contributions to the effectiveness of the school counseling program, and colleague support was the strongest predictor of efficacy. Similarly, in their study of the discrepancies between the actual and preferred practices of school counselors, Scarborough and Culbreth (2008) found that predictors for discrepancies included place of employment, self-efficacy, and school climate. The researchers found that school counselors in this study were more likely to engage in tasks that they knew would lead to particular outcomes and if those tasks were supported by agents of the school system in which they were employed.

In another qualitative study on the relationships between school counselors and principals, Ponec and Brock (2000) found that there was agreement in role definition between the principals and school counselors interviewed and the principals viewed the school counselor as an integral part of the team. Interestingly, the principals were more effective at delineating the role of the principal from the role of the counselor: meaning the counselor is there to support the children not discipline. They also mentioned that fostering mutual trust and communication through frequent communication and visibility was vital to success in the role. The authors also found that the quality of relationships with teachers played into the effectiveness of the counselor and that education regarding the role of the school counselor provided for more collaboration and team working opportunities between school counselors, teachers, and administration.

In addition to administration, other major stakeholder that can have an effect on a school counselor's sense of efficacy and affect the overall school climate are teachers (Clark &

Amatea, 2004; Sutton & Fall, 1995). In their qualitative study on teacher's perception of the school counselor, Clark and Amatea (2004) found that the most common themes that emerged from teachers were communication, collaboration, and teamwork as well as the importance of the counselor being visible. Although the teachers interviewed in this study overall felt positively about the work of their counselor, several of the teachers interviewed wished for better communication and wished that their counselors had more time for individual work. Interestingly, in this study the teachers were interviewed by pre-service school counselors and their reflections on the interview process were also utilized in the study. In their reflections, the pre-service school counselors noted that this process made them more aware of the need to make a concerted effort to form quality relationships with the teachers in their future schools as well as emphasized the importance of the counselor being visible and accessible. Then, some noted that they were also alerted to the importance of educating and informing teachers of their role in order to not be viewed as being support staff.

Lastly, other key stakeholders in the educational system are the parents of the students. Depending on the demographics associated with the school (i.e. location, percent free and reduced lunch eligibility, access to resources and funding, limited English proficiency, etc.), parental involvement and need can vary greatly. A school that is well funded and has families that reside in a higher socioeconomic status will have very different needs than a school that is made up of mostly low income families. In their study on involving low income parents in schools, Van Velsor and Orozco (2007) discuss that low income parents participate less in schools than high income parents despite the benefits that are associated with higher parental involvement in schools. Some barriers they mention are physical such as working

hours that do not allow for participation, lack of basic resources and some are psychological such as confidence, perception of racism, and mental health issues related to poverty. The authors also claim that poor attitudes from the teachers towards the parents may also contribute to the parent's lack of involvement. Such limited support and accessibility to parents can play into a school counselor's sense of efficacy and feeling as though they are adequately helping their students as well as limit the work that can be done to help their child be successful in school.

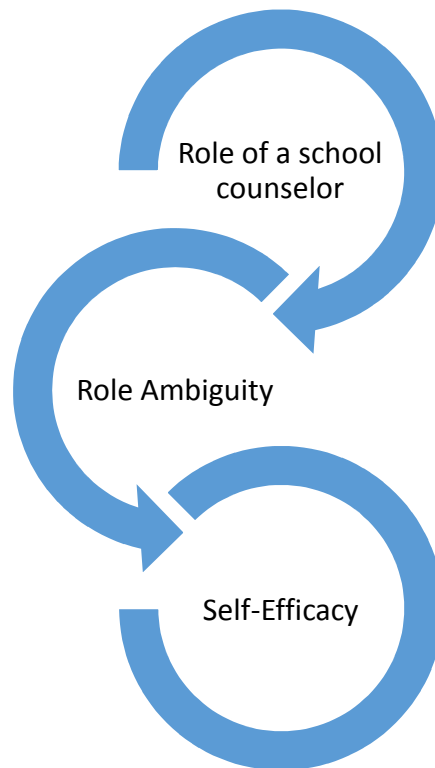
Summary. In summation, a school counselor delivers services to students through school guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and system support (ASCA, 2009). However, research suggests that administrative leaders do not always understand the distinctions of such services (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005; Lieberman, 2004) and this lack of clarity and ambiguity in role definition can result in inappropriate job assignments and tasks that are non-counseling related. Hence, personal capabilities are impeded and thus affect the school counselors' sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Because the job of a school counselor depends greatly on many factors, such as the location, grade level, number of counselors, and type of program, an in depth exploration as to the personal contributing factors that create the experience of self-efficacy can be helpful in developing training models for future school counselors as well as furthering the depth of knowledge into what creates an optimal school climate.

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this study is to explore school counselors' perceptions of how self-efficacy is experienced and manifested for their profession, and it will be organized by

observing the definition of the role of the school counselor, the potential for role ambiguity, and how such ambiguity can affect the counselor’s self-efficacy.

Figure 2.2: Conceptual Framework



Traditionally, the role of the school counselor is to handle the social and emotional needs of the students and families within the school system in a manner appropriate to that school system. According to the ASCA model, school counselors practice a comprehensive guidance program through the elements of foundation, delivery, management, and accountability. Within this National Model, ASCA defines what practices a school counselor should incorporate into their work at their schools as well as what practices are considered “non-guidance” activities that do not effectively utilize the skills and training of a school counselor. With the acceptance of the ASCA model in 2003, school counselors gained a

professional identity that easily accommodates to the academic mission of the school as well as supports students in their social and emotional development.

Because of the multi-faceted and individualized nature of the work of a school counselor, self-efficacy in the workplace manifests from influences that are hidden within the context of the job. School counselors' work is subjective and sometimes private in nature and does not provide for a highly visible outcome measures (such as grades or standardized tests) that can determine job performance. Because of the differences in educational paradigms of training for leadership or teaching as compared to school counseling, there often exists confusion and misunderstanding by school administrators in regards to the role of a school counselor which leads to role ambiguity. This ambiguity can lead to the school counselor being assigned roles and responsibilities that do not utilize their specific training and feedback that is not effective for improvement of their work. Therefore, if performance outcomes are subjective, what helps the school counselor to manifest self-efficacy?

Self-efficacy plays a major role in job satisfaction and performance (Sutton & Fall, 1995). Bandura and Wood (1989) explain self-efficacy beliefs in the workplace as a product of reciprocating behavioral, personal, and cognitive factors and, performance feedback in the workplace can be considered a strong contributor to self-efficacy. In the job of a school counselor, feedback on job performance can be gathered from administrators, teachers, and students as to their specific interactions and vested interest. However, the amount and quality of the feedback to school counselors is largely influenced by the role expectations of the evaluator (typically the principal). Therefore, this evaluation process can look different for each counselor.

Because the role of a school counselor can depend greatly on many factors such as the location, grade level, number of counselors, and type of program, an in depth exploration as to common themes on how a school counselor experiences self-efficacy can be helpful in developing training models for future school counselors as well as current practicing professionals. In addition, it is also hoped that such knowledge will provide more insight as to what creates optimal conditions for a school counselor to effectively do their job.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore elementary school counselors' perceptions of how self-efficacy is experienced and manifested in their work. Because the role of a school counselor is somewhat ambiguous depending on factors of the school system (i.e. grade levels, location, population demographics, etc.) and well as the knowledge of the role of the school counselor by the leadership team, literature on school counselor's experience of self-efficacy is somewhat lacking. Most research that does exist discusses outcomes and efficacy in school counseling from a quantitative perspective that summarizes the counselors' feelings of efficacy with numbers and generalization. In addition, not much literature, outside of dissertations, exists that describes the experience of counselor efficacy in rich terms. Because of the subjective nature of the construct being studied, it was deemed appropriate that a more individualized and personal approach to conducting this study was merited, and a qualitative approach to exploring this experience would be the best fit.

Although the climate of the school counseling profession is colored by so many external as well as internal, individualized factors and constructs, it was hoped that some common theme would emerge from the data. Thus, the research question posed was: how do school counselors experience and manifest self-efficacy for the school counseling profession? Some additional research questions that were answered are: to what degree does the level of administrative support relate to a school counselors sense of efficacy, what specific aspects of the job contribute more significantly to a school counselors efficacy, and what uncontrollable

factors (population, location, grade level) have the most effect on a school counselors' sense of efficacy?

According to Bandura's (1977) work on self-efficacy, human behavior develops through modeling, and cognitions, and perceptions are altered through a person's experience of mastery in a given task. In other words, an individual's perceptions through feedback of the self and the environment will drive their determination to continue in the face of adversity, and essentially, such thoughts and factors that manifest as self-efficacy "construct" their reality. Furthermore, Bandura and Wood (1989) state that, "People's self-beliefs of efficacy also determine their level of motivation, which is reflected in how much effort they will exert and how long they will persevere" (p.362). Within the constructivist paradigm for qualitative research, realities are constructed based on a person's experiences and individual perspectives. Because the current study intends to explore school counselors' perceptions of self-efficacy, the constructivist approach will be used in order to "reconstruct the constructions participants use to make sense of their world" (Hatch, 2002, p.15)

By using the overarching theoretical lens of constructivism, which is based in one's perspectives and experiences, the grounded theory approach, which includes the use of theory and data to guide the research, was used in order to gain further insight to the nature of school counselor's experiencing of self-efficacy. This research began with a strong theoretical base for understanding the role ambiguity associated with as school counselor, the climate associated with a school, as well as what motivational constructs can influence self-efficacy in the workplace in order to procure a strong vantage point to be knowledgeable about the context of the data. It also brought awareness and insight to my own sensitivities and biases to

the subject. However, it is the intention, and a tenant of grounded theory, to remain open to the process. According to Charmaz (2006), “we do not force preconceived ideas and theories directly upon our data. Rather, we follow leads that we define and in the data, or design another way of collecting data to pursue our initial interests” (p. 17).

Research Design

For the purposes of this study, data was collected via multiple methods. According to Maxwell (2013), using multiple methods of data collection helps to ensure the information being used is accurate, provides differing aspects of the study, and helps to increase validity. In this study, it the bulk of the direct information gathered was from an interview with the school counselor. Maxwell (2013) states interviewing is a good way to get a description of another’s perspective on events whereas observation gives the researcher an opportunity to make inferences on that information. Then, indirect information was acquired through observation. In this sense, observation data was used to accent and drive the interview as well as support (or contradict) the information provided. The inclusion of both direct and indirect data helped to create a richer, more detailed picture of the participants experiencing of the construct being studied and allowed the researcher a better perspective of their reality.

General Overview. Under the overarching theoretical lens of constructivism, the grounded theory approach was utilized in this study. This approach includes the use of theory and data to guide the research and allows the researcher a framework from which to gain further insight to the nature of school counselor’s experiencing of self-efficacy in the qualitative research process. In this process, eight elementary school counselors were interviewed with a semi-structured protocol of questions developed by the researcher (See

Appendix A). The questions were designed to address the participants' experiencing of efficacy as related to potential role ambiguity, climate, and possible motivational constructs.

Observations of the participant's emotional reactions, body language, and physical responses to the questions were observed. In addition, observations were also made on interactions between the counselor and other staff as well as the overall feel of the school.

Once the interviews were complete, the data was immediately transcribed and coded in a timely fashion for emerging themes. The initial coding process began with theme that developed based on the questions. Through the grounded theory approach, a constant comparative analysis was performed in order to reach a thematic saturation point for the information gathered. Then, the initial coding was organized into emerging themes based on the context of the school and taking into account the overarching research question. Then, the researcher debriefed the data finding with professional experts that are knowledgeable about the material in order to assure the validity and trustworthiness of the findings. The following sections will discuss the procedures of this study in more detail.

Sample and Sample Selection. Purposeful sampling was utilized in this study. Eight elementary school counselors from local school districts in a small Midwestern town were selected for approximately hour long interviews based on recommendation from a practicing school counselor in the district.

School Demographics. The participants served in schools that were primarily K-4. The enrollment counts for the schools ranged from 316 to 819, and four of the seven building utilized a traveling (part-time) counselor. A traveling counselor is a counselor who works part time at one school and travels to work part-time at another school. Travelers are common in

schools that are above the state ratio of 450 students to one counselor. In regards to free and reduced lunch program eligibility, three of the seven schools were below 50% low income percentage (ranging from 18% to 46%) and four of the schools were above (ranging from 60% to 92%). Three of the schools' populations were over 50% for limited English proficiency. All demographic information was obtained through accessing the state department of education's website for each school of the participating counselor. The information provided was specifically obtained from each school's 2015 report card. Please see the table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Demographic Make-up of Schools

SCHOOL (BY PSEUDONYM OF PARTICIPATING COUNSELOR)	ENROLLMENT NUMBERS	TRAVELER	% LOW INCOME (FREE AND REDUCED LUNCH ELIGIBLE)	% LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY
SCHOOL 1 (P1)	361	No	60%	6%
SCHOOL 2 (P2)	640	Yes	85%	67%
SCHOOL 3 (P3)	316	No	46%	2%
SCHOOL 4 (P4)	590	Yes	41%	14%
SCHOOL 5 (P5)	494	No	18%	3%
SCHOOL 6 (P6)	819	Yes	92%	79%
SCHOOL 7(P7)	674	Yes	11%	2%
SCHOOL 8 (P8)	819	Yes	78%	53%

***Note: School 7/Participant 7 (P7) was the traveling counselor from School 4.*

Participants. All participants were fulltime counselors in their building with the exception of one participant who is a full-time traveling counselor who splits time at two

schools due to higher enrollment numbers. The prior experience of the participants ranged from a first year school counselor to 18 years as a school counselor. Six of the eight participants came from a teaching background and were teachers prior to becoming a school counselor. Only one participant lacked a Master's degree in counseling, however, all were licensed school counselors as per state department of education requirements.

Data Generation. For this study, direct and indirect (or unobtrusive data) were utilized to generate results. The direct data originated from the interview process. The interview questions were semi-structured and based in the current literature. They were also based on observations that occurred during this researcher's experiences in practicum and internship semesters at an elementary school (See Appendix A). Indirect, or unobtrusive data, originated from observations during the interview process. According to Hatch (2002), unobtrusive data are non-invasive measures that help to provide context to the background without disturbing the natural "flow" of the event and are considered indirect. Unobtrusive data was collected from observation of the participant's body language, emotional reactions, and physical responses to questions. Observations were also made on the interactions with the administration, teachers, and staff with the school counselor as well as conversations that occurred between the counselor and others based upon those interactions. Observations of the daily schedule/ work of the school counselor and her interactions with students were also included.

Other observations and interactions that Maxwell (2013) and Hatch (2002) might refer to as "triangulation" occurred from other experiences in working, speaking, and discussing initial findings with other elementary school counselors. Lastly, some data relating to the

school population and demographics were gathered indirectly via the state board of education website. Finally, outside sources of data used in this study that are also considered unobtrusive were the literature—peer reviewed journals and original source books.

Due to the nature of the research questions developed for this study, it was determined that the main source of data collection would be obtained through the interview process (Refer to Table 3.2). In creating the interview questions, a combination of the unobtrusive data and the literature to develop questions were used that might lead to more insight in regards to self-efficacy. Questions were intentionally created open-ended and arranged in a specific order, in hope of evoking a more rounded thought pattern that would also help to either provide support (or again contradict) later in the interview for things discussed early in the interview. The interview protocol questions were also constructed with the research questions in mind.

Table 3.2: Overview of Information Needed

<i>Research Questions</i>	<i>Information Needed</i>	<i>Method</i>
1. <i>How do elementary school counselors experience and manifest self-efficacy for the school counseling profession?</i>	Participants' perceptions of what makes up the job role, influential agents, and constructs that add to their sense of how they know they are doing a good job.	Interview
2. <i>To what degree does the level of administrative support relate to a school counselors sense of efficacy?</i>	Participants' perceptions of their levels of administrative support and its effects on the evaluation process.	Interview
3. <i>What specific aspects of the job contribute more significantly to a school counselor's efficacy?</i>	Participants' perception of their job roles and what specifically motivates them to continue. In addition, what aspects make the job less appealing?	Interview
4. <i>What uncontrollable factors (population, location, grade level) have the most effect on a school counselors' sense of efficacy?</i>	Participants' views on what factors within their profession are controllable and what factors are not, and are their commonalities with counselors who serve similar populations.	Demographic School Data from State Department of Education Website, Interview

Because most of the information was obtained through the interview process, it was important to sequence the order to the questions to gather as much information as possible. According to Hatch (2002), beginning with background questions allows the participant to discuss familiar events and ease into harder questions. In this regard, the beginning questions were kept broad and asked for a generalized overview of the school counselor's perspective on the job and sense of control. The questions then moved into the discussion of evaluations and

their perceptions of the instruments used and the person evaluating. The questions that addressed their perspective on others' opinions of their work were placed toward the end. The interview is then wrapped up with a positive question on personal motivation and an open ended "anything I missed" question. This sequencing was intentional in order to derive as much data as possible about the school counselor's internal processes before moving onto their perceptions of others' perceptions, which could potentially stir up more anxious and uncomfortable thinking. Then, this sequence was followed with another positive personal contemplation—in a sense, making a positive sandwich from beginning to end. The interviews ranged in time from 35 minutes to an hour and fifteen minutes, and were recorded using a personal recording device.

Procedures

Once permissions were secured, interviews proceeded in a timely fashion over the course of three weeks as to enable enough time for reflection, but not too much time for memory gaps. The interviewees were contacted via email and times for face to face interviews were scheduled. Informed consent was delivered in paper form as well as in verbal contract, and all interviews were conducted in a private location and were recorded via an electronic recorder. Notes were taken with intention to be used as a supplement to the transcript and filed with the data. Once the interview was finished, participants were thanked and given contact information should any concerns arise or more information becomes available. The recorded interviews were then immediately transcribed for data analysis and kept in a secure and private location. The interviewees and associated schools were assigned pseudo names to protect anonymity.

Materials. The materials used in this study included a personal electronic recorder and a legal pad, as well as the previously created interview questions (See Appendix A).

Storage of Data. The data gathered from the interview was removed from the digital recorder and stored on a secure flash drive as well as a private file share account for the duration of the study.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

For the purposes of this study, data analysis was based on the data collection techniques associated with the grounded theory approach to qualitative research. In this method, data was collected through guided interviews and observation. Notes were taken during the interview process that provided more insight and context to the constructs and themes being discussed. They also provided clues as to the emphasized phrases and body language that occurred during the course of the interview when asked particular questions.

The next step in the data collection process was transcribing and coding the data through categorizing strategies and thematic analysis. According to Maxwell (2013), categorization analyses come from statements within the text that hold meaning. Thematic and versus coding was used to categorize the emergent themes based upon the research questions. Through a first coding process, initial themes emerged based on the research questions. The initial themes included: school population, background of the counselor, inspiration to become a counselor, self-perceived roles, good job indicators/factors, perceived barriers, perceived control of barriers, understanding of role by admin/ teachers/ staff, response to the climate, evaluations, data drives, support, motivation to continue, climate of school, and closing thoughts.

Then, data was organized into a visual “data display” as recommended by Hatch (2002) in order to assist in determining if any relationship exists between the initial codes and the research questions. Once the relationships are established, the emerging themes were synthesized into the corresponding research questions. The overarching research question (R1) of this study was what factors are the most influential in the elementary school counselor’s experience of doing a good job and assists the most in manifesting self-efficacy. Some additional questions addressed were: (R2) to what degree does the level of administrative support relate to a school counselor’s sense of efficacy, (R3) what specific aspects of the job contribute more significantly to efficacy, and finally, (R4) what uncontrollable factors such as school population, location, and grade levels have the most effect on efficacy?

The final step in the data analysis process was to begin the write-up by including the contextual and structural descriptions of the construct being studied as well as the memos taken throughout the analysis process. These descriptions were used within the final write-up to provide more meaning to the themes and create a greater level of understanding of the school counselor’s experiencing of self-efficacy. Lastly, a summarization of finding for each research question was synthesized and incorporated back into support (or contradiction) of the initial theoretical framework. Figure 3.1 describes the coding process in more detail below.

Figure 3.1 Analysis

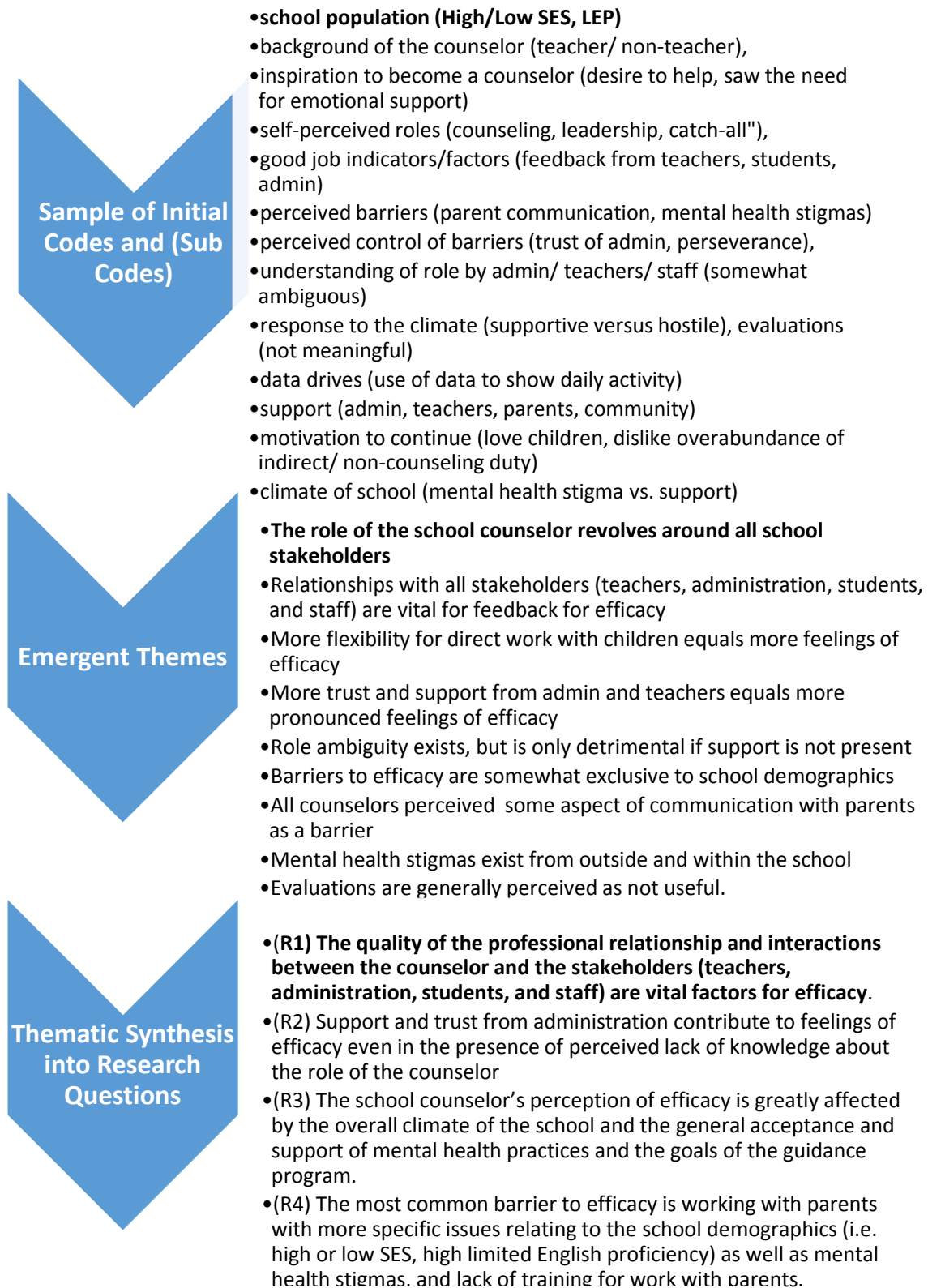


Figure 3.1. The process of analysis: coding, themes, and synthesis

Validity/ Trustworthiness

“Research is only good as the investigator.”
-Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers (2002), p.17

According to Morse et al. (2002), validity in qualitative research can be viewed as a means for obtaining rigor through verification strategies such as methodological coherence appropriateness in sampling, concurrently collecting and analyzing data, and thinking theoretically; and through such a process, the rigor of the inquiry will be “beyond question, beyond challenge, and provide pragmatic scientific evidence” (p.19) for our knowledge base. However, the researcher must also be aware of threats to validity. According to Maxwell (2013), a researcher must be aware of bias—preconceptions of the researcher—and reactivity—the influence of the researcher on the participants being studied. For the purposes of this research, validity was addressed by the guidelines suggested by Morse et al. (2002) and Maxwell (2013) to ensure rigor and quality without bias and reactivity.

The first and second suggestions by Morse et al. (2002) to proactively ensure rigor by the researcher is to take into account the methodological coherence and the appropriateness of the sampling. In this study on how school counselors determine self-efficacy in the workplace, the grounded theory approach was utilized, which means that through theoretical sampling and concurrent comparative analysis, as data was collected it was continuously being compared to the existing data to inform direction and need to investigate areas of new insight. Because of the internal and subjective nature of the construct self-efficacy, the construct was approached through the use of guided interview questions directed at elementary school counselors that seek to uncover the counselor’s perceptions of how his/her

role is viewed through the lens of “other” school agents as well as “what” keeps him/her motivated to stay with the job. Observation of the school counselor’s interactions with “other” school agents (i.e., principals, asst. principals, administrative personnel, and teachers) were also noted and utilized from time spent at the school. This additional time in observations was used to support validity by observing discrepant evidence and negative cases between what was said in the interview and what was observed (Maxwell, 2013). Because the research question for this study addresses how school counselors experience and manifest self-efficacy, these methods and sampling techniques are considered congruent and appropriate to the methodologies required of the grounded theory approach to qualitative research.

In addressing Morse et al.’s (2002) third and fourth suggestions for collecting/analyzing data concurrently and thinking theoretically, data obtained through interview and observation were transcribed and coded in a timely fashion as to allow for reflection of the experience, but not too much time to forget the nuances and those things that “stand out”. Due to the nature of the coding process, thinking theoretically will emerge as an organic process that helps to keep “the micro-macro perspectives, inching forward without making cognitive leaps, constantly checking and rechecking, and building a solid foundation” (Morse et al., 2002, p.18). Through the process of thinking theoretically about the data, a theory developed that was then tied back and synthesized with the research questions.

Threats to validity in the form of bias and reactivity were addressed and proactively rechecked throughout the research process. Biases were checked by exploring my preconceived notions, ideas, and opinions and trying indefinitely to ensure objectiveness in

the collection and reporting of the data. Reactivity was also addressed through the interview protocol where questions get at similar ideas from differing perspectives, as well as through the process of corresponding observation of behaviors and interactions of the school counselor in the workplace. In addition to self-check for bias and reactivity, a peer debriefing from a colleague who was familiar with the material as well as the profession of the elementary school counselor was utilized during the data collection process and the final write-up. Lastly, member checks with the counselors interviewed were also conducted to ensure that the data collected as accurate and that the interpretation of it seemed appropriate and good.

Risks and Benefits

The risks associated with this study included maintaining the confidentiality of the interviewees in light of possibly sensitive information. Because of the nature of the power role between administrator and school counselor, it is possible that some information shared would be detrimental to the school counselor's working relationship with the district or administration. It could also bring to light issues or concerns of a systemic nature. Another risk concern could be the well-being of the school counselor when asked to think existentially about their working role and satisfaction with their job. With these risk factors in mind, it is imperative that confidentiality remain intact and that informed consent is received and understood.

Because the process of a person creating self-efficacy is subjective and internal, it is the hope that a benefit of this study will be to bring insight and perspective to the various factors that contribute to a school counselor's sense of doing a "good job". By exploring and having

awareness of this notion, school districts and administrators would be better able to ensure that such constructs are in place in order to ensure the most optimal working environment for the counselor. This knowledge would also help graduate level school counselor programs to properly address such needs and issues in the training of future school counselors.

Limitations

Limitations that need to be discussed in this study include the purposeful sampling, the restriction of location, and the lack of diversity in the participants. In regards to the purposeful sampling, participants were chosen based on accessibility and availability at the time of interviewing. Initially, 12 counselors were contacted for interview but only eight could complete the interview process, thus reducing the sample size to a smaller number. Also, participants were chosen from surrounding areas that were quickly accessible to the researcher and in some ways, could limit the findings to being more specific to this region. In addition, all of the participants used in this study were Caucasian females. This limit to diversity could have also limited the findings to the perspective of the majority population of the region without bringing a diverse perspective to the study.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore school counselors' perceptions of how self-efficacy is experienced and manifested for their profession and what significant thematic factors emerge between the participants. This study utilized a qualitative, grounded theory, research design based in a constructivist paradigm. In this study, eight elementary school counselors were interviewed in order to explore their experience as a school counselor and through that perspective uncover what factors emerge as being significant to the development

of self-efficacy in the workplace. It was the hope that through this study, more information as to how to support elementary school counselors in their work to be the most effective as well as more information as to how to train future school counselors would be produced.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings

Due to the individualized nature of the work of a school counselor and the strong likelihood of role ambiguity and its associated effects, the purpose of this study was to observe what thematic factors emerge in qualitative interviews with elementary school counselors that contribute the most to a sense of efficacy in job performance. In this study, rich information was discovered, and the findings are organized based on the research questions and goals. Then, new emerging insight is discussed. The overarching research question (R1) of this study was what factors are the most influential in the elementary school counselor's experience of doing a good job and assists them in manifesting self-efficacy. Some additional questions addressed were: (R2) to what degree does the level of administrative support relate to a school counselor's sense of efficacy, (R3) what specific aspects of the job contribute more significantly to efficacy, and finally, (R4) what uncontrollable factors such as school population, location, and grade levels have the most effect on efficacy?

(R1)What factors are the most influential in the elementary school counselor's experience of doing good job?

When asked to talk about how they "know" they are doing a good job, all eight school counselors interviewed paused and reflected, and four out of eight stated that thinking about how they were doing a good job was novel and something of which they had not given much thought. It was evident from the manner in which this question was processed and answered that the participants were pouring over the external and internal messages that they use to determine whether or not they did a good job that day. When asked about their typical day, all of the counselors listed components that involved working with children, administration,

teachers in many intertwined roles, but they also stated that each day was different depending on the circumstances. This ambiguity in role and routine made this question of how do you “know” you are doing a good job a hard question to answer. As stated by one participant (P8) in regards to the constant flux of her role:

And that’s one of the things that I like and one of the things I struggle with. Feeling like I am accomplishing what I need to be accomplishing..when sometimes you walk in the door and things go to hell in a hand basket. You are calling saying hey I have to reschedule..or I cannot get to the blue hallway because I am in the yellow but I will be there as soon as I can. Sometimes that can be frustrating because I think-- am I really being, ya know, wise with my time? Or am I letting things suck me in and I don’t manage it really well. So, kind of figuring that piece out. (P8)

Most of those interviewed felt as though the main source of “knowing” they were doing a good job came from relational factors with teachers, children, administration, and parents.

(R1) Teachers. A common theme of importance that emerged foremost was the rapport with teachers. Rapport to these counselors meant that the teachers were supportive of the guidance program enough that they trusted the school counselor to work with their kids, were complementary and respectful, and were willing to send kids when they needed emotional support. As stated by one participant:

I try not to base my worth or you know what I believe..my values on feedback from teachers or, you know, other folks because then you are always looking for that external kind of reward, however, I feel like that this success of this program is based on external things. You know... teachers giving complements, teachers trusting you with their kids, and teachers making guidance a priority and staying in the room because they know the lesson is something they can implement after I leave. Those are the things that make me feel successful. (P8)

It seemed that rapport also encompassed a sense of mutual respect and inclusiveness when it came to working collaboratively to meet the needs of the students. Four participants interviewed mentioned the challenges associated with time constraints in the classroom and

being able to pull students for individual work, and these counselors felt as though it was a great complement when the teachers understood the importance of the work being done and the need for flexibility and some transparency when working with their kids. However, this respect was mutual. As stated by one counselor in regards to her relationship with her teachers:

Most teachers want what is successful for their kids, like all of us are afraid of being vulnerable, so if I reach out for help it looks like I cannot manage the situation. So, I have worked really hard in the last year and a half to not come across like, “well let me float down on my cloud because I am the expert and save this child that you can’t manage”. I feel like yes- by making myself approachable and willing to clean up vomit if that’s what I need to do, then teachers see you as part of the team versus this separate entity that is coming to judge or tell me how to manage my class. (P8)

All counselors interviewed talked some about the relational components with their teachers and how it made a great difference in the challenges associated with their work. As stated by one counselor in speaking about the dynamics of the teachers within the school as related to her role:

I think that the sense of community makes a difference. I think if there is a lot of tension between teachers, then that affects how I approach those teachers and how I navigate through them. There was just a lot of tension this year. So, I am thinking and trying to navigate and build those relationships and not make other people mad and walk that tightrope. And I also think, just showing up and being visible. I think the school counselor is really responsible for tying the whole school together and building that community and building that trust with the whole school. (P8)

(R1) Children. The next relational component of importance was with their rapport with the children. The rapport was described as children feeling comfortable to come to the school counselor for what they need and the children knowing the face of the school counselor (visibility). As mentioned by one participant:

It's kind of a hard job. Some of the kids... you can see how they progress and you can tell you are doing a good job. But others you do what you do and hope for the best because they move on and you do not really know. I feel like when I have kids who are coming to me and they feel comfortable coming to me- I think that shows I am doing my job well and I have established enough rapport. I mean we are talking 490 something kids or 480 something kids whatever we are at the moment. They all know my name and they know how to find me. (P5)

All of the counselors interviewed spoke to some extent about using their hallway duty or morning/afternoon greeting duty to be a face and be visible to the children. One counselor stated that the core of her program revolves around guidance because she is able to see more kids at one setting, which is vital to her remaining visible to a very large school population. In general, the relational theme that emerged with the rapport with children was vital to efficacy. Although not talked about as frequently as the teacher component when asked directly how they "know" they are doing a good job, every elementary school counselors interviewed mentioned children as their number one reason for what keeps you coming back to work. As stated by one school counselor:

I think, I feel like I am doing a good job when I see a lot of my stakeholders in day. I feel like I am not doing a good job if I sit in this chair all day looking at my computer. I try to allot time for program planning stuff, but I can get bogged down to where when I walk away I am like "what did I do today?" I do not like that feeling... and hardly interacting with people. That is not what I got into this for. I love it when a kid says to me, "I like it when you are here". And they do..ya know. The little kids will say, "I like it when you come and speak", and that's what makes me feel good. (P7)

Although children were the number one reason that these counselors returned to work every day and every school year, they were not the sole determination of efficacy. As stated by one participant:

If I just based the job I was doing on the feedback I get from children, I would say I get an A+ because I feel that I meet children's needs, and they let me know that in many, many ways. But they are not my evaluators. (P1)

All of the school counselors interviewed listed their administrative team as their evaluators of their working performance.

(R1)Administration. The last relational component mentioned was administrative trust. Four of the eight counselors interviewed mentioned support or trust of their administration as an indicator that they were doing a good job. For some, it seemed that they viewed their administration as being encouraging of the guidance program and willing to support their counselors in having an active role in the school through leadership opportunities and more outside training. All counselors discussed their administration somewhat, but an emerging theme seemed to be that if trust was present then the school counselor felt more supported and free to implement their guidance program to the best of their ability. As stated by one participant:

I feel very, very fortunate that my principal doesn't make me feel like that... she has come in and does observations on my lessons, both announced and both as a walk-through- which I love because I love for her to see what I am doing. But I feel like she.. I have never felt like pressure that I am going to mess up. If I know she's coming for a formal evaluation, I make sure to get here early, look better, dress nice, have everything planned- but I have never stressed about it and felt like I was going to be in trouble or that I am doing something wrong. I have been very fortunate with all I have had- I have had 4 or 5 principals- and I have always felt that they were totally supportive and complementary. They make you want to work harder and do better because they are not on your case. (P3)

Although only half of the participants mentioned the relational component with administration as an indicator of doing a good job, all interviewed mentioned that their working performance evaluations were performed by their administration. In addition, only one counselor interviewed indicated that her principal had a thorough understanding of her role. All others indicated that the administration may not fully understand the role, yet there

seemed to be a lot of trust that the counselor was doing her job well. As stated by one counselor:

I think a lot of it has to do too that a lot of people do not understand the counselor's role. For example, my evaluator did not know how to rate me on my evaluation, so I think..yes.. they don't understand the role of the counselors a lot of times. Maybe they understand but they do not know how it all fits together as easily as they do for teachers. They haven't been in our role before. I know my evaluator had a hard time because he was like, "I know I saw you do this and this is really great, but I don't know what it is or what it is called and I don't know how to rate you on your skills". There are still a lot of discrepancies and vocabulary that we are working on. (P7)

When asked about their evaluations of their working performance, all counselors mentioned the use of the Teacher Excellence and Support System (TESS) as well as personal growth plans. All of the counselors seemed to be in agreement that the TESS evaluation was more teacher oriented and made for some challenges in being evaluated on counselor activities, however, most felt as though their administration was fair, supportive, and understanding in the process. Although all the counselors seemed to speak about rapport with administration as being important to their sense of efficacy, interestingly, none linked their TESS or working performance evaluation as an indicator of doing a good job.

(R1)Parents. Lastly, another indicator of efficacy that was mentioned by all counselors was rapport with parents. Rapport with parents was described as parents being involved with their child's school life, being supportive of the work of the school counselor, and being willing to allow their child to participate in the guidance program. For some counselors, parent rapport was an element that due to a negative stigma associated with mental health took some time and education as to the role of the school counselor. As stated by one counselor:

Sometimes, I will have a parent that said, “ I am so sorry! I heard my daughter had a fight and came to your office. I say, “No, I appreciate that. That’s what I want to do.” All friends have fights. I want them to try to work it out themselves. It’s better they come to me and let me try to help, then taking it home and getting mom’s angry with each other. So that’s the main thing that I need to work on is letting parents know my role. A lot of times they are like “you see my child every other week in guidance lessons!” and they think that the counselor is just there. Or some of them even, on a negative, they think if their kids come in they haven’t done anything wrong and you’re not going to call DHS on me. They think if the counselor comes “I am in trouble” and what I did wrong..or what kind of problems they have.. so I try to make that a positive. (P3)

Other counselors made similar statements in their interviews in regards to dealing with parents and the stigma associated with mental health. As stated by another counselor:

We do have parents from other cultures that when they see anything about counseling, they will need a phone call with an explanation. All of my groups are friendship oriented and conflict oriented. I try to explain that it’s not therapy and I think that’s why it’s easier too whenever I get anything signed and I need feedback. I am just talking about their friendship. And I always try to let them know what I am doing and the group is just an extension of what I am doing in their guidance lessons. It’s nothing extremely personal and it’s not therapy. We are just talking about friendship and conflict. It’s less threatening. I usually do just briefly explain my activities and after they hear that they are fine. I have never had anyone say, my child cannot be in a group with you. Um.. I have had parents say my child cannot speak to a counselor, like after a hotline, but I understand. And at the same time, we are never trying to get anyone into trouble. (P4)

Although most of the counselors mentioned some facet of a parental component as part of their stakeholders in their role as the school counselor as well as an indicator of a job well done, many mentioned the parental piece as being one of the more challenging components of their job.

In summation to (R1), the factors that appeared to be the most influential to a counselor’s sense of doing a good job appeared to be relationally tied to rapport with teachers, children, administration, and parents.

(R2) To what degree does the level of administrative support relate to a school counselor's sense of efficacy?

As mentioned in the above section on influential factors to efficacy, the school counselors interviewed all included administrative trust and support as a significant component that added to their sense of working efficacy. Although in some cases, it seemed as though the school counselors felt that their administrative team did not fully understand the role; it seemed excusable so long as they were supportive and not scrutinizing. When asked how her admin viewed her role as a school counselor, one participant who is a traveling counselor at two different schools and works with two sets of principals/ assistant principals stated:

My admin at one school would say, we are there to support, and they would leave it very general --to the kids to the teacher to everybody, because they do utilize the counselors in so many different ways there. But I also think that they would say- we have a lot of kids popping up over there- their demographic is changing. We are seeing more high poverty kids over there- so I would say a lot of education for the teachers about families and kids in poverty, and just trying to develop empathy in teachers. So, I think they would say education and support. Here at this school- I think they would say just meeting the needs of the kids. The population is so different that they would say just take care of the kids whatever that takes. (P7)

When asked this question about their administration's view of their role, all counselors added some component about being there to support the children and help meet their needs, however, just as stated above, many gave more generalized and vague answers with the same idea of do "whatever it takes" to meet the needs of the population without specificity. Interestingly, this role ambiguity due to the private and confidential nature of some of the

work was further elucidated when the counselors were asked about their working performance evaluation. As stated by one counselor:

Here's the conundrums with TESS- which I am sure have come up with others- it's hard to find an appropriate time for an admin to observe a school counselor, and they are most comfortable with guidance. And so, it's still not as cookie cutter as I am sure the admin would like it to be, but that's what I was observed in this year, guidance. I'm not sure that we are supposed to be observed in certain settings, and even in that one the kids were talking about some pretty heavy stuff. Sometimes even in guidance confidential stuff comes out, and that's just what happens. (P6)

However, this counselor also felt as though she was supported and respected by her principal, and she considered her an ally for doing her job when met with challenges from teachers. She also stated:

I think my admin is pretty trusting in my vision. So if I go to them and say, "I need your help- I need to get my guidance in today and it's not happening", I have that. It's a big card that I play if I have to. I think my schedule is pretty consistent and so I have some things in place, so usually teachers see it coming. (P6)

However, this ambiguity also leads to another factor in regards to lack of critical feedback for job improvement. As stated by one counselor in regards to feedback from her evaluations:

They [administration] do not understand. Have you looked at the TESS eval for school counselors? I would love to be evaluated by a school counselor. They do not have a clue. I am not saying that to be mean. I am just saying.. "Are you doing a good job with this? Well, I don't know what that means but... do I like you as a person? Yes, you are proficient." It's very, very subjective. (P1)

And this lack of understanding on part of the administration as evaluators also leads to other internally motivating qualities that may be present in school counselors and may contribute to a sense of efficacy. As stated by one counselor:

You do have to be very self motivated and self driven in this job because- even though I am constantly putting stuff in front of my principal (guidance and stuff) it's not her area so she's not going to give me a lot of feedback. (P8)

In summation to the research question R2, the elementary school counselors interviewed seemed to place high value on the support of their administration regardless of their administration's perceived understanding of their role. It seems that when administrative support is high, it contributes to efficacy and conversely, when it is low, it creates a sense of uncertainty about job performance. However, there may be other self-motivating constructs at work that assist in balancing out the lack of direct feedback from job evaluators.

(R3) What specific aspects of the job contribute more significantly to efficacy?

As mentioned in research questions R1 and R2, relational components with teachers, children, administration, and parents seemed to contribute most significantly to efficacy for the school counselors interviewed. In addition, the overall climate of the school and personal motivating constructs also contributed to the feeling of doing a good job.

(R3) School Climate. School climate was described as the overall feeling the counselors received from their working environment. It seemed that the school counselors who felt more supported, included, and professionally respected at their schools, spoke more confidently about their roles as well as about their job. In speaking about her school, one counselor stated at the beginning of her interview:

Parents here are amazing. Staff is amazing. Everybody is very aware of their surroundings and their kids and they have good relationships. Both my principal and asst principal are really amazing. I can go to them and say "hey, this is going on, ya know. Can you do this part of it and I'll do the other part of it and they are on it. I have a lot of support here. They are really great. (P5)

She later went on to say:

I love my job. I love the kids. I love to see their smiling faces when they come here in the mornings. Like I said our staff here is amazing. We are losing a lot of them for next year so that's going to be really hard. It's just a great community. This is a first year of my nine years- where I don't think there's been a single morning that I have woken up

and said “I don’t want to go to work”. I love it here. The kids are great, the parents are great. We have a great community here! (P5)

However, perhaps due to the individualized nature of schools and the different focus of administration, not all school counselors experience their schools with the same exuberance as participant 5. One counselor spoke to the difference in her school:

It depends on who your principal is because, just to be honest, this year I feel like I am ancillary, like I do not matter as much. I feel like I am not considered in a leadership position, where for a few years I was considered a school leader, and now I am not. Which is, well, on some levels good, because I get to more small groups and work with kids more. But it’s really strange where education is going. It’s all about data and test scores and if you can’t show that what you are doing is affecting test scores...It seems like they are putting all of their eggs into the data basket, which is great but you can make it look anyway you want to support your program and I think that when we are talking about the emotional well-being of children, how can you quantify that. (P1)

Then, because of some schools being more focused on the data and improvement of scores, some counselors also experience some challenges in the form of reluctance from the teachers and accessing kids which contributes to the overall feeling of the school for the school counselor. As stated by one participant:

Yes, I know what teachers will work with me in certain ways, especially the older grades. They want you to pull kids during lunch and not miss academic time. But when you have almost 600 kids, it’s hard to get to them as quickly if you are just meeting during lunch. So time restraints are typical. You get to know your teachers. There are some teachers that when you walk in the room, they are like take them anytime whenever, they will catch up. But there are some kids that cannot miss academic time. I would say that is definitely a challenge, especially at the end of the year and scheduling. My administrators are great to let me do whatever I need to do. There are some kids that want to eat lunch with me every day for fun and there are some kids that need to see me in an emergency. The teachers are pretty good about letting me in. I have kind of learned which ones to ask for what. (P4)

Unfortunately, time constraints and teacher reluctance was a common theme amongst those interviewed. As stated by another participant:

The climate in Elementary schools is not conducive or developmentally appropriate for the little kids at all, and it's all about academics. There is increasingly less and less room for the whole child. We use to have a testing month, April, and it was black time for the counselors office. We cut everything and wouldn't do anything during that time, and that was just to keep everybody happy. Unfortunately, the kids are anxious. The teachers are anxious. Everyone has high anxiety. And so now it's turning into testing season where it's like the whole spring. With the PARC comes so much testing, then the trials. It was like from January on. (P6)

She goes on to speak how the time constraints associated with core subjects and testing affect the work with families in need:

So, if I got a phone call from a parent saying would you please check on this child because his dad has been deported and dad was in jail for some time, and he's really upset. And I go to pull that kid and the teacher is like, "this is really not a good time". I would consider that an obstacle and that happens a lot. A lot. (P6)

Then, she spoke to the differing cultures within the schools which was a common theme amongst schools that had traveling counselors:

Yea, and I think, especially the school culture thing, because my traveler was like, "your teachers work hard". Our schools pretty good about hiring folks who work hard, but they are stingy with the kids. And they are unwilling to let them out. She said, "when I used to be a school counselor in a building: they wanted them out". I have to fight to get guidance time. A lot of the teachers were like, "I don't have 30 minutes to give you this month". So that's a big obstacle. Just a lack of, I guess, perspective. I know I have to be on good terms with everybody to make things work. But I feel like I have a pretty clear focus on who my most important client is and it's not that teacher. So, if it's in the moment- I will pull the kid and ask forgiveness later. (P6)

This perspective also encompasses the stigmas associated with mental health and affects the counselors' perspective of the school's climate. As mentioned in R1 when discussing the parents, many counselors have to face challenges with the community and cultures outside the school building in regards to the negative associations with their child seeing the counselor. However, some counselor's interviewed alluded to a stigma that was not only outside the school, but within the school. As stated by one counselor:

In my building, I think they do see an appreciation for counseling, but just in general. Sometimes there is a negative stigma, or they do not see it as it being as important as it really is. I would like to see people value mental health in schools and not have a negative stigma attached to it. (P4)

Then by another counselor who experienced the stigma associated with mental health directly:

Last year I squawked and squawked that we needed some mental health information for teachers in regards to common presenting childhood disorders because we have fairly low educated parents, and they will buy everything the teachers say. And the teachers were stepping over the line and saying things like, “you need to take your son to the doctor. He has ADHD”. So, I told my principal we that we really need to educate our teachers about this stuff. So May is mental health awareness month, and this year I put some little handouts from the Mayo clinic, one per week, saying this is what depression looks like in a child. This is how its treated, and this is how you can support a child in the classroom. Some of them were put back in my box. And so, I was clued into the fact that we probably have some staff members who are probably anti-mental health. So it depends on who you talk to and I am not sure who those folks are- but it was an eye opener to me. There are probably some who think I do not need to be here. But I have had staff members say, “you and the school nurse are the most important people in this school”, so I think it’s all in who you ask. There is still a stigma associated with mental health out there. (P6)

Although this negative mental health stigma within the school did not emerge in all of the interviews with the counselors, dealing with the stigma outside the school with parents and community did. And interestingly, this topic of conversation brought to light some other motivating qualities that assisted these school counselors in overcoming the challenges associated with the profession.

(R3) Motivational constructs. When asked to describe their typical day and what makes up their job, the school counselors interviewed listed tasks that are more commonly known to be associated with the school counseling profession such as guidance lessons, individual/ group sessions, and crisis management. In addition to the more known tasks, some

also listed things some less commonly known tasks such as: morning/afternoon duty, behavioral check-ins, various collaborative meetings with teachers and administration, testing coordination, parental involvement, teacher consultations, family/ community resource liaison, special education meetings, assembly organization, medicine distribution in nurse's absence, home visits, snack pack coordinator, community English literacy program. When asked to describe their role, descriptions given were: nurturer, barrier remover, resource finder, super hero, problem solver, safe place, proactive supporter, new student/ teacher orienteer, listener, behavioral specialist, social worker, advocate for the child and school, and mental health specialist. With such typical days that involve the wearing of many hats, it is not unexpected that the school counselors interviewed were often overwhelmed. However, all seemed highly motivated for the work. As stated by one participant:

I really, really enjoy my job. I really enjoy being there for kids who really need me. Maybe they don't have anyone else for them or there is no one else they can talk to. I feel like I am making a huge difference in kids' lives and, there are just a lot of kids that are sad. I really enjoy being that person they can come to and hug when there's no one else, or giving families resources that make a huge difference in their lives when they feel like they cannot do it anymore, then they do. Families and children are really suffering and no one has been there to be their voice, so they feel heard. I do feel like I am making a difference everyday and it's rewarding. I have always been around kids where I can see they are suffering, and it's painful to watch. It's just an extremely rewarding job. It can be sad at times, but you have to remind yourself that you are making a difference. You take it one day at a time and do what you can. I cannot imagine any other job being as rewarding. (P4)

This sense of motivation is vital to a counselor returning to the work every day despite that the job entails being an advocate for the child and involves things like reporting abuse and neglect.

As stated by one counselor when reflecting on some of the more challenging, but necessary aspects of the profession that contribute to doing her job well:

I am just thinking about the hotlines, and how do you feel like you have done a good job with that. I don't know that I have ever felt as though I have done a "good job" with that. So it's a lot of little measures you have at the end of the day. Just because I wear so many hats that I guess that's feel enough. I got my hands wet. I jumped in and got my feet dirty..ya know. (P6)

Ultimately, all counselors interviewed shared the sentiment that the kids are the driving force that keeps them coming back every day and their want to help them be the most successful in life. As stated by another participant:

I love working with the kids and helping them work through things and grow as people. They are in the stage where they are molding their brains to be the people they are going to become later, so it's fun to see them think things through and maybe make a different choice. (P1)

In addition, the counselors from schools with very high poverty rates shared the same idea that their kids love to come to school and would rather be at school than not. As stated by one counselor:

I think there are different roles for school counselors in different schools. I have as a traveling school counselor worked at the poverty and the non-poverty school. Whereas the kids leech onto you here, (I am surprised we have been in the office without interruption for this long), I feel like where I was a different school before. The kids would not want to tell their parent they were with you. Here, I had a kid yesterday at lunch and she invited her mom, and that was her birthday party. She invited her mom and she brought McDonalds and ate it in here. They just come in, and you are their best friend. Some 5th graders call me their stepmom. I'm not their stepmom! They just need someone to look at and someone to hang on: a role model for some of them. We have no attendance problems on Monday. These kids love to come to school. We had Saturday school and kids loved coming. We had almost everyone-- a full school on Saturday-- to recover a snow day because they need something to do. (P2)

The motivation of the students to be there and their trust of the school counselor plays into the relational component mentioned in R1 and ties into the counselor's sense of efficacy.

However, the many tasks and roles they assume are so varied and interwoven throughout the

schools' organization and climate that is can add or take away from the feeling of doing a good job. As stated by one participant:

I usually have a pile about this big with a running list of things I am trying to get accomplished. I used to make a list everyday and then I realized it never gets done so I just got a small little legal pad and I make a running list of stuff...And that's one of the things that I like and one of the things I struggle with. Feeling like I am accomplishing what I need to be accomplishing when sometimes you walk in the door and things go to hell in a hand basket. (P8)

She went on to discuss how the role can lend itself to being overworked and over tasked.

This was the first year for me to be the lead counselor at the end of school. Last year the counselor just really managed it and she would say "do this" or say "I need to you to go here" so it just seemed really smooth. This year absolutely from the time I walked in at 7:30 to the time I left at 3:30 I didn't sit down. Sometimes I didn't eat. I had to rearrange groups. There was so much to do that I didn't even realize it. When I look back at it I wonder "what did I do" because it was such a blur. (P8)

In addition, the role ambiguity and confidential nature associated with the job not only leads to limited feedback on performance, as stated in research question R2, it also can mean limited complements and gratitude amongst a high potential for scrutiny. As stated by one participant:

If you are into accolades this is not the job for you- but you have to be valued in order to keep your job. And that's like how do you qualify it? That's the big question, how do you make it pretty on paper and make yourself seem essential. (P6)

In order to accomplish this idea of "making yourself seem essential", some counselors spoke about data and accountability and their approach to "proving their worth" to those other agents of the school and stakeholders who might feel their role is ancillary. One participant who was at risk of losing her job due to budget cuts stated:

I do think we need more training on data and accountability. Although we do have those evaluation measures, I think that we need to- and just being fresh out of grad

school- I am all about it. But just keeping track of what we are doing and how many kids we are meeting with and how many minutes we are spending with each level. That is something I am trying to push at district meeting about a google form you can use and its easy- just to have more accountability and we can show- in case it does come down to and it and they are like, "school counselors" we are cutting you", and we can say, "look I have met with hundreds of kids this year". Here are pre and post tests. Here are teacher evaluations that show the differences we are making with these kids. They teach us this now, but I don't think it was taught 15 years ago. So, to make sure we are keeping with what is current and it's important. I had to re-interview for my position this year and that's what saved me. I was able to bring in a portfolio and show what I did. She [principal] was like, "I have never seen this before". (P7)

In this light, elementary school counselors not only have to remain motivated to return to a job that is very ambiguous and dynamic in its role but also under constant scrutiny and at risk for being cut from school programs. Because the current push in education is data driven accountability, counselors find themselves in the position to also be accountable in the education system for a job that is highly subjective and qualitative by design. As stated by another participant:

It seems like they are putting all of their eggs into the data basket- which is great but you can make it look anyway you want to support your program and I think that when we are talking about the emotional well-being of children, how can you quantify that? And just the validity of it. Why do I want to waste my time doing it, when I could be working with a child? I do not have time to input all that data because it takes just that... time- which we do not have. (P1)

As the state of education demands accountability, the job of school counselors entails not only advocacy for mental health within the school (as stated in (R2) School Climate) but also advocacy for the need for counselors within the school system, and this advocacy role can take its toll. As stated by one participant:

Budget cuts are coming. I don't think I made an friends when I stood up and told everyone at our district meeting of school counselors that you may not feel it yet, but school counselors are being cut all over the place, so you had better be able to prove

what you are doing. Everyone was kind of like “what!?” And then here we are, and budget cuts are happening. (P6)

She later in the interview went on to say:

I think the part that I am coming to terms with right now in my career is the discomfort that goes hand in hand with the advocacy. I am not really comfortable with conflict. I am not really comfortable with going against the grain: that swimming upstream feeling. I think when you are an advocate that is going to come. I think... I am going to cry. [Crying] For a little while there, I wondered if I was doing my job right. I feel like I am always fighting. (P6)

Whether advocating for the profession as an agent of mental health wellness or fighting for the professional integrity of the work within schools, an emotional toll comes with the job an elementary school counselor. This kind of challenge must be met with other motivational constructs at work that keep the counselor able to continuously and tirelessly return to the work and love their job. As stated by one participant about the job of a school counselor:

You do have to be very self-motivated and self-driven in this job. (P8)

And by another participant in regards to the mindset of a typical day:

Assertiveness is a tool I would say, or more like a support, that I use. (P6)

And by another participant in talking about collaborations with other stakeholders:

You have to do what you say you are going to do. (P4)

These statements all bring to light a type of internal motivation that seems necessary for the school counselor to be able to be the assertive advocate that the role demands, but at the same time encompass and balance the role that is more subjective such as “the nurturer”.

In summation for research question R3, what specific aspects of the job contribute significantly to the efficacy of the school counselor, the counselors interviewed stated that the overall school climate impacted their sense of doing a good job. Relating to school climate, the counselors also viewed their own internal motivation as a factor that plays into efficacy. Those interviewed stated that motivation to continue can sometimes be challenging in a job that requires qualities that are in antithesis of each other (i.e., the advocate versus the nurturer) in a climate that does not support the need for the school counselor to embody all of the qualities that are necessary to do the work.

(R4) What uncontrollable factors such as school population, location, and grade levels have the most effect on efficacy?

The work of an elementary school counselor is highly individualized to the schools in which the counselor works based on population makeup such as high/low socioeconomic status, limited English proficiency, and size/ numbers of the school. The school counselors interviewed came from schools that were very different in make-up. Three of the seven schools were below 50% low income percentage (ranging from 18% to 46%) and four of the schools were above (ranging from 60% to 92%). Three of the schools' populations were over 50% for limited English proficiency. When asked about barriers, most of the counselors interviewed mentioned some of the hardest barriers to overcome are the uncontrollable factors outside of the school such as parent contact, language barriers, and meeting the needs associated with poverty. As stated by one participant from a high poverty and limited English proficiency school:

Probably the biggest barriers are all the factors outside of school: the language barriers to be able to access families and things like that. Attendance is big problem for us- so it is something we are really focusing on. It is harder to connect with a family in a really scary situation because what if you can't fix it and you can't help, and you are left with the knowledge that this family is in a sticky situation and you can't do anything about it. So, these families are missing 22-25 days. (P8)

And by another participant also from a high poverty and limited English proficiency school stated:

Our barrier here is speaking with parents. We have a lot of Spanish and Marshallese kids and I don't speak Spanish. That's a big barrier with parents. Even when I have an interpreter, there are things that are lost and that is huge. (P2)

Although these counselors viewed the language barrier as a challenge, they both spoke to the fact that the children at their schools were different from what they had experienced in schools with a lower poverty rate in that the children viewed the counselors as a resource and were more inclined to come to see them.

This discrepancy was also stated by another traveling school counselor interviewed who works in a school with a very low poverty rate part of the time and a school with a 50% poverty rate half of the time. When speaking to the differences between the two schools, she stated:

Both schools are very different. The demographic and population is very different and it actually feels like two very different jobs. Like the things I am responsible for here, I do not have to do over there. For example, here [higher poverty rate] we do a lot of helping families find community resources like handing out food and clothes to kids who cannot afford it for the weekend. There [low poverty rate] maybe once a month we have something like that come up. There it is more dealing with the interpersonal relationships between the kids, and here it's more resource management for the families and the students. (P7)

Although all of the school counselors interviewed came from three different school districts, three different towns, and somewhat differing school make-ups, it seemed as though they were all able to work towards overcoming the barriers presented to them, and stated that

they still love the work. However, it seemed as though the schools that school counselors from high poverty schools were more inclined to assume many of the social work roles and duties such as assisting the families to find resources in the community, assisting the families with snack pack and food to go home, and in conducting home visits for children high in absences. Another interesting difference stated by the school counselor split between the two schools was that she found she has more of a leadership role at the higher poverty rate school. She stated:

Here [high poverty rate] I am more involved with admin tasks. I am Response to Intervention (RTI), ya know, just those different meetings. I have the social services meeting every other Friday. There [low poverty rate], we really don't have anything to do with the RTI or 504 or things like that. I do have a really good relationship with admin over there but not as many leadership roles as I have here. Then, there- I do less school counseling activities. I kind of hate to admit that I do less school counseling things there because they don't have those basic needs issues like here, so I am always looking to see what I can do and how can I help out. (P7)

In summation to research question R4: what uncontrollable factors have the most effect on efficacy, it seems as though working with parents who perceived a negative stigma associated with mental health (as mentioned in research question (R2: School Climate) as well as working with parents and the language barrier in high limited English proficiency rate schools were discussed the most. However, these parental factors did not seem to play into the counselors' sense of doing a good job. Interestingly, the difference in need of the school counselor in high poverty schools versus low poverty schools seemed to be a factor. In high poverty schools, the counselor was viewed more favorable and accepted as a helping resource whereas the low poverty schools there seemed to not be such a need for services and more of a stigma associated with visiting the school counselor.

Chapter 4 Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore elementary school counselors' perceptions of how self-efficacy is experienced and manifested in their work. In this study, rich information was discovered, and the findings were organized based on the four research questions and perceived goals of the study.

The overarching research question (R1) of this study was what factors are the most influential in the elementary school counselor's experience of doing a good job and assists the most in manifesting self-efficacy. Results suggested the factors that appeared to be the most influential to a counselor's sense of doing a good job appeared to be relationally tied to rapport with teachers, children, administration, and parents. In regards to question (R2) to what degree does the level of administrative support relate to a school counselor's sense of efficacy, results suggested the elementary school counselors interviewed seemed to place high value on the support of their administration regardless of their administration's perceived understanding of their role. It seems that when administrative support is high, it contributes to efficacy and conversely, when it is low, it creates a sense of uncertainty about job performance.

In regards to (R3) what specific aspects of the job contribute more significantly to efficacy, it seemed that the counselors interviewed stated the school climate impacts their sense of doing a good job and their ability to remain motivated to continue. The counselors felt that the climate of the school creates a sense that they must be able to encompass the role of the assertive advocate for the child while simultaneously embodying the role of the caring nurturer for the child—two qualities that are often in antithesis of the other.

Lastly, in respect to question (R4) what uncontrollable factors such as school population, location, and grade levels have the most effect on efficacy, it seemed as though working with parents overcome the negative stigma associated with mental health as well as working with parents and the language barrier in high limited English proficiency rate schools were discussed the most.

In Chapter 5, discussion of findings and hopes for future research will be discussed.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore elementary school counselors' perceptions of how self-efficacy is experienced and manifested in their work. In a role that is multifaceted and individualized to a particular school, school counselors must be flexible and somewhat accommodating to ambiguity. In addition, the ambiguous nature of the role to school counselors in relation to other stakeholders in the education system can lead to detrimental effects on a counselor's sense of efficacy. Being that research would suggest that self-efficacy is manifested from internal as well as external influences (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1986; Pajares, 2002) and the work is ambiguous, it is important to explore what factors and themes emerge when school counselors are asked the question "how do you know you are doing a good job".

In this chapter, the discussion of findings will be organized in accordance with the study's research questions. In this study, the overarching research question (R1) was: what factors are the most influential and assist in the elementary school counselor's experience of doing a good job and manifesting of self-efficacy. Then, additional questions addressed to further explore specific topics were: (R2) to what degree does the level of administrative support relate to a school counselor's sense of efficacy, (R3) what specific aspects of the job contribute more significantly to efficacy, and finally, (R4) what uncontrollable factors such as school population, location, and grade levels have the most effect on efficacy? This chapter will begin with a discussion about the first overarching research question then follow with the additional questions and implications for further research.

(R1)What factors are the most influential in the elementary school counselor’s experience of doing good job?

In addressing the first research question of the study, specific themes emerged in the data. For the elementary school counselors interviewed in this study, experiencing of efficacy encompassed the relational aspects of the work specifically associated with teachers, children, administration, and parents. Those interviewed placed a lot of importance on the quality of the relationships and interactions that took place within the workplace with other stakeholders. This finding was congruent with ASCA’s definition of a school counselor and seems appropriate considering that the role of the school counselors revolves around collaboratively working with all facets of the school system.

According to the ASCA (2015b), elementary school counselors are integral to an entire educational program because they engage in proactive leadership that involves all stakeholders to help students achieve educational success. Because the collaboration piece is so vital to the role of a school counselor, it stands to reason that the quality of the relationships between the school counselor and the involved stakeholders such as teacher, students, and parents would have an effect on the counselor’s sense of efficacy for their job. Also, because many administrators perceive the role of the school counselor to be one based in relationships and collaboration (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Curry & Bickmore, 2013), a counselor who struggles in this area may also experience poor evaluations from administration. In Amatea and Clark’s (2005) study on administrator’s conceptions of the work of school counselors, they found that administrators perceived elementary counselors as having specialized knowledge to be able to work with the key adults in the students’ life in order to

accomplish the needed goals for educational success. Although the relational aspect may be a perceived role of the school counselor, it is an area that is multi-faceted and dependent on many external factors. Within the general need for positive relationships with those key stakeholders such as teachers, children, administrators, and parents, are specific, more complicated layers that can assist in manifesting efficacy. The relationships between teachers, children, administrators, and parents are discussed in detail in the following paragraphs.

Teachers. Relational aspects of the counselor-teacher relationship are influenced by factors such as power in relationship, role ambiguity, and lack of support. Although the school counselor does not necessarily hold power over the teachers in the building, the role is one that allows for the counselor to be an advocate and liaison between the student and the key adults when needed. It is also a role that requires consistent, daily collaboration between teachers and administration. In addition, because role ambiguity is high for school counselors in the educational system, it can be assumed that not all teachers fully understand the role of the school counselor and, for whatever reason-personal or professional, are less willing to support the counseling program.

Interestingly, when speaking about the factors that help the school counselors to “know” their work is successful, all interviewed mentioned some form of trust of their teachers to be working with their students. To those interviewed, this trust meant that their teachers were indirectly supporting their guidance program by allowing the students in their classrooms to be a part of it. These counselors also felt as though they were more able to be a part of a “collaborative team” if their teachers were willing to approach them with questions or concerns. In a sense, it seemed as though building and maintaining a relationship of mutual

trust and respect with the teachers was vital in feeling as though they had access and opportunities in working with the students as well as maintaining a climate conducive to doing the work.

This finding about the importance of the relational quality between teachers and counselors is supported by Clark and Amatea's (2004) qualitative study on teacher's perceptions of school counselors where communication, collaboration, and teamwork were the themes that frequently emerged from teachers about the relationship between teachers and school counselors. This finding supports Sutton and Fall's (1995) finding that colleague support was the strongest predictor of efficacy for school counselors when considering school climate. Otherwise, limited literature exists in regards to research on the relational components between teachers and school counselors. Although the ASCA model (2012) addresses the need for communication with administration in the service area of management and it does touch on collaboratively working with teachers in delivery, it does not speak in any detail about the need for establishing quality relationships with teachers. However, all counselors interviewed in this study discussed the need for trust, open communication, and transparency with their teachers and how they, as school counselors, worked hard to acquire and maintain those relationships. For them, the teachers played a large part in how they determined whether or not their role was successful.

Children. In addition to the relational component with teachers, the findings suggested that the next factor that played into efficacy was the school counselor's relationship with their student population. Those interviewed stated that they knew they were doing a good job if their students felt comfortable coming to see them, the school counselor, and if their kids

knew who they were. Within this relational component with the children, the theme of visibility emerged the strongest. Although the relational quality the school counselors held with their students was not discussed in such an intense manner that the relations with the teachers were discussed, interestingly, the relationship with the students were what kept each school counselor returning to work each day. This finding validates that the school counselors interviewed love working with children and despite the stressors that can come from other aspects of the job, the genuine desire to work with their kids may help them to remain motivated to continue in the face of adversity.

Because working directly with the children is what drives a school counselor to continue, these findings validate the need for the school counselor to be allotted the necessary time to, in fact, work with children in their assigned role of a counselor rather than being tasked to non-counseling duties or assignments that would take away from direct services. This finding supports the idea that school counselors who are performing activities that are more consistent with the role of a school counselor are more likely spending most of their time in direct services, as per the ASCA (2012) National Model. This finding may also support Cervoni's (2007) finding that counselors who spend more time outside of ASCA recommended areas were less satisfied with their jobs as that direct work with the children was viewed as the ultimate motivation for those interviewed to continue to do the work.

This finding also supports Bandura's theory on self-efficacy in that if school counselors are truly motivated to work with children and can overcome the other issues of the job related to role ambiguity, then working with children would be considered a bolstering factor for efficacy for school counselors. According to Bandura's theory, self-regulation and the ability to

continue with a task in the face of adversity is contingent on a feedback process that helps to bolster self-concept and confidence in a given area; for the school counselors interviewed in this study, it seemed that children gave them feedback that the work they are doing is important and meaningful. So, though the direct work with children, the self-regulatory feedback process is enough to persevere. According to ASCA (2012), direct services to students should make up 80% of the counselors day, so this finding is regards to children being the motivating factor for school counselors indirectly supports the research by Ernst (2012) that found that school counselors who operated within the ASCA framework felt more self-efficacy for their position. Ultimately, this finding shows the impact that the direct work may have for school counselors.

Administrators. Another relational component that emerged from the school counselors interviewed was administrative trust. For the most part, those interviewed felt as though their administration was supportive and encouraging of their guidance program and within that support, they felt that there was trust from the administration for the school counselor to implement their vision of the guidance program. Interestingly for some, it seemed as though their administration was not fully understanding of their role, yet they “trusted” the school counselor to be doing her job. This supports Ponec and Brock’s (2000) findings that an effective relationship between school counselors and principals must have an element of mutual trust that is based in frequent communication, visibility, and accessibility. Although many meetings between school counselors and principals happen informally (hallway chats, on the run, between meetings, lunch periods, etc.), having the opportunity to

connect allows both parties to remain congruent on expectations and day to day functioning and reduces the likelihood for misunderstandings or confusion.

In this study, a lack of understanding of the role of the school counselor was evident in evaluations and feedback received from the school counselors from their administration. This finding supports the research that confusion does exist between the school counselors and their principals (Curry & Bickmore, 2013; Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005; Lieberman, 2004) and that education for administration on the role of the school counselor is merited (Leuwerke et. al, 2009) and can be viewed as an opportunity for collaboration and team work (Ponec & Brock, 2000).

Parents. The last indicator of efficacy mentioned by the school counselors interviewed was rapport established with the parents of their students. The counselors described this rapport as being involved with their child's school life, being supportive of the work of the school counselor, and allowing their child to participate in the guidance program. A theme that emerged when discussing the rapport with parents was an underlying negative stigma associated with counseling that created a barrier from being able to most effectively work with the child and the parent. All counselors interviewed felt as though working with the parents was the most challenging and that they were not trained enough on how to do it. For most, the barrier was based on issues related to the low income status of the families and negative association with counselors related to hotline calls, court ordered counseling, and mental health stigmas. For other counselors interviewed, the main barrier was a combination of families having limited English proficiency in addition to the issues related to low income status. These findings support Van Velsor and Orozco's (2000) discussion of barriers associated

with low income families. Some of the school counselors interviewed felt that their parents were hesitant to participate in school related activities and seemed to be highly against their child's involvement with the counselor. The counselors felt that these suspicious parents viewed mental health services with a negative stigma related to DHS hotline calls, police involvement, or possibly viewing the parents as incompetent which, in turn, limits the work with the counselor.

In summation to question (R1): what factors are the most influential in the elementary school counselor's experience of doing a good job and what factors assist the most in manifesting self-efficacy, it seemed that those counselors interviewed placed a lot of emphasis in determining whether or not they were doing a good job on the relational components with the stakeholders in the school system. Trust, mutual respect, and effective communication were highly valued qualities for those interviewed that assisted the most for fostering the needed relationships within in the school, and the counselors that described their current working relationships with those qualities seemed to be the most content at their associated schools.

These findings support the current literature about the need for effective and qualitatively good working relationships playing into job satisfaction as well as working self-efficacy (Cervoni, 2007; Clark & Amatea, 2004; Curry & Bickmore, 2013; Sutton & Fall, 1995; Ponec & Brock, 2000; Van Velcor & Orozco, 2000). The added value to the literature brought forth by this question is the emphasis on the necessary quality of the relationships between school counselors and other agents of the school, especially relating to teachers, in regards to trust, mutual respect, and effective communication. Another added value from this research question was uncovering the level of importance placed on the direct work with children in

regards to addressing motivations to continue the work. See Table 5.1 below for a summary of findings.

Table 5.1: Summary of Findings for Research Question 1

(R1)What factors are the most influential in the elementary school counselor’s experience of doing good job?			
Relationships with teachers that embody trust, mutual professional respect, and professional collaboration	Freedom to maximize direct work with children	Trust and support from administration	Effective communication and rapport with parents

Additional Questions: (R2) to what degree does the level of administrative support relate to a school counselor’s sense of efficacy?

According to the school counselors interviewed, higher levels of administrative support in the form of trust corresponded with a clearer perception of doing a good job even if there was not much faith in the evaluation system. For some counselors, they felt as though their principals were not fully understanding of their role as the school counselor and therefore, they did not perceive their working evaluation as solid evidence that they were, in fact, doing a good job. However, if they felt as though their administrator trusted them to do their job and gave them the support, freedom, and flexibility to manage the guidance program without too much critical feedback, they felt that was evidence that their work as a counselor was effective.

This finding supports the previous work by Curry and Bickmore (2013). In their study which observed principals’ perceptions and novice school counselors, they found that

principals lacked a full understanding of the role of the school counselor and often were operating from the mindset of managing teachers when approaching school counselors. This finding also supports Sutton and Fall's (1995) study that a strong predictor of efficacy for school counselors was the quality and quantity of the exchanges between the counselor and the administrator as well as Ponec and Brock's (2000) study that fostering trust was vital to the role. In addition, it also supports the work of Bodenhorn and Skaggs (2005) that counselors with higher levels of administrative support were more likely to meet their career goals. However, no literature reviewed discussed the lack of understanding of the role and therefore the need for trust within the same context.

In summation to question R2, the counselors interviewed in this study reported a higher sense of efficacy if trust and support were present from their administration. Interestingly, many counselors discussed that they felt as though their administrator was, in fact, supportive of their work, yet lacked a full understanding of what the role of a school counselor encompasses. So, to these school counselors, it seemed as though they did not see this lack of understanding as necessarily a detriment to their work so long as their administrator was still supportive and "trusted" that they were doing their job. This finding contributes a new facet to the literature that merits further exploration. See Table 5.2 below for a summary of findings.

Table 5.2: Summary of Findings Research Question 2

Addition Questions: (R2) To what degree does the level of administrative support relate to a school counselor's sense of efficacy?	
High trust and support from administration lead to greater feelings of efficacy	Lack of understanding of role was excused so long as trust was present

Additional Questions Continued: (R3) What specific aspects of the job contribute more significantly to efficacy?

As previously mentioned in question R1, the relational components between teachers, children, administration, and parents contributed significantly to the counselor's sense of efficacy. In addition (as mentioned in R2), feeling as though they were supported and trusted by their administration was also a significant factor that played into the manifestation of efficacy. Other findings related to the specific elements that affect the counselor's efficacy is the overall school climate. School counselors interviewed in this study who discussed feeling more supported and professionally respected at their schools spoke more confidently about their role as the school counselor and felt more integrated into the workings of their schools, and those interviewed who did not feel that sense of respect or support from their schools viewed their working situation more negatively. Some things that stood out as factors that played into a positive school climate for these counselors included: access to students, perceived reluctance from teachers for collaboration, time constraints, and negative stigmas associated with mental health.

These findings support Sutton and Fall's (1995) research that suggested a supportive school climate was more conducive to counselor efficacy and that peer/ colleague support was also related to higher levels of efficacy. Because school counselors must have direct access to students throughout the school day in order to do their work, it is imperative that a working relationship of mutual trust and professional respect be in place with teachers and staff within the school. Therefore, when negative stigmas, time constraints, and lack of access to students via teachers become barriers, the likelihood is high for lowered self-efficacy of the school counselor. This finding also supports Clark and Amatea's (2004) study that for an effective working relationship, school counselors and teachers expect and want better communication, collaboration, and accessibility. According to their study and Ponc and Brock's (2000) study, the working relationship is something that is not only important for the teachers and counselors to foster, but also for the administrator to encourage and support through providing more opportunities for collaborations and more flexibility for communication.

In regards to negative mental health stigmas, some research suggests that it is not uncommon for some parents of students who come from lower socioeconomic status to view mental health as a threat (Velsor & Orozco, 2007); however, limited research exists which specifically addresses a negative stigma of mental health services from inside the school system, especially related to negative attitudes coming from teachers, administration, or staff. Literature in regards to school counselors being viewed as ancillary support due to role ambiguity is not uncommon (Baggerly and Osborn, 2006; Cervoni, 2007; Curry & Bickmore, 2013; Erford, 2011; House & Hayes, 2002; Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Leuwerke, Walker, & Shi, 2009; Thompson & Powers, 1983), and because ambiguity in the workplace can create

unrealistic expectations based on previous experiences (Bandura & Wood, 1989), it could be argued that some of the lack of support for counseling comes from a lack of value in the profession or viewing the counselor as incompetent. Such a perceived lack of value can also stem from the lack of knowledge of the role of the school counselor or perhaps limited visibility of the school counselor.

In addition to the overall school climate, another theme that emerged for the counselors interviewed revolved around attitudinal qualities and motivational constructs. Because the role of the school counselor can range from the ASCA suggested duties to “fair share” duties outside of counseling to “above and beyond” duties, an effective counselor must be fluid and flexible to be able to change attitudinally as needed based on the role. For example, one counselor interviewed noted that she is often in the position of being an advocate for her students with other school agents but simultaneously must also be able to collaborate with the same agents in order to help the student be successful. Having to metaphorically “wear both hats” while working with the same team can lead to issues such as strained relationships, resentment, and negative attitudes if transparency and open communication is limited. This is especially true if the role of the counselor is not completely understood.

Another attitudinal dichotomy that presented was the school counselor being able to embody the qualities of the nurturer (loving, caring, kind, warm, responsive, empathic) while at the same time being able to exude the qualities of the advocate (assertive, direct, task/goal-oriented). This role of advocacy can be a challenging role for counselors because it requires sometimes going against administration and/or teachers’ thoughts or ideals. According to

House and Sears (2002), school counselors tend to be overly accommodating and subject to overt and covert pressures exuded by the school which results in adopting an agenda that is not theirs, thus becoming maintainers of the status quo. The counselors interviewed who spoke to the challenges they experienced mostly elaborated on how being in the role of the advocate impacted their working relationship with other school agents. Although advocacy is a part of a counselor's ethical code, it is an area that is sometimes not reinforced and taught enough in training and some counselors struggle when finally in a school (House and Sears, 2000).

In summation to question R3, the themes that emerged as specific factors that contributed to efficacy for the counselor's interviewed related to an overall school climate of support, communication, and professional respect. New contributions that merit further exploration include the potential for mental health stigma from agents within the school contributing to a lowered sense of self efficacy for the school counselor. Another area that merits more emphasis and exploration is the training of pre-service school counselors in the role of the advocate. This finding speaks to the importance of building a climate that is promoting more opportunities for collaborative involvement and opportunities to define the school counselor's role in the school. See Table 5.3 below for a summary of findings.

Table 5.3: Summary of Findings for Research Question 3

Addition Questions: (R3) What specific aspects of the job contribute more significantly to efficacy?		
Overall school climate of support, communication, and professional respect.	A school climate that does not endorse stigmas associated with mental health	A school climate that promotes the advocacy role of the school counselor

Additional Questions Continued: (R4) what uncontrollable factors such as school population, location, and grade levels have the most effect on efficacy?

For the elementary school counselors interviewed, the most discussed uncontrollable factor was working with parents with a perceived negative stigma towards mental health as well as working with parents with limited English speaking skills. It seemed that despite the school make-up, all interviewed mentioned working with parents as a struggle but much emphasis was placed on working specifically with parents who were reluctant to allow their child to work with the school counselor due to a perceived negative stigma. In some cases, the counselors were able to educate the parents and overcome the challenge. For others, the counselor learned to approach parents differently in regards to the language associated with receiving services (i.e. rather than calling group work “counseling” it was referred to as “friendship skills”).

Some counselors mentioned that their parents were hesitant to trust the counselor based on previous situations relating to DHS hotline calls or experiences with child protective services. Then, for some parents, it almost seemed embarrassing that their child would come to the counselor for help. Interesting to note, the embarrassment of the stigma was true for

the affluent school as well as the rural school. This finding brings to light the need for education to parents on the role of the school counselor as well as the need for constant communication, visibility, and transparency of the counselor to the parents. Interestingly, some counselors interviewed mentioned that their training did not prepare them for working with the parents. The lack of training was also theme related to working with parents who speak limited English.

Some of the counselors interviewed spoke to the challenges they encountered when working with parents who speak limited English proficiency (LEP) and, for the most part, came from lower socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds. Not surprisingly, the counselors who worked with populations with large LEP makeup and low SES mentioned that a lot of their work resembles that of social work in that they are constantly assisting in meeting basic needs for students and families with limited communication abilities. However, it is interesting to note that these counselors also emphasized that their students and families were quick to come for aid and did not seem to struggle with the negative stigma related to mental health that other populations did. Then, although the counselors in these schools found themselves often in the role of the social worker, they also seemed to report a greater feeling of being wanted/needed in their schools and were in more roles of leadership.

In summation to question R(4), when asked about the uncontrollable factors related to efficacy, the counselors interviewed were quick to discuss various issues relating to work with parents in the differing populations and their lack of training for such work. However, they did not seem to view working with parents as barriers to efficacy as much as they viewed the feedback from the internal agents and relationships within the school. These findings

contribute to new knowledge by showing that differences in parental issues do exist based on the population of the schools and the role of the counselor is impacted greatly based on the population needs. These findings also suggest that there is a need for more continuing education and training on working with parents from differing populations. See Table 5.4 below for a summary of findings.

Table 5.4 Summarization of Findings for Research Question 4

Additional Questions Continued: (R4) what uncontrollable factors such as school population, location, and grade levels have the most effect on efficacy?		
Working with parents- lack of training	Working with reluctant/ambivalent parents- due to perceived mental health stigma	Working with parents with Limited English Proficiency - issues related to LEP and low SES

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore elementary school counselors’ perceptions of how self-efficacy is experienced and manifested in their work. In this study, eight school counselors discussed the ways in which they know that are doing a good job, what helps to reinforce their sense of doing a good job, and what factors would they consider uncontrollable that affects their sense of doing a good job. Although each counselor came from a unique school which had challenges specific to their school, common themes of efficacy emerged. Four research questions were addressed in this study, therefore, four conclusions follow in sequential order below.

Conclusion (R1)

The overarching research question for this study was: (R1) What factors are the most influential in the elementary school counselor's experience of doing good job? The findings for this question indicated four areas for discussion: relationships with teachers, flexibility for work with children, trust and support from administration, and effective communication with parents.

Relationships with teachers. For all interviewed, relationships with other school agents in regards to communication, collaboration, trust, and professional respect were of the utmost importance. This was particularly true for the relationships with the teachers. This finding suggests that school counselors need to have a positive working relationship with their teachers which entail a clear understanding of the role of the school counselor and a mutual understanding that all work is being done with the best interest of the child and school in mind. It also means that school counselors and teachers need more quality interactions and time permitted for collaborative efforts that help to foster and maintain a positive working relationship. Then, because communication is vital for transparency, a school counselor and a teacher must have open lines of continuous communication and feedback for collaborative efforts. The results of this study showed that for these elementary school counselors, their relationships with their teachers was something that had to be consistent and maintained throughout the semester in order to make the climate conducive for mutual respect and trust.

Flexibility for direct work with children. For the school counselors interviewed, a factor that affected their sense of efficacy as well as their motivation to continue the work in the face of challenges was their direct work with children. The ASCA (2012) model suggests

that the majority of the school counselor's time (80%) should be in direct work with students, and the indirect work should make up the remainder. However, all interviewed felt that the indirect work tended to often cloud and encroach upon their direct work with students. From paperwork to meetings, indirect work is often "fitted" into the counselor's very hectic schedule and often can quickly become something that also spills over into their free time. Despite the demands that come with the job relating to indirect work, it is interesting to note that most interviewed felt as though the work with children was the best part of their job and what helped them to power through days that includes things like: no lunch break, short bathroom breaks, before and after-hours/ weekend work related to completion of indirect services.

This finding shows the value and the level of importance placed on the school counselors having the freedom and flexibility to perform direct services to students. This freedom and flexibility entails being able to have access to students throughout the day, having access to the classrooms for guidance lessons, having access to students for group activities, and having flexibility in the schedule to attend to situational crises when needed. A common theme that emerges for direct work with students is having access to those students through support and understanding of the teachers. This finding relates back to the importance of the quality of the relationships between the school counselor and the teacher, and the sense of trust and professional respect between both parties to allow the counselor to do the job needed. It also speaks to the need for the teachers to understand the role of the school counselor and have open lines of communication for events such as unexpected crises that must be handled. This finding also relates to the importance of having an administration

that emphasizes the importance of the work of the counselor and promotes a climate conducive to the counselor having access to students (without issue).

Trust and support from administration. As addressed in previous sections, administrative support of the guidance program and of the counselor's working activities played into the school counselor's sense of self-efficacy. However, it should be noted that many of the interviewees felt as though their administration lacked some understanding of their role as a school counselor. Therefore, they felt that if their administration was not critical and placed them in leadership roles than they were "trusted" to be doing their job, despite the perceived lack of understanding. It was also interesting to note that only a few of the schools visited for interviews had a current working definition of the role of their school counselor which made evaluations somewhat arbitrary and played into the importance of administrative trust. Some of the counselor's interviewed stated that they did not place much emphasis on the value of their evaluations because they felt as though their evaluators (administrators) did not know how to adequately rate them due to the lack of knowledge. Therefore, their evaluations did not play into their sense of efficacy as much as the perceived "trust" of their administration.

This finding shows the importance of the relationship between the school counselor and their administration and relates to similar conclusions in regards to the relationships needed with teachers. It shows that the relationship between the school counselor and the administrator requires open communication, transparency, continuous feedback, and mutual professional respect. It also demonstrates the value that could be added to the school system by more effectively utilizing the school counselor if the administrators were more aware of

what tasks specifically make up the role (and what is involved with said tasks). By increasing the knowledge of the school counselor's role, the administrator is in a better position to advocate for a climate within the school that fosters more opportunities for collaboration, emphasizes the importance of the work, and creates a greater sense of mutual, professional respect.

Effective communication with parents. In addition to the relational components in the workplace, another factor that presented as having an effect on efficacy was mental health stigmas that come from outside as well as inside the school. For these school counselors, one of the barriers that was associated with the school climate and the sense of support was from the perceptions of parents in regards to mental health services. This factor of a negative mental health stigma for parents is potentially rooted in fear from past experiences or negative speak about the profession, and it speaks to the importance and need for more education for parents in regards to the role/ purpose of the school counselor as well as more visibility and accessibility of the counselor for the parents.

Conclusion (R2)

Additional questions answered by the research included research question (R2) to what degree does the level of administrative support relate to a school counselor's sense of efficacy? To the school counselor's interviewed, support from the administration was a very important factor that affected their sense of efficacy, and it revolved around the theme of "trust". The school counselors who felt supported by their administration felt more freedom in their role, talked with confidence about their program, and presented with a sense of ownership when speaking about the work. In contrast, school counselors who did not feel as

supported or felt scrutinized spoke with more uncertainty and more frustration about their programs. It seemed as though most of the school counselors interviewed felt that their administration had somewhat of an understanding of their role as the school counselor and they essentially “trusted” that their counselor was doing the things that school counselors are supposed to do. Even though this lack of knowledge did not seem to necessarily affect the efficacy of those interviewed, it did seem to affect the way the school counselors perceived their evaluations. It seemed as though they did not place much value on them because they felt like their evaluators (their administration) did not know how to evaluate their work due to lack of knowledge of counseling jargon and how it should be evaluated.

These findings show that support from administration was highly valued by the elementary counselors interviewed in this study, and they also valued a sense of trust that allowed them freedom to have ownership of their guidance program, without fear of being scrutinized. However, the need for the “trust” could be because the administration truly lacks knowledge and understanding of what the role of the school counselor entails, and this lack of knowledge, in turn, limits the effectiveness and purpose of the evaluation process. Because the purposes of evaluations are to reflect on current practices in order to improve effectiveness, this process is being underutilized if the evaluator cannot give good, constructive feedback. This finding speaks to the importance of administration having more in-depth knowledge as to the purpose and functioning of the school counselor in order to create a more effective system. Administration needs to be knowledgeable enough to provide constructive feedback that helps to align the counselor to the overall mission of the school.

Conclusion (R3)

The next additional research question addressed was (R3) what specific aspects of the job contribute more to efficacy? The purpose of this research question was to uncover the specific factors of the working role of the counselor that have the greatest impact on the counselor's sense of doing a good job. As discussed in conclusion (R1), the elementary counselors in this study placed a high value on the relationships with all stakeholders within the school system, thus, it is reasonable that the findings of research question (R3) significantly revolve around the overall school climate relating to the school counselor's perceived relationship with other agents of the school. The counselors interviewed placed a lot of emphasis on the overall support, communication, and professional respect coming from the school, as a whole, and the counselors who felt valued by their schools from all stakeholders (front office staff ranging to administration) spoke with more enthusiasm about their work and expressed more of a sense of being an integral part of the system. Those who felt less valued expressed more disconnect and uncertainty. This was especially true for the school counselors who experienced the negative stigma associated with mental health from within the school.

As mentioned in research question (R1), school counselors commonly have to deal with the potential for a negative mental health stigma coming from parents outside of the school system. In addition to the external attitudes, there is also sometimes the internal threat of negative attitudes toward mental health services that comes from within the school. This type of attitude not only affects the school climate but it also affects the counselors' overall feeling of support for the guidance program. This lack of support can affect the counselor's sense of efficacy. Whether coming from the outside or coming from within, a negative mental health

stigma can significantly impact the work of a school counselor. Therefore, it is important to consider whether or not role ambiguity and lack of understanding by other agents of the school is a contributing factor.

Then, the last prominent commonality between those interviewed were the unique challenges faced from working with the various different populations (i.e. low SES, high SES, high LEP, rural) and the general sense of a lack of training on how to appropriately work with parents. Most interviewed felt that their training (which was quite varied) lacked how to address working with parents. In addition, the counselors who worked in districts without social workers and were tasked to those duties felt somewhat ill prepared for the demands the work would require. This commonality speaks to a need for more training or continuing education on working with a diverse population of parents. Although the counselors did not necessarily feel that the work with the parents contributed significantly to their sense of efficacy, it did play into their overall sense of climate associated with the school.

Although the school counselors in this study were interviewed at the close of their school year and exhibited all of the signs of fatigue from the work, they all essentially loved their jobs and were motivated to keep going, despite the challenges. Because the role of a school counselor is somewhat ambiguous and because lack of knowledge about a role can create issues that can affect working relationships in a workplace, it is important to take into consideration that, for these school counselors, the quality of the relationships with other school agents and stakeholders greatly affected their sense of efficacy. Therefore, it is important to take preventative measures that help to ensure that role ambiguity is not an underlying stressor on those relationships.

Conclusion (R4)

The last additional research question addressed in this study was: what uncontrollable factors such as school population, location, and grade levels have the most effect on efficacy? The purpose of this question was to observe what factors are outside of the school counselor's ability to control that are unique to their jobs, yet have an impact on efficacy. For the counselor's interviewed, the factors that were discussed that were essentially out of their control were similar to some of the factors relating to working with parents previously discussed in research question R1: working with parents with a negative mental health stigma and working with parents who have limited English proficiency language skills.

The elementary counselors interviewed mentioned working with parents as a continuous challenge because the parents of their students can present with a wide range of attitudes and needs, and ultimately, most of the interactions with parents were in regards to situations that encompass a student being in "trouble" or needing additional services or work. As one participant expressed, it was rare that she had the opportunity to call a parent for something positive that a child did. She felt that it was almost always for a "negative situation". For some counselors, they felt the biggest challenge with their population of parents was overcoming the negative mental health stigma associated with the term "counselor". Other parental challenges experienced involved issues relating to parents with limited English speaking abilities. Some counselor's interviewed found it challenging to acquire permissions for their children to participate in services or to communicate with the families when their children were absent. They also found it challenging to be sure that the

child and families' basic needs were meeting met which often led these counselors to assume more social work duties such as: home visits, resource referrals, and resource finding.

Although the theme of working with parents was common, it is also interesting to note that these counselors did not necessarily view the work with parents as a negative. For the most part, all interviewed seemed to be tenacious in their attempts to connect with parents and they also carried with them an attitude of perseverance. However, most interviewed stated that working with parents was an area that they felt was lacking in their training and they wished for more education on best practices when working with parents from diverse backgrounds. Although most training programs do address a parental component in the school counseling core classes, there exists a heavy reliance on the experience gained at the internship level for the hands on work with parents. This reliance is good in that any experience received is good, however, the likelihood of a counseling intern being employed in a school with a similar population they experienced while in training is low- because school make ups are so different. Therefore, this finding speaks to the need more training on working with parents and families as a school counselor as well as the need for more classes in continuing education that revolve around current, evidence supported practices with parents.

Implications and Practice

Self-efficacy in the workplace is a construct that can help a person to remain effective in their job and remain motivated to continue to do the work, and the role of a school counselor is one that has a very high demand without a lot of appreciation or feedback. It is also a role that is subjective and ambiguous to other agents/ stakeholders within the school system. Therefore, it is important to know what factors play into a counselor's sense of doing a

good job so that those areas can be explored further for more efficient training and more proactive procedures in schools. The findings of this study can help to assist in the training of elementary school counselors as well as validate common themes and challenges for practicing school counselors. The findings can also help show the impact that role ambiguity has for the school counselor on their sense of efficacy and addresses the importance of educating all stakeholders of the school system on what exactly the school counselors does. Because the role of an elementary school counselor can be an isolated and high stress position that does not allow for consistent supervision or peer “venting”, it is important to have preventative measures in place that help to keep school counselors from becoming less effective, feel undervalued, and possibly burn out.

Benefiters of the current research include all stakeholders in the school system including: school counselors, administrators, teachers, parents, and staff. Others that can benefit from this research include graduate training programs for school counselors, teachers, and administrators. These findings can also assist organizations and private practitioners who develop and teach continuing education courses.

Further Research

This study observed the factors that assist in manifesting self-efficacy for an elementary school counselor. From this study, ideas for future research would include a more in depth exploration of some of the findings. One area for further research would be taking a more thorough approach to observing the quality of the working relationships between teachers and school counselors. Although some research in this area does exist, it is lacking a

more in-depth discussion on how to foster more effective and efficient working relationships and how to take into account the unique attributes associated with differing schools.

Another area that merits further exploration would be to observe the idea of “trust” between school counselors and administrators in relation to role ambiguity and the administrator’s lack of understanding of the role of the school counselor. Although it was evident in this study that the perceived trust of their administration played a key role in the counselor’s sense of efficacy, it was not clear what factors were included into this sense of trust and why the “trust” was necessary- whether it was in fact due to a lack of understanding of the role or some other factor.

Finally, another area recommended for further research would be school counselor’s work with parents. Because the training for school counselors working with parent is limited, it would seem that the profession could greatly benefit from more in-depth research into the best practices in working with parents from a school counselor’s perspective.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore elementary school counselors’ perceptions of how self-efficacy is experienced and manifested in their work. Because school counselors are an integral part of the school system that helps students to grow emotionally, socially, and personally, it is very important that the most effective practices are in place to allow the school counselor to do the work needed. Society continues to grow and change and so do the students who present in the education system, therefore it is important to continue to produce research relating to the practice of school counselors in order to keep the training programs current to the needs of the profession.

In this study, it was evident that a large component of the elementary school counselor's work is in building and maintaining relationships with all of the stakeholders within the school system and those relationships are multi-faceted and intertwined with issues relating to all parties understanding the role of the school counselor. This study speaks to the need for school counselors to be advocates for educating others within their schools as to their roles and it speaks to the need for administrators to better understand the role of the school counselor in order to foster a school climate conducive to mutual trust, professional respect, and effective collaboration. Although this study was limited in its sample size of eight, it was still able to show that despite the uniqueness associated with the different schools that some common themes do exist for school counselors in regards to their world of work and what gives them a sense of doing a good job. Because school counselor's help children to flourish in the classrooms, it is vital that we help our school counselors to flourish in the school system.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Self-Efficacy

Name of Interviewee: _____

Date: _____

Preliminary Script: "This is Bonni Behrend. Today is _____. It is _____ o'clock, and I am here in [location] with [name of interviewee], the [title] of [institution]. We will be discussing self-efficacy.

1. Describe for me what it is like in the day of a life of a school counselor.

- a. Tell me how you know you have done a good job.

2. What factors do you think affect you the most in doing your job well?

3. Describe for me any barriers that keep you from feeling as though you have done your job well.

4. What supports do you have for overcoming challenges?

5. How is your working performance evaluated?

- a. How do such evaluations affect your daily work life?

6. How would you define your role as a school counselor?

7. If I were to ask your school principal what is your role as a school counselor, what do you think he/she would say?

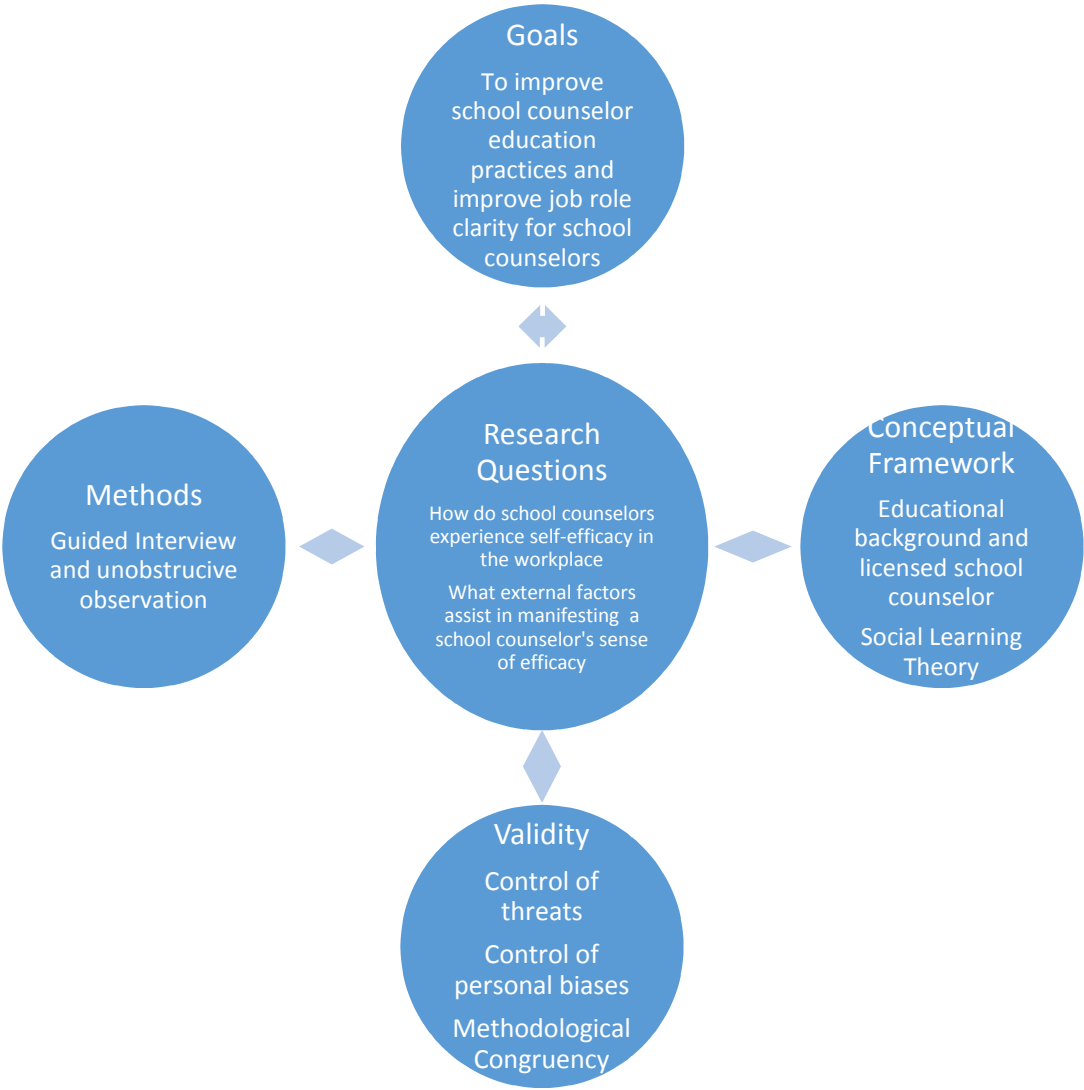
a. How about a teacher?

b. School staff?

8. What factors keep you coming back to work each day?

9. Is there anything I missed or that you would like to follow up on?

Appendix: B



Appendix: C



College of Education and Health Professions
Department of Rehabilitation, Human Resources, and Communication Disorders

May 14, 2015

MEMORANDUM

TO: Bonni Behrend
Kristin Higgins

FROM: Ro Windwalker
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 15-05-709

Protocol Title: A Study Exploring Elementary School Counselors Experience of Self-Efficacy

Review Type: 1 EXEMPT 0 EXPEDITED 0 FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 05/13/2015 Expiration Date: 05/12/2016

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (<https://vpred.uark.edu/units/rscp/index.php>). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

This protocol has been approved for 12 participants. If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change. If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.