Development of professional school counselor identity

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Professional identity formation and development have been studied in numerous professions including teaching (Kuzmic, 1994), psychoanalysis (Rosenbloom, 1992), and psychology (Watts, 1987). What appears to be salient across these studies is a process of continual interplay between structural and attitudinal changes that result in a self-conceptualization as a type of professional. This self-conceptualization, which has been termed one's professional identity, serves as a frame of reference from which one carries out a professional role, makes significant professional decisions, and develops as a professional.

The literature on professional counselor development has identified similar processes involved in identity formation and development of counselors (Bruss & Kopala, 1993; Hogan, 1964; Loganbill, Hardy, & Delworth, 1982; Reising & Daniels, 1983; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). The focus of previous research has been on counselors-in-training, with little attention paid to identity development during the working years beyond graduate school. Further, whether counselor identity development is identical for professionals in the various specialties of counseling such as school counseling has not been determined.

The counseling literature is saturated with studies and articles that examine the role and functions of school counselors (e.g., Carroll, 1993; Helms & Ibrahim, 1983, 1985; Shertzer & Stone, 1963; Stanciak, 1995; Wrenn, 1957). In spite of the best efforts of professional associations, accrediting bodies, and training programs to define the profession of school counseling, studies cited in the literature indicate that the actual functions of counselors in the schools do not always reflect what have been identified as the best practices in school counseling (Hutchinson, Barrick, & Groves, 1986; Partin, 1993; Peer, 1985; Tennyson, Miller, Skovholt, & Williams, 1989). A major theme that is repeated throughout the literature related to the professionalization of school counseling relates to this dissonance or conflict between school counselor preparation and the realities of the work environment. How decisions are made in this context reflects one's self-conceptualization as a professional--one's professional identity.

The development of a professional school counselor identity thus serves as a frame of reference for carrying out work roles, making significant decisions, and developing as a professional. Unfortunately, there is a lack of available information on how this professional identity develops. By understanding the meaning-making framework in professional identity development, school counselors may be in a better position to determine their roles and functions for serving students and the school community. Further, counselor educators will be better able to provide training to students aspiring to become professional school counselors.

Because professional identity development is a process rather than an outcome--which begins in training and continues throughout one's career--it is best studied with emerging research paradigms (e.g., qualitative methods). One such research paradigm is grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A grounded theory orientation allows theoretical categories to emerge from the data that explain how individuals continually process and respond to a problem. Data are gathered primarily through interviews and are analyzed inductively. The resulting theory is thus grounded in real-world patterns. A judgment can then be made about the adequacy of the research and the credibility of the newly developed theory.

A qualitative study was undertaken to propose a grounded theory that will contribute to an understanding of school counselors' professional identity development. Based on a review of the literature, the salient theme related to the professionalization of school counseling seemed to be one of conflict or, more specifically, conflict decisions. Given that conflict is inevitable, the process of conflict decisions may describe the development of an identity as school counselors manage professional conflicts and carry out their role as service providers to students. Therefore, six research questions were developed and addressed in the study to look at the process of conflict decisions.

Method

The qualitative research design included a sampling of school counselors who were selected to represent diverse perspectives. Data collection was through qualitative interviews using a structured, open-ended approach incorporating an interview guide (i.e., research questions) as well as observations in the schools.

Participants

Ten school counselors from elementary/middle school settings in the United States (n = 7) and the Caribbean (n = 3) participated in this study. The participants included nine females and one male who identified their ethnic/cultural group as Caucasian/white (n = 5) or African-American/Afro-Caribbean/black (n = 5). All ten counselors had a master's degree in counseling or a related field, or a professional studies certificate in counseling from a country other than the United States. Seven of the participants were certified by their state as school counselors. In addition, four of the counselors were National Certified Counselors (NCC), two were Licensed Professional Counselors (LPC), and three were counselors certified in another country. Their years of experience as a school counselor ranged from one to 29.

Researcher-Interviewer

The researcher-interviewer was a white female with a master's degree in counseling and was completing a doctorate in counseling and counselor education. Her qualifications include school counselor certification, National Certified Counselor, and Licensed Professional Counselor. Her 14 years of experience as a school counselor included 6 years in the United States and 8 years in the Caribbean.

There are, of course, several possible biases that can result from the research process when the researcher is also the interviewer, and these biases can affect the subsequent generalizability of the findings. Foremost is the possibility that the researcher would find what she was looking for through selective attention to details and selective interpretation of data. The fact that several doctoral faculty representing multiple disciplines participated in systematic and frequent reviews of the data and interpretations was intended to minimize researcher expectations as a possible source of error. Additional concerns are the possible selection of participants by the researcher to reflect pre-existing biases and perceptions, and the unique perception and experiences of the school counselors which would lead them to respond in particular ways to the research questions.

The selection of participants was intentional, as described above, and thus provided sufficient variety in experience, credentials, and other demographic variables to overcome the possibility of selection bias. The unique perceptions and experiences of the school counselors were actually a strength of the study rather than a limitation, in that their uniqueness contributed to the variety of perspectives and thus themes which emerged in the analysis of the data.

Interview Questions

Six research questions were developed to elicit the process of conflict decisions for school counselors. These questions evolved from a review of the literature, experiences of the principle investigator during 14 years as a professional school counselor, and through Socratic dialog with experts in school counseling, educational administration, measurement, and qualitative research design. Several iterations and revisions of the questions were developed and discussed with these experts resulting in the following six research questions addressed in the study:

1. What factors determine the school counseling program?

2. Who is involved in determining the school counseling program?

3. How do school counselors make decisions about the school counseling program?

4. What issues of conflict with principals have been dealt with by school counselors?

5. What is the decision process used by school counselors when interacting with principals in professional conflict situations?

6. In what ways do conflict decisions reflect the role of school counselors?

Procedure

A purposeful sampling approach (Patton, 1990) was used to generate information-rich cases that illuminated the study and elucidated variation as well as significant common patterns within that variation. Data collection was through structured interviews using an open-ended approach with an interview guide as well as observations in the schools. The interviews lasted approximately one hour and were completed at each school counselor's respective work site. The questions included in the interview guide focused on the school counseling program and on the school counselor's perception of the issues and processes used in making professional decisions. The interviews were tape recorded with prior consent of the participants, and verbatim transcriptions were produced for data analysis. Each school counselor who participated also was asked to complete a brief paper-and-pencil assessment of demographic variables.

The researcher, as an active participant in data collection, was intent on understanding in detail how school counselors think and how they came to develop the perspectives they hold. The interview guide provided topic or subject areas within which the researcher explored, probed, and asked questions to elucidate and illuminate the subject area. Therefore, the researcher remained free to build a conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style, albeit with the focus on a particular subject that had been predetermined. In addition to the interview and descriptive data, the researcher observed participants on two or three occasions for a total of two hours each in the respective school setting. Observations were recorded as fieldnotes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Lofland, 1971; Patton, 1990). A narrative that was a composite of the descriptive questionnaires and participant observations provided a portrait of the school counselors who participated in the study.

A set of rigorous coding procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) guided the analysis to develop theoretically informed interpretations of the data. Data analysis progressed through the stages of open, axial, and selective coding. Open coding identified and developed concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions. Axial coding put the data together in new ways by making connections between a category and its subcategories to develop several main categories. Finally; selective coding integrated the categories to form a grounded theory for the development of a professional school counselor identity.

Open Coding

The naming and categorizing of phenomena through a close examination of the data is referred to as open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In taking apart an observation by a line, a sentence, or a paragraph of transcription, each discrete incident, idea, or event was given a name or code word that represented the concept underlying the observation. Creativity is an important element in analyzing the data; assigning code words was the first creative step in the data analysis. Code words were selected by the researcher to elicit new insights from the data. Examples of code words identified in this study include assaying (i.e., trying), conceptual (i.e., issues), connection (i.e., relationship), and discovery (i.e., realize). A total of 295 code words were identified in this study.

Grouping the code words around a particular concept in the data, called categorizing, reduced the number of code words with which to work. Once again the creative aspect of the data analysis was incorporated with the researcher naming categories as a basis of innovative theoretical formulations. For example, the code words assaying, conceptual, connection, and discovery were grouped around the category named evolving (i.e., personal perspectives). A total of 12 categories were identified through open coding in the study.

Finally, categories from the open-coding process were written as code notes that are a type of memo. Memos were written and coding paradigms were created to analyze the data further by asking questions and making comparisons about the content of the interview. The purpose of questioning is to open up the data by thinking of the categories in terms of their properties and dimensions. The basic questions are who? when? where? what? how? how much? and why? Examples of the types of questions asked were: What are the properties (i.e., attributes or characteristics) of the category? What are the dimensions (i.e., frequency, duration, rate, timing) of the property along a continuum?

Axial Coding

Whereas open coding fractured the data, axial coding put the data back together in new ways by making connections between a category and its subcategories to develop several main categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The resulting model denotes causal and intervening conditions, phenomena, contexts, action/ interactional strategies, and consequences.

Selective Coding

The selective coding process integrated the categories to form a substantive theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This theory describes an interrelated set of categories that emerged from the data through a constant comparative coding and analysis procedure. The identification of a core category, one that accounts for most of the variation in a pattern of behavior, was essential for the development of the theory. Once the core category was identified, the remaining categories could then be related to the core category as the conditions that led to the occurrence of the phenomenon and as the phases that represented the phenomenon.

Credibility of the Study

A qualitative study can be evaluated accurately only if the procedures are sufficiently explicit and the research standards (i.e., scientific canons) are appropriate to the study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The credibility of the study was judged by both the adequacy of the research process and the adequacy of the empirical grounding of the research findings (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The research process was guided by detailed procedures (e.g., selection of participants, identifying categories) and conceptual relationships among categories. These conceptual relationships were formulated and tested by re-examining each interview through a comparative method to test the relationships. The resulting conceptual relationships among the categories included the following: (a) there is a reciprocal interplay within the process, (b) there is a fluid nature to the process as the conditions and decisions change, and (c) the phenomenon as a blending of influences is a dynamic process within the context, conditions, and phases for a counselor performing in the role.

The adequacy of the empirical grounding of the research findings addresses concepts, linkages, variation and specificity, conditions, creative interplay, and process. Concepts were generated from the data and systematically related. The conceptual linkages were presented as strategies and activities of counselors performing in their role. Variation and specificity were built into the theory as conditions for the process under study. Broader conditions that effect the process were seen as the settings within which the counselors were providing services. The theory described a dynamic process for the blending of influences involving phases and actions/interactions in response to prevailing conditions. The theoretical findings represented the creative interplay between the researcher and the data. Finally, the substantive theory was presented as a process.

Although the credibility of the study and the adequacy of the empirical grounding have been addressed from a qualitative viewpoint, a few comments regarding the limitations of the study should satisfy those readers more familiar with quantitative analysis. First, grounded theory is generalizable to the specific actions and

interactions that pertain to a phenomenon and the resulting consequences. This study represents the theoretical perspectives of ten participants. Variations uncovered through additional research can be added as amendments to the original formulation. Second, reproducibility of the study may be questioned. Theory that deals with a social or psychological phenomenon is probably not reproducible because conditions cannot be exactly matched to the original study though many major conditions may be similar. However, given the same theoretical perspective of the original researcher and following the same general rules for data gathering and analysis in a similar set of conditions, another investigator should "reproduce" the same theoretical explanation about the given phenomenon. Should discrepancies arise, they are worked out through reexamination of the data and identification of the different conditions that may be operating in each case.

Results

The results of the coding procedures reflect the emergence of theoretical categories that explain how the participants continually processed the problem (i.e., self-conceptualization of their role). These categories form the basis for a substantive theory, which describes an interrelated set of categories grounded in the data that emerged from the constant comparative coding and analysis procedures.

Eight theoretical categories emerged through the axial coding process that explained how the participants continually processed the problem (i.e., self-conceptualization of the role). The eight theoretical categories included: (1) accounts. (2) advocates. (3) defines, (4) intertwines, (5) manages, (6) rates, (7) responds, and (8) sustains.

The basic problem grounded in the data was the counselor's need for personal guidelines in carrying out the professional role. Personal guidelines referred to the self-conceptualization of the role as a school counselor. As revealed reviewing each story (i.e., interview), counselors were faced with multiple influences, and each counselor found a way to intertwine or blend these influences. As a process, the core category was thus entitled "blending of influences." Using selective coding, each of the remaining theoretical categories was related to the core category as conditions (i.e., events or incidents that led to the phenomenon) or phases (i.e., strategies and activities of the process).

Performing in the role of a school counselor was the context for the blending of influences process. Performing was influenced by three conditions, namely experiences, other counselors, and essentials in a particular setting or context. Experiences were defined by one's length of service or years of experience as a school counselor and by one's knowledge of what had been done before (i.e., legacy) and of the setting (i.e., school community, counseling directives).

Table 1

Selective Coding: Conditions for Performing in the Role

Condition	Facets	Examples
Experiences	Length of Service	Novice or seasoned counselor
	Previous knowledge	What has been done before (i.e., legacy); knowing the setting (i.e., school community, counseling directives)
Counselors	Number of service providers	Exclusive service provider; work with one or more co-counselors
	Time and responsibility	Not having time as the only counselor; sharing of Responsibilities with a co-counselor
Essentials	Developmental issues	Related to population being served
	Directives	Related to administrator’s expectations of the Counselor

Counselors were providing services to students in the school either as the only counselor or as one of two counselors. This condition was expressed in terms of time and responsibilities for the counselors. Essentials were defined as the needs or developmental issues of the students and the directives issued by the principal or the counseling supervisor. The conditions are summarized in Table 1.

The four phases in the blending of influences for school counselors performing in their role became structuring, interacting, distinguishing, and evolving. The phases are described in terms of strategies and activities. The phases for the blending of influences are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
Selective Coding: The Strategies and Activities in the Phases for the Blending of Influences

Legend for Chart:

A - Phases
B - Strategies
C - Activities

A	B	C
Structuring	Defining	Implementing training received, knowing directives, recognizing homebase timbre, informing multiple publics
--	Rating	Appraising structure, receiving rejoinder, evaluating self
Interacting	Managing	Maneuvering hindrances and obstructions, making judgements, identifying a strategy
--	Responding	Recognizing realm of services, intervening information to multiple publics
Distinguishing	Advocating	Focusing on essentials to safeguard, counter, and/or broker
--		

Accounting

Asserting professional responsibility, performing approvingly

Evolving

Sustaining

Experiencing challenges, learning on the job, forming cognition

--

Intertwining

Reflecting professional substance, tying together as tongue-and groove, developing a guiding focus

Substantive Theory for the Blending of Influences

The problem grounded in the data of this research was to identify counselors' self-conceptualizations (i.e., personal guidelines) that provide a meaning-making framework in carrying out the professional role of a school counselor. It was discovered that a process occurred as counselors were involved with professional interactions when performing their role in the context of elementary and middle school counseling. This process for performing in the role of a school counselor was identified as the blending of influences (i.e., core category). The core category, blending of influences, and the major theoretical categories were linked through the conditions (Table 1) and phases (Table 2) that described how school counselors performed their role. Figure 1 presents the context, conditions, and phases that comprise the process for the blending of influences. (See page 345.)

Conditions from which school counselors may be viewed include experience, number of service providers, and essentials or needs in the particular setting. A school counselor in a particular setting may be considered a novice or seasoned counselor based on years of experience. The counselor's experience contributed to his or her knowledge regarding the legacy of the setting and the timbre of the school. Within a particular setting, the counselor may be the exclusive service provider or may work with one or more co-counselors. Essentials or needs of a particular setting include the developmental issues related to the population being served and the directives related to administrators' expectations of the counselor. Given the dynamics when these conditions are intermixed, each school counselor can be viewed as a unique service provider entering the phases for the blending of influences.

School counselors, at the onset of their professional role, become involved in the structuring phase for the blending of influences using a structural or external perspective based on their graduate training. Counselors may move in and out of this phase as conditions of the role change (e.g., experiences, different principal/co-counselor). This phase can be discerned through the counselors' description for determining the school counseling program (e.g., "I was trained ...," "our students need ..."). As influences beyond the structural perspective surface, counselors enter the interacting phase.

Interactions with multiple publics are inherent to the role of the school counselor. The interacting phase initiates the personal or internal perspective of the self-conceptualization as counselors become involved with managing and responding to multiple influences. Whether viewed as challenges, hindrances, and/or obstructions, the counselors maneuver the multiple influences and make decisions regarding their role. Through the interacting phase, the personal guidelines emerge as a meaning-making framework from which decisions or judgments are enacted.

Counselors move in and out of the distinguishing phase based on their performance goals and perceptions. This phase is marked by the what and how of the influences. As early as the novice year, counselors determine the focus (i.e., what) of their role performance and the perceptions (i.e., how) of self and others in performing the role. This phase may be revisited numerous times as conditions in the role change.

The dynamic interplay of the structuring, interacting, and distinguishing phases is a precursor to the evolving phase. Sustaining a variety of experiences develops the personal perspective. The intertwining of the structural and personal perspectives weaves a guiding focus that is revealed through personal guidelines for carrying out the role of a school counselor. The evolving phase becomes a part of the interplay of the phases for blending of influences.

Describing the phases as a dynamic interplay represents the fluid nature of the process for the blending of influences. What is viewed as the consequences of the dynamic interplay of phases are presented as the self-conceptualization or identity of school counselors performing in the role. The identity also has a fluid nature as the conditions change and counselors become involved in the phases of the process. The identity is not viewed as a final outcome but rather as a consequence of the conditions and phases of the process.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to generate a grounded theory of school counselors' professional identity development. The aims of the study were to explore and to conceptualize school counselors' professional interactions as defining experiences in the development of a professional school counselor identity. The substantive theory generated from the study describes the context, conditions, and phases for a process identified as the blending of influences.

It appears as if the development of a professional identity does contribute to defining the role of school counselors, which in turn shapes the counseling programs and services provided to students. In providing appropriate services, school counselors are involved in making decisions that involve complex interactions. Managing interactions with multiple publics--which include administrators, teachers, and co-counselors--are particularly important. Further, managing interactions are one part of a larger process identified as the blending of influences. As was expected, the blending of influences process was conceptualized as a dynamic interplay of internal and external perspectives; however, the resulting personal guidelines were far more individualized than initially expected. This is important because the personal guidelines followed by counselors determine the school counseling program, hence the highly individualized personal guidelines result in diverse programs and services offered to students and the school community.

In determining the school counseling program, a process of transformation occurs as the school counselor moves from determining the program based on external (i.e., structural) influences such as the graduate training received to an internal (i.e., attitudinal) conceptualization of the role. As part of the transformation process, the school counselor recognizes the needs of students that may elicit challenges from multiple publics, which the school counselor must manage. Professional identity develops over time and is a part of an experiential and maturation process. Although the study revealed a similar process among the participants for developing a professional identity, involvement in the process was unique to each school counselor.

Findings from this study support what has been defined in the literature as professional socialization and development (e.g., Hall, 1987; McGowen & Hart, 1990; Watts, 1987). The literature for a number of professions (e.g., teachers, counseling psychologists) reports that professional growth and development begins during one's training for the profession, evolves during entry into the profession, and continues to develop as the practitioner identifies with the profession. This concept was true for the school counselors who participated in this study. The maturation process began with the structural perspective developed during one's graduate training and was moderated by experiences during entry into the profession. Further development occurred as each participant internalized the role, which resulted in counseling services that were determined by

individualized personal guidelines. What was illuminating was the similarity of experiences among the participants and yet the dissimilarity of how these experiences were internalized into the self-conceptualization of the role among the participants. It was the personal or internal perspective as a self-conceptualization of the role that led the participants in the current study to develop new values, attitudes, and self-identity components portrayed through each individual's personal guidelines as a school counselor.

The substantive theory for the blending of influences presents a conceptualization of professional identity development for school counselors. Previous studies have presented professional identity development as a career spectrum model (Hall, 1987), a stage model (Skorholt & Ronnestad, 1992), and a tripartite model (Watts, 1987) of professional socialization. The current study presents professional identity development as a dynamic interplay of phases as school counselors become involved in a variety of strategies and activities when performing in the role. Further, the findings from this study support the literature that professional identity development is not a final outcome. The theory for the blending of influences conceptualizes professional identity development of school counselors as being responsive to a variety of influences and the importance placed on those influences by the individual counselor when performing in the role. The internalized self-conceptualization contributes to defining the role of school counselors who shape counseling programs and services provided to students and the school community.

The findings reveal that the professional identity of school counselors may mediate what and how services are delivered to the students and to the school community. The implications have relevance for the practice of school counseling as well as training and credentialing of school counselors.

The implications for practicing school counselors are seen in terms of professional multi-faceted growth. The concept of personal guidelines is integral to the development of professional identity and thus to the counseling programs and services offered in our schools. In the future, personal guidelines may become the focus for assessing school counseling programs and services as well as school counselors' performance by asking questions such as "How do individual school counselors assess their performance as providers of counseling services in schools as viewed through the blending of influences process?" The strategies and activities that delineate the phases of professional school counselor identity development may give rise to empirically measurable outcomes. These outcomes may be used as indicators for the level of excellence in school counseling programs.

The phases of the process have significant implications for both novice and seasoned school counselors. The study supports programs such as mentoring (e.g., VanZandt & Perry, 1992) and academies (e.g., Splete & Grisdale, 1992) that have been instituted to support practicing school counselors. Where these types of programs are not available, experiences that provide reflective opportunities can be a means of engaging in the process for the blending of influences. Such experiences include writing a journal, attending professional conferences, and networking with other counselors.

The importance of the interacting phase as counselors manage and respond to requests speaks to practitioners "picking their battles." School counselors' identities are formed by the decisions made when interacting with multiple publics, in particular principals and co-counselors. Requests for school counselors to perform administrative and/or clerical tasks will continue to be made if such administrative directives are held in the same esteem as administrative directives for counseling services. This condition will impact the blending process with administrative and clerical tasks becoming integral influences that practitioners must address. In addition, interactions between co-counselors can provide opportunities for confrontation, arbitration, and collaboration that can be seen as an integral part of the process, resulting in appropriate programs and services to address the developmental needs of students.

Professional identity development is not a final outcome; rather it is an evolving perspective that spans a practitioner's professional career. The evolving phase needs to be as important to the seasoned counselor as it is to the novice counselor. Opportunities need to be made available to challenge the seasoned counselor to identify

issues and to plan strategies that address conditions that are constantly changing and which impact the blending of influences process. The issues faced by students in schools continue to change, and the practice of counseling continues to change as we learn more about meeting the needs of students. These changes are significant factors that have a bearing on the dynamic interplay of phases within the identity development process.

The structural (i.e., external) perspective of professional identity development is formed during one's graduate training. The implications for training of school counselors are that counselors-in-training be prepared with a mindset that they will evolve and change in their professional role, that they will be made aware of the factors that impact their professional development, and that they will ultimately determine the counseling program and services offered in the school setting. The process of developing a professional identity, as defined in this study, made the participants increasingly aware of the differences between what they had learned in their training programs and the realities of the requirements of their position. This observation has implications for courses, seminars, and internships as part of pre-professional training for school counselors.

Courses within the training program should address not only the structuring of the school counseling program but also the importance of decision making in determining the program and services. Decisions involve interacting with multiple publics that become a part of the fluid process for the blending of influences. Practicing school counselors as well as practicing principals would make excellent guest speakers in training courses to share examples of decisions and to stimulate discussions or, in the context of the present study, interactions.

An innovative approach to introducing the blending of influences process to counselors-in-training would be seminars with other educators-in-training (i.e., principals, teachers). These seminars could provide an opportunity for participants to become involved with the interacting phase as each individual manages and responds to seminar topics related to issues in schools. In addition, seminars would provide a forum to discuss the services of the school counselor and to develop an understanding of the profession.

A review of the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) Standards (1994) indicates a strong emphasis on the structural perspective of school counseling through specified curricular experiences that include a required internship experience. However, the standards do not provide the same structural guidelines for intensive supervision of the internship beyond the requirements for supervision of any counseling intern. Consideration should be given to developing guidelines for the supervision of internship experiences in school settings by both the on-site host and the university supervisors. For example, the host supervisor's responsibilities could include the supervision of the intern's experiences in group counseling, classroom guidance, and consultation with teachers and parents. This would complement the university supervisor's responsibilities that include the supervision of the intern's individual counseling experiences utilizing both individual and group supervision techniques. It is through the internship experience that a bridge between the training and the practice of school counseling can be provided; in other words, this is where students learn about the reality of school counseling.

Further exploration and conceptualization of this grounded theory through both qualitative and quantitative methods would be advantageous. Future research should be focused on testing and refining the theory through examining relationships within the theory, collecting data from multiple publics (i.e., principals, teachers, co-counselors), and determining relationships between consequences of the process and the services provided to students.

In testing and refining the theory, the consequences of the process need to be explored and conceptualized. There are numerous possibilities for the consequences that may include decision styles, program services, and personal attachment/detachment. Once conceptualized, consequences can then be considered in relation to contexts, conditions, and phases in the blending of influences process.

There was an indication from this study of a professional maturation. This concept needs to be further explored. The development of identity across the professional life span would be an important contribution to the theory and would have implications for both practicing counselors and training programs.

Collecting data from multiple publics would be a view from the other side of the process. Qualitative studies involving principals and teachers would focus on the origins of their perceptions of school counseling and school counselors. Studies of co-counselors would provide a comparison between intentions and perceptions in the blending of influences process.

With the extensive literature on the role and function of school counselors, another study in this area certainly is not needed. However, a study to link the blending of influences process to programs and services could be enlightening. Searching for linkages between contexts, conditions, and phases that result in certain types of programs and services (e.g., developmental, directive) may help determine if it is the training or the person, or a particular blending of the training and the person that is the critical ingredient for the blending of influences process.

In conclusion, the self-conceptualization of practitioners as a particular type of school counselor has been shown to be directly linked to the programs and services offered to students in schools. Clearly, the beneficiaries of the blending of influences process defined in this study are the students. Further research is needed to test and refine the theory across elementary, middle, and high school settings as a basis for improving the quality of school counseling services for students of all ages.

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