Novice Professional School Counselor Development: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Supports and Resources

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Novice Professional School Counselor Development:
An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
of Supports and Resources

By
Lynn M. O’Brien

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education
in Counselor Education and Supervision

Minnesota State University
Mankato, MN
May 2021
April 5, 2021

Novice Professional School Counselor Development: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Supports and Resources

Lynn M. O’Brien

This dissertation has been examined and approved by the following members of the student’s committee.

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Dr. Jacqueline Lewis, Committee Member
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NOVICE PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL COUNSELOR DEVELOPMENT: 
AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS 
OF SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES

LYNN M. O’BRIEN

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE 
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION 
IN COUNSELOR EDUCATION AND SUPERVISION

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ABSTRACT

Novice School Counselors face many challenges during their first years in the profession and may be unaware of the supports and resources that are available. This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of novice professional school counselors to shed light on reported supports and resources that assist novice school counselors in their professional development. For this study, eight novice professional school counselors participated, and data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Each participant interview was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Four themes emerged through the data analysis: (a) sources of influence, (b) coping with adversity, (c) sense of confirmation, and (d) commitment to increasing one’s expertise. The importance of people, experiences, and organizations/teams were noteworthy regarding novice professional school counselor professional development. Although the small sample size, midwestern demographics, and researcher bias were noted as limitations to the study, the sample was purposely selected and protocol for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was followed. The study provided implications for practice and further research, including investigating how differences between school settings, past experiences, and personality impacts school counselor development. Additionally, highlighted was the need for Counselor Education Programs to provide training in crisis management and addressing the impact of poverty and other systemic issues. Finally, the results suggest novice Professional School Counselors would benefit from participating in clinical supervision.
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Professional school counselors are vital members of educational leadership teams. Their focus is on maximizing student success through helping all students achieve academic achievement, plan for future careers, and manage social and emotional development (ASCA, 2019a). This effort is not always easy, as school children deal with a myriad of problems, including experiences with poverty, abuse, and a range of changes impacting families (Gladding, 2000). The primary role of school counselors is to help students with their development (Schmidt, 1999; Stone & Dahir, 2016) to ensure success in the school environment.

In addition to helping students develop, school counselors are developing as professionals themselves. Factors that impact school counselors’ professional development across their career include growth in the areas of multicultural understanding, ethical standards, supervision, and continuing education (ASCA, 2019a). School counselors are not substantially different in training and expertise from counselors who work in mental health clinics or other settings. The school counselor’s role and function specifically set the profession apart. While mental health counselors evaluate and treat clients, school counselors focus on academic achievement, career and post-secondary planning, and social and emotional development (ASCA, 2019a). As with all counselors, moving from the novice of a school counseling career with its uncertainty and lack of confidence (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992) to the wisdom that comes with experience constitutes a professional journey.
This chapter includes background information on novice professional school counselors and the professional issues they face, including a problem statement, the purpose statement, the research questions, the theoretical framework, the methodology, and basic definitions of terms for this study.

**Background**

The professional journey begins as a graduate student receiving academic training to become a school counselor. School counselors’ academic training standards are clear in their direction that field placement training must be conducted under the supervision of someone qualified in terms of experience and licensure as a professional school counselor (CACREP, 2016). However, one issue is the lack of uniformity regarding the type of supervision required or provided among professional school counselors following graduation and entering the field as novice school counselors (Agnew, 2000). Most novice professional school counselors receive or have access to some form of oversight; yet this is usually provided by school administrators who typically only focus on managerial support and direction (Bultsma, 2012; Dollarhide & Miller, 2006; Fye et al, 2018; Wilson et al., 2015). School administrators typically do not understand the roles of school counselors, nor do they fully understand the interpersonal and mental health issues that need to be addressed by school counselors (Herlihy et al., 2002). The lack of understanding can lead to an even more difficult transition into the professional role for novice school counselors.

Additionally, administrators lack knowledge of the counseling profession and are unfamiliar with the ASCA National Model for a comprehensive school counseling
program (Lane et al., 2020). Furthermore, school administrators may see clinical supervision as unimportant or take away time for school counselors to work with students (Crutchfield & Borders, 1997; Dollarhide & Miller, 2006). Because of this, there is an inability to evaluate the work performance of clinical work within the school setting (Kreider, 2014). The ambiguity regarding the evaluation by administrators of necessary skills and acceptable skill levels is a stressor for novice school counselors (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003).

To meet the needs of all students, novice professional school counselors need to be well by taking care of their own mental and physical health. Lawson (2007) states that counselors who are unwell due to stress, distress, or impairment are likely to experience a decrease in their quality of life. This can impact their physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being and therefore impact the ability to provide high-quality counseling services to students. Conversely, counselors can better meet students’ needs in positive ways when they take better care of themselves (Lawson, 2007).

To reach optimal functioning as a counselor, novice professional school counselors need to be resilient to overcome the “fragile and incomplete practitioner-self” (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003, p. 50), which involves being less reactive to negative feedback without becoming defensive (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003). Stressful events experienced by novice professional school counselors compile and result in a state of being unwell, contributing to burnout (Cummins et al., 2007), thus making self-assessment, formal assessment, or ongoing dialogue regarding wellness essential. Multiple models of supervision have been developed to assist counselor supervisors with
the task of supervising competent counselors (Borders & Brown, 2005) and has always
been crucial to preparing professional counselors (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). However,
the traditional models did not meet all of the needs of today’s school counselors because
the school counselor’s job encompasses much more than individual and group counseling
(Brott & Myers, 1999; Studer, 2006) and the models lack focus on the complexities of
school counseling tasks, professional issues, and professional development specific to
school counseling supervision (Crutchfield et al., 1997; Lambie & Sias, 2009; Paisley &
McMahon, 2001; Wood & Rayle, 2006). Additionally, as student mental health needs
increase, school counselors are being called upon to provide mental health services
through collaboration with school and community stakeholders. The role of mental health
provider is often in addition to filling the roles of advocate and leader to create
comprehensive school counseling programs that rigorously promote educational equity
and student success (Dahir & Stone, 2006; DeKruijf et al., 2013; Kaffenberger &
O’Rorke-Trigiani, 2013). To meet the additional mental health needs of students, school
counselors need to be accessible as they are often the only trained mental health
professional in the school setting (Lambie et al., 2019) and have access to mental health
agencies, clinics, and private practice settings to refer students and families with more
complex needs (Stone & Dahir, 2016).

With school counselors being called upon to fulfill several roles and
responsibilities as an education team member and as a mental health professional,
disagreement on which role is the foundation of their professional identity are likely
(DeKruijf et al., 2013; Gibson et al., 2012). However, the most commonly agreed upon
role function is the ability to meet the needs of all students (ASCA, 2019; Paolini & Topdemir, 2013; Young & Kaffenberger, 2011), including students with mental health needs and from marginalized groups (DeKruyf et al., 2013; Ratts & Greenleaf, 2017).

**Problem Statement**

Ideally, professional school counselors strive to be advocates for all students within the school system and inspire them to reach their full potential and achieve their goals. However, Bridgeland and Bruce (2011) found school counselors report considerable misrepresentation between their perceived role as a strong student advocate and what they are experiencing in schools. To aid with aligning the professional ideal with reality, school counselors favor receiving more support, time, and empowerment to take on leadership roles (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011). Additionally, most counselors also support reduced administrative tasks, smaller caseloads, counselor training, collaboration, data collection and dissemination, and the creation of accountability measures and incentives for counselors (ASCA, 2019a; ASCA, 2020; Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011; Cigrand et al., 2015; Woods & Domina, 2014).

Although most counselors have a master’s degree and many have prior work experience as teachers or administrators, Bridgeland and Bruce report that 28% of the school counselors surveyed did not feel well trained for their jobs and 56% felt only somewhat well trained (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011). These findings suggest that novice school counselors need support to assist in their continued professional development once in the field. Jackson et al. (2002) suggested counselor training programs must ensure professional mentoring practices are implemented and include training for on-site
supervisors. Additionally, novice counselors need support to develop relationships with stakeholders and access to resources, particularly when new school counselors are expected to lead systemic change initiatives in schools and professional arenas (Jackson et al., 2002).

Novice professional school counselors may not know where to look for support and resources to assist with their professional development once they graduate. There are a number of resources novice school counselors could utilize including self-help books, reflective journaling, professional conferences, and other professionals.

One avenue novice school counselors could look for support is self-help books that are reflective in nature. In fact, novice professional school counselors might not realize self-help books could be as helpful to them in their professional development as the books could be for mental health counselors (Smith & Burkhalter, 1987). They might also utilize reflective journaling tools (Milsom & Kayler, 2008), which can encourage novice school counselors to be insightful as they recognize personal strengths and areas for improvement (Williams et al., 2009).

Novice professional school counselors might turn to professional conferences for support or to seek out resources. School counselors report needing more knowledge and skills but are limited to accessing professional conferences due to required training specifically geared toward teachers, lack of funding, or lack of coverage when the school counselor is absent (Savitz-Romer, 2019). Professional school counselors need access to content relevant to their profession, and that focuses on the demographics and challenges specific to students, staff, and families served (Savitz-Romer, 2019). Furthermore, novice
counselors may continue to rely on their university supervisor or their cooperating counselor who provided site supervision during the practicum and internship experience (Schmidt et al., 2001), or other school counselors or school professionals, such as psychologist or social worker (Bultsma, 2012). However, there is limited existing research on the types of supports and resources utilized by novice professional school counselors to assist in their professional development.

**Purpose Statement**

For this study, an interpretative phenomenological analysis was conducted to gain insight into novice professional school counselors’ lived experiences to shed light on reported supports and resources that assist novice school counselors in their professional development. The aim was to better understand the professional journey of the novice school counselor by identifying some inherently intense stress due to the often-unknown ambiguity of professional work (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003). This research clarified which supports and resources might help novice professional school counselors bolster their professional identity. It also highlighted resources for counselor educators to share with school counseling interns to better prepare them for lack of clinical supervision and promote self-reflection and growth. Additionally, it provided resources for supervisors or other professionals, such as induction or mentor coaches, who provide supervision to novice professional school counselors in their day-to-day work.
Research Questions

The overarching research question was: What are the lived experiences of novice school counselors? Further, this study sought to examine the reported supports and resources that assist novice professional school counselors in their professional development. Specifically, the following interview questions guided the study:

1. Tell me about your current position as a beginning school counselor.
2. Thinking back when you first began, tell me about your experience.
3. Describe for me your process in transitioning from graduate school to the profession?
4. What experiences have shaped your professional identity throughout your time in the field?
5. What experiences have shaped your development throughout your time in the field?
6. In your experience as a professional school counselor to date, what resources or supports assisted you with your professional development?
7. What has moved you from feeling novice as a professional school counselor to feeling more self-assured?

Theoretical Perspective

The overarching theoretical perspective of this study is developmental in nature. Filtering interpretations through a lens or theoretical perspective allows researchers ways to make findings intelligible (Kilbourn, 2006). Developmental models or developmental
theories of supervision provide one way to understand or explain the professional
development of novice professional school counselors. Developmental theories suggest
that supervisees move through a developmental process gradually moving from a lower
level of functioning to a higher level of functioning over time and training.
Developmental models have a long history of describing supervision as addressing
counselors’ needs and developmental levels through supervisor modification of the
applied developmental model (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019; Shechtman & Wirzberger,
1999). Developmental theories of supervision are based on two foundational assertions:

A. It is necessary for supervisees to advance through a set of stages that are
   qualitatively unique to become competent counselors.

B. It is necessary to match developmental levels of supervisees to qualitatively
   unique supervisory environments for maximum counselor growth and
   satisfaction (Chagnon & Russell, 1995).

Various developmental models describe progressive supervisee growth and
development through phases or stages with each level of development predicting
struggles with developmental issues and concerns (Bradley & Ladany, 2010; Morgan &
Additionally, developmental models assume trainees have an understanding of self and
others, as well as personal motivation and individual autonomy (Stoltenberg, 1981).
These developmental models of supervision are based on cognitive development theories
and describe behavioral, affective, and cognitive changes that occur over time (Borders &
Brown, 2005). Each developmental model differs in the number of stages the trainee will
pass through and various descriptions of typical supervisee behaviors which illustrate simple progression to more complex mastery (Smith, 2009).

Salvador (2016) noted that “developmental models of supervision are usually derived from the idea that the supervisee has the capability to develop from novice to expert with the guidance and counseling of the supervisor” (p. 244). Additionally, noting the supervisor and supervisee acknowledge the specific skills and competencies of each developmental stage over time (Salvador, 2016). A lifespan model of development would lend itself to providing longitudinal data. The field of counseling has long been concerned with lifespan development issues, especially how trainees develop (Goodyear et al., 2000). Many of the theories and models that explore counselor development predominately focus on supervision of trainees and counselors in general (e.g., Blocher, 1983; Hogan, 1964; Littrell et al., 1979; Loganbill et al., 1982; Stoltenberg, 1981) and do not consider the lifespan of a counselor’s career. A notable exception to this trend is the theory offered by Skovholt and Rønnestad (1992), who were interested in counselor development across the lifespan. They proposed that predictable, developmental changes would take place throughout counselors’ work lives.

Although there has been shifts in supervision models that organize knowledge and skills specific to school counseling which address effectively meeting the needs of developing school counselors (Colbert & Magouirk-Colbert, 2003; Lambie & Sias, 2009; Luke & Bernard, 2006; Wood & Rayle, 2006), career lifespan models for school counselors are still scant. Therefore, three models that address career lifespan, school counseling, and multicultural perspectives guided this research study. The life span
model of development of Rønnestad and Skovholt (2013) extensively informed this research and influenced the chosen topic, method, and analysis of the data as professional development in this study is seen as a life-long process. The Integrative Psychological Developmental Supervision Model proposed by Lambie and Sias (2009) also influenced the study by including a school counseling specific focus on development. The multicultural perspective presented by Gonzalez, Biever, and Gardner (1994) guided the research and recognizes that discrimination and diversity impacts one’s professional development and life experiences; despite promising advances and legal protections, issues of equity remain at the forefront for many students and educators (Noltemeyer et al., 2012). An overview of all three theoretical frameworks is described below, with further discussion provided in the method’s chapter.

**Rønnestad and Skovholt (2013)**

The overarching purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of novice professional school counselors and the reported supports and resources that assist with their professional development; thus, it follows that a developmental model guides the primary lens in which the data was collected and analyzed. Developmental models offer an overarching view of counselor growth that shows progression "toward greater complexity and integration" (Borders & Brown, 2005, p. 12). There are many developmental models describing counselor development. The (2013) model is a lifespan model that describes phases and tasks at different levels of development. Since its inception in 1992, the model has gone through several iterations, the most recent (2013) model.
In their book *The Developing Practitioner*, Rønnestad and Skovholt (2013) describe the first years after graduation as the Novice Professional Phase, which is when the counselor begins practicing as a professional. This phase is marked by a sense of being on one’s own and a continual process of reformulating the profession’s concepts and behaviors. The order of change is in this phase is sequential and begins with a period of confirming the validity of training (Rønnestad and Skovholt, 2013). When novices feel they have not successfully mastered new professional challenges, they become disillusioned with themselves and their professional training. An intense inner exploration occurs into the self and the professional environment. A revived interest in learning more direct inward and autonomous counseling techniques occurs (Rønnestad and Skovholt, 2013). This research study focuses specifically on the Novice Professional Phase of development and professional school counselors’ experience in this phase.

**Lambie and Sias (2009)**

While Rønnestad and Skovholt’s (2013) model provides unique stages focused on novice professional development, the Integrative Psychological Developmental Supervision Model proposed by Lambie and Sias (2009) focuses specifically on school counselor professional development, including advanced clinical counseling skills, such as active listening, case conceptualization, and applying theory to practice. Integrative Psychological Developmental Supervision Model guided this research through its design to promote growth in emotional awareness, creativity, problem-solving skills, and supervisees’ confidence and self-efficacy in effective clinical practices (Lambie & Sias, 2009), which can be applied during graduate school and beyond.
Finally, a major focus for school counselors when serving diverse students in a contextually rich environment is utilizing a multicultural approach. Recognizing the impact of diversity on professional development is particularly pertinent to this study because many people have experienced discrimination and harassment as barriers. Such discrimination impacts work with students (Gonzalez et al., 1994), particularly due to the nature of counseling requiring authentic and deep understanding of students’ cultural and social worlds (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Pedersen, 1991). School counselors must be able to identify thoughts of bias within themselves in order to avoid it, affecting them at work and their work with students. Once a counselor understands their own biases, they can work towards understanding the worldview of culturally diverse students (Sue & Sue, 2013). However, this process can be rather challenging since it requires an individual to confront sensitive issues that one might not want to admit to holding, such as racism (Knox et al., 2003).

Personal experience with discrimination, rather than academic learning, may help counselors feel more comfortable and open to working on culturally centered issues with students (Knox et al., 2003). However, when discriminatory experiences are processed in non-affirming ways during supervision, supervisees report being afraid of their supervisor’s reactions and believed their supervisor would evaluate their performance negatively (Burkard et al., 2009). Additionally, school counselors face barriers of not having enough time or believing multicultural education is not needed in their school (Merlin-Knoblich & Chen, 2018). Overcoming these barriers can be accomplished

Gonzalez, Biever, and Gardner (1994)
through implementing a multicultural focus into curriculum delivery and approaching professional development through a multicultural lens, thus leading to equal opportunities for all students through increased awareness, knowledge, and skills by the school counselor (Merlin-Knoblich & Chen, 2018).

Gonzalez et al., (1994) describe the counselor as a learner who maintains curiosity, one who must be sensitive to the students’ understanding of the influences of their culture, and one to entertain all ideas, allowing for multiple answers to problem and various routes for arriving at solutions. Our perceptions of the world around us are mediated by and learned through our culture. In contrast, other’s perceptions are different when mediated by and learned through their own cultural backgrounds (Pedersen, 1991). Collaboration between the student and counselor focuses on a balanced relationship with equal power, allowing both to search for other ideas to expand behavioral options in generating solutions to problems (Gonzalez et al., 1994).

**Methodology**

Trends in published literature revealed few research articles on school counseling supervision, especially research utilizing qualitative methods. Between 1968 and 2017, a search for school counseling supervision yielded 69 articles which were found in 11 counseling and counseling-related journals (Bledsoe et al., 2019). Additionally, 17 of the journals investigated did not contain published articles on the topic. Across the 69 articles found, empirical research and conceptual manuscripts accounted for 31 and 38 of the articles respectively; furthermore, 20 quantitative, 8 qualitative, and 3 mixed methods were utilized in the 31 empirical research articles (Bledsoe et al., 2019). This author
conducted a search of the same 11 journals published between 2019 and 2020. An additional 131 articles were added to the research related to school counselors and school counseling. However, of the 131 articles, 6 specifically addressed school counseling supervision and only 2 were qualitative studies (Tan, 2019; Bledsoe, et al., 2019). This sparse focus on clinical supervision for school counselors utilizing qualitative research methods indicates a need for additional qualitative research on the topic of school counseling supervision, as well as indicating a need for additional resources that address school counselor development through supervision. Qualitative approaches are appropriate when existing research is minimal and when the focus is on understanding an experience in a context-specific setting (Morrow, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005).

**Research Paradigm**

The paradigm sets the context for the study (Ponterotto, 2005), which Guba and Lincoln (1994) describe as a worldview representation that guides the investigator. The philosophical anchors of a paradigm include ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Ponterotto, 2005). Ontology is defined by the nature of reality, epistemology is defined by the relationship between a person and reality, and methodology is defined by how a person approaches finding out about reality. Cohesion among the responses to each question of ontology, epistemology, and methodology contributes to the integrity of a paradigm. The three anchors are interrelated. For example, the ontology response to a person’s perspective regarding the nature of reality directly influences the epistemology response to the possible relationship between the person and reality or knowledge. Thus, the relationship of knowing, in turn, impacts the methodology response of the way a
person discovers reality (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Ponterotto, 2005). Paradigms are often referred to as a belief system not requiring proof. Guba and Lincoln (1994) contend:

...[belief systems] are in all cases human constructions; that is, they are all inventions of the human mind and hence subject to human error. No construction is or can be incontrovertibly right; advocates of any particular construction must rely on persuasiveness and utility rather than proof in arguing their position [italics included in original text] (p. 108).

Qualitative research offers a constructivist paradigm as an alternative interpretative paradigm to the traditional positivist paradigm to allow subjective understanding of human experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Adhering to a relativist position, this study was conducted utilizing the constructivist paradigm, assuming multiple and equally valid realities (Schwandt, 1994; Yardley, 2008). Following the constructivist position, this researcher did not attempt to bring to light a single “truth” from the participants’ realities, as reality is subjective and affected contextually by particular situations (Ponterotto, 2005). Through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, as the researcher, this author identified the phenomenon through describing the “essence” of human experiences through the participants stories. Patterns and relationships of meaning emerged through extensive and prolonged engagement with the data gathered from interviewing a small number of participants (Moustakas, 1994).

**Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is a qualitative approach that describes the commonality of the lived experience of a group of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018), in this study, novice
professional school counselors. Utilizing this process, the researcher interpreted the universal meanings of events, situations, or experiences to arrive at a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, thus providing transferability of the understood results. The founder of phenomenology was existential philosopher Edmund Husserl, who focused on the phenomenon of experience and not on the object (Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenology is a rigorous and thorough qualitative research method with the goal of finding the “central underlying meaning of the experiences that contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on the memories, images, and meaning” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 52). Husserl (1962) stated that each participant’s personal experience of each participant concerning the phenomenon is the crucial component of a phenomenological study. Merriam (2002) noted that phenomenology attempts to disrobe inner experiences of everyday life. Therefore, this type of research method was suitable for studying the lived experiences and reported resources that assist novice school counselors in their professional development.

**Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Approach**

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) considers the human lived experiences through detailed examination (Smith et al., 2009). The aim of IPA is to “conduct this examination in a way which as far as possible enables that experience to be expressed in its own terms, rather than according to predefined categories” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 32). This research project was committed to understanding the lived experiences of novice professional school counselors through collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data describing the ways participants make sense of their lived experiences. IPA was the
qualitative approach utilized to guide how participants were selected and how data was collected, analyzed, and interpreted. Other qualitative methods were ruled out, as IPA is descriptive and interpretative (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) which allowed for understanding through greater detail and a more personalized accounts of individual experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

**Definition of Terms**

To delimit the study and to conceptualize constructs appropriately, key terms identified in this study will be defined in this section. These key terms will be referenced through this study of the lived experiences of novice professional school counselors and the reported supports and resources that assist in their professional development.

**Administrative Supervision** focuses on the supervisees’ functioning as an employee through evaluation of work performance within the organization (Kreider, 2014), specifically provided by a school administrator who is paying attention to organizational duties (Dollarhide & Miller, 2006).

**Adversity** is hardship, difficulties, and challenges, specifically in this study, within the counseling profession (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013).

**American School Counselor Association (ASCA)** “supports school counselors’ efforts to help students focus on academic, career, and social and personal development so they not only achieve success in school but are prepared to lead fulfilling lives as responsible members of society.” Additionally, “ASCA empowers school counselors with the knowledge, skills, linkages and resources to promote student success in the school, the home, the community and the world” (ASCA, 2019a).
**Case Conceptualizations** are the skills and ability to “recognize, understand, and integrate discrete facts” (Prieto & Scheel, 2002, p. 11) about students and their problems and to identify additional information about the relationships and connections between facts required to plan, implement, and adjust school counseling interventions. (Prieto & Scheel, 2002).

**Classroom Management** are skills and techniques teachers and school counselors take to create an environment that supports and facilitates student growth, success, and learning (Soodak & McCarthy, 2006).

**Clinical Supervision** is a necessary component to professional development when examining complex situations (Christman-Dunn, 1998), which allows supervisees to process their counseling experiences by focusing on clinical skills, ethical competency, and case conceptualization (Bradley & Ladany, 2010; Thompson & Moffett, 2010), as well as supervisee professional growth and development, which impacts their professional work (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019).

**Connection** is “the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship” (Brown 2010).

**Development** is change that is systematically organized and involves change over time through cumulative responses to activity (Lerner, 1986). New professionals proceed through a cycle of learning, practice, and feedback while experiencing dependence and autonomy (Auxier et al., 2003).
**Disillusionment** is the realization that “acquired skills are insufficient and that the practice world of unique situations is different from that portrayed by academic models” (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003, p. 52), with criticism by former students directed to the courses, the professors, or the entire program (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003).

**Expert** is defined as a person with a rich experience base, enabling them to respond intuitively to a situation (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992) and to think differently than a novice (Kemer et al., 2014).

**Expertise** is when specialized skill or knowledge has been obtained through years of study and experience (Glaser & Chi, 1988).

**Multicultural Competency** consists of a cultural knowledge, sensitivity, awareness, beliefs and attitudes, and skills to guide counselor development and training necessary to work effectively with diverse students (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Sue et al., 1982).

**Novice** is a person who has no experience from which to draw context and must rely on rules to guide practice (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992) and for most will encompass the first 2 to 5 years after graduation (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013).

**Professional Development** is the process of gaining experience in becoming an expert spanning from the beginning of an individual’s career through retirement (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992).

**Professional Identity** may be defined by the roles, responsibilities, and specific activities a professional performs (Alves & Gazzola, 2011) while integrating the identity in a professional setting (Gibson et al., 2010), thus minimizing the potential for ethical violations (Mascari & Webber, 2006).
**Resources** are assets, such as professional development webinars, publications, and research that novice school counselors can draw upon to function effectively and supports growth (ASCA, 2019).

**School counselors** “are certified/licensed educators who improve student success for ALL students by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program” (ASCA, 2019).

**Self-efficacy** is described as an individual feeling more competent in performing tasks that they have successfully completed or been exposed to in the past (Bandura, 1977). Specifically related to "one's beliefs or judgments about his or her capabilities to effectively counsel a client in the near future" (Larson & Daniels, 1998, p.180) and a “counselor's perceived ability to carry out school counseling-related tasks” (Holcomb-McCoy et al., 2009, p. 344).

**Supervision** refers to “an intervention provided by a more senior member of a profession to a more junior colleague or colleagues who typically (but not always) are members of that same profession. The relationship is evaluative and hierarchical, extends over time, and has the simultaneous purposes of enhancing the professional functioning of the more junior person(s); monitoring the quality of professional services offered to the clients that they see; and serving as a gatekeeper for the particular profession the supervisee seeks to enter” (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019, p. 9).

**Summary**

This chapter probed the background of the problem through consideration of professional issues novice school counselors face. Next, the problem statement presented
an overview of the discrepancy between what is ideally desired and what is really being experienced by novice school counselors in their professional role. The purpose statement highlighted the phenomenon to be studied; the lived experiences of novice professional school counselors and the reported resources and supports that assist in their professional development. Finally, the theoretical framework, the methodology, and definitions of terms for this study were outlined.

The next chapter features a literature review that provides an overview of what it means to be an expert in the field of school counseling as well as development of novice professional school counselors. Furthermore, issues related to professional development and the school counseling profession are described. Professional identity, self-efficacy, and behaviors are addressed within professional development. Additionally, professional issues such as caseload, role confusion, clinical supervision, and struggles of novice counselors are fully examined. Finally, existing supports and resources are reviewed to lend understanding to novice professional school counselor development.
CHAPTER TWO

Introduction

This chapter features a literature review that provides an overview of what it means to be an expert in the field of school counseling as well as development of novice professional school counselors. Next, the nuances of professional development, including professional identity, self-efficacy, and counselor behavior, will be described. Next, professional counseling issues such as caseload size, role confusion, clinical supervision, and general struggles of being novice are examined. Finally, existing supports and resources are then reviewed to lend understanding to novice professional school counselor development.

School counselors must be increasingly accountable in what they do and in what they are prepared to do. By understanding the tasks performed at the beginning stages of professional development and the importance of those tasks, school counselors will be better prepared to fulfill the role expected of them. Counselor educators will also be better able to train students to be successful professional school counselors. Therefore, when thinking about overcoming struggles and obtaining expertise within the field of counseling, a counselor must understand the tasks they are faced through demonstration and completion of said tasks during an internship and the beginning stage of professional development. More specifically, they need to know how to reach and prepare for the next stage in their development to become more expert.
Expertise

There has been an absence in the research defining “expertise” that is commonly accepted in the counseling field (Frensch & Sternberg, 1989; Tracey et al., 2014). However, the general assumption regarding expert performance reflects some fluctuation between nurturing through training and experience versus the innate nature of individual capacities and talents (Ericsson & Lehmann, 1996). This view suggests that expertise in human performance is balanced between talent (nature) and instructional and practice (nurture).

Acknowledging innate differences in natural capacities and talents contributes to differing levels or qualities of human performance, expertise has been defined as "the ability, acquired by practice and experience, to perform qualitatively well in a particular task domain" (Frensch & Sternberg, 1989 p. 158). This definition provides some clarity regarding the definition of “expertise”, but it does not identify what specifically constitutes expertise.

Glaser and Chi (1988) provided a clearer picture of expertise by identifying seven characteristics as being typical of expert performance. After synthesizing a large body of research from various fields, particularly the hard sciences, they concluded that these central characteristics included: (a) Experts excel mainly in their own domains; (b) Experts perceive large, meaningful patterns in their domains; (c) Experts are faster than novices in performing domain skills, and quickly problem-solve with little error; (d) Experts have superior short-term and long-term memory about their domain; (e) Experts see and represent a problem in their domain at a deeper (more principled) level than
novices, who tend to represent a problem at superficial levels; (f) Experts spend a great
deal of time analyzing a problem qualitatively; and (g) Experts have strong self-
monitoring skills (Glaser & Chi, 1988). Additionally, Glaser and Chi (1988) contend that
these common characteristics span across a variety of professions, including physical and
social sciences to athletics and the arts.

The simplest explanation for expertise, according to Glaser and Chi (1988), is the
development of very specific knowledge and skills obtained through years of experience
and study. For the novice counselor, expertise means acquiring an advanced degree with
many hours of supervised practice while gaining problem-solving strategies and
increasing efficiency and accuracy in diagnosing.

Another point regarding expertise is the relationship between speed and quality
that has been demonstrated in many studies of expertise (Glaser & Chi, 1988), with
quality indicating expertness, rather than speed. Being considered an expert is evidenced
by producing qualitatively superior products of reasoning compared to non-experts.
Furthermore, experts have developed internal conceptual knowledge as a base to draw
from so that they can operate from a place of understanding and intuitive knowledge
(Glaser & Chi, 1988). In other words, once a beginning counselor integrates book
knowledge into their ways of being, through time, practice, and commitment, they can
become an expert by demonstrating the ability to help clients achieve their goals in
optimal ways.

Expertise in the counseling profession is both desirable and elusive (Jennings et
al., 2003; Tracey et al., 2014). Each year hundreds of novice counselors enter the
professional field in hopes of gaining experience and becoming an expert. A novice counselor starts this extraordinary commitment through development. To enhance understanding of the novice counselor, Jennings et al. (2005) stated counselor educators need to increase their own knowledge regarding the professional development of counselors throughout the lifespan and the role expertise plays in the profession. Guiding the journey from novice to expert is the developmental pathways of expertise (Jennings et al., 2005).

**Development**

Development is a theoretical concept rather than an empirical concept (Lerner, 1986). As Lerner (1986) has pointed out, the concept of development bears particular characteristics regardless of philosophical and theoretical orientation. These features include change that is systematically organized and involves change over time through cumulative responses to activity (Lerner, 1986).

Using a developmental model helps counselor educators and supervisors understand the process through which expertise develops. Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) formulated a developmental model that concentrates on increases in expertise. This model hinges on levels of skilled performance differentiated by experience and education. The five professional development levels (Novice, Advanced Beginner, Competent, Proficient, Expert) vary by functioning on two general dimensions (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). This first is a shift in time to using one’s own work experience rather than abstract principles for paradigms to guide one’s performance (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). One example would be a beginning counselor successfully confronting a client
during a counseling session once learning about and practicing confrontation skills in a controlled classroom environment. Second is perceptual changes in the use of only certain elements of a complex situation rather than many equal parts, demonstrated by a counselor’s ability to prioritize a client’s many issues.

An important element of the Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) formulation is the replacement of the theories of experts with one’s own relevant experience as the essential guide for practice. To do so requires the beginning counselor to not just rely on the values of the program they graduated from or of the practicum and internship supervisor, but rather to go beyond and develop their own values that include theoretical orientation. Additionally, Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) pointed out that an expert does not automatically know the correct way to proceed, but rather the person is required to “critically reflect on one’s intuitions” (p. 32).

Without an understanding of counselor development and a detailed picture of what facilitates development for counselors, training and supervision will remain, at best, practices based on intuition and personal experience, perhaps leaving counselors to flounder rather than succeed (Worthington, 1987). Borders (2014) believed we have come to a time when empirical research is now available to create statements of best practices to help facilitate counselor development through supervision.

Developmental models describe various predictable, progressive stages through which supervisees develop discrete characteristics and skills by resolving particular needs, conflicts, or tasks to grow from novice to expert (Bradley & Ladany, 2010; Morgan & Sprenkle, 2007). For example, Corey et al. (2010) reported novice supervisees
would likely demonstrate minimal skills and lack counseling confidence, while a supervisee in the advanced stage of the developmental spectrum has likely developed confidence and skills to be self-sufficient as a counselor.

Most current models of development, the so-called developmental models, have been constructed conceptually from notions of development borrowed from contexts other than psychotherapy skills training (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992). In their book *The Evolving Professional Self*, Skovholt and Rønnestad (1992) proposed a stage model of counselor development outlining three stages consisting of processes and tasks for completion. The goal of the study was to address the lack of rich descriptive information derived from intensive interviews to answer questions about growth beyond graduate school and the impact of personal life on professional functioning. Their inquiry covered the lifespan of professionals in the helping field and generated knowledge regarding “challenges, emotional reactions, attitudes toward work, influential factors in development, learning method, perceptions of the role and working style, conceptual ideas used, and measures of success and satisfaction” (Skovholt and Rønnestad, 1992. p. 506).

One limitation of this model is that it is not based on longitudinal data, which would provide developmental data on the participant as they grew professional throughout the lifespan. Another limitation is the sample is limited in its diversity, as the graduate students were from one program, which introduces the possibility of training bias. This original model was developed on a homogeneous sample of Caucasian Minnesotans, so it is unknown how well the model applies to a broader sample.
Additionally, the model does not address whether “normal” development can occur for counselors who do not fit into the mold that the model presents. The authors only noted that stagnation and “pseudodevelopment” could occur when counselors do not engage in reflection and are defensive and rigid. Thirdly, the qualitative nature hinders determination of causal relationships that statistical analysis may have revealed.

Skovholt and Rønnessad have since engaged in cross-cultural research with colleagues utilizing samples numbering in the thousands to continue to explore therapist development (Orlinsky et al., 1999; Orlinsky et al., 2001). Twenty themes were formulated from Skovholt and Rønnessad’s (1992) 8-stage model of development were reduced to 14 themes through reanalysis and reformulation (Rønnessad & Skovholt, 2003). Interviews were conducted to answer the questions of:

“What counselors/ therapists develop? Do all develop? What is the nature of changes therapists go through during their career? If there is change, how do therapists perceive the changes that have taken place? If a developmental perspective is relevant, is development continuous, erratic, cyclical, or can it be described otherwise.” (p. 8)

In their book The Developing Practitioner, Rønnessad & Skovholt collapsed and shortened the themes to further reduce overlap to 10 themes (2013), which will be highlighted in the next chapter.

The authors original formulated eight-stage model of counselor development was collapsed into six phases and then further reduced to five phases; the Novice Student Phase, the Advanced Student Phase, the Novice Professional Phase, the Experienced
Professional Phase, and the Senior Professional Phase (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003, 2013). The Novice Professional Phase encompasses the first years after graduation and are “experienced as highly intense and engaging” (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013, p. 83). The developmental tasks in this phase include confirming the validity of training and commitment to the profession, followed by emotionally struggling with disillusionment of aspects of self and the profession. Finally, the novice explores and defines their professional and personal self, along with the professional world (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013). Most beginning school counselors fall in the Novice Professional Phase.

Moving from novice to expert requires professional development. Engaging in professional development to improve their practices and enhance their school counseling programs can aid school counselors in better defining and enacting their expanding and increasingly important roles (Wingfield et al., 2010). Dahir et al. (2009) asserted that professional development specific to school counseling contribute to increased confidence “needed to reaffirm their beliefs, reassess their priorities, and transform their practices and thus build higher levels of capacity to implement comprehensive school counseling programs” (p. 189). A study by Bridgeland and Bruce (2011) highlighted that counselors themselves may not completely understand how to make the transition from novice to expert. The findings determined that school counselors struggled with defining their role as “the counselor’s role is viewed, in fact, as less of a defined position in schools than as a catchall” (Bridgeland & Bruce, p. 24, (2011), even though school counselors are positioned to bring positive change within their schools. These school counselors’ views differed regarding the best use of their time with 52% stating each
student should receive equal support and the other 48% stating their time should be spent focusing on targeting students with the greatest needs. Additionally, school counselors struggled with how to effectively merge their unique programs into the overall agenda for educational reform (Bridgeland and Bruce, 2011).

**Professional Development**

Within the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies (ASCA, 2019a), school counselors are directed to engage in professional growth opportunities and to develop a yearly professional development plan. Paying attention to relevant professional standards and competencies, including personal limitations, school counselors self-assess their own knowledge, attitude and skills. To promote professional growth and development, this plan may be formulated using personal reflection, as well as consultation and supervision. Areas of concern within professional school counselor professional development that warrant further exploration include professional identity (Alves & Gazzola, 2011; ASCA, 2019a; Mascari & Webber, 2006; Myers et al., 2002), self-efficacy (Holcomb et al., 2009; Larson & Daniels, 1998; Romano et al., 2009) and behaviors as outlined by the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies (ASCA, 2019a).

**Professional Identity**

With the complexity of demands facing the profession, school counselors need a frame of reference from which to make decisions and understand their roles, which can be provided through a strong professional identity (Brott, 2006). Counselor identity may be defined by the roles, responsibilities, and specific activities school counselors perform
(Alves & Gazzola, 2011). The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs (2019b) provides a framework for defining the roles, responsibilities, and practices of the school counseling profession. The model covers components of school counseling programs, such as how to define, manage, deliver, and assess. The model also encourages school counselors to perform in the role of leader, advocate, collaborator, and change agent tasked with removing individual and systemic barriers that have the potential to impede student academic success (ASCA National Model, 2019b; Baker et al., 2009; DeKruyf et al., 2013; Havlik et al., 2019).

School counselors with solid professional identity support advocacy for clients, the profession, and increases inter-professional collaboration and credibility (Alves & Gazzola, 2011; Myers et al., 2002). School counselors with an established professional identity minimize the potential for ethical violations (Mascari & Webber, 2006) and support the development of a unique identity which legitimatizes the professional field (Alves & Gazzola, 2011). Alves and Gazzola (2011) stated that “individual professional identity includes one’s personal work values, skills and knowledge, growth as a person, success and improvement at work, and imagination and innovation” (p. 190). The connection between individual professional identity and the professional identity of the field highlights the importance for school counselors to support development of school counseling professional identity. For example, Wilder (2018) suggested school counselors can no longer be passive, rather they must learn to advocate for their role. Cigrand et al. (2015) agreed, proposing individual school counselors must learn to advocate for the profession by utilizing data that justifies program planning and delivery
of school counseling programs and supports refusal to engage in non-ASCA related activities. Furthermore, they identified that school counselors should employ evidence-based practices and disseminate positive outcomes to stakeholders, administrators, parents, and peers at state and national conferences, and through publications (Cigrand et al., 2015). Individual school counselors should also learn to articulate their roles and responsibilities to administrators and other stakeholders and to highlight their expertise and competence in developing comprehensive counseling programs (Cinotti, 2014; Powers & Boes, 2013; Wilder, 2018). Finally, Cigrand et al. (2015) highlighted that school counselors should promote the profession through professional affiliation and membership, connection with constituency groups, collaboration with education and accreditation bodies, and use consistent language to describe the profession. Educators can reinforce the identity development of individual school counselors through specialized training, advocacy, and support. As part of the specialized training, school counselors-in-training need support to become leaders and advocates (Cinotti, 2014) and to embrace professional effectiveness and accountability as essential aspects of their professional identities (Brott, 2006).

**School Counselor Development**

Identity development is a lifelong process (Brott & Myers, 1999; Moss et al., 2014). Studies by Brott and Myers (1999) and Moss et al. (2014) highlight the counselors' professional identity development process and the changes that occur throughout the professional life span. Awareness of this process allows counselors to
experience greater job satisfaction and be more effective as a counselor (Moss et al., 2014).

Specifically focusing on school counselor development, Brott and Myers (1999) conducted a study proposing a grounded theory contributing to understanding professional identity development of school counselors. A key theme that emerged from the literature was the management of professional conflicts and the impact on their school counseling role.

Through interviewing of ten participants, all of whom were practicing school counselors in elementary and secondary settings, with years of experience ranging from one to 29 years, Brott and Myers (1999) generated a theory to describe the professional identity development of school counselors. Furthermore, the theory described how the shaping of counseling programs and services provided to students and how interactions with administrators, teachers, and co-school counselors are managed. Brott and Myers (1999) reported the maturation process for the school counselors began with the structural perspective developed during the training process and evolved during the entry into the school counseling profession.

As each participant internalized the role of school counselor, services were then determined by individualized personal guidelines. Each school counselor demonstrated unique involvement in the process, even though the process for developing professional identity was similar among participants. Brott and Myers (1999) also noted that professional identity development is an evolving perspective that spans a school counselor’s professional career and not a final outcome.
Furthering support highlighting lifespan development of school counselor identity development, Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003) provided the foundation for a study by Moss et al. (2014). The process of counselor professional identity development during transitional times in their careers (novice, experienced, and expert) were explored through participants’ evolving definition of counseling, professional identity and influential factors, and future professional identity development needs (Moss et al., 2014). The authors found counselors experienced movement towards professional identity development as they gained working experience, while the themes of experienced guide, work with clients, and continuous learning provided opportunities for growth (Moss et al., 2014). Additionally, when confronted with contrast between ideals developed in their training and the reality of practice, engagement in transforming idealism towards realism begins for novice counselors (Moss et al., 2014). The contrasts included being assigned non-counseling duties and administrative tasks, completing paperwork that interfered with counseling tasks, and knowledge that their roles were being defined by other stakeholders and organizations (Moss et al., 2014).

Furthermore, Moss et al. (2014) found the transformation for novice counselors involved adjusting expectations of confidence and freedom to recognize their limitations. Experienced counselors addressed adjustment to expectations when challenged with moving through burnout towards rejuvenation brought on by job dissatisfaction and work frustrations. Experienced counselors also utilized experienced guides, continuous learning, and work with clients as catalysts to move them forward professionally and counter their frustrations and dissatisfaction in the job (Moss et al., 2014). Counselors
demonstrated a shift from compartmentalization towards congruency, which involved a process of separating and integrating personal and professional lives into professional identities. The authors identified beginning counselors separated work from other aspects of their lives, and they tended to compartmentalize roles. Experienced counselors were able to integrate professional and personal selves into one identity congruently, and they were able to consider the influence one had over the other. Overall, the authors identified counselors’ professional identity was developmental and that individuals experienced a transformation at the completion of tasks (Moss et al., 2014).

School counselors participating in clinical supervision may receive benefits of increased self-efficacy, a supportive work environment and professional identity, increased ego development, and less burnout (Lambie, 2007; Leach et al., 1997; Rutter, 2007). Furthermore, school counselor supervision has been shown to be effective by increasing client safety, counselor wellness, and counselor clinical competency (Crutchfield & Borders, 1997; Peace, 1995). Due to a lack of shared value and understanding about the need for supervision spanning an entire career, school counseling continues to wrestle with the need for counselors to receive this amount of supervision (Black et al., 2011), even though clinical supervision for school counselors may enhance clinical skills and professionalism contributing to improved student services (Kim & Lambie, 2018; Lambie, 2007; Oberman, 2005). Decreased school counselor skills and professional stagnation could cause school stakeholders to question the role of the professional school counselor.
Traditional training model practices were not keeping up with the needs of school counselors whose jobs encompassed much more than individual and group counseling (Brott & Myers, 1999; Studer, 2006). Shifts in supervision models that organize knowledge and skills specific to the school counselors have recently appeared to address effectively meeting the needs of developing school counselors (Colbert & Magouirk-Colbert, 2003; Lambie & Sias, 2009; Luke & Bernard, 2006; Wood & Rayle, 2006).

The Integrative Psychological Developmental Supervision Model proposed by Lambie and Sias (2009) focuses specifically on school counselors-in-training psychological development. Higher levels of psychological development of professional school counselors contribute to an increased ability to negotiate complex situations, increases empathy, flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, boundary setting, personal and interpersonal awareness, and self-care when performing counselor-related tasks (Lambie & Sias, 2009). The model also supports school counselor development of advanced clinical counseling skills of active listening, case conceptualization, and applying theory to practice; and it is designed to promote growth in emotional awareness, creativity, problem-solving skills, and supervisees’ confidence and self-efficacy in effective clinical practices (Lambie & Sias, 2009).

**Self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy occurs when an individual feels more competent in performing tasks that they have successfully completed or been exposed to in the past and is an important impetus of continued success (Bandura, 1977). Counselor self-efficacy relates to beliefs or judgments one holds regarding their abilities to effectively provide counseling services.
to a client (Larson & Daniels, 1998). More specifically, “school counselor self-efficacy is a conceptualization of self-efficacy that reflects a counselor’s perceived ability to carry out school counseling-related tasks” (Holcomb-McCoy et al., 2009, p. 344) relating to beliefs school counselors hold about their abilities to effectively provide counseling services to a student.

Experience, as well as many other factors have influence on school counselor self-efficacy (Dunn and Baker, 2002; Romano et al., 2009). For example, school counselors demonstrated higher self-efficacy scores when they had more than five years of experience compared to those with less experience in providing services to students with 504 accommodation plans under Section 504 (Romano et al., 2009). Similarly, Dunn and Baker (2002) found that school counselors reported more formalized in-service training on students with disabilities increased their knowledge base and confidence in working with these students. Additionally, school counselor self-efficacy research has been conducted on the impact on school climate with results indicating a positive relationship between school climate and school counselor self-efficacy (Haron et al., 2013; Sutton & Fall, 1995). Bodenhorn et al. (2010) concluded that school counselors with higher self-efficacy had greater awareness of and impact on achievement gaps. Furthermore, school counselors who have experience with LGBT people have more favorable advocacy self-efficacy when working with lesbian, gay, and bisexual students (Simons, 2018). School counselor self-efficacy and supervision (Cashwell & Dooley, 2001) and multicultural counseling self-efficacy (Holcomb-McCoy et al., 2008; Matthews et al., 2018; Owens et al., 2010) have also been studied.
For example, Owens et al. (2010) utilized the School Counselor Self Efficacy Scale (SCSE) and a multicultural competency scale to investigate school counselor self-efficacy and its relationship to multicultural competence. According to the study, school counselors' multicultural self-efficacy related to terminology, knowledge, and awareness increased with years of experience and having greater amounts of contact with multicultural students (Owens et al., 2010). The researchers recommend that students in school counseling programs take at least one course in multicultural counseling and that practicing school counselors engage in professional development activities that further develop knowledge and awareness of diverse cultures, which is comparable to findings related to the positive effect of, and need for, coursework in disabilities (Milsom, 2002; Roberts et al., 2010).

Additionally, Tang et al. (2004) investigated how counselor self-efficacy related to graduate counseling students' training background. The most significant links were found between counselor self-efficacy and coursework, internship hours, and clinical instruction (Tang et al., 2004). "Students who had more course work, more internship hours, and more related work experience perceived that they were more competent in performing the counseling skills in some specific domains" (Tang et al., 2004. p. 77).

These findings complement Bandura's (1977) theory that individuals may feel more competent in performing tasks that they have successfully completed or been exposed to in the past. Support, especially when dealing with crisis situations, also contributes to high counselor efficacy expectancy and is a vital component of supervision (Cashwell & Dooley, 2001; Peace, 1995; Sutton & Fall, 1995). Clinical supervisors can
provide school counselors with support through discussing efficacy of performance and
tasks related to difficult situations (Cashwell & Dooley, 2001). Through supervision
recommendations, strategies, and insights into encountered crisis situations can
successfully be navigated (Cashwell & Dooley, 2001).

**Counselor Behaviors**

Despite being a challenge, professionals in the field have a responsibility to
provide quality clinical supervision for school counselors (Murphy & Kaffenberger,
2007). Even though supervision is a vital component to promoting school counseling
services that are effective for all students and stakeholders (Herlihy et al., 2002; Perera-
Diltz & Mason, 2012), school counselors are charged with formulating an appropriate
professional development plan to self-assess their own knowledge, attitude, and skills
through the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies (ASCA,
2019a).

The standards are beliefs school counselors hold regarding student achievement
and success. ASCA (2019a) recognizes that knowledge, attitude, and skills are more
measurable through demonstration of competencies by school counselors and focus on
professional foundation, direct and indirect student services, and planning and
assessment. Specifically related to school counselor professional development, the
standards and competencies addressing multicultural competency, counseling skills, and
curriculum delivery will be highlighted.
**Multicultural Competency**

School counselors are expected to “respect students’ and families’ values, beliefs, sexual orientation, gender identification/expression and cultural background and exercise great care to avoid imposing personal beliefs or values rooted in one’s religion, culture or ethnicity” (ASCA, 2016, p. 1). This requires school counselors to acquire “knowledge, skills, sensitivities, and awareness that are effective when working with diverse student populations (Stone & Dahir, 2016, p. 268). Furthermore, to understand the nuances of students’ cultures, school counselors need a cultural frame of reference to gain deep understanding, including an appreciation of student and family values and beliefs (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018).

There are many issues that can hinder a school counselor’s multicultural development and effectiveness, including caseloads, discrimination, and school systems. High caseloads with much diversity coupled with the effects of poverty and oppression are concerns that school counselors must factor into their continued professional development and programming plans. Counselors have high numbers of ethnic minority students on their caseloads (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2016; Mau, 1995; Woods & Domina, 2014). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2019), the percentage of White and Black students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools between 2000 and 2017 decreased from 62 to 51 percent and 15 to 14 percent, respectively. In contrast, NCES reported the percentage of students enrolled in public schools who were Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander increased from 16 to 25 percent and 3 to 5 percent respectively, while the percentage of students enrolled in public
schools who were American Indian/Alaska Native remains steady. However, the percentage of students enrolled in public schools who were of two or more races also increased from 2 to 4 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). This trend is expected to continue as projected through 2027 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

Although we have some understanding of the experiences of students of color (Portnoi & Kwong, 2015; Wright et al., 2017), less is known about students who experience multiple forms of discrimination due to belonging to multiple marginalized identities (Grant & Zwier, 2011). Along with racial injustice, oppression creates inequitable advantages for some students while producing disadvantages for other students (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018).

An oppressive school system that traditionally operates from a White, middle class frame of reference creates many challenges for parents and students living in poverty (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Grothaus & Cole, 2010). School culture and educational practices often perpetuate barriers that sustain inequities to academic achievement (Grothaus & Cole, 2010). School counselors have an important advocacy role to ensure equitable educational services are provided to all students (ASCA, 2018; Grothaus & Cole, 2010; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Additionally, school counselors can provide leadership to facilitate staff development and education related to equitable practices and bias free school culture (Grothaus & Cole, 2010).

Learning becomes difficult when students’ ability to focus is compiled with attending schools in low-income areas where expectations are low (Kozol, 2005). The
cycle of poverty creates barriers for parents, especially when they are consumed by dealing with its effects and faced with the inability to change the culture of low expectations due to lack of resources (Mani et al., 2013). Understanding the relationship between student experiences in school and privilege and marginalized statuses continue to need research attention (Ratts, 2011). School counselor leadership can acknowledge privilege and power when confronting multicultural and social justice issues through creating a culture of acceptance, thus supporting marginalized students in striving to reach their potential (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018).

However, novice school counselors may not be cognizant of diverse values and norms, which may cause counseling decisions based on stereotypes. Professional school counselors may more easily impose their own personal values and norms onto students and judge them through personal biases because these students are children (Parker et al., 1986) or they may play a role in maintaining the status quo of educational outcomes for students from marginalized backgrounds (Militello & Janson, 2014; Welton & Martinez, 2013). Research has shown that individuals with lower levels of racial identity are more likely to have racist attitudes and behaviors (Evans & Foster, 2000). Militello and Janson (2014) speculated school counselors may be inadvertent victims of organizational constraints/ dysfunction or they may be active agents of the status quo to school systems with policies and practices that maintain inequitable achievement. To address this issue, school counselors should not only focus on academic rigor and college readiness, but should more importantly develop relationships built on trust and authenticity with students of color (Welton & Martinez, 2013).
Practicing counseling in an ethical manner “requires that practitioners have knowledge about and sensitivity to clients’ cultural background and social context” (Frame & Williams, 2005, p. 165). This is a requirement of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) framework for school counselors and school counseling programs (ASCA, 2019b). The ASCA Model framework incorporates ethical standards as an integral piece of the framework and includes having a working knowledge of multicultural issues. In addition to understanding students’ diverse cultural backgrounds, the professional school counselor also discerns how their own cultural, ethnic, and racial identity impacts their beliefs and values about the counseling process (ASCA, 2019a). This is particularly important, especially knowing that racial stereotypes remain prevalent.

School counselors-in-training need support to develop cultural competence to work with diverse populations. This need for support continues for novice school counselors as they enter the professional field. Essential competencies include attitudes, skills, and knowledge (Lewis & Hatch, 2008; Sue & Sue, 2013). Although school counselors go through rigorous preparation programs, once in the field, they are rarely monitored for counselor efficacy (Crutchfield & Borders, 1997). For school counselors, it is a necessity that stereotypical beliefs are not used as the primary source of information about culturally diverse students (Fisher et al., 2001). Strohmer and Shivy (1994) suggested that first impressions potentially cloud a counselor’s ability to effectively conceptualize cases and often lead to counseling incompetence.
Multicultural competence challenges personal biases and enables counselors to provide effective counseling services to meet the needs of all students as well as creates the ability to see the world through another’s eyes and apply appropriate techniques and interventions to work within the framework of another (Strohmer & Shivy, 1994). Holcomb-McCoy (2004) established nine competencies professional school counselors need to be multiculturally effective. In their research, multicultural competencies were addressed, followed by issues in multicultural consultation, which are a major responsibility for school counselors as they spend much time consulting with diverse populations including teachers, parents, administrators, and students (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004). Additionally, understanding racism, student resistance and racial identity development were outlined as issues cultivated by institutional and societal norms (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004). Understanding racial identity development allows school counselors to be able to assess student development and then apply the knowledge learned to help students with their issues and concerns. School counselors need continued training and education in order to remain multiculturally competent (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004). In the absence of continued professional development, the multicultural competency checklist (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004) can allow professional school counselors to assess their abilities to work in a multicultural population, while also guiding school counseling interns towards effective practices for working with a diverse population. Studies indicated that counselors who are at higher levels of racial identity development are more likely to be effective in working with multicultural populations (Carter, 1990; Carter & Helms, 1992).
Assessing one’s multicultural competence continuously is fundamental to counseling culturally and ethnically diverse students more effectively (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004). Obtaining multicultural competence and believing in their capabilities to provide services to ethnically diverse students expands school counselor effectiveness (Holcomb-McCoy et al., 2008). When school counselors lack competence and belief, they may neglect to see the importance of such tasks, possibly avoiding those tasks altogether. The rapidly changing demographics in the school setting may lead school counselors to perceive themselves as ill-prepared to address tasks relative to diverse populations of students (Holcomb-McCoy et al., 2008).

With little feedback and evaluation of their counseling abilities, counseling practice can drift away from best practices and ethical standards. Supervision is a primary method of support through which counselors gain and maintain multicultural knowledge and skills (Atkins et al., 2017; Cook, 1994; Ladany et al., 1997; Owens et al., 2010). However, the cultural beliefs pertaining to diversity issues held by the supervisor and the supervisee impact all aspects of supervision and counseling (Helms & Cook, 1999). Professional school counselors are the largest group to practice without supervision; thus, they rely on their own perceptions and skills to develop and implement programs that directly affect a diverse student body (Bradley & Ladany, 2010; Holcomb-McCoy & Chen-Hayes, 2007; Page et al., 2001; Stone & Dahir, 2016).

Discussions with supervisors regarding the supervisee’s perspective on diversity are critical for professional growth to occur for the supervisee (Aponte & Wohl, 2000). Additionally, supervision provides a way to help school counselors prepare to meet the
needs of a multicultural population, and it provides counseling approaches that are suitable for working within diverse populations (Constantine, 2002).

Key components of effective supervision include promoting multicultural awareness and sensitivity of counseling students (Bradley & Ladany, 2010). Since culturally competent counselors are better equipped to work with diverse populations, school counselors need supervision to help facilitate the process of working with a multicultural population. Counselors should be able to understand and integrate the impact of racial and cultural factors on presenting problems as well as be knowledgeable about how to provide appropriate treatment methodologies (Constantine, 2002).

Regardless of theoretical background, school counselors and supervisors will be compelled to work toward meeting the needs of a diverse and multicultural student body. The expectation is for multiculturalism and social justice to be integrated into comprehensive school counseling programs and leadership (Ratts & Greanleaf, 2018) as every interaction between school counselor and students, or between school counselor and supervisor is an encounter that is multicultural due to the broad definition of culture (Pedersen, 1991). On one hand, individual perceptions of the world are mediated and learned through their own culture; while on the other hand, other’s perceptions are mediated and learned through their own cultural backgrounds (Pedersen, 1991). Not only is it important to understand the social and cultural world of the counselor in supervision, but accuracy is equally essential. Complimentary, counseling requires an accurate and profound understanding of the cultural and social world of the student (Pedersen, 1991).
Social constructionism is compatible with a multicultural perspective (Gonzalez et al., 1994). The application of a social constructivist approach to multicultural counseling can be applied to supervision as well. Gonzalez et al. (1994) outlined eight propositions of a social constructivist approach. The first is that of therapist as learner. The therapist, or school counselor, or supervisor, must be aware of the unique distinctions of clients’ or students’ or supervisees’ understanding of the influences of their culture. The second is to entertain all ideas, which allows for multiple answers to problems and various ways to arrive at solutions. The third is the maintenance of curiosity in order to remain open and avoiding learning too quickly or assuming answers prior to asking of a question. Fourth is focus on collaboration between the client and therapist, or student and counselor, or supervisee and supervisor, rather than on a one-up/one-down relationship. This allows for mutually searching for alternate ideas and expanding behavioral options. It also focuses on the confidence in the client’s/student’s/supervisee’s ability to generate solutions through exploring different descriptions and explanations. Fifth is maintaining focus on the self-stated presenting problem. Sixth is the therapist’s/counselor’s/supervisor’s understandings as “grist for the mill.” The client’s/student’s/supervisee’s stories are understood as tentative hypotheses rather than the therapist’s/counselor’s/supervisor’s understanding as better stories, better descriptions, or better options. Seventh is the creation of space for these stories. Understanding and explaining personal experiences may be significantly different for a person from an ethnic minority group compared to one from a majority culture. Eighth is seeing barriers as opportunities in the
form of strengths, skills, and competencies rather than focusing on weaknesses, deficits, and incompetence (Gonzalez et al., 1994)

Supervision provides for more effective counseling, but it may also provide opportunities for leadership development in multicultural counseling and social justice competencies (Kozol, 2005). The prejudice of low expectations needs to be addressed by stakeholders and school personnel to provide safe learning environments with resources to succeed (Kozol, 2005). It is critical for school counselors to be leaders in the school setting to promote and advocate for multicultural and social justice approaches (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Culturally responsive counseling guides school counselors to make informed decisions through understanding the connection between counselor self-awareness and student worldview and the impact on the counseling relationship (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). Additionally, school counselors must be able to work with diverse populations and be able to train school counseling interns to work with diverse populations. To not do so constitutes a direct violation of the American Counseling Association (ACA, 2014) and the American School Counseling Association’s (ASCA, 2016) ethical codes.

Monitoring the level of care for students is called into question if school counselors are not receiving clinical supervision (Agnew et al., 2000; Christman-Dunn, 1998; Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2012; Protivnak, 2003). Given the possibility of changing school policy is low, school counselors must be taught ways to monitor in the absence of receiving clinical supervision. Instructing counseling students and professionals through a cognitive developmental framework is one way to equip counselors with the capacity to
self-monitor work with diverse populations (Christman-Dunn, 1998). Steward et al. (1995) conducted a five stepwise multiple regression analysis procedures examining the degree to which sex, multicultural counseling competence, and the four stages of cognitive complexity were related. Results indicated the ability to avoid stereotyping and reduce biases in clinical judgement related to the client’s age, sex and race was greater in counselors with higher levels of cognitive complexity (Steward et al., 1995). Higher levels of cognitive development are related to counselor efficacy in case conceptualizations, multicultural competency, and therapeutic technique and intervention. Specifically, moral development directly relates to increased counseling abilities and more effective counseling of multicultural populations (McAuliffe & Milliken, 2009).

Resources such as multicultural training, including social and cultural diversity classes, was found to be helpful in changing attitudes toward racial groups, challenging social norms, and promoting engagement in advocacy (Evans & Foster, 2000; McAuliffe et al., 2012). Multicultural training was found to be helpful in changing negative, racist attitudes (Evans & Foster, 2000). The link found between multicultural training and positive racial attitudes is particularly relevant to school counseling. While stated 20 years ago “the most current issues facing school counselors today is the challenge to facilitate the development of increasingly diverse student populations” (Peace, 2000, p. 551) remains relevant today.

Atkins et al. (2017) noted although coursework was beneficial, it may have short-term impact. Additionally, they found integrating personal experiences into learning and self-reflecting with mentors and supervisors effectively promoted counselor multicultural
awareness development. Furthermore, counselors who took the personal initiative to utilize their work with clients to reflect, critique their work environment for status quo, and participate in advancing multicultural sensitivity were inspired to work through the difficult multicultural awareness developmental process (Atkins et al., 2017). For school counselors, continuing to focus on their multicultural development might include additional workshop hours and educational courses, which were found to be predictors of reported levels of multicultural competency (Pope-Davis et al., 1994). It is the responsibility of everyone, including school counselors, to confront and remedy systems of inequality, especially in the school setting (Kozol, 2005).

Counseling Skills

In addition to developing multicultural competency, novice school counselors continue their journey to expertise through homing in on specific counseling techniques and skills (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003). Hill et al. (2017) offered a definition of expertise as “the manifestation of the highest levels of ability, skill, professional competence, and effectiveness” (p. 3). Additionally, they assert “expertise can be evaluated against criteria such as a high level of therapist performance, personal qualities, credentials, professional reputation, and self-assessment” (p. 4). Tracey et al. (2015) also noted skill, competence, or adherence to a prescribed standard of performance as contributing to expertise.

School counselors must possess counseling skills to effectively deliver a comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2019a). In particular, counseling micro-skills are required to build rapport with students and to successfully identify and
implement student interventions (ASCA, 2019a; CACREP, 2016; Bayne & Jangha, 2016). Encouraging student disclosure through establishing a therapeutic working relationship involves developing and utilizing micro-skills, including active listening, authenticity, and empathy (Kuntze et al., 2009; Ridley et al., 2011).

A core challenge for novice counselors is how to regulate porous or rigid emotional boundaries when relating to a client (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003). Boundaries are necessary in the counselor-student relationship to help distinguish between what is appropriate and inappropriate (Aultman et al., 2009). Physical boundaries are clearer regarding to touch or not to touch a client, but the emotional boundaries are more ambiguous, which can result in premature closure of processing a client’s issue or insufficient closure to stop processing the session once ended (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003). To reach optimal functioning as a counselor, novices need to be resilient to overcome the “fragile and incomplete practitioner-self” (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003, p. 50), which involves being less reactive to negative feedback without defensively protecting the self (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003), through self-integration and self-insight (Schwing et al., 2011).

Tracey et al. (1988) conducted a cross-sectional design to examine a two-stage model of counselor response development. Their results supported the hypothesis that response differences were associated with experience and training of counselors. Confrontation and immediacy use increased with experience (Tracey et al., 1988). Advanced student counselors also responded with more verbosity than beginning students. Doctoral counselors had more flexibility with strategy acquisition, particularly
related to dominance, meeting client demands, immediacy, and confrontation (Tracey et al., 1988).

Similar to Tracy et al. (1988), Martin et al. (1989) examined the differences between novice versus experienced counselors in conceptualizations used to test whether experience or expertise are related in counseling. A Cognitive Mapping Task (CMT) (Martin, 1985) was given to 11 experienced and 12 novice counselors after several sessions with two actual clients per counselor. Experienced counselors were found to be more effective in conceptualizing specific client situations due to having more extensive, abstract, and general knowledge of counseling (Martin et al, 1989).

Both Tracy et al. (1988) and Martin et al. (1989) found developmental differences between novice and experienced counselor’s case conceptualization skills with individual clients. Kivlighan and Quigley (1991) examined differences between experienced and novice group counselors’ conceptualizations of group members. In order to study these conceptualizations, the multidimensional scaling (MDS) was used, which is a method that displays relative dimensions in a data set, such as group members. The two major hypotheses of the study were supported by the results. First, experienced therapists seemingly had an advanced understanding of the group process, group members, and group member interactions when compared to novice therapists. Second, experienced therapists were able to make more nuanced distinctions about group members than did novices (Kivlighan & Quigley, 1991). Although the research in this area is dated, the results were similar to a more recent study conducted by Kivlighan et al. (2007), which suggested experienced group leaders, compared to group leader trainees, develop more
complex views of group member dynamics earlier during the group. Over time, trainees’
group member conceptualizations become more expert-like (Kivlighan et al., 2007).

School counselors may not recognize the need to develop clinical
conceptualization skills, especially critical when related to students’ mental health issues.
Recognizing factors that contribute to the cause of students’ difficulties is one of two
distinct but interrelated dimensions of a school counselor’s ability to conceptualize
student issues related to mental health (Butler & Constantine, 2006). The second
dimension focuses on effective treatment planning to work with students who
experienced difficulties (Butler & Constantine, 2006). The ability to perceive and
conceptualize treatment has implications for the school counselor’s ability to work
effectively with students, especially when determining interventions (Butler &
Constantine, 2006). In their study, Butler and Constantine (2006) found that case
conceptualization abilities and collective self-esteem increased with participation in a
peer supervision group focusing on case conceptualization. The authors suggested having
a supportive space to discuss development provided validation and points of connection
when conceptualizing cases. Additionally, participants were able to consider multiple
clinical responses with differing views (Butler & Constantine, 2006). Hence, the school
counselors’ professional competence would further develop through additional
supervision, which focuses on case conceptualization.

Additionally, Skovholt & Rønnestad (2013) highlighted the important skill of
conceptual mapping, which deepened the understanding of the client and their
experience. They include components such as counseling theories and putting the client’s
experience into the context of their social and environmental systems. The novice most likely accesses the map of a lay helper and draws from personal situations of helping as a friend or family member. Additionally, a beginning counselor would be more adept at understanding issues they are more familiar with, such as mild depression, than more complex issues, such as schizophrenia, which they are less likely to have encountered (Ladany et al., 2001). The replacement of the novice map by the professional map can be stressful in that the novice experiences elevated stress of inexperience, yet it is experience that provides one with the internal cognitive map (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003).

Recognizing counseling duties and discerning the increased mental health needs of students is essential if school counselors are to remain relevant (Mainzer, 2010). It is necessary for school counselors to take on both roles as educational leader and mental health professional (Dekruyf et al., 2014). Whiston (2002) argued that all students need comprehensive school counseling programs, yet not all students are receiving the services they require. She contended that many school counselors are not receiving credit for the services that they do provide. Furthermore, although school counselors are well suited to provide mental health services to students in school settings, focusing on student social and personal development may be underemphasized due to school counselors responding to pressures to increase student test scores (Whiston, 2002).

**Curriculum Delivery**

In addition to individual and group counseling, a distinct and unique role to professional school counseling is delivery of classroom-level curriculum. An essential component to a comprehensive school counseling program is the delivery of the school
counseling core curriculum, which the purpose is to increase academic, career, and social/emotional success through focusing on students’ mindsets and behaviors (ASCA, 2019a). An important aspect of the school counselor’s role is serving every student (ASCA, 2019a), but often novices are not prepared to deliver this service through classroom lessons.

The ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies (2019a) recommends that school counselors demonstrate effective classroom management when leading classroom lessons. Classroom lessons provide the opportunity for school counselors to introduce themselves to students and to “proactively and preventatively work with all students on their caseload” (Goodman-Scott, 2019, p1). School counselors often meet the mindset and behaviors standards through facilitating classroom lessons (Buchanan et al., 2017; Goodnough et al., 2015). To effectively deliver these classroom lessons, school counselors must effectively and efficiently provide classroom management (Haskins, 2016). To fully understand the school system and climate, some argue that teaching experience is necessary for school counselors to be effective (Hobson et al., 2000; Smith et al., 2001) and that counselors may not be as competent in conducting classroom lessons without classroom teaching experience (Hobson et al., 2000). Additionally, some school districts require school counselors to hold a teaching certificate and have prior teaching as hiring qualifications (Stein & DeBerard, 2010). Because school counseling is part of the educational system, school counselor’s classroom lessons require similar strategies as those utilized by teachers (Akos et al.,
2007). At the same time, school counselors’ roles are distinctively different from teachers (ASCA, 2019a).

Difficulties with implementing interventions and managing student behavior in large group and classroom lessons were reported by school counselor interns who did not have teaching experience, which Peterson et al. (2004) argued that counselor educators need to help these interns develop skills to compensate for their lack of knowledge regarding educational settings. However, school counseling experience and perceived effectiveness contribute to strong feelings of membership to the profession, which tend to be essential for new school counselors entering the field and classroom (Moyer & Yu, 2012).

Bringman and Lee (2008) considered the impact previous teaching experience had on perceived competence in delivering classroom lessons. A significant relationship was found between teaching experience and competence in delivering classroom lessons. However, the significance was decreased and not a factor when considering school counseling experience. School counselors with teaching experience in delivering classroom lessons reported higher competence in comparison to those without teaching experience, however, high levels of competence were reported by both groups. Teaching experience was correlated with feelings of competence; having experience in school counseling was considered to be more important in comparison to having self-perceived competence in delivering classroom lessons (Bringman & Lee, 2008). Stein and DeBerard (2010) did not find any differences between school counselors with teaching experience and those without, when considering job performance outcomes. They
attribute the findings to school counselors’ desire to work with children, and that contributes to feeling more comfortable interacting in small groups or classroom settings. Additionally, school-based, experiential training was highlighted as contributing to narrowing any prior deficiencies between the two groups.

Buchanan et al. (2017) investigated the classroom management experience of first-year school counselors. Participants reported prior experience, relationships with students and teachers, and strategies and techniques for lesson planning and preparation, delivery, and managing behavior influenced their classroom management experiences (Buchanan et al., 2017). Classroom instruction is "a powerful method of helping students" (Quarto, 2007, p. 3). The ASCA National Model (2019b) recommends school counselors spend 80% of their time providing direct and indirect services to support student success, with 15-45% of this time spent delivering classroom instruction, depending on school level and student needs. With such a significant amount of time spent engaging this "powerful method," school counselors need to learn and apply effective classroom management skills and techniques (Geltner & Clark, 2005).

In fact, if school counselors do not employ effective classroom management techniques, the students might not receive the benefits normally received from classroom instruction. Runyan et al. (2019) conducted a Delphi study to explore classroom management competencies for school counselors. A list of 81 competencies was developed and arranged into 12 broad themes that identified effective classroom management (Runyan et al., 2019). Interacting with students and designing classroom lessons had the most competencies grouped within each theme, with 16 and 10 items,
respectively (Runyan et al., 2019). In agreement, Quarto (2007) described the responses of school counselors on how they manage student behavior during their classroom lessons. The respondents, by far, preferred nondirective and nonverbal redirection to punitive methods. Walking near a student’s desk and praising other on-task students were perceived effective methods to classroom management while not calling attention to the off-task student. Techniques perceived to be positive or neutral and possibly non-direct were rated as the most effective, while techniques seen as more punitive in nature were rated as least effective (Quarto, 2007), maybe due to discipline as identified as outside of the school counseling role (ASCA, 2019a).

Goodman-Scott (2019) reported findings that validated and expanded the school counseling results of the Buchanan et al., 2017 and Quarto, 2007 studies. School counselors valued using classroom management strategies for students with disruptive behaviors and lamented the lack of practical classroom experiences during their training. Additionally, school counselors identified school counselor characteristics, knowing students, varied previous experiences, and teacher collaboration as factors affecting their classroom management experience (Goodman-Scott, 2019). Providing novice school counselors with classroom experiences can aid in developing classroom management. This support can aid novices in creating an engaging and caring educational environment for all students as part of a comprehensive school counseling program.

Professional Issues

It is not unusual for school counselors to report feeling alone and without support while managing difficult situations (Crutchfield & Borders, 1997). This isolation is
particularly challenging for beginning professional school counselors who are often asked to make the transition from their training experiences to assuming full responsibilities for comprehensive school counseling programs (Peace, 1995). The impact of this isolation combined with the rising complexity of students' needs puts the welfare of students at risk, particularly if the professional school counselors serving these students are not prepared to meet their needs and if they are faced with other issues of the profession (Peace, 1995).

School counselors should be prepared to implement a culturally responsive program that addresses student concerns and school problems by removing barriers to student achievement and success through alignment of the school counseling roles (Stone & Dahir, 2016); while equally engaging in collaborative work with school principals (Dahir et al., 2019; Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). While working collaboratively might be deemed necessary, there are other issues in the professional field that need to be discussed, including caseload, role ambiguity, and lack of clinical supervision, especially for processing the struggles of being a novice counselor.

**Caseload**

One such systemic issue is student-to-counselor ratio. Throughout the history of the profession, the student-to-counselor ratios have fluctuated (Moyer, 2011). The recommended student-to-school counselor ratio is 250:1 (ASCA, 2020), though the national and state averages tend to be greater (Glander, 2015). Consider the 2018-2019 highest three student-to-school-counselor ratios in the United States: Arizona, 905:1; Michigan, 691:1; Minnesota, 654:1, with a national average ratio of 430:1 (ASCA, 2020).
Student needs are often left unmet due to the high student-to-counselor ratio that impedes school counselors work (McCarthy et al., 2010; Woods & Domina, 2014). For school counselors to be effective, reduction in the ratios is necessary (Baker & Gerler, 2008). The quantity and quality of services offered by a school counselor are impacted by the number of counselors hired in a school building (Schmidt, 2008). Understandably, the lower the student-to-counselor ratios, the more successful the school counseling program can be (Baker & Gerler, 2008).

When a reduction of caseload is not a reality, supports and resources are even more vital to help school counselors provide the most effective services possible. ASCA provides professional development, publications, and research and advocacy resources pertaining to the school counselor role, caseload, and support (ASCA, 2019a). Other known supports and resources include self-help books (Neville, 2012), reflective journaling (Milsom & Kayler, 2008), professional conferences (Savitz-Romer, 2019), and supervisors (Bultsma, 2012; Milsom & Kayler, 2008; Schmidt et al., 2001).

**Role Confusion**

Another issue is role ambiguity, or role confusion as both terms have been used synonymously in the literature (Chandler et al., 2018). Principals are often confused about the roles of school counselors (Dodson, 2009). Karatas and Kaya (2015) found great variation and lack of consensus among school administrators’ perceptions of school counseling tasks. Chandler et al., 2018 suggested that historically, a standard model of practice was lacking and contributed to this imbalance between appropriate and inappropriate duties.
Further, the current stakeholders working with school counselors may still be unfamiliar of the appropriate tasks and role of a school counselor (Moss et al., 2014; Perusse et al., 2004). Research demonstrates the role confusion of both school counselors and the stakeholders that support them detracts from the ability to acknowledge specified training that contributes to the work of school counselors (Hines et al., 2011). Additionally, the lack of a consistent, cohesive professional identity development as a school counselor creates barriers to advocating and advancing the profession. These challenges also disrupt a counselor’s ability to appropriately convey and perform the role of a school counselor (Barret & Schmidt, 1986; Herlihy et al., 2002; Sink, 2002).

The implications of role ambiguity result in stress and conflict for counselors (Moyer, 2011; Powers & Boes, 2013). As a result, school professionals and other stakeholders tend to conceptualize and misunderstand school counselor roles in the context of ASCA endorsed and non-endorsed duties (Powers & Boes, 2013). Not knowing how professional gatekeepers, such as principals, will assess them as beginning school counseling and the ambiguity of what the necessary skills are, and what the acceptable skill levels are for novices while they are being evaluated is a stressor (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003). The public and the profession of counseling demand quality control in order to be assured there is a level of competence upheld by the beginning counselors, which requires scrutiny by professional gatekeepers through evaluation and supervision through live observation, as well as, audio and video recording. Greater anxiety is felt by many novice counselors due to the ambiguity of the standards, especially when school counselors are often evaluated through teacher
assessment tools that are not designed to assess school counselor competencies (Studer & Sommers, 2000). In a desire to be effective and evaluated well by administrators, faculty, and on-site supervisors, novices try to meet these standards by taking on the many roles of leader, advocate, and change agent in systems that do not understand the school counselor role (Cervoni & DeLuccia-Waack, 2011).

For professional school counselors, role ambiguity and role conflict are important job satisfaction predictors (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011). In a study of 175 high school counselors, school counselors experienced pressure when tasked with managing and prioritizing multiple demands placed on them by other stakeholders (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011). Conversely, participants who spent time on ASCA related activities that aligned with school counselors’ professional identity, specifically counseling, experienced job and work satisfaction and promotion (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011). Similar findings were found in a study of 103 high school counselors, where Pyne (2011) concluded that school counselors who successfully implemented comprehensive school counseling programs most likely experienced higher job satisfaction than counterparts with no successful implementation. Job satisfaction was higher when implementation was accompanied by administrative support and improved communication between faculty and staff members, which allowed for a clearly established philosophy, services being provided to all students, and opportunities for program planning and evaluation (Pyne, 2011).
Clinical Supervision

Although ASCA (2020) and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2016) agree that supervision is necessary for training school counselors, it is not required for post-graduate school counselors as it is for mental health counselors (Agnew et al., 2000; Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2012; Thompson & Moffet, 2010). Most professional school counselors recognize the importance of clinical supervision to their professional development (Duncan et al., 2014). Professional school counselors who seek supervision tend to be younger in age and more likely inexperienced, often face difficulty in accessing or finding time to participate in clinical supervision (Luke & Bernard, 2006; Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2012). This is particularly true for school counselors in rural areas (Duncan et al., 2014).

For those who receive or have access to some form of oversight, it is typically provided by school administrators who are not trained to provide clinical supervision to school counselors (Bultsma, 2012; Dollarhide & Miller, 2006; Fye et al, 2018; Wilson et al., 2015). School administrators typically do not understand the roles of school counselors, nor do they understand the interpersonal and mental health issues that school counselors address (Herlihy et al., 2002). Furthermore, school administrators may see clinical supervision as unimportant or taking time away from school counselors work with students (Crutchfield & Borders, 1997; Dollarhide & Miller, 2006).

Supervision provided by a school administrator who lacks training and experience of a school counselor and school counseling programming can negatively impact the growth and development of the supervisee (Lane et al., 2020; Oberman, 2005). This is
especially true when school administrators evaluate a school counselors’ work performance within the organization based on the administrative issues and organizational duties such as adherence to school policy, professional behaviors, and performance in non-counseling tasks (Cinotti & Springer, 2016; Dollarhide & Miller, 2006) thus, unable to evaluate the work performance of clinical work within the school setting (Kreider, 2014).

As school counselors balance their educational and mental health professional roles (Dekruyf et al., 2014), supervision provides opportunities to receive support and feedback related to developing professional and ethical decision-making skills (Bradley & Ladany, 2010; Lambie, 2007; Lambie et al., 2011). Supervision is connected to lowering levels of school counselor stress (Culbreth et al., 2005). The lack of clinical supervision and limited support can leave school counselors vulnerable to experiencing burnout due to feelings of isolation, chronic fatigue, depersonalization, and increased stress (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Cinotti & Springer, 2016; Crutchfield & Borders, 1997; Herlihy et al., 2002; McCarthy & Lambert, 2008; Moyer, 2011; Young & Lambie, 2007).

Effective supervision can serve as a protective factor against burnout for school counselors; fostering a sense of professionalism and enhanced counseling skills (Agnew et al., 2000; Dollarhide & Miller, 2006; Lambie, 2007). Clinical supervision may also provide school counselors with supportive opportunities in which enhance the quality of the ethical and effective services they provide (Kim & Lambie, 2018). Furthermore, clinical supervision can increase self-efficacy, ego development, and professional identity while lessening burnout for school counselors (Lambie, 2007; Leach et a., 1997; Rutter,
2007). Clinical supervision experiences are a rite of passage and are just as important for novice professional school counselors as they are for interns. An opportunity for continued professional development is missed when clinical supervision and counselor training ends with graduation from a master’s level program (Dollarhide & Miller, 2006) which could help novices process the struggles of being novice.

**Struggles of a Novice Counselor**

Counseling professionals often report feelings of self-doubt, uncertainty, and insecurity about their effectiveness, regardless of the number of years in the field (Mahoney, 1997; Theriault et al., 2009). The ability of novice counselors to contain and manage feelings of incompetency grow as professional and personal experiences are gained (Theriault et al., 2009). Their results also found connection with inner peace can be made as management increases through self-growth and acceptance of life experiences.

Findings from the Society for Psychotherapy Research Collaborative Research Network (SPRCRN) database of nearly 4000 therapists (Orlinsky et al., 1999) found feelings of competency led to feelings of improvement. Additionally, an increase in perceived therapeutic mastery developed over years of experience regardless of demographic differences. This finding lends support to Skovholt and Rønnestad’s (1992) assertion that counselor development occurs across the lifespan and is not completed by the end of graduate school (Orlinsky et al., 1999), underlining the importance of a lifespan developmental perspective.
Struggle with insecurities is often associated with being a counselor-in-training (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992; Stoltenberg, 1981; 2005). Skovholt and Rønnestad (2003) have stated that the “major catalyst for the intense stress faced by the novice is the inherent, but often unknown to the novice, ambiguity of professional work” (p. 45-46). For school counselors, this would equate to preparing to meet students for the first time, interacting during the first counseling session, and conceptualizing the experience into a theoretical framework that can contribute to ambiguity and the intense stress felt by the novice. Although the struggles of the novice practitioner can create difficult first years, professional work as a counselor can be very rewarding in knowing someone has changed their way of being for the better due to the counselor’s help (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003).

Skovholt and Rønnestad (2003) described stressors of the novice practitioner gleaned from counselor development literature. According to Young and Bryan (2015), acute performance anxiety and fear can stem from beginning counselors’ lack of professional confidence, which is a leadership quality. The ASCA Model (ASCA, 2019b) highlights confidence as necessary for school counselors to effectively lead the charge to address problems of today’s schools (Dollarhide, 2003). The quality of the clinical work carried out by beginning counselors is impacted by anxiety because attention is diverted from the client as the focus is on self-consciously reducing visible signs of trembling, sweaty hands, or unsteady voices (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003). Beginning counselors also express anxiety about developing therapeutic relationships, concern over being directive or utilizing confrontation skills, and being perceived as incompetent (Schwing
et al., 2011). Beginning counselors may also focus on the fear of being speechless in session and not knowing what to say to the client. Such anxiety and fear about their performance and the unknown can seriously heighten beginning counselors’ stress levels and lower counseling self-efficacy (Daniels & Larson, 2001).

Although the novice may have experienced success as a lay helper, this experience does not automatically transfer to success as a professional helper (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003). The idea of making a difference in the lives of others often contributes to glamorized expectations. The stressor in this situation is that professional self-worth is dependent on student improvement (Skovholt & Rønnestad 2003). The beginning counselor is highly vulnerable and is often not fully aware of being so self-focused and are often expected to mirror “normal” mental health (Kern, 2014).

Realistically, “many counselors are wounded healers, struggling to achieve integration of their own vulnerabilities with their professional identity” (Kern, 2014, p. 304). Through supervision, the novice will come to realize that human change is a complex and slow-moving process with which they play only a part, with supervision providing the most benefit to the beginning counselor (Skovholt & Rønnestad 2003; Watkins, 2011).

The gaps between self-doubt and the coping mechanisms utilized for dealing with beginning counselor insecurities were addressed by Theriault et al. (2009). Positive impacts, such as increased responsiveness through intentionality and concentration; and negative impacts, including feeling stuck and reactivity to self-consciousness, were described when relating to experiencing feelings of incompetence both within counseling sessions as well as in supervision. Participants stated validation and normalization is
needed during training to help with responding to the lack of preparation for dealing with feelings of incompetence (Theriault et al., 2009).

The novice counselors in this study all realized that feelings of incompetence were an ongoing aspect of their subjective experience of counseling and that there are drawbacks of harboring self-doubts, such as the inability to stay in the moment, a decrease in the desire to help, and feeling like a fraud (Theriault et al., 2009). These struggles and stressors indicate the acute need for positive mentors. However, guiding beginning counselors to self-disclose personal reactions and feelings of incompetency during supervision may be a challenge (Staples-Bradley et al., 2019). Experienced and expert supervisors, teachers, and mentors can provide support and positive opportunities for reflection and for professional growth. When supervisors provide validation, clarity, and hope to beginning counselors who are experiencing anxiety, discomfort, and uncertainty, the beginner can begin their journey to becoming experienced and expert themselves (Skovholt & Trotter-Matthison, 2011). Additionally, shedding light on supports and resources that assist novice professional school counselors along this journey is vital.

**Supports and Resources**

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) “supports school counselors' efforts to help students focus on academic, career and social/emotional development so they achieve success in school and are prepared to lead fulfilling lives as responsible members of society” (2019a). Additionally, ASCA provides “professional development, publications and other resources, research and advocacy to school
counselors around the globe” (ASCA, 2019a). Other known supports and resources for ongoing school counselor development include self-help books (Neville, 2012), reflective journaling (Milsom & Kayler, 2008), professional conferences (Savitz-Romer, 2019), and supervisors (Bultsma, 2012; Milsom & Kayler, 2008; Schmidt et al., 2001).

Novice professional school counselors might not realize that self-help books can aid in their professional development, especially when other resources or supports are not accessible. Self-help books are reflective in nature and tend to be experienced in very personalized and individual ways despite the fact they are mass-produced (Neville, 2012). The use of self-help books has a more intrinsic focus and “allows for and accommodates notions of pleasure, desire and dislikes that are subject-dependent and expressive” (Neville, 2012, p. 367). One participant in the Rønnestad and Skovholt study said, “I stopped reading textbooks and started reading self-help books” (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013, p. 77) when focusing on their specific, subject-dependent needs.

Research by Smith and Burkhalter (1987) found that well-established and long practicing counselors used self-help books with clients. The positive outcomes may be numerous when utilizing self-help books to assist novice professional school counselors with their professional development. Pardeck & Pardeck (1998) identified the following outcomes:

- increasing self-awareness
- enhancing empathic understanding and knowledge of other cultures
- fostering an appreciation of one’s own ethnic/cultural identity
• clarifying emerging values; stimulating discussion of feelings, thoughts, and behaviors
• improving coping skills and generating ideas for problem-solving
• alleviating negative emotions such as stress, anxiety, and loneliness (Pehrsson & McMillen, 2010, p. 3).

Novice professional school counselors might also utilize reflective journaling tools (Milsom & Kayler, 2008). Common concerns and issues experienced by beginning school counselors once they enter the profession have not been widely researched; thus, beginning counselors are not being asked to share what was helpful for them (Milsom & Kayler, 2008). Significant experiences, challenges, and support systems were studied by Milsom and Kayler (2008) to learn about the experiences of first-year school counselors.

In their study, participants from one school counseling Master’s program were asked to keep a reflective journal as a useful method for helping them as they transitioned into the profession as a beginning school counselor (Milsom & Kayler, 2008). The journal prompts were to focus on reflecting on what was important to the participants each week. The data analysis of this study focused on mentoring themes, with the identification of two sub-themes: mentoring and support. The results suggested that beginning school counselors can and do benefit from daily general interactions with a variety of school personnel, and these interactions contributed to feelings of confidence, increased knowledge of school procedures, and feelings of worth. Additionally, writing in the journal provided first-time school counselors with a voice to share their experiences (Milsom & Kayler, 2008).
Professional conferences might be another direction novice professional school counselors might turn to for support. To support students, staff, and families, beginning school counselors report needing to expand their knowledge and skills to keep pace with new demands placed on them by schools (Savitz-Romer, 2019). Educators have known for some time that students are facing a considerably different educational context than in the past. As more students face challenging issues, the school counselor has the necessary qualifications, including knowledge and skills, to be a resource for these students (Savitz-Romer, 2019). Additionally, she called attention to the high expectations we can and should set for all school counselors, along with the requisite professional working conditions and supports necessary to meet those expectations (Savitz-Romer, 2019). To reimagine the school counselor role, access to additional training and professional conferences is a necessity. However, due to lack of funding, school counselors are often not permitted to attend conferences. Further limiting opportunities for additional training and professional conferences, administrators may have concerns about not having coverage to respond to crises when school counselors are absent (Savitz-Romer, 2019).

Novice counselors may rely on their university supervisor, their cooperating counselor who provided site supervision during the practicum and internship experience (Schmidt et al., 2001), or other site professionals (Bultsma, 2012; Milsom & Kayler, 2008). Schmidt et al. (2001) interviewed focus groups of novice counselors and principals to learn more about the role of the school counselor, expectations of the current counseling positions, and the level of satisfaction with the role of school counselor. Some of the counselors indicated they were not satisfied with the supervision received in their
new positions, and over half were not satisfied with the mentoring they received as a newly hired counselor. The mentors identified were mostly teachers in the school. In general, the counselors felt that another counselor would have been more helpful, and several found their own mentors within the school system. Most of the counselors indicated they rely on other counselors, or they found other colleagues for help, and some said they call upon the counselors who were their supervisors during practicum and internship experiences (Schmidt et al., 2001).

As outlined previously, Milsom and Kayler (2008) recognized the benefits beginning school counselors gain through daily interactions with a variety of school personnel. Through a phenomenological inquiry, Bultsma (2012) gathered data about new school counselor supervision experiences. In their new role as a professional school counselor, participants described wanting support and supervision to meet their needs. One unmet need was quality supervision. Participants reported needing time for supervision, having access to qualified supervisors, and receiving supervision that meets administrative, clinical, and developmental needs of the beginning school counselor (Bultsma, 2012). Covering all types of supervision needs would ensure ethical standards of the school counseling practice are being met (Bultsma, 2012). One of the participants responded to a question describing the supervision experience by stating, “I go to my colleagues, my experienced colleagues, which in essence I guess are my supervisors, more for advice” (Bultsma, 2012, p. 10). Considering many school counselors receive supervision from principals, collaboration can lead to school improvement, positive school climate, and student achievement (Militello & Janson, 2007). Additionally,
principal support positively impacts time spent conducting appropriate counseling duties indicating trust in the professional judgement of school counselors (Fye et al., 2018).

Summary

With the primary role of school counselors being to help students with their development (Schmidt, 1999), school counselors are developing as professionals themselves. Multicultural understanding, ethical standards, supervision, and continuing education are factors that impact the professional development of school counselors across their careers (ASCA, 2019a). According to Baltes et al. (1980), when a change in behavior is desired, a developmental orientation is needed to provide understanding of the process.

Bearing this in mind, this dissertation sought to explore how novice professional school counselors make meaning of their lived experiences and to shed light on reported supports and resources that assist in their professional development. The following research questions guided this study: 1. What are the lived experiences of novice professional school counselors? 2. What are the reported supports and resources that assist novice professional school counselors in their professional development?

This chapter featured a literature review that provided an overview of what it means to be an expert in the field of school counseling as well as development of novice professional school counselors. The nuances of professional development, including professional identity, self-efficacy, and counselor behavior, were described. Professional issues such as caseload, role confusion, clinical supervision, and struggles of novice
counselors were examined. Finally, existing supports and resources were reviewed to lend understanding to novice professional school counselor development.

The next chapter outlines the methodology utilized to examine the research questions. A restatement of purpose will be provided, as well as the research questions guiding the study. Next, the paradigm underlying this research summarizes the basic beliefs that provide a framework for the worldview of the researcher. The methodology will provide information about the research design, including the sample, procedure for data collection, and a detailed description of the data analysis process. Additionally, information regarding assessing quality, rigor, and trustworthiness will be explored. Finally, a description of ethical concerns will be provided, including researcher biases that may impact the study.
CHAPTER THREE

Method

In the previous chapter, a review of the literature was provided to identify gaps in the current literature on novice professional school counseling development and the supports and resources utilized to assist in their professional development. Additionally, the literature review provided a foundation to justify the research questions being asked in this study. In this chapter, the reader will find a restatement of purpose, as well as the research questions guiding the study. The paradigm underlying this research and the methodology provides information about the research design, the sample, procedure for data collection, and a detailed description of the data analysis process. An exploration of how validity and trustworthiness will be established, and a description of ethical concerns will be provided. Finally, a description of ethical concerns will be provided, including researcher biases that may impact the study.

Restatement of Purpose

This research study explored the development of novice professional school counselors and the supports and resources employed to influence professional growth and development. The literature has focused on supervision models and training of supervisors, but little research has focused on the supports and resources novice professional school counselors utilize to assist their professional development. Expertise in the counseling profession is both desirable and elusive (Jennings et al., 2003), so some beginning counselors seek out sources of support, such as self-reflective journaling (Milsom & Kayler, 2008) or contact their former practicum supervisor (Schmidt et al.,
2001) and other on-site professionals (Bultsma, 2012) that are outside their training structure. Counselor development self-help books (Neville, 2012; Smith & Burkhalter, 1987) are another resource a novice professional school counselor might utilize. One of the participants in Rønnestad and Skovholt’s study stated, “I stopped reading textbooks and started reading self-help books” (2013, p.77).

Each year hundreds of beginning counselors enter the professional field of school counseling in hopes of gaining experience and becoming an expert (Jennings et al., 2005). One issue for beginning counselors is the feelings of self-doubt, uncertainty, and insecurity about being effective with students (Mahoney, 1997; Theriault et al., 2009). Beginning counselors may experience intense stress due to the ambiguity of the professional work but may not realize what is causing it (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003). In addition to understanding the struggles and stressors of being a beginning counselor, in particular, that of beginning school counselors, some high levels of stress in the counseling field are due to evaluation based on unclear task definition and difficulty in defining expertise (Skovholt et al., 1997). Without an understanding of novice professional school counselor development and a detailed picture of what facilitates development for school counselors, training and supervision would remain, at best, practices based on intuition and personal experience, perhaps as likely to have counselors flounder as to succeed (Worthington, 1987).

Many theories and models in the developmental supervision literature explore, describe, and explain how trainees develop professional competencies (Blocher, 1983; Hogan, 1964; Littrell et al., 1979; Loganbill et al., 1981; Stoltenberg, 1981). Although
these models are still applicable, the model offered by Skovholt and Røønestad (1992) focused more on counselor development across the lifespan. They proposed that predictable developmental changes would take place over the course of counselors’ work lives (Skovholt & Røønestad, 1992).

Although the Skovholt and Røønestad (1992) model makes theoretical sense, there are several drawbacks. Because of the limited diversity in the sample, and the focus on mental health counselors, the question of transferability arises when considering the application of the Skovholt and Røønestad (1992) model. However, Skovholt and Røønestad have since engaged in cross-cultural research with colleagues utilizing samples numbering in the thousands to continue to explore counselor development (Orlinsky et al., 1999; Orlinsky et al., 2001). This additional research provided an opportunity for Røønestad and Skovholt to revise their model. The updated developmental model created by Røønestad and Skovholt (2013), the school counseling model proposed by Lambie and Sias (2009), and the multicultural social constructivist approach presented by Gonzalez, Biever, and Gardner (1994) provided the theoretical lens for this study.

The goal of this study was to gain an understanding of the natural longing to become an expert within the school counseling profession and to provide awareness of novice school counselor development. The understanding gained from this study may help novice school counselors advance developmentally, and in turn professionally by understanding how novice school counselors respond to the following research questions: 1. What are the lived experiences of novice professional school counselors? 2. What are
the reported supports and resources that assist novice school counselors in their professional development?

**Paradigm Underlying Research**

The research paradigm is a set of basic beliefs that provide a framework for the worldview of the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In qualitative research, due to the influence throughout all stages of the research process, it is vital that the researcher outlines their paradigm underlying the research. There are three questions regarding ontology, epistemology, and methodology that help distinguish inquiry paradigms (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The authors suggest the ontological question asks: “what is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it?” (p. 108). They go on to state the epistemological question asks to define knowledge and to identify what can be known. Last, the methodological question asks how the seeker can find the answer to what they want to know (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

In qualitative research, the theory is “used to focus the inquiry and give it boundaries for comparison in facilitating the development of theoretical or conceptual outcomes” (Morse, 1994, p. 221). Throughout the research process, my research paradigm has guided my selection of data sources and methods used in this study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), thus, the research paradigm set the context for my study (Ponterotto, 2005).

This section provides details highlighting the utilized research paradigm, including discussion of constructivism along with the developmental model of Skovholt and Rønnestad revised model (2013), the school counseling model proposed by Lambie
and Sias (2009), and the multicultural social constructivist approach presented by Gonzalez, Biever, & Gardner (1994). Additionally, the influence of the research paradigm of the present study will be detailed.

**Constructivism**

Researchers who use a constructivist approach strive to understand the complex experiences from the perspective of those who have lived the experiences (Schwandt, 1994). The author asserts that constructivists believe perspective is created, not discovered, through perceived objective knowledge and truth. Furthermore, constructivists do not believe in a single reality or truth, therefore requiring qualitative methods of research to interpret multiple realities (Crotty, 1998).

The ontology of constructivism is described as *relativist* (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), meaning reality is understood as many intangible mental constructions that are based on social interactions and experiences. The idea is that constructions are not deemed more or less “true,” but rather more or less informed. Constructions can change, which means their associated realities can change as well. The epistemology is described as *transactional and subjectivist* (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). From this perspective, the researcher and the subject being researched are assumed to be related, where the findings identified by the researcher are created through the research. A subjectivist epistemology implies that through their own thinking, researchers make meaning of the data and socially construct knowledge from personal experiences (Punch, 2005) and will, therefore, impact the outcome. Finally, the methodology is *hermeneutical and dialectical* (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), meaning the individual construction of meaning is enhanced by
the interaction between the researcher and the subjects. The goal is to identify a
construction through consensus that is more informed than previous constructions.

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), a research paradigm also includes
axiology. Axiology addresses the nature of ethics or ethical behavior regarding the needs
to be considered when planning a research proposal (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In terms
of constructivist axiology, it is assumed a balance will be maintained between the
findings and the reflection of values by the researcher (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). I
maintained this balance by making notes regarding how my choices fit into themes and
the interpretation of the data. I bracketed to balance my values and to stay neutral, as not
to overreach in my interpretations of supporting quotes. My researcher bias and ethical
considerations will be described later in this chapter.

**Theoretical Orientation**

Three models guided this research to create the theoretical framework. The
Rønnestad & Skovholt lifespan developmental model largely informed this study through
influencing the chosen topic and the methods used to obtain and analyze the data. The
Integrative Psychological Developmental Supervision Model proposed by Lambie and
Sias (2009) and The Multicultural Perspective in Therapy: A Social Constructivist
Approach proposed by Gonzalez, Biever, and Gardner (1994) guided this dissertation.
These two additional frameworks provide a lens to support that notion that supervision is
only one component that impacts one’s life experiences and professional development.
All three theoretical models are discussed below.
There are many developmental models describing counselor development. The Rønnestad and Skovholt (2013) model is a lifespan model that describes phases and tasks at different levels of development. The four developmental tasks in the Novice Professional Phase according to Rønnestad and Skovholt (2013) include 1) developing an identification with the profession and commitment to the professional sector, 2) successfully transforming from the dependency of graduate school to expected professional independence, 3) mastering disillusionment with training, self, and that profession that may emerge after graduation, and 4) to keep exploring and defining one’s work role. In examining their data, Rønnestad and Skovholt (2013) viewed how a counselor copes with the hardships and challenges of professional work as the most important determinant for development. The Novice Professional Phase may pose challenges to the quality of how the novice copes due to the intensity of difficulties and disillusionment of this phase, especially when entering into the field of Professional School Counseling.

In their book *The Developing Practitioner*, Rønnestad & Skovholt updated their 2003 model, thus releasing the most recent version by collapsed and shortened the themes, reducing to 10 themes (p. 145-159, 2013) listed as follows:

**Theme 1: Optimal Professional Development Involves an Integration of the Personal Self into a Coherent Professional Self**

**Theme 2: The Modes of Therapist / Counselor Functioning Shifts Markedly Over Time – From Internal to External to Internal**
Theme 3: Continuous Reflection Is a Prerequisite for Optimal Learning and Professional Development at All Levels of Experience

Theme 4: Professional Development Is a Lifelong Process

Theme 5: Professional Development Is Mostly a Continuous Process but can also be Intermittent and Cyclical

Theme 6: An Intense Commitment to Learn Propels the Developmental Process

Theme 7: Many Beginning Practitioners Experience Much Anxiety in Their Professional Work: But Over Time, Anxiety Is Mastered by Most

Theme 8: Interpersonal Sources of Influence Propel Professional Development

More Than “Impersonal” Sources of Influence
- Theme 8.1: Clients are Primary Teachers
- Theme 8.2: Personal Life Impacts Professional Functioning and Development Throughout the Professional Life Span
- Theme 8.3: New Members of the Field View Professional Elders and Graduate Training with Strong Affective Reactions

Theme 9: Not All Therapists / Counselors Develop Optimally

Theme 10: For the Practitioner There Is a Realignment from Self as Powerful to Client as Powerful

Being aware of these tasks and themes guided the research questions and the interview protocol. The tasks and themes will be identified in the transcripts and throughout the analysis of data.
The Integrative Psychological Developmental Supervision Model (Lambie & Sias, 2009)

To focus specifically on the challenges and difficulties of professional school counselor development, this study will also employ the developmental lens of the Lambie and Sias (2009) professional school counselor model. The Integrative Psychological Developmental Supervision Model proposed by Lambie and Sias (2009) focuses on the psychological development of school counselors in training rather than on specific school counselor activities. In addition, the model supports the development of advanced clinical counseling skills such as active listening, case conceptualization, and the application of theory to practice. The Integrative Psychological Developmental Supervision Model guides this research because it is designed to promote growth in emotional awareness, creativity, problem-solving skills, and counselors’ confidence and self-efficacy in effective counseling practices (Lambie & Sias, 2009). These areas of growth will be identified in the data analysis.

The Multicultural Perspective in Therapy: A Social Constructivist Approach (Gonzalez, Biever, & Gardner, 1994)

The application of a social constructivist approach to multicultural counseling can be applied to development, thus creating compatibility with a multicultural perspective (Gonzalez et al., 1994). A multicultural approach is particularly pertinent to this study because many people have experienced discrimination and harassment as barriers to their professional development. Additionally, such discrimination impacts work with students (Gonzalez et al., 1994). When school counselors understand their own biases, they can
then begin to understand the worldview of culturally diverse students (Sue & Sue, 2013). Understanding the connection between school counselor self-awareness, student worldview, and the impact on the counseling relationship is guided through culturally responsive counseling approaches (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). Furthermore, as the researcher, an thorough examination of assumptions and worldview was noted in a journal (sample provided in appendix H). The propositions of a multicultural perspective will be identified in the data analysis.

This study was conducted from a developmental perspective. One way to understand or explain the professional development of novice professional school counselors is through the lens of developmental models or developmental theories of supervision. Developmental theories suggest that supervisees advance through a developmental process that are qualitatively unique to becoming a competent counselor (Chagnon & Russell, 1995). Developmental models have a long history of describing supervision as addressing counselors’ needs and developmental levels through supervisor modification of the applied developmental model (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019; Shechtman & Wirzberger, 1999). Developmental models assume that the supervisee is capable of developing from novice to expert with supervisor guidance (Salvador, 2016).

The field of counseling has long been concerned with lifespan development issues, especially how supervisees develop (Goodyear et al., 2000). Skovholt and Rønnestad (1992) were interested in counselor development across the lifespan, and they proposed that predictable, developmental changes would take place throughout counselors’ work lives (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013).
The life span model of development of Rønnestad and Skovholt (2013) extensively informed this research and influenced the chosen topic, method, and analysis of the data as professional development in this study is seen as a life-long process. Their model, however, did not exclusively apply to novice school counselor development. Although there has been shifts in supervision models that organize knowledge and skills specific to school counseling which address effectively meeting the needs of developing school counselors (Colbert & Magouirk-Colbert, 2003; Lambie & Sias, 2009; Luke & Bernard, 2006; Wood & Rayle, 2006), career lifespan models for school counselors is still scant.

The Integrative Psychological Developmental Supervision Model proposed by Lambie and Sias (2009) also influenced the study by including a school counseling specific focus on development. Additionally, there was a need to specifically focus on multicultural development that was absent in the Rønnestad and Skovholt (2013) model and Lambie and Sias (2009) model. Therefore, three models that address career lifespan, school counseling, and multicultural perspectives guided this research study. The multicultural perspective and social constructivist approach presented by Gonzalez, Biever, and Gardner (1994) guided the research and recognizes that discrimination and diversity impacts one’s professional development and life experiences; despite promising advances and legal protections, issues of equity remain at the forefront for many students and educators (Noltemeyer et al., 2012). Additionally, social constructivism posits that it is through communities of understanding, what is known or understood is identified. The group of participants formed the community of understanding, as this study sought to
gain understanding of within group differences of participants who self-selected by answering the call to participate. According to best practices of culturally responsive research, studying within group differences is more socially just, rather than comparing ethnic groups and their differences (Ponterotto et al., 2010). Furthermore, what people come to believe together becomes true for them within their social community due to learning and interactions from relationships (Cattone, 2007). For this study, the aim was to capture the lived experiences of novice professional school counselors in a way that is not predefined, rather organically expressed through IPA (Smith et al., 2009).

Methodology

This project utilized a qualitative research design. Using a qualitative research design was appropriate for many questions school counselors and school counselor educators would like to ask (Oliver, 2011). There are several characteristics of qualitative research that allow researchers to explore “the richness of the personal experience of our profession (Berrios & Lucca, 2006, p. 181). Qualitatively investigating the lived experiences of novice professional school counselors and the supports and resources that assist in their professional development is a contribution to hearing the voices of novices in the profession, which can provide an extensive understanding of their specific experience (Morrow, 2005). Additionally, it is beneficial for school counselors, counselor educators, and the profession to hear novice voices to become aware of the supports and resources that new school counselors identify as helpful. In particular, these supports and resources can be provided through clinical supervision, which can serve as a protective factor against burnout, foster a sense of professionalism, enhance counseling skills, and
enhance the quality of services school counselors provide (Agnew et al., 2000; Dollarhide & Miller, 2006; Kim & Lambie, 2018; Lambie, 2007). However, the lack of clinical supervision and limited support can leave school counselors vulnerable to negative experiences (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Cinotti & Springer, 2016; Crutchfield & Borders, 1997; Herlihy et al., 2002; McCarthy & Lambert, 2008; Moyer, 2011; Young & Lambie, 2007).

Schreier (2012) identified eight key features of qualitative research. First, qualitative research is concerned with the researcher’s interpretation. Verbal and visual data, as well as artifacts are symbolic materials collected in qualitative research, contributing to room for interpretation. Thus, the experiences of novice professional school counselors and the supports and resources that assist in their professional development are ripe for interpretation. Second, qualitative researchers are interested in real-life contexts. The assumption is that these contexts create meaningful data and are rich in information and experiences, just as the resources and supports are meaningful for novice school counselors and counselor supervisors and educators, as well as rich with information for those readers. Third, qualitative research is situational. Interpretation is an active construction of meaning for qualitative researchers, and it is assumed that the meaning varies depending on the interpreter and the context in which the meaning is produced (Schreier, 2012). This study was conducted by someone invested in novice professional school counselor development and lifelong learning.

Fourth, qualitative research is reflexive in that it starts out from the assumption that in the social and behavioral sciences, researchers conduct research on other human
beings and that as human beings, researchers share certain features with their participants (Schreier, 2012). Fifth, qualitative research has emergent flexibility due to the continual changing of all aspects of our research as we collect and analyze our data. Sixth, qualitative research is inductive in nature, where the researcher decides on the key codes and concepts as they go through your material, letting the categories emerge organically from the data by using open, non-directional measures. Seventh, qualitative research is case-oriented, meaning is concerned with the cases in their entirety rather than looking at the variables. In this study of novice professional school counselor experiences, along with supports and resources, it was important to examine the messages of each participant individually and at the messages of all participants combined. Eighth, qualitative research emphasizes validity. Validity is established by making sure procedures and reasonings are transparent to the readers, and that the design and method are appropriate to the research questions (Schreier, 2012).

Qualitative research helps to answer questions that begin with “How” or “What” rather than “Why” (Creswell, 1998). Although the purpose of this study was to better understand how supports and resources assist novice professional school counselors with their professional development, the developmental model by Rønnestad & Skovholt (2013), the school counseling model proposed by Lambie and Sias (2009), and the multicultural social constructivist approach presented by Gonzalez, Biever, & Gardner (1994) provide a lens and framework for understanding how novice professional school counselor development. Through analyzing novice professional school counselor experiences, light will be shed on how novice professional school counselors develop and
what novice professional school counselors need to do next in order to intentionally grow; with the overall research question being what are the lived experiences of novice professional school counselors and what are the reported supports and resources that assist novice professional school counselors in their professional development?

**Research Design**

Creswell (2007) stated that research design is the way the study is laid out. This study will utilize a qualitative research design. Qualitative approaches are appropriate when existing research is minimal, while aiming to provide rich descriptive accounts of a phenomenon with the main concern of the researcher being to provide an extensive understanding and to make meaning of a specific topic or experience (Morrow, 2005; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). With this in mind, an appropriate approach for this study was a qualitative design. The qualitative method of inquiry used for this project is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

**Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is concerned with making sense of how lived experiences become significantly important to people (Smith et al., 2009). IPA aims to capture the lived experience in a way that is not predefined, rather organically expressed (Smith et al., 2009). This research study explored novice professional school counselors and the reported supports and resources that assist with their professional development through collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data describing the ways participants make sense of their lived experiences. IPA was the qualitative approach utilized to guide how participants were selected and how data was
collected, analyzed, and interpreted. Other qualitative methods were ruled out, as IPA is descriptive and interpretative (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) which allowed for understanding through greater detail and a more personalized accounts of individual experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

There are two complementary commitments of (IPA): “the phenomenological requirement to understand and ‘give voice’ to the concerns of participants; and the interpretative requirement to contextualize and ‘make sense’ of these claims and concerns from a psychological perspective” (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 102). Novice professional school counselors are often the sole counselor in a school or district, leading to experiencing isolation and facing issues with the profession, particularly when carrying out the multiple professional tasks outlined in the ASCA National Model (Wilczenski et al., 2010). Hence, IPA was a suitable approach for this study as it helped give voice to novice professional school counselors, In addressing reported supports and resources that assist novice professional school counselors in their professional development, IPA focused on exploring how professional school counselors make sense of their lived experience (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Although accurately capturing the whole lived experience of a being is impossible, the attempt should not be ignored or overlooked (Moustakas, 1994; Smith et al., 2009). Interpretative phenomenological analysis “is a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 1). IPA is based on the foundation of Edmund Husserl’s belief that there was value in going back to the thing itself to make sense of the phenomenon.
through understanding the participant’s experience (Smith et al., 2009; Van Manen, 1990). People tend to reflect on the significance of major events, experiences, or phenomenon that occur in their lives and IPA is designed to capture these reflections. IPA is therefore a double hermeneutical because the researcher has the dual role of making sense of the participant, who in turn is trying to make sense of the experience (Smith et al., 2009).

*Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, and Idiography* are the theoretical foundations of IPA (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). These theoretical foundations allow a commitment to deep understanding of how the participant makes sense of a phenomenological experience through detailed examination. IPA is considered phenomenology due to the emphasis on exploration of lived experience in each individual participant’s own terms and descriptions of meaning. Phenomenology requires focus on perception about objects and events, engagement in intentional reflection in the present moment to allow the phenomena to speak for themselves (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). IPA is considered hermeneutic in the sense that there are constant considerations of various levels of interpretation. Hermeneutics require examination of an experience by not only the participant’s meaning, but the researcher’s interpretation as well (Smith et al., 2009). IPA can be described as double hermeneutic because of this dual interpretation that occurs during the analytical process (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Finally, IPA is considered idiographic in the sense of commitment to a detailed and thorough examination of each particular case from a personal experiential positioning.
(Smith et al., 2009). Idiographic abstains from generalization, specifying that analysis only applies to the participant’s experiences of a phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009).

**Participants**

A purposive sampling of eight participants engaged in this study. Participants were recruited through two Midwest state counseling association organizations. Emails were sent to the organization presidents and subsequently posted to the organization’s email listservs and Facebook pages. The researcher sent emails out to several school districts who listed school counselor emails on their websites. Additionally, two colleagues shared the information with school counselors whom they personally knew fit the criteria.

Participants were directed to a Qualtrics survey, where each signed the Informed Consent Document, which can be found in Appendix C. The document outlined the purpose of the study, the purpose of the form, the risks of the study, the benefits of the study, and the privacy and confidentiality of the participants’ information. This study was approved by the Minnesota State University, Mankato’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) IRBNet Id Number 1547123 to ensure maximum protection of the rights and welfare of human research subject.

The Qualtrics survey served as a screening mechanism. Participants were screened using a series of questions related to the inclusion criteria for the study, including being a Master’s level professional school counselor who has been practicing more than one year and less than five years in the field, who practices in the public school setting, and who graduated from a CACREP school counseling program. Typically, a
fairly homogeneous sample is sought for IPA research (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Additionally, there is no rule set regarding the number of participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). For novice researchers to conduct a detailed analysis of each case, Smith et al. (2009) recommends four to ten interviews.

Participants were selected if they met the parameters of the inclusion criteria as described above. In line with best practices of culturally responsive research, cultural demographic variables were not considered as constructs for inclusion or exclusion (Ponterotto et al., 2010). Although age and gender was noted for each participant, they were not considered inclusion criteria. However, years of experience was one demographic that was a consideration for inclusion to participate in the study. Interviews were conducted with each participant in the order they responded to the Qualtrics survey. In interviews, data saturation is indicated by the redundancy of statements by participants (Grady, 1998). Interviews were conducted until saturation was reach, which eight participants provided ample data.

Collecting Data

To best describe each participants’ experience with their professional development and the reported supports and resources that assist novice professional school counselors, in-depth interviews were used to collect data. Semi-structured interviews were utilized to allow flexibility, especially with follow-up questions to clarify or expand participants’ answers. According to Smith et al. (2009), an interview schedule requires the researcher to think explicitly about what is expected to be covered in the interview and allows planning to address difficulties that might occur. Additionally,
Smith et al. (2009) suggested familiarity with the interview guide prior to the actual data collection to help the researcher be less distracted during the interview and to aid in comfortable facilitation.

McNamara (2009) suggested applying the following eight principles to the preparation stage of interviewing: (a) choose a setting with little distraction; (b) explain the purpose of the interview; (c) address terms of confidentiality; (d) explain the format of the interview; (e) indicate how long the interview usually takes; (f) tell participants how to get in touch with you later if they want to; (g) ask participants if they have any questions before you both get started with the interview; and (h) do not count on your memory to recall their answers. Interviews were conducted via Zoom conferencing and audio was recorded to ensure accurate transcription, which ensures sufficient detailed data was collected to conduct an analysis utilizing the IPA design. The audio files were stored in an encrypted file, on a password protected computer, and were destroyed after transcription.

Conducting a semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to employ prompts as follow-up questions. The overall research questions that guided this study provided the framework for the interview guide, as outlined by Smith et al., 2009. The prompts for each interview question allowed for variation in participant’s narratives depending on their individual experiences. The questions that were asked of all participants included:

- Tell me about your current position as a beginning school counselor.
- Thinking back when you first began, tell me about your experience.
• Describe for me your process in transitioning from graduate school to the profession.

• What experiences have shaped your professional identity throughout your time in the field?

• What experiences have shaped your development throughout your time in the field?

• In your experience as a professional school counselor to date, what resources or supports assisted you with your professional development?

• What has moved you from feeling novice as a professional school counselor to feeling more self-assured?

Data Analysis

IPA provided the framework to analyze the data collected from participants. In accordance with the IRB (IRBNet Id Number 1547123), the interviews were stored in an encrypted file on a computer that was password protected. The audio recordings were only accessed by the investigator and were destroyed after interviews were transcribed. The recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher verbatim and reviewed by the researcher for accuracy. Each transcript was numbered according to the order of the interview. Participant information was kept in a separate file from the transcripts to assure privacy and confidentiality of participant information. Smith et al. (2009) stated the process of analysis begins with a single case, analyzing in detail before moving on to the second case, and so on. Step one involved immersing myself in the original data. It
was helpful to listen to the audio-recording a second time while reading the transcript, noting pauses and laughs, to ensure the participant became the focus of analysis.

Step two was the most detailed and time-consuming as it involved initial noting. Comments were made in the margins on initial reactions and more interpretative noting to help me understand how and why the participants had particular concerns, which helped me make sense of the patterns of meaning in their account. As advised by Smith et al. (2009), I reread each transcript and made additional notes to highlight the language used, including key words and phrases. Extending the engagement with the transcripts in this way added to the researcher’s submersion in the data.

Step three involved looking at the notes for emergent themes, and step four involved searching for connections across the emergent themes. Smith et al. (2009) suggested several techniques to help look for patterns and connections. I utilized abstraction, polarizations, and numeration. Abstraction involves identifying basic patterns between emergent themes through putting like with like, thus creating superordinate themes for which a new name for the cluster is developed (Smith et al., 2009). For example, there were many comments about being a member of teams within the school setting and being a member of professional organizations. These themes combined created a theme of membership. Polarization examines emergent themes for relationships that are not similar by focusing on opposite differences (Smith et al., 2009). Although there were many comments about relationships with principals and others in the school setting, these relationships were different in that the principal has administrative power as a boss compared to connecting with other equal counterparts such as social workers and
psychologists. Numeration was one way of indicating the relevant importance of some emergent themes through repetition (Smith et al., 2009). This was evident with comments being made not only by most or all the participants but also repeatedly by the same participant regarding many of the subthemes.

Step five involved moving to the next case after thoroughly analyzing the previous cases (Smith et al., 2009). Finally, step six involved looking for patterns across cases that made connections between the interviews and participants and (Smith et al., 2009). I reviewed cases in the same order as the conducted interviews to control for researcher and case bias. Data analysis can be an inspiring activity (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) even though it is complex and takes considerable time. Outlining and following the recommended steps ensured that the investigation and analysis were thorough and represented the participants’ experiences.

As each case was being analyzed, I mapped general themes by writing them on a chart. Once all cases were analyzed, the themes were grouped together to form subgroups. Superordinate themes emerged from the subgroups. There were originally five overarching themes that were narrowed down to four after thoughtful consideration.

**Assessing Quality and Rigor**

Qualitative research has been questioned as a whole regarding merit and legitimacy as an approach (Gordon & Patterson, 2013; Shinebourne, 2011). IPA has similarly been questioned (Shinebourne, 2011). This may be due to IPA being seen as a descriptive approach, even though the focus is to actually interpret the experience of each individual. Larkin et al. (2006) stated it is “easy for flexibility to be mistaken for lack of
rigour” (p. 103). Therefore, the procedures used to analyze the collected data is detailed though following the IPA step-by-step guide provided by Smith et al. (2009). The steps along with strategies to ensure quality will be discussed to help address this concern.

Smith et al. (2009) also highlighted criteria to assess high-quality research set forth by Yardley (2000). Four broad principles were presented by Yardley (2000) to assess qualitative research: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigor, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance. As the first principle, sensitivity to context can be established through the research paradigms in which the study is situated, the awareness of existing literature on the topic, and the interactional nature of obtaining data from the participants (Yardley, 2000). Key markers of quality in qualitative research include starting with a worthy topic that is relevant, significant, and interesting while rigorously researching theories and gathering abundant data to prepare to see the nuances and complexity of the topic (Tracy, 2010). The developmental model of Skovholt and Rønnestad (2013), the school counseling model proposed by Lambie and Sias (2009), and the multicultural social constructivist approach presented by Gonzalez, Biever, & Gardner (1994) impacted my worldview and guided the interview schedule and analysis. Additionally, the literature review section provided a broad foundation to orient the present study. Furthermore, my understanding was informed by coursework in supervision, along with work experience as a school counselor.

The second principle, commitment and rigor were addressed through being attentive to each participant during the interview and taking care during the analysis of each case by following IPA guidelines (Yardley, 2000). I conducted in-depth interviews
with the participants and thorough analysis provided deeper understanding of the individual and shared experiences of novice professional school counselors and the utilized supports and resources to assist with their development. Credibility adds to the quality through the rich description provided by the researcher, and the ethical considerations of the procedures utilized (Tracy, 2010).

The third principle, transparency and coherence refer to clearly describing the process of the research and how the researcher followed the IPA guidelines (Yardley, 2000). As the researcher, I described the process for participant selection, the questions utilized in the interview schedule, and the steps followed for analysis. Transparency is also marked by sincerity regarding how the biases of the researcher play a role in the method and the research (Tracy, 2010). I described my research bias and took reflexive notes about thoughts and feelings I had throughout the research process. Samples of my memos and journal can be found in Appendices G and F.

The fourth principle that Yardley (2000) described was impact and importance of the research. Little has been written about supports and resources utilized by novice professional school counselors that contribute to their professional development. Results of the analysis and interpretation in this study add to the existing research, with the new understanding possibly being useful to counselor educators and supervisors as they work with novice professional school counselors to gain a better understanding of how their professional development and supports and resources that assist them. Additionally, such an understanding may be useful to school counselors already in the field when asked to provide supervision for practicum and internship students or beginning school
counselors, or when thinking about their own professional growth and development. These research outcomes may resonate with novice school counselors to influence their naturalistic application and transferability of the findings, which contributes to the overall quality of the study (Tracy, 2010).

**Assessing Trustworthiness**

Qualitative studies properly carried out can help us “understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing” (Eisner, 1991, p. 58). Lincoln and Guba (1985) used the term *trustworthiness* for the criteria used for evaluating qualitative research, with the aim to support the argument that the findings of the study are worth paying attention to. Prolonged engagement with the participants and the data is one way of dealing with trustworthiness (Yin, 2016). Through the investment of time, including listening to the interviews, transcription, and reading and rereading the transcripts, I increased my understanding of the contextual data, which enabled me to more readily “detect and take account of distortions that might otherwise creep into the data” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p 302). Additionally, Guba (1981) suggested that research conducted within the constructivist paradigm should utilize four criteria to foster trustworthiness and authenticity in qualitative research. These criteria include credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Guba, 1981).

**Credibility**

Credibility is the criterion used to refer to the believability, trustworthiness, and authenticity of the data and data analysis (Guba, 1981). Furthermore, credibility is the researcher’s ability to investigate the alignment between the constructed reality of the
researcher with the participants’ reality (Merriam, 2009). In this study, credibility was established by engaging in triangulation, member reflecting, and peer examination.

Triangulation is based on the idea of mutual confirmation of data from multiple perspectives to ensure that all aspects of a phenomenon have been investigated (Knafl & Breitmayer, 1989) and a thorough understanding of the phenomena has been developed (Patton, 1999). Data triangulation involves cross-checking data and interpretations across data sources (Krefting, 1991). A convergence of data or data leading to the same finding, especially on key findings, indicates strong evidence of the phenomena (Yin, 2016). For this study, I had two doctoral students in a counselor education and supervision program review the transcripts and conduct a single case analysis and full analysis to check for confirmation. Peer examination helped ensure the quality of the research through additional assessment, thus determining whether the process was described clearly and with enough depth, with attention being paid to any bias the researcher might bring to the process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt et al., 2007). Comparing participant data with existing literature provided a third data source, particularly when noting support or renunciation of existing research with the findings of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2016). This comparison can be found in chapter five of this paper.

Central to credibility is the ability of participants to recognize their experiences in the research findings (Krefting, 1991). Member reflecting allows the participants an opportunity to review the initial findings, ask questions, and to provide feedback (Tracy, 2010). I asked participants to review and comment on the preliminary data analysis. Reconnecting allowed the participants to correct or improve the accuracy of the data
while reinforcing the collaborative and ethical relationship (Yin, 2016). Allowing member reflection/ member checking moves from just checking the findings to an opportunity for collaboration and elaboration of the findings (Tracy, 2010).

**Dependability**

The criterion of dependability refers to the constancy of observing the same data and findings under similar circumstances (Guba, 1981). Gasson stated a useful way of ensuring the dependability of the findings is by making the process through which they were derived explicit (Gasson, 2004, p.94). This means the process was mine to thoroughly and understandably describe my procedures so that the readers may understand how I got from the described procedures to my presented results. An external auditor is one way to ensure dependability. As stated above, under credibility, I engaged in a peer examination process that helped assess the feasibility of an outside reviewer to follow the process as described, hence allowing a clear and deep understanding of the researcher’s process and results of the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt et al., 2007).

**Confirmability**

Confirmability is the criterion that refers to the degree which the research findings are accepted and represented by others in the field through minimizing but preferably eliminating the researcher’s biases, which may contaminate results of the analyzed data (Guba, 1981). In my efforts to meet the guidelines of confirmability, I tied together the analytic procedures, IPA, the data from the transcripts, and the findings throughout the paper in a way that my readers can determine to what degree my findings are sufficient
I used a well-defined audit trail, which documented a chronological list of research related tasks and any memos, including observations and personal biases. Additionally, I noted challenges related to the research process. Samples of the audit trail, memos, and researcher journal can be found in the Appendices F, G, and H.

Confirmability is also established through transparency of the possible biases that the researcher might bring to the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt et al., 2007). With this in mind, I shared how my beliefs and experiences related to the topic of the study might bias the results of the study. This is outlined under the heading of Researcher Bias.

**Transferability**

The criterion of transferability refers to the researcher’s ability to provide a rich description of the research and findings so readers can make sense of the outcomes in their own way (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, transferability means the findings of this study of what are the lived experiences of novice professional school counselors and the reported supports and resources that assist in their professional development can be applied to the greater fields of school counseling and counselor education and supervision (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt et al., 2007). However, the results are a reflective snapshot of the novice Midwestern school counselor participants and their experiences at that fixed moment in time. To establish transferability, researchers present the findings and the process for determining the findings through rich and thick descriptions. For this study, an audit trail was documented to keep track of the research process and memos were written to note researcher thoughts regarding the research
process, as stated previously. Samples of the audit trail and memos can be found in Appendices F and G.

**Ethical Considerations**

Due to the nature of IPA interviews, sensitive issues are bound to arise, and this could be viewed as potential harm to the participant (Creswell, 2007; Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, it is important to utilize a written informed consent prior to the interview and to also obtain consent at the time of the actual interview (Smith et al., 2009). Approval was granted by the Minnesota State University, Mankato’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) IRBNet Id Number 1547123 to ensure maximum protection of the rights and welfare of human research subject. The IRB and each participant read the informed consent letter and reviewed the purpose of the study prior to gathering data. The Informed Consent forms will be stored on a thumb drive in a secure location and will be destroyed three years after this study has been completed. Before each interview, I answered any questions from participant. Each was also reminded that they could discontinue participation at any time or withdraw from the study without penalty. All audio recordings were kept anonymous, and participant’s identities were protected through removal of names and other identifying information from the transcripts. Each transcript was numbered in the order the interview occurred. A key was created to match each transcript with participant information gathered through Qualtrics. Audio recordings and participant information was stored electronically on a password-protected laptop. The audio recordings were deleted upon completion of transcription. Consent documents are
being kept in a secure location and will be destroyed three years after the research study has been completed.

**Researcher Bias**

I recognize that there is no way to eliminate the biases with which I enter the research; however, proactive steps were taken to increase my awareness of what my biases are and to provide the reader with information about my own background so that the lens through which I view the data is explained. The purpose of this was to increase the trustworthiness of my results and the rigor of the methodology.

One method for increasing my awareness is reflexivity. Reflexivity helps achieve accountability and honesty, and it is one of the signposts that verify trustworthiness in qualitative design (Hays & Singh, 2012). Lincoln and Guba (2000) described reflexivity as “the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the ‘human as instrument’” (p. 183). I engaged in several mechanisms to enhance my reflexivity. First, I maintained a reflexive journal throughout the dissertation process. In this journal, I tracked my reactions to the data, as well as concerns, acknowledge biases, and irritations or annoyances. A sample of the journal can be found in Appendix H. Additionally, I periodically checked in with my dissertation advisor and a peer to discuss aspects of the process that came up in my journal. This way, I not only reflected on the process, but I also had additional people to help me identify where my experiences and perspectives impact the way I am viewing the project.

In addition to researcher reflexivity, bracketing, or epoche, attempts to minimize the impact the bias of the researcher. The researcher brackets through setting “aside their
experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination” (Creswell, 2007, p. 59-60). To minimize subjectivity in the research process, Gasson (2004) suggested that I reflect on the position I took through the process. I have experience as a beginning school counselor at the master’s level and as a beginning counselor educator and supervisor at the doctoral level. I also have a natural desire to learn and develop professionally and personally. Additionally, being a white bodied female contributes to my assumptions and worldviews. These experiences contribute to how I approached this research study. Noting the impact on my understanding of the concepts, constructs, and research adheres to suggestions for conducting culturally responsive research (Ponterotto et al., 2010). Furthermore, I attempted to recognize how these experiences shaped my lens for interpreting the data through bracketing while also seeing the data from perspectives that are different from my own eyes.

As a researcher, I acknowledge the possibility of confirmation bias. Confirmation bias is based on the researcher’s beliefs, preferences, and preconceptions. It is the result of overlooking or ignoring contradictory evidence (Althubaitie, 2016; Nickerson, 1998). My beliefs include being a life-long learner, a curious learner, and an advocate for social justice. I believe that everyone deserves equitable, educational opportunities and the required supports to promote critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.

As a former school counselor and current counselor educator and supervisor, I acknowledge the possibility of in-group and affinity bias. Once being a member of the group in which I interviewed and feeling connected to the participants can introduce a
question of bias (Mehra, 2002). I found many similarities in the stories told by participants to my own experiences. This affinity may contribute to limiting my own curiosity, leading to discovery of what I think I do not know, rather than further inquiry into the hidden unknown. (Chenail, 2011).

These biases were mitigated through bracketing and journaling. I conducted member checks, utilized triangulation, and engaged in peer examination. Additionally, I used an audit trail to document a chronological list of research related tasks and memos. Following the IPA step-by-step guide provided by Smith et al. (2009) and applying the eight principles to preparing for interviewing presented by McNamara (2009) aided in addressing bias. I addressed the parameters for high-quality research set forth by Yardley (2000) and utilized the four criteria set by Guba (1981) to foster trustworthiness and authenticity in my research.

**Summary**

This chapter restated the study’s purpose and provided a more in-depth description of the research paradigm and theoretical framework, along with the research design, standard of quality, and ethical considerations. The aim of this study was to seek understanding regarding the lived experiences of novice professional school counselors and the reported supports and resources that assist in their professional development. Qualitative techniques were utilized to conduct semi-structured interviews as the main method of data collection. The guidelines for IPA were used to analyze data to produce themes and subthemes, which were identified as significant aspects of participant
interviews, highlighting individual and shared participant narratives. Measures to ensure trustworthiness and ethical considerations were also discussed in this chapter.

The next chapter will share the participants’ experiences, as well as my interpretation of these experiences. The findings will include narratives from the interviews which support my analysis and interpretations, thus adding to the transparency of the study.
CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

This chapter details study findings and provides a collective analysis of the eight novice professional school counselor’s experiences. Recruitment of participants came from two Midwest school counselor association listservs; the requirements to participate included being a Master-level professional school counselor who has been practicing 1-5 years in the field, practicing in a public-school setting, and graduated from a CACREP school counseling program. Semi-structured interviews lasting approximately forty to sixty minutes were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

Participant Demographics

Demographic information was collected through a Qualtrics survey. Participants identified as a professional school counselor who has been in the field 1-5 years, with an average of 2.5 years of experience. The eight participants in the study ranged from 27-49 years old and averaged 33 years in age. All eight identified as white or Caucasian, and seven of the eight identified as female and one identified as male. Five of the eight identified as novice, according to the Rønnestad and Skovholt (2013) phase model, while the other three identified as experienced. None of the participants identified as senior or expert, as most who identify with this phase have worked in the field for over 25 years (Rønnestad and Skovholt, 2013). All the participants have Master’s degrees, and one participant was currently enrolled in a doctoral program. Although unusual, half of the participants stated they were receiving clinical supervision. The average caseload was
about 475 students per counselor, with four working with the elementary level, two working with the middle school level, one working with the junior high/senior high level, and one working with K-12 level.

For this study, number of years in the field was criteria for inclusion and identifying as novice or experienced according to the Rønnestad and Skovholt (2013) phase model was not, as hearing the voices of those early in their career was deemed important. The three professional school counselors who identified as experienced were participants who were currently enrolled in a doctoral program, the eldest participant, male, had previous work experience in a helping profession, or had prior work experience in the school where they were hired. Table 1 highlights participant demographics, participant names are pseudonyms and listed in order in which each was interviewed.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Caseload (# of students)</th>
<th>Development (Novice to Senior/Expert)</th>
<th>Years in Field</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>JH/SH</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>Experienced</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billie</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>Novice</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameron</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>Novice</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drew</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>Novice</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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<td>Ezra</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>Novice</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frances</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>Experienced</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgie</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>Novice</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollis</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Experienced</td>
<td>3</td>
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Overview of Themes

This study explored how novice professional school counselors make sense of their development, including supports and resources that assist with their professional development. The research questions regarding the lived experiences of novice school counselors and the reported supports and resources that assist novice professional school counselors in their professional development guided the study and interview process. Four overarching themes emerged out of the analysis, including: (a) sources of influence, (b) coping with adversity, (c) sense of confirmation, and (d) commitment to increasing one’s expertise. Additionally, four subthemes supported each theme and are detailed in Figure 1. The themes and subthemes are not ordered hierarchically; instead, each is listed as they emerged in the analysis.

When considering the lived experiences of novice professional school counselors, there are individual stories of growth and development that create the overall journey toward expertise and mastery. Although each story varied, many pieces of the eight narratives converged to make up the themes and subthemes. Each overarching theme is unique in how it contributes to the novice school counselor’s professional development. Each theme and subtheme will be discussed thoroughly in this chapter with extracts from participants to provide transparent evidence supporting the research questions: 1. What are the lived experiences of novice professional school counselors? 2. What are the reported supports and resources that assist novice professional school counselors in their professional development?
Figure 1

*Overarching Themes and Subthemes of Participant Interviews*

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<td>Past Experiences</td>
<td>Challenging Situations</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
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Note. Four overarching themes emerged through the analysis of interviews with eight novice professional school counselors. Four subthemes further support each of the overarching themes.
Sources of Influence

One theme that prevailed throughout all interviews was participants reporting sources of influence, which supported their transition and development in the professional field as a school counselor. In general, influencers included people and experiences. The people who influenced novice school counselor development were most often other professionals who worked in the school setting. However, students, parents, and others outside of the school community sometimes influenced development as well. Collaboration involved these same people, the difference being the experience of collaboration and not the relationship as the influence. Past experience involved previous work experiences or prior counseling experiences as an intern or, more specifically, within the mental health field. From the overarching theme of sources of influence, four subthemes emerged, including relationship with principal, connecting with others, collaboration, and past experiences.

Relationship with Principal

All participants stated that they currently rely on their principal for support using language such as “very fortunate,” “getting along,” and “fantastic” to describe working with their principal. Drew stated, “I confided in my principals a lot and asked a lot of questions,” as it was their second year in the field, and Frances stated, “the biggest thing that helps me grow is just talking through different issues with our administration.” This relationship’s importance is evident in Cameron’s response when being asked whom they process situations with, stating:
I have built a really good professional relationship with my principal. And we are the… we sit and debrief together about certain things. I feel fortunate to have that very good professional relationship where it’s a very trusting relationship that we can process and talk about things or bounce ideas off of each other.

This relationship was not always the case for Cameron. They went on to reflect upon their previous year at a different school stating, “Whereas last year I didn’t feel I had that with really anybody as I look back at it.” This was also not the case for Georgie, who was employed in a different district the previous year, referring to the principal “she herself had been a counselor for seven-plus years, so she wasn’t comfortable with behavior, behavioral referrals, or contacting parents.”

It seems that principals are a necessary support for beginning school counselors. On the one hand, it was helpful for some of the participants to have someone to talk to for planning and debrief with over troubling situations. Still, on the other hand, a principal who relies too heavily on the school counselor to fill their role when they are out of the building or not skilled at filling their role as principal can be overwhelming. Both positive and negative relationships with principals contributed to novice professional school counselor growth.

Connecting with Others

Participants also noted the importance of connecting with others. A noted positive for most of the participants was working with students and helping them succeed. Also, getting to know their families was evidenced through statements such as, “I feel like I’m
way more connected with families” [Ezra], and “when you get to know a student or when you get to know their parents and, you know, having that relationship” [Drew].

Even though it took time, building relationships with teachers was another positive and seemed to enhance over time. This was true for Ezra, third-year school counselor:

This year has been way better than the first two years, just in terms of feeling comfortable too, with the relationship I have with teachers, I can talk more real with them, and they can be more real with me. They’re more open with me.

These connections also contributed to the environment; as Cameron stated, “We have a lot of present teachers and active teacher…it feels like it’s a very warm and welcoming community, for sure.” Cameron went on to reflect on how the teachers contribute to feeling welcome:

This year I’ve had a lot of teachers come up to me and tell me, “have you read this? Have you heard of this book? Have you read this article or watched this video? … a lot of your colleagues, as well that are your biggest assets.”

Two other participants expanded the connection with others by stating:

I have two fellow counselors that I work with, and we work pretty closely, and then we have a social worker and a school psych, and we all work fairly close together. We have a great working relationship. [Frances]

And

I’m actually very fortunate, and we have a school psychologist that has proven to be like the best resource, best sounding board I could ever ask for. She’s very
professional, has lots of great ideas. You know, she doesn’t overstep boundaries, and she has helped me through a lot of tough cases. [Georgie]

In summing up what connecting with another counselor, social worker, and mental health therapist means, Hollis stated, “in talking about support, that’s been a huge thing for me” and follow up later with “those connections just feel really authentic and, and feel good, that I know it kind of keeps me going.”

Connecting with other professionals and students and families influenced novice professional school counselor development. Many of the relationships were supportive in nature and provided novices with resources to assist with their development. These first two subthemes were relational, while the second two subthemes were more experiential.

**Collaboration**

It seems that novice professional school counselors rely on collaborating with many people within their buildings and with their communities, particularly those in helping professions. This includes outside mental health agencies, “I have utilized their counselors, and just them to be able to, whether it be like using their suicide checklist…what they do to break through with certain people” [Alex]. Billie explained that the previous year there was not a mental health therapist in their building and felt it really helped to have that service available the current year: “it’s so collaborative, and all of a sudden we had … another person trying to … figure out some ideas and behavior.” They went on to say that their Special Education Department has helped a lot too, “especially try(ing) to figure out … what to do for some kids … behavior intervention.”
Billie stressed the importance of collaboration not only with school-based therapists and the Special Education Department but:

customarily collaborating with your teachers because they really know the kids too. Talking to parents because parents really want to be in the know if something’s happening with their student and really being an advocate for that student too.

Collaboration also occurs with other school counselors [Drew] and with social workers and student support teams. Ezra described it as nice:

I also love the collaboration piece, you know, working with the student support team, our school psych, and our social worker. It’s really nice that we all get along well. We work well together, we’re able to collaborate, and you know, take things off each other’s plates if we need to.

The experience of collaborating with other professionals influences the development of novice school counselors by providing the opportunity to learn from others. It can be a time for novices to demonstrate newly developed skills and knowledge when leading teams or initiatives, which may contribute to their professional identity and efficacy. Other professionals might provide feedback to the novice counselor, which may assist in their professional development through collaboration, experiences and resources that can be shared.

*Past Experiences*

Although professional school counselors have similar training and experiences with relationships and collaboration, they each have diverse past experiences that
influence their development. Alex came from a law enforcement field and approached training with being extra prepared by completing an additional 150 hours of internship to provide extra practice, “I think I really had to push myself beyond what the school wanted me to do in order to really prepare myself.”

Cameron’s first year as a professional school counselor was in the school they completed their internship, as they replaced their internship advisor, who retired. This experience can be positive in that the novice professional school counselor knows the school and the system. Yet, they might be expected to keep the counseling program the same as the retiree, leaving the novice little opportunity to create their own program. Ezra also had a prior connection to the school that hired them, as they were a playground supervisor during graduate school. They stated, “I kind of got my foot in the door here, I got to know the principal and some other teachers, so I don’t know if that made any difference, but I feel like that was just really good experience.” Frances had a similar experience as an at-risk counselor for the school district before transitioning to a school counselor for one building. They felt that their previous experience in mental health prepared them for their current role stating, “working with a variety of different kids, the variety of different disabilities, so like, I feel like I had a really good substance.”

Hollis also had prior experience in the mental health field. Additionally, they completed one year as a school counselor many years ago and started in a new position as a school counselor this school year. They are also completing a doctoral program in Counselor Education and Supervision that they began before accepting this current position, all of which contributed to their development coming into the professional
school counseling field. These experiences helped prepare them for the position, “I think from all my studies and the experiences I’ve had prior to this year, I knew coming in what I, what it was going to be like or felt pretty strong about what it was like.” In describing their transition from graduate school to the profession, Georgie thought it was easy:

I know that some people have a harder time, but my background before grad school was in residential treatment, so I was already very familiar with doing community-based counseling, and so I was comfortable with parents and other agencies or schools like via the consent forms. So it was a pretty seamless transition for me because I had that experience.

Many past experiences influence novice professional school counselor development. These experiences included education, professional experiences within the helping field and outside of the counseling profession, and “foot-in-the-door” experiences, such as internship or other school-related positions, including playground duty.

**Coping with Adversity**

All the participants spoke about coping with adversity in their role as a novice professional school counselor in describing experiences that shaped their professional identity and professional development. This is not surprising as we all deal with adversity in our lives but coping with the adverse experiences helped these novices grow and develop professionally. The process of moving through adversity provided novices the opportunity to build confidence and competency, especially when processing with other
professionals such as peers, supervisors, and administrators. The subthemes found relating to coping with adversity include defining roles, conflict, disillusionment with graduate school, and challenging situations.

**Defining Roles**

Even though ASCA has recommended percentages of time dedicated across the domains of career, academic, and social/emotional counseling activities and lists appropriate activities for school counselors versus inappropriate activities for school counselors, the role each school counselor plays can look very different. All eight participants are aware of the ASCA National Model, but only a few are able to implement part or all of the model into their programs. As noted in their narratives, each participant has something to say about their job duties, which define their role as the school counselor.

Alex was frustrated by not being able to spend time doing extras: “I have not been able to put all that effort and put everything kind of together like I think these students deserve.” Alex chalks this up to lack of services and has started a clothing swap with other schools to meet the student’s needs. They also stated, “I am doing everything from truancy, attendance, to dealing with fights,” and calling the police for a few sexual assaults that were reported to him, all while trying to set up the ACT college entrance exam. Additionally, Alex and Drew shared that social work duties seem to fall on them as school counselors, especially servicing smaller districts where there is typically a social worker or a school counselor, not both. Drew stated:
Being in a smaller district, I do a lot of social work duties, I would say also, like I’m the homeless liaison and I’m in charge of attendance and truancy meetings, as well as the 504 coordinator and some different things like that. And I also am the district assessment coordinator. [Drew]

Billie identified challenges in dealing with students with severe mental illness or behaviors, stating, “a lot of times it’s the really challenging behaviors that’ll take up almost my entire day, so then I miss my caseload of kids or I can’t see other kids or have a lunch bunch.” Typically, discipline is an administrative duty, but when there is a bullying situation, they will most likely get involved. In agreement was Drew, who fills in for the principal when they are out of the building, but they will “try my best to not be involved in like disciplinary things, sometimes that just can’t, you know, it just can’t be that way.” Being asked to perform administrative duties was also a challenge for Georgie, a second-year school counselor, who stated:

oftentimes she kind of wanted me to be administrator because I think she still had that counselor hat on. And so she tried to push some of those administrative duties onto me. But I, that’s not what I believe the counselor should do. So it was kind of comfortable at times. They put a lot of responsibilities on me because no one else in the school wanted to do something like PBIS. No one wanted to do that, so they told me I was going to do it, whereas I had no experience with that. So, I had to be the internal coach. And so, I had to learn from ground zero. And I was also told, hey, the district told us that we have no choice, we have to get past
tier one. And we also we failed the last five years. So, you need to get us through it. (laughs)

Non-counseling duties can be a source of frustration, especially for Ezra when they are asked to help with playground duty or with testing or in the lunchroom, “but, it doesn’t happen often enough for me to get upset about it, so I just go with it.” However, it does disrupt their schedule and their meetings with students:

There was like 12 kids on my list that I wanted to meet with today, and I got to like six of them. And then I added on a few other ones that just came up today, you know so it's just like I don't have time for everything and then to be out at recess that's not a counseling duty. And like I said, it's fine that I can fill in what I needed, but then I waste an hour and a half of my time that I could be spending meeting with kids. So, then all these kids will push it tomorrow and then more things come up tomorrow.

Non-stop crisis counseling and crisis intervention was a challenge for Cameron: “I didn’t have the opportunity to be in the classrooms or do any groups because it was always just a go go go.” They went on to say that the current year is still “super busy” and “go go go,” but being at a “new level for my experience, my career, I feel much more prepared and able to cover (pause) to reach more of a variety of students.” Additionally, participants shared “lack of services” and “feeling like a behavior support” were issues regarding helping students with mental health needs.

Even though there is a social worker who works with the level 3 Emotional and Behavioral Disorder (EBD) students, sometimes Frances would work with these students
if they had a prior relationship with them. Additionally, they stated, “I support a lot of students with mental health needs. Academic is about, I would say maybe 15 percent, 20 percent of my duties at the school, and then the social emotional friendship, all that stuff is another category that I am, that I support a lot of my school.”

Being in a new district and school for Georgie has been positive for them. They state that they do not have many non-school counseling duties which allows them to have access to students for classroom guidance, as this helps them reach all 500 students on their caseload. They also provide individual counseling and small group counseling, stating, “I'm trying to get it as close to the recommended ratio as possible. So currently seventy-eight percent of my services are with direct services with students, but since I'm a beginning educator, I have to attend more meetings. So that keeps my number a little lower than I would like.”

Hollis also provides individual sessions with students and classroom lessons. Also, they state, “A lot of support for staff occurs as well throughout, throughout the weeks. Just randomly, I mean, mostly, you know, just emotional support through different challenging situations.”

Drew sums up their roles as “I always tell people that I wear a lot of hats and that I wasn't totally prepared for because some, some days I feel like I do I do less counseling duties than I than I would have hoped just because I do have so many different kind of job titles or different things that I do, especially in the spring when, you know, when --- testing comes around.”
Having clear role definition supports novice school counselors’ professional identity and development by allowing novices to focus on professional counseling activities that support student well-being through direct services. Lack of clarity and lack of support can lead to novices feeling overwhelmed and unprepared when asked to complete tasks they were not trained to do. Conversely, clarity of role definition helps to keep the focus on tasks and services that school counselors are trained to provide.

**Conflict**

Participants noted several situations where conflict created challenges with working with teachers, other counselors, and administrators. Cameron summed it up by stating, “I feel like we’re battled on a constant basis of following that, our ethics and the ways we’re taught” and adding “the ethical ways that the school needs to run as well.” Conflict can be difficult to navigate as a novice professional school counselor and was difficult to articulate for Ezra when they shared:

I think sometimes, challenge is, challenging to work with teachers. That, (pause) how can I say this? Sometimes teachers just don't have the whole perspective. They have difficulty taking the perspective of a student who, who's struggling or they, they might not know the whole family situation. But it's also not their business to know. So, it's kind of, it's kind of hard to really pull teachers in sometimes to help them be a little bit more empathetic to a situation because their expectations are strictly academic. And so that can be kind of tricky sometimes.
This was not the only conflictual situation with teachers. School counselors adhere to codes of ethics that include confidentiality, as well as protecting the rights of students.

Billie emphasized the importance of confidentiality and noted:

I've learned in this small school where everybody knows everybody, you know, you got to really keep confidentiality with the kids that you see and with even with the teachers, like the teachers don't need to know everything. So it's a, you have to keep a balance of what they can know, what they know, what they need to know, what they don't need to know.

Sharing confidential information is not always an easy decision for school counselors, especially novices as they are likely to still be learning to follow the ASCA Code of Ethics. In particular, the Code A.2. addresses school counselors’ responsibility to students and confidentiality, Code B.1 addresses school counselors’ responsibility to parents, and Code F addresses the ethical decision-making process (ASCA, 2016). Some of the information regarding students and their lives does not come from the school counselor, sometimes it is information that is known in the community or shared by other adults which include faculty and staff in the school building. When describing frustrations, Hollis shared:

Frustrations, (pause) I feel like maybe most of it comes from other adults in the building and maybe just like things that you wished didn't happen in communication or like adults saying things with kids in earshot or behaving a certain way that you wish wasn't an example.
These were not the only issues with teachers. Several participants share their experiences with teachers not wanting the school counselor to pull students from their classes. They described this experience using language of “demand,” “this is my class,” and “tiptoeing and walking on eggshells.” Cameron, with a caseload nearing 500 added that “how others, like teachers and staff members view my time” adds to this challenge, stating that teachers feel “when I call you, I need you right away” and that “they don’t necessarily understand that there are other situations that could be happening that might need my attention more at the time.” To address this issue, Frances emphasized the need to approach student concerns as a team that includes parents and teachers and not as an individual. They shared their thoughts about “we all kind of have to be on the same page. I can support the plan, but I can’t put the plan in place.”

In addition to experiencing issues with teachers, Frances also shared a situation with reaching out to a district counselor for support regarding an issue with a fellow counselor. She described this as being “hard reaching out to the district person that’s within your school system when there is a conflict with the other counselor who is, and has a pretty good relationship with that person.” Sometimes internal relationships are a source of conflict and novice school counselors might struggle with how to navigate the nuances, especially when there is a power differential in the relationship.

As much as a good relationship with Principals is a source of influence, addressed in the first overarching theme, for some, administration can also be a source of conflict, especially when it comes to feeling supported in situations and ethical dilemmas. “It was an administrative issue and, you know, I didn’t feel that that support.” Georgie also had a
particularly difficult experience with an administrator, which lead to them leaving that school, as they described:

there was an administrator and we did not see eye to eye on ethics. And I had to have some very uncomfortable conversations with this individual in front of the leadership team, the intervention team. And I had to really stand by what I believed as an advocate. And it's very hard because this was in my first couple months in that school and to go head to head with the principal about something, seeing something and saying something, that really solidified to me that I am an advocate, even though I want this person to like me, I have to stand up for what I believe is ethical and right…., I consulted with the other counselors in my district to reach kind of consensus on what they felt would be the appropriate moves.

For Frances, an experienced second year school counselor, the issue with administration had to do with being threatened with a lawsuit by a parent, which will be described further under the challenging situations subtheme. Parents can also be a source of conflict, as demonstrated by Hollis’ comment:

One thing coming in this year, I guess to that I I've had angry parents before (laughs) but that was something that just kind of hit me this year, I guess, too. Is that just the level of it, I guess, and the level of expectations that parents put on staff at school.

Relationships can be a source of influence while also being a source of conflict. Building relationships for novice school counselors contributes to their development, as does
navigating conflict that arises in these relationships. Many people can be resources and supports for novices, including principals, teachers, counselors, students, and parents.

**Disillusionment with Graduate School**

Each participant agreed that the internship portion of graduate school was the most valuable experience. However, many of them realized they were not adequately prepared for the school counselor’s position when they started in the field. Navigating the process of disillusionment contributes to professional identity development for novice school counselors, especially when the novice takes responsibility for their learning and professional development.

With my grad school in particular, I had been really disappointed with the program. So, I had been doing a lot of outside research beforehand and kind of putting a lot of extra work in. And if I hadn’t put so much time and effort into actually what I consider preparing myself for some real-life situations, I think I would have been a far more behind. [Alex]

Cameron did not have as strong of an opinion, but still noteworthy that they reported, “I think there's a lot that we're taught in our graduate studies that is aligned with what we do as school counselors. But I think there's so much that is left out” and they went on to say that graduate school, “it's so different from what you learn. I think we learn a lot more clinical counseling skills than we do school counseling skills.” Additionally, Drew reported:

grad school, it was different than I expected, but yeah, but I think, you know, it prepared, it prepared me as much as you could. But, but you're never gonna be
fully prepared because things happen that you know, that aren't expected. You can’t … be set up for every situation.

One area participants felt they needed more knowledge was in the area of special education, specifically writing 504 plans. Ezra stated, “we didn’t talk about 504s … during grad school, and that’s maybe because…we weren’t really aware of everything that went into a 504, so maybe we didn’t ask enough questions.” Frances agreed that this was an area of weakness, “I wish I could have been more prepared for that.” Although both Ezra and Frances talked about being more prepared to write 504 plans, Ezra also stated:

there are some things like in grad school you learn a bunch of tools to help kids process through some hard emotions or handle some behavior, things like that, that were helpful. And I think it just took me to realize like, like I had a few moments where I would (pause) where I would be like, oh, my gosh I have no idea what to do with this, but then all it took was kind of like a little reminder to be like, you know what --- you actually, you know, you can do this.

The transition from graduate school can be difficult, and novice school counselors might have many questions they ask themselves about entering the school counseling field, such was the experience with Hollis:

When I first left graduate school and then I went to work in the field I felt like, how do I take what I learned and put it into place here? How does what I learned at school relate to this? Now I'm going to really have to work with people. And am I going to have what I need in place to do this?
Although many participants wanted more learning to occur during graduate school, some recognized that much of what novice school counselors need to know is learned on the job. The transition from being a graduate student to a professional school counselor provided the novices with the opportunity to take ownership of their own continued development. This awareness contributes to novice’s professional identity development as well as their overall professional development.

**Challenging Situations**

There were several challenging situations that participants described related to coping with adversity. These situations ranged from large caseloads, as was the case for Alex when describing being the only counselor in the building: “I have about four hundred and, a little over 400 students right now. I'm kind of, the initial challenges with that is not only do I have all the students myself, but there's only the principal and myself. So there is no other assistant principal, even the athletic director is only part-time” to lack of resources and funding: “It's just what's, with the cost of it and stuff we would have to pay for that.” [Drew]. Cameron reported overseeing five hundred students, Ezra stated, “my first year as a counselor ever, I was here, a building of four hundred and then another building with maybe just under two hundred kids”, and Georgie’s current caseload is about 500 students.

Additionally, novice school counselors were faced with a lot of meetings which pulls them away from time with students. Frances described getting “together weekly to discuss any … specific student situations” with other district helping professionals. This type of meeting may be beneficial, but other meetings were not so productive. Ezra stated
that some of these meetings are only focused on teachers, “Workshop week was kind of, or new teacher orientation was kind of a joke because it's like all for teachers and it didn't really feel relevant to counseling at all.” Drew shared being “in charge of attendance and truancy meetings”. Ezra summed up attending meetings by stating:

I think another thing that I have recently felt a little bit frustrated by is just like all these other things I am a part of, like I don't mind being on all these teams and all these committees and all these things. That's really great for our school too, but then it gets then it pulls me into things like during the school day. And again, it takes away from my time trying to reach kids. Then my list gets longer, longer. So that part gets a little tricky because I want to help. I want to make our school the best it can be. But I also want to reach those kids that just need some one-on-one time, someone to sit down with them just for 10 or 15 minutes. So that can be kind of tricky.

Participants also described working with students with high behavior needs as challenging. Billie, now in their fourth year, recalled, “when I first started, it was probably one of the most difficult years. I had, I had five students who are brand new to the district that year with very severe behaviors, mental illness, lots and lots of trauma.” Another participant described being assaulted by a student their first year and Frances had a difficult first year noting “my first year was very difficult because I had some pretty major cases that came through my way that year. I mean, that were pretty much all surrounding like bullying.” She went on to describe a troubling incident:
I had one parent who is very aggressive. He was a male and he was very aggressive towards me. And he would call me out as being a female. And that was one that stands out in that. Really like sticks out to me because it was just it was I was not expecting that…. So that really helped prepare me for future incidents when I deal with parents who have different views or I don't know or more outwardly going to say something like I've been really able, really focus, unable to keep a poker face in front of them and just really focus on the facts, which I did at that time too. But it just was so interesting dealing with that specific situation. My first year and that was the parent who said that he was going to sue. So that was an interesting experience and I wish, it helped me with my future experiences, because like I said, it just it taught me how to understand different perspectives, but also advocate and stand up for me and what my profession is and who I am as a person.

These situations can be distracting for a novice professional school counselor. Yet, they persist despite the challenges and are always wanting to do their best and be there for the students:

that the hardest thing I think for me is to leave at the end of a week feeling like I wasn't able to reach all the students that I felt like I needed to. And so how to, I think of the idea like, let what you do in a day be enough, but it sometimes feels like there's so many things that pull you from like you have this, the schedule for your day. And I think coming up with that is tricky, like where to fit kids in in your daily schedule and not to pull them from core classes or not to pull them
from certain classes, but to pull them from others. And then how do you see them all? And then when other crises come up or other things come up, then you can't see them. And so you might go a week or two weeks without seeing them and they want to see you. And that's great. And I want to see them, but I think that's one of my biggest challenges is how to be OK with that. [Hollis]

Addressing and facing challenging situations assists novice school counselor’s professional development by providing opportunities to increase professional resolution skills. Overcoming adversity and challenging situations can increase professional self-efficacy and professional identity for novices.

**Sense of Confirmation**

All participants had unique journeys that lead them to the school counseling profession. Each of them shared their stories that confirmed their choice to enter the field. A sense of confirmation assists novices in their professional development through solidifying professional identity. When novices start to see integration and congruency between their personal way of being and their professional behaviors, their choice of profession is confirming. Participants’ stories were about making a difference, ownership, being seen as a professional school counselor, and confidence.

**Making a Difference**

Working with students and helping them to learn and grow has been rewarding for all participants. Cameron, a second-year elementary school counselor explained that even though teachers can be demanding of their time, they stated, “I think it’s a positive
thing, though that they get to see how important it is to have counseling in the school system, and how beneficial it's been for the students.” They went on to say:

I think this year has really mostly overall just been that aha moment when like I have I walk through the hallway every day and all the kids, I don't even know some of their names because I never meet with them and there's so many, but they're always in Ms. ---, Ms. --- and they can't, they get so excited to see you or they want to come talk to you and there you have teachers calling you left and right because the students on come talk to you and tell you whether it's something going on or even a positive.

Drew concurred by stating, “trust that what you’re doing does make a difference.” This resonated with many of the participants sharing, in particular Hollis recalled, “I think the best thing is when I just get to be with the kids and I get to interact with them and I get to be a person that they know cares about them. So, they know that and they can tell that I do.” And Ezra added:

I want kids to feel loved at school and I want them to feel cared about, and for someone to listen to them. And so those kids that are asking me to chat because they know that I'm that person, they know that I'm the person that will listen to them at school and that will care about them and that will love them.

Additionally, Hollis stated, “when you can help a kiddo and encourage them in any way and just be a positive message for them and an encouraging person in their world. I think that's exciting.” Not only did participants see themselves making a difference, they saw students making a difference too:
When I see them reacting or engaging in a really deep way, I just know that there's some meaning there and we're having meaningful conversations. And I can't give myself credit. They're the ones that really take it and give it that depth.

[Georgie]

And in sharing about what has been rewarding, Frances said this about making a difference:

The rewards that I have is just working individually with the students, like seeing their progress, working with the family. It's like, you know helping them get supports in place, talking through issues. And just like my day to day, like getting to work with students in a variety of different areas. I mean, sometimes it can be easy as like test anxiety, or it can be as difficult as like school refusal due to their anxiety. So just to constantly change and problem solving. But then also coming up with a plan is very rewarding to support everyone involved.

Making a difference assists novice professional school counselors in developing a sense of professional identity by affirming the connection between demonstrating professional behaviors and student success. Knowing that students’ lives are positively impacted by the services novice school counselors provide increases the feeling of pursuing the right career.

Ownership

Participants credited part of their development to taking ownership of their programs and their role as a professional school counselor, even when they were isolated, as Alex stated, “I think part of what shaped my development so much is just having to
realize how kind of isolated I am out here as a counselor. And beyond me calling or e-mailing other counselors from other schools, I've really had to kind of, you know, find my own way and find my own path and be very confident and be willing to do that.”

They went on to say:

I think a lot of it has just been trial by fire. I think very quickly, within a month or so of my job, I very much had to kinda just accept that, like, all right, I'm gonna have to be in charge. I have to run with this” and then stated, “I think being the only school counselor in the school has been a huge strength as far as forcing myself to be ready and able to handle it. And I'm kind of just fake it until I make it.

Regarding setting up their own program, Billie described it stating:

My first year especially, I was brand new learning the school, I had some teachers were used to the old way because before my position we had a social worker do my position, and so he did it one way, and then I came in and I did a school counselor way. And so it was just a lot harder for everyone to kind of get used to me in the building.

They continued to say, “And then I came here and you're kind of your own. So it's like, oh, ok, so now I got to do my own thing and set up my own program because it was really set up that way here.” Other participants might agree that you need to set up your own program:

The counselor that had been there before me was there for 13 years. And, and these were the words of the people that knew her since I did not. They said that
she kind of was starting to get burnt out in the last several years of her career. So the teachers at my last school had a pretty negative perception of school counseling and were not really open to getting to know me or listen to ideas, which was an interesting challenge. And compared to this school, so this this school, I have the opposite problem. So the counselor that was there was there for about four years and he was very beloved. So right off the bat, they wanted me to be (laughs) as experienced and knowledgeable as him because he was there for four years. But he had been a counselor for seven plus years. And I'm starting off as an educator, so there's things that I told them, you know, I don't know or I'm not confident in yet. So, I think that people had to kind of adjust their expectation of school counseling to kind of remediate for me since I am still new.

[Georgie]

Ezra had this to say about not being idle in your first year as a school counselor, rather, actively setting up your own program:

because I feel like sometimes maybe I do this too, counselors just like might float through the first year. And all they're trying to do is just keep their head above water when really they could be a little bit more proactive with that and asking all those questions from the very beginning…You're on island by yourself and you have to figure it out. So, don't go ask like what did the old counselor do, but maybe rather establish what what do you what do you see for me? What are the expectations for me as a counselor and how can I meet the needs here at school? … I need to figure out what we're going to do. What's the plan going to be? What
strategies are we going to use for this kid? And then I just needed to take, take a step back and realize like, no, I'm prepared for this, I've done things like this.

Like Ezra, once her program was established, Cameron commented:

Finally, I get to see my work and see the students listening and practicing the skills that we're going through. And I think I mean, it's motivating to continue to do that as well, because you get to see the kids that are so excited about it or, you know, they leave your office happier and are able to repeat what you're saying. I think that's the coolest part, and it's, when you can see that happening.

Taking ownership of and developing their counseling program increased novice school counselors’ professional identity. When novices expand their skills and knowledge to create comprehensive programs, they are demonstrating professional leadership and putting student needs at the forefront of their work. Professional development occurs when novices feel supported and have the resources to deliver their own comprehensive program effectively.

*Seen as a Professional School Counselor*

Another boost to having a sense of confirmation was being seen as a Professional School Counselor. This is demonstrated in Billie’s narrative:

One story in particular is my very first conference I ever had. I was invited to a conference and I barely knew the student because I had just started. I knew him a little bit and I had to tell mom and dad, you know, we really need to look at special ed for your student just because there are so many behaviors. And they were very emotional about that. At that moment, I was like, ok, so I'm the school
counselor in this, you know, I'm breaking the news, and this is how we have to help them. I felt like that really started like, ok, I'm the professional, I understand behavior, you know, this is what I'm supposed to do.

This experience led this participant to feel more self-assured talking to parents, stating she felt more confident:

talking to them about their students or their child. So, I just feel like the more you're in this role, the more you're involved in the school, it really helps you personally. Just to be more competent in your role.

Other participants described being seen as a professional school counselor as being rewarding, especially when students report difficult issues, such as sexual assault. Alex talked about it this way:

I think, five or so sexual assaults that I've been the first adult that the students have told. And as an adult male, I mean, I always empower the kids so much, I'm so impressed with them. As a young teenage girl, to be able to tell an adult male about a sexual assault takes a lot of a lot of strength because that's the last person if I were in their shoes I'd want to talk to about such issues. I think there's just a lot of unreported concerns that the kids just have, and who to reach out to and how to do that. That has been a really nice, rewarding.

Georgie, a second-year elementary school counselor, saw themself as a resource, stating, “once I checked my mailbox and saw how many students were reaching out to me, I think that was my moment of realizing like, yep, this is real, this is legitimate. These kids
see me as a resource to help them through the things.” And Frances also saw themself as a resource while playing a connecting role:

it's like really that connecting piece, like like I'm working with all these different like I'm working with the teachers, I'm working with the parents, I'm working with administration. And that's like kind of like, oh my gosh, I am like the connecting piece to all these different areas are all these different people and areas and things like this to, you know, so it's just like the student that I'm working with. So that's just really interesting is you're that like you're that middleman…, well, that's great like, you know, I'm the school counselor. So, I am like that, like, I'm kind of like connecting piece, like the blob in the middle of all the the things or whatever. Like I'm that person. And that's just interesting. And I feel like that's been really like my, OK, yup, this is this is my role, and this is kind of where I can help in a variety of different ways.

Cameron stated they felt that following the ethical codes and being a trustworthy person was important to being seen as a professional school counselor, stating:

it's shaping me to be that professional who is a trustworthy person and not, you know, I feel trustworthy to everyone in life and that people can come into me and trust me. Where that trust is a huge thing, it's earned, it's not given. And I think it's so important to have that. But by following what I need to do as a counselor in those ethical codes and such and doing what I feel is best, I think creates that trust and that respect that you get as a professional.
Finally, for Hollis, their family also solidified their sense of confirmation by seeing them as a counselor:

once I started this position, then they “say my mom is a counselor”. And I think that was interesting too, just the, you know, maybe the effect it had on my family, too, and then them saying something like that (laughs). Yes, I don't know. But I think that was a moment where I thought, yep, here I am. But I think too this in when there are certain situations, and you step up to reach out to the teacher and you reach out to the parent and support that kiddo. I think moments like that on a regular basis have been influential for sure. And in saying, like yeah, this is what I'm doing.

Being seen as a professional increases novice school counselor professional identity through bolstering confidence. Confidence and competence aid in the successful implementation of a school counseling programs and effective delivery of services, which in turn contributes to student success.

Confidence

Although confidence showed up in other themes, it was apparent that the word “confidence” was an essential aspect of each participant’s development. Experience contributed to confidence, “I feel like I'm more confident now, especially my fourth year in of being a school counselor and knowing kind of what to do, because I've had past experiences now [Billie], having one year under the belt, “I just feel I feel more relaxed (laughs) in the job duties that I have because I've been through year one like last year” [Drew], and student responses, “seeing students reaction to regular classroom guidance.
That right there gives me all the confidence in the world because they're the ones that I need to make an impression on.” [Georgie]

For Cameron, a new environment was what they needed:

   going into this year and being in a new building and district, it was kind of like a refresh. I think that my view on everything has changed a lot and I've had a lot more confidence going in and able to feel like I'm ready and able to be successful as a counselor. Whereas last year, just I think it's a lot of the confidence, I didn't feel confident as I do now.”

And sometimes being able to handle the difficult and challenging situations builds confidence:

   So I had to do research and just, you know, a lot of a lot of hats I never expected to wear as a school counselor once I realized I had to throw all that stuff on top of what I was already doing I've just kind of just decided, like, you know, a lot of time get through all that, then there's nothing really else they can throw at me that is going to surprise me or that I don't feel like I can handle. So just really a lot of that trial by fire, fire and a lot of long, long days and coming through on the other end. (pause) I'm still in my second year, so I wouldn’t, I don’t know if I'd call myself an expert, but definitely I feel very confident in my ability. [Alex]

Not every novice develops confidence so quickly. One participant described having really low confidence in their first year, partly due to being shy and partly due to having high expectations for themself. Ezra reported:
feeling way more comfortable with lots and lots of teachers here has really helped me feel just more confident in my role and now as new teachers are starting, I feel like I can reach out for them with more confidence and start that relationship building sooner and quicker so that we both are kind of on the same page and it doesn't take a whole year to figure that person out and for them to figure me out. I would say, definitely moving from novice to more, more set counselor would be just the confidence I feel in relationships.

Hollis also reported not feeling as assertive as they are now. They also described being more hesitant to advocate for students during their first year as a school counselor. They went on to talk about how adverse situations contributed to her confidence:

I think every experience that I have and we we work through, you know. So I'm thinking, you know like angry parents, you work through it and you do your best to to listen and to provide support and and to stay up when they just keep sending mean messages or something. So then you make it through those kinds of situations and you've got them on your team and (laughs) you, that feels like, that is something to put, you know, add to my collection (laughs) of being more concrete in my professional identity.

Finally, they added:

I've had a challenging teacher events or circumstances and parent circumstances and, you know, utilizing this, the counseling skills and really listening to what they need to say and then expressing my position and my perspective. And every
time that one of those happens and I move through it successfully, I feel like I just
grow stronger in what I'm doing. [Hollis]

Based on their reports, confidence seemed to grow for each participant every year.
It appears that when novice school counselors gain experience, their confidence and
competence increase, as does their professional identity. Feeling supported and having
access to resources, such as other professionals, professional organizations, and
professional trainings, increases confidence and professional identity and development.

Commitment to Increasing One’s Expertise

Most of the participants agreed that growing and developing professionally takes
time and experience. Although participants were new to professional school counseling,
they recognized they were professionally developing each year and learning more over
time. They also understood that to continue learning, there needed to be a commitment to
increasing one’s expertise. Participants focused on learning through reflection,
supervision, continuing education, and membership on various teams and organizations.

Reflection

Evaluation and observation are typically required for teachers, but not always for
school counselors. The information provided through evaluation and observation can
provide a school counselor valuable insight regarding what areas they could focus on to
continue their development. Cameron reflected on being evaluated versus not being
evaluated:

Last year I was not evaluated. I, from my understanding, there was not even a
system really of, well, no, there was I have to remember, I, I think that there was
like at one point I wrote goals and then I was finishing the goals, but there wasn't a structured meeting where I think my principal only saw me once sat in on a counseling session… But this year there are very structured, they use teach point and we had to create goals right away, we do a new teacher meeting once a month and I've had three evaluations already where this was either come into my classroom lessons, group or individual setting and provided feedback, which I found very helpful because I mean, even though he says I'm doing a great job and everything, but it's still there is always something that you can take away from that. And in order to grow as a as a counselor and as a professional, I mean, you have to have that. And I didn't know last year what I was and wasn't doing. Now I look back at even my second year and being in a different building, different district, I'm like, oh, my gosh, are so many things I could have done differently to be more successful and be more successful with the students as well, and I think a lot of that is because of the evaluation.

Ezra agrees that evaluation and observation are helpful, “I actually really liked the observation system because I feel like I too feel like my groups and lessons are pretty solid. And it's nice to get feedback in other areas that might be more difficult to observe.” She described having an intern, which put her in the position of being the evaluator, processing their own development in parallel with processing their intern’s development: I think another thing that's helped my development too, is having an intern this year. It's amazing how much like you, you self-reflect, and you are more aware of yourself when you have someone watching your every move. (laughs) So I think
that's definitely helped me along the way. During this third year as well, just having that experience and then asking her to reflect on how things are going. But then also I'm able to reflect my thoughts with her and that that's been really helpful and definitely helped me develop even more yet this year.

Hollis also was observed:

the beginning of the year we had a kind of a check in, what are your goals and what are your plans for the year? And what students are you currently seeing or what do you plan to do with students? So, I checked in with him in the fall for goal setting and then I had some monitoring.

They are also part of the teacher inclusion program stating, “I also have a mentor who is the high school counselor that we meet once a month for the program. And then weekly she and I connect with one another.” But Hollis’ most prominent reflection related to development was focusing on self-care. This reflection was inner evaluation compared to the external observation by others:

I think my big thing is self-care and it's not so easy to do always. But it's so important and I think when I first started in the counseling field, somebody said years ago, somebody said, make sure you make time for lunch and when I haven't done that, my body gets really worn out. So it's a hard thing sometimes to implement, but it's so important. I think in this field, so that I would encourage people listening to what their body is telling them and taking care of whatever the need is. And taking a lunch break just so that you can have, you know, like maybe
go to a different spot than your office just to clear your mind, cause it's, there's a lot of heavy, emotional things that occur.

Reflection for the participants occurred during formal and information observations and evaluations, and through internal self-evaluations. For one participant, it included reflection through supervising an intern, which provided parallel processes for the novice professional school counselor and the supervisee. Reflecting assisted participants in setting goals in which to focus on their continued development toward expertise.

**Supervision**

Supervision for novice professional school counselors occurs in many forms. The most common supervision is administrative and is typically delivered by a principal (Bultsma, 2012; Dollarhide & Miller, 2006; Fye et al, 2018; Wilson et al., 2015). Peer supervision and clinical supervision are not required for school counselors but would be beneficial in assisting professional growth and development. Although half of the participants indicated they were receiving clinical supervision, it is suspected that the supervision being received is more administrative in nature.

Being able to process situations and asking questions of a supervisor was helpful for a few of the participants. “There was a time I got to meet with our elementary lead and so I sat down with her for a couple hours and just talk through some things and she answered a bunch of my questions and that was the most helpful thing in the three and a half days of training.” [Ezra]. For Alex, the principal served as a supervisor:
I felt very fortunate that me and the principal do get along extremely well, which has made what has been a very taxing kind of chaotic changes with all this other stuff that it's been it's been really, really nice to have somebody that I can rely on, and we all I think I very much have similar thought processes of doing things intentional, and that's fairly good.

Hollis, who is in a doctoral program and has previous experience in the mental health field, has a professional clinical supervisor, which has been beneficial:

Dr. ____ has agreed to be a supervisor for me throughout the year. Um, he is my advisor, so we check in on dissertation. But we, he also has been a supervisor for me for just some hours, collecting hours for certain things. But he, that has been amazing, too.

Hollis is a Licensed Professional Counselor in addition to being licensed as a Professional School Counselor. Clinical supervision is required for them to apply for the next level of licensure as a mental health professional. With mental health services becoming a priority for school counselors, it seems appropriate for the profession to require clinical supervision to help school counselors process difficult cases, especially for novice school counselors.

Frances, a second-year middle school counselor who identified as experienced, wished they could have continued contact with their cohort from graduate school to help them process difficult situations, “I wish I had more information on or I wish you almost had like, like an extra they can extend a year of once you start working that you could kind of do a cohort like with your cohort and reconvene and talk about some of the things
that you're going through to get some other advice and information.” This type of peer supervision would seem to be beneficial in assisting school counselors with their professional development. In describing situations that they could use this support for implementing skills and interventions:

But it's so different when it's like, like during it, like when you're in the midst of it, like when you're in the that that time where you really need like you just need to pick someone's brain. And then when you get that information later, you're like, oh, OK, I see how I can use this. But then when you put it into, when you put it into effect, it's just so different than what you thought. So it's almost like I wish you could have real life experiences. And those meetings are when you're doing the professional development, because it's different when you hear about it and your thoughts are like, oh, yeah, I can use it in this way, this way, in this way. And then when you use it, it's looks differently than what you thought.

[Frances]

These supervisory connections are important and can provide opportunities for professional growth and development, noting:

I think that to have somebody to connect with is so important in the field too, so I feel blessed that I have two other counselors, social worker people that we meet, I have --- as a supervisor. I think it would be lovely if people could have a supervisor or their own counselor to visit with to debrief. But, but finding somebody to connect with for that, I think is really important. [Hollis]
Participants recognized the value of supervision but may not have a clear understanding of the types of supervision; administrative, clinical, and peer. Administrative supervision is the most typical type of supervision that school counselors receive. Based on the known definition, administrative supervision is what most of the participants who indicated they were receiving supervision are receiving. This type of supervision covers school-related expectations and goals, but does not provide counselors with the opportunity to brainstorm and share ideas which peer supervision would provide, nor does it provide the opportunity to explore professional growth and skill development as clinical supervision would provide.

**Continuing Education**

Continuing education provided learning opportunities for many of the participants. Conferences, professional development days, and workshops allow school counselors to learn about skills, interventions, and best practices in the field. This is an important aspect of continuing to learn and grow, and to increasing expertise. Cameron shared one experience they had in their district:

I'm glad that they require us to do those CEUs because, like we just had one over President's Day on cultural competency and it was a poverty simulation and being able to experience that, that it was with the high school staff members. But we were given cards and we were created into a family and told these are the bills that we had and such. And to be able to learn and put ourselves in those experiences or continuing to do research and such really, I think helps us grow because nothing is going to stay the same. Even from the beginning of the year to
the end of the year time, society, everything's changing. So, I think it's so important that they keep us continuously learning, which helps our development as it, even as a counselor.

Another participant agreed that continuing education is beneficial:

Going to a lot of conferences have helped. Talking to other counselors have really helped… I just went to one for child of children's mental health in November and that was fantastic. So, I try to go to a lot of conferences and try to connect with the school counselors around here. That helps a lot, too, especially if I'm stuck on, like, what do you do? [Billie]

Ezra described professional development opportunities, such as their regional counseling association meetings and mini-conferences, mental health conferences, and district trainings as being helpful. Additionally, they reported:

another piece of professional development that I'm trying to use more of it is like taking more courses, like ASCA, ASCA offers some courses and some other people have taken some like grad school courses. So, I'm thinking about doing more of that too, just to continuously learn there's like best practice updates. I feel like all the time. So, what can I, what can I be doing to stay up to date on those things and learning more and more and more? Because kids’ mental health continues to struggle, technology continues to increase, behaviors are increasing. Also, what am I doing too to keep up to date with that and really to help with that. [Ezra]
Georgie agreed stating “hearing other counselors present on topics relative to me and my level, you know hearing their experiences, having their takeaways, that for me was the most beneficial because they talk to you as people actually in the field.” Additionally, Hollis declared:

we had a cultural awareness, cultural competency staff development presentation.

I think those are, are wonderful. So that absolutely, you know, provides me reminders of things and I mean, those (pause) so they add to my knowledge, my awareness of the professional position.

The school counseling profession is ever-changing, and it is imperative to stay current with trends and best practices. Continuing education is required in many states to renew a professional school counseling license, as it provides school counselors opportunities to continue their learning and professional development and contributes to increasing expertise and efficacy within the field.

Membership

Many of the participants were members of educational teams, such as PBIS team, Leadership team, and Student Support team. Being part of a team allows novice school counselors to connect with others, which is relational. It provides opportunities to gain experience as a leader, collaborate, and share their knowledge. Membership also included belonging to state and national organizations specifically for school counselors.

Ezra described their first year being a member of the problem-solving team:

I maybe didn’t say as much because I was brand new, and I was still kind of getting my feet wet and figuring out how this whole system worked. But I think
after more and more meetings I was able to understand how that really works, how people interact and really, just like learn this, picked up a little bit more confidence, like I can I can contribute to this conversation and feel good about it, I know something, I know a strategy to help with that, I can help with that plan, I can create that chart. You know, things like that. So I think those experiences along the way with each meeting really helps build my confidence as well.

Frances is a member of a counseling team, and they had this to say:

Working as a team has been interesting, like to be able to have different ideas, but then also being OK with developing your own program within the counseling program. I am very different than the other two counselors, and they're different than me and I think that's great. But just being OK with that difference in that we approach things differently. So that's been another experience that's been helpful for me, and I feel like I've done a pretty good job at developing a pretty good counseling program at our school with the help of the other counselors. But we are very different, and we like to do things differently. And just being OK with that has been a learning experience and something that I value, and I've taken away.

Other participants were members of organizations. This included their state school counseling association and their annual conference:

the school counselor association in my state, that has endless resources for me. I mean, they have vendors that sell school counseling books, they have vendors that can talk to you about updates on the curriculum you're using, a lot of these other
school counseling professionals, they have resources that they will align with the ASCA standards and they align with state standards. So that for me is just like, I don't know, the best opportunity. [Georgie]

It also included ASCA, the ASCA National Model, and the ASCA website, as Hollis stated, “I've looked on ASCA’s website many times to find a number of things.” When Billie, who has a caseload of 500 elementary students, needs to create classroom lessons, explaining:

I use the ASCA model, especially when I'm doing my classroom lessons… to try to figure out like what the classrooms need, …because a lot of times one classroom needs one type of help for social, emotional and another classroom is another, so just using ASCA model to help with that.

Cameron also utilizes the ASCA model reporting, “that's one thing I've really tried to look at during every lesson planning that I do for each month.” Adding:

I want to have all my documentation. So if something were to come up, right now, I'm asked at the end of the year, how are you a benefit to our school that I can follow and then also have that documentation like this is the ASCA model, this is how I followed it. So, I feel like I've done a pretty good job of trying to really remember and stick to that, too.

Participants were members of many school-based teams and professional organizations. Membership provided novices with experiences to develop their leadership skills and to assist with their professional identity. Professional development
opportunities through membership seem necessary when committing to increasing one’s expertise.

**Supports and Resources**

Participants shared many supports and resources that were utilized to assist in their professional development. These supports and resources include three categories: people, experiences, and organizations/teams. The sixteen subthemes are represented within these categories and presented in Figure 3. For example, the subthemes Relationship with Principal and Connecting with Others are related to people, the subthemes Collaboration, Past Experiences, Conflict, and Challenging Situations are related to experiences, and the subthemes Membership and Ownership are related to organizations/teams. Figure 2 represents a listing of various people, experiences, and organizations/teams that were reported as supports and resources.
Figure 2. Through the analysis of interviews with eight novice professional school counselors, supports and resources were identified that assisted novice professional school counselors with their professional development. These supports and resources are listed in three categories: people, experiences, and organizations/teams.

People

When asked which supports and resources assisted participants with their professional development, all participants identified people as supports and resources that assist with their professional development, specifically their Principals. Additionally,
Alex cited, “interacting with the professionals” and “I utilize (name of MH center), … the outside school program, a lot”. Supports included utilizing school-based mental health counselors for suicide checklists and how to work with certain types of mental health issues. Billie identified “my Special Education Department,” and Cameron shared “colleagues…are your biggest assets to continuing to learn and get those resources too”. Drew stated, “I still have contact with my supervisor and staff” from her internship site, and Ezra added teachers to the list of resources and supports that have helped her move from feeling novice to feeling more self-assured. Frances shared, “knowing the right people and where to go for the information” has contributed to her self-assurance as a school counselor. Georgie identified a school psychologist who “has proven to be the best resource, best sounding board,” and Hollis shared she connects with other school counselors to gain resources and support, as did Alex, Drew, Ezra, Frances, and Georgie. Some of the participants worked with other school counselors in their building or district, while others reached out to school counselors from other districts.

The subthemes related to the supports and resources category of people are listed in Figure 3. Each of these subthemes identify people who are supports and/or resources for the novice professional school counselor and assist with their professional development. The category of People is inclusive of supports within and outside of the school building including, principals, school helping professionals, teachers, students, mental health therapists, former supervisors, and caregivers.
Experiences

Experiences also contributed to participant’s professional development. Supports and resources for Alex included utilizing the ASCA website, free videos, and online chats. Alex also stated “doing research” assisted in moving from novice to more self-assured. Billie shared going to counselor meetings, going to conferences, reading books to find interventions, specifically the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) to investigate mental illness and symptoms, the ASCA Model, knowing about trauma and bullying, and mindfulness are resources and supports she relies on to assist with her professional development. Cameron also utilizes the ASCA Model and the internet, such as Google.

Experiences ranged from debriefing with a principal (Alex) and asking a lot of questions (Drew) to being assaulted by a student (Cameron). Billie described working with trauma as “eye opening” and Georgie experienced conflict and needing to stand “by what I believed as an advocate”. Ezra, Frances, and Hollis shared their experiences with their new role by exploring “how do I take what I learned and put it into place here?”, moving to understanding that “this is my role”, “where I can help in a variety of ways”, and “I’m just going to do it and move on and get to as many kids as I can”. These experiences lead participants to “trust what you are doing does make a difference”.

The subthemes related to the supports and resources category of experiences are listed in Figure 3. Each of these subthemes identify experiences that are supports and/or resources for the novice professional school counselor and assist with their professional development. The category contains a wide range of experiences includes attending
conferences, district trainings, mentoring, previous job experience, and ASCA Professional Development. Also included are more difficult experiences related to conflict, challenging situations, and figuring out the role of the school counselor.

**Organizations/Teams**

Organizations and teams provided novices with supports and resources to grow professionally. Drew is a member of the state counselor association and believes this to be a valuable resource. Ezra agreed that the state counselor association mini conference in fall and spring is a good resource to “branch out and see what other districts are doing”. Additionally, the state Mental Health conference is a good resource for Ezra expressing, “I pick up things along the way from all of those different experiences”, including district professional development and graduate courses.

Frances stated they are, “learning every single day, there’s something new all the time”, through the state counselor association, Facebook groups for school counselors, district training experiences, and articles related to school counseling. Georgie also utilizes the state school counselor association and conference. She depends on ethics books and ASCA. Hollis stated, “I look for information all the time”, utilizing books, websites, the internet, and ASCA.

The subthemes related to the supports and resources category of organizations/teams are listed in Figure 3. Each of these subthemes identify organizations or teams who are supports and/or resources for novice professional school counselors and assist with their professional development. The category of Organizations/Teams
includes ASCA, Leadership Teams, Professional Learning Communities, and State Counseling Associations.

Each supports and resources category tied into the subthemes that emerged from the interview data. Participants shed light on supports and resources that assisted in their professional development through sharing their lived experiences. While Figure 2 highlighted the list from the three categories: People, Experiences, and Organizations/Teams, Figure 3 highlights the mapping of the sixteen subthemes to the Supports and Resources categories. Many subthemes fall within two or all three of the categories. This demonstrates the overlap and interwoven relationships between the subthemes and the supports and resources categories. Therefore, demonstrating it takes multiple types of supports and resources to assist novice school counselors with their professional development.
Figure 3

Supports and Resources Mapping to Subthemes

Figure 3. The subthemes from the analysis are mapped to the supports and resources categories: people, experiences, and organizations/teams.
Summary

Four overarching themes (sources of influence, coping with adversity, sense of confirmation, and commitment to increasing ones’ expertise) emerged through the analysis of the data. Additionally, four subthemes fell under each theme (see Figure 1). These themes captured the participants’ lived experiences as novice professional school counselors and shed light on the resources and supports utilized to assist with their professional development. The collective findings were provided in this chapter, along with a section specifically highlighting the supports and resources the eight participants shared during their interviews.

The first theme was sources of influence. Participants shared unique experiences with principals, connecting with others, collaboration, and past experiences. The second theme, coping with adversity, was a theme throughout the participants’ stories, particularly concerning defining roles, conflict, disillusionment with graduate school, and challenging situations. The third theme indicated how participants experienced a sense of confirmation, which presented itself through issues around making a difference, ownership, being seen as a Professional School Counselor, and confidence. The fourth theme indicated participants had a level of commitment to increasing one’s expertise. This was further supported through the subthemes of reflection, supervision, continuing education, and membership. Additionally, three categories of supports and resources were highlighted (People, Experiences, and Organizations/Teams) and mapped to the themes and subthemes in Figure 3.
The next and final chapter will provide further discussion of the themes, subthemes, and supports and resource categories referencing and expanding upon existing research. Results will be compared to existing literature, which will include new understanding of the lived experiences of novice professional school counselors and the supports and resources utilized to assist with their professional development. Limitations to this study and implications for future research as well as for practice in the fields of school counseling and counselor education and supervision will be addressed.
CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

A review of the study will be shared, along with the implications of the findings detailed in the previous chapter. In the previous chapter, four overarching themes were outlined with four subthemes that emerged from the data and analysis of all eight participants’ interviews. The themes and subthemes emerged as follows:

Theme: Sources of influence

Subthemes: Relationship with Principal, Connecting with Others, Collaboration, Past Experiences

Theme: Coping with Adversity

Subthemes: Defining Roles, Conflict, Disillusionment with Graduate School, Challenging Situations

Theme: Sense of Confirmation

Subthemes: Making a Difference, Ownership, Seen as a Professional School Counselor, Confidence

Theme: Commitment to Increasing One’s Expertise

Subthemes: Reflection, Supervision, Continuing Education, Membership

The first overarching theme focused on the supports utilized as a novice professional school counselor, more specifically, the sources of influence for each participant. The second and third overarching themes were specific to participants’ role as a professional school counselor and included coping with adversity and developing a sense of confirmation. The fourth theme that emerged was commitment to increasing one’s
expertise. An additional section was developed that described the supports and resources that assisted novice school counselors’ professional development, as this study sought to identify these supports and resources, along with better understanding the novice school counselors lived experience.

Triangulation of this study’s findings with existing published literature in the field of professional school counseling and professional identity development is examined in this chapter. Furthermore, discussion of the findings supported by existing literature will be shared, as will new understandings of how novice professional school counselors experience their development and the supports and resources they utilize to assist in their professional development. Limitations of this study, along with recommendations for future research and practice in the fields of school counseling and counselor education and supervision will conclude this chapter.

**Review of Study**

This qualitative study was conducted utilizing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to explore the overarching research question: What are the lived experiences of novice school counselors? Further, this study sought to examine the reported supports and resources that assist novice professional school counselors in their professional development. Eight novice school counselors were interviewed related to their lived experience as beginning school counselors and the resources and supports that assist with their professional development. This study was conducted utilizing the constructivist paradigm, adhering to a relativist position. Additionally, the theoretical framework that guided this research dissertation included the Rønnestad & Skovholt life-span
developmental model, the Integrative Psychological Developmental Supervision Model proposed by Lambie and Sias (2009), and the Multicultural Perspective in Therapy: A Social Constructivist Approach proposed by Gonzalez, Biever, and Gardner (1994).

**Review of the Findings**

This study sought to gain insight into the lived experiences of novice professional school counselors and to shed light on reported supports and resources that assist novice school counselors in their professional development during their first years in the profession. In this study, I used an Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) approach as guided by Smith et al. (2009) to explore the lived experiences of eight Professional School Counselors to gain an understanding of their development during their beginning years in the field of school counseling. I conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants to answer the overarching research question investigating the lived experiences of novice professional school counselors. Further, this study examined the reported supports and resources that assist novice professional school counselors in their professional development. The results represent the participants in this study and yielded four themes: sources of influence, coping with adversity, sense of confirmation, and commitment to increasing one’s expertise. Additionally, sixteen subthemes developed from those themes: relationship with principal, connecting with others, collaboration, past experiences, defining roles, conflict, disillusionment with graduate school, challenging situations, making a difference, ownership, seen as a professional school counselor, confidence, reflection, supervision, continuing education, and membership (Figure 1 in Chapter 4).
In the following section, each theme will be detailed by discussing the findings, as well as how the themes and the identified supports and resources support existing research. Where these findings and existing research do not coincide, light will be shed on new understanding of novice professional school counselor experiences.

**Sources of Influence**

Each participant identified influences that impacted their experience as a novice professional school counselor. These influences yielded four subthemes that include relationship with principal, connecting with others, collaboration, and past experiences. This supports the eighth theme of the Rønnestad and Skovholt (2013) model of development, which suggests interpersonal, more than impersonal, sources of influence create professional development. Having a professional relationship with and feeling supported by the principal was one key source for participants. Participants described when they experienced a positive relationship with their principal, and they felt they could discuss situations with them and “bounce ideas” off of them. This relationship allowed participants to feel “fortunate” and that they could “confide” in their principal.

This outcome coincides with research that found principals who value counselors look at what counselors add to the school system related to servicing students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the entire school community (Dollarhide et al., 2007). Additionally, while professional school counselors should keep in mind that principals are in charge of the schools (Henderson & Gysbers, 1998), building effective relationships with principals is crucial if counselors are to become effective change agents within schools; even though they have separate roles in schools, they both work
toward common goals. When school counselors and principals collaborate by joining forces through leadership and advocacy, they positively impact academic success and climate of the school (Boyland et al., 2019; Dahir et al., 2010; Stone & Clark, 2001).

One factor that can impact student outcome in schools is school climate (Rock et al., 2017). When school counselors collaborate with principals to focus on improving school climate, informed decisions can be made regarding interventions and delivery of services through collection and analysis of student achievement data (Militello & Janson, 2007; Rock et al., 2017; Stone & Clark, 2001). Thus, creating an alliance that is most effective for meeting students’ needs through comprehensive programming (ASCA, 2019b; McCarty et al., 2014). The overall school climate can be positively influenced, thus increasing student achievement when leadership teams collaborate by combining the skill sets of principals and school counselors, (Rock et al., 2017).

Participants also stressed the importance of connecting with others, including teachers, other professionals, parents, and students. Professional school counselors are in a unique position to work collaboratively with all school personnel and to interact with students, parents, and the community to remove barriers to student academic achievement (Stone & Dahir, 2016).

The connections described by participants can lead to collaboration. Participants reported “being lucky” to work collaboratively with teachers and other professionals to “figure out” what to do for students. The increased focus on collaboration in the school by the American School Counselor Association highlights the importance of school counselors connecting through collaboration with stakeholders to support academic
success for all students (ASCA, 2019a). Furthermore, developmental school counseling programs are built on the foundation of collaboration (Keys & Green, 2005). School counselors value connection through collaboration and consultative endeavors, which “multiplies and extends the reach of their school counseling program (Peed & Stevens, 2020, p. 98). Sink and Yillik-Downer (2001) discovered that counselors in the initial phase of implementing a comprehensive counseling program had significantly higher collaboration and higher task and impact concerns than counselors in later stages of program development, and counselors with less than five years of experience reported higher needs for collaboration (Sink & Yillik-Downer, 2001).

Collaboration also extends to working with students in collaborative ways. Gibbons et al. (2010) found 87 percent of professional school counselors in their study reported collaborating with students. Additionally, a safe environment where youth feel safe enough to empower themselves aids collaboration efforts between school counselors and students (Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010). Gonzalez et al. (1994) presented their collective experience for counseling clients with different cultural backgrounds through a social constructionism lens. The fourth focus of the Gonzalez et al. (1994) model outlined collaboration between the student and counselor. The model allows for searching mutually to generate alternate ideas and to expand behavioral options for creating solutions to problems, rather than on a one-up/one-down relationship. Additionally, collaboration between the student and counselor focuses on a balanced relationship with equal power (Gonzalez et al., 1994).
Another source of influence was past experiences. Participants described how practicing beyond the requirements of graduate school “really prepared” them for the field and how “all of my studies and experiences prior” contribute to the congruency between what they thought the job would be and what it actually was. Participants also noted how working with students with trauma “has really, kind of, opened my eyes,” and previous work in the mental health field or in residential treatment helped to prepare them as well. Participants’ responses here advance the literature since little existing research has discovered or discussed the influence of past experiences.

The theme Sources of Influence highlighted the importance of novice school counselors building a relationship with their principal and connecting with others. These relationships set the foundation for strong collaboration and lead to a positive school climate and enhanced student achievement. Past experiences influenced novice school counselors by providing prior opportunities to learn and grow and experiences in which to draw upon, which in turn added to the novices’ professional development. Research related to past experiences and the contribution it can make to the beginning school counselor’s professional identity and professional development is an area yet to be explored. This study highlighted past experiences as being important to novice school counselor professional development. The next theme, Coping with Adversity, highlights how difficulties can contribute to the novices’ growth and development.

Coping with Adversity

Coping with adverse situations can be difficult. Defining the role of a professional school counselor was challenging for each participant and emerged as a subtheme.
Participants described job duties ranging from setting up clothing swaps to planning for the ACT. Many faced high caseloads comprised of students with significant mental health needs, and often filling in for the principal when they are not available. “Wearing a lot of hats” was a common description and performing “non-counselor” or “social work” duties was sometimes, if not often, asked of participants. There has been a discrepancy between what is considered best practice regarding school counselors’ role and what they actual do, which has been a major issue for the profession for many years (ASCA, 2020; Hatch & Chen-Hayes, 2008; Holman et al., 2019; Kim & Lambie, 2018; Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008). When school counselors integrate the ASCA standards into their comprehensive programs they are more satisfied with their practice (Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008). Specifically, the ASCA model provides a framework to help school counselors do their job in a more defined and accountable way (ASCA, 2019b). Higher levels of school counselor-facilitated services focused on improving academic success, personal and social development, and career and college readiness positively impacts students’ educational experience and academic outcomes (Carey & Dimmitt, 2012; Dimmitt & Wilkerson, 2012; Wilkerson et al., 2013). Knowing this, it would behoove novice school counselors to implement and follow the ASCA National Model (2019b), thus providing novice school counselors a more clearly delineated role and perhaps a framework that supports the work they have been trained to provide.

School administrators do not typically understand the roles of school counselors, nor do they understand the interpersonal and mental health issues that need to be addressed by school counselors (Herlihy et al., 2002). Additionally, role ambiguity
experienced by professional school counselors is due in part to the fact that over the decades, the professional roles, responsibilities, and expectations of school counselors has shifted to adapt to changing educational philosophies, federal legislations, and societal needs (Borders, 2002; DeKruyf et al., 2013). Monteiro-Leitner et al. (2006) stated differing perceptions or role confusion can be traced to the early 1950s and remains an issue. This role confusion is based tripartite, including failure of supervisors and school officials to understand or agree on the role of counselors; power differences among school officials make it difficult for counselors to standardize their role; and variable levels of student needs determined by communities and socio-economic status (Monteiro-Leitner et al., 2006).

Performing inappropriate or non-guidance related tasks significantly affects school counselors’ professional satisfaction (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006). Unclear definitions of the school counselor role can lead to unclear expectations. Novices are left not knowing what their role is and what tasks are expected of them. The role and task confusion impacts student achievement, thus prompting conflict; not only between a school counselor and administration, but within the school counselor between their ideal and real professional self (Bemak & Chung, 2008). Participants described difficulty in working with teachers who do not want the school counselor to pull students from their classrooms, even though the teachers want help with the student behaviors. Although school counselors serve as change agents and student advocates, they may fear being labeled as troublemakers, and school systems may resist change (Bemak & Chung, 2008). One participant described feeling as though she was “tiptoeing and walking on
eggshells” and the situation being “kind of tricky” when trying to navigate working with some teachers, as teachers do not always have the “whole perspective” on a student situation.

Participants also experienced conflict with administration regarding confidentiality and “not seeing eye to eye” on ethics regarding working with student issues. Because school principals often have little or no training with regard to the role of the school counselor and assign duties that are not counseling related, school counselors face challenges in assisting students (Dahir, 2004; Monteiro-Leitner et al., 2006; Perusse et al., 2004). While coping with this adversity, one participant stated that working through an adverse situation “really helped prepare me for future incidents” and another stated, “I was able to stand up for myself.” Coping can lead to optimal development as a professional school counselor. Through reframing adverse situations as opportunities for growth, novice school counselors practice their counseling skills related to conflict resolution and effective communication. Adversity provides opportunities to gain confidence, contributing to professional development. Reaching optimal functioning as a counselor, novice professional school counselors need to be resilient to overcome the “fragile and incomplete practitioner-self” (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003, p. 50).

Feeling fragile and incomplete as a novice school counselor is not uncommon, and it is not unusual for school counselors to report feeling alone and without support while managing difficult situations (Crutchfield et al., 1997). This isolation is particularly challenging for new-entrant professional school counselors who are often asked to make the transition from their training experiences to assuming full responsibilities for
comprehensive school counseling programs (Peace, 1995). During the novice professional phase, there is a sense of being on one’s own while continuing to reformulate through adding or discarding at the behavioral and conceptual levels of development (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). The novice professional school counselor is often eager to enter the professional field and face disillusionment with their professional training and with themself following confrontation with professional challenges that are inadequately mastered (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013).

This disillusionment with graduate school was experienced by most of the participants to varying degrees. One participant was “really disappointed” with their graduate program, while another stated it prepared them “as much as you could.” Participants with prior experience in residential treatment or in mental health “felt prepared,” but wished there were more training on crisis interventions, 504 plans, and navigating the school system. For one participant, the disillusionment stemmed from a misalignment between their philosophy and the school’s philosophy. This participant spoke of their understanding of the school counselor role yet being assigned more administrative duties stating I wanted to “execute my services, but that was denied.”

Although the research is dated, Warnath and Shelton (1976) found restrictions imposed by counselors’ work setting causes more distress for them compared to other workers, and this seems to be as true now as it was then. As noted earlier, disillusionment with the job comes from discrepancies between what a novice school counselor actually does and best practices (Hatch & Chen-Hayes, 2008; Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008), including
role ambiguity (Borders, 2002; Dekruyf et al., 2013; Monteiro-Leitner et al., 2006) which significantly impacts job satisfaction (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006).

Adversities and challenges experienced by novice professional school counselors add to an awareness of the complexity inherent in counseling work (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013). Participants described challenging situations with having large caseloads and having to attend a lot of meetings, which took time away from working with students. Working with students who had significant needs was also a challenging situation that novice school counselors navigated. Often the needs are related to mental health and behavioral issues, which can be challenging for novice school counselors to effectively support when they feel they have not been trained in these areas, have insufficient knowledge or are inappropriately assigned to provide services without proper support, such as clinical supervision, who one participant described as being “amazing” as they are able to discuss and process self-care, case conceptualizations, and difficult situations. These situations contributed to participants stating, “when I first started, it was probably one of the most difficult years,” and another participant recalled being physically assaulted by a student, and yet another participant described dealing with “a very aggressive parent.”

Despite coping with these adverse situations, participants persisted and looked at dealing with it as “a platform for me to take on more of a leadership role” or more pragmatically like “figuring out how to wear your life jacket when you’re always drowning.” Having the ability to continuously process and reflect on difficulties and challenges encountered is at the core of coping (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013).
Contributing to novice professional development includes seeing opportunities (i.e., strengths, skills, and competencies) instead of barriers (i.e., weaknesses, deficits, and incompetence) (Gonzalez et al., 1994).

Although the theoretical literature supports the findings related to processing and reflecting on adverse situations, the literature specifically addressing how novice school counselors cope with adversity is scant. Participants highlighted how reframing and seeing adverse situations through a strength-based lens provides novice school counselors with opportunities to grow and develop professionally. Navigating these situations can lead to increased confidence and clearer pathways in how to handle future conflicts, aiding novice school counselors’ sense of confirmation.

**Sense of Confirmation**

Each participant described their unique journey that led them to the school counseling profession, and each shared their story confirming their choice to enter the field. Some participants were hired right after graduated school and some were inducted with previous professional experience. Collectively, the stories told were about making a difference, ownership, being seen as a professional school counselor, and confidence.

Because school counselors can impact student achievement, they are important members of school communities (Bickmore & Curry, 2013). Additionally, school counselors are trained to bolster college and career readiness to all students while often being one of the few professionals in the building or district to provide conflict resolution, communication, positive behavior support, and parent engagement (Bickmore & Curry, 2013). Participants recognized they are in a unique role to make a difference by
contributing directly to student success and well-being, while also recognizing “that what you’re doing is important” and “beneficial” On a social/ emotional end, one participant even stated wanting “kids to feel loved at school” and wanting “them to feel cared about.” Making a difference has been “rewarding” for the novice professional school counselor, and as Mullen and Gutierrez (2016) noted, studies have shown the positive effects school counselors have on students who receive direct services from their counselors, especially in closing the achievement and opportunity gaps and improving student achievement, attendance, and discipline when the ASCA National Model is implemented (ASCA, 2019b).

Direct service through face-to-face connection with students is part of a comprehensive program for school counselors. Although their exploratory research was conducted prior to the development of the ASCA National Model, Sink and Yillik-Downer (2001) found that in general, school counselors were relatively anxious about various aspects of their programming. The researchers speculated that the more school counselors value their comprehensive program, the higher their level of engagement to implement it (Sink & Yillik-Downer, 2001). The ASCA National Model “paved the way for school counselors to navigate the chaotic landscape of education in more comprehensive, consistent, and systematic ways” (Sabella, 2006, p. 412), allowing for more consistent roles and responsibilities for school counselors. One participate stated using the ASCA model “especially when doing my classroom lessons…to figure out like what the classrooms need” and another participant reported the ASCA model as a means to providing accountability “so if something were to come up…I’m asked at the end of
the year, how are you a benefit to our school?” the response would be “this is the ASCA model, this is how I followed it”, thus having documentation that as the school counselor, they are making an impact on student achievement. Participants described “finding” their own way, and having to “be in charge” has been a “huge strength” for “forcing myself to be ready and able to handle” the position. If school counselors do not take the lead in serving as agents of change, others or no one will take the lead in the change process for them (Studer, 2005. p. 25). Participants described taking ownership of their programs, realizing they were “prepared for this” when they reflected on content, tools, and resources gathered along during graduate school or in a previous profession. One participant spoke about being hired after the previous counselor was “burnt out” and having to combat negative perceptions of school counseling. Even though the previous counselor was seen as being “burnt out”, this participant also described the previous counselor as being “very beloved” and having to ask people to “adjust their expectations” because she was novice and not as “experienced and knowledgeable.” Overall, one participant summed up the reward of creating and owning a comprehensive program as “motivating” and “the coolest part,” especially when seeing “the kids so excited” and leaving “your office happier.”

Another rewarding aspect adding to a sense of confirmation was being seen as a professional school counselor. Participants spoke about knowing “what steps to take” and understanding that “this is what I’m supposed to do” based on prior training and internship experience. House and Hayes (2002) explained the need for counselors to remove systemic barriers that impact student success through leading and advocating.
Leadership and advocacy by the school counselor, along with collaboration with principals and school community can be effective in minimizing barriers to student success while increasing opportunities through the use of a data-driven school counseling program (ASCA, 2019b; House & Hayes, 2002; Sabella, 2006). One participant shared her insight into being the “connecting piece” and recognizing that “this is my role, and this is, kind of where I can help in a variety of different ways.” Sometimes the role of professional school counselor involves “breaking the news” to parents and being the “middle-man” between parents and the school system. Giving parents difficult or troubling news often falls on school counselors (Auger, 2006).

“Informing parents that their child is failing or has been involved in a behavioral incident at school or being part of a team that informs parents that their child has a disability requiring special education are tasks that are often part of the daily life of school counselors” (Auger, 2006, p. 139).

Being seen as a professional school counselor by the school community has been rewarding. Additionally, being seen “as a resource to help them through things” by students and having family recognize that “my mom is a counselor” has been “influential for sure” in aiding novices to develop professionally. Following the professional ethical codes and being seen as “the professional” school counselor “creates that trust and that respect that you get as a professional” and adds to feeling “like I’m a lot more confident.”

Even though one participant shared they did not feel they could call themselves “an expert” and another reported that they “still feel novice” in the position, many shared feeling “very confident in my ability” and having a “lot more confidence going in,”
meaning starting their second, third, or fourth school year as a professional school counselor. Through successfully navigating difficult situations, reflecting on growth, and ownership of the school counseling program, novice school counselors’ professional identity starts to take shape, and novices’ development shifts from novice to a more self-assured professional. The developmental progression “toward greater complexity and integration” (Borders & Brown, 2005, p. 12) suggests movement from being novice through demonstration of advanced counseling skills when performing counselor duties and tasks (Lambie & Sias, 2009).

Time and experience contribute to feeling more confident as a novice, and according to Lambie and Sias (2009), professional school counselors exhibit growth in emotional awareness, problem-solving skills, and self-efficacy with higher levels of psychological development. This growth aids effective negotiating of complex situations and performing counselor-related tasks with empathy, tolerance for ambiguity, boundary setting, and self-care; more so than individuals at lower levels of development (Lambie & Sias, 2009), lending to movement from novice to expert professional. Rønnestad and Skovholt (2013) describe the novice movement into the next phase when the counselor has a sense of being on one’s own due to transforming from dependency of graduate school to independence of being a professional. Additionally, “the reflective processing that follows confrontation with challenges and difficulties that are not easily mastered may actually be more favorable for optimal professional development (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013, p. 96). Movement was evidenced by statements such as, “slow myself down and have more reasonable expectations” and “I’m learning something every year,
even every day” and “I learned a lot that year because I dealt with so many different situations”.

Novice school counselors feel a sense of confirmation of being in the right job when they perceive they are making a difference and take ownership of the school counseling program. Additionally, being seen as a professional school counselor and building confidence were integral segments of the novice school counselor’s lived experience. Although the literature supported the findings related to making a difference, ownership of the school counseling program, and confidence as contributors to novice professional development, a new finding was related to being seen as a professional school counselor. Fulfilling the role of school counselor and becoming a resource and support for others contributes to expertise. Rønnestad and Skovholt (2013) describe moving into the Experienced Professional Phase occurs when the novice begins to create congruency between their professional and personal self. This movement allows for preparation in becoming well established and regarded as a senior in the final phase.

**Commitment to Increasing One’s Expertise**

Not only does growing and developing professionally take time and experience, but it also takes a commitment to increasing one’s expertise. Expertise in the counseling profession is desirable (Jennings et al., 2003). As novice professional school counselors continue to develop, exploration into the professional environment and self intensifies, contributing to a revived interest in learning specific counseling techniques that are directed more inwardly and autonomously (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013). Participants
focused on developing professionally through reflection, supervision, continuing education, and membership on various teams and organizations.

Reflection often resulted from being evaluated and observed by the administration. Participants recognized that to grow as a counselor and as a professional, they needed feedback. One participant reflected on the previous year when there was not a structured meeting to discuss evaluation or feedback, and that there were “so many things I could have done differently to be more successful” and crediting that to evaluation. Continuous reflection is a prerequisite at all levels of experience for optimal learning and professional development (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013), which seemed to be more inwardly directed by the participants who were more seasoned by years in the field or in other professions.

For participants, reflection included checking in with administrators to set goals and plan for the upcoming school year. It also involved being part of a mentoring system for one participant and having an intern for another participant, “it’s amazing how much like you self-reflect and you are more aware of yourself when you have someone watching your every move.” Serving both as mentors and supervisors, school counselors develop greater expertise (Bultsma, 2012; Wilczenski et al., 2010). Self-reflection is emphasized in clinical supervision and best practices indicate that supervisors regularly engage in their own professional development (Borders, 2014). “Supervisors teach supervisees reflection skills, encourage self-reflection during counseling sessions, and model and practice self-reflection on an on-going basis (Borders, 2014, p. 158). Through their own self-reflection as a supervisor or mentor, the novice explores the professional
counseling environment and self more intensely, indicating movement through the novice phase (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013).

Reflection, awareness, and understanding can motivate school counselors’ alignment of beliefs with behaviors. Thus, benefiting student achievement and school success (Stone & Dahir, 2016). Finally, reflection involved self-care and time to reflect on their “self” as a person. One participant recommended, “I encourage people to listen to what their body is telling them and taking care of whatever the need is.” For this participant, it involved eating lunch alone to make time to reflect and clear her mind.

School counseling is complex and challenging; the reflective process allows the professional to bring personal theories into “active awareness” through reliable and intentional use when taking professional action and can be used for professional development (Schon, 1987). For some participants, the congruency between professional and personal self occurred when their family recognized them as a professional school counselor. For others, “aha” moments occurred when they took on leadership roles within the school setting or when they took on supervisory roles for school counseling interns.

Reflection is often a part of supervision. Participants described times when they were able to ask questions and process situations as being “helpful” and feeling “fortunate” to have “somebody to rely on.” Most often, this supervisor is the principal, and most often, this type of supervision is administrative. School counseling professionals need to understand that clinical supervision is not only necessary during the internship experience, but also paramount post-master’s for school counselors (Bledsoe et al., 2019; Sutton & Page, 1994). Additionally, supervision for school counselors can
increase professional self-efficacy (Tang, 2020). Yet, “school counseling supervision remains less clearly defined and implemented compared to other counseling specialties and related disciplines. This underscores the need for ongoing advocacy in schools to ensure that practicing school counselors receive adequate clinical supervision” (Bledsoe et al., 2019, p. 7).

The benefits of and reasons for clinical supervision are copious. Specifically, McMahon & Patton (2000) cited “support, accountability, debriefing, professional, personal and skill development, counsellor development, and induction of those into the profession” (p. 344). Participants spoke about wishing they could continue meeting with their cohort “to pick someone’s brain” and receive advice and information, and about receiving clinical supervision, seeing this as “beneficial.” To understand the effects on the practice of school counseling without clinical supervision, Wiggins (1993) found that 28% of the experienced school counselors in his study who were rated low in effectiveness ten years earlier were again rated low in effectiveness ten years later by supervisors, which included principals, assistant principals, or a counseling supervisor. School counselors generally remained at the same level of effectiveness over time but Wiggins noted that if there was a change, it was generally in a downward direction, most likely due to being assigned non-counseling duties or burnout (1993). Lack of support and over assignment of non-counseling duties led two participants to leave the respective district and find other school counseling positions. Both of which could be addressed through clinical supervision. Clinical supervision contributed to higher job satisfaction and lower levels of burnout due to opportunities to learn new counseling skills and
increases in professionalism, confidence, and validation (Agnew et al., 2000). Only one participant shared their experience with clinical supervision. Other participants talked about their relationship with their principal as being supportive and supervisory in nature, including evaluation, which was conductive administratively. There seems to be a lack of understanding of, the need for, and access to clinical supervision for professional school counselors.

Clinical supervision is one support that can provide a space for novice professional school counselors to talk about their professional development. Participants also shared that continuing to learn through education has been helpful. For novice counselors, moving through the developmental process is an intense commitment to learn (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013). When counselors see themselves as a learner and maintain curiosity, learning too quickly or assuming answers prior to asking questions is avoided; thus, contributing to novice development as a counselor and to a multicultural approach to counseling (Gonzalez et al., 1994). One participant described attending a cultural competency and poverty simulation during a professional development day provided by the district as “so important that they keep us continuously learning, which helps our development.” Another participant also shared attending a staff development presentation on cultural awareness was beneficial and stated, “they add to my knowledge, my awareness of the professional position.” Additionally, school counselor expertise grew more when school counselors attended more courses and workshops (Howell et al., 2007; Studer, 2006). However, school counselors report needing more knowledge and skills but are limited to accessing professional conferences (Savitz-Romer, 2019). A few
participants spoke of having no funding to attend professional conferences and “feeling guilty” for leaving the building. When school counselors do not receive or have access to appropriate professional development, they can begin to stagnate and lose their understanding of best practices within the profession. The profession is ever changing, especially when it comes to the diversity of students and the issues that students face. School counselors need to stay up to date with research that outlines interventions and approaches to helping students achieve and succeed. Additionally, the educational system changes at a slow pace and often does not keep up with what is happening in society. Technology, societal issues, and occupational skills are changing daily. School counselors are in the position to lead the way to making a difference in students’ lives, but they need access to the information and opportunities to stay current. One participant stated, “I feel like there isn’t really like a go to resource for me, especially here at school”. Furthermore, “they offer professional development for teachers and things a few times a year, but they don’t for counselors”.

One of the conferences that many participants found value in attending is their annual state school counseling association conference. Being a member of their state school counseling organization and utilizing the organizations’ websites for resources and information was noted as being helpful. Additionally, several participants described using the ASCA Model and the ASCA website as resources for their programming, especially for classroom lessons and for aligning their delivery with the ASCA standards. Participants also look to ASCA for professional development webinars, trainings, and conferences. The school counselor's task of implementing a comprehensive school
counseling program is easier with organizational support. The more members of the team that provide that support, the more important role they play in integrating and shaping the implementation of the school counseling program (ASCA, 2019b). These members might include administration, teachers, and other school professionals, or members of an advisory board consisting of stakeholders, parents, and students. A school counselor cannot deliver all components of a comprehensive developmental program in isolation. Best practice requires that many members of the school community be involved in its delivery (ASCA, 2019a; ASCA, 2019b). Many participants rely on their principal to process student issues. Participants also rely on other professionals in their building or district. One participant shared “calling back and forth” on the telephone “just to keep in communication on certain issues” with the school social worker to “make sure we have a plan”. Another participant recalled “we do have a social worker who will work with our Level 3 EBD students, but some of them I still work with too, depending on my relationship previously with them”.

Membership within the school included leadership teams, PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) teams, problem-solving teams, and professional learning communities. Participants appreciated being able to share ideas and strategies in these teams. One participant emphasized learning to “seek first to understand and then be understood” in a leadership program. Another participant shared “being ok” with team members approaching situations differently with unique perspectives because it “has been a learning experience and something that I value.” Being able to entertain ideas from all team members allows for multiple answers to a problem and a variety of ways to arrive at
a solution (Gonzalez et al., 1994). One participant shared being able to “go to then and ask any questions that I need to” when describing the relationship with other professionals in their school setting. Membership requires openness and acceptance, demonstrating professional development as a novice professional school counselor. Being a member of an organization or on an educational team helps novice professional school counselors “not feel like you’re in isolation” and that “it helps too, if you have a counseling team to work with that you can ask those questions to” and “don’t think there’s any shame or embarrassment and asking as many questions as you have.” The collaborative team approach is valuable for school counselors, as they can trust and rely on peer counselors, other helping professionals, and their administration for support to assist with the novices’ professional development. Additionally, professional school counselors draw their strength from a collaborative team approach which serves students but also serves to advance their professional development.

A novice school counselor may feel uncertain about becoming a member of professional organizations and how many memberships are necessary for professional growth (Bauman, 2008). ASCA membership rate among school counselors is particularly important because the national model provides the framework for a data-informed school counseling program, impacting student success (ASCA, 2019b). Although most of the participants shared they utilize ASCA as a resource, only one indicated they were a member of the national organization. Others reported being members of their state school counseling association and appreciated attending the state conference. The impact of the national model is diminished if the organization represents only a small proportion of
school counselors in the field (Bauman, 2008). Results of the Bauman study showed that “two beliefs were associated with higher rates of professional association membership: (a) being a professional includes belonging to professional organizations and (b) professional organizations advance the field” (p. 173, 2008). Membership for participants focused mostly on participating in school specific teams, such as a leadership team or problem-solving team. Participants accessed and utilized ASCA, but most were not paid members. However, most were members of their state affiliation for school counseling.

**Synopsis of Themes**

Participants recognized the importance of establishing a relationship with their principal and appreciated opportunities for feedback and debriefing with their principals. Principals were identified as a resource and support for participants. Each participant valued connecting with others, as they found these relationships to be beneficial, positive, and rewarding. Additionally, the relationships with peer counselor, teachers, parents, students, and other professionals were identified as supports. Through collaboration, participants found support to establish and accomplish mutual goals focused on student success. A variety of past experiences influenced participants’ approaches and transitions to the school counseling profession. Experiences were identified as a resource that provided participants the opportunities to demonstrate skills and to learn and grow professionally. These people and experiences supported the theme of sources of influence.

All participants described issues with defining roles, especially when performing non-counseling duties. To support novice professional school counselors, a clearer
definition and scope of the school counseling role would be beneficial. Ethics and confidentiality created conflict for some of the participants when others did not adhere to the professional standards; cooperation from teachers and teacher behavior was also noted. Ethical standards of the school counseling profession were identified as a resource. The ethical standards set forth by ASCA (2016) “specifies the obligation to the principles of ethical behavior necessary to maintain the high standards of integrity, leadership and professionalism” (p. 1) to clarify the norms, values and beliefs of the school counseling profession. Additionally, the ASCA (2016) ethical standards guide and inform professional school counselors regarding ethical practice and behavior.

Teachers were identified as a support when participants were able to work with them in a collaborative manner. Internship was a valuable experience, but some participants experienced disillusionment with graduate school once they entered the professional field. Working through the disillusionment provided participants with the opportunity to reflect and explore their development, thus leading to trusting themselves as a professional by seeking out the knowledge and skills they felt they were lacking. Moving through this process supported novices’ professional development. Participants faced challenging situations, including high caseloads, attending a lot of meetings, and angry parents, yet they continued to support and care for students as best as they could. These people, specifically principals, peer counselors, other helping professionals, and supervisors assisted participants in facing and working through difficult experiences, which supported the theme of coping with adversity.
Supporting student learning and growth was rewarding for each participant, leading them to feel they were *making a difference* in positive ways. Being in charge and taking *ownership* of their program and roles as a professional school counselor was important to each participant as they navigate their first years. Being *seen as a professional* was critical for most of the professionals as they recalled moments when they knew they were the school counselor and being relied on for action or information. *Confidence* increased for each participant with time and experience, and with each successful situation. These people and experiences supported the theme of *sense of confirmation*, assisting novice school counselor professional development through bolstering self-efficacy and professional identity.

*Reflection* occurred for some participants through formal evaluation and observation, while others reflected informally through conversation with others and internally. The act of reflecting supports professional development as it allows the novice to take responsibility for their growth. Novices move through this phase of development through a revived interest in learning and understanding their motivation for entering and staying in the field (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013). Some participants engaged in clinical *supervision*, and others wished supervision were available, such as what was experienced during internship. One participant supervised an intern and greatly appreciated the opportunity. *Continuing education* was experienced in the form of conferences and district-led trainings. Some participants had more funding and opportunities for professional development, and many felt they could not be absent to attend trainings and conferences. Many participants had *membership* to professional organizations, and most
were members of an educational team. Clinical supervision, continuing education, and membership are resources and supports that assist with novice professional development. People (i.e., administrators, other counselors, teachers, students, and other school professionals), experiences (i.e. conferences, supervision, trainings, and mentoring), and organizations (i.e. ASCA, leadership teams, PLCs, and student support teams) supported the theme *commitment to increasing one’s expertise*.

**Summary**

Each theme and subtheme emerged from eight collective interviews. Participants responded to questions that sought to uncover the lived experiences of novice professional school counselors and to the supports and resources that assist with their professional development. Participants shared that people, experiences, and organizations/teams assisted them as they moved from the Advanced Student Phase to the Novice Professional Phase and toward the Experienced Professional Phase as outlined by Rønnestad and Skovholt (2013). Through analysis, the themes of sources of influence, coping with adversity, sense of confirmation, and commitment to increasing one’s expertise highlighted participants’ lived experiences and the specific supports and resources they utilize to assist with their professional development. Additionally, subthemes emerged that further shed light on how each theme was supported. Through this investigation, the complexity of the relationships between the sources and resources categories and the subthemes emerged. Figure 4 demonstrates the relationships of the direct interconnections between people, experiences, and organizations/teams to the
sixteen subthemes. In this summary, I will delineate the woven connections between the three categories and sixteen subthemes.
Figure 4

Relationship between supports and resources categories and subthemes

Figure 4. Relationship between the supports and resources categories: people, experiences, and organizations/teams and the sixteen subthemes.
**People**

Eleven subthemes map to the category of people. Participants identified a variety of people who support novice school counselors and rely on for resources to assist with their professional development. Principals provide support to novice professional school counselors through administrative supervision and working through conflict and challenging situations that arise within the school setting. Although ASCA clearly defines the role and appropriate tasks for school counselors, many administrators are unaware of or do not adhere to these position statements, thus causing conflict and challenging situations for the novice.

When novice school counselors connect with others, they enhance their leadership skills and support students through collaboration. School counselors feel they are making a difference when they are seen as a professional school counselor. Clinical supervision provides school counselors with the opportunity to reflect on the impact the work of a school counselor is having on student success.

The relationship between people and the identified subthemes are supported by the three lenses that influenced this study. Novice school counselors need support and resources of various people to assist with their professional development. Rønnestad and Skovholt (2013) stated clients are to be seen as primary teachers, new members of the counseling field view professional elders with strong affective reactions, and interpersonal sources of influence promote proper professional development through the career span. To move from novice to expert, novices complete developmental tasks by exploring and defining their work role and continuously reflecting to enhance optimal
learning (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013). Novices rely on principals, other school counselors, other professionals, teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders for support. They also rely on supervision as a means to reflect on their professional work and professional development.

Supervision also provides space for growth in emotional awareness and self-efficacy for novice school counselors (Lambie & Sias, 2009), aiding in movement from novice to expert. Additionally, collaboration between supervisor and supervisee and between the student and counselor focuses on a balanced relationship with equal power, allowing for mutual searching and exploring alternate ideas and solutions to problems (Gonzalez et al., 1994). Novice school counselors rely on many people for support and to provide resources to assist with their professional development.

**Experiences**

Thirteen subthemes map to the category of experiences. Participants identified a variety of experiences which support novice school counselors and provide resources to assist with their professional development. Principals can provide leadership experiences for novice school counselors that bolsters confidence and aids in taking ownership of their comprehensive school counseling program. Yet principals might also contribute to conflict and create challenging situations by not adhering to ethics set forth by the counseling profession or assigning the school counselor non-counseling duties that may conflict with the school counselor building trusting relationships with students.

Novices may come into the field with a variety of past experiences, such as previous work experience or their own life experiences that impact their work as a school
counselor. Clinical supervision can provide school counselors with the opportunity to reflect on these experiences and to shed light on how it impacts their professional work. Supervision also provides opportunity to process conflict and challenging situations.

To foster continued professional development, ASCA (2019a) suggest school counselors formulate a professional development plan which focuses on school counselor competencies. Through continuing education and membership, novice school counselors can continue their professional growth by attending conferences and trainings, reading books or journals, and seeking professional development opportunities online. Additionally, when novices are disillusioned with their training from graduate school, they can focus on the areas they feel are not as developed according to their professional development plan and are needed to make a difference in their role as school counselor. Thus, continuing education and membership bolsters professional growth and movement toward expertise.

The relationship between experiences and the identified subthemes are supported by the three lenses that influenced this study. Novice school counselors need support and resources from various experiences to assist with their professional development. Rønnestad and Skovholt (2013) stated professional development is mostly a continuous process, but some counselors might grow intermittently or in a cyclical manner when moving from novice to expert. Developmentally, novice school counselors are tasked with successfully transforming from dependency of graduate school to professional independence. Many novices experience anxiety during their beginning years as a
professional. Over time the anxiety is mastered, as is the disillusionment of graduate school training (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013).

Post Master’s supervision can aid movement from novice to expert through promotion of the novice school counselors’ confidence (Lambie & Sias, 2009). Ongoing post Master’s supervision provides space for the novice school counselor to share their stories and allows them to be curious learners when exploring their own experiences and the varied experiences of the diverse students they serve (Gonzalez et al., 1994). Additionally, post Master’s supervision provides opportunities for novice school counselors to further develop case conceptualization skills and to apply theory to their school counseling practice (Lambie & Sias, 2009). Supervision can help the novice school counselor to see barriers as opportunities by focusing on strengths, skills, and competencies (Gonzalez et al., 1994). Novice school counselors rely on many experiences that support and provide resources to assist with their ongoing professional development.

**Organizations/ Teams**

Seven subthemes map to the category of organizations/ teams. Participants identified a variety of organizations and teams which support novice school counselors and provide resources to assist with their professional development. Novice school counselors connect with others through membership of ASCA, state counseling associations, and school teams. They may collaborate to discuss student issues or to resolve conflict that is occurring at their site. Novices who take a leadership role on a team bolster their sense of being seen as a professional school counselor.
ASCA is a helpful resource for novice school counselors as the organization defines the role of a professional school counselor and provides support for continuing education. ASCA encourages members to “lead, advocate, and collaborate to promote equity and success for all students” (2021). Membership allows school counselors the opportunities to collaborate and to connect with others, such as with other school counselors who have had similar experiences or share a common vision for the profession.

The relationship between organizations/teams and the identified subthemes are supported by the three lenses that influenced this study. Novice school counselors need support and resources of various organizations/teams to assist with their professional development. Rønnestad and Skovholt (2013) stated an intense commitment to learn aids in movement from novice to expert. Novices develop through identifying with the profession and committing to the professional field (Rønnestad and Skovholt, 2013). One way novice school counselors contribute to the professional field is through supervising a graduate intern. Understanding the gatekeeping responsibilities and ethical obligations is necessary when supporting skill development of interns (Lambie & Sias, 2009) ASCA (2019a) provides standards and competencies for school counselor interns and supervisors, as well as ethical guidelines for practice (ASCA, 2016).

School counselors are in a position to lead social change. When leading teams in which they are a member, novice school counselors develop leadership skills and can advocate for students. To avoid perpetuating the status quo, novice school counselors should focus on opportunities to support minority and marginalized students. Through a
social constructivist lens, school counselors can share their understanding of student behaviors from the social context in which it occurs (Gonzalez et al., 1994). Being a member of educational teams provides school counselors with the opportunity to develop leadership skills, thus bolstering professional development. Novice school counselors rely on many organizations/teams for support and to provide resources to assist with their professional development.

**Exploring Interconnectedness**

Looking across the categories and the interconnectedness to the themes and subthemes, it is important to note the number of times each theme and subtheme related to each category. The theme Commitment to Increasing One’s Expertise had a total of nine relationships with the categories of people, experiences, and organizations/teams. Coping with Adversity mapped to eight categories, and Sources of Influence and Sense of Confirmation each mapped to seven categories. The subthemes of Conflict, Seen as a professional, and Membership mapped to all three categories. The subthemes of Past experiences, Disillusionment with graduate school, and Ownership only mapped to single categories. The other subthemes: Relationship with principal, Connecting with others, Collaboration, Defining roles, Challenging situations, Making a difference, Confidence, Reflection, Supervision, and Continuing education mapped to two categories.

This researcher’s interpretation of this analysis concludes that novice school counselors move from novice to expert through committing to increasing their expertise. Although people and organizations/teams assist in novice school counselors’ professional development, it is the experiences that aid the movement. The experiences can be
adverse, such as navigating conflict; or favorable, such as being seen as a professional school counselor and yet they still impact growth. Additionally, membership is beneficial and includes professional organizations, such as ASCA or a state counseling association, or being a member of an educational team. Membership allows access and opportunities for professional development through access to journals, trainings, and webinars, but also through leadership positions which bolsters growth.

In summary, this study has shed light on how novice professional school counselors experience and interpret their developmental journey and the resources and supports they utilize to assist in their professional development. Specifically, through their narratives, participants described their development through sources of influence, coping with adversity, sense of confirmation, and commitment to increasing one’s expertise. Additionally, people, experiences, and organizations/teams were categories that emerged from the identified supports and resources. This study has substantiated existing research as well as provided new understandings of how novice school counselors discern their lived experiences as professionals, and the supports and resources that assist with the novice school counselor’s professional development. Limitations of this study, recommendations for future research, and professional implications are discussed in the following sections.

**Limitations**

Qualitative research can be a source of discovery for new phenomenon, especially when utilizing IPA to understand the nuances of lived experiences. IPA enables the
researcher to become immersed in the interview data and focus on each individual’s story. Along with the benefits of an idiographic focus, limitations are notwithstanding.

This study was based on the analysis of interview data provided by eight novice professional school counselors from Iowa and Minnesota and results represent only their experiences. Although the sample was considered to be relatively small, it was purposely selected in order to gain a deep and personally meaningful understanding of the participants’ beliefs and experiences regarding their professional development during their beginning years in the profession. Since the findings are context-specific and limited to participants who were willing to take part in the study, it is acknowledged that application may be compromised. While not considered a limitation, in general, results of smaller sample sizes do not transfer to the larger population. However, smaller sample populations are consistent with qualitative research, and particularly with IPA.

The very nature of qualitative research may have inherent limitations since it is an inductive approach whereby researcher bias must be acknowledged regarding data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Furthermore, the foundation of IPA includes a series of procedural steps and guidelines that were applied to all stages of phenomenological analysis. Despite attempts to bracket to limit bias, it is cautioned that the researcher’s previous experience as a professional school counselor and as a counselor educator and supervisor may have influenced the interview and analysis process, as it is difficult for one to separate from their experience. While steps were taken to mitigate and bracket personal biases and assumptions through journaling, consultation,
and the use of member-checking interviews, IPA involves a significant amount of researcher interpretation.

Additionally, the demographic and geographic span of the participants was narrow and is likely a limitation. All participants were practicing as professional school counselors in the Midwest, and all held the required Master’s degree. In addition, all eight identified as white or Caucasian, and seven of the eight identified as female and one identified as male. These demographics tend to mirror the profession as a whole, with school counseling roles being filled by white females (Brock, 2020). The homogenous sample can be seen as a limitation, especially considering the lack of diversity and representation by the whole population pool of professional school counselors. This is rather common with qualitative research and may be considered as favorable in IPA research because the findings are more digestible and applicable (Smith et al., 2009). Nevertheless, expanding the demographics and geographic areas of the sample may provide important contributions to the findings. Furthermore, variation in the school size, number of students served, rural versus an urban setting, and being the only counselor in the building versus on a team of counselors might also contribute to the experiences and development of a novice professional school counselor. Over half of the participants in this sample served the Elementary level, which may be a limitation regarding the lack of equal representation from all three educational levels.

There is also the likelihood that participants define clinical supervision differently. Over half of the participants claimed to receive clinical supervision, yet only two described being supervised in a clinical sense. Perhaps some of the participants were
confused by the different purposes between administrative and clinical supervision, as it is unusual for school counselors to receive clinical supervision despite the benefits. Nonetheless, the findings of this study sheds light on novice professional school counselor development and the supports and resources utilized to assist with their professional development, substantially contributing to the field. Recommendations for further research and practice highlighting the contributions to the field will follow in the next sections.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Many questions come to mind while analyzing the interview data, sparking a need for further research. One question relates to working in more affluent school districts versus school districts with many more students who receive free and reduced lunch and deal with higher levels of mental health needs. Poverty has been linked to poor health and increased mental health needs in children (Hodgkinson et al., 2017). Additionally, school districts with higher rates of diversity and lower budgets have less access to school counselors (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2016). Furthermore, do the school counselors represent the student demographics and are the school counselors delivering culturally responsive services? Also, how are recruitment and training efforts reaching marginalized prospective school counselors? With school counseling roles being filled predominately by white females (Brock, 2020), there is a need to research the impact when working with students who are marginalized. For novices coping with adversity, is it easier to implement the ASCA National Model in more affluent schools because often higher mental health needs equate to less time spent with all students and less time focusing on
counseling services for all students? This also leads one to wonder about the hiring practices and supports provided by affluent school districts versus higher need school districts, and rural versus urban districts, especially when considering the sources of influences for novices in terms of collaboration. Providing necessary support might also relate to novice school counselor’s time allocated by administration to focus on counseling duties, such as developing and taking ownership of their comprehensive program, leading to a sense of confirmation. Additionally, administration may provide funding support and time for novice school counselors to continue their education which can aid commitment to increasing one’s expertise.

Another question regarding the analysis and existing research was a contradiction between the need for collaboration, especially for more experienced counselors. Sink and Yillik-Downer (2001) reported that counselors with less than five years of experience reported higher needs for collaboration. While collaboration for novices provides sources of influence, more experienced school counselors may realize they need to collaborate more to continue developing professionally. More research is warranted to investigate if there is indeed a change in the level of need for collaboration over a career span.

A third consideration for future research would be a difference in personality types. Amongst professional school counselors, do certain personality types seek continuous learning and growth at a higher rate than others? For participants in this study, some viewed the same situations two different ways. Some viewed situations as negative or challenges, while others recognized similar situations as opportunities for growth. This was especially evident for participants describing coping with adversity. Knowing the
personalities types of professional school counselors might help to shed light on the relationships school counselors develop with students and the ability of the school counselor to deliver a comprehensive program that can impact student achievement and student well-being. If a school counselor is not-effective due to their personality type, they may stagnate or burn out. Stagnating or burn out as a professional school counselor can have detrimental effects on the school community. Relying on sources of influence, coping with adversity, gaining a sense of confirmation, and maintaining a commitment to increasing one’s expertise can assist novice school counselors with their professional development and perhaps preventing stagnation and/ or burnout.

Finally, additional research is warranted related to themes or subthemes that emerged that current research has not addressed. Past experiences assisted novices with their professional development, but further research is needed to determine if particular past experiences have a greater impact, such as a related career (i.e., mental health counselor) or non-related career (i.e., law enforcement officer) or a role in the building a novice has been hired (i.e., internship placement site, playground duty supervisor). Furthermore, a better understanding of how past and present experiences lead to novice professional development would be beneficial.

Additional research is also warranted to discover how novices cope with adversity, how negative and positive experiences lead to professional development, and if perspective or mindset impacts their professional development. Lastly, beneficial research includes an investigation of how being seen as a professional school counselor impacts professional development or other themes or subthemes, such as commitment to
increasing one’s expertise or confidence. Additionally, more research is needed as to how to further cultivate supports and resources for novice professional school counselors and what conditions make this happen.

**Recommendations for Practice**

The findings of this study provide the basis for several implications in how the results can inform practice. Although the results represent only the participants in this study, this research edifies counselor educators and counseling programs, clinical supervisors, school administrators, novice school counselors, and school counselor trainees in how to assist novices in their professional development. The resources and supports identified are important aspects of guiding novices through the novice phase toward expertise. By knowing what the resources and supports are, stakeholders can provide what is needed throughout the developmental process.

**Counselor Educators**

Counselor educators and counseling programs are helping school counselors-in-training to prepare to face the challenges of the growing educational and mental health demands of children and adolescents in the school setting. Counselor educators understand how the school counselor-in-training develops as a graduate student, but also need to know how professional school counselors develop once in the field. This understanding can help counselor educators to bolster knowledge and skills to assist novices in understanding their continuous professional development journey throughout the career span.
The aim of counseling training programs is to prepare future school counselors with the professional knowledge and skills necessary to promote academic, career, and personal/social development of all P-12 students through data-informed school counseling programs (CACREP, 2016). Although counseling training programs are limited in the amount of time to train professional school counselors, participants shared additional training was desired from their graduate programs that included crisis management, writing 504 plans, and addressing high needs related to mental health. Additionally, knowing how to navigate adverse situations and cognitive dissonance would be helpful for school counselor trainees, especially when communicating with parents and when advocating for their students, programs, and themselves. Furthermore, school counselors-in-training would benefit from learning how to navigate conflict successfully, as this was one of the themes that mapped to all three categories of people, experiences, and organizations/teams. In addition to conflict resolution skills, school counselor trainees would benefit from developing leadership skills. School counselors lead educational teams and are seen as a professional school counselor who is a valuable resource.

Several participants described professional development related to cultural diversity and understanding populations as helpful. Weaving multicultural and social justice discussions into the counseling curriculum can aid novices in checking their own privilege, especially when working with parents who lack resources or who are expressing pent up systemic frustrations. Multicultural and social justice discussions can aid school counselors-in-training understanding of how to develop and delivery culturally
responsive services. Additionally, counselor educators should place emphasis on multicultural and social justice competencies endorsed by the American Counseling Association (Ratts et al., 2015), not only throughout the curriculum but when training site supervisors for practicum and internship placements. There is also a need for more diverse professional school counselors. In addition to creating and supporting and inclusive learning environment, counselor educators have an obligation to recruit and admit marginalized students who represent the diverse populations in which school counselors will be working (CACREP, 2016).

School counselors are directed to engage in professional growth opportunities and to develop a yearly professional development plan, as stated in the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies (ASCA, 2019a). With novice school counselors citing the need for additional training, especially due to the time limited nature of graduate training programs, counselor educators could help school counselors-in-training develop their plan prior to graduation. This would help novices identify professional development areas to focus on once in the field. An important professional identity building tool, counselor educators can promote professional membership, as professional organizations, such as ASCA, aid novices in keeping current with best practices and provide position statements regarding appropriate roles and tasks within the field of school counseling. ASCA also provides opportunities for professional development through webinars, conferences, and events. Furthermore, counselor educators can stress the importance of clinical supervision when discussing the novices’ yearly professional development plan. The benefits of clinical supervision are known and
were emphasized in this study, counselor educators can weave discussions about the importance throughout the curriculum. The next section will address recommendations for clinical supervisors.

**Clinical Supervisors**

Clinical supervisors have a great impact on school counselor trainees during internship, but there is also benefit when clinical supervision is provided throughout the career span, especially for novice professional school counselors. Although half of the participants indicated they are receiving clinical supervision, it seems unlikely that it is actually clinical supervision and more likely that they are receiving administrative supervision. A clear understanding of what clinical supervision is and the benefits that it can provide is warranted. Novices could benefit from continuing conversations that begin during their graduate studies into their beginning years in the profession. These conversations would include privilege, understanding the impacts of diversity and poverty, communicating with parents, collaborating with other professionals, advocating for students, leading teams, developing and owning a comprehensive school counseling program, utilizing data, and advocating for self as a professional.

Clinical supervision would provide opportunities for novice school counselors to process conflict and reflect on their leadership skills, thus aiding in their professional identity and development. Furthermore, clinical supervision allows novice school counselors to explore what it means to be seen as a professional school counselor, as this was one of the subthemes that mapped to all the categories of people, experiences, and organizations/teams.
Clinical supervisors need to be versed in supervision models. Additionally, clinical supervisors need training in culturally responsive supervision (Burkard et al., 2006), school counselor competencies (ASCA, 2019a), multicultural and social justice competencies (Ratts et al., 2015), and school counselor specific issues, especially as supervisors may have mental health licensure and have no experience as a professional school counselor. There are barriers to supervision that will need to be addressed, such as time, cost, and prioritizing by school administration. Additionally, finding a supervisor who is trained in supervision, mental health, and school counseling might be a challenge.

**School Personnel**

School personnel, such as principals who provide supervision, albeit most likely to be administrative in nature, would also benefit from understanding novice professional school counseling development. Principals are seen as one of the most beneficial resources and supports for novice professional school counselors and therefore need to understand the developmental tasks and general experience to provide helpful, developmentally appropriate feedback and to have appropriate expectations of the novice. Proper training in evaluating school counselor performance would be beneficial. This training might include role definition for school counselors, highlighting the impact of lower caseloads, understanding the competencies set forth by ASCA (2019a) for school counselors, awareness of school counseling ethics, and recognition of the ASCA National Model components, which can aid professional school counselors in doing their job.

Other school personnel, such as teachers, school psychologist, school nurse, and school social worker would benefit from understanding the role of the school counselor.
School counselors have the knowledge and skills to lead educational teams and to provide interventions to promote student success. Although successful navigation of conflict aids novice school counselors in their professional development, if other school personnel understood the role and appropriate tasks for school counselors, there may be fewer conflicts to resolve, and more time can be spent focusing on student achievement and success.

**Novice School Counselors**

Perhaps the greatest implications this study has is for novice professional school counselors and school counselor trainees. This study shared experiences from eight different novice professional school counselors who have identified sources of influence, along with coping with adversity, having a sense of confirmation, and having a commitment to increasing one’s expertise as assisting them with their professional development. Although each novice shared their unique story, there were commonalities in their journeys. These commonalities can help to normalize the novice experience, providing reassurance to professional school counselors that they are not alone on the path of professional development, and with time and experience, they will continue to feel more confident in their role.

The interviews highlighted the importance of having a positive relationship with the principal and connecting with others, namely teachers, other counselors, and other school professionals. Novices, when interviewing for new positions as school counselors, should interview the principal, as well as others, to assess for fit. These people are key components to assisting with professional development and job satisfaction. Also, when
interviewing, novices could share their prepared vision of a comprehensive school counseling program to determine whether the school is on board with supporting it. This includes role definition and caseload. Novices should look for more solidly defined school counselor role in the job description and describe what they are seeking regarding a manageable caseload. Once an offer has been extended, novices could negotiate for professional development funding to ensure they have opportunities to continue their education, which assists in growth and movement toward expertise. Once in a new position, novices will need to demonstrate leadership through directing, collaborating, and consulting with stakeholders and school professionals to overcome adversity, be able to work in isolation, define their role, and advocate for their comprehensive program for themselves and for students. Knowing the identified supports and resources that have assisted other novices can aid them through this complex process.

Novice school counselors benefit from being aware of and utilizing ASCA and other professional organizations that promote school counselor role, caseload requirements, and appropriate tasks. Membership with ASCA provides many supports and resources that assist novice school counselors with their professional development. Membership on educational teams provides opportunities to be a leader and to be seen as a professional school counselor. Novice school counselors would benefit from knowing how to navigate conflict and how to lead change within the school setting.

Clinical supervision also provides novice school counselors with opportunities to grow professionally. As school counselors balance their educational and mental health professional roles (Dekruyf et al., 2014), it is vital they receive supervision that is
dedicated to processing mental health needs in a clinical way. Novice school counselors will need to negotiate time during their busy schedules and address the cost for supervision if the supervisor is not a district employee. They most likely will need to convince their administration that clinical supervision is a necessity and may argue that it is ethically responsible. Committing to increasing their expertise, novice school counselors can propel their professional development forward.

**Conclusion**

This research has highlighted the complexity of novice professional school counselor experiences. It also shed light on reported supports and resources utilized by novice professional school counselors in this study to assist with their professional development. The impassioned and dedicated participants in this study experienced both support and challenges along their beginning journey, one that led to personal growth and strength. Four overarching themes were found: sources of influence, coping with adversity, sense of confirmation, and commitment to increasing one’s expertise. The importance of people, experiences, and organizations/teams were important to note regarding novice professional school counselor professional development. Future research exploring this topic is needed and could focus on the novices’ needs pertaining to collaboration partners and necessary experiences during their first years.

In closing, I greatly respect and appreciate the participants in this study, as well as other novice professional school counselors who feel unsure about their professional development journey. To quote Hollis, “I think it would be lovely if people could have a supervisor or their own counselor to visit with to debrief… finding somebody to connect
with for that, I think is really important.” Knowing who to connect with and the supports and resources that aid novice school counselor professional development can provide the opportunity for movement from novice to expert.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval

February 13, 2020

Dear Tracy Peed, PhD:


Your IRB Proposal has been approved as of February 13, 2020. On behalf of the Minnesota State University, Mankato IRB, we wish you success with your study. Remember that you must seek approval for any changes in your study, its design, funding source, consent process, or any part of the study that may affect participants in the study (see https://grad.mnstate.edu/irb/revision.html). Should any of the participants in your study suffer a research-related injury or other harmful outcome, you are required to report them to the Associate Vice-President of Research and Dean of Graduate Studies immediately at 507-389-1242.

When you complete your data collection or should you discontinue your study, you must submit a Closure request (see https://grad.mnstate.edu/irb/closure.html). All documents related to this research must be stored for a minimum of three years following the date on your Closure request. Please include your IRBNet ID number with any correspondence with the IRB.

You must download and save the signature pages with a copy of your consent form, as outlined in your application. The Principal Investigator (PI) is responsible for maintaining signed consent forms in a secure location at the university for 3 years following the submission of a Closure request. If the PI leaves the university before the end of the 3-year timeline, he/she is responsible for following "Consent Form Maintenance" procedures posted online (see http://grad.mnstate.edu/irb/storingconsentforms.pdf).

Cordially,

Bonnie Berg, Ph.D.
IRB Co-Chair

Jeffrey Buchanan, Ph.D.
IRB Co-Chair

Mary Hadley, FACN, Ph.D.
IRB Director

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Minnesota State University, Mankato IRB’s records.
Appendix B: Call for Participants

Subject: Dissertation Study: Novice School Counselor Development: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Resources and Supports
IRBNet Id Number: 1547123

Dear School Counselor Colleague:
If you are a novice professional school counselor with 1-5 years of experience and who is a professional school counselor working in a public school, then you may be eligible to participate in this research dissertation study. My name is Lynn O’Brien, and I am a former professional school counselor and Doctoral Candidate in Counselor Education and Supervision at Minnesota State University, Mankato. This study will explore the lived experiences of novice professional school counselors during the beginning phase of their career span and the resources and supports utilized to assist in their professional development. This study is under the advisement of Dr. Tracy Peed, Professor, Counseling & Student Personnel, Minnesota State University, Mankato.

By agreeing to participate, I am asking you to commit to a 45–70-minute audio interview via zoom conferencing that would entail questions about your experience as a novice professional school counselor and resources and supports that you utilize to assist with your professional development. While there is no compensation or direct benefit to you through your participation, I hope that the personal reflection during the interview will result in a greater understanding of your professional development and professional goals. Indirectly, by participating in this study, you are contributing to the limited research on beginning school counselor development.

Your consideration and assistance are greatly appreciated. Please contact me for more information or to express your interest in being a participant. If you are interested, please sign the consent form and complete the pre-screening survey at: https://mnsu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_e5aHWO33MzOjw6V.

Thank you!
Lynn O’Brien, Doctoral Candidate
Lynn.obrien@mnsu.edu
Counselor Education & Supervision
Minnesota State University, Mankato
Appendix C: Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: Novice Professional School Counselor Development: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Resources and Supports
Principal Investigator: Tracy Peed, Ph.D.
Student Investigator: Lynn O’Brien, M.S.
IRBNet Id Number: 1547123

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?
This research study is designed to explore the lived experiences of novice school counselors and the supports and resources utilized to assist in professional development. For this study, a novice school counselor is a professional school counselor who has been employed as a school counselor for less than 5 years. This research is being completed to meet the dissertation requirement of the student-investigator’s Doctor of Education program in the Department of Counseling and Student Personnel at Minnesota State University, Mankato under the guidance of Dr. Tracy Peed.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS FORM?
This consent form provides information about how the study will be conducted, specifies your commitment as a participant, and identifies the risks and benefits of participating so that you can make an informed decision about your participation. Please read the form carefully and ask any questions you may have about the study or if anything on the form is unclear. Only participants who agree to be audio recorded and who agree to allow the use of direct quotes in the write-up of the study will be asked to participate. By signing the consent form, you are agreeing that you are at least 18 years of age.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?
You have been identified as someone who may meet the qualifications of the study of being a novice professional school counselor with 1-5 years of experience and a professional school counselor working in a public school who graduated from a CACREP accredited program. Your participation is completely voluntary.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THE STUDY AND HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?
If you choose to participate in this study, you will sign that you have read the informed consent document, and then you will be asked to fill out the prescreening questions. These questions will ask you for your contact information, along with general demographic information. You will also answer questions about your graduate program and about your professional school counseling position. If you meet the qualifications of the study, the student-investigator will then schedule one meeting with you via Zoom conferencing, which will last approximately 45-70 minutes. The interview questions will focus on your experience as a novice school counselor, your transition from graduate school to the profession, your identity development, your professional development, and...
resources and supports you utilize. Upon request, the student-investigator can provide you with a summary of the interview findings after all participants have been interviewed and the analysis has been completed. The summary will not include any identifying information but will include the results from the analysis with direct statements from the interviews.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THIS STUDY?
There is a low risk that emotions may arise from participating in this study. The study requires you to be reflective about personal experiences you have had during the beginning phase of your career span as a professional school counselor including both positive and negative experiences. Reflecting on and sharing such experiences may lead you to feel uncomfortable at times. Should you feel that your discomfort is too much or if you decide you no longer want to be a participant, you can stop interview at any point by telling the interviewer you would like to discontinue the interview and if needed, a referral to counseling can be provided.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?
While there are no direct personal benefits from participating in this study, reflecting upon your experiences with respect to your experiences as a novice school counselor, you may develop a better understanding of your own professional development as a professional school counselor. This could potentially lead to greater self-awareness and professional goals. Indirectly, by participating in this study, you may be contributing to the limited research on supports that assist novice school counselors with professional development.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?
No, there is no monetary compensation associated with participating in this research study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION I PROVIDE?
The investigators are committed to maintaining your privacy. However, there are some situations when complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. The Minnesota State University, Mankato Institutional Review Board that approves any research with human participants, has the right to examine any research materials including consent forms and transcripts. As educators and employees of Minnesota State University, Mankato we are required to report any child abuse, abuse of vulnerable adults, criminal activity of which we are aware, incidents of domestic violence, dating/relationship violence, sexual assault, or stalking, discrimination/harassment.

To make sure your interview is accurately accounted and to aid in data analysis, the interview will be audio recorded. The audio recording will only be accessed by the investigators and will be destroyed after interviews have been transcribed. Demographic data and transcribed interviews will not include names and will be kept separately from consent documents. Any research documents including the audio recordings and
transcribed interview, will be stored and/or transmitted in an encrypted file on a computer that is password protected. Consent documents will be kept in a secure location and will be destroyed three years after the research study has been completed. Please note: Excerpts from participant interviews including direct quotes from your interview will likely be included in papers and presentations that can be accessed by the public and may be published. However, steps will be taken to ensure anonymity so that it will not include personally identifiable information.

DO I HAVE A CHOICE TO BE IN THE STUDY?
Yes, your participation is completely voluntary, and you can discontinue participation at any point or choose not to answer questions you do not wish to answer without penalty or loss of benefits. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato, nor will a refusal to participate involve a penalty or loss of benefits.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?
If you have any questions about this research study, please contact:
Principal Investigator: Dr. Tracy Peed at (507) 389-5240 or tracy.peed@mnsu.edu

If you have any questions about participants’ rights and for research-related injuries, please contact the Administrator of the Institutional Review Board, at 507-389-1242.

If you would like more information about the specific privacy and anonymity risks posed by online surveys, please contact the Minnesota State University, Mankato IT Solutions Center (507) 389-6654 and ask to speak to the Information Security Manager.

Your electronic signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form via email.

If you do not consent, you will be exited from the survey.
Appendix D: Interview Schedule

Research questions
What are the lived experiences of novice professional school counselors?
What are the reported supports and resources that assist novice professional school counselors in their professional development?

1. Tell me about your current position as a beginning school counselor.
   a. Job duties, levels, caseload
   b. Demographics of school
   c. Evaluation methods
   d. Work environment, colleague relationships
   e. Challenges, frustrations, rewards

2. Thinking back when you first began, tell me about your experience.
   a. Hiring process
   b. Job duties, levels, caseload
   c. Demographics of school
   d. Evaluation methods
   e. Work environment, colleague relationships
   f. Challenges, frustrations, rewards

3. Describe for me your process in transitioning from graduate school to the profession?
   a. Congruency between what you thought the job would be vs. what it actually was
   b. Change in philosophy and theory

4. What experiences have shaped your professional identity throughout your time in the field?
   a. Ethics
   b. Advocacy
   c. Student development
   d. Professional development opportunities
   e. Personal development
   f. Critical incidents

5. What experiences have shaped your development throughout your time in the field?
   a. Ethics
   b. Advocacy
   c. Student development
   d. Professional development opportunities
   e. Personal development
   f. Critical incidents

6. In your experience as a professional school counselor to date, what resources or supports assisted you with your professional development?
7. What has moved you from feeling novice as a professional school counselor to feeling more self-assured?
Appendix E: Summary of Findings for Participants

Novice Professional School Counselor Development:  
An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Supports and Resources  
Lynn M. O’Brien, MS  
Counselor Education and Supervision  
Minnesota State University, Mankato

Sources of Influence
- Participants recognized the importance of establishing a relationship with their principal and appreciated the opportunities for feedback and debriefing.
- Each participant valued connecting with others, as they found these relationships to be beneficial, positive, and rewarding.
- Through collaboration, participants found support to establish and accomplish mutual goals focused on student success.
- A variety of past experiences influenced participants approach and transition to the school counseling profession.

Coping with Adversity
- All participants described issues with defining roles, especially when performing non-counseling duties.
- Ethics and confidentiality created conflict for some of the participants when others did not adhere to the professional standards; cooperation from teachers and teacher behavior was also noted.
- Internship was a valuable experience, but some participants experienced disillusionment with graduate school once they entered the professional field.
- Participants faced challenging situations; including high caseloads, attending a lot of meetings, and angry parents, yet they continued to support and care for students as best as they could.

Sense of Confirmation
- Supporting student learning and growth was rewarding for each participant, leading them to feel they were making a difference in positive ways.
- Being in charge and taking ownership of their program and roles as a professional school counselor was important to each participant as they navigate their first years.
• Being **seen as a professional** was critical for most of the professionals as they recalled moments when they knew they were the school counselor and being relied on for action or information.

• **Confidence** increased for each participant with time and experience, and with each successful situation.

**Commitment to Increasing One’s Expertise**

• Some participants used **reflection** of formal evaluation and observation to contemplate development and growth, while others reflected informally through conversation with others and through self-talk.

• Some participants engaged in clinical **supervision**, and others wished supervision were available, such as what was experienced during internship. One participant supervised an intern and greatly appreciated the opportunity.

• **Continuing education** was experienced in the form of conferences and district-led trainings. Some participants had more funding and opportunities for professional development, and many felt they could not be absent to attend trainings and conferences.

• Many participants had **membership** to professional organizations, and most were members of an educational team, such as Problem-solving teams, Leadership teams, Special Education teams.
Appendix F: Sample of Audit Trail

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*Close, line-by-line analysis of text, extracting claims, concerns, understanding*
*Identification of emergent patterns (themes)*
*Categorization, convergence, commonality, nuance: single case vs. multiple cases*
*Development of a dialogue with researcher, their coded data, a psychological knowledge about individuality*
*Mean for participants to have their concerns*
*The development of a structure, framework, which illustrates the rel. set of themes*

1. Reading & re-reading
2. Initial noting
3. Descriptive comments
4. Linguistic comments
5. Conceptual comments
6. Developing emergent themes
7. Connections across themes
8. Next case
9. Patterns across cases

Larkin, Watter, & Clifton, 2006
Batteh & Smith, 2004
Smith, 2007
Audit

Basic parameters
- case by case
- collectively

Read & reread
Initial noting

Identify transcripts
delete transcripts
One drive
invite to view
don't download
Get hard copies
read back

Type up a summary
Print & send
Confirm received
Let them know to remove from device

Interviewed
Typed up transcripts
Re-listened and added pauses, laughs
Read transcript #1, made notes
Created list of emergent themes for #1
Added identifiers
Transcript #2 - #8

Examined peer reviewers
Peer debriefed

Number check
- Sent to participants
Appendix G: Sample Memo

- 800 students
- open
- confident
- willing to share
- good practice
- good relationship with principal
- high needs students
- only one in school
- not easy
- knew the kids on case load
- being ok, not knowing something

Building on principal relationship
- doing something they called implementation on their end - change in their program
- being new, in a new building, learning the building, doing things in a new way.
- internship contributes to transition
- experience = confidence
- being ok, not knowing
Memo

Programming
Working w/ parents
Challenging: Students take a lot of time
First year most difficult
- Following someone else's way of doing things
Principal + Elyja

Working as only CS VS CS team
- Adds to rel. w/ Principal
Set up own program
Variety in internship + smooth transition
Collaboration w/ MH Therapist
Conferences = New Ideas
Becoming an expert

Trauma
Working w/ Students
Advocacy
Confidentiality
Confident - Knowing
Competent - Times
Getting to know kids
Ask for help > OK
Not knowing
Keep Learning
Being the Professional
Be there for the kids
Contribute

Resources
Principal
Sp Ed teachers
Other Sc CS
& CS Metas

books
Conferences

AISCA
Appendix H: Sample Journal Entry

- Do beg sc not know how much they learned in grad school until it makes sense or they need to use it?
- Each year more contingent
- Does having a specific program in place mean more focused on services? Not as much putting out fires?
- Is it easier to create a program for more affluent schools? Higher needs = less time a organization for programming?
- Many commonalities, but with individual situations
- Other cs make it more difficult to deal wel w/ students. Following in other cs footsteps makes more difficult to build own program
- Sometimes same issue is seen as negative and positive @?
  (i.e. differences in personalities of other cs; difficulties w/ parents (challenging, yet provides growth))
Participant. She seemed to have a story she wanted to share. She talked about being threatened by a parent to be sure that a male patient was aggressive toward her. I think she wanted to share this experience like maybe nobody listened to her before. She also talked about talking to a district counselor who was like a friend who didn’t really check her on listen to her because one was friends with the other counselor. These areicky situations and I have felt those very too. This is interesting how I see myself in these stories. For me it’s about finding a sense of belonging – I wonder what it is for this participant. I should have asked her more about that, but again I wonder how far I should deviate from the questions and prompts. I wonder how or if she feels involved with these situations. She did talk about when the principal thought she was good and did a good job, so when she interviewed for a regular position she felt was transferred and didn’t have to follow the typical protocol. I wonder if that was the principal’s way of assessing the issue on their end or if the principal was not fully supported by admin. Interesting stories, it helps to normalize some of theicky situations we’ve been dealing with. I debated and learned from these situations and I have too. Maybe that’s a case personality or why we are drawn to the profession. This would be a follow up question in the future. I want to dig deeper.