School Counselors and Principals: Different Perceptions of Relationship, Leadership, and Training

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Abstract

This study examined school counselors' and principals' perceptions of their relationship and the effectiveness of their respective professional preparation programs. An exploratory factor analysis (n = 615) revealed three salient factors: relationship quality, campus leadership and training satisfaction. Kruskal-Wallis tests revealed statistically significant differences in all three factors across the four groups (elementary counselors and principals, and secondary counselors and principals). Mann Whitney *U* post hoc tests indicated more statistically significant differences among secondary counselors and principals than elementary. Implications for school counselors and improvements in preparation programs for counselors and principals are included.

School Counselors and Principals: Different Perceptions of Relationship, Leadership, and Training

Given that building principals directly impact school counselors' roles, programs, priorities and directions, the counselor-principal relationship is a key factor in counselor effectiveness (Brock and Ponec, 1998; Janson, Militello, & Kosine, 2008; MacDonald, Armstrong, & Henson, 2008; Ponec & Brock, 2000). In most schools, principals have the power to stop change and define school counseling programs (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Dollarhide, Smith, & Lemberger, 2007). If principals lack understanding of appropriate counselor roles, they may unintentionally move counseling programs into quasi-administrative directions that fail to capitalize on the talents and training of school counselors in promoting student growth and development.

Research has indicated that it is imperative to have support from building principals to implement and maintain guidance and counseling programs (Beale, 1995; Coll and Freeman, 1997; Fitch, Newby, Ballestero, & Marshall, 2001; Ponec and Brock, 2000). In fact, Dollarhide et al. (2007) noted that principals could even shape the professional identity formation of school counselors, especially if the counselors were isolated from supportive colleagues. Meyers (2005) noted that poor counselor-principal relationships result in higher stress levels and less job satisfaction for counselors.

According to Zalaquett (2005), it is important for school counselors and principals to "form a partnership based on knowledge, trust, and positive regard for what each professional does" (p. 456). Vaught (1995) emphasized the importance of mutual respect and consideration as well as openness and communication. In addition, Ponec

and Brock (2000) found that good school counselor-principal relationships not only include mutual trust and clear communication but also continual maintenance.

Establishing constructive relationships of mutual respect and support, however, may be challenging because principals often determine counselor roles without understanding them (Dollarhide et al., 2007). When counselors and principals have different definitions of counselor roles and responsibilities, it places stress on the relationship (Lampe, 1985). Counselors and principals also have "different approaches for addressing the same student concerns and use different frameworks for dealing with the challenges" they face (Shofner & Briggs, 2001, p. 194). Counselors advocate for individual students while principals focus more on the school as a whole. Student discipline, confidentiality and student achievement are all issues in which counselors' and principals' perspectives may differ (Shofner & Williamson, 2000). In addition, the counselor's role has shifted in recent years to a stronger leadership role (Amatea & Clark, 2005; ASCA, 2007; Dodson, 2009).

If professional preparation programs addressed these differing perspectives prior to graduation, counselors and principals might be better able to bridge their differences but according to Shofner and Williamson (2000), they "are trained separately and have few opportunities to learn about the roles, responsibilities, and perspectives of each other" (p. 129). Even in internship, counselors tend to have minimal interaction with school principals.

Purpose of Study

Though the importance of counselor-principal relationships has been noted in the literature, there is a dearth of quantitative research on school counselor-principal

relationships (MacDonald et al., 2008). Given the differences in professional preparation of school counselors and principals as well as the lack of emphasis in their training on working collaboratively, the current study was designed to examine differences between perceptions of school counselors and principals regarding their relationship, leadership and professional preparation.

Method

No appropriate survey questionnaires were found in previous studies of counselor-principal relationships. Therefore, based on previous literature that included empirical studies and relevant articles, two survey questionnaires (one each for counselors and principals) were developed to examine school counselors' and principals' perceptions of factors related to the principal-counselor relationship and their respective professional preparation programs. In addition to demographic items, the instruments included statements with Likert scale response choices, and open-ended questions. The survey questions focused on school counselor role and leadership, levels of communication, trust and cooperation between the counselor and principal, and the adequacy of preparation programs with regards to understanding counselors' roles, responsibilities, confidentiality, and collaboration.

After the authors created survey items designed to explore and assess counselor-principal relationships, two counselor educators and two professors of educational administration reviewed each item for clarity and content, which strengthened the content validity for both questionnaires. Both counselor educators had school counselor experience and over five years experience as professors. The

educational administration professors were former principals and both had over three years experience as professors in their field.

Mailing lists of three national professional organizations - American School Counselor Association (ASCA), National Association of Elementary Principals (NAESP), and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) were used to survey a cross-section of counselors and principals in the United States. Random samples of the population of elementary school counselors (n = 500), elementary school principals (n = 500), secondary school counselors (n = 500), and secondary school principals (n = 500) were obtained from the professional organizations' mailing lists.

A pilot study (n = 39) was conducted in a major metropolitan area in the southwestern United States with urban, suburban and rural participants to strengthen construct validity and reliability of the survey instrument. Pilot study participants were asked to make suggestions on questionnaire items and provide feedback on confusing or ambiguous questions. As a result of the pilot participants' feedback, four items on the counselor questionnaire and three on the principal questionnaire were revised. Revised surveys were mailed to participants and those who did not respond to the first mailing were mailed the survey again to increase the response rate (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996).

Results

As a result of wrong addresses and other issues, the total number of surveys received by school counselors was 960 of 1000 and the total received by principals was 964. Of the 370 surveys returned by counselors (39%), 362 were usable, whereas 285 principals returned surveys (30%), and only 253 were usable. Many elementary school principals in the western region of the United States returned surveys but indicated that

they did not have a counselor in their building. Thus, many elementary principals returned surveys that were not usable, which lowered the total number of participants in this group.

The demographics of the counselor respondents were: gender (12% male and 88% female); level (54% elementary and 46% secondary); setting (33% rural, 48% suburban, and 19% urban); median number of years serving as counselor (9); median number of years with current principal (3); and median number of students for whom they are responsible (400).

The demographics of the principal respondents were: gender (54% male and 46% female); level (43% elementary school principals and 57% secondary school principals); setting (47% rural, 39% suburban, and 14% urban); median number of years serving as principal (7); median number of years serving on current campus (5); median number of years with current counselor (3); median number of students on campus (560); and formal training as counselor prior to serving as principal (25% had training and 75% had no training).

In order to strengthen the reliability and validity of the scores on the survey questionnaire, a factor analysis was conducted. Construct validity, the degree to which measured variables represent hypothesized constructs, can be strengthened through factor analyses (Heppner, Wampold, & Kivlighan, 2008). An exploratory factor analysis (n = 615) revealed a three-factor solution based on visual inspection of a scree plot. Scree plots are more accurate than the eigen value greater than one method, which tends to overestimate the number of salient factors (Zwick & Velicer, 1986). The three factors were named as follows with coefficient alphas in parentheses: relationship

quality (.952), campus leadership (.871) and training satisfaction (.806). These three factors explained 71% of the variance in the scores of elementary counselors (EC), secondary counselors (SC), elementary principals (EP) and secondary principals (SP).

Descriptive Findings

The primary emphasis of the current study was to focus on the differences in perception between principals and counselors in the abovementioned three areas; therefore, the descriptive findings are presented with this contrast in mind. As Table 1 indicates, the differences between secondary school counselors and principals are much more pronounced than those with their elementary counterparts. For example, when asked about having similar views on how to handle crises, there was a much larger difference between secondary school counselors (62%) and principals (89%) than elementary counselors (75%) and principals (85%). Similarly, when asked about understanding of the counselor's role, the secondary school counselors (67%) and principals' (91%) perceptions were quite different in comparison to the elementary counselors (82%) and principals (89%). In fact, on 16 of the 18 variables presented in Table 1, secondary school counselors' perceptions were the most negative. In other words, secondary school counselors perceived their principals as less supportive, dependable, trustworthy, and predictable than the other groups. Secondary school counselors also were less satisfied with their role and aspects of their training than the other groups.

The perceptions of elementary school counselors and principals were much more similar. On 14 of the 18 variables in Table 1, the differences in perception between elementary school counselors and principals was 12 percentage points or less. On 10 of

Table 1

Percent of School Counselors and Principals Who Agree with Statements about Relationship Quality, Campus Leadership and Training Satisfaction

	Elementary		**Secondary**	
	Counselors	Principals	Counselors	Principals
Relationship Quality				
My principal (counselor):				
Is supportive of me	90	91	81	94
Can be counted on	83	89	75	94
Is honest and truthful with me	92	94	88	97
And I have similar views on how to handle crises	75	85	62	89
Keeps his/her promises	82	92	71	94
Shows me enough consideration	83	94	77	98
Understands my (his/her) role as a counselor	82	89	67	91
I feel that I can trust my principal (counselor)	82	91	71	93
I can predict how my principal (counselor) will handle a delicate situation	61	85	57	95
I am satisfied with my (my counselor's) role in my school	80	88	74	90
Campus Leadership				
My principal seeks my opinion regarding issues relating to curriculum and instruction	43		53	
I seek the opinion of my counselor regarding issues relating to curriculum and instruction		55		75
My principal considers me to be a vital part of the Campus Leadership Team	78		68	
I consider my counselor to be a vital part of the Campus Leadership Team		86		90
I am involved in the campus site-based decision-making process	74		68	
The counselor is involved in the campus site-based decision-making process		91		86
My principal often shares new ideas, approaches, professional readings/research, and experiences with me	73		61	
I often share new ideas, approaches, professional readings/research, and experiences with my counselor		85		92

	Elementary		Secondary	
	Counselors	Principals	Counselors	Principals
Campus Leadership (continued)				
My principal routinely shares vital and important parent and student communiqués with me	83		68	
I routinely share vital and important parent and student communiqués with my counselor		94		97
Training Satisfaction				
Prepared me to work collaboratively with principals (counselors)	55	64	41	72
Helped me to understand how to support principals (counselors)	50	64	36	64
Helped me to understand how much to disclose to principals regarding student confidences	69		67	
Helped me to understand how much I should expect counselors to disclose regarding student confidences		56		65

the variables, the difference in perception among elementary counselors and principals was 10 percentage points or less.

By contrast, a 12 percentage-point or less difference was only present among secondary counselors and principals on two variables. Thus, the pattern is quite apparent; secondary school counselors and principals saw most of the relationship, leadership and training issues quite differently. When asked about the principals often sharing ideas with the counselor, only 61% of secondary counselors agreed that this occurred while 92% of principals agreed. This difference of 31 percentage points was not atypical of the disparity between the secondary counselors and principals. There was a 20 percentage-point (or greater) difference among secondary counselors and principals on 10 variables.

When asked if their training prepared them to work effectively with each other, the percentages in all four groups dropped. As Table 1 indicates, a lower percentage of elementary (55%) and secondary (41%) school counselors agreed that their training prepared them to work collaboratively with principals than elementary (64%) and secondary (72%) school principals, but the responses on the three training variables in Table 1 were among the lowest percentages of all the variables in all four groups of counselors and principals. Even fewer of the respondents said their training helped them to understand how to support one another, with secondary school counselors (36%) standing out as the lowest group of the four.

Another difficult issue for principals and counselors is confidentiality in the counseling relationship. Ethical standards from the American School Counselor Association (2004) can be confusing to school counselors because they are expected to keep student disclosures confidential (within limits) but also are expected to inform school officials of potentially destructive or disruptive acts of students. In the current study, slightly more than two-thirds of elementary (69%) and secondary (67%) school counselors said their training helped them understand how much to disclose to principals regarding student' confidences, and even fewer elementary (56%) principals stated their training prepared them to know how much they should expect counselors to disclose. Thus, it appears that many of the respondents in each group viewed their training as inadequate to prepare them to work together and understand the boundaries of confidentiality in this relationship.

Primary Analyses

To examine differences between counselors and principals on the three factors, factor scores were saved and used as dependent variables; however, the data did not meet the model assumptions of the general linear model so non-parametric statistical analyses were used. To reduce the risk of experiment-wise Type I error, alpha was set at .01 (Armstrong & Henson, 2005). A Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a statistically significant difference in levels of relationship quality across the four groups (EC, n = 195; SC, n = 167; EP, n = 108; & SP, n = 145), χ^2 (3, n = 615) = 47.31, p < .001. A second Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a statistically significant difference in levels of campus leadership (EC, n = 195; SC, n = 167; EP, n = 108; & SP, n = 145), χ^2 (3, n = 615) = 16.0, p = .001. In addition a statistically significant difference was found in training satisfaction (EC, n = 195; SC, n = 167; EP, n = 108; & SP, n = 145), χ^2 (3, n = 615) = 47.31, p < .001.

Mann-Whitney U post hoc tests were conducted to determine which groups were significantly different from one another. A Mann-Whitney U test indicated a statistically significant difference in relationship quality levels between elementary counselors (EC, Md = -.139, n = 195) and elementary principals (EP, Md = -.669, n = 108), U = 7626, z = -3.98, p < .001, r = -.23 (small effect). There were no statistically significant differences in campus leadership between EC (Md = -.022, n = 195) and EP (Md = -.198, n = 108), U = 9459, z = -1.47, p = .143, nor were there statistically significant differences in training satisfaction between EC (Md = .074, n = 195) and EP (Md = -.414, n = 108), U = 9518, z = -1.39, p = .166. A statistically significant difference in relationship quality levels was found between secondary counselors (SC, Md = .147, n = 167) and

secondary principals (SP, *Md* = -.539, *n* = 145), *U* = 7832, *z* = -5.38, *p* < .001, r = -.3 (medium effect). A Mann-Whitney *U* test revealed a statistically significant difference in campus leadership between SC (*Md* = .033, *n* = 167) and SP (*Md* = -.386, *n* = 145), *U* = 9326, *z* = -3.5, *p* < .001, r = -.198 (small effect). Another statistically significant difference in training satisfaction was found between SC (*Md* = .565, *n* = 167) and SP (*Md* = -.533, *n* = 145), *U* = 8469, *z* = -4.58, *p* < .001, r = -.26 (small effect).

In summary, the inferential analyses supported the descriptive findings; most of the differences between school counselors and principals were in secondary schools. Three of the four statistically significant Mann Whitney *U* tests were between secondary counselors and principals and the only medium effect size difference was between secondary school counselors and principals.

Discussion

"Now more than ever, the relationship between professional school counselors and principals is crucial" (Janson, Militello, & Kosine, 2008, p. 353). Though the principals in the current study tended to view this relationship more favorably than the counselors, counselors for the most part felt supported by and trusted their principals. However, the obvious pattern in this study that is consistent through all three factors (relationship quality, campus leadership and training satisfaction) is secondary school counselors clearly perceived the relationship the most negatively. The primary focus in this study is on the differences in perception between counselors and principals, and the negative perceptions of secondary counselors are accentuated by those of secondary principals, which were the highest of any group. Secondary principals had the highest percentages on the vast majority of the variables (15 of 18) listed in Table 1, while

secondary counselors had the lowest percentages (16 of 18). In other words, secondary principals agreed with the statements in Table 1 most often and secondary counselors least often. If this finding is true in the population of secondary counselors and principals, it might add additional stress to the professional lives of secondary counselors (Meyers, 2005). If these counselors see issues as significantly more problematic than their principals, the disparity could be a source of friction and frustration for the counselors. For example, 74% of secondary school counselors (compared to 90% of secondary principals) indicated they were satisfied with their role. If one of the secondary school counselors who is not satisfied attempts to initiate a conversation with a principal who is pleased with the status quo, the counselor faces a more difficult challenge than one whose perceptions are closer to her principal's. Differences in perception make communication and collaboration more challenging.

By contrast, based on the post hoc test results, there was only one statistically significant difference between elementary counselors and principals among the three factors (relationship quality, campus leadership and training satisfaction) while secondary counselors and principals were statistically significantly different in all three areas. On most of the variables in Table 1, the overall gap between elementary counselors' and principals' perceptions was less than with the secondary group but it does appear that elementary school counselors agree less than principals on how crises and delicate situations are handled.

In the area of leadership, elementary counselors and principals were more than 10 percentage points apart on four out of five variables. For example, elementary counselors (78%) appear to see themselves as a vital part of the campus leadership

team compared to principals (86%), and they do not see themselves (74%) as involved in site-based decision-making as their principals (91%) see them. This disparity may be due to more of a focus on site-based decision-making by administrators. Though the role of school counselors is shifting to one of leadership, the elementary school counselors in this study may not have changed in this area. Of course, they may not have as much opportunity to participate in site-based decisions as administrators think they have. Though there are some differences in perception, it would be reasonable to assume that communication and understanding between elementary counselors and principals might be less challenging given the closer matching of their perceptions.

Many of the issues between principals and counselors in the current study highlight the importance of this relationship and underscore the importance of a greater emphasis on it in professional preparation programs. In the current study, only 36% of secondary school counselors agreed that their training helped them understand how to support principals and less than half (41%) stated that their training prepared them to work collaboratively with principals. Though elementary school counselors' percentages were higher (50% and 55% respectively), both groups appear to believe that their training did not prepare them adequately in these areas. Secondary school principals also indicated a lack of preparation in their training to work with counselors, which was in contrast to their perceptions in the areas of relationship and leadership.

Limitations

In survey research, self-report responses may be problematic because researchers are not able to guarantee that respondents' answers are truthful and accurate. In the current study, the overall response rate of less than 40% lowers the

external validity of the scores. Specifically, the response rate for elementary school principals was lower than the other groups, and as mentioned previously, may have been adversely affected by a lack of elementary school counselors in the western region of the country. By contrast, the largest group in the survey was elementary school counselors so this geographical issue did not appear to affect the response rate in this group.

Non-parametric statistical analyses were utilized in this study because the assumption of normality was not met. Some non-parametric analyses (Pallant, 2007) have less statistical power and “they may be less sensitive than their more powerful parametric cousins, and may therefore fail to detect differences between groups” (p. 210).

Implications for School Counselors

Relationship Building

According to Fitch et al. (2001), school counselors should set the tone for their relationship with principals beginning in their job interview. During the interview, Fitch et al. recommend that counselors provide the principal a summary of a comprehensive developmental guidance program to determine the principals’ response to the proposed program. “This is the counselor's first chance to obtain support for a solid program” (p. 97). If principals are supportive of the counseling program and informed about appropriate roles of counselors from the beginning, a more collaborative relationship is likely to develop.

Two-thirds of the secondary school counselors in this study indicated their principals understood their roles compared to 80% of elementary counselors. This

finding underscores the importance of all school counselors—especially secondary counselors—educating principals about their roles. Different perceptions of appropriate roles strain the relationship and adversely affect collaborative partnerships. Given the size and complexity of many middle and high schools, it may be more challenging for secondary counselors to meet regularly with principals but without consistent communication between counselors and principals existing issues in the relationship are likely to worsen.

Assertiveness

One of the challenges many school counselors experience involves initiating conversations with principals that may include elements of conflict. Many school counselors have not been trained to initiate these types of conversations (Dollarhide, et al., 2007; Fitch et al., 2001), which adds to the difficulty. Given that the sample of school counselors in the current study is 88% female, additional factors may complicate attitudes toward assertive behavior. Lerner (1985) noted that many women tend to "sacrifice the self in order to preserve harmony with others" (p. 11). Thus, being assertive may be more challenging for female school counselors with a strong dislike for conflict. Based on findings in this study, the need to be assertive with principals is even more critical in secondary schools because the gap between perceptions of counselors and principals is much more pronounced.

Fitch et al. (2001) stressed the importance of counselors knowing the difference between assertive and aggressive communication so that they might be more effective in expressing their needs and grievances to principals. It might be beneficial for school counselors to read books on assertiveness such as *When I Say No I Feel Guilty* (Smith,

1985), which is a widely used source for assertiveness training. Finding support and guidance from fellow counselors who have successfully initiated difficult conversations with their principals may also be helpful.

Communication and Advocacy

Several researchers have stressed the importance of communicating clearly with administrators about the goals and achievements of the counseling program (Dollarhide et al., 2007; Fitch et al., 2001).

> School counselors must document their value as a resource to the entire school community. For example, a school counselor working with academically challenged students can track the successes of these students that occur as a result of their experiences with the school counselor (Dollarhide et al., p. 367).

School counselors should not only advocate for students but also "advocate for themselves. They need to make sure principals know that they do a variety of things: They counsel kids with issues, they work on transitions, they do problem solving with kids and families" (Dollarhide et al., p. 365). As Meyers (2005) noted, most principals receive little or no training on the role of school counselors; therefore, it is the school counselors' responsibility to tell the principal what they are doing, how well they are doing it and what they plan to do next. Meyers also stressed the importance of counselors having facts and data to support their opinions when they talk to principals.

Implications for Counselor Educators

Findings from the current study support recommendations from previous authors and researchers that suggest more emphasis on the relationship with principals is needed in counselor and principal preparation programs (Dollarhide et al., 2007;

Shofner & Briggs, 2001; Shofner & Williamson, 2000). As Dollarhide et al. noted, “the counselor-principal relationship has far-reaching influence on the systems that impact school climate and on the nature of the student support roles adopted by a school counselor” (p. 367). In the current study, Table 1 indicates the training variables had the lowest percentages across the four groups of respondents, which suggests that counselors and principals believed their training did not adequately prepare them to work effectively with each other. Specifically, less than two-thirds of the principals (64% for both groups) indicated their training helped them understand how to support counselors.

This study also agrees with previous authors who have stated that school counselors and principals are not trained to work collaboratively with each other. In Table 1, slightly more than half (55%) of elementary and less than half (41%) of secondary counselors agreed they had been trained to work collaboratively with principals. This finding indicates that approximately half of these counselors believed they were not trained adequately in this area. Given the importance of collaboration between principal and counselor in today’s schools, more emphasis should be placed on this critical aspect of the principal-counselor relationship. As Fitch et al. (2001) recommended:

> Counselor-principal collaboration issues should be addressed in training programs, and school counselors need to be aware, prior to employment, of how their supervisors view the counselor's role. Ultimately, collaboration will be needed with educational leadership programs to ensure that graduates of these

programs have a solid understanding of a comprehensive developmental school counseling program (p. 99).

Counselor Education and Educational Leadership Collaboration

Amatea and Clark (2005) noted that universities should “initiate courses, seminars, and field experiences in which graduate students in counseling, educational leadership, and teaching are enrolled together so that they can learn what each has to offer and how to work as a team” (p. 25). Among counselor educators, Perusse, Goodnough and Bouknight (2007) found that direct collaboration with educational administration was the most popular way for ideas to be exchanged. As Fitch et al. (2001) stated, not only do school counselors need training in collaboration, but counselor education programs also need to collaborate with educational leadership programs to encourage dialogue between the two groups of trainees, increase understanding and provide meaningful experiences prior to graduation in which future counselors and principals are able to listen to each other and discuss critical aspects of this vital relationship (Shofner & Briggs, 2001; Shofner & Williamson, 2000).

Shofner and Briggs (2001) created a CD-ROM with vignettes that could be viewed by pre-service principals and counselors with the goal of promoting more collaboration between the two groups. Similarly, Shofner and Williamson (2000) arranged for counselors and principals to attend a seminar together to promote inter-professional collaboration. Both of these strategies to promote interaction and collaboration are examples of the kind of experiences needed by trainees to prepare them to work together in the field. It would appear that the impetus for greater collaboration between training programs should come from counselor education

programs because the counselor is directly impacted by this relationship more significantly. Fitch et al. (2001) contended that training programs should address counselor-principal collaboration issues. “Collaboration will be needed with educational leadership programs to ensure that graduates of these programs have a solid understanding of a comprehensive developmental school counseling program” (Fitch et al., p. 99).

Leadership

Educational administration programs provide pre-service principals with coursework in leadership but counselor education programs focus on different skill sets for school counselor trainees. Though the current Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2009) standards for school counseling programs include leadership as one of the domains of student learning, the primary focus is on knowledge and understanding rather than skill-based practice. In the CACREP domain of collaboration and consultation, principals are not even mentioned. Given the importance of consulting and collaborating with principals for the overall success of school counseling programs, this omission of principals seems to be significant.

As Dollarhide et al. (2007) noted, “the skills of leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and consultation may deserve more attention in preparation programs” (p. 368). Fitch et al. (2001) recommended assertiveness training for school counselor trainees and suggested that they “role-play different techniques for communicating their needs and grievances. The role-playing sessions should show how assertive

communication differs from aggressive communication; students should also be advised on how to choose their battles" (p. 97).

Recommendations for Future Research

One of the limitations of survey research is the dependence on self-reporting rather than observation. Qualitative studies include observation of participants, interviews, and the analysis of documents (Heppner, Wampold, & Kivlighan, 2008). Field-based research on the relationship between school counselors and principals could fill some of the gaps in the literature. Given the magnitude of the disparity of perception between secondary school counselors and principals, it would be informative to observe the relationship in context and analyze it in greater depth.

Another useful direction for future research might be a retrospective examination of school counselor and principal training in which participants could reflect on training they wish they had received that would have helped them navigate the unpredictable currents of this critical relationship. In addition, such a line of inquiry might include a retrospective look at the challenges counselors and principals experienced in relating to each other their first few years on the job. As Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) discovered, asking seasoned counselors to describe earlier experiences can be very enlightening.

Conclusion

The relationship between the counselor and principal is critical because the principal has the influence to directly impact the quality of the school counseling program. As Zalaquett (2005) noted, it is important for school counselors to work with principals to "form a partnership based on knowledge, trust, and positive regard for what

each professional does” (p. 456). More than half of the counselors and over one-third of the principals in the current study indicated their training programs did not help them understand how to support one another or work collaboratively. Secondary school counselors in this study were the most dissatisfied with their training and their relationship with their principal, which suggests that secondary counselor trainees may need additional support in their preparation programs. This study supports previous research that calls for more emphasis to be given to principal-counselor relationships in both professional preparation programs.

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