

PERCEPTIONS OF IMPLEMENTING A COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELING
PROGRAM IN TEXAS: THE VOICES OF PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL COUNSELORS

A Dissertation

by

ABRAN JONATHAN RODRIGUEZ

BS, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, 2012
MS, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, 2016

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This dissertation meets the standards for scope and quality of
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is hereby approved.

Joshua Watson, Ph.D.
Chair

Jennifer Gerlach, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Sandy-Ann M. Griffith, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Frank Lucido, Ed.D.
Graduate Faculty Representative

MAY 2019

ABSTRACT

There is convincing evidence validating the positive impact of comprehensive school counseling programs on a variety of student factors such as attendance, academic progress, behavior and school climate (Carey & Dimmitt, 2012). Literature exists involving the perceptions of counseling program leaders in implementing school counseling programs in Texas; however, the voices of professional school counselors have yet to be recognized. Therefore, the overarching aim of this study was to fill the notable gap of professional school counselor's silence in the existing literature. The purpose of this study was to investigate professional school counselors' experiences implementing a comprehensive school counseling program in Texas. A descriptive phenomenological study design was employed to determine what the experiences of professional school counselors meant to them through comprehensive descriptions. The researcher selected participants via a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling. A total of 12 professional school counselors participated in individual interviews. In this study, the researcher utilized Moustakas' (1994) Modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method to analyze the professional school counselor's descriptions of their lived experiences of implementing a comprehensive school counseling program in Texas (Colaizzi, 1973; Keen, 1975; Stevick, 1971). Conceptually, this study was framed within the Fifth Edition of the Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2018). The findings of this study provides professional school counselors, counselor educators, researchers, and public education stakeholders a deeper understanding of factors related to the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs as experienced by professional school counselors.

Keywords: professional school counselor, comprehensive school counseling program

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Professional school counselors play a vital role in promoting greater educational equity and quality academic performance for all students through their involvement as instructional leaders and stakeholders in school reform initiatives. To be productive and valued players in this mission, professional school counselors must be allowed to implement a comprehensive school counseling program to their fullest potential to service students in the twenty-first century (Cicero, 2010). Comprehensive school counseling programs have evolved significantly over the past 100 years, most notably the identities, roles, and responsibilities that professional school counselors assume in public school systems. For example, vocational guidance, a practice geared more towards mental hygiene and directive counseling from the 1900s to the late 1950s, was one of the first descriptions used for what we now call school counseling (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; Savickas, 2009). From the late 1950s to the early 1990s, school counseling professionals began focusing on developmental theories and academic guidance resulting in increased popularity in group counseling and guidance curriculum (Cox, 2018). The combination of psychoanalytical and social ideologies became the underpinnings of this early developmental stage of the counseling profession (Gehart, 2016; Kaplan & Gladding, 2011). The metamorphosis of school counseling services followed suit and was apparent with the transition from vocational counseling to a more theory-driven, multiculturally sensitive approach based on professional school counselor competency (Cinotti, 2014).

Because of this expansion of professional school counselor roles, school counseling stakeholders developed new practice requirements. The need for qualification accountability increased licensure and certification requisites. Currently, the combination of an advanced degree and mastery in professional school counselor competencies are requirements to practice

as a professional school counselor in most Texas public-school districts (Cox, 2018). According to the American School Counselor Association (American School Counseling Association [ASCA], 2012), professional school counselor competencies address the individual, educational, career, and social needs of students. In Texas, according to the Texas Education Code (TEC) §21.003, a person may not be employed as a professional school counselor by a school district unless certified by the state agency that certifies that profession. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) sets forth the certification requirements for professional school counselors. TEA requires professional school counselors to have completed a school counselor preparation program in addition to holding a minimum requirement of a master's degree from a qualified higher education institution. After September 2019, applicants who are admitted to an educator preparation program for a school counselor certificate will be required to hold, at a minimum, a 48-hour master's degree specifically in counseling from an accredited institution of higher education (TEC, §21.003). Additionally, TEA also requires the combination of passing the Texas Examination of Educator Standards, completing a minimum amount of school counseling related graduate courses, and two years of certified teaching experience (Texas Education Agency, 2018).

TEA not only sets forth the certification requirements for professional school counselors but recognizes the importance of gatekeeping credentials and educational development. Such focus ensures that professional school counselors are ready to meet the demands of Texas public education. The needs of students, adolescents, parents, and families are becoming increasingly more complex. These populations need the intentional support of all public education stakeholders including professional school counselors (Fye, 2016). It is crucial that professional school counselors assist such populations and for this reason, the TEC requires school districts to

provide students with school counseling services (Texas Education Agency, 2018). For example, TEC §33.004, requires professional school counselors make counselor-related materials, such as the guidance curriculum used for the academic year, available to all parents and legal guardians. TEC §33.007 requires that professional school counselors provide students and their guardians with information regarding the significance of college/career education as well as financial aid opportunities and requirements. Notably, TEC §33.006 requires professional school counselors to address a priority of student needs. Among the types of students who are required to be assisted by professional school counselors are those who are at-risk of dropping out of school, involved in drug abuse or gangs, need instructional support, or are exceptionally skilled.

To provide quality support for Texas students, the 74th Texas Legislature legalized comprehensive school counseling programs via TEC §33.005. This legislation states “a school counselor shall work with the school faculty and staff, students, parents, and the community to plan, implement, and evaluate a developmental guidance and counseling program” (TEC §33.005). As such, Texas professional school counselors are charged with planning, designing, implementing, and evaluating their comprehensive school counseling programs based on this codified requirement. The goal of Texas professional school counselors is to foster learning and to service the individual, educational, career, and social needs of all Texas scholars (Texas Education Agency, 2018). This goal requires significant effort. The American School Counseling Association (ASCA) recommends comprehensive school counseling programs be “comprehensive in scope, preventative in design, and developmental in nature” (ASCA, 2012, pg. 13). It is through guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and system support that Texas professional school counselors deliver the Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (Texas Model; Texas Education Agency, 2018).

The TEA presented the first edition of the Texas Model in 1991. Four years later, Texas legislators codified the Texas Model because of the apparent need for implementation support of developmental school counseling systems. However, this incorporation into the TEC only addressed elementary professional school counselors. Due to changes in the school counseling field and legislative requirements, a revision to the Texas Model resulted in the publication of the second edition of the model in 1997. One year later, the TEA solicited input from public school stakeholders and included this feedback in the third edition of the Texas Model. In 2001, a new statutory requirement mandated that all Texas public schools implement a comprehensive school counseling program. This statutory requirement exists in chapter 33 of the TEC. Roles and responsibilities of Texas professional school counselors were defined and codified at this time. Because of the recommendations provided by the TEA Guidance Advisory Committee, the TEA published the fourth edition of the Texas Model in 2004.

Additionally, the publication of the fourth edition reflected the current needs of Texas students. Over a decade later, Texas professional school counselors, through the Texas Counseling Association (TCA), requested an update to the Texas Model that reflected the progression of professional school counselors and legal requirements. In response, TCA created a special task force to revise and update the Texas Model which resulted in changes to professional school counselor responsibilities, the model implementation process, foundational components, program structure and counseling program scope and sequence (Texas Education Agency, 2018). The TEA published the fifth edition of the Texas Model in 2018.

The Texas school counseling standards correspond with the national school counseling standards set forth by ASCA. Both sets of standards endorse professional school counselors “design and deliver comprehensive school counseling programs” that are data-driven and

promote student success (ASCA, 2012, p. 13). Furthermore, the Texas Model outlines the process in which Texas professional school counselors service all students (Texas Education Agency, 2018). Additionally, the Texas Model is codified in law, and for these reasons, it served as the conceptual framework in this study.

Statement of the Problem

The ASCA National Model was created to provide a structure for comprehensive school counseling programs that are developmental, comprehensive, and data-driven (ASCA, 2012). Research exists concerning the implementation process based on the ASCA National Model as well as the positive impact that comprehensive school counseling programs have on student academic success (Neil, 2015; Studer, Diambra, Breckner, & Heidel, 2011). There is a paucity of research that focuses on state-specific models such as the Texas Model. Although the Texas Model recommends collaboration between professional school counselors, campus administrators, district leaders, and local boards of education (Texas Education Agency, 2018), the minimal state-specific research that exists only includes school administrators and district leaders as participants. It is true that existing state-specific research provides a significant contribution to the literature regarding the Texas Model, but there continues to be an absence in the literature concerning the voices of Texas professional school counselors.

Although this absence is not the issue, it is the effects of this absence that continues to challenge the school counseling profession in Texas. Not allowing the voices of professional school counselors to be recognized diminishes their capability to execute an effective, comprehensive school counseling program to its full potential. The victims of this unfortunate occurrence are students, parents, and families who rely on professional school counselors to deliver critical components of the Texas Model through guidance curriculum, responsive

services, individual student planning, and system support (Texas Education Agency, 2018). Not knowing the experiences related to the implementation of the Texas Model, public school stakeholders such as district leaders, school counseling coordinators, and campus principals remain limited in their ability to support their professional school counselors, especially regarding the implementation of their developmental guidance and counseling programs as required by TEC §33.005.

Purpose of the Study

Professional school counseling researchers have conducted research for decades. There is evidence in the research literature supporting comprehensive school counseling programs positively impacting student's overall academic achievement, attendance, and behavior (Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Hoffman, 2012; Lapan et al., 2012; Wilkerson, Pérusse, & Ashley, 2013). The extensive collection of school counseling research ranges in topics from professional school counselor roles and responsibilities to the impact of the ASCA National Model on student success (ASCA, 2012; Young, Dollarhide, & Baughman, 2015). Codified in Texas law through legal program requirements, the Texas Model outlines the provision of school counseling services for all Texas students. However, because of the legal codification of the Texas Model, the ASCA National Model is merely supplementary in Texas (Cox, 2018).

While Texas law requires implementation of a developmental guidance and counseling program by professional school counselors (TEC §33.005), a lack of research addressing the implementation experiences connected to this requirement exists. This descriptive phenomenological study aimed to shed light on the lived experience of implementing comprehensive school counseling programs thereby informing decision-making policies facilitative of more seamless implementation in the future. Additionally, this study was designed

to address a gap in the research literature related to understanding Texas professional school counselors' lived experiences implementing comprehensive school counseling programs in their local school communities.

Research Question

The researcher proposed to understand professional school counselors' experiences in implementing a comprehensive school counseling program in Texas. This study addressed the following research question:

1. What are the lived experiences of professional school counselors regarding their efforts in implementing a comprehensive school counseling program in Texas?

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

The researcher assumed that all the professional school counseling participants understood the professional school counselor's role and responsibility as defined by the TEC §21.003. Another assumption was that professional school counseling participants understood the process of planning, designing, implementing, and evaluating a comprehensive school counseling program as endorsed by the Texas Model (Texas Education Agency, 2018). Additionally, the final assumption was that all participants would answer the interview questions with honesty and sincerity to their lived experiences.

The researcher identified several study limitations. Demographical factors such as the size of schools from where the participants of this study work at and their counselor-to-student ratios may have been additional barriers to their implementation of their school counseling programs, thus having skewed their perceptions. Second, professional development variations such as the length and quality of the school counseling training that the participants have had may have affected their comprehension of and experience in implementing school counseling

programs. Last, the researcher maintained a professional leadership role in Texas school counseling. Due to this fact, one possible limitation was that participants may have been tempted to reflect in a way that would signify fidelity of implementation to the Texas Model. Last, the ASCA National Model is implemented by many Texas professional school counselors who at the same time may not know the Texas Model.

Significance of the Study

This study had several implications that could impact professional school counselors, counselor educators, researchers, and public education stakeholders. Counselor education programs can utilize the themes derived from this study to inform the development of their professional school counselor curriculum to better meet the needs of Texas school counseling programs, especially those requiring additional growth and development. The results of this study can better inform school counseling students by exposing the realities of implementing school counseling programs. Armed with this information, students can choose to seek out professional development opportunities to prepare them for the real world of school counseling during their practicum and internship experiences. This study also can inform the efforts of professional school counselors, school boards, campus administrators and district leaders who are developing or reforming their comprehensive school counseling programs.

Understanding the lived experiences of professional school counselors attempting to implement school counseling programs is vital to the continued growth of the school counseling profession. Understanding these specific experiences allow professional school counselors to better meet the needs of students, which in turn demonstrates the profession's importance in educational systems. Professional associations such as the American School Counseling Association (ASCA), the Texas Counseling Association (TCA), and the Texas School

Counseling Association (TSCA) can become better informed by qualitative research to advocate effectively for professional school counselors. When public school stakeholders understand such factors, they are more equipped to design district and campus procedures directly benefiting student success via their school counseling programs.

Definition of Terms

ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs (ASCA): A national comprehensive school counseling program model that provides an outlined process for professional school counselors to plan, organize, execute, administer and assess their programs for the success of students. This model includes an all-inclusive method to foundation, delivery, management, and accountability (Bowers & Hatch, 2005).

Comprehensive school counseling program: An intentional and systematic method for assisting students to acquire and exercise basic life skills. Comprehensive school counseling programs make use of the expertise of professional school counselors.

Professional School Counselor: A school-based counseling professional, referred to as *guidance counselor* in the past, that helps students achieve academic success through service delivery. Through professional school counselor competencies, such persons address the individual, educational, career, and social needs of all students. In Texas as of September 2019, professional school counselors will be certified professionals who have (1) a minimum of a 48-hour master's degree in counseling, (2) passed the Texas Examination of Educator Standards, (3) completed minimum amount of school counseling related graduate courses, and (4) two years of certified teaching experience (Texas Education Code, §21.003).

Texas Counseling Association (TCA): A state professional counseling association that provides

leadership, advocacy, and education to increase access to professional counselors in Texas.

Texas Education Agency (TEA): A state organization that supervises primary and secondary public education in Texas. The commissioner of education regulates and is responsible for the governance of Texas education laws and rules.

Texas Education Code (TEC): Laws and rules applying to educational institutions that are passed by the Texas state legislature. These statutes are supported partially or in their entirety by state tax funds.

The Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs, Fifth Edition (Texas Model): The Texas Counseling Association produced this publication in collaboration with the TEA. This guide outlines a process for modifying comprehensive school counseling programs to address various needs of Texas public schools. It is a resource that is used by school districts to recognize quality program standards and goals to enhance comprehensive school counseling programs.

Texas School Counseling Association (TSCA): TSCA is a division of the Texas Counseling Association. It is a professional organization that aims to serve Texas professional school counselors by supporting and progressing the functions of comprehensive school counseling programs.

Organization of the Study

The researcher has organized this dissertation into four chapters. Chapter one introduces the study's primary purpose, statement of the problem, research question, the significance of the study, definition of terms, assumptions, and limitations. The purpose of this study is to investigate Texas professional school counselors' lived experiences in implementing a

comprehensive school counseling program in Texas. Chapter Two provides a detailed review of the literature related to comprehensive school counseling programs. Other literature of importance to the understanding of this research study was reviewed and included. This review of literature consists of a chronicle of school counseling history, a description of school counseling, a summary of comprehensive school counseling programs as they relate to the ASCA National Model and the Texas Model, and an overview of professional school counselor topics such as roles, responsibilities, counselor-to-student ratios, and non-counseling duties. Chapter Three includes the study's methodology and recapitulates the research question. Additionally, the researcher explains the design of the study and describes the sampling procedure. Furthermore, this chapter includes a description of data collection and analysis. Chapter Four provides the study's results and data analysis written in the form of a journal article manuscript. Additionally, this chapter includes critical elements from chapters one, two, and three to provide a well-rounded depiction of the study.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter includes a description of the conceptual framework from which I designed my study as well as the main constructs involved in this original inquiry. First, I define my epistemological framework based on interpretivism. Next, I identify the conceptual framework as being the Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (Texas Education Agency, 2018). I based my review on resources from the literature concerning professional school counselors and comprehensive school counseling programs. I obtained all resources using several peer-reviewed journals as well as databases related to psychology, counseling, and education. My university library's main page search engine was also a primary resource that I used. Key constructs were used as search terms to obtain viable literature on the topic of professional school counseling and comprehensive school counseling programs.

Epistemological Framework

I designed and conceptualized this study using an interpretive epistemological framework (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). According to Rossman and Rallis (2017), researchers working from an interpretivist epistemology aim to comprehend the social world as status quo (as it is) from the viewpoint of individual experiences. The exploration and understanding of different individual meanings and experiences as they relate to the investigation of the specific phenomenon are aims of the researcher working from an interpretivist epistemology (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, working from this paradigm, I viewed my participants as “creators of their worlds” (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 43-44). Through interviews, I sought an in-depth understanding of their experiences related to implementing their comprehensive school counseling program. Since I was not starting with a specific theory, as positivistic researchers do,

I instead used an inductive approach which is representative in interpretivism. An inductive approach allowed me to develop a deep understanding of the themes and patterns derived from the participant's expressed meanings, which in turn became my interpretation (Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, & Morales, 2007). It is important to note that researchers working from an interpretivist framework recognize their worldviews and experiences may or may not influence their interpretations (Creswell, 2013).

For my study, I unearthed the meanings of professional school counselors' experiences of implementing comprehensive school counseling programs through my use of interviews. I conducted my study in an interpretivist tradition to address the question "What are the lived experiences of professional school counselors regarding their efforts in implementing a comprehensive school counseling program in Texas?". It was best to address this question through the interpretivist tradition because of its accord to *Verstehen* (understanding), which also corresponded with my phenomenological method (Schwandt, 2007). My research question was in line with the interpretivist framework because of the focus I put on lived experience. It was through my research question that I tied a philosophical discipline to a research method, as phenomenology is often considered central to the interpretive paradigm (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

My experience in providing responsive school counseling services to at-risk adolescents has instilled in me a deep appreciation for narratives. The approach of interpretivism resonates with me because of the respect for human meaning it requires. I, like many individuals, have experienced moments in life that have deep meaning in my existence. I find strength in the ability to share these meanings with others. An assumption in interpretivism regarding the nature of reality is that it is socially constructed (Giddens, 2013). I have witnessed as a counselor the

transformational power that narratives have in client's lives. Narratives give people a voice, and if respectfully present, a counselor can share in the most profound realities of those people without having to experience a specific phenomenon.

The interaction component of subject and researcher in qualitative inquiry is what I agree with most. I believe that our personal stories and experiences as human beings are irreplaceable, and it is our fundamental right to decide who can hear or understand them. In respect to this fundamental right, I also believe that understanding the meanings of others is a privilege. In qualitative research, one of the underlining purposes is to comprehend meanings of human action. In this manner, qualitative researchers are tasked with the mission of identifying meaning in the participants they study. Through an interpretive epistemological framework I shared in the lived experiences of my participants and sought to understand their meanings of implementing comprehensive school counseling programs.

Conceptual Framework

The Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (Texas Model) was created by the TEA to support student success through effective, comprehensive school counseling programs (Texas Education Agency, 2018). The Texas Model is a tool for professional school counselors, administrators, school board members, and other stakeholders who are developing, authenticating or refining their comprehensive school counseling systems. Most importantly, the Texas Model is a process outline for adopting comprehensive school counseling programs to meet the needs of Texas students (Texas Education Agency, 2018). Educators founded the Texas Model upon the roots of developmental psychology (ASCA, 2012; Texas Education Agency, 2018). The creators of the Texas Model intertwined this framework with educational philosophy and school counseling methodology. The Texas Model was

constructed upon the philosophical rationale that professional school counselors play a vital role in the holistic development of students (Texas Education Agency, 2018). Through this framework, the Texas Model is designed to cover development across the academic span of students, similar to how developmental psychology covers the human development across the lifespan of clients (DeKruyf, Auger, & Trice-Black, 2013).

The conceptual basis of this study included the Texas Model's four service delivery components of "guidance curriculum, responsive services, individual student planning, and system support" (Texas Education Agency, 2018). The interview protocol of this study was specifically designed to understand the participant's experiences of these four service delivery components. More specifically, the conceptual basis of this study also included responsibility domains of the Texas Model (Texas Education Agency, 2018). Under the Program Management Domain, professional school counselors must be able to consult and collaborate with others to provide services via the four delivery components of the Texas Model. The Guidance Domain requires professional school counselors offer individual and group assistance to students in academic, career, personal, and social need. The Counseling Domain involves professional school counselors making individual and group interventions accessible to all students. The Consultation Domain requires professional school counselors build collaborative relationships with public school personnel and community agencies to advocate for all students. The Coordination Domain involves professional school counselors acting as coordinators of resources and services to enhance academic, career, personal, and social success of students. The Student Assessment Domain requires professional school counselors to have the ability to review and interpret standardized test results and other student data to inform decision making as it relates to the development of all students. The Leadership Domain requires professional school

counselors acting as leaders in all four delivery components of comprehensive school counseling programs. The Advocacy Domain obliges professional school counselors to employ advocacy competencies in all elements of their comprehensive school counseling program. The Professional Behavior Domain requires professional school counselors to act responsibly towards their professional development and growth as a member of their school system. The Professional Standards Domain requires professional school counselors to adhere to professional standards in all components of their comprehensive school counseling program. Although this study was designed to address a gap in the research literature related to understanding Texas professional school counselors' experiences of implementing comprehensive school counseling programs, the Texas Model served merely as a conceptual basis and was not used to confine the study.

Literature Review Process

As I conducted my literature review, I had two main goals in mind: (1) to demonstrate a thorough command of the school counseling field and (2) to provide a comprehensive and contemporary review of the topic. As I designed my study, my review process of current literature served as a basis. My overarching intention was to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding school counseling and comprehensive school counseling programs.

Managing the Search

I initiated my journey into the literature review by formalizing an institutional affiliation with my university's library. I confirmed with my university's library technicians that I had functional access to all library resources. By doing so, I was able to freely utilize online databases both on and off campus, which I discuss in detail later in this chapter.

Before beginning my searches of online databases, I participated in university-based workshops tailored to the library research process at my university. Although I had conducted online research before, these workshops were immensely beneficial in walking me through the process and providing me with valuable instruction. I also sought individualized assistance from a reference librarian that specialized in the psychology field.

Selecting Search Engines and Databases

The first step into the search process included my selection of the search engines that I believed would cast a wide net for identifying potential research resources. After a short period of exploring several options, I decided to utilize my university's online library search engine as well as Google Scholar. These two search engines led me to the databases that would ultimately provide me all the research resources analyzed and synthesized for my dissertation. I utilized three research databases for my literature review; (1) the ERIC database provided through the EBSCO interface, (2) Dissertations and Theses Global provided through ProQuest, and (3) PsycINFO. I decided to use the ERIC database because of its sponsorship by the U.S Department of Education. Since this dissertation references legislation quite often, the use of such a database makes professional and logical sense to me. I chose to use the ProQuest and PsycINFO databases due to their reputation amongst researchers and educators as well as their inclusion of journal sources likely to include school counseling-related literature. I intended to achieve transferability with my study, which meant that it could be applied to other contexts or participant samples. My decision to use these specific databases as search tools, in my opinion, helped to ensure that the literature I based my study on would be supportive of its applicability.

Keywords

Since I included the Texas Model as the conceptual framework for my study, it made logical sense to have started my search process with keywords related to the topic of school counseling programs. Due to my experience in the school counseling field, I was aware that the term *comprehensive school counseling program* was widely known in the research community to represent implementable school counseling systems. Searching the PsycINFO database, the keywords *comprehensive school counseling program*, from 1987 to 2017, yielded 70 academic articles. To narrow my search to include more quality and relevant literature, I adjusted the output search criteria to include peer-reviewed journals for the last ten years. The keywords *comprehensive school counseling program* yielded 32 articles. Using the same output criteria but with the date range being the previous five years, the database yielded 16 articles. Searching the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global database, the keywords *comprehensive school counseling program*, from 1990 to 2018, yielded 35 dissertations without any specific output criteria, 19 dissertations as full texted, peer-reviewed publications from the previous 10 years, and 11 dissertations under the same output criteria but with the date range representing the previous five years. This information was useful for me because it gave me a suitable amount of resources to explore the general systemic underpinnings of school counseling programs. This information allowed me to gain knowledge of different factors related to the implementation process of comprehensive school counseling programs as they relate to the different key players in public school systems. A synthesis of this information is provided later in this chapter.

Since the Texas Model is based on the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012), it was clear to me that my study would benefit from a review of the related literature. Information on the ASCA National Model would direct me to specific constructs related to my research. Searching the PsycINFO database, the keywords *ASCA National Model*, from 2003 to 2017, yielded 60

journal articles. To narrow my search to include more quality and relevant literature, I adjusted the output search criteria to include peer-reviewed journals for the previous ten years, and the same keywords yielded 45 results. Using the same output criteria but with the date range being the previous five years, the database yielded 17 articles. Searching the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global database, the keywords *ASCA National Model*, from 2006 to 2018, yielded 15 dissertations without any specific output criteria, 13 dissertations as full texted, peer-reviewed publications from the previous ten years, and 10 dissertations under the same output criteria but with the date range representing the previous five years. The information associated with my ASCA National Model search provided me with resources related to school counseling program factors such as implementation, support, challenges, and evaluation. A synthesis of this information is provided later in this chapter.

I strictly utilized professional school counselors as participants for my study. I sought to investigate their lived experiences in implementing a comprehensive school counseling program. To gain a picture of the type of literature already existing regarding my sample population, I decided to use the keywords *school counselors* as part of my search. Searching the PsycINFO database, the keywords *school counselors*, from 1983 to 2018, yielded 2,916 journal articles. I realized from the number of articles produced that the term *school counselor* was too broad. After changing it to *professional school counselor*, the number of results diminished to 196 results. I assume that the appropriateness of adding the qualifier "professional" to my search protocol stems from the historical development of the identities of professional school counselors. I believe that as the school counseling profession evolved through educational history, so did the researcher's identification and mention of professional school counselors in literature. After I adjusted the output criteria to include only peer-reviewed journals for the

previous ten years, the same keywords yielded 89 results. Using the same output criteria but with the date range being the last five years, the database yielded 39 articles. Searching the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global database, the keywords *professional school counselor*, from 1948 to 2018, yielded 118 dissertations without any output limiters, 59 dissertations as peer-reviewed publications from the previous ten years, and 31 dissertations under the same output criteria but with the date range representing the previous five years. Literature related explicitly to professional school counselors benefitted the design of my study because it gave me a birds-eye view of their inclusion as participants in the world of research. A synthesis of literature related to professional school counselors is provided later in this chapter.

Literature Collection for Review

The next phase of my literature review included the assembly of my final collection of sources to include in my review. To further narrow my bank of literature using the keywords mentioned above, I analyzed all the source information from the peer-reviewed articles attained from the PsycINFO database from the last five years. This analysis resulted in an accumulated total of 72 articles. After removing duplicates, I had at my disposal 65 journal articles related to comprehensive school counseling programs, the ASCA National Model, and professional school counselors. The 65 articles mentioned above represent 23 peer-reviewed academic journals, with *Professional School Counseling* representing 60% ($n=39$) of the total. Only 6% ($n=4$) of the 65 articles were represented in the *Journal of Professional Counseling: Practice, Theory, and Research* making it the second most common journal publication out of the total. After a comprehensive review of the 65 articles, much of my review included literature published in *Professional School Counseling* and *Journal of Professional Counseling: Practice, Theory, and Research* due to their relevance to my topic of comprehensive school counseling programs. To

offset the bias that the *Professional School Counseling* journal displays regarding the school counseling profession, I decided to include non-school-counseling journals in my literature review. Other professional journals used in my literature review include *Counselor Education & Supervision*, *the Journal of Counseling & Development*, *the Qualitative Report*, *the Nurse Practitioner*, and *the Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*. The following section includes a synthesis of the trends and themes derived from my collection of resources.

Comprehensive School Counseling Programs

There is an extensive collection of literature that defines the positive impact comprehensive school counseling programs have on student outcomes. For example, Goodman-Scott, Watkinson, Martin, and Biles (2016) stated it is through comprehensive school counseling programs that professional school counselors enhance opportunities for students to develop social and emotional maturity. This is echoed in the statewide evaluation of the implementation of the ASCA National Model by Carey, Harrington, Martin, and Stevenson (2012). This statewide evaluation of school counseling programs consisted of survey, demographic, and outcome data from 144 Utah public high schools. The authors used hierarchical linear regression to determine if the school counseling programs at the 144 Utah public high schools had a significant impact on student educational outcomes after controlling for the variability in outcomes related to critical demographic differences between schools (Carey et al., 2012). The researchers found significant evidence that the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program produces many student benefits including boosted academic achievement, an increase in fair services, and a broader impact on career development (Carey et al., 2012).

Since the term *academic achievement* can be used to define a wide range of student growth, it is beneficial to school counseling researchers to express their definition of *academic*

achievement by better specifying participant and contextual details in their studies. In doing so, researchers can better provide a more transparent picture of the impact, both significant or insignificant, of their school counseling research. For example, a school-wide comparison of the annual yearly progress of an elementary school that adopted a comprehensive school counseling program and one that did not, is a study that is specific in its display of academic success (Wilkerson et al., 2013). This study resulted in a significantly higher proficiency rate in English Language Arts and Math for elementary students involved in a comprehensive school counseling program (Wilkerson et al., 2013).

Implementation

One factor directly affecting the impact comprehensive school counseling programs have on student outcomes is program implementation. (Lapan et al., 2012). Lapan (2012) ascertains that several studies on the delivery of comprehensive school counseling programs indicate that when professional school counselors are highly trained in the implementation process, students inherit quantifiable benefits. Factors such as large implementation gaps in programs across schools and unbalanced student-to-counselor ratios both affect the professional school counseling team's ability to implement an effective, comprehensive school counseling program on their campuses (Lapan, Whitcomb, & Aleman, 2012). The survey results of 888 professional school counselors who completed the *Survey of Comprehensive School Counseling Programs* in 514 Wisconsin public high schools indicated that the implementation training of professional school counselors and the level at which they implement their school counseling programs significantly affect the impact their programs play in student achievement (Burkard, Gillen, Martinez, & Skytte, 2012).

The TEA (2018) outlines a program implementation cycle for comprehensive school counseling programs in Texas. At a broader level, the American School Counseling Association (2012) describes an implementation framework for comprehensive school counseling programs nation-wide. Program implementation varies according to a school's local needs, student demographics, and resources. The implementation cycle of comprehensive school counseling programs include five steps that work simultaneously; they are (1) organization, (2) planning, (3) designing, (4) implementation, and (5) evaluation (ASCA, 2012; Texas Education Agency, 2018). As professional school counselors organize their school counseling programs, it is through identifying quality leadership that they ensure commitment to action. By adopting specific frameworks like the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012) or the Texas Model (Texas Education Agency, 2018) for example, professional school counselors can plan their programs according to a specific structure instead of having to reinvent the wheel. It is through the designing phase of the implementation cycle that professional school counselors can develop a master plan. By participating in the designing aspect, professional school counselors have the opportunity to become more readily equipped to handle challenges and barriers that may occur during the implementation process. It is through the actual implementation phase of a program (delivery of school counseling services) that professional school counselors can make needed program improvements. Upon discovering areas of needed growth, professional school counselors can evaluate their programs and make adjustments or revisions accordingly.

According to the 2015 school climate survey by Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, and Danischewski (2016), experiences of harassment, assault, and feeling unsafe were among the most common contributors to a hostile school environment. To demonstrate how the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program can impact school climate, I

provide the following example using lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning (LGBTQ) students. Kosciw et al. (2016) provide considerable evidence that most school environments are hostile towards LGBTQ students, but systemic models such as School Counselors: Educate, Affirm, Respond, and Empower (SCEARE) decrease hostility experienced by LGBTQ students (Asplund & Ordway, 2018). The SCEARE Model, as provided through a comprehensive school counseling program, aims to educate students about multicultural differences, offer opportunities to affirmation of all students, and includes anti-bullying prevention strategies to lower the occurrence of inequality within school culture (Asplund & Ordway, 2018). However beneficial evidence such as this may be, it does not mean that there are no barriers and challenges to the implementation process.

Studer et al. (2011) discovered in their survey of 81 CACREP school counseling program graduates that several challenges exist in the professional school counselor's endeavor to implement a comprehensive school counseling program. Participants of the study provided that the lack of system support of administration, unconstructive collaboration between same-campus counselors, and the non-adherence to a structured model were all barriers to effective implementation (Studer et al., 2011). Although these factors are amongst the most detrimental to the implementation process, system factors also serve as implementation barriers.

A system-related factor often seen as a barrier to the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs is student-to-school counselor ratios. As Rayle and Adams (2007) found in their exploratory study that focused on the differential patterns of daily work activities among elementary, middle, and high professional school counselors, heavy counselor-to-student ratios keep professional school counselors from concentrating on all needed areas of a comprehensive school counseling program. Participants of this study stated that due to their high

caseloads, they are forced to spend most of their time in crisis prevention and less time on other service delivery components. It is important to note that the ASCA National Model recommends a 250-to-1 ratio of students to professional school counselors and the Texas Model favors a 350-to-1 ratio for proper program implementation (ASCA, 2012; Texas Education Agency, 2018). It is equally as important to know that there is minimal research that supports the claims that these ratios as recommended by the ASCA and Texas Model are supportive or detrimental to the implementation process of comprehensive school counseling programs.

Program Support

Effective implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs requires the support of several key players. Duarte and Hatch (2014) express that school administrators, school district leaders, and other stakeholders are more likely to support their school counseling programs if positive results are grounded in data. However, the unfortunate reality for professional school counselors is that when there is a lack of support towards the implementation of their school counseling programs, adverse student outcomes occur (Gilfillan, 2017). For example, Gilfillan (2017) proves that high school student's knowledge of postsecondary education is related to whether they are a product of a well-rounded and an effectively implemented comprehensive school counseling program. Fye, Miller, and Rainey (2017) indicate that school stakeholders are often uneducated in the appropriate use of professional school counselors which directly impacts the level of support they offer them despite it being spelled out in the ASCA National Model. As Janson, Militello, and Kosine (2008) establish in their investigation of professional school counselors' and principal's perceptions of their professional relationships, school administrators often lack the educational training and understanding of the professional school counselor's role and responsibility within their school systems.

The responsibility of educating school administrators often falls on professional school counselors. Some efforts that can be made by professional school counselors to gain the support of their administrators and other stakeholders are to include them in their counseling program advisory committees and to provide them open access to consultation regarding the implementation of their school counseling programs (Texas Education Agency, 2018). Through their involvement with a counseling program advisory committee, administrators can share their thoughts about how all stakeholders can support each delivery component of their comprehensive school counseling program (Mason, 2010). The participation in an advisory committee allows professional school counselors and administrators to have an open dialogue about their roles and responsibilities as they pertain to student achievement.

The ASCA National Model

The ASCA national model (ASCA, 2012), is comprehensive in scope, preventive in design, and developmental in nature. According to Kimbel and Schellenberg (2013), to be comprehensive in scope, a school counseling program must be implemented in a way that addresses the needs of all students through its services. Additionally, comprehensiveness also indicates that programs catalyze expansion across their district (Duarte & Hatch, 2014). The ASCA National Model is made up of four components: foundation, management, delivery, and accountability (ASCA, 2012). Through the foundation, comprehensive school counseling programs must foster a focus regarding their intent, identify specific student competencies and delivery details, and create program arrangements ensuring loyalty to the foundational components (Cox, 2018). It is from the foundation of a program that the professional school counselor works. In adherence to the ASCA National Model, professional school counselors should manage their programs effectively through design processes that include the use of data,

assessment, and the creation of action plans (Smith et al., 2017). Martin and Carey (2012) express that professional school counselors deliver services through a variety of channels including individual student planning, guidance curriculum, and responsive services. Lastly, it is through program accountability that professional school counselors can demonstrate the efficacy of their programs by using monitoring and outcome data (Dugger & Jones, 2016).

Similar to the history of the Texas Model, the ASCA National Model was created by school counseling stakeholders as a response to the evolution of the school counseling profession (ASCA, 2012; Texas Education Agency, 2018). From its start in the 1900s, school counseling was accepted primarily as vocational guidance. The identity of school counseling was strengthened in 1952 with the formation of the American School Counseling Association, and in 1979, the first standards for guidance and counseling programs were created by the ASCA board which ultimately became the ASCA National Model (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). The model became essential to professional school counselors due to the framework it provided regarding practices and procedures that conformed to the philosophy of education. As a result, professional school counselors nation-wide had a structure that outlined program resources and facilities, program review processes, and planning and evaluation guidelines for guidance and counseling programs (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). Along with the evolution of the school counseling profession came the development of professional school counselor identity.

The Professional School Counselor

Comprehensive school counseling programs often define the roles and responsibilities of professional school counselors. It is only in this circumstance that education stakeholders, such as campus administrators and district leaders benefit. Professional school counselors working from a comprehensive school counseling framework provide their school systems with effective

services (Robertson, Lloyd-Hazlett, Zambrano, & McClendon, 2016). A significant element of the responsibility of professional school counselors involves the ability to provide responsive services to all students in need. This notion is embedded and outlined in the ASCA National Model as well as the Texas Model and supported by the U.S. Department of Education (ASCA, 2012; Texas Education Agency, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The literature on school counseling responsive services highlights that the developing foundation of comprehensive school counseling programs is parallel to the expansion of professional school counselor's identities, roles, and responsibilities (Cox, 2018). This development in the identities of professional school counselors requires that school districts adapt to the growth by expanding their perceptions of the development (Robertson et al., 2016).

The professional school counselor identity has shifted in the past decade due to environmental shifts in society (Gruman, Marston, & Koon, 2013). Changing societal factors such as family structures, increased minority populations, poverty rates, and family transience have all fostered a need for the expansion of professional school counselor's roles in working with students (Dollarhide et al., 2013). According to DeKruyf et al. (2013), the need for the expansion of school counseling services stems from a significant amount of students who have mental health needs that remain unmet. The statistics regarding children with mental health needs are notable. According to Perou et al. (2013), 13-20% of children will experience difficulty with a mental health disorder every year. Less than 20% of children who are diagnosed with a mental health disorder will receive mental health services (Patel, Flisher, Hetrick, & McGorry, 2007). It is for the reasons mentioned here that it is crucial for professional school counselors to have the ability to respond to the needs of students.

Through providing a comprehensive school counseling program, professional school counselors enhance opportunities for students to achieve success in a variety of ways, including academically, socially, and emotionally (Fye et al., 2017). Some public-school districts adhere to the framework outlined in the ASCA National Model; however, there are still school communities that do not, which opens the possibility of professional school counselors to be underutilized by their district and campus administrators (Burkard et al., 2012). The underutilization of professional school counselors by campus administrators often is related to the assignment of non-counseling duties such as lunch monitoring, tutoring, and student achievement testing (Auger, 2013). Administrators who underutilize their professional school counselors often misunderstand their contribution to the overall success of their school systems (Cox, 2018).

Roles and Responsibilities

Professional school counselors play essential roles in the success of schools. Not only do they provide services to students through delivery components, but professional school counselors are also vital members of educational teams. Academic achievement as well as personal, social, and career development are just a few of the ways that professional school counselors positively affect student outcomes (DeKruyf et al., 2013). The intention of the defined roles and responsibilities as recommended in the ASCA National Model is to develop students into becoming productive members of society (ASCA, 2012). Additionally, there is empirical evidence that demonstrates significant student growth in math and reading scores of elementary and middle school students who participated in curriculum and group interventions focusing on cognitive, social, and self-management skills (Hartline & Cobia, 2012). It is only through an appropriate assignment of roles and responsibilities that professional school

counselors are equipped to implement their comprehensive school counseling program effectively (Texas Education Agency, 2018).

Professional school counselors have the responsibility to implement preventative measures for students who are at-risk of dropping out of school. According to Shields, Dollarhide, and Young (2018), students who participate in professional school counselor-led dropout prevention programs exhibit significant growth in prosocial behavior. Gruman et al. (2013) provide evidence that school counseling services are the leading element in school dropout prevention. Furthermore, the responsibility of professional school counselors to deliver guidance curriculum has been found to positively affect student factors such as prosocial behavior as well as aggressive behavior (Gruman et al., 2013).

According to the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012), professional school counselors are exhibiting appropriate roles when they plan individual student success, interpret cognitive and aptitude achievement tests, and provide counseling to students who demonstrate an academic, social, or emotional need. The importance of professional school counselor roles has also been recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. In 2015, more than \$24.8 million was awarded to 67 schools in 26 states. In doing so, the U.S. Department of Education aimed to enhance counseling programs in elementary and secondary schools with the focus on expanding the quality of school counseling services (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP) includes school counseling as an essential component of their Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) Model which is a framework geared to enhance student health (CDCP, 2015). The CDCP encourages that certified professional school counselors provide direct and indirect interventions to address psychological, academic, and social barriers to learning (CDCP, 2015). Providing counseling services to

students who demonstrate attendance issues, disciplinary problems, and relational difficulties are also critical responsibilities of professional school counselors. Professional school counselors should seek opportunities to collaborate with teachers and school staff in the development of a comprehensive guidance curriculum (Texas Education Agency, 2018). Inappropriate activities for professional school counselors involve coordinating paperwork and data entry for students, coordinating and administering achievement testing programs, and behavior discipline (DeKruyf et al., 2013). Clerical activities such as maintaining student records, computing grade-point averages, as well as assisting with principal duties are considered inappropriate activities according to the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012).

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of my epistemology, conceptual framework, and literature review process. Through an interpretivist framework, I aimed to explore and understand the individual experiences of my participants as they comprehend the social world as the status quo. Through the interpretivist framework, researchers attain knowledge by molding their interpretations of the themes derived from their participant's expressed meanings (Creswell et al., 2007). My conceptual framework is the Texas Model (Texas Education Agency, 2018), which includes counselor domains, program implementation, foundational components, and service delivery. Although the Texas Model serves my study as a conceptual framework, it is important to note that much like the ASCA National Model, it merely provides a structure to deliver components of a comprehensive school counseling program. As a struggling professional school counselor, I often asked the question "is it possible to implement school counseling components without actually identifying them with a specific Model?". The answer to this question is *yes*. It is not a model that defines school counseling; it is the school counseling

profession and the ongoing assessment of the current educational needs of students that require school counseling programs to be comprehensive. The Texas Model is merely a vehicle to deliver components of school counseling services.

The section of my literature review process included a step-by-step description of my search management, database selection, utilization of specific keywords, and the assignment of my final collection of literature. The last section of this chapter included an overview of the literature about comprehensive school counseling programs and related factors such as implementation and program support. Literature pertaining to the ASCA National Model, and the role and responsibilities of professional school counselors were also reviewed and discussed. This chapter reflects that there is a dearth in information about the experiences of professional school counselors implementing a comprehensive school counseling program. The next chapter provides a detailed explanation of the design and methods used in data collection and data analysis.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In Chapter 3, I define the research method used for this study. First, I offer my rationale for selecting a qualitative methodological research design and reiterate my research question. Then I discuss the research methodology, emphasizing the participants, their security, and the selection criteria used. Next, I supply a thorough narrative of my data collection process, including analysis and general procedures. In this section, I also detail how I used the Moustakas (1994) modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method to analyze my data (Colaizzi, 1973; Keen, 1975; Stevick, 1971). Finally, I provide a summary of my procedures in safeguarding trustworthiness, and clarify the notions of credibility, transferability, and dependability.

Research Design and Rationale

Due to the notable lack of research on professional school counselor's candid experiences of implementing comprehensive school counseling programs in Texas, I utilized a phenomenological qualitative design. The preparation for this study included reviewing literature from quantitative and mixed method research involving professional school counselors and their impact on student success (Bardhoshi, Schweinle, & Duncan, 2014; Goodman-Scott et al., 2016; Graham, Desmond, & Zinsser, 2011; Villares & Dimmitt, 2017). While these studies provided a foundation regarding the roles and responsibilities of professional school counselors, they were deficient in strong, in-depth perceptions that qualitative investigations could provide. Awareness of the collective experiences of professional school counselors and their involvement in implementing their comprehensive school counseling program aids to inform customs and procedures of the school counseling profession (Creswell, 2013).

The justification for selecting a phenomenological study design involved numerous purposes. The primary aim of the phenomenological approach is to define and comprehend a “lived experience” from the viewpoint of individuals experiencing the phenomenon (Roberts, 2013). With the accounts collected through in-depth interviews, the qualitative researcher usually assembles the data from numerous participants (Creswell, 2013). Secondly, working from the phenomenological approach allowed me to precisely exemplify the professional school counselor’s perceptions of implementing a comprehensive school counseling program in a way that targeted their lived experience. Last, the phenomenological approach emphasizes the perceptions of participants instead of the experiences or predetermined notions of the investigator. It is through shifting the conversation from the viewpoint of lived experiences to the way participants experience the phenomenon that the researcher becomes knowledgeable (Patton, 2002). Phenomenology permitted the professional school counselors to communicate a trustworthy viewpoint of the association between themselves and the phenomenon: the implementation of their comprehensive school counseling program (Creswell, 2013).

Amid numerous approaches to qualitative research, phenomenology was the most suitable for this study. This specific approach allowed for the most comprehensive understanding of the professional school counselor’s perceptions; however, there are several types of phenomenology. I implemented a descriptive phenomenological method, which was unique to other modalities of qualitative research. Descriptive phenomenology is concerned with loyally and accurately unfolding the participant's meaning of the phenomenon as opposed to the researcher dictating to the phenomena (Giorgi, 2012). This methodology allowed me to understand the essence or meaning of professional school counselor’s perceptions of implementing a comprehensive school counseling program in Texas. As a beginning researcher,

qualitative descriptive phenomenology was the most suitable method for two reasons: (1) I was required to read the descriptions in totality in order to gain the “essence” of the phenomenon, and (2) descriptive phenomenology offered the opportunity to make use of language in order to gain comprehensible access to the experience of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2012). Both strategies of conceptualizing an essence and interpreting language are essential characteristics of professional school counselors and higher education academics.

Research Question

A research question was presented to collect the professional school counselors’ experiences in implementing a comprehensive school counseling program in Texas. The study was administered to address the following research question:

1. What are the lived experiences of professional school counselors regarding their efforts in implementing a comprehensive school counseling program in Texas?

Role of the Researcher

My primary purpose during this process was to function as an instrument in data collection, which is common in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). Numerous vital roles aid the investigator to maneuver through research effectively. Primarily, a qualitative researcher must be keenly aware of their existence and inspect the effects that their presence has on the truthfulness of the study (Patton, 2002). It is through knowledgeable rigor, professional honesty, and research competence that qualitative researchers can be deemed credible. Keeping this in mind, I welcomed the professional school counselors and assisted them to participate in a safe way by staying aware of their responses and observing my restrictions (Patton, 2002).

I was conscious of my connection to the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs, which included my values, beliefs, and emotions. Patton (2002) ascertains

that the cognizance of any fluctuation to the experience on behalf of the researcher is of utmost importance. These occurrences must be documented to govern how they may affect the study. It was my goal to respect the role as “collector of key data” as described by Emde (2015) in her investigation of parents’ perceptions of and experiences with professional school counselors. My goal as a researcher was to collect data through a collaborative effort with the participants with the intention of providing them with a positive experience. I had several identities that may have influenced the data collection and interpretation of the results of this study.

I served as the middle school district lead counselor for a South Texas school district and had worked in public education for five years. These identities came into play because I had experienced, first-hand, the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program and had witnessed its positive impact on student achievement. Because of my experience and knowledge regarding comprehensive school counseling programs, I had to refrain from looking for specific answers when analyzing the data. Instead, I had to let the data inform me.

Furthermore, I served on district committees that referred to the Texas Model to make informed decisions on district-wide school counseling protocols. This identity came into play as I interviewed my participants. As detailed in the *epoché* section of my data analysis plan, I had to refrain from supporting the responses of my participants and displaying expression to avoid influence. I was also a professional member of the Texas School Counseling Association which promoted the Texas Model as the standard for school counseling programs in Texas. I was an experienced professional school counselor who was vested in the operation of professional school counselor standards. I was keenly aware of the effects that my bias could have on the orientation of the study. I was also mindful that my personal involvement as a professional school counselor could shape my interpretation of the results. To view the data subjectively, I set

aside my biases and prejudgments and attempted to look at it anew. I provide details as to how I did this further in this chapter.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

Participants considered for this study were knowledgeable in school counseling. According to Creswell et al. (2007), participant selection must also be heterogeneous in opinions, skills, and viewpoints. For this study, I investigated 12 professional school counselors from Texas public school districts, with four representing each of the instructional levels most common in public education; elementary, middle school, and high school. Having a diverse sample allowed me to gain a bird's eye view of the K-12 implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs as opposed to a single grade level. Professional school counselors are described to have specific school counseling skills or knowledge in promoting the academic success of students (Texas Education Agency, 2018). This research study defined Texas professional school counselors as individuals who met the following mandatory selection criteria.

Mandatory Selection Criteria

1. Participants must have attained a master's degree in school counseling.
2. Participants must have been working as a professional school counselor at a Texas public school.
3. Participants must have held a current Texas school counseling certification through the Texas Education Agency.
4. Participants must have had three or more years of school counseling experience.

The mandatory criteria mentioned above was vital in my selection process since some private and charter schools in Texas had different employment requirements for their professional school counselors. For example, some private and charter schools do not necessitate a school counselor certification as required in public school settings. The school counselor certification process in Texas requires that professional school counselors complete an educator preparation program which very often include professional development in areas such as developmental school counseling and responsive services. The first two to three years of working as a professional school counselor often involves a period of assimilation to the profession, and for this reason, I required a three year minimum of school counseling experience in order to elicit more solidified perceptions from my participants. I vetted whether the participants met the mandatory criteria using a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C). Due to my experience as a professional school counselor and my awareness that diversity in school counseling backgrounds existed, I adapted the requirement of my participants to meet the criteria mentioned.

Instrumentation

Milena, Dainora, and Alin (2008) ascertain that there are many types of instruments that researchers use to collect data, but that the most commonly used in qualitative research is the in-depth interview. I selected semi-structured, in-depth interviews as my primary source of data. This decision was due to the relaxed setting that interviews provide participants, which allows them to express their voice in comfort (Patton, 2002). The participants of this study most likely entered the interviews with premeditated notions of comprehensive school counseling programs. As Milena et al. (2008) state, it was crucial that I always recalled that my participants were experts of their experiences. Thinking from this point of view set the stage for me to be able to learn from my participants.

I utilized semi-structured, open-ended questions during the interviews. It was through the combination of this form of questioning and follow-up questions that allowed the participants to respond descriptively (Turner, 2010). Before the interviews took place, I required the participants to complete an informed consent that outlined the purpose of the study, the role of the researcher, and general procedures. An overview of the benefits and risks of participation was also detailed in this informed consent (see Appendix B). The informed consent was read aloud to the participants before the recording of the interviews. To ensure accurate participant inclusion, I verified their demographics via an online survey website (www.qualtrics.com) during the recruitment phase of the selection process. I used this demographic questionnaire to collect participant information such as gender, contact information, education, credentials, and school counseling experience (see Appendix C).

After an exhaustive review of school counseling literature, I designed the interview questions for this study. The interview questions specifically centered around the implementation processes of a comprehensive school counseling programs by professional school counselors. Silencing the voices of professional school counselors reduces their capability to execute effective, comprehensive school counseling programs to their full potential. This unfortunate occurrence signals to the reality that the collaborative consultation between professional school counselors and vital stakeholders is not of high quality. Because comprehensive school counseling programs have such a significant impact on student outcomes such as academic performance, social, emotional, and career development (DeKruyf et al., 2013), it is pertinent to know what factors and barriers affect the implementation of such programs.

Before the data collection phase began, I piloted the interview questions to determine any flaws or limitations with the interview protocol. As Turner (2010) suggests, this procedure

allowed me to make necessary changes to the interview design prior to conducting the study. I piloted the interview questions with two participants that met the selection criteria mentioned earlier and I changed questions and formatting based on their recommendations. Turner (2010) recommends that the procedure of pilot testing include individuals who demonstrate similar interests of the participants of the study.

Data was collected and recorded via telephone. I pursued the interview process by utilizing an internet program via www.freeconferencecall.com. Details on the recording process I used as well as an outline of procedures pertaining to data storage, identity protection, and confidentiality is further discussed later in this chapter. After recording the interviews, I transcribed and analyzed them to detect themes. Details regarding the analysis software I used as well as my data analysis plan is provided later in this chapter. As a professional school counselor, my skills of reflective listening and clarifying communication aided in the accomplishment of my interview protocol. The following interview questions were employed for this study (see Appendix D).

1. What is your educational and professional background?
 - a. How did you end up working as a professional school counselor?
2. Tell me about your school's population, staff, and overall climate.
 - a. Describe the role you play in your student's experience of school?
3. What do the words "comprehensive school counseling program" mean to you?
 - a. What does your specific program look like?
4. What do you think your students experience because of your services?
5. How do you personally define "guidance curriculum" as a professional school counselor?
6. What does your specific guidance curriculum look like and how do you deliver it?

7. Tell me about the topics you cover in your school's guidance curriculum?
 - a. How are these topics chosen?
 - b. How do you know your curriculum has impacted your students?
8. What does prevention and remediation mean to you as a professional school counselor?
9. Describe to me what ways you provide preventative and remedial services to your students.
10. Tell me how you handle student crises at your school.
 - a. What are the most common types of student crises at your campus?
 - b. Describe to me the skills you use to handle them?
11. How do you help students plan, monitor, and manage their educational development?
12. How do you personally measure student success?
 - a. Tell me about one of your favorite success stories.
13. What does "system support" mean to you as a professional school counselor?
14. How would you describe your relationship with your school's staff and administration?
 - a. What does it feel like to be supported?
15. Describe to me the tools you use to manage your school counseling program?
16. Is there anything else about your experience of implementing a comprehensive school counseling program that you'd like to share with me?

Construction of Interview Questions

To construct the interview questions for this study, I utilized Bevan's (2014) method of phenomenological interviewing as a structure guide. The structure of Bevan's method includes the following key concepts: description, natural attitude, lifeworld, modes of appearing, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. Bevan's (2014) method structures

interview questions into three domains; (1) contextualization, (2) apprehending the phenomenon, and (3) clarifying the phenomenon.

It is through questions based on the *contextualization* domain that I elicited the natural attitudes of the participants. This process was represented by questions like “What does prevention and remediation mean to you as a professional school counselor?”. It was through questions and prompts based on the *apprehending the phenomenon* domain that I elicited information about the specific appearances of the participant’s natural attitudes. This process was represented by prompts like “Describe to me what ways you provide preventative and remedial services to your students”. It was through questions based on the *clarifying the phenomenon* domain of Bevan's (2014) method that I guided the participants to describe their experience (implementing their school counseling program) more dynamically through an imaginative variation. This process was represented by questions like “What do you think your students experience as a result of your services?”.

Utilizing Bevan's (2014) method of interviewing allowed me to gain phenomenal clarity from the descriptions provided by my participants. This structure of questioning aided me in interpreting the participant’s experiences from a more bracketed standpoint because of the reductional process it imbedded. See *Figure 1* for an illustration of how I structured my interview questions using Bevan's (2014) three domains.

Topic	Domain	Interview Protocol
Comprehensive School Counseling Program	Contextualization	1. What is your educational and professional background?
	Apprehending the Phenomenon	a. How did you end up working as a professional school counselor?
	Contextualization	2. Tell me about your school's population, staff, and overall climate.
	Clarifying the Phenomenon	a. Describe the role you play in your student's experience of school?
	Contextualization	3. What do the words "comprehensive school counseling program" mean to you?
	Apprehending the Phenomenon	a. What does your specific program look like?
Guidance Curriculum	Clarifying the Phenomenon	4. What do you think your students experience as a result of your services?
	Contextualization	5. How do you personally define "guidance curriculum" as a professional school counselor?
	Apprehending the Phenomenon	6. What does your specific guidance curriculum look like and how do you deliver it?
	Apprehending the Phenomenon	7. Tell me about the topics you cover in your school's guidance curriculum?
	Clarifying the Phenomenon	a. How are these topics chosen?
	Clarifying the Phenomenon	b. How do you know your curriculum has impacted your students?
Responsive Services	Contextualization	8. What does prevention and remediation mean to you as a professional school counselor?
	Apprehending the Phenomenon	9. Describe to me what ways you provide preventative and remedial services to your students.
	Apprehending the Phenomenon	10. Tell me how you handle student crises at your school.
	Clarifying the Phenomenon	a. What are the most common types of student crises at your campus?
Individual Student Planning	Clarifying the Phenomenon	b. Describe to me the skills you use to handle them?
	Contextualization	11. How do you help students plan, monitor, and manage their educational development?
	Apprehending the Phenomenon	12. How do you personally measure student success?
System Support	Clarifying the Phenomenon	a. Tell me about one of your favorite success stories.
	Contextualization	13. What does "system support" mean to you as a professional school counselor?
	Apprehending the Phenomenon	14. How would you describe your relationship with your school's staff and administration?
	Clarifying the Phenomenon	a. What does it feel like to be supported?
Closing Question	Apprehending the Phenomenon	15. Describe to me the tools you use to manage your school counseling program?
		16. Is there anything else about your experience of implementing a comprehensive school counseling program that you'd like to share with me?

Figure 1. Structure of Interview Questions (Illustrates the organization of interview questions structured by three domains; (1) contextualization, (2) apprehending the phenomenon, and (3) clarifying the phenomenon as adapted from Bevan's (2014) method of phenomenological interviewing)

Procedures for Recruitment and Participation

I used a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling to identify the twelve professional school counselors for this study. Snowball sampling occurs when a researcher asks knowledgeable individuals for referrals to other potential participants (Patton, 2002). Purposeful

sampling occurs when a researcher selects participants based on specific population characteristics or study criteria (Patton, 2002). I recruited potential participants using the following methods: (a) consultation with surrounding district school counseling leaders and administrators, (b) utilizing the CESNET professional counselor listserv, and (c) posting on a Facebook page owned by the Texas School Counseling Association. I identified potential individuals through a formal invitation to participate (see Appendix A). I disseminated the initial invitation via the CESNET professional counselor listserv, and as well as through surrounding district school counseling leaders and administrators. The invitation to participate addressed the selection criteria which was for participants to have had attained a master's degree in school counseling, to be currently employed as a professional school counselor at a Texas public school, to have held a current Texas school counseling certification through the TEA, and to have had three or more years of school counseling experience. Upon receiving requests to participate, I provided interested individuals with an online survey website link (www.Qualtrics.com) to a demographic questionnaire. I used this questionnaire to screen them for appropriate inclusion. In summary, all potential participants selected for this study met the mandatory criteria defined and were vetted using a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C).

Data Collection Protocol

Creswell (2013) establishes interviewing as a suitable research method due to the specific applicability of the interview questions to the interviewees. In my study, the interviews began with items discovered through critical concepts. All interviews were performed over the phone and I utilized an internet program called www.freeconferencecall.com. To use this internet program, I created a password-protected account. According to the program's privacy policy, all calls made and recorded are kept private upon the discretion of the account holder. Although

recorded calls made through this online program were initially stored in my online account, upon completing each interview, I exported the audio files from my online account to an encrypted file folder on my personal computer. After recording the interviews, I transcribed the audio files using the media player on my personal computer and Microsoft Word to type the transcriptions.

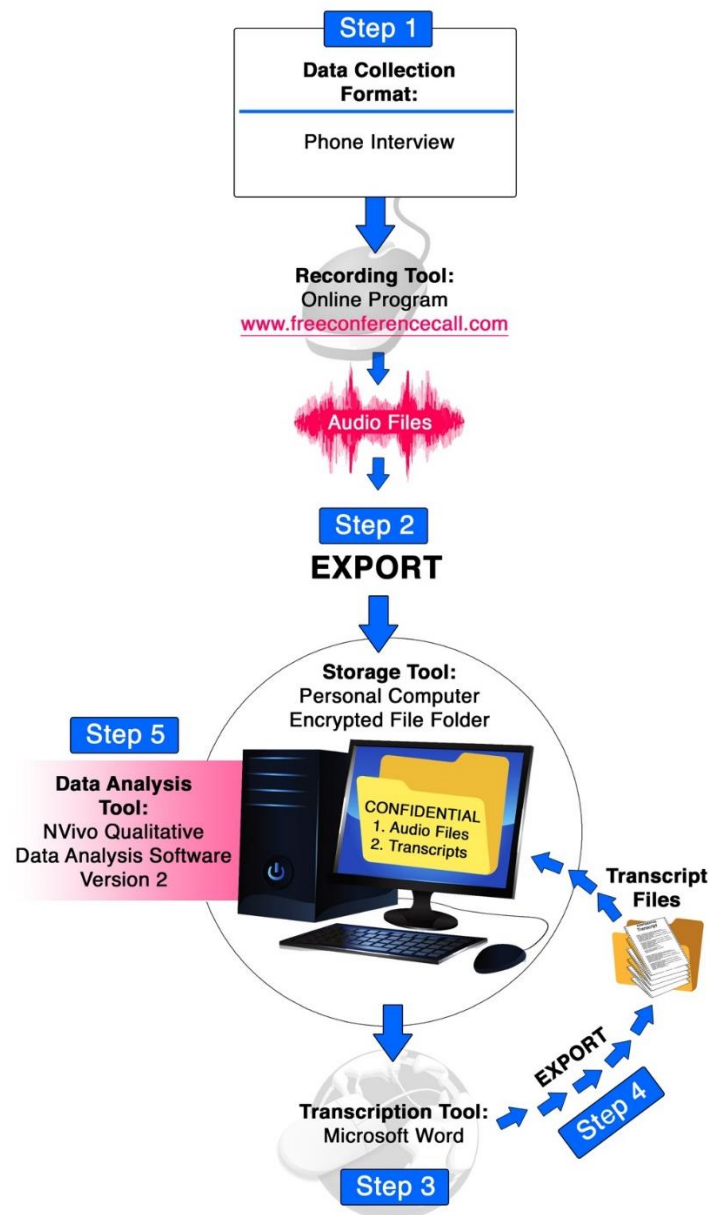


Figure 2. Data Collection Protocol (Illustrates the step-by-step process of my data collection and storage)

My data collection included the following five steps.

1. Recorded interviews via www.freeconferencecall.com
2. Exported audio files from www.freeconferencecall.com to encrypted file folder on my personal computer
3. Transcribed audio files using computer audio player and Microsoft Word.
4. Kept transcription files in an encrypted file folder on my personal computer
5. Uploaded transcription files to NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis Software for data analysis phase

Saturation

My focus as the researcher during this phase of data collection was to enhance saturation through my intentional listening of responses, and my follow-up questioning. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), saturation occurs when the researcher can no longer collect data due to the discontinuation of fresh insights or new properties. For phenomenological study designs, Morse (2015) and Creswell and Creswell (2017) recommend a sample size anywhere from 5 to 25. To reach saturation, I utilized the assistance of a peer coder in analyzing the transcripts using a codebook for categorical organization. Before I provided any transcripts to my peer coder, I removed any identifying information from them. The peer coder I selected for the saturation process was not involved in any other phase of the study. They were familiar with qualitative data analysis and were required to read through the transcripts and identify a category system as recommended by Burnard (1991). The peer coder and I discussed their identified category system and compared it to mine. As the coding process commenced, we consulted with each other regarding our view of the themes. The aim was to arrive at a consensus and identify the threshold in which no new themes occurred. After a thorough screening of the themes, the

peer coder and I determined that saturation had occurred at the fourth transcript. Although saturation was reached with four participants, I stopped collecting data at the intended twelve interviews for further deepening of thematic results. It is important to note that the peer coder was only used for the purpose of reaching saturation and not in the data analysis phase. The peer coder ought not be confused with the peer debriefer whom I utilized later to assess the accuracy of my data analysis. As I discuss the dependability of my study further in this chapter, I clarify the role of my peer debriefer.

Data Analysis Software

Throughout the data collection process, I utilized the Nvivo 9 computer software system to aid in coding (NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis Software, Version 2). This software is a tool that allows researchers to store, organize, categorize and analyze qualitative data. Utilizing this software for the data analysis phase (as opposed to the codebook used for saturation) allowed me to make better use of my time in organizing the data. All data used with this software remained confidential.

Data Storage, Identity Protection, and Confidentiality

I provided each participant an informed consent that outlined all information regarding data storage, protection, and confidentiality (see Appendix B). Regarding data storage, I stored all transcripts and audio recordings of the interviews in a password-encrypted electronic file folder on my personal computer. I will delete the electronic folder mentioned above after three years from the completion of my study per TAMUCC policy. I ensured that adequate provisions were in place to protect the confidentiality of my participants during the study and after its conclusion. To ensure confidentiality, I assigned pseudonyms to participants on the transcripts. I created a pseudonym key document which I housed in the encrypted file folder on my personal

computer. To limit access to identifiable data, I was the only individual who attained access to this electronic file folder.

Data Analysis Plan

In qualitative research, investigators have the unique opportunity to analyze and collect data concurrently (Creswell, 2013; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Multimedia resources like audio files and images, as well as text resources such as field notes and transcripts, are all examples derived from the immense quantity of qualitative data (Creswell, 2013; Lodico et al., 2010; Moustakas, 1994). To analyze my data, I employed a step-by-step process presented by Moustakas' (1994) modified version of Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen's method (Colaizzi, 1973; Keen, 1975; Stevick, 1971). My data analysis included the following ten steps:

1. *Epoché*
2. Obtaining an understanding of the data
3. Horizontalization
4. Identifying the invariant constituents
5. Identifying themes
6. Individual textural descriptions
7. Individual structural descriptions
8. Composite textural description
9. Composite structural description
10. Textural-structural synthesis

I provide an illustration of the step-by-step process of my data analysis in Figure 2, followed by more detailed descriptions of each step below.

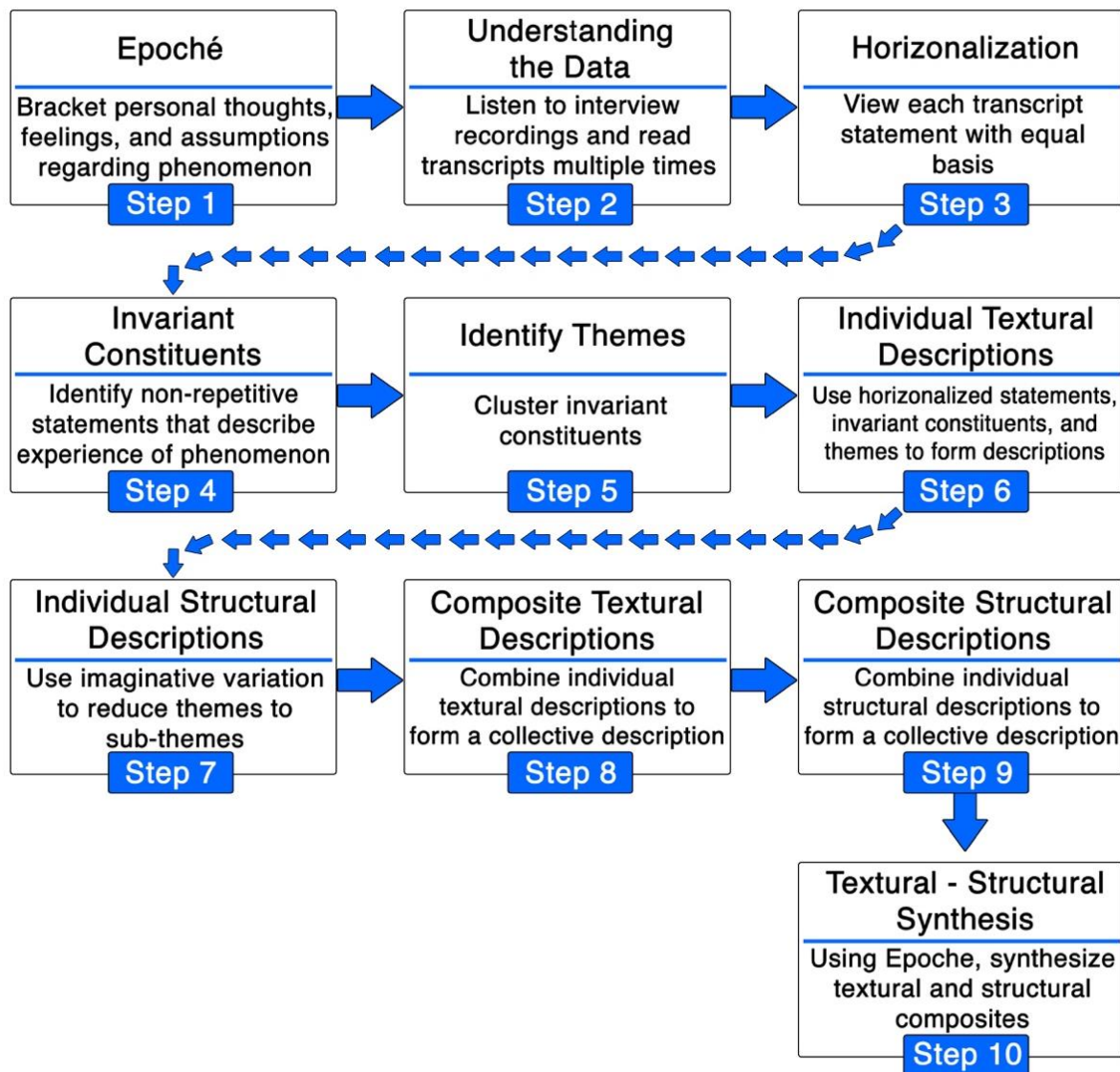


Figure 3. Data Analysis Plan (Illustrates the step-by-step process of my data analysis using Moustakas' (1994) modified version of Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen's method)

Step 1: Epoché

The term *epoché* refers to a researcher's investigation of a phenomenon without partiality and preconceived notions. According to Moustakas (1994), investigating a phenomenon without partiality and preconceived notions means to set aside "predilections, prejudices, and predispositions" (p.85), and to allow room for new consciousness when looking at a particular

phenomenon. In every one of my reviews of the participant's data, I intentionally set aside biases and prejudgments and looked at their experiences anew. According to Moustakas (1994), I had to reflectively address the following two questions during this step of my data analysis:

1. How did my personal experiences of implementing a comprehensive school counseling program in Texas not bias my data collection and analysis process?
2. What new concepts and understandings did I learn about the phenomenon of implementing a comprehensive school counseling program in Texas?

I placed my data in brackets and refrained myself from anything outside of those brackets, including my thoughts, feelings, and assumptions regarding the phenomenon of implementing a comprehensive school counseling program in Texas. I achieved this using the following two strategies:

1. Prevented myself from supporting the responses of the participants and displaying expression.
2. Recorded the participant's responses as presented.

Step 2: Obtaining an Understanding of the Data

I recorded all 12 interviews and transcribed them myself. To safeguard the accuracy of the transcriptions, I reviewed and listened to the interview recordings at least twice for each participant. In addition to this, I read the transcriptions multiple times to fully absorb each of my participant's feelings and perceptions regarding their experiences of implementing a comprehensive school counseling program in Texas. This process not only allowed me to gain a well-rounded understanding of the data, but it also aided me in the horizontalization of significant statements and descriptions of experiences.

Step 3: Horizontalization

According to Moustakas (1994), horizontalization occurs when the researcher assigns equal value to every statement of the participant's account of their lived experience. The researcher does this to identify verbatim fragments of the transcriptions that specifically explain the phenomenon being studied. To complete this step, I analyzed each transcript, viewed each statement with an equal basis, and identified *horizontalized statements*, which according to Moustakas (1994) were those that appeared to be more significant than others. This process allowed me to identify further invariant constituents which I explain in the next step.

Step 4: Identifying Invariant Constituents

Invariant constituents are statements that contain a component of the experience that is essential for understanding it. Moustakas (1994) refers to invariant constituents as non-repetitive statements that participants provide to describe their experience with the phenomenon. I identified the invariant constituents within my participants' transcripts by using Moustakas' (1994) modified version of Van-Kaam's method. Upon reviewing each of these statements I reflected on two pieces of criteria; (1) was the statement essential in understanding the phenomenon, and (2) could it be abstracted and labeled? I identified invariant constituents as any statements that met these criteria. I used these invariant constituents to determine the themes in the next step.

Step 5: Identifying Themes

I clustered the invariant constituents from Step 4 and identified the core themes of the participants' experiences of implementing a comprehensive school counseling program in Texas. To explicitly articulate the invariant constituents and themes, I checked them against the complete transcript of each participant. I then utilized these themes to formulate rich, thick, and individual textural descriptions of the participants' experiences of the phenomenon.

Step 6: Individual Textural Descriptions

I developed descriptive narratives for each participant using the horizontalized statements from Step 3, invariant constituents from Step 4, and themes from Step 5, all reduced from their transcripts. Moustakas (1994) describes the essence of the textural description as follows:

Throughout there is an interweaving of person, conscious experience, and phenomenon.

In this process of explicating the phenomenon, qualities are recognized and described;

every perception is granted equal value, nonrepetitive constituents of the experience are

linked thematically, and a full description is described (p. 96).

This step resulted in me formulating textural descriptions of my participants' experiences of implementing a comprehensive school counseling program in Texas using their own words.

Step 7: Individual Structural Descriptions

Using imaginative variation, I created a structural description for each participant. According to Moustakas (1994), researchers use imaginative variation to disclose possible meanings through the use of imagination, changing the frames of reference, utilizing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from different positions. I used periods of reflection to contemplate the fit of my imaginative variations and the structures presented in my participant's data. Moustakas (1994) refers to structural descriptions as explanations of how the participants' feelings and perceptions connect to specific experiences and the root for such feelings. To reflect upon and analyze the data at this step, I utilized a conceptually clustered matrix (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) using the "Matrix Coding" feature in the Nvivo 9 software. Applying imaginative variation, I aimed to identify sub-themes from the core themes derived in Step 5.

Step 8: Composite Textural Description

The term *composite* denotes the combination of many components or parts (Moustakas (1994). In this step, using inductive reasoning and analysis, I combined the individual textural descriptions formulated in Step 6. This process of the combination allowed me to present a composite depiction of the descriptive narratives of all participants as a whole.

Step 9: Composite Structural Description

In this step, I used imaginative variation to combine the individual structural descriptions of the participants formulated in Step 7. This process of the combination allowed me to present a composite structural description of all participants as a group. The goal of completing this step was to enhance my understanding of "how" it felt to experience the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program in Texas and the "cause" of the experience for all participants.

Step 10: Textural-Structural Synthesis

In this final step of my data analysis, I developed a synthesis of the composite textural and structural descriptions from steps 8 and 9. Using the process of *epoché* mentioned in Step 1, I generated a newer understanding and captured the nature of the phenomenon of implementing a comprehensive school counseling program in Texas. The lived experiences of the twelve participants allowed me to develop a new understanding of the phenomenon.

Trustworthiness

Creswell et al. (2007) note that a researcher can moderate their predispositions by increasing the trustworthiness of their study. To safeguard trustworthiness, I employed several strategies. Specifically, my procedures of *epoché*, formulating thick descriptions, member checking, keeping a reflexive journal, and practicing emphatic neutrality served to ensure the trustworthiness of the data.

As detailed in Step 1 of my data analysis plan, I bracketed my biases through the process of *epoché*. As described from Steps 6 through 10 of my data analysis plan, I produced rich and thick descriptions of the phenomenon of implementing a comprehensive school counseling program in Texas. Regarding my process of member checking, I emailed each participant their textual (Step 6) and structural descriptions (Step 7). They were given one week to review the descriptions and make any changes.

In order to further monitor my personal biases and assumptions (Valandra, 2012), I maintained a reflexive journal through the research process, specifically during the data collection phase. Before and after every interviews, I recorded my reflection regarding the impact of the research process on my personal view of the participants and the data produced. My aim with the reflexive journal was to allow myself, through in-depth reflection, to find ways to represent the voices of my participants authentically to their personal meaning.

The final way that I avoided personal bias was to uphold what Patton (2002) calls *emphatic neutrality*. Being compassionate towards the participants yet impartial about the data are the characteristics of a researcher exhibiting empathetic neutrality. I aimed to understand the participants without judgment by demonstrating sincerity, sensitivity, reverence, and awareness to display empathetic neutrality (Patton, 2002). By doing so, I had the ability to analyze the data while staying informed to the phenomenon. Since I was a professional school counselor, this preventative measure was of utmost importance. Additionally, I attained accountability through the collaboration with colleagues who were familiar with the profession of school counseling.

Qualitative Rigor

Credibility

According to Patton (2002), rigorous methods, the credibility of the researcher, and philosophical beliefs are all essential elements that define the credibility of a researcher. Concerning the rigorous methods element, I was a credible researcher due to my complex processes in collecting and analyzing the data. In conjunction with this, I was also held accountable to the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi's Institutional Review Board. Regarding the credibility element that Patton (2002) suggests, I believe that my professional training, experience, and presentation were of quality substance. Although I was a novice researcher, it was through my rigorous training as a doctoral student that I was able to execute this study confidently. I carefully analyzed and preserved the meanings of the participants' responses through extensive verification and presentation, as detailed in my data analysis plan. Regarding philosophical belief (Patton, 2002), my investment and commitment to the research process was evident through the meticulous planning and designing that my study entailed. Manifestations of my commitment to the research process included member-checking and triangulation.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the applicability of a study's findings to other contexts or participant samples (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). To address this in my research, I applied two forms of triangulation; (1) triangulation of literature, and (2) triangulation from utilizing multiple researchers. Regarding triangulation of literature, I grounded (but not binded or structured) my study by the review of different contents of literature including professional school counseling, counselor education, and educational administration (Young et al., 2015). Additionally, I utilized multiple perspectives during the data analysis phase of my study. I did this by employing the

assistance of a peer coder. The goal of this collaboration was to reach consensus in coding, and thus, to triangulate the data.

Dependability

Dependability exists when a researcher describes the methodology so articulately that other researchers can duplicate the study (Patton, 2002). It was of utmost importance to me as a researcher that my study was defensible. With this in mind, I aimed to uphold rigorous accuracy by trailing my processes using written notes of all communication involving my research. Ferguson, Briesch, Volpe, & Daniels (2012) encourages that methods for research are sound to ensure dependability. To complete this, I made sure to include methods that had a rich history in research. All of the methodological procedures that I used in my study had been utilized successfully in the past by other researchers.

To ensure that my data was reliable and valid, I utilized member-checking, as detailed in my section about trustworthiness, and a peer debriefer to assess the accuracy of my analysis. The peer debriefer in my case was my methodologist, a member of my dissertation committee. She had experience as a qualitative researcher, professional school counselor, and counselor educator. Without being involved in the data analysis process, the peer debriefer provided me with feedback on the findings of my study in a subjective manner, and with openness to challenging my outcomes (Creswell, 2013).

Summary

Chapter Three identified my research design and rationale. Due to the paucity of research on professional school counselor's personal experiences of implementing comprehensive school counseling programs in Texas, I utilized a descriptive phenomenological qualitative design. This chapter also included my research question as well as details regarding my role as the researcher.

The section detailing my methodology included descriptions of my participant selection process, instrumentation, and procedures for participant recruitment, and data collection. In this section, I also addressed my procedures for data storage, identity protection, and confidentiality.

At the end of the chapter, I also provided a detailed data analysis plan that outlined my use of Moustakas' (1994) modified version of Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen's method (Colaizzi, 1973; Keen, 1975; Stevick, 1971). A step-by-step description is provided surrounding the ten steps of the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen's method; (1) *epoché*, (2) obtaining an understanding of the data, (3) horizontalization, (4) identifying invariant constituents, (5) identifying themes, (6) individual textural descriptions, (7) individual structural descriptions, (8) composite textural description, (9) composite structural description, and (10) textural-structural synthesis. I also addressed trustworthiness and the procedures that I performed to safeguard it. Finally, this chapter concludes with descriptions of qualitative rigor components such as the credibility, transferability, and dependability of the study. Chapter 4 includes the results of my study in the form of a journal manuscript.

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Appendix A: Invitation to Participate

Study Title: *Perceptions of Implementing a Comprehensive School Counseling Program in Texas: The Voices of Professional School Counselors*

Greetings,

My name is Abran J. Rodriguez and I would like to invite you to participate in a research project studying professional school counselor's lived experiences of implementing a comprehensive school counseling program in Texas. This study aims to shed light on the *lived experience* of the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs thereby informing decision-making policies facilitative of more seamless implementation in the future. You were selected to be a possible participant of this study because you are a professional school counselor currently working at a Texas public school.

If you agree to be involved in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 60-minute interview with the researcher. Your interview will be conducted at the location agreed upon by you and the researcher OR over the phone. You will also be invited to review your transcribed interview to ensure accuracy.

The risks associated with this study are minimal and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life. The possible benefits of participation in this study may include increased awareness of personal involvement with the implementation of your school counseling program, a stronger and more concrete school counselor identity, and the involvement in a project that can potentially enhance the school counseling profession and the experiences of other school counselors.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty of any kind whatsoever. If you agree to participate and do so until the study is complete, you will receive a \$20 gift card as compensation.

If you wish to participate in this study or have any questions, you may contact any of the following individuals:

- Abran J. Rodriguez (phone: 361-878-4660 or email: Aleal5@islander.tamucc.edu)
- Dr. Joshua C. Watson (phone: 361-825-2739 or email: Joshua.Watson@tamucc.edu)
- Dr. Jennifer Gerlach (phone: 361-825-3318 or email: Jennifer.Gerlach@tamucc.edu)

Thank you!



Abran J. Rodriguez

Appendix B: Informed Consent



Appendix M-Consent to Participate in a Research Study at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (Documentation Waived)

Title of Study:

"Perceptions of Implementing a Comprehensive School Counseling Program in Texas: The Voices of Professional School Counselors"

WHO IS DOING THIS STUDY?

A study team led by Dr. Joshua Watson is doing this research study. Other research professionals may help them. We are asking you to be a part of this research study. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before you make a choice.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

The purpose of this research study is to understand professional school counselors' experiences implementing a comprehensive school counseling program in Texas. While Texas law requires implementation of a developmental guidance and counseling program by professional school counselors, a lack of research addressing the implementation experiences connected to this requirement exists. This study aims to shed light on the lived experience of implementing comprehensive school counseling programs thereby informing decision-making policies facilitative of better implementation in the future.

WHO CAN BE IN THIS STUDY?

We are asking you to be a part of this research study because you are a professional school counselor.

To be eligible to be in this study, you must:

1. be age 18 or older
2. hold at least a master's degree in school counseling
3. hold a current school counseling certification through the Texas Education Code (TEA)
(You can look up your certification using this link: <https://secure.sbec.state.tx.us/SBECONLINE/virtcert.asp>)
4. have 3 or more years of school counseling experience

To learn more about who can be in this study, see *Appendix: Study Participants*.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME IN THIS STUDY?

Being in this study involves answering questions in an interview with the researchers. If you agree to be in this study, you will be in this study for the expected duration of your interview which will be approximately 40-60 minutes. If you decide to be in this study, the following things will happen:

- Your participation will involve collecting information about you. See *Appendix: Study Procedures-Collecting Information* to learn more.
- You will be asked to answer some questions by a brief interview with a member of the research team. The interview will take about 40-60 minutes to complete at a location and time agreed by you and the researcher. Additionally, this will include a 10-15 minute consent discussion. Your interview will be audio recorded and kept confidential. See *Appendix: Study Procedures-Interview* to learn more.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?

There are reasonably foreseeable risks/discomforts in this study. The main risks may include:

- Pressure to participate or conform: If you ever feel uncomfortable or no longer wish to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. See *Appendix: Withdraw* to learn more.



- **Confidentiality risk:** There is a slight risk of loss of confidentiality. Your confidentiality will be protected to the greatest extent possible. See *Appendix: Confidentiality* to learn how your information is protected.
- **Results of this study may be made public.** If made public, you will NOT be identified in any publications or presentations.

If you have any of these problems or changes in the way you feel about being in the study, you should tell the study team as soon as possible.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?

There may be direct benefit to you from being in this study. The potential benefits to participate may be the opportunity to provide insight into your own personal views of how you implement your school counseling program. You will be able to reflect upon ways that you can enhance the development of your school counseling program to better serve your students.

By being in this study, you may help researchers. This study will contribute to generalizable knowledge with the intent to influence behavior, practice, theory, and future research designs in the school counseling profession. This study also can inform the efforts of professional school counselors, school boards, campus administrators and district leaders who are developing or reforming their comprehensive school counseling programs.

WHAT ABOUT EXTRA COSTS?

Participation in this study will NOT result in any extra costs to you. You will not have to pay anything extra if you are in this study aside from the personal time and any travel costs it will take to come to your interview if you travel.

WHAT WILL I RECEIVE FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?

A \$20 Amazon eGift Card will be emailed to participants after the completion of the interview. See *Appendix: Payments* to learn more.

WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES TO BEING IN THIS STUDY?

Instead of being in this study, you may choose not to participate.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A STUDY PARTICIPANT?

Being in this research study is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you choose not to participate, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. What if I change my mind? You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

WHO SHOULD I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?

Dr. Joshua Watson is in charge of this research study. You may call Dr. Watson at 361-825-2739 with questions at any time during the study. You may also call Abran Rodriguez at 361-429-9908 with any questions you may have.

You may also call Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Institutional Review Board (IRB) with questions or complaints about this study at irb@tamucc.edu or 361-825-2497. The IRB is a committee of faculty members, statisticians, researchers, community advocates, and others that ensures that a research study is ethical and that the rights of study participants are protected.



RESEARCH COMMERCIALIZATION OUTREACH

Appendix: Study Participants

Up to 12 professional school counselors will be interviewed for this study. Location, date, and time of the interviews will be agreed upon the participants and the researcher/interviewer. The criteria for inclusion in this study is for the participants to be currently working as a professional school counselor at a Texas public school. This means that all participants will be age 18 or older and hold at least a master's degree in school counseling as well as a current school counseling certification through the Texas Education Agency (TEA). Participants will have three or more years of school counseling experience.

The researcher provides the following rationale for the inclusion criteria: The inclusion of participants holding at least a master's degree in school counseling, a school counselor certification from TEA, and current employment at a public school is due to the fact that some private and charter schools do not necessitate a school counselor certification for employment as required in public school settings. The inclusion of participants having three or more years of school counseling experience is two-fold. First, the beginning years of working as a professional school counselor often involves a period of assimilation to the profession. Secondly, setting a minimum of three years of school counseling experience will allow the researcher to elicit more solidified perceptions from the participants. Participants must be able to commit to an interview for data collection. Outside of these criteria, no age, physical characteristics, learning characteristics, or other demographic variables will limit their voluntary participation.

Appendix: Study Procedures-Collecting Information

Your participation will involve collecting information. The following information will be:

- You do not have to give any information to the study that you do not want to give. By signing this form you are authorizing the collection and use of the information outlined in this form.
- If you choose to participate, the study team will collect information from your demographic questionnaire that you completed using the survey link from the invitation email. The information collected will include the following:
 - demographic information
- We will ask for your contact information, including your telephone number, so that we can call you to go over your interview transcript with you.
- Information above collected for this study will not be shared with anyone.
- Your interview will be audio recorded and kept confidential.

Appendix: Study Procedures-Interview

You will be asked about: your experiences of implementing your school counseling program. Some questions may be embarrassing or uncomfortable to answer. Sample questions that you may be asked are:

- What do the words "comprehensive school counseling program" mean to you?
- What does your specific program look like?
- Tell me about the topics you cover in your school's guidance curriculum.

You do not have to answer questions you do not want to. You can exit the interview and stop at any time.



RESEARCH COMMERCIALIZATION OUTREACH

Appendix: Confidentiality

When information collected about you includes identifiers (like names, addresses, phone numbers), the study can involve confidential information. A research record will be created and kept in the researcher's private office. The research record may include documents that have your name, home street address, email, or telephone number.

The researcher will store participant's names and/or other identifiers separately from the research data. The researcher will replace participant's names and other identifiers with unique pseudonyms and use them to refer to the subject data. Further, the researcher will store the pseudonym key separately from the participant's identifiers and will use security measures such as an encrypted file folder on a password-protected personal computer for file storage. Additionally, the researcher will be the only individual to have authorized access to the data files. All data collection and storage devices will be password protected with a strong password. All research records will be maintained in a confidential manner. We will share your information only when we must, will only share the information that is needed, and will ask anyone who receives it from us to protect your privacy.

Appendix: Payments

A \$20 Amazon eGift Card will be emailed to participants after the completion of the interview. See *Appendix: Payments* to learn more. Participants will not be compensated for any unscheduled visits.

Time of Payment	Payment	Notes
Interview	\$20	Payment will be received upon completion of the interview

What are the tax consequences for receiving payment to participate in research?

There are NO tax consequences for receiving payment to participate in this study.

Appendix: Withdraw

If you withdraw from the study early for any reason, the information that already has been collected will be kept in the research study and included in the data analysis. No further information will be collected for the study. The information that already has been collected will be de-identified (the information cannot be traced back to you individually). Because you cannot be identified from the information there is no further risk to your privacy. This information will continue to be used even after you withdraw.

Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire

Study Title: *Perceptions of Implementing a Comprehensive School Counseling Program in Texas: The Voices of Professional School Counselors*

1. Full Name (Last, First): _____
2. Pseudonym: _____
3. Email Address: _____
4. Contact Number: _____
5. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other
6. Race/Ethnicity:
☐ African-American ☐ American Indian ☐ Asian or Pacific Islander
☐ Caucasian ☐ Hispanic ☐ Other _____
7. Do you hold a Master's degree in school counseling?
☐ YES ☐ NO
8. Do you currently work as a professional school counselor at a Texas public school?
☐ YES ☐ NO
Counselor-to-Student Ratio: _____
9. What grade level are you currently a school counselor for?
☐ Elementary ☐ Middle School ☐ High school
10. Do you hold a current Texas school counseling certification through the Texas Education Agency? ☐ YES ☐ NO
11. Do you have three or more years of school counseling experience?
☐ YES ☐ NO
School Counseling Experience in Years _____

Appendix D: Semi-Structured/Open-Ended Interview Guide

Study Title: *Perceptions of Implementing a Comprehensive School Counseling Program in Texas: The Voices of Professional School Counselors*

1. What is your educational and professional background?
 - b. How did you end up working as a professional school counselor?
2. Tell me about your school's population, staff, and overall climate.
 - b. Describe the role you play in your student's experience of school?
3. What do the words "comprehensive school counseling program" mean to you?
 - b. What does your specific program look like?
4. What do you think your students experience because of your services?
5. How do you personally define "guidance curriculum" as a professional school counselor?
6. What does your specific guidance curriculum look like and how do you deliver it?
7. Tell me about the topics you cover in your school's guidance curriculum?
 - c. How are these topics chosen?
 - d. How do you know your curriculum has impacted your students?
8. What does prevention and remediation mean to you as a professional school counselor?
9. Describe to me what ways you provide preventative and remedial services to your students.
10. Tell me how you handle student crises at your school.
 - c. What are the most common types of student crises at your campus?
 - d. Describe to me the skills you use to handle them?
11. How do you help students plan, monitor, and manage their educational development?
12. How do you personally measure student success?
 - b. Tell me about one of your favorite success stories.
13. What does "system support" mean to you as a professional school counselor?
14. How would you describe your relationship with your school's staff and administration?
 - b. What does it feel like to be supported?
15. Describe to me the tools you use to manage your school counseling program?
16. Is there anything else about your experience of implementing a comprehensive school counseling program that you'd like to share with me?

PREFACE TO SUMMARY MANUSCRIPT

Identification of the Target Journal

My journal of choice is the *Journal of Professional Counseling: Practice, Theory, and Research*. The *Journal of Professional Counseling* (JPC) is the official journal of the Texas Counseling Association (TCA). This journal best fits my study because of their recent call for a special issue regarding best practices for school counseling. Submissions to this special issue of JPC may include topics such as best practices for school counselors, research related to the efficacy of comprehensive school counseling programs, creative interventions in school counseling, and innovative models for integrating mental health professionals into campus-based school counseling program teams.

In my study, I looked at PSCs implementing a school counseling model in Texas, and because many of my participants likely used a model specific to Texas, their inclusion as my participants and their relation to the audience of JPC is a key point in my decision to submit for publication in JPC. Due to the topic of my study involving the perceptions of professional school counselors implementing comprehensive school counseling programs in Texas, and since JPC is a journal by TCA and created for the members of TCA, I feel that this special issue of JPC is the perfect fit for my dissertation manuscript.

Accepted manuscripts for JPC include those aligning with one of the following areas: (a) research, (b) theory, (c) practice, or (d) trends and issues. To submit a manuscript to JPC, prospective authors should be well-organized and concise in their writing so that the development of their ideas is logical. To be concise, I limited my inclusion of participant evidence to a maximum of four to six quotes per primary theme and two quotes per subtheme. Authors should avoid dull stereotyped writing and aim to communicate ideas clearly to a

readership composed of practitioners and educators. Abstracts should not be longer than 100 words and should express the central idea of the article. Authors are required to make manuscript titles no longer than 50 characters. The literature review should only contain more recent studies specific to the research at hand. Additionally, manuscripts should not exceed 20 double-spaced pages, including references, tables, and figures. Manuscripts should not include more than three tables and two figures.

Dissertation Hearing Comments and Responses

At the conclusion of my dissertation defense hearing, my committee members provided feedback and recommendations regarding various features of the presentation and final prospectus manuscript. All committee members were present and explained how their recommendations would advance and augment the work I had already accomplished. After the dissertation defense hearing, I met with my dissertation chair, Dr. Joshua Watson, to evaluate all the comments and discuss how to include the recommendations from the committee into the final document. The following table represents the feedback provided and my response to each point, including how I addressed the recommendation and revised my manuscript.

Table 1

Dissertation Committee Comments with Responses

Committee Comments	Response
1) Discuss the fact your participants did not reference the ASCA or Texas Models in their comments [Gerlach]	This recommendation was addressed during the "Participants" section in the journal manuscript.
2) Comment more on potential participant characteristics that might have contributed to their comments (who they are, where they are from, admin structure, etc.) [Griffith]	This recommendation was addressed during the description of themes in the journal manuscript.

3) Make sure your need for the study is clearly defined in Chapter 1 [Gerlach]	I better clarified the need for my study by incorporating more of an argument highlighting the absence of professional school counselor voices in literature.
4) Use appropriate language in describing participant demographics; ethnicity and race are not the same constructs [Lucido]	I changed the word "Caucasian" to "non-Hispanic" to represent my ethnic categories when describing my participants.
5) If possible, try to infuse more personal reflection, takeaway messages into your draft manuscript. This would depend on space allotment and journal guidelines. [Griffith]	I added more personal reflection to the "Implications for Practice" section of the journal manuscript.
6) Bridge the “results” to “discussion” of barriers and roadblocks faced. This appears in section before you discuss limitations. [Griffith]	I added statements that highlight barriers and roadblocks to the description of themes and the "discussion" section of the journal manuscript.
7) Balance the length of coverage you devote to discussion and implications. Make sure you really articulate what the findings say and mean. [Gerlach, Lucido, & Griffith]	I addressed this in the journal manuscript. Sections have been balanced.
8) Further clarify in your sampling/recruitment discussion how you plan to account for district size and geographical representation in your sample [Lucido]	I am unable to clarify district size and geographical representation in my sampling/recruitment discussion because this information was not elicited in the background questionnaire.

CHAPTER IV: MANUSCRIPT

IMPLEMENTING A COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAM: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY

Abstract

There is convincing evidence validating the significant impact of comprehensive school counseling programs on student success. Literature exists involving the perceptions of counseling program leaders in program implementation; however, the voices of professional school counselors have yet to be acknowledged. This phenomenological study reveals insights of twelve professional school counselors regarding the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs in Texas. Five themes emerged from semi-structured interviews. The authors provide implications for counselor educators, school administrators, professional school counselors, and school counseling directors. The authors also discuss directions for future research.

Keywords: *Professional school counselor, comprehensive school counseling program*

Implementing a Comprehensive School Counseling Program: A Phenomenological Inquiry

Professional school counselors (PSCs) play a significant role in enhancing greater educational equity and quality academic success for all students through their involvement in school systems as instructional leaders and stakeholders. To be valued players in this mission, PSCs must be able to implement a comprehensive school counseling program (CSCP) to their fullest potential to service students in the twenty-first century (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2018). A CSCP is an intentional and systematic method for assisting students in acquiring and exercising basic life skills. A CSCP, implemented by PSCs and driven by student data, is an integral element of a school's mission. CSCPs ensure equitable access to a rigorous education for all students and identifies the knowledge and skills all students will acquire as a result of the K–12 CSCP. CSCPs are delivered to all students in a systematic fashion and are based on data-driven decision making. CSCPs make use of the expertise of professional school counselors. From the late 1950s to the early 1990s, school counseling professionals focused on developmental theories and academic guidance resulting in increased popularity in group counseling and guidance curriculum (Cox, 2018). The combination of psychoanalytical and social ideologies also influenced this early developmental stage of the counseling profession by broadening it beyond occupational concerns and infusing comprehensiveness to service delivery (Gehart, 2016; Kaplan & Gladding, 2011). The transformation of school counseling programming followed suit and was apparent with the transition from vocational counseling to a more theory-driven and comprehensive approach to helping children in the schools, based on PSC competency (Cinotti, 2014). The modulation in school counseling from a vocational to a more theory-driven standpoint also occurred in Texas via the creation of professional school counselor competencies and the Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (Texas

Model; Texas Education Agency, 2018).

Due to the expansion of PSC roles, school counseling stakeholders developed new practice requirements. The need for accountability increased licensure and certification requisites. Currently, the combination of an advanced degree and mastery in PSC competencies are requirements to practice as a PSC in most Texas public-school districts (Cox, 2018). The Texas Education Agency (TEA) sets forth the certification requirements for PSCs. TEA requires PSCs to have completed a school counselor preparation program in addition to holding a minimum requirement of a master's degree from a qualified higher education institution. After September 2019, applicants admitted to an educator preparation program for a school counselor certificate will be required to hold, at a minimum, a 48-hour master's degree specifically in school counseling from an accredited institution of higher education (TEC, §21.003-21). Additionally, TEA requires the combination of passing the Texas Examination of Educator Standards, completing a minimum amount of school counseling related graduate courses, and two years of certified teaching experience (Texas Education Agency, 2018).

TEA's focus on the credentials and educational development of PSCs ensures that PSCs are ready to meet the demands of Texas public education. The needs of students, adolescents, parents, and families are becoming increasingly more complex. These populations need the intentional support of all public education stakeholders including PSCs (Bardhoshi, Schweinle, & Duncan, 2014). Notably, TEC §33.006 requires PSCs address and prioritize student needs. Among the types of students who are required to be assisted by PSCs are those at-risk of dropping out of school, becoming involved in drug abuse or gangs, needing instructional support, or are exceptionally skilled. It is through PSCs' participation in planning, implementing, and evaluating CSCP that these at-risk students successfully are identified.

Additionally, the support of other education stakeholders such as district leaders and campus administrators also aid in PSCs' ability to identify students in need. Additionally, PSCs do the day-to-day work and are able to give a more accurate representation of what it is like trying to implement a standardized model in school settings. For the reasons previously mentioned, it is important that the voices of PSCs regarding program implementation are heard. Literature exists involving the perceptions of counseling program leaders in implementing school counseling programs in Texas; however, the voices of professional school counselors have yet to be recognized.

Comprehensive School Counseling Programs

A CSCP is developmental and systematic in nature, sequential, clearly defined, and accountable. CSCPs are founded upon developmental psychology, educational philosophy, and school counseling methodology (ASCA, 2012). CSCPs are vital to the achievement of excellence in education for all students and are an integral part of each school's total educational program. Additionally, CSCPs are developmental by design and sequentially organized and implemented by PSCs with the support of teachers, administrators, students, and parents. CSCPs organize resources to meet the priority needs of students through delivery system components such as guidance curriculum, responsive services, individual student planning, and system support.

There is an extensive collection of literature defining the positive impact CSCPs have on student outcomes. For example, Goodman-Scott, Watkinson, Martin, and Biles (2016) state that it is through CSCPs that PSCs enhance opportunities for students to develop social and emotional maturity. The claim that PSCs enhance developmental opportunities for students through a CSCP is echoed in the statewide evaluation of the implementation of the ASCA National Model by Carey, Harrington, Martin, and Hoffman (2012). This statewide evaluation of school counseling programs consisted of a survey, demographic, and outcome data from 144

Utah public high schools. The authors used hierarchical linear regression to determine if the school counseling programs at the 144 Utah public high schools had a significant impact on student educational outcomes after controlling for the variability in outcomes related to critical demographic differences between schools (Carey et al., 2012). The researchers found significant evidence that the implementation of a CSCP produces many student benefits including boosted academic achievement, an increase in fair services, and a broader impact on career development (Carey et al., 2012).

Program Implementation

The lack of consistency and systematic processes make it difficult to establish the true value of CSCPs. Furthermore, the Texas Model recommends that the following resources be made available in support of proper implementation of a CSCP in Texas: (a) appropriate staffing, (b) balanced counselor-to-student ratios, (c) access to parents, (d) time given to the program design, evaluation, and implementation, (e) an adequate school counseling department budget, (f) materials, supplies, equipment, and (g) easily accessible and adequate facilities (TEA, 2018).

One factor directly affecting the impact CSCPs have on student outcomes is program implementation (Lapan, Gysbers, Stanley, & Pierce, 2012). Lapan (2012) ascertained that several studies on the delivery of CSCPs indicate that when PSCs are highly trained in the implementation process, students inherit quantifiable benefits. The survey results of 888 PSCs who completed the *Survey of Comprehensive School Counseling Programs* in 514 Wisconsin public high schools indicated that the implementation training of professional school counselors and the level at which they implement their CSCPs significantly affected the impact their programs had on student achievement (Burkard, Gillen, Martinez, & Skytte, 2012). Specifically, the findings related to the correlation between CSCP implementation and student outcomes

indicated that passing rates at the advanced mathematics level, increased student attendance, and graduation rates were significant with more fully implemented CSCPs. The findings also indicated a relationship between non-school counseling activities and classroom guidance and individual planning, signifying that, as PSCs spend more time on non-school counseling activities, they were more likely to spend less time on these specific school counseling related components which lowered their fidelity to proper program implementation (Burkard, Gillen, Martinez, & Skytte, 2012). Additionally, factors such as large implementation gaps in programs across schools and unbalanced student-to-counselor ratios both affect the professional school counseling team's ability to implement an effective CSCP on their campuses. Inconsistent standards and guidelines for implementation across campuses making it difficult for school districts to properly and efficiently assess program effectiveness.

Purpose of the Study

There is evidence in the research literature supporting CSCPs positively impacting student's overall academic achievement, attendance, and behavior (Carey et al., 2012; Lapan et al., 2012; Wilkerson, Pérusse, & Ashley, 2013). While Texas law requires implementation of a developmental guidance counseling program by PSCs (TEC §33.005), a lack of research addressing the implementation experiences connected to this requirement exists. It is true that for some schools across Texas, program standards and consistency may be non-existent, and for this reason, PSCs may struggle with role ambiguity and may be unsure where to focus their attention and resources. Although CSCPs may be helpful, PSCs are not able to know where or how to begin in some cases which may result in unsupported relationships with their campus administrators. This descriptive phenomenological study aims to shed light on the lived experience of implementing CSCPs thereby informing decision-making policies facilitative of

more seamless implementation in the future, and enhancing relationships between administrators and PSCs. Additionally, this study is designed to address a gap in the research literature related to understanding Texas PSCs' lived experiences implementing CSCPs in their local school communities. To meet these goals, we established the primary research question for our study as follows: What are the lived experiences of professional school counselors regarding their efforts in implementing a comprehensive school counseling program in Texas?

Method

Due to the notable lack of research on PSCs' experiences of implementing CSCPs in Texas, we utilized a descriptive phenomenological research design (Moustakas, 1994). Matua and Van Der Wal (2015) ascertain that descriptive designs are more useful when there is an underdeveloped understanding of an experience. While quantitative and mixed-method studies provide a foundation regarding the roles and responsibilities of PSCs, they are deficient in strong, in-depth perceptions that qualitative investigations can provide (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Goodman-Scott et al., 2016; Graham, Desmond, & Zinsser, 2011; Villares & Dimmitt, 2017). According to Hays and Singh (2012), phenomenological analysis warrants the investigation of the shared essences of participants' experiences. As indicated by Creswell (2013), an awareness of the collective experiences of participants aids to inform the customs and procedures of a profession, in the current study, an awareness of the collective experiences PSCs and their involvement in implementing their CSCP aids to inform the customs and procedures of the school counseling profession.

Participants

Before initiating the research study, we sought Institutional Review Board approval. During the research process, we utilized purposeful and snowball sampling (Hays & Singh,

2012). We recruited participants by consulting with district school counseling leaders in south Texas and administrators and utilized professional counseling email listservs and social media. Twelve PSCs agreed to participate in the study, a size we deemed appropriate given the research question and level of expertise across the participants and following the recommendations of Creswell and Creswell (2017) and Morse (2015). Our sample included nine females and three males, and we assigned each participant a corresponding pseudonym. Five participants self-identified as Non-Hispanic and seven as Hispanic. Four participants self-identified as elementary school counselors, four as middle school counselors, and four as high school counselors. Additional participant demographic data is included in Table 1.

Data Collection

We developed a semi-structured interview protocol utilizing Bevan's (2014) method of structuring interview questions into three domains: (1) contextualization, (2) apprehending the phenomenon, and (3) clarifying the phenomenon. Examples of questions from our protocol include "Tell me how you handle student crises at your school." "How do you know your curriculum has impacted your students?" and "How do you help students plan, monitor, and manage their educational development?" We also asked follow-up questions as needed. The first author conducted the semi-structured interviews, which lasted approximately 45 to 65 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the first author.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, we employed a step-by-step process presented by Moustakas' (1994) modified version of Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen's method (Colaizzi, 1973; Keen, 1975; Stevick, 1971). Our data analysis included the following ten steps: (1) epoché, (2) obtaining an understanding of the data, (3) horizontalization, (4) identifying invariant constituents, (5)

identifying themes, (6) constructing individual textural descriptions, (7) constructing individual structural descriptions, (8) constructing composite textural descriptions, (9) constructing a composite structural description, and (10) textural-structural synthesis. We illustrate the step-by-step process of the data analysis in Figure 1.

Researchers and Trustworthiness

The first author is a professional school counselor and district school counseling leader at a public school district in South Texas. He also serves in a variety of capacities at the district level including as a member of the crisis team and district advisory committee. He is also a lead middle school counselor. The second author is a professional counselor with over 15 years of experience in a variety of community mental health and private practice settings. He is a counselor educator at a university in South Texas. The third author has six years of experience as a high school counselor and district school counseling leader. She also is a counselor educator and coordinator of the school counseling track at a university in South Texas.

It is essential for qualitative researchers to define their procedures of trustworthiness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Additionally, Creswell and Creswell (2017) noted qualitative researchers could moderate their predispositions by increasing the trustworthiness of their data. For this study, the researchers worked to establish the trustworthiness of data by utilizing epoché, member checking, a peer debriefer, and practicing emphatic neutrality. Regarding the procedure of epoché, we bracketed our predispositions by staying mindful of our experiences and perceptions within our positionality in the field of professional school counseling. By actively understanding the participants without judgment, and demonstrating sincerity, sensitivity, reverence, and awareness, the researchers displayed empathetic neutrality (Patton, 2014).

Results

The author extracted 312 significant statements from 12 verbatim transcripts. Utilizing phenomenological reduction, the first author reduced the 312 significant statements to 23 initial codes. We illustrate the flow of our thematic reduction process in Figure 2. Upon further reduction, five major themes surrounding the lived experience of implementing a CSCP by PSCs emerged: (a) systematic school counseling, (b) school counselors as first responders, (c) maneuvering a professional climate, (d) continuum of student development, and (e) the whole child. The systematic school counseling theme included the following two subthemes: (a) program management, and (b) school counselor role. The continuum of student development theme included the following three subthemes: (a) providing support, (b) facilitating growth, and (c) measuring success. The authors outline the emergent themes in Table 2, and descriptions about the themes and the supporting quotes make up the remainder of the results section. The identified themes were common to the twelve PSCs, however, participants experienced them differently depending on the grade level of students they serviced (elementary, middle school, and high school). Although participants did not mention the Texas Model or the ASCA Model specifically, it was clear that they were familiar with their service delivery components. A diverse sample allowed the authors to gain a bird's eye view of the K-12 implementation of CSCPs as opposed to a single grade level. PSCs are described to have specific school counseling skills or knowledge in promoting the academic success of students (Texas Education Agency, 2018). The presence of specific school counseling skills and knowledge was apparent to the researchers as the participants provided descriptions of their lived experiences. We illustrate the disbursement of participant evidence in support for each theme and subtheme in Figure 3.

Systematic School Counseling

One recurring theme, as experienced by 11 out of 12 participants, was the emphasis of school counseling program implementation being systematic. The participants described program implementation as having to be methodical, organized, and consistent. This theme included the subthemes of *program management* and *the school counselor role*. Implementation of a CSCP often requires that PSCs use managing tools that are data-driven and technological. PSCs use data for student assessment and planning which is represented in the four service delivery components of the Texas Model which include guidance curriculum, responsive services, individual student planning, and system support (Texas Education Agency, 2018). Regarding *program management* and the use of technology, Will, a high school counselor, stated:

More often than not I utilize computers. I find that our library has a couple of iPad carts and those are extremely productive for things that I need to lead students in and when I need them to follow along and do it for themselves.

Furthermore, Sandra added that she utilizes interactive display devices such as Smart Boards to present guidance lessons to her students on. Sandra stated:

I am very thankful that I'm able to incorporate technology into my guidance lessons. I do think that is important as well. I'm also able to get on the Internet during my guidance lessons. That is very helpful. The last couple of years we have made the transition to all the classrooms now having both internet and Smart Boards available.

Additionally, regarding the *school counselor role*, PSCs conceptualize student histories and current issues to tailor school counseling services to meet their needs, making the implementation of such services systematic and needs-based. Nicole stated,

I feel like as a counselor, we're tasked with a lot of different roles...we are their [students] lifeline to any social or emotional help while they're at school. Sometimes,

they call on us to try to help with their parents or their home situation... I feel like we are more than just a helper for them at school.

It was apparent that Nicole viewed her role as a PSC as an all-encompassing responder to the diversity of student needs on her campus. She stated that her response to the academic and social needs of her students is an "all day thing." Tracy also sees herself as wearing many hats as a PSC. Tracy stated:

I have a lot of different roles. One of the roles is that I am responsible for our campus serving our Gifted and Talented (GT) students. So, I work specifically with, and I'm tied to our GT students for the campus. I help with the transition into middle school and then the transition out of middle school; helping them with their academics and post-secondary education, and courses that they're going to be taking. I help guide their path for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, and the entire time that they're in middle school.

Not only is Tracy responsible for the academic development of the general education students at her campus, but she is also tasked with directing the Gifted and Talented program which is designed for students that exhibit high-performance capabilities in an intellectual, creative or artistic area, and that possess an unusual capacity for leadership.

School Counselors as First Responders

PSCs are tasked with addressing the various needs of students in the form of responsive services. Ten out of 12 participants expressed that when student crises occur, PSCs are often the first to respond. PSCs utilize educational development, often in the form of guidance curricula, as preventative measures. Sandra stated, "the biggest way that I provide prevention is through the guidance curriculum, and as far as remediation, that's where those responsive services come in." Sandra often covers topics in her guidance curriculum such as bullying, cyber-safety, self-

esteem, and conflict resolution. Regarding PSCs as first responders, Frida stated,

If there is a crisis where a student is coming into our school, and they have been hurting him or herself, we first meet with the student...we communicate with the parents...we let our assistant principal and principal know what is going on.

Sarah states the following as a description of what happens when she receives a student outcry:

First, I'll make sure that the child is safe. That's first and foremost. I talk to the teacher and kind of check to see what happened and then I'll follow the district crisis protocol. I make sure that they're not going to harm themselves, I do the crisis report, notify the parent, and inform the administrators. I do all of this the second it's been brought up to our attention, and then we focus on the well-being of that student.

Student conceptualization, as Olivia states, is a crucial element for responding to students in crisis. Olivia stated, "the minute something's reported I take it seriously. I bring [the student in crisis] in and we discuss it." She added, "the crises our students experience are not stemmed from something that just happened immediately. It's usually something that's happened or has been happening before." PSCs act as first responders by supporting students and offering support in their time of need (Texas Education Agency, 2018).

Maneuvering a Professional Climate

Effective implementation of CSCPs often requires that PSCs communicate with campus professionals including teachers, parents, and administrators. Eleven out of 12 participants agreed that a professional climate is influenced by quality teamwork and support between members. When describing her relationship with the teachers and parents on her campus, Jade stated, "As far as our relationship with the teachers. I feel like I'm an advocate for them. I act as a liaison between the teacher and the parent sometimes." In Stella's opinion, a supportive

environment attracts teachers and counselors to stay on board as a team. Stella stated, “Since the climate is very supportive and most staff members like to work here, we haven’t had a high turnaround in a long time.” When asked about how it feels to be supported, Todd states that “It feels great to be supported as a professional school counselor. I feel like I can truly make a difference”.

Additionally, networking and utilizing outside resources are factors that often aid PSCs in effectively implementing their CSCPs. Describing communication at her campus, Denise stated they have “developed a system where [they] are in constant communication with one another.” She added, “the teachers, counselors, and admin team are always talking...capturing every moment as a team and having that communication piece is essential.” Will described his team as having a “family dynamic,” and noted that communication is “always about what the students need.” Regarding resources and networking, Frida admitted that when she is not comfortable with a situation or guidance curriculum topic, “the most important thing...to do... is to tap into resources.” Frida’s resources include bringing in speakers to address students on topics and utilizing district-wide guidance curriculum materials. Similarly, Ram stated, “every once in a while, we’ll call in an outside provider to cover topics” such as “identifying possible signs of suicide or self-mutilation, symptoms of mental illness, and the debunking of myths about mental illness.”

Continuum of Student Development

PSCs’ implementation of CSCPs often leads to the opening of growth opportunities for students. This theme included the subthemes (1) *providing support*, (2) *facilitating growth*, and (3) *measuring success*. All participants described the career and post-secondary readiness, workforce preparation, and character building as vital areas of student development.

Additionally, participants perceived that the three subthemes, which make up a continuum of student development, support the overarching goal of PSCs to develop students into productive members of society. Regarding the subthemes of *providing support* to students, Olivia stated:

I've been able to help [students] with their anger....help them to think about their consequences....slow down their thinking. I believe that at the moment for a lot of them they need adults that they can come and turn to for support. I think that's a huge deal.

Additionally, Nicole describes her role as a high school counselor as one that makes sure that students are taking the classes they need to take to "prepare them for the future." Nicole's statement supports the overarching goal of PSCs to develop students into productive members of society.

Regarding the subtheme of *facilitating growth* in students, Todd described his intention as "to help children think about what kind of person they want to be." He continued to state that he aims to "help children...recognize parts of themselves that are already there." Through his guidance curriculum, Todd helps students "articulate that aspect [of themselves] and help it to grow if they so desire." Ram, a middle school counselor, believes that the transitional years are some of the most important regarding the involvement of PSCs in facilitating student growth. Ram stated:

I look at the child development because a lot of times the transitional years are the toughest for not just the kids but the parents because they're noticing their children grow. Their children are changing, and they're noticing things that they didn't see when they were in fourth or fifth grade. So, I offer that type of communication. I try to work with the parents and students a lot. I'm that bridge between them.

Participants agreed that a student's demonstration of acquired skills from their experiences of guidance curriculum and individual planning are markers of success. Sarah stated,

When [students] come back and tell me that they used a strategy at home that I taught them, or that they told their mom about it, that tells me that that they listened and that I've been able to help them be successful and make the right choices.

Denise described that her administrative team created a "culture and a climate where the core belief is that within the walls walk students who will be the future leaders of the community and not just the community within the area of town or the city, but in the global community." She continued to say that it is through the guidance lessons that she can teach her students the skills needed to become such leaders. She stated that she sees the efficacy of her guidance lessons in the student's day-to-day behaviors and attitudes.

Regarding holistic student development, PSCs advocate for students to facilitate for them an equal opportunity for education. PSCs work progressively in a preventative manner to eliminate potential determinants of student success and measure success by student's demonstration of acquired skills from guidance curricula and school counseling services.

The Whole Child

Effective implementation of CSCPs, as perceived by seven out of 12 participants, addresses all aspects of student development; including academic, career, and psychosocial elements. Jade describes her role as a PSC to encompass not just being an "academic counselor" but also "addressing any social needs and personal needs" that students may have. Similarly, Sarah expressed, "we have to consider how they're [students] being brought up at home...looking at the whole child, and not just bits and pieces." Stella also confirms this theme

by adding that an “all around program” includes “not just providing academic support but emotional support as well.”

Because of building rapport with students, PSCs foster opportunities of student connectedness in a multifaceted approach to school counseling services. When describing her perception of what students may experience because of her services, Tracy stated, “[students] know that if they need anything that they can come and ask me” and that she practices an “open-door policy.” Ram stated he hoped students “experience more of connectedness with self, being able to work through self and not only maneuver their academics, but also their understanding of relationships.”

Discussion

The findings from this study are consistent with the growing body of literature on CSCPs. For example, the subthemes of *program management* and *school counselor role*, which makes up the theme of *systematic school counseling*, align with work by Robertson, Lloyd-Hazlett, Zambrano, and McClendon (2016), who concluded that school counselors who function in appropriate roles are better suited to contribute to overall student success. Furthermore, an investigation of Texas school counseling program leaders’ experiences implementing the Texas Model supports the importance of maneuvering a professional climate to enhance the implementation process (Cox, 2018).

The theme of *school counselors as first responders* aligns with work by Grothaus (2012) and Johnson, Nelson, and Henriksen (2011). For example, Grothaus (2012) proposes that when programming is designed by school counselors to be geared more towards responsive services, personal and social disparities experienced by students are more effectively addressed and mediated systemically by PSCs. Regarding the *continuum of student development* theme, the

work of Bowers, Lemberger-Truelove, and Brigman (2017), and Shillingford, Oh, and Finnell (2018) supports the correlation between positive student development and the role of PSCs in schools.

Finally, the theme of *the whole child* aligns with work by Collins (2014), Lewallen, Hunt, Potts-Datema, Zaza, and Giles (2015), and Watson (2017). For example, Watson (2017) highlights the value of school counselors nurturing school connectedness as another way of enhancing student wellness. Collins (2014) and Lewallen et al. (2015) emphasize the significance of PSCs in advocating for the whole child while comprehensively addressing mental health needs in schools.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study are significant considering the emergent need for an increase in the presence of the voices of PSCs in the research literature (Cox, 2018). This study was designed to address a gap related to understanding Texas PSCs' lived experiences implementing CSCP in their local school communities. PSCs' unique positionality in schools allow them opportunities to make an impact on student success (Shillingford et al., 2018). The authors provide the following implications focused on improving the implementation of CSCP.

Understanding the lived experiences of PSCs implementing CSCP is vital to the continued growth of the school counseling profession. Understanding these specific experiences will allow PSCs to meet better the needs of students, which will, in turn, demonstrate the profession's importance in educational systems. PSCs can better advocate for change in the school counseling profession by unifying their experiences, and by becoming aware of and embracing new ways of implementing CSCP. Additionally, professional counseling associations can become better informed by qualitative research to advocate effectively for PSCs

and the students they serve. Similarly, when public school stakeholders understand such factors, they become fit to construct district and campus school counseling practices which directly affects student success via their CSCPs.

For counselors that provide services in private practice, college campuses, criminal justice settings, and at community mental health centers, it is essential to be knowledgeable of the school counseling systems that adolescents have or may have access to while in school settings. For example, a family counselor in private practice or a community mental health center may benefit from familiarizing themselves with the delivery models of school counseling services via CSCPs to better support the children in the families that the counselor is servicing. Knowing CSCPs will better equip professional counselors in designing treatment plans for families that include adolescents who require individualized education plans for example.

Counselor educators can utilize the themes derived from this study to guide the development of their professional school counselor curriculum to meet the needs of Texas school counseling programs better, and allow for more seamless implementation. Additionally, the results of this study can better inform school counseling students by exposing the realities of implementing CSCPs thus preparing future school counselors for potential barriers and roadblocks that may be immovable. Furthermore, by being knowledgeable of the potential obstacles and roadblocks of program implementation, school counselors-in-training will be better equipped to advocate for themselves and their profession, resulting in the ability to provide the best possible services to students. In doing so, students will reap the benefits as evidenced by academic outcomes, better mental health, and enhanced wellbeing as related to student success. Armed with this information, students can choose to seek out professional development opportunities preparing them for the real world of school counseling during their practicum and

internship experiences. This study also can inform the efforts of PSCs, school boards, campus administrators and district leaders who are developing or reforming their CSCP. Codified in Texas law, school districts are required to plan, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive developmental guidance program to serve all students and to address the unique needs of students (TEC §33.006).

Limitations and Future Research

In this study, we examined the experiences of 12 PSCs implementing a CSCP in Texas. The researchers identify several study limitations. Factors such as counselor-to-student ratios and the campus demographics from where the participants work serve as potential limitations of this study. These factors may be additional barriers to the lived experience of implementing CSCPs, thus potentially having skewed the perceptions of the participants. For example, counselor-to-student ratios that are unbalanced can potentially put PSCs at risk of experiencing professional burnout due to the demands of a high caseload. Additionally, PSCs can find it challenging to provide responsive services to students when CSCPs are understaffed, thus making their availability to students scarce. Similarly, the length and quality of the school counseling training that participants received may have affected their comprehension of and experience in implementing CSCPs. For example, graduate counseling programs that are 60 semester hours as compared to 48-hour programs may offer additional school counseling courses to students thus enhancing their professional development. Similarly, graduate programs accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) may offer more standardized school counselor training programs for school counseling students, thus, better preparing them to implement CSCPs.

Further research is recommended to use an extended representative sample to validate the findings of this study better. Exploring the voice of students as recipients of the services provided by PSCs through CSCPs would add depth to the richness of this study's findings using verification and confirmation. Another suggestion for future research is to seek to understand the experiences among and between parents and PSCs connected to the implementation of CSCPs. This recommendation would permit researchers to understand the environmental and supportive factors impacting the implementation of CSCPs among these groups. Parents may offer researchers unique comprehension into the factors that are helpful or hindering for school counselors to provide services. Researchers can compare these factors to the findings of a study exploring the lived experiences of students in CSCPs.

Conclusions

While generalization is not the goal of qualitative research, the shared understanding, expertise, and perceptions of the 12 participants who implement CSCPs at the elementary, middle, and high school levels are valued contributions to the existing literature on the implementation of CSCPs. Participants shared their knowledge and expertise to identify the theme of *systematic school counseling* through their description of *program management*, and their *school counselor role*. Participants also provided insight into their presence as *first responders* to students with high levels of needs on their campuses. Subsequent themes included *maneuvering a professional climate*, a *continuum of student development*, and addressing *the whole child* as being factors identified in the participant's experiences of implementing a CSCP in Texas. The synergy of the themes derived from the lived experiences of implementing CSCPs may inform decision-making policies facilitative of more seamless implementation in the future. Seamless implementation of CSCPs allow for more collaborative and better working

relationships between PSCs and educational stakeholders such as campus administrators and district leaders.

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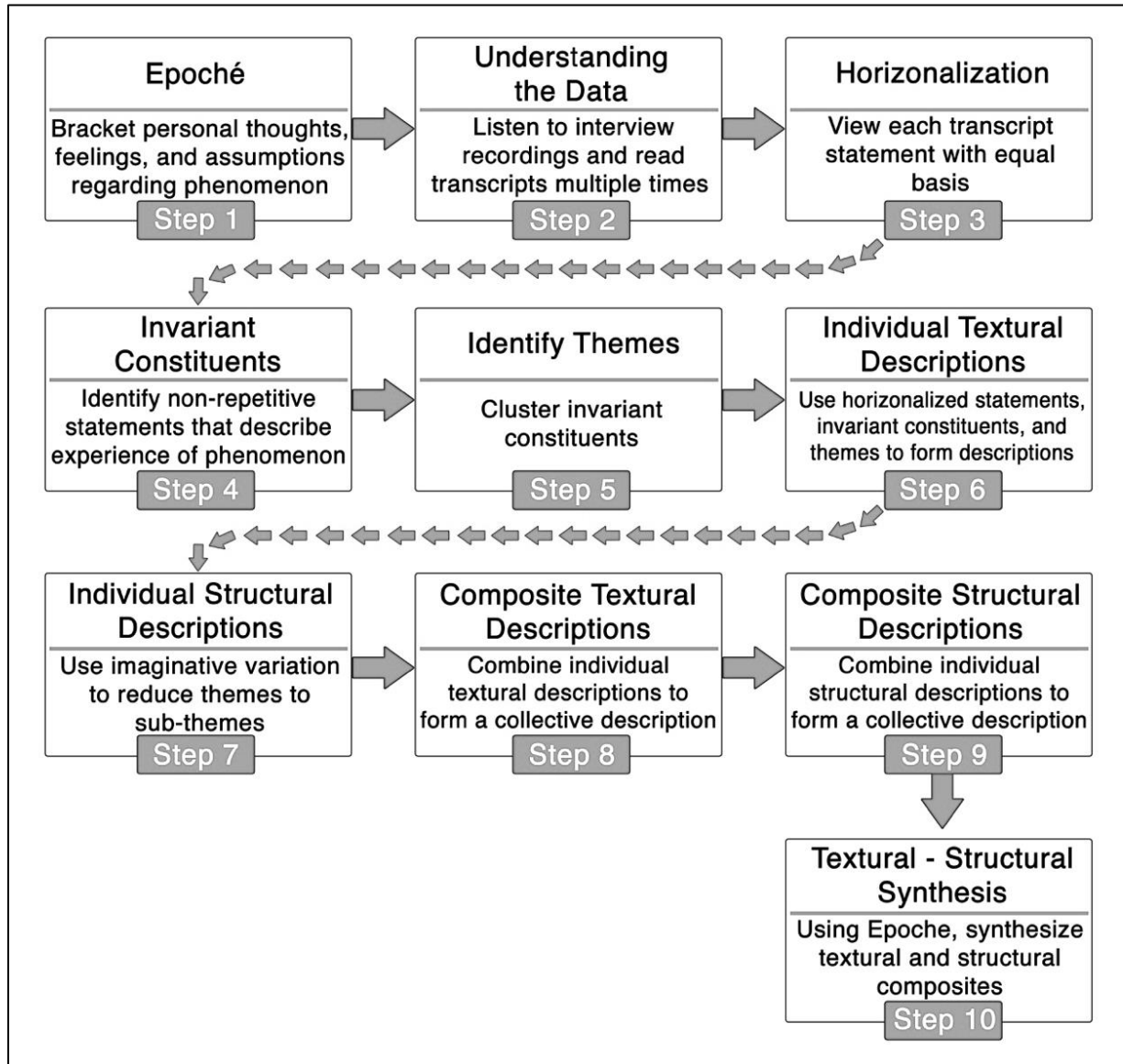


Figure 1. Data Analysis Plan (Illustrates the step-by-step process of my data analysis using Moustakas' (1994) modified version of Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen's method)

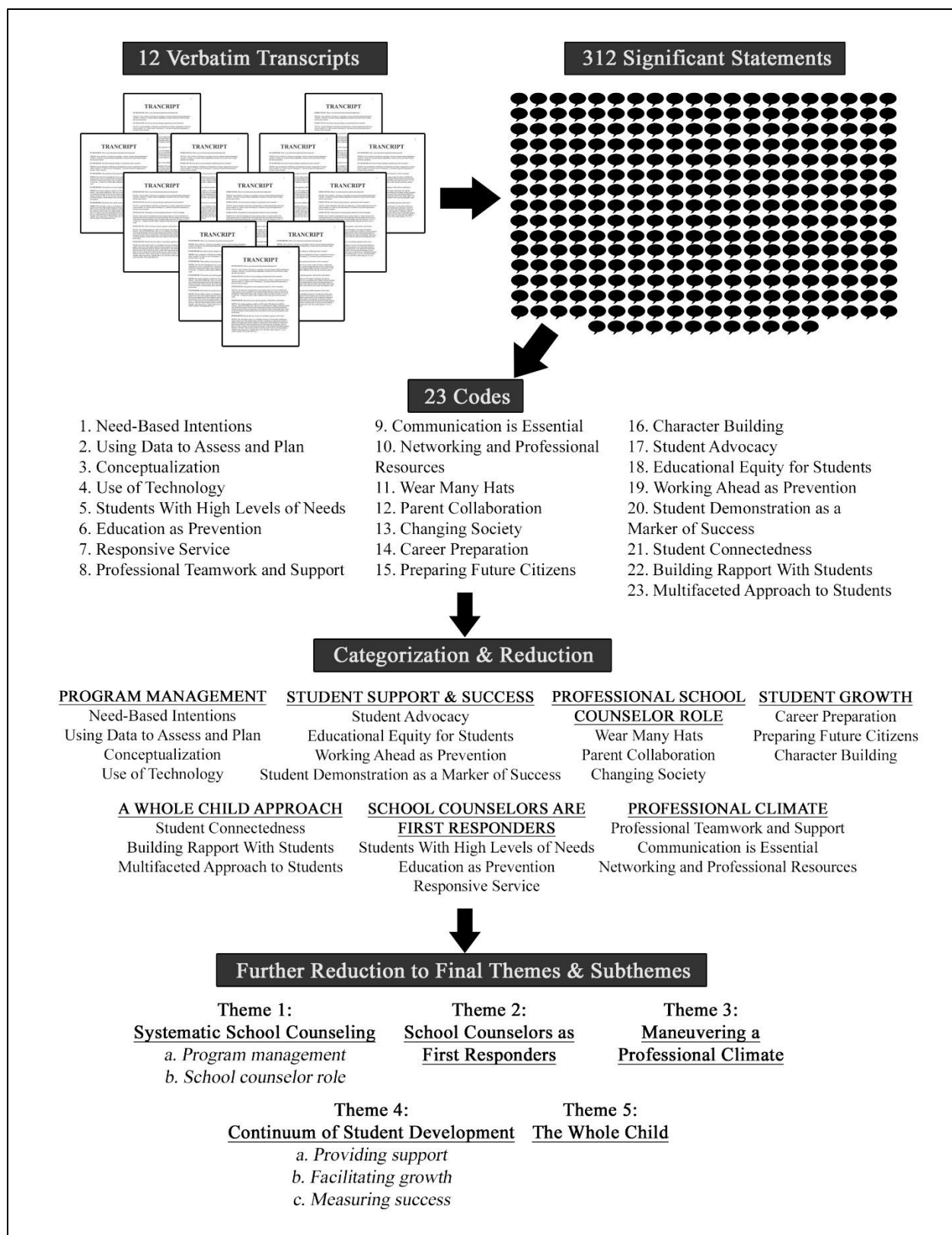


Figure 2. Reduction Flowchart (Illustrates the reduction of themes and subthemes)

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
Systematic School Counseling	School Counselors as First Responders	Maneuvering a Professional Climate	Continuum of Student Development	The Whole Child
(a) Program Management	Sandra	Denise	(a) Providing Support	Jade
Will	Frida	Will	Olivia	Sarah
Sandra	Sarah	Frida	Nicole	Tracy
(b) School Counselor Role	Olivia	Jade	(b) Facilitating Growth	Ram
Nicole		Stella	Todd	Stella
Tracy		Todd	Ram	
			(c) Measuring Success	
			Sarah	
			Denise	

Figure 3. Participant Evidence for Themes (Illustrates the disbursement of participant evidence in support for each theme and subtheme)

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Grade Level	Gender	Ethnicity	Counselor-to-Student Ratio	Years of Experience
Denise	Elementary	Female	Hispanic	1:340	3
Frida	High School	Female	Hispanic	1:382	6
Jade	High School	Female	Non-Hispanic	1:300	16
Nicole	High School	Female	Non-Hispanic	1:349	4
Olivia	Middle School	Female	Hispanic	1:350	3
Ram	Middle School	Male	Hispanic	1:300	10
Sandra	Elementary	Female	Hispanic	1:420	9
Sarah	Elementary	Female	Hispanic	1:400	6
Stella	Middle School	Female	Hispanic	1:350	16
Todd	Elementary	Male	Non-Hispanic	1:350	3
Tracy	Middle School	Female	Non-Hispanic	1:350	9
Will	High School	Male	Non-Hispanic	1:2270	6

Table 2
Final Themes and Subthemes with Unique Participants

Theme	Subthemes	Total unique participants (N=12)
Systematic School Counseling	a. Program management b. School counselor role	11
School Counselors as First Responders		10
Maneuvering a Professional Climate		11
Continuum of Student Development	a. Providing support b. Facilitating growth c. Measuring success	12
The Whole Child		7