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THE PRINCIPAL-COUNSELOR RELATIONSHIP AS SCHOOL LEADERS WITHIN A FRESHMAN ACADEMY

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

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This is dedicated to my daughter, Olivia, who has always believed in me more than I have ever believed in myself.

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ABSTRACT

The principal-counselor relationship is an important component to serving families in a comprehensive manner in schools. Collaboration of principals and school counselors supports students while simultaneously meeting the requirements of school reform and student accountability required by the law (Rock et al. 2017). Previous research has shown a lack of collaboration between principals and counselors while other research also suggests that when principals and counselors combine their knowledge, skills and expertise, this combination can lead to an increase in school success, a more positive school climate and increased support of staff needs. This study was conducted in order to examine the lived experiences of the principal and school counselor relationship in the concentrated freshman academy setting.

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to investigate the principal-counselor working relationship as school leaders working in a freshman academy setting. This study primarily serves as an educational tool by sharing the lived experiences of principals and counselors working in freshman academies. A review of the literature takes a closer look at the existing research on the principal-counselor relationship and current trends in education including the freshman academy and trauma informed practices. These initiatives provide concentrated environments and opportunities for the specialized skills of a school counselor to be best utilized in a shared leadership relationship.

The researcher conducted a hermeneutical phenomenology study conducting interviews to explore the lived experiences of the participants. Max van Manen's (2014) *Phenomenology of Practice* provided the methodological framework for this

study. van Manen's existential lifeworlds: temporality (lived time), corporeality (lived body), relationality (lived self-other), spatiality (lived space), materiality (lived things) and technology (lived cyborg relations) were used to examine how school counselors and principals describe their lived experiences working as school leaders in a freshman academy.

The findings indicate that when a relationship exists between the principal and school counselor shared leadership results. When care is given to defining the role of the school counselor, and that role is protected, programs such as the Freshman Academy thrive in serving their students and families as well as in supporting teachers. Stakeholders continue to misunderstand and misuse school counselors requiring continuous advocacy for their role and benefits. The conclusion of the study calls for future research to explore the benefits of the principal-counselor relationship on the school environment and in settings other than the freshman academy.

Prologue

School counselors play a pivotal role in providing resources to families and supporting students in ways that ensure student success. When school counselors and principals work together the level of support for students and families has the potential to be exponentially impactful. Allowing school counselors to focus on the job, that their professional training prepared them for, allows them to work in partnership with the school principal to create a cohesive leadership team that will take the school's success to an unbelievable level.

I am a school counselor in a suburban high school. I work with five other counselors and five principals in my building. Over the span of my fifteen-year career, I have worked with over twenty different school administrators. I believe that it is the responsibility of both school counselors and administrators to build a more effective and supportive working relationship. Sharing in leadership responsibility is the key to fostering a shared leadership team at the school site to support students. The responsibility lies within each of these individuals to inform others of their unique skill set and training in order to best work together.

Competency standards require that school counselor possess the knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes necessary to plan, organize, implement and evaluate a comprehensive, developmental, results-based school counseling program that aligns with the American School Counselor Association National Model. School counselors complete approximately sixty credit hours as part of their masters degree programs while school administrators master degree programs are typically less than forty credit hours. Principal competencies include such things as organizational management,

leadership, school policy and law, community relations, and instructional management (Gulcan, 2012). Combining these two skill sets would have a profoundly positive impact on student success, school climate and teacher satisfaction. Viewing student learning, through the lens of the key competencies, connects counselors into learning in the wider school community (Crocket et al., 2014). Throughout my years in this field, I have had the chance to be a part of a strong principal-counselor relationship where collaboration was used to make decisions and serve families through the construct of shared leadership. When a true leadership team is formed between the principal and school counselor the results can be inspiring to everyone involved. This results in the principal-counselor team focusing the entirety of its efforts on supporting teachers, students and their families toward the end goal of success for the entire school community.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

School principals and school counselors have a lot in common, perhaps more than they would like to admit. Both groups are Master's degree educated and typically are located in the front office of the school and they are naturally looked at in an administrative capacity. Although historically receiving little attention, collaboration between school leaders and school counselors is important to student success in academic, social and career development (Carnes-Holt et al., 2012). It is of the utmost importance for principals and school counselors to clearly discuss the explicit roles and responsibilities of each position (Edwards et al., 2014). Hence, the principals and counselors, play a vital role in the successful matriculation and cultivation of students.

These two groups working together can set the tone in a school building for how to effectively collaborate with each other, leading to actions that help students succeed in school and sites to best reach accountability goals. "School counselors are in a critical position to focus on issues, strategies, and interventions that will assist in closing the achievement gap between low-income and minority students and their more advantaged peers" (Martin, 2002, p. 149). As the leadership team in the school, it is critically important that principals and counselors work together and communicate effectively in order to have a greater impact while supporting students. Building relationships with students and families will give school leaders deeper insight into students allowing for a fuller understanding of potentially at-risk students and to, in turn, better serve all families. Principals must clearly understand their roles and communicate those roles to stakeholders in order to utilize school counselors effectively in partnership to assist students (Stone & Clark, 2001).

Within the concentrated environment of the freshman academy setting the roles of school counselors' and principals' are magnified. These two groups are responsible for leading and collaborating in order to serve student needs as a team for academic, social and career development. By definition freshman academies share a common goal of smoothing the transition from middle to high school and typically include separate sections of a high school designated only for ninth graders and their teachers (Veasey, 2011). Freshman academies first came into the spotlight as a means of intervention with dropout rates (Fulk, 2003; Smith et al., 2008; Black, 2004). Generally, freshman academies are intended to provide ninth graders with structure, a personalized learning environment, a sense of belonging and ease in the transition to high school, while integrating content and increasing communication between teacher and parent (Ratliff, 2009). Research on critical times for students to drop out revealed that the transition from ninth to tenth grade proved to be the crucial time when students make the decision whether or not to complete high school (Black, 2004; Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). Thus, came the movement in education to focus on the freshman year of high school as a time for interventions. Killebrew (2016) cited earlier research from Reents (2002) stating that students who are involved in a freshman academy have a better chance of acquainting themselves with the rigor of the high school curriculum and maturing more quickly than those students who are not involved in a freshman academy. This research explored the principal-counselor relationship, and shared leadership, within a freshman academy setting through the following question: What are school counselors' and principals' lived experiences as school leaders working within a public high school freshman academy? This study took a look at the perceived relationships and lived experiences of these principals and counselors in freshman academies.

There is a need to understand school leadership and its effect on student success. Veasey (2011) cited earlier research from Graber and Brooks-Gunn (1996) stating that not only is there a decrease in achievement as students transition from middle school to high school, there is an increase in behavior problems in the form of suspensions and expulsions. Principals and counselors join their efforts in addressing these issues of behavior, achievement and intervention. Freshman academies often function as a school-within-school. This model puts a greater emphasis on the principal and counselor team as being the leaders of this concentrated environment. The need for this study was to examine more closely the working relationship between the principal and counselor in this specialized setting as a shared leadership unit. Both the principal and counselor need to be intentional and deliberate in committing to a shared leadership format. Learning about each other and building a working relationship lays the foundation for this leadership team to have an effect on students, families and teachers.

A commitment to leadership supports student success (College Board Advocacy & Policy Center, 2011). The school leadership team sets the tone for the building, not just for teachers but also for the students and their families. The ability of the leadership team, principals and counselors, to function effectively in this regard is vital to the school's role to scaffold means for students to succeed academically as well as socially. How does one define the leadership team? Is it merely the building administrators, principal and assistant principals? Or does the leadership team include the school counselors? Ratliff (2009) stated that it is necessary to investigate and explore both principals' and counselors' perceptions of each other's role in the building leadership team since the two educators are leaders in school reform initiatives. It is beneficial to the school's success if principals and school counselors

respect one another both personally and professionally. In order to achieve the level of respect needed, both must understand their counterpart's role, responsibilities, training and how those combine to benefit their students (College Board Advocacy & Policy Center, 2011). There is little research that exists on the principal-counselor relationship as a unified leadership team, and the effect this relationship has on the school environment. There is also little research regarding the freshman academy or schools-within-schools model. The current study will take a closer look at this leadership relationship within this specialized environment.

In order for the principals and counselors, in a concentrated school unit or freshman academy to best function as school leaders, principals must first understand the role of the school counselor. Strong relationships between principals and school counselors enhance role understanding, prevent burnout and positively impact the overall performance of a school (Duslak & Geier, 2017). The Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC), which produces standards for school administrators, explicitly delegates, in standard number seven, that it is the school leaders' responsibility to forge the counselor and principal relationship (Carnes-Holt, et al, 2012). The standards referenced by Carnes-Holt, et al (2012) were updated in 2018 to the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) Standards. According to NELP Standard 7: Building Professional Capacity (NELP, 2018, p. 27) principals should be educated on the training preparation and unique talents of all school staff and demonstrate leadership by utilizing personnel to their full capacity. Counselors use a repertoire of refined and specialized skills in creating highly personalized learning moments, in response to the difficulty or challenges each student brings (Crocket et al., 2014). In this regard principals are the guiding force in the leadership team of principals and counselors,

and the school principal(s) are charged with the responsibility of knowing who they are working with and utilizing that person to their full potential. Principals can effectively lead by providing guidance and direction to other members of the school team to best utilize their unique skills to meet the varied needs of students (Elmore, 2000).

According to the Enhancing the Principal-School Counselor Relationship Toolkit (2011) published by College Board, the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) the principal-counselor relationship is a dynamic and organic relationship that evolves over time in response to the ever-changing needs of a school. This toolkit focuses on five key areas. These areas include communication, trust and respect, leadership, collaborative planning and advanced practice (College Board Advocacy & Policy Center, 2011). By fostering these areas of the principal-counselor relationship the team can work together more effectively and serve the school community in a more positive way promoting higher retention rates and growing students into productive community members, which are most often key goals of the freshman academy model. The ninth-grade year is a pivotal year where students often find themselves lost and in survival mode (Fulks, 2003 as cited in Killebrew, 2016). This study will ask counselors and principals to share their experiences in leadership roles, and working relationships with each other, in a freshman academy. This focus on principal-counselor leadership roles and working relationships is the phenomenon I have examined in the following study with the hopes of adding to the literature on this topic. This unique setting, with focused team building and targeted interventions, is the prime situation for understanding the dynamics of principal-counselor leaders working together.

The goal of an effective principal-counselor relationship is to use the strength of the relationship to collaboratively lead school reform efforts to increase achievement for all students (College Board Advocacy & Policy Center, 2011). Counselors have often been utilized in more of an administrative assistant role, doing clerical tasks and not being treated as equals, on the school leadership team. Lunch duty, bus duty, test coordinating, such duties are not within the scope of counseling duties and are more appropriate for the assistant principal or even the support staff (Carnes-Holt et al., 2012). While counselors view themselves as professionals who want to be involved in the decision-making process regarding important school decisions, research indicates that administrators may not value or understand their competency in these areas (Carnes-Holt et al., 2012; Brown et al., 2006). It is vital that counselors advocate for themselves by communicating with, and educating, administrators on what their training has prepared them to contribute to the leadership team and to the entire school community. Counselors need to be adamant about the role they should play in the leadership team and how this can impact students. This is done by standing up for themselves to define their role in order to have a greater relationship with administrators (Perez, 2016). Communication among the principal-counselor leadership team is a vital component to a strong sense of trust and respect. Counselors are in a unique position to have a deeper insight into students, their social circles, and their home lives allowing this information to be incorporated into creating a more holistic school environment, addressing the needs of the students through the school community. Administrators who are not versed in the expanded roles counselors can play in realizing the school's mission, run the risk of missing the opportunity to utilize their skills to improve student achievement (Kaplan, 1995).

Context of the Study

The context of this study includes the public high school setting, grades 9-12, which utilizes a freshman academy model. The academy has specifically assigned principals and counselors that work together to serve the students and teachers. This context is relevant for this study because it provides an insightful look into principals' and counselors' lived experiences and fits with my study's focus on understanding the leadership roles and working relationship of counselors and principals within a Freshman Academy model. The phenomena examined through this study is leadership roles and the working relationship of school counselors and administrators.

Problem of Practice

The role of the school counselor is often misunderstood by school stakeholders. It is the responsibility of both the school administrators and the school counselors, as members of the school site leadership team, to clarify the role and responsibilities of the school counselor (Armstrong et al, 2010; Edwards et al., 2014; Dollarhide et al., 2007). With an increase in mental health needs in schools (YRBS, 2017) it is vital that school counselors are not being misused by performing duties that are outside of their professional preparation. School counselors and principals should be forming an alliance and working together to address these current issues. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS, 2017) the percent of students who did not go to school at least once in the past month because of safety concerns went up from 5.6% in 2015 to 6.7% in 2017. The YRBS also found the number of students with persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness rose from 29.9% to 31.5% from 2015 to 2017. This survey also revealed that in 2017 17.2% of students seriously considered attempting suicide. There is a persistent need in

our schools for not just trauma and crisis response but also for prevention services. School counselors need to be afforded the time and resources to properly address these issues within schools. School counselors should not only advocate for students but also advocate for themselves. School counselors have specialized training in working with students in crisis and need to be afforded the opportunity to work in both prevention and intervention opportunities with students and families. They need to make sure principals, as well as other stakeholders, know that school counselors have formal training in a variety of areas: They counsel kids with issues, they work on transitions and they do problem-solving with kids and families (Dollarhide et al., 2007). When there are not clear expectations and understanding of the role of the school counselor there is a distraction from being able to properly build relationships with students and families. This inhibits their ability to play a crucial role in school leadership by providing services to the students. In view of their overlapping roles, it is surprising school counselors and principals have not traditionally regarded each other as being partners in leadership (Edwards et al., 2014).

This study examines the meaning of the relationship of the counselor to the principal, school and community in the larger context of the school leadership team within the freshman academy. These principal-counselor relationships are important because they provide deeper insight into how school counselors' and principals' make sense of their leadership role and working relationship within the structure of the freshman academy. Recent research suggests when their roles are properly understood, these leaders can form a very powerful alliance in academic achievement (Edwards et al., 2014). This concentrated setting, with a focus on assisting in the delicate transition time from middle to high school for students, gives us a unique look at understanding the role of both the school counselor and

the principal in the school leadership team and clearly illuminates how this relationship has a lasting, building-wide effect on school and student success.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study provides insight into school counselors and principals critical role in fostering a safe and supportive school environment, as school leaders, and to facilitate student academic growth and general well-being. Working within a freshman academy context this relationship can have a direct and profound impact on student success. The freshman academy is an important factor in schools that can affect student outcomes; school counselors in collaboration with principals can work toward improving the school climate (Rock et al., 2017). There is currently very limited research in this area. A search of scholarly peer-reviewed articles using the ERIC database netted a result of twenty-three results, using the search terms principal-counselor relationship. Of those twenty-three results three were not relevant to this research. This study will serve to add to the literature in regard to understanding the unique dynamic of the school leaders particular to the principal-counselor relationship and leadership roles. The awareness created through this study helps to further continually analyze and build the relationship between school counselors and administrators in an effort to better serve schools and students.

This study is foundational due to the very limited amount of research available on the principal-counselor relationship and specific to these school leaders' roles working as a leadership team. School counselors and principals are in a unique position to have a direct impact on school leadership, especially through this concentrated environment found in the freshman academy.

Purpose of the Study

This study used hermeneutic phenomenology to examine the lived experience of both school counselors and administrators in order to better understand the unique dynamic and insights of these leadership roles in the school, and the working, relationship. The hermeneutic phenomenology approach was chosen in order to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of leadership roles and working relationships. This allows participants to voice their lived experiences about their respective leadership roles, serving students in a freshman academy, through their stories. The functionality of the leadership team has a direct impact on the school climate. Managing a school is a job that is too complex for one person alone (Siccone, 2012). School counselors and principals both bring a unique skill set to the leadership team and it is in the school communities' best interest if each of these individuals work together to best perform their jobs and collaborate in order to foster a safe and supportive school environment where interventions are focused and implemented with ease. Examining the focused environment of a school-within-school model of a freshman academy, this study seeks to uncover the participant stories, their lived experiences of working as respective school leaders and an understanding of the perspectives of both counselors and principals in their role to serve students. In order to conduct a successful freshman academy, administrators, counselors and teachers should all be on the same page as far as shared expectations and goals to guarantee a smooth transition for ninth grade students (Killebrew, 2016).

Guiding Research Question

This study asked school counselors and principals to describe their experiences with relation to leadership in a freshman academy setting. This study addressed the following

research question: What are school counselors' and principals' lived experiences as school leaders working within a public high school freshman academy? The researcher used an overarching question as a starting point for the interview process and employed follow-up questions to further illuminate the lived experiences being sought by the research question (See Appendix B).

Guiding Methodological Framework

The guiding framework for this study is van Manen's (2014) existential lifeworlds: temporality or lived time, relationality or lived self-other, spatiality or lived space, materiality or lived things, corporeality or lived body and technology or lived cyborg relations. This framework was chosen in order to best explore the participants lived experiences. It sought to understand the phenomenon specific to the relationship of how school counselors' and principals' view their lived experiences and working relationship as school leaders, in a freshman academy school model, to support students learning and social-emotional well-being.

Research Method Used

Phenomenology is primarily a philosophical method for questioning, not a method for answering or discovering or drawing determinate conclusions (van Manen, 2014). van Manen's (2014) phenomenological approach guided me through my analysis of the interview data and served as a lens to generate themes from the data in order to uncover the lived experiences of the participants. This particular study design is emergent as situated in finding meaning and understanding as expressed from the voices and lived experiences of the participants. Looking into the principal-counselor working relationship for insights into how to make the leadership experience more effective, and to further understand the principal-

counselor leadership roles, and working relationship in a specific school structure of a freshman academy, is what this study sought to uncover and illuminate from the lived experiences: the stories of professional practice as perceived and experienced from the participants – counselor and principal. To synthesize the data the researcher used the lifeworlds existentials as a guide to reflection, participated in thematic analysis and hermeneutical phenomenological writing. Data were collected through a purposeful sample using in-depth interviews. The study included a sample size of three participants who worked in a freshman academy setting as a school counselor or principal at the time of data collection. Removing other factors and concentrating on this intense and focused environment was ideal as the researcher was able to get a closer look at the participants lived experiences and how they perceive the counselor-principal relationship, as a school leader, specific to their roles in a freshman academy.

Operational Definitions

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) – An organization that supports school counselor's efforts to help students focus on academic, career and social/emotional development so they achieve success in school and are prepared to lead fulfilling lives as responsible members of society (ASCA, 2005).

College Board – an American non-profit organization that develops and administers standardized tests and curricula used by K-12 and post-secondary education institutions to promote college-readiness and as a part of the college admissions process.

National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP)Standards – standards for programs that educate school leaders. The NELP standards, which are aligned to the Professional Standards for Educational Leadership (PSEL) serve a distinct purpose in that

they provide specificity around performance expectations for beginning level building and district leaders. (see: http://npbea.org/nelp/ for more info)

Freshman Academy – refers to centers, separate wings, schools within schools or separate ninth grade schools whose goal it is to separate the freshman from the upperclassman in an effort to ease the transition to high school and to produce more successful high school students (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010 as cited in Killebrew, 2016).

Lived experiences – The lifeworld-the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize it, or reflect on it (van Manen, 1990)

National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) – a national organization of and voice for middle level and high school principals, assistant principals, and aspiring school leaders from across the United States. (see: https://www.nassp.org/ for more info)

Principal-counselor relationship – School principals and school counselors have something in common: both want to see students succeed. Although their individual roles and responsibilities are very different, both principals and counselors face difficulties and challenges in their efforts to improve student outcomes within the school. When principals and counselors can work effectively together, their efforts stand a far better chance of making a difference and helping all students achieve (College Board Advocacy & Policy Center, 2011).

School Counselor - School counselors are certified/licensed educators with the minimum of a master's degree in school counseling and are uniquely qualified to address the developmental needs of all students through a comprehensive school counseling program

addressing the academic, career and personal/social development of all students. (ASCA, 2019).

Summary and Organization of the Dissertation

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the lived experience of school counselors and principals, specifically to understand the dynamic of the principal-counselor working relationship as school leaders in a freshman academy. When collaborating as leaders, principals and counselors are better positioned to improve the quality of life for the school community which in turn may create a more positive overall school climate (Militello & Janson, 2007). Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of counselors as well as the skills that they receive through their professional preparation will be a key element to improving communication, trust and respect between school counselors and principals. It is important to explore the stories of how counselors' and principals' make sense of their role of supporting students within this structure of shared leadership.

Five chapters are presented in order to provide the background for this research, discussion of the principal-counselor relationship, literature review, methodology, phenomenological narratives, and the interpretation of the findings. This Chapter one, provided an overview of the principal-counselor relationship and its implications in the freshman academy. Chapter two will review the current literature on the principal-counselor relationship and freshman academy model as well as examine relevant current issues in education today. Chapter three describes the methodology supporting this study and Chapter four presents the results. Finally, Chapter five will present a discussion of findings and the conclusions, along with implications and recommendations. The goal of this study is to examine school counselors' and principals' lived experiences as school leaders working

within a public high school freshman academy in an effort to add to educational research and impact school leadership practice.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

Relationship building begins with a foundational knowledge of each person involved. van Manen (2014) tells us that phenomenology does not just pose a problem to be solved, or a question to be answered, but that a good phenomenological study almost always starts with wonder. Exploring the lived experiences of principals and counselors helped the researcher to gain insight in to perceptions of their roles and beliefs about leadership within schools. Different perceptions of appropriate roles places strain on the relationship and adversely affects collaborative partnerships (Armstrong et al., 2010). It is the responsibility of both the principal and the counselor to advocate for appropriate use of their time and skills. When principals and school counselors form an alliance or cooperative relationship around this objective, it will serve to eliminate barriers and improve student achievement (Edwards et al., 2014). Supporting each other and working together in shared leadership will have a direct impact on the effectiveness of this partnership and on the success of the school.

This belief is what guided the focus of this study, to explore the principal-counselor relationship in a freshman academy school setting. This smaller scale school-within-school model was the ideal situation to examine the impact of a shared leadership among school counselors and principals. Having a small team of individuals responsible for this cohort of teachers and students created a nuanced focus on school community and by design spreads the leadership responsibilities around. An effective school counselor hears more, knows more, and understands more about teachers, parents, students and the community than anyone else in the school (House and Hayes, 2002). Investigating the lived experiences of

these individuals in this environment, hoped to provide insight into the principal-counselor relationship. Knowing the appropriate role of the school counselor and the school administrator will help us to better explore the working relationship of these school leaders and to understand how it is applied through their lived experiences in the freshman academy.

Principal-Counselor Relationship

In a 2010 study Armstrong, MacDonald, and Stillo examined school counselor and principal's perceptions of their relationship, each of their roles in leadership and training. They found that if principals lack understanding of appropriate counselor roles, they may unintentionally move counseling programs into quasi-administrative directions that fail to capitalize on the talents and training of school counselors in promoting student growth and development (Armstrong et al., 2010) It seems that one of the key elements of a productive and professional working relationship, among school counselors and principals, first requires each participant to advocate and educate the other on what their role is, and what their professional preparation entailed that has qualified them for this role. In 2011 College Board National Office for School Counselor Advocacy, The American School Counselor Association and the National Association of Secondary School Principals published the *Enhancing the Principal-School Counselor Relationship Toolkit* which was the end product of surveying principals and counselors nationwide about their relationships. These three organizations assert that:

> The principal-counselor relationship is dynamic and organic. It evolves in response to the needs of a school with the goal of collaboration in school reform efforts to increase the achievement of all students.

Armstrong et al. (2010) developed two questionnaires to examine school counselors and principals perceptions of factors related to the principal-counselor relationship and their respective professional preparation programs. Their questions focused on the topics of school counselor role, leadership, communication, trust, cooperation, and how adequate their preparation programs were with regards to each other. The results of Armstrong et al. (2010) indicated that there is a greater discrepancy in perceptions of their relationship in secondary counselors and principals versus elementary. Secondary school counselors perceived their principals to be less supportive, dependable, trustworthy and predictable (Armstrong et al., 2010). While principals in this study were found to view the principal-counselor relationship more favorably, counselors, for the most part, felt supported by and trusted their principals. This study focused primarily on the perception of the relationship by both parties. This is important because differences in perception make communication and collaboration more challenging (Armstrong et al., 2010). The authors suggested that real change needs to happen in preparation programs educating both sides on the role of the other. College Board et al. (2011) also stated that

> The goal is to help principals and school counselors build effective relationships in which communications are open and fluid, all professionals trust and respect one another, all professionals serve leadership roles, and planning involves close collaboration.

This can also be addressed currently by school counselors educating their principals on what their preparation entailed and what their role should ideally be. If principals are supportive of the counseling program, and informed about appropriate roles of counselors from the beginning, a more collaborative relationship is likely to develop (Armstrong et al., 2010).

Having differing ideas of what roles the other plays adds strain to the relationship which can have negative effects on the school climate as the leadership team sets the tone in the building. The counselor-principal relationship has far-reaching influence on the systems that impact school climate and on the nature of the student support roles adopted by a school counselor (Dollarhide, et al., 2007). Armstrong, et al. conclude that communication is key in building the relationship between principals and counselors. They emphasized this important connection due to its potential impact on the school climate.

Edwards, Grace and King (2014) examined how the principal-counselor relationship impacted student success. They found that the principal-counselor relationship sets the tone for the building and impacts student success as well as teacher effectiveness. Edwards, et al. (2014) found that recent research suggests when their roles are properly understood, these leaders can form a very powerful alliance in academic achievement. College Board et al. (2011) also stated that when principals and school counselors work together effectively, they are able to solve many of the issues that matter most in schools. The key to this partnership once again is communication and mutual respect. There is little doubt among researchers that improvements in the principal-counselor relationship must begin with each professional understanding and respecting the role of the other (Edwards, et al., 2014). Communication needs to be effective in ensuring that the principal and counselor understand the proper role of school counselors based on their professional preparation. The principal may then need to advocate for and protect the counselor from being assigned other duties that are not in line with their part in the school leadership team dynamic. It is incumbent upon principals to employ strategies that will remove such hindrances. The author goes on to state that the most significant hindrances involve principals utilizing school counselors in non-counseling

duties, lack of support, high student ratios, resistance from other staff, classroom interferences, and lack of communication (Edwards, et al., 2014). This article places some blame on the principal but also places the responsibility on the principal to shield the counselor from other responsibilities that are outside their intended purpose.

Principals and counselors need a strong working relationship in order to be the leaders in the school and have the greatest impact possible on student achievement. When school counselors are allowed to implement counseling programs and interventions, with the support of the principal, student academics, behavior, and attendance improve (Edwards, et al., 2014). So where does this education of school principals about the role of school counselors start? The authors suggested that preparation programs for principals need to be adapted to prepare principals to work effectively with counselors. Identifying the most effective ways to inform principals of these roles, and the effectiveness of school counselor implemented interventions, would not only contribute to both professions, but it would also become a vital component of school leadership (Edwards, et al., 2014). It is also noteworthy that school counselor preparation programs also need to implement the training of counselors to better advocate for their professions and communicate effectively with principals about their role and benefits to the school leadership. When a proper understanding of roles and responsibilities is communicated between school counselors and principals, it enhances the relationship in a manner that will have a positive impact on learning (Edwards, et al., 2014).

In a 2016 study Duslak and Geier examined the communication levels between the principal and counselor to determine if this had an effect on their relationship quality. The authors noted that other studies have suggested the importance of communication frequency, principal availability, and structured meeting times between

school counselors and principals, but these studies have not directly explored the effect of measurable behaviors such as frequency or set meeting times on relationship quality (Duslak & Geier, 2016). College Board et al., (2011) also asserted that:

> Principals and school counselors need to respect one another both personally and professionally. In order to achieve the level of respect needed, both need to understand their counterpart's role, responsibilities, training and how those combine to benefit their students.

Duslak and Geier (2016) set out to address some of the suggestions for future research, that other studies had previously noted, and look more closely at specific factors influencing the principal-counselor relationship.

The most notable result from the Duslak & Geier (2016) study is that meeting frequency, how often the principal and counselor met, was the greatest factor in predicting relationship quality between a school principal and counselor (Duslak & Geier, 2016). Simply having open dialogue and communication more frequently among principals and counselors had an impact on reported satisfaction with the relationship. So, the length and quality of the meetings were not as impactful as the frequency as reported by school counselors. Based on the findings of the present study, a principal or counselor intentionally creating opportunities for informal conversations appears to be valuable (Duslak & Geier, 2016).

Further, the study found that school counselors did not report that the quality of the communication was important to them, but the frequency. This suggests that what was most important was open lines of communication leading to a feeling of inclusion. Strong

relationships between principals and school counselors enhance role understanding, prevent burnout, and positively impact the overall performance of a school (Duslak & Geier, 2016).

Hence, the study findings from Duslak & Geier (2016) may also benefit schools with high rates of turnover by providing a means for developing relationships in an efficient manner by increasing the frequency of interactions and prioritizing frequency over structure. Of the variables considered in this study, communication frequency had the greatest impact on school counselor's opinion of relationship quality with their principal. The more frequent communication led to a reportedly stronger relationship. If a principal understands the goals of the counseling program and how they relate to the mission and vision of the school, there is less chance for misunderstanding and a greater chance of a cohesive plan of coordination between the counselor and principal on leadership matters (Duslak & Geier, 2016).

Dollarhide, Smith and Lemberger (2007) examined school principals' early memories of school counselors in their lives and how that may have an effect on their perceptions of school counselors today. Examining principals' memories of, and learning about, school counselors/counseling could help school counselors understand what experiences predispose a principal to value and support school counseling (Dollarhide et al., 2007). The principals set the tone in their individual buildings regarding how school counselors spend their time and the tasks they are assigned to, their own perceptions of this role can certainly have an impact on the allocation of resources.

The researchers found that the critical incidents that appear to be most determinant of a principal's support for school counseling seemed to derive from the relationships the school counselor has built with the principal and with the school community (Dollarhide et al., 2007). While they initially thought that the principal's early experiences with their own

school counselors may have been impacting the current professional relationships. They found that was not the case. What had the greatest impact was the current working relationship between principal and counselor. The critical incidents that determine support from the principal are those in which the principal experiences the value that counselors add to the school in terms of impact on parents, students, administration, and the entire school (Dollarhide et al., 2007). It is critical that school counselors practice self-advocacy and not shy away from making others aware of their positive impact on the school and school climate. Principals desire school counselors who are communicative, systemic in their work, student focused, and able to take on leadership roles in the school (Dollarhide et al., 2007). The authors discuss implications for this study by first suggesting that this data outlines that the counselor-principal relationship has far-reaching influence on the systems that impact school climate and on the nature of the student support roles adopted by school counselors (2007). The emphasis remains on relationships across the board as well as advocacy for the appropriate use of school counselors. Rather than relying on a positive relationship with the principal, school counselors must document their value as a resource to the entire school community (Dollarhide et al., 2007). This study suggests that school climate can be predicted by the principal-counselor relationship and suggests further research in this area. The findings of these studies indicate that a greater understanding of the principal-counselor relationship would benefit programs in public schools such as the freshman academy. Further understanding is needed in the area of freshman academy leadership. My study asserts that the principal- counselor relationship is a vital phenomenon of this leadership. My study aims to add to or advance this topic in the sense that it informs practice in the area of school leadership.

Freshman Academy

A rising level of attention is being placed on addressing student dropout rates by focusing on the critical transition times in education, particularly the transition to high school. One solution that has become most implemented is the use of the schools-within-schools model or freshman academy as it is often called. A 2009 study by Ratliff investigated freshman academy principals' and counselors' perceptions of the implementation strategies used in their respective freshman academies. The strategies examined included such things as academic teaming, alternate scheduling, multi-year grouping, teacher advisory systems, etc. It is necessary to investigate and explore both principals' and counselors' perceptions of their relationship since the two educators are leaders in school reform initiatives (Ratliff, 2009). The setup of the freshman academy is unique in that the principal and counselor are viewed as the exclusive leadership team for the teachers and students. Principals and school counselors both think that it is important that counselors participate in school leadership (College Board et al., 2011).

The ninth-grade year has been noted as being one of the most critical years of high school and is referred to as the "make-or-break year" because it sets the tone for a student's entire high school career (Black et. al (2004) as cited in Ratliff, 2009). For this reason, it is important to attend to the functioning of the freshman academy and supports offered. The academy principals and counselors perceive the freshman and ninth academy as a positive educational reform initiative that will provide ninth-grade students with academic success, regardless of their ethnicity or background (Ratliff, 2009). Existence of a freshman academy is just one step to this support, giving care and attention to its proper functioning and leadership is also important to its success.

Veasey (2011) examined the impact of freshman academies on high school transition. This study looked solely at improving student performance, student attendance and graduation rates but offered insight into the structure and teacher satisfaction with that structure. Veasey cited earlier research by Chmelynski (2004) stating that because ninth grade is hailed as a difficult year for students, an initiative that has gained support to ensure students transitioning to high school from middle school are successful, some districts across the nation are designing and implementing freshman academies. This structure makes a unique environment where controlling certain variables can hopefully lead to success with both teachers and students. The freshman academy at the high school was designed to separate ninth graders from the rest of the student body in a building designated specifically for first-time freshmen, with one administrator and one counselor (Veasey, 2011). Prior research has suggested that having one administrator promotes consistency, uniformity and equity with regards to student issues. The findings of this study also found that teachers perceived having one counselor assisted students in knowing specifically where to go for assistance with day-to-day "drama." (Veasey, 2011). The counselor in this particular freshman academy also stated that she viewed her role as important, not only in helping diffuse conflicts, but also in offering assistance to keep students from dropping out.

Veasey (2011) examined the impact of a freshman academy by interviewing principals, teachers and counselors. This study revealed no significant impact on the students' achievement, attendance or graduation rates. What they did find was an impact on student motivation, students' attitudes toward school and the school culture (Veasey, 2011). The researchers noted that the implementation of a freshman academy model is often an attempt to address the former issues but seems to be having a greater impact on the latter. I

believe the principal and counselor relationship set the tone for the culture in the school. The school's culture adds to the motivation and attitude toward school (Veasey, 2011). In an indirect way by having an impact on students' motivation and attitudes about school the freshman academy is still having an effect on students' performance and graduation rates. A commitment to leadership supports student success (College Board et al., 2011).

Killebrew (2016) examined the teachers, counselors and principals' opinions of the effectiveness of the school-within-school model. Killebrew begins by citing many sources on the configuration of freshman academies and their purpose. Regardless of their physical form, all Freshman Academies have the same goals, which are to separate the freshman from the upperclassman, to help ease the transition to high school, and to produce more successful ninth grade students (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010 as cited in Killebrew, 2016). Killebrew took a closer look at whether principals, counselors, and teachers believed Freshman Academies or schools-within-schools are an effective way of transitioning ninth graders into mainstream high school. The author found that all parties agreed that the model made a significant difference with attendance rates and reaching students from a low socio-economic background. However, they had differing opinions on such topics as the effect on academic performance, discipline referrals, school culture and transitioning in general.

One of the key messages of Killebrew's (2016) research was that the care put into staffing and structure of the Freshman Academy model is key to its success. School counselors and principals are in a unique position here as they often work together in master scheduling. Finding a group of teachers who care about each other and consider all ninth graders a collective team or unit can be a powerful thing (Killebrew, 2016). While principals may be able to assess based on classroom observation and teacher evaluation what teachers

are a best fit for ninth grade academy, the school counselor can attest to teachers that form effective and supportive relationships with students regarding personal-social support. Utilizing the most engaged teachers that have a knack for relationship building with the freshman, can be a major factor in the success of this freshman academy model. Killebrew (2016) found that often twelfth grade classes have the lowest teacher to student ratio. If the ninth-grade year is the make or break year this should alert administrators and counselors to the need to improving student to teacher ratios in the ninth-grade classes. Counselors and administrators in this study agreed that isolating freshman improves academic performance and decreases drop-out rates because the freshman feel like part of a family (Killebrew, 2016). For this reason, the relationship between the principal, school counselor and freshman teachers is an important factor to be considered in freshman academy success. Building a strong principal-school counselor relationship, working through shared leadership, will strengthen the freshman academy in its focused interventions and supports.

Counselor Role in Learning and Support for Students

School counselors play a vital role in preparing students to learn in the classroom as a result we must also examine current trends and needs in education and how school counselor can best work, and lead, with the school administrator in implementation of interventions and supports to address the evolving needs of the school population. When principals and school counselors work together effectively, they are able to solve many of the issues that matter most in their schools (College Board et al., 2011). With an increased focus on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the current need for trauma informed practices (TIPs) in the classroom we are in a pivotal time for school counselors to take an active leadership role in professional development within their schools to create trauma informed environments.

ACEs are defined as potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood such as experiencing violence, abuse or neglect; witnessing violence in the home; and having a family member attempt or die by suicide (CDC, 2019). Traumatic events during childhood can have long lasting effects that require targeted intervention and support in schools. The recent Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 suggests that schools implement a tiered system of support, such as Mutli-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), in order to address both behavior and academic needs of students. ESSA includes a provision for mental health services that are "based on trauma-informed practices that are evidence-based" (ESSA, 2015). RB-Banks & Meyer (2017) stated that general education teachers and staff members are often unaware of best practices for dealing with students that have been impacted by childhood trauma. It is crucial for school counselors to not only take a leadership role in professional development for staff and teachers, but to also themselves be trauma informed so that they are best prepared to serve students and their families. School counselors, collaborating with school staff and community partners, can help transform the school into a safe, supportive, trauma-sensitive learning environment for all students (ASCA, 2016).

Gone are the days of one school administrator running a school building single handedly. It is important that school administrators rely on the expertise of those around them and create a shared leadership team that can build a comprehensive program of supports at their school site. School counselors advocate for policies and procedures focused on the trauma-sensitive framework and establishment of a safe school climate for all students (ASCA, 2016). With large class sizes and varied mandatory programming, shared leadership is a must in order to ensure all students are served appropriately. The relevance of trauma informed practices in the classroom, to build resiliency in students facing trauma, is essential

to the design of an effective educational platform (RB-Banks & Meyers, 2017). Leadership teams must consist of those informed in social emotional interventions. "[Students' successes] point to the benefits that can be gained successfully through collaborative efforts that bring support to schools where students facing trauma come daily" (RB-Banks & Meyers, 2017, p. 69). Carefully structuring and implementing trauma-informed programs that take tiered-interventions into consideration will increase student's success academically and improve student's overall wellbeing. Implementation of any MTSS model requires administrative support and an effective [school counseling] team (Reinbergs & Fefer, 2017).

Schools striving towards becoming trauma informed must enlist the help of, and empower, school counselors. Moya (2018) defines a trauma-informed school as one that provides a safe and respectful environment that allows students to build caring relationships with adults and peers, as well as self-regulate their emotions and behaviors so they can experience success in the school setting. School counselors who are able to deliver a comprehensive school counseling program, following the American School Counselor Association framework, devote eighty percent of their time to delivering direct services to students. Through these services, counselors are able to teach students to self-regulate their emotions and build caring relationships with adults. The ASCA National Model (2019) guides school counselors in the development of school counseling programs that:

- Are based on data-informed decision making
- Are delivered to all students systematically
- Include a developmentally appropriate curriculum focused on the mindsets and behaviors all students need for postsecondary readiness and success
- Close achievement and opportunity gaps
- Result in improved student achievement, attendance and discipline

School counselors are focused on improving student outcomes and can be key players in promoting a trauma-sensitive environment at their schools (ASCA, 2016). Implementing trauma informed practices in public school environments gives school counselors the opportunity to take a significant leadership role within their schools. Introducing new trauma prevention protocol is a must in this ever-evolving world of whole-child education.

Literature Summary and Significance of This Study

Focusing on this critical transition point in students' lives, during the first year of high school, and working to ensure positive growth and development of students, is likely not a topic that will go away any time soon. This study asked counselors and principals to describe their leadership role, and working relationship, with each other in a freshman academy. By exploring the lived experiences of school counselors' and principals' in supporting their students in a schools-within-schools model, this dissertation research hoped to gain an understanding of the relationship of the principal and counselor as school leaders. In order to understand the phenomena of the principal-counselor relationship, it is important to attend to the experience of a principal and counselor who work closely together in the same school (Odegard-Koester & Watkins, 2016).

From reviewing the literature on the principal-counselor relationship and freshman academies it is important to understand that a connection can be made between the need for a greater deal of attention to social and emotional aspects of students and their success in freshman academy settings and how the principal-school counselor relationship has an effect on school climate and student success. Strengthening the working relationship between principals' and counselors' and creating a more cohesive school leadership that supports the freshman academy students, families and teachers will have a positive impact on freshman

academy program outcomes. As no literature currently exists on this topic directly, this research aimed to bridge the gap on the principal-counselor relationship, and freshman academy model, in order to inform practice.

Following this review of existing literature, which created a basis for understanding of the principal-school counselor relationship, freshman academy and current issues, the significance of this study examines the influential factors of the principal-counselor relationship and its influence on shared leadership. This dissertation will expand the findings of empirical studies about shared leadership practices specifically by contributing data from school counselor and school administrators experiences in the school-within-school model.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Prologue

As a qualitative researcher, I am obligated to describe my role and position as it relates to the research question being examined. It is important in the use of hermeneutic phenomenology to explore researcher reflexivity and positionality. Hermeneutic phenomenology was chosen for this study versus transcendental because the researchers own opinions and experiences are important to the topic being studied in order to co construct meaning around the phenomena.

I am a high school counselor in a large suburban high school that utilizes a freshman academy model much like the schools used for this study. My professional experience has spanned the K-12 range as a school counselor for the last 15 years, as well as working in a school counseling role at a junior college with a program supporting first-generation college students. I have worked with a wide variety of principals and administrators exhibiting many diverse leadership styles. I hold a bachelor's degree in psychology, a master's degree in school counseling and, as I write this dissertation, I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Administration Curriculum and Supervision (EACS) program at the University of Oklahoma. I am an active board member and former president of the Oklahoma School Counselor Association and am very passionate about advocating for the role of school counselors.

All of these experiences have brought me to this point in my career and uniquely prepared me to conduct this research in an ethical and as unbiased manner as possible. In exploring the lived experience of school counselors and principals and their roles as leaders

in the freshman academy, I hope this study adds to a body of knowledge and research that is currently limited on the topic of the principal-counselor working relationship. Hermeneutic phenomenology provided the methodology to unveil these experiences. Exploring this topic was very important to me both personally and as a researcher. I am of the opinion that school counselors could and should be better utilized in shared leadership roles. I believe this lack of utilization of school counselors' unique skill set is largely due to individuals not being aware of the training and background of school counselors. For this reason, I am passionate about encouraging school counselors to advocate for themselves and educate others on the training and skill set that school counselors bring to the school setting to facilitate support for students' academic and social success. I believe my experiences have allowed me to relate, and add a deeper understanding, to the participants' stories in this research.

Introduction

There will always be challenges to the education system that education professionals must work to overcome. Tackling these challenges and supporting teachers and students as they evolve from year to year requires strong leadership and is a big task that requires a team of professionals working together cohesively. This study utilized hermeneutic phenomenology to uncover the lived experiences of principals and counselors as they work in a freshman academy setting examining their use of shared leadership, feelings about roles and relationship. This chapter three examines the historical background of hermeneutic phenomenology and van Manen's (2014) existential lifeworlds as the guiding framework for analysis.

van Manen's (2014) Phenomenology of Practice as a Method

This study examined the lived experiences of principals' and school counselors' in the suburban high school setting, using phenomenology, the study of experience, particularly as it is lived and structured through consciousness (Friesen, et al, 2012). The hermeneutic phenomenology approach (van Manen, 2014) was chosen as the guiding framework of this study in order to get an in-depth understanding of how school counselors and school principals work with one another as school leaders in the freshman academy. The study examined the insights of school counselors and administrators engaged in their respective school leadership to describe their individual experiences in their particular roles working with other leaders in a freshman academy. This method is the best fit for this topic because phenomenology emphasizes subjectivity. The reward phenomenology offers are the moments of seeing-meaning or "in-seeing" into "the heart of things" (van Manen, 2007). The data collected through individual interviews with each participant were analyzed and the findings provide insights to answer the study's research question: What are school counselors' and principals' lived experiences as school leaders working within a public high school freshman academy?

Due to the fact that the researcher's goal was to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences, processes and issues that principal-counselor leaders face when working together the research question was best answered through the hermeneutic phenomenology approach. Phenomenology of practice aims to open up possibilities for creating formative relations between being and acting, between who we are and how we act, between thoughtfulness and tact (van Manen, 2007). For this research study, this methodological approach allowed a deeper understanding of the relationship of school counselors and school

administrators working together. It was the researchers hope that by examining the experiences of both counselor and principal leaders from the context of existing literature on the principal-counselor relationship, and the smaller more contained environment in a freshman academy, that recommendations and implications for practice can be set forth to inform and improve practice.

This study followed the process of hermeneutical phenomenological analysis as outlined by van Manen (2014). To fully understand this approach, one must look back at the historical background of phenomenology through the writings of Husserl, Heidegger and Gademer. As van Manen (2014, p. 88) noted, "Husserl is generally regarded as the intellectual founder of phenomenological philosophy." Husserl explained phenomenology as a descriptive philosophy of the essence of pure experiences (Husserl, 1962). Heidegger focused on not the knowledge of phenomena like those before him but on the meaning of their being (Heidegger, 1982). Thus "phenomenology" means – to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself (van Manen, 2014). Heidegger agrees with those that feel that phenomenology lacks effectiveness or utility if one hopes to do something practically useful with it: "nothing comes" of philosophy; "you can't do anything with it" (van Manen, 2007). Gadamer, who studied under Heidegger, questions the justification of the oppositional contrast between theory and practice (van Manen, 2007). He states that valuing the theoretical life over the life of practice points at a high commitment to the truth, therefore, theory can mean a rebuttal of practice, but it can also be seen in the service of practice (Gadamer, 1976). Gadamer believes that phenomenology becomes hermeneutical when its method is taken to be essentially interpretive and primarily oriented to the explication of texts rather than directly oriented to lived experience (Gadamer, 1976).

Practice, in its social version, is not only meant to mean something, practice is supposed to make it possible to explain, interpret or understand the nature of the phenomena within its scope (van Manen, 2007). The term hermeneutic means interpretive, phenomenology meaning experience, hermeneutic phenomenology in this context could be defined as interpreting experiences (van Manen, 2014). Through this thoughtful and reflective process of phenomenology, I detail a rich textured description of the lived experiences of school counselors' and principals' working within a freshman academy leadership model. Phenomenology orients to the meanings that arise in experiences (van Manen, 2014).

A hermeneutic phenomenology approach was used in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of school leaders from the perspective of both school counselors' and principals. Further, utilizing qualitative methodology for this study allowed for an open-ended format of discussion which led to a deeper understanding because participants were not bound to closed questions. The researcher was mindful throughout the study, from beginning to completion, to not let their personal experiences bias the analysis but instead work as a lens to better understand the participants' own lived experiences as school leaders. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a method of non-self-indulgent reflection on the basic structures of the lived experience of human existence (van Manen, 2014).

According to van Manen (2014) phenomenological research begins with a question that comprises an element of wonder. A phenomenological question asks what is given in immediate experience and how it is given or appears to us – it asks what a possible human experience is like (van Manen, 2014). Phenomenological analysis cannot be conducted on data that consists of views, opinions, beliefs, perceptions, interpretations, and explanations of

experiences (van Manen, 2014). van Manen (2014) asserts that the best materials for conducting phenomenological analysis are direct descriptions of the experience, rather than accounts about the experience.

Using van Manen's (2014) universal themes of lifeworlds, the participants' interviews were examined by engaging in a reflective inquiry process to employ the existentials of lived self-other (relationality), lived body (corporeality), lived space (spatiality), lived time (temporality), lived things (materiality) and lived cyborg relations (technology) to explore phenomena (the principal-counselor relationship) in a heuristic manner. This framework assisted the researcher in finding themes within the experiences while using a selective reading approach. The notions of lived self-other, body, space, time, things and technology are existential in the sense that they belong to everyone's lifeworld and are universal themes of life (van Manen, 2014).

Research Question

The research question, what are school counselors' and principals' lived experiences as school leaders working within a public high school freshman academy, meets the criteria for a hermeneutic phenomenology study as laid out by van Manen (2014). This was evident in the fact that the participants were aware of their leadership role and it was experientially accessible to them. This was also the case due to the fact that the participants' beliefs regarding how others view them and their role as leaders, as well as how they view themselves, were revealed through their stories. In utilizing a hermeneutic approach to this research and van Manen's (2014) thematic analysis, the themes that emerged from the data are embedded within the transcripts of the research findings in chapter four that show implications for relationships in the freshman academy setting.

Sample Selection

The participants, who were purposefully asked to participate in this hermeneutic phenomenology study, are ones who have a lived experience that is the focus of the research being done, who are willing to share and talk about their experience (van Manen, 1997). Hermeneutic phenomenology does not require a certain sample size to conduct a study, but instead focuses on rich description of lived experiences. The sample population available for this study was a small group of administrators and school counselors responsible working in a freshman academy in a public high school. The freshman academy leadership team is comprised of the building principal, the freshman academy principal, who is employed as an assistant principal status in the district, and two school counselors. For the purposes of this study, invitation to participate was extended to two (2) administrators and two (2) school counselors that work on the freshman academy leadership team at the high school level utilizing a freshman academy model.

Description of Participants

The purposeful sample group which included two principals and two counselors, who met the requirements of working in a freshman academy as principals or school counselors, were invited to participate in the study. All participants were contacted via e-mail (see Appendix A) protocol, using the study's approved IRB recruitment script. Out of the four participants sought to participate in the study, three agreed to voluntarily participate. One principal declined to participate due to time constraints after a third follow up inquiry was made. All identifying criteria for each participant was changed in order to ensure anonymity. Participants are given a description of SC1, SC2 for school counselors and SA1 for school administrator. This purposeful sample lends insight to this hermeneutic phenomenological

study rather than random sampling because the research focus was to examine the lived experiences of school counselors and administrators working in the specified setting of a freshman academy.

Data Collection

Personal one-to-one interviews with each participant served as the primary means of data collection. Individual participant interviews served as the means to collect data on the research question: What are school counselors' and principals' lived experiences as school leaders working within a public high school freshman academy? van Manen (2014, p. 314) states, "The interview first of all serves the very specific purpose of exploring and gathering experiential narrative material, stories, or anecdotes that may serve as a resource for phenomenological reflection and thus develop a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon."

Interviews

The qualitative data were collected through one-to-one interviews with each participant. Each interview took place at a location and time chosen by the participant and were audio recorded. Prior to starting the interview rapport was established through friendly conversation with each participant. Once the interview began informed consent was obtained. Initially, the interview process asked for each participant to provide background information. The background information is present in the interview protocol primarily to give the researcher perspective on how the participant responds to questions based on their prior leadership experience in education and their experience and time at their current site particular to the context of this study and understanding leadership roles in the freshman academy.

The interview followed a protocol of asking a primary question about the participant's experience with the phenomenon with the goal of uncovering the lived experience and illuminating themes. The main interview question asked each participant to: Tell me about your experiences as a school counselor [school administrator] in a leadership role working in a Freshman Academy. This primary question sought out the lived experience of each participant in relation to the leadership of the freshman academy itself. Each participant was asked to describe, in as much detail as they could, their lived experience leading up to becoming a part of the freshman academy and what their experience has been like as a part of this school-within-school model and in working with their counterpart school leaders in the freshman academy. The researcher used IRB approved questioning where this primary question lead to other types of follow up questions that were not predetermined and resulted from the descriptions each participant shared regarding their lived experience (see Appendix B). The research stayed in line with van Manen's (2014) hermeneutic phenomenology because the interview questions asked participants about their lived experiences and provided a conversational interview where the researcher was able to explore the participants real world experiences more. This process follows the phenomenological interview approach so as to allow the participants to describe their personal accounts and lived experiences, and to keep the focus on the phenomena being investigated, the principal-counselor relationship working in a freshman academy.

The data for this research were collected from transcripts of interviews that were audio recorded in order to allow both the participant and the researcher to speak freely and allow the interview to be more natural and uninterrupted by note-taking, consistent with hermeneutic phenomenological conversational interviewing style. Following each interview,

the researcher participated in reflective journaling to capture details about the interview such as body language and other non-verbal information observed. The journal notes were used later along with the interview transcriptions for the data analysis process. The interviews were then reviewed and transcribed to look for themes among participants. This data were then combined with the researcher's notes on non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and the participant's use of silence, inference or other emotionally implied information expressed during the interview meeting to assist in developing rich and descriptive context in order to develop meaning. All participants were open and engaged throughout the entire interview process. The researcher then engaged in van Manen's (2014) lifeworld reflection by thoughtfully, and deeply, reflecting on the interviews and notes in relation to each of the lifeworlds.

Data Analysis

The researcher continued the process of writing, reflecting and interpreting throughout the research process, reviewing both the recorded and transcribed interviews, reflecting on their journal notes, contemplating the lifeworlds for each participant and across participants, writing and re-reading all of this data over and over looking for illuminating themes.

Lifeworld Existentials as Guides to Reflection

The reflective inquiry process was guided by the existential lifeworlds as presented by van Manen (2014). Relationality – lived self-other gave the researcher insight into how the self and others are experienced with relation to the phenomena being studied. Corporeality – lived body asks how the body is experienced with relation to the phenomena being studied. Spatiality – lived space guides the researcher's reflection of how the physical

space is experienced with respect to the phenomena being studied. Temporality – lived time guides the researcher's reflection by asking how time is experienced with regards to the phenomena being studied. Materiality – lived things guide the reflection by asking how material things are experienced in relation to the phenomena being studied. Technology – lived cyborg relations are broken down into five kinds of experiences related to technology (van Manen,2014, pp. 308-309):

1. Experiencing technology as taken-for-granted: tools and techniques
2. Experiencing technology ontically: concrete manifestations
3. Experiencing technology ontotheologically: a means to an end
4. Experiencing technology as technics: caught up in the latest innovations
5. Experiencing technology aesthetically: relationship between human and technology

Hermeneutic Phenomenological Writing

Hermeneutic phenomenological writing emphasizes the attentiveness to the spoken interview. The researcher stayed focused during the conversational interview not distracting from the process with note-taking. Immediately after interviews, the researcher engaged in reflective journaling as a means to explore and develop a rich understanding. The reflective journaling included observations by the researcher of body language, facial expressions, and intonation of the participant as well as an overall reflection of the interview experience.

Hermeneutic Circle

An element that is vital to the hermeneutic phenomenology research method is the hermeneutic circle through which understanding and interpreting joins the data with the ever-evolving understanding of the phenomena. The researcher transcribed the interviews word-

for-word for each participant, combining this text with the reflective journaling of the researcher, thus allowing the researcher to examine the interaction between the whole and the part each giving the other meaning. The researcher, engaged in this process of hermeneutic writing to develop the overall picture of each participants' lived experience through repetitive reading of the interview transcripts, reflective writing and interpretation of their lived experiences using van Manen's (2014) lifeworlds as a guide. The hermeneutic circle is a tool used to not just interpret the phenomenon but also to develop meaning in the information gathered and to make sense of it all. The aim is to collect examples of possible human experiences in order to reflect on the meanings that may exist in them and to paint a rich descriptive picture of the experiences.

Theming

Data analysis is the process of finding meaning in the raw bits of data that have been collected. According to van Manen (2014) "analyzing" thematic meanings of a phenomenon (a lived experience) is a complex and creative process of insightful invention, discovery and disclosure. The first step in analyzing the participants experiences based on the lifeworld themes as decribed by van Manen (2014) was to read and re-read each transcription looking for van Manen's (2014) motifs of lived worlds: relationality, spatiality, temporality, corporeality, materiality and technology. The researcher began by theming the interview data by combining the participants own experiences with reflective journaling notes in order to identify the prominent lifeworlds across participants. It is important to be aware of the interpretive meaning of the participants' interviews in conjunction with the researcher's personal experiences (van Manen, 2014).

Keeping in mind my position as a secondary school counselor, I was certain to not be biased in my theming of the interview data. By engaging in this bracketing process, I, the researcher, was careful not to set aside my presumptions when reflecting on the participants lived experiences. I also incorporated reflexive inquiry by using my own reflection on the role of the school counselor as part of the school leadership team in the data analysis. van Manen (2014) outlines three ways in which text can be explored for themes and insights. These are: the wholistic reading approach, the selective reading approach and the detailed reading approach. Using van Manen's (2014) selective reading approach the researcher listened to and read the text multiple times while asking themselves what statement(s) or phrase(s) emerged as being particularly essential or revealing in regard to the phenomenon or experience being described? This approach allowed for themes to present themselves through experiences being described in the study. Once the themes emerged the researcher moves from the part to the whole and the themes begin to be illuminated through the rich description. Incorporating these emergent themes back in to the next phase of reflective writing elicits clarity and illuminates the phenomenon.

Minimizing Researcher Bias

It was important in this hermeneutic phenomenology type of study for me as the researcher to pay special attention to reducing my own bias to the study as a school counselor in a public high school. I was certain to be mindful to not exaggerate data based on my own experiences. During the lifeworlds reflection process I, the researcher, engaged in bracketing, or setting aside what we already know about a given phenomenon by reflecting on my assumptions and thoughtfully removing any presuppositions that I may have had based on my own experiences working with principals. While it was not possible for me to entirely

avoid my own prejudices, it was crucial for me to remain aware of their influence in order to minimize bias within the study.

Special Factors

There are some assumptions inherent to this qualitative study. It is assumed, and perhaps even taken for granted, that participants will be honest and open about their lived experiences while they are being recorded. This study only included high school counselors and administrators in a suburban setting and, hence, it is a small but purposeful sample size. Further, the freshman academy in this setting and the participants' experiences are generative to their unique school setting, as such generalization is not what this study purports, but aims to illuminate key understandings of the principal-counselor leadership roles in the freshman academy as they support the students and as they understand and experience their role working as school leaders in this unique and specific school setting.

Summary

This chapter presents the research methodology. Beginning with an overview of van Manen's (2014) hermeneutic phenomenology approach to research. Included in this chapter is the description of the site, participant selection method, study participants and data collection process including interview procedures. Data analysis procedure is outlined using van Manen's (2014) lifeworlds to develop an understanding of the participants lived experiences. The hermeneutic circle was utilized to assist the researcher in reviewing the data to further develop emergent themes. This process allowed for a deeper understanding of the participants stories as principal and school counselors working in a freshman academy. Chapter Four will present the findings in detail and tell the story of the lived experiences of

the administrators and school counselors and describe their professional relationship working as school leaders in a freshman academy.

CHAPTER FOUR

Phenomenological Narratives: Presentation of Findings

Introduction

This chapter contains the data resulting from interview questions and exposes the key points and themes of the lived experiences of each participant. The findings are presented following van Manen's (2014) methodology of practice. I transcribed each interview and reflected deeply on each interview experience using van Manen's (2014) structure for analysis by considering each interview through six lifeworlds. van Manen (2104) describes the lifeworlds as: relationality (lived self-other) or how self and others are experienced with respect to the phenomenon; corporeality (lived body), how do our fears and anxieties incarnate themselves in the world; spatiality (lived space) examines how our physical space is experienced; temporality (lived time) is thought of in terms of how time periods are experienced in different ways and the wishes or goals we have for these time periods; materiality (lived things) or experiencing the moral force that "things" exert on and in our lives; and technology (lived cyborg relations) or the human experience of the existential of things and technology. These lifeworlds are used to gain insight on the principal-counselor working relationship in a freshman academy.

In this chapter, I provide descriptions of each participants lived experiences in relation to the lifeworlds as a result of the data analysis process described in chapter three. Specifically, I detail each participants lived experience from the interview data to highlight their experiences working with school counselors and school administrators and further apply an interpretation of what their lived experiences mean in relation to a public high school freshman academy setting. As indicated in chapter three, the analysis of the data led to the

emergence of themes: role, relationship and shared leadership. A deeper analysis of these themes is presented in chapter five.

Phenomenological Narratives: Lifeworld Reflection

The phenomenological narratives provide the findings from analyzing each participant interview as seen through van Manen's (2014) lifeworlds in order to gain insight into the research question and the lived experiences of the relationship between principal and counselors in a freshman academy setting. The participants' unique training and background is present in their experience. Exploring how they perceive others to view them alongside how they view themselves gave this study an added layer of depth.

Of the three participants who took part in the phenomenological interviews, experiences in education range from two to twenty years, two of the three started off as classroom teachers. They are all still involved with their respective roles within the freshman academy. The freshman academies examined in this study have all been operating as such for at least four years.

School Counselor 1 (SC1)

Participant one is a female working as a school counselor in a freshman academy. She has been a school counselor for three years at the time of our interview. All three of her years as a school counselor have been working in a freshman academy setting. She received a masters degree in school counseling prior to obtaining her current position. The following findings will discuss SC1's experiences as seen through the existential lifeworlds.

Relationality reflection (lived self-other)

In reflecting on lived self-other van Manen (2014) states that the researcher must think about how self and other are experienced with respect to the phenomenon. The

researcher must analyze how their participants, school counselors and administrators, experience the phenomenon, the freshman academy, in relation to those around them. School counselor 1 talked about a connection with their school administrator as that of a boss or supervisor relationship. The relationship was talked about in a very authoritative way. School counselor 1 said, "There is a cap to my ability to have leadership because my administrator has the final say." At this point SC1's body language had become tense with her arms crossed in front of her. School counselor 1 talked about having ideas for new and innovative tasks but feeling as though permission was needed from the school administrator in order to proceed every step of the way. School counselor 1 described "if the administrator doesn't have the same goals then there is only so much a counselor can accomplish". This experience that SC1 describes is evidence of a lack of communication between principal and counselor which was a key factor in the principal-counselor relationship as shown in the chapter two literature review. School counselor 1 noted, "I couldn't take [an 8th grade visit] all the way without having the principal be a part of it," expressing the desire to plan a visit for incoming eighth grade students for the first time in their school's history and the idea was accepted enthusiastically. School counselor 1 was then not included in any further planning and discussion. School counselor 1 said, "sometimes I struggle, finding that balance where [the school administrators] are saying I'll take care of it, but then I'm not seeing that [the school administrators] are following through, but I can't nag them because technically they're my boss." The experience described by SC1 does not sound like shared leadership or mutual respect between principal and counselor. School counselor 1 approached her freshman academy administrator with innovative ideas asking to work collectively on them and was then not included in further plans. School counselor 1 then stated, "based on me

being the counselor, I don't have enough pull to make certain things happen." School counselor 1 also noted that, "principals and counselors are more divided and not a cohesive team at the high school level." School counselor 1 made this assertion based on her own experience within her high school.

School counselor 1 spoke of connections to parents and teachers in a way that demonstrated a lack of confidence in a leadership role. When she stated: "I constantly get told that I look like a high school student by parents and teachers and I feel that this affects their confidence level in me." School counselor 1 referred to the relationships with teachers and parents as being strained and not being taken seriously due to her observed age having an unsupportive effect on her perceived experience and preparation for this role. School counselor 1 commented on teachers existing attitudes towards school counselors prior to their employment at this particular site being a factor. School counselor 1 said, "at my school, the teachers' perception of counselors is not super positive and so I think that really affects the thought or idea of trying to be more of a leader within the school." This perception, "[teachers] struggle with the fact that I have never been a classroom teacher before", was what SC1 credited with a general feeling of mistrust towards counselors. School counselor 1 went on to say, "I think the administration has to be on board with lifting school counselors up." School counselor 1 felt that administrators should do more to advocate for school counselors. This adds on to SC1's want for support from her administrator. School counselor 1 said, "this is something that is timely because I think at my school this is something we are trying to figure out, where we stand within the administrative team."

When considering school counselors abilities to implement new or innovative programs SC1 said:

> School counselors have to have a high level of education and training, and so I think that, just as professionals, we bring a lot to the table and we bring a lot of experience and knowledge about areas that are different than administrators, and I think that's really valuable within a school and… having more of a role to be leaders to teachers within decision making, I think there is a place for it, and I think that part of it is on the teacher buy-in side of things.

School counselor 1 would like to take part in a shared leadership role but feels that her current relationship with teachers and administration within the freshman academy does not allow for this. In this conversation, SC1 referred to principals needing to do more to advocate for the value of school counselors within the school and community. School counselor 1 said,

> at the end of the day if people are not educated about what a school counselor actually is and what training and abilities we have then [shared leadership] is not going to be possible in a school if people don't respect the role of what a school counselor is.

Corporeality reflections (lived body)

In reflecting on lived body van Manen (2014) encourages the researcher to examine the lived experience through the perspective of how the physical body reacts to our fears, anxieties, happiness, etc. and how they incarnate themselves in our world. This feeling of anxiety and fear can be observed when SC1 questions whether her ideas are getting brushed off due to gender, stating that sometimes she is uncertain if the resistance is just "a man-woman thing". School counselor 1 talked a great deal about not wanting those around them to know that they aren't completely pleased with the way things are going in the freshman academy. van Manen (2014) refers to this as pretend normalcy, as they aren't showing their

sense of unhappiness to others. School counselor 1 hides her fears and anxieties by pretending that everything is fine. When, specifically, SC1 talked in depth about the structure in the freshman academy and wanting to have more of a shared leadership role. School counselor 1 said,

> We've kind of been working on [structure] this year at our school and we have a document of what we think our role is and what we think the principals' role is and what roles we think we share together. [Counselors] supposedly were going to talk about it with principals but then it never really happened. My principal personally is like "I think everything is fine" and we don't need to talk about anything and I'm like, well UH….but again prior to that [document] it's just me personally working out my confidence levels and being able to say "Well actually there are some things that we need to address and things I would like to change and things I would like to do but we have to do it together! It's a journey!"

School counselor 1's descriptions about the experience became agitated, which was evident by her body becoming more rigid and her speech becoming more rushed and she forced exhale as if exasperated by the topic. School counselor 1 spoke of hesitance to speak up about the actual status of the freshman academy. This is evident when SC1 expressed that others have a "what do you know?" attitude towards SC1's position as a counselor.

Spatiality reflections (lived space)

During the interview, SC1 mentioned her relationship with the physical space around her in the freshman academy as feeling removed and isolated from the larger high school setting. School counselor 1 said, "I feel that in the Freshman Academy it's very removed. So, I feel a lot of times others have no idea what we're doing". School counselor 1 also

mentioned “not knowing if other colleagues were even in the building on any given day” due to the freshman academy being so separated from the rest of the school. School counselor 1 said, “I don’t feel like I work very closely necessarily with [the other counselors and principals], it’s more of us down in our own separate area.” This is indicative of van Manen’s (2014) lifeworld of spatiality in that it illuminates how SC1 feels about the counselor principal relationship in relation to the phenomenon of the freshman academy setting.

Temporality reflections (lived time)

In consideration of temporality as “lived time” SC1 had referred to an early phase of her career as passing by very quickly. This is indicative of van Manen’s (2014) lifeworld of temporality as he describes it as the differences in the passage of time such as the first thirty minutes of a road trip versus the last thirty minutes. One is perceived as passing much more quickly or slowly than the other. School counselor 1 credited this difference in the perception of time to the turn over experienced in the freshman academy each year having a new school counselor and/or a new administrator. School counselor 1 stated, “it’s been interesting because last year was both mine and [freshman academy principal]’s first year in our respective careers.” School counselor 1 noted a constant stream of new personnel every year it is a struggle and, in particular, “figur[ing] out how [the counselors and principals] want to do things together because nothing has been set up”. This statement reflects a frustration with the lack of structure and its effect on progress in this fourth year of the freshman academy’s existence. This is important to note here, since lived time in consideration of the freshman academy is experienced briefly as students only remain in this program for one year.

School counselor 1 referred to goals and plans for this position within the freshman academy and that those wishes and dreams were not being realized as time passes quickly. School counselor 1 indicated a sense of frustration with the experience in the freshman academy, as noting, "it's been interesting because last year was my first year, and then this year is [the other freshman academy counselor]'s first year, and it feels like we're always starting over." Connecting this conversation to the literature in chapter two, this issue of temporality can be frustrating when working to implement programs of support for students as time seems to fly by and the lack of progress can be frustrating. Having a solid principal-counselor working relationship is key to working against perceived time constraints when supporting students and teachers in the classroom.

Materiality reflection (lived things)

van Manen (2014) defines the existential theme of materiality as how things are experienced with respect to the phenomenon being studied, which in this research is the principal-counselor relationship. In reflecting on materiality in regards to the experience of SC1 I examined the climate of the freshman academy. School counselor 1 referenced more than once during our discussion there was no point to the freshman academy as it was currently functioning. School counselor 1 noted, "there is a lack of direction of what we are supposed to be doing." During this discussion, SC1's body language became more closed off and they seemed visibly annoyed about this matter. School counselor 1 said,

> If you are going to do a freshman academy you need to be doing it, sometimes I struggle and I get frustrated because I can be all in on this freshman academy idea but I feel kind of stopped.

This frustration is linked back to the lack of a principal-counselor relationship and the lack of shared knowledge and leadership felt by SC1. School counselor 1 noted that the freshman academy as it is currently functioning is not providing a different experience than the rest of the building. School counselor 1 said,

> I don't feel that [the freshman academy] is functioning in the way that it could be and maybe that it should be because there is no point to it, really it's not helping the kids. At the end of the day, it can kind of be detrimental to the kids.

School counselor 1 pointed out there were specifically no special or different structures in place in the freshman academy. School counselor 1 said, "On the structure side of it I haven't seen desire to implement structure beyond my thoughts or ideas." This statement relates to the lifeworld of materiality in that the climate of the freshman academy is not being experienced as beneficial. School counselor 1 communicated through these statements a desire to advocate for the development of a principal-counselor relationship as it would create a benefit to the functioning of the freshman academy.

Technology reflection (lived cyborg relations)

Examining the lived experience of SC1 from the perspective of technology, I felt as though the type of lived cyborg relations SC1 described most closely related to experiencing technology ontotheologically, or as a means to an end or a human activity (van Manen, 2014). School counselor 1 spoke in detail of communicating with the [freshman academy] team primarily through text, email or group messaging apps. School counselor 1 referenced the team as being: the school counselors, school administrators and the secretary of the freshman academy. Technology, as noted from SC1's experience, is described as more of a hindrance to the principal-counselor relationship. School counselor 1 noted, "I feel like the

only time I know where anyone is, is because of group messages. Only because as a team it's an expectation to let everyone know." This type of communication seems to be creating the illusion of a principal-counselor working relationship and was a barrier to real collaboration and growth among the team. The impression was that while this communication exists it was not meaningful and did not add substance to the principal-counselor relationship.

School Counselor 2 (SC2)

Participant two works as a school counselor in a freshman academy. He has been a school counselor for 1 year and has only worked in this current freshman academy. He is alternatively certified as a school counselor holding a master's degree in a counseling related field. The following findings will discuss SC2's experiences as seen through the existential lifeworlds.

Relationality reflection (lived self-other)

Reflecting on the interview with SC2 in terms of the lived self-other, examining how people or things are connected, SC2 spoke of a deep connection and relationship with the secretary in the freshman academy. The secretary was portrayed as being a gatekeeper and invaluable to management of the work of a school counselor in the freshman academy. School counselor 2 said, "[the secretary] helps keep certain things off the backs of [principals and counselors] and if it really needs to come to us then [the secretary] will push it through."

School counselor 2 also spoke of having a trusting relationship with his school administrator and referenced "having each other's backs" in reference to working as a team. However, SC2 described feeling not as shared leaders, or working as peer leaders or colleagues with their administrator in the freshman academy, noting, "I don't want to say I

am a secretary to [the administrator], but I do pick up where [the administrator] can't." When examining this statement as the researcher I reflected back on van Manen's (2014) discussion of relationality, thinking more deeply on the ethics of community. This led me, as the researcher, to conclude that this freshman academy, as it is currently functioning, has minimal opportunity for shared leadership among principals and counselors. This has had an impact on the work for SC2 as a counselor, and in thinking about the leadership role, where SC2 described feeling diminished as a leader. School counselor 2 recounted, "when I'm having to pick up for [my administrator] I take more of a disappointed approach, whereas when I'm in my own role I try to help [students] process through things." Looking back to the literature review in chapter two this is perhaps a start to building a working relationship with the principal, however, there is work to be done in the area of shared leadership and building the opportunity for this growth within the freshman academy.

In consideration of relationality and the experience of SC2 with lived other in the context of the freshman academy, no reference of relationality was made to the other school counselor working in this particular freshman academy. School counselor 2 did describe several examples of negative relation to teachers in the building. School counselor 2 shared, "I remember trying to get a couple students in to a play and [the teacher] wouldn't allow it. I had to go get a principal, it made me feel like I am nothing because I wasn't even able to be helpful to the kids." School counselor 2 had hoped to work more symbiotically with the other teachers, counselors, and principals, especially in the school-within-school model, but the experience has not been as fruitful in sharing leadership roles. School counselor 2 said, "right now I don't feel like there is any room for any leadership roles for school counselors."

As referenced previously, SC2 feels as though there is no leadership responsibilities in any capacity currently in the freshman academy but has hopes of this emerging over time.

Corporeality reflections (lived body)

In relation to lived body, as van Manen (2014) describes as fears and anxieties incarnated in our worlds, SC2 referenced an uneasiness in regard to the expectations of the role as a school counselor in the freshman academy. School counselor 2 said, "I'm in this role because I want to reach kids at an important part in their lives, and it's really not coming to fruition." The reality of the work is not what was expected when choosing this career path as SC2 said, "I feel like I'm never in the office and I am doing really bad at my job." When SC2 spoke of this discrepancy between expectation and reality of the work, SC2 shifted more in their chair and seemed anxious. School counselor 2 then described a situation trying to build relationships with students by spending time with them during SC2's lunch but was unable to do so because of other non-school counselor duties assigned, in this case lunch duty. School counselor 2 said, "I was trying to be helpful to the kids and I wasn't even able to do that, it stung." This experience demonstrates how anxieties manifest in the real world because it emphasizes how SC2 felt as though school counselors often aren't able to spend enough time helping students directly. "At a previous job my coworkers told me that I wouldn't enjoy school counseling in a public school because I wouldn't get to actually talk to students." This demonstrates how SC2's fears about this role have revealed themselves through lived experience. During this part of the interview SC2 became very quiet, withdrawn and introspective. He seemed to be internally reflecting on how his day to day work was not living up to what he had hoped this role would be.

Spatiality reflections (lived space)

van Manen (2014) referred to lived space as the manner in which individuals relate to others in shared spaces. When SC2 reflected on the freshman academy they referred to the physical space of the freshman academy as not being closed off enough. School counselor 2 said that if there was one thing, he could do to change the current experience of the freshman academy it would be to completely enclose it. School counselor 2 said, "It doesn't feel like a real freshman academy because it's not closed off. [Ninth grade students] still have classes in the upper classmen area, they aren't really as separated as they should be." School counselor 2 also described the mixing of students, both freshman and upperclassmen, and that the beliefs and attitudes of the upper classmen have a negative effect on any strategies that are trying to be implemented in this school-within-school model. School counselor 2 said, "When trying to get freshman to wear their IDs it wouldn't be as hard if they didn't have knowledge of the opinions of the upperclassmen who aren't used to being bound by these new policies."

School counselor 2 spoke a great deal about the way the physical space influenced the dynamic in the freshman academy including how it affected the principal-counselor relationship. When asked to describe the experiences of working with a principal in a freshman academy space and how it differed from the other principals and counselors at this site SC2 noted the physical closeness of their offices making the bond between the principal and SC2 closer. School counselor 2 said, "It's kind of like a world of its own back here and so I feel like we're close knit because we are all in a little hallway". School counselor 2 elaborated that, "I can't comment on my colleagues but I can knock on [the principals] wall or yell [the principals] name and they come right over." This can be interpreted as SC2

having the feeling of a supportive relationship because of the close proximity and work space.

Temporality reflections (lived time)

In consideration of SC2's perception of time, SC2 provided details of the experience working in a freshman academy in terms of semester time. Specifically, SC2 referred to the difference between the first semester of the school year versus the current experience in the second semester. School counselor 2 said, "First semester I feel like I was a lot better than this semester. I got to do more interacting with kids, it felt like more of a team [with the principal and other school counselor] and I was in the office a lot more." School counselor 2 did also refer to not being satisfied with his experience day-to-day second semester, in particular, his job duties and responsibilities, which were primarily focused on meetings and planning for the future students. School counselor 2 referred to wanting to go back to spending time like he did in the previous semester, interacting more directly with current students. School counselor 2 said:

> I felt like I was never in the office and I felt like I was really bad at my job. Whenever I'd be around, it would be for a second. Kids would ask to talk and I would have to leave. It sucks. Even though their crises aren't what we would consider crisis as adults, It's very real to them.

This statement connects to van Manen's (2014) discussion of temporality and how "we experience the time of waiting differently from when we are actively involved in something." School counselor 2 was experiencing time as passing more quickly than he would like, because he wanted to spend more time with students and were dreading time ahead doing non-school counselor duties, when time would pass slower, and with less significance.

School counselor 2 said, “I’m taking it one day at a time, but I hear after spring break it’s all testing and I’m not even going to get to talk to anyone.”

Materiality reflection (lived things)

In reflecting on materiality, the researcher must think about the experiences that portray the moral force that “things” exert on, and in, our lives (van Manen, 2014). In this reflection the “thing” we are examining is the principal-counselor working relationship. School counselor 2 referred to the atmosphere of the freshman academy in a positive sense in relation to the experience working with the secretary and principal. School counselor 2 said:

> When [the principal] is leaving, I can see him leave. I can catch him before he leaves and run something by him. The location is probably the biggest piece of it. It makes it feel more intimate, like they’re always right there if you need them.

School counselor 2 states here that the feeling experienced from the proximity has a direct, and positive, effect on the principal-counselor relationship in the freshman academy. This proximity of the school-within-school model helps to make the experience of the principal-counselor relationship stronger. Unlike technology which may give a false sense of closeness, the proximity allows for more involvement in shared leadership and relationship growth by building on the physical closeness of the relationship.

Technology reflection (lived cyborg relations)

The experience of technology that SC2 spoke of most was the communication between the secretary, principal and counselors via text, email and group messaging apps. Experiencing the technology ontotheologically as a constant connection to a resource. School counselor 2 said:

> But as far as team goes, we do a good job in our group text bouncing off of each other. We make sure each other knows where we're at and cover for each other when we can, but [when someone] is gone it really stinks.

My impression of technology related to my discussion with SC2 was that the technology component was one of the main experiences that contributed to the existence of a principal-counselor relationship with this freshman academy staff and this sets it apart from other parts of the building. School counselor 2 said, "That constant communication that we talk about. We're all in this group chat and [the secretary] does a great job filling us in on any little detail whether [the secretary] thinks it is important or not."

In consideration of SC2's experience as described, the spatiality (proximity of working with others) and the technology combined in the freshman academy have contributing to strengthening the principal-counselor relationship indirectly. School counselor 2 said, "Even if nothing else is happening down here, that dynamic [of communication] makes a difference".

School Administrator 1 (SA1)

Participant three is a head principal of a high school that contains a freshman academy. She has worked in public education for twenty years with half of those being as a school administrator. She has been in her current role as Head Principal for two years. Five of her administrator years have been working in a school that had a freshman academy on site. The following findings will discuss SA1's experiences as seen through the existential lifeworlds.

Relationality reflection (lived self-other)

When exploring the manner in which individuals are connected to one another in their community through van Manen's (2014) lived self-other SA1 talked about being connected to others through the responsibility to facilitate the assistant principals and counselors and to form, and grow, their relationships. School administrator 1 said,

> My role is working toward helping [administrators and counselors] have a really great team between them and balancing all of their tasks, but then also looking at how [counselors] are working with their assistant principals and what that dynamic looks like so it's more of a team.

As a principal SA1 works to foster these relationships between principals and counselors. School administrator 1 said, "The principal world and what principals deal with on a daily basis and counselors; it's very different. So, helping each person understand where the other person is coming from can sometimes be a challenge." As a principal SA1 understands the responsibility to foster and grow the principal-counselor relationship.

School administrator 1 mentioned that in meetings she facilitates, school counselors and school administrators are intentionally grouped to sit together to grow and nurture the principal-counselor relationships, and this was not the case prior to them implementing this norm. School administrator 1 said, "we've changed where we sit in our principal-counselor meetings, they have to sit next to their assigned assistant principal or counselor." This speaks to van Manen's (2014) lifeworld of lived self-other by exploring relational aspects of the community. School administrator 1 said, "We started setting aside fifteen minutes in our principal-counselor meetings to discuss only students, those conversations start to build a partnership." School administrator 1 sees these efforts as working to strengthen the principal-counselor relationships by building the community atmosphere. School

administrator 1 said, “the expectation is that we [principals and counselors] find a way to work together, and do it the right way, because we’re all here to care for the kids.” School administrator 1 then makes a new point when asked about the current relationship between the principal and counselor in the freshman academy:

> My experience has been that its really more of a team approach where you have your attendance secretary, they’re kind of the initial filter for everything when it comes to parents, and then we have our counselors at the freshman level that work a lot between kids and teachers, and parents and teachers, to focus on that academic piece. When it reaches the level of needing a disciplinary action involved then it moves from the counselors to the assistant principal.

School administrator 1 mentioned that this movement from one member of the freshman team shows significant strength in the structure of this principal-counselor relationship in the freshman academy.

School administrator 1 spoke of the relationship of a principal working with a school counselor and referenced the fluidity of that relationship, saying “we’ll also sometimes share that responsibility [of working with families]. Sometimes it’s a principal and a counselor sitting in a room with a student or a family. I’ve worked with counselors a lot with parents just talking through struggles.” School administrator 1 went on to say, “maybe it’s an academic issue, a behavior issue or just a mental health issue and figuring out that balance between what’s more appropriate for a counselor role and a principal role and just sharing the responsibility to try to help the family or the kid.” This statement ties to van Manen’s (2014) lifeworld of relationality in examining how people are connected. This assertion also connects back to the literature in chapter two by emphasizing the importance of knowing the

role and strengths of the principal or counselor you are working with and working together in a shared leadership format to serve students and families.

Corporeality reflections (lived body)

van Manen's (2014) lifeworld of corporeality leads us to examine how the physical body reacts to the fears and anxieties, or the cheerfulness and desires, of the phenomenon, in this case the principal-counselor working relationship in the freshman academy. School administrator 1 talked about the experience of the freshman academy positions, the principal and counselor, and how that played a unique part in their experience. School administrator 1 said, "the purpose of the freshman academy is really to provide that year of adjustment with a freshman team [principal and counselor] that love freshman, their specialty is freshman – they are freshman specialists." When reflecting on this quote it struck me as eliciting cheerfulness from SA1 regarding the team that has been put together. School administrator 1's body language was very open and positive during this conversation eliciting a sense of pride. School administrator 1 went on to say, "the ninth-grade academy is designed to act as a comfort zone with many extra supports." This sense of pride and contentment with the relationship of the principals and counselors that SA1 oversees in the freshman academy was evident in the content and tone projected during the interview process.

Spatiality reflections (lived space)

In regard to lived space, SA1 talked about how the freshman academy was a school-within-school and should function somewhat independently from the rest of the building. School administrator 1 said:

> It has set up the impression that we [school counselors and principals] are all together as a team supporting the ninth graders, but that's appropriate at that age because we

know that ninth grade is really a pivotal year. As a logistical piece it makes things very different, but that was done intentionally.

School administrator 1 referred to the experience of the freshman academy space within the building making it unique. School administrator 1 said, "the proximity is different, they're all right there and that makes a huge difference". van Manen (2014) makes reference to the difference in the way large spaces and small spaces are experienced. This links to SA1's description of what makes the freshman academy unique, in that the small space of the freshman academy provides a sense of safety and community. School administrator 1's body language was very confident and inviting when speaking about the preparation the freshman academy provides, "[students] come out of the freshman academy ready to go!" The literature in chapter two does support the notion that one of the unique qualities of the freshman academy that makes it successful is the focused environment and targeted interventions of the school-within-school.

Temporality reflections (lived time)

School administrator 1 talked about the difference in how quickly time passes in a school versus working in other positions in education such as at the district office level where she worked for 4 years of her career. School administrator 1 focused on discussing the current experiences in trying to effect change when it feels like time is flying by. School administrator 1 said, "so we have had, the past two years, someone new in the freshman academy every single year. Then you get new teachers and it kind of feels like three steps forward and two steps back and you're almost starting fresh at the beginning of each year."

School administrator 1 also referred to when in principal-counselor meetings they set aside fifteen uninterrupted minutes for the principals and counselors to specifically discuss

any student concerns and that they often have trouble getting them to stop talking at the end of the fifteen minutes. "One of the things we started doing in our principal-counselor meetings is setting aside fifteen minutes to talk about student situations, I actually have to stop them because they need more time." School administrator 1 attributed this to their proximity in connecting during the meeting. This supports the literature in chapter two discussing the frequency of communication between principal and counselor as being more significant than the content of the communication. Time spent is impactful on relationship building. van Manen (2014) references how lived space and lived time are mingled and hence, this is why time is described as "lengths of time". The location of the principal and counselor in this meeting time, as well as in the location of their offices, intersects with the temporality of their lived experiences forging the principal-counselor relationship.

Materiality reflection (lived things)

When reflecting on materiality, from SA1's experiences described in the interview, I did not find many components of "lived things" as evident from my discussion with SA1. van Manen (2014) refers to one way to consider materiality as the moral force that things (i.e. thoughts, deed, experiences, etc) exert on and in our lives. School administrator 1 did describe the students and the responsibility to help freshman transition and grow in the freshman academy. School administrator 1 said:

> When you talk about the counselors and the principals, one of the first things we did this year is that, it became very clear that we are actually unsure what each other's jobs are, I had the assistant principals and the counselors both put together, what do you see as a total counselor role, what is a total assistant principal role, and what do you see as joint roles. Surprisingly they were very similar, and I think sometimes you have to

> really work on this when you have very strong personalities. When you talk about what assistant principals deal with on a day to day basis and the amount of conflict that they deal with, it comes with a certain kind of personality, so does being a counselor. Those personalities don't always see eye to eye, but the common ground is we both care about kids.

Hence, SA1's reflection is indicative of having a responsibility to facilitate the growth of the principal-counselor relationship and make them the best team they can be in order to best serve students and their families.

Technology reflection (lived cyborg relations)

When reflecting on lived cyborg relations, SA1's experiences can be related to experiencing technology as technics. School administrator 1 mentioned a deep reliance on email, alerts, reminders and alarms of technology to prompt her when to do things in the everyday experience as a school administrator. School administrator 1 utilized technology as a reminder to think and reflect on a certain problem being experienced and necessitated an alert to be sent at a later date. School administrator 1 said, "I actually have a reminder set up in my email to go back and revisit – how are we doing with this one, how are we doing with these." The experience SA1 describes with technology strikes me as very rote and dependent on the utility of technology.

Reflection of Existential Lifeworlds Across Participants

In order to illuminate the lifeworlds that were strongest across participants the researcher gave further reflection to the lifeworlds bringing the parts back to the whole in the cycle of writing and reflecting by revisiting the lifeworlds again as a whole across all three participants. While each of the participants has a different background in education, they

share the connection of working in freshman academy settings and their experiences are varied across lifeworlds.

Relationality reflection (lived self-other)

When looking across subjects, with regard to the lived connection between individuals, SC1 and SC2 both talked about their relationship with each of their freshman academy principal and how that relationship affected their performance. They also spoke of a desire for the relationship to be stronger and grow. Whereas SA1 only discussed relationality in the context of their role in the overall school environment. School counselor 1's experience was not as positive in nature as SC2, relationality was a factor in the freshman academy, but varied across the participants experiences in this way.

Corporeality reflections (lived body)

Examining the emotional and physical connection across participants to the principal-counselor relationship, the common theme among the counselor participant's, both SC1 and SC2, was the lack of support felt from administrators and teachers. School counselor 1 and SC2 both had expressed anxieties incarnated in their experiences in the freshman academy which is indicative of corporeality. Whereas SA1 was more focused on their responsibility to create relationships using the proximity of the counselors and assistant principals in the freshman academy.

Spatiality reflections (lived space)

It was evident across participants that the space of the freshman academy has an impact on the working relationship between the principal and counselor. School counselor 2 and SA1 both spoke about the separation of the freshman academy from the whole high school context, as having a positive impact on the principal-counselor relationship.

Conversely, SC1 spoke about how the freshman academy felt closed off and how she felt separated from her colleagues.

Temporality reflections (lived time)

Each participant made meaningful reference to how quickly time passes in their experience of working in a freshman academy. They all had the common experience of feeling as though they did not have enough time in the day to implement any new goals or programs and expand any services offered. They all mentioned having distinct expectations of their time and that reality was not meeting those expectations.

Materiality reflection (lived things)

When examining the level of attachment to the principal-counselor working relationship, the lived thing of this study, there was a discrepancy in participants. The school administrator, SA1, functioning in the capacity of building principal, painted a very positive picture of the leadership in the freshman academy as doing what it was intended and assisting students in making the transition to high school more successfully. While both school counselors, SC1 and SC2, asserted they did not feel a strong principal-counselor working relationship currently existed for them and did not feel there was adequate opportunity, if any, for shared leadership within the current structures at their sites.

Technology reflection (lived cyborg relations)

All participants greatly emphasized the role technology plays in the functioning of the freshman academy and on the perception of the relationship between principal and counselor. This reliance of SC1 and SC2 on technology for communication may be creating the illusion of a principal-counselor relationship where there is a generous sharing of facts and a timely resolution to situations that arise. However, the abundance of communication in a

technology driven fashion does not in fact deepen the fundamental relationship and level of trust felt between the principal and counselor.

Conclusion

Throughout the examination of the participant's lifeworlds, the following themes emerged through the use of van Manen's (2014) hermeneutic phenomenology framework. The lifeworlds that were most evident from the participants stories of their experiences were relationality, spatiality and corporeality. Relationality and spatiality had the most connection to the participants description of their relationship with their school counselor or school administrator and their ability to participate in any type of shared leadership. As SC1 had noted, "I think the administration has to be on board with lifting school counselors up." Emphasizing that efforts are required from both sides to create a team or shared leadership atmosphere. Corporeality, in both counselors, SC1 and SC2, lifeworld analysis was reflective of their respective anxieties in their ability to perform their jobs in the freshman academy. While SA1's corporeality analysis had less of an illuminating effect, it showed a clear contradiction in how SA1 perceived the freshman academy principal and counselor as being far more collaborative than supported by the lived experiences of SC1 and SC2. Further, a reflective analysis of the main lifeworlds led to the identification of three themes: relationships, roles and the physical space of the freshman academy. As SA1 aptly noted, "[The Freshman Academy] has set up the impression that we are all together as a team supporting the ninth graders."

Summary

In this chapter the researcher described all participants' lived experiences as school counselors and principals in a freshman academy. Using van Manen's (2014) existential

lifeworlds to illuminate each participant with regard to temporality (lived time), spatiality (lived space), relationality (lived relation), corporeality (lived body), materiality (lived things) and technology (lived cyborg relations). In this chapter the researcher also introduced the themes of relationship, role and shared leadership as key concepts that emerged from deeper analysis of the lifeworld experiences of the school counselors and principals.

CHAPTER FIVE

Chapter Five presents a summary, and discussion, of the findings of this research study. The chapter also includes the implications of this study as connected to the existing literature. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the study limitations, implications for practice, as well as recommendations for future research.

Summary

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the principal-counselor relationship by investigating the lived experiences of participants currently working in a freshman academy setting. I have determined that when both the principal and counselor report having a positive working relationship the result is a shared leadership that creates a more effective environment for all. Researchers can always gather data on topics such as feelings about relationships, but utilizing a hermeneutic phenomenology approach was important in this research in order to gain a rich description of the lived experiences of these professionals in their day to day relationship with each other in order to create a more robust understanding of this topic.

Discussion

The purpose for this research was to examine the lived experiences of shared leadership, of principals and school counselors, to determine if the principal-counselor relationship was a factor in the success of the freshman academy. The findings of this hermeneutic phenomenological study shine a light on the complexities of the principal-counselor relationship within the context of the lived experience of those working within the freshman academy setting. This study did not set out to solve a problem but to provide deeper insight and expand the literature on shared leadership and the principal-counselor

working relationship. Phenomenology is a method of questioning more than answering, insights come in a mode of reflective questioning and an obsession with sources and meanings (van Manen, 2014). The three participants provided insight, and the researcher presented their stories, as related to their experiences of the principal-counselor relationship in a school-within-school model. School counselor 1 tells us through her story that she desires a shared leadership role but is struggling to develop that relationship with her principal partner. School counselor two's story told us that he wasn't really looking for a shared leadership style but was being thrust into it naturally. School administrator 1 spoke of actively and intentionally working to foster the relationships that are foundational to shared leadership between principal and counselor.

As seen in chapter four, a phenomenological design was used in order to understand more deeply the experiences and perceptions of school counselors and school administrators. Hermeneutical phenomenological studies are used as a means of constructing interpretive descriptions of meanings by reflecting on the lived experiences of the sample (van Manen, 2014). From the participants experiences in this study, it was found that relationship, role and leadership are important factors in the principal-counselor relationship working in a freshman academy setting, providing answers to the research question.

This study's findings of relationship, role and shared leadership relate back to the existing literature as seen in Edwards, et al. (2014) assertions that the principal-counselor relationship sets the tone for the building and impacts student success as well as teacher effectiveness. Therefore, the results inform principal and school counselor preparation programs at the graduate school level as well as inform these professionals on how to forge working relationships for shared leadership. In this chapter, the research findings are further

described from the three themes: relationship, role and shared leadership, and connect back to the literature in order to support the assertion that the principal-counselor relationship has an impact on the school setting.

Themes

The themes explored here are not all of the themes that emerged from the interviews, three major overarching themes emerged that provided further insight into the research question. Through the participants experiences, as depicted across van Manen's (2014) lifeworlds, reflective analysis led to three distinct themes of relationship, shared leadership and roles. The lived experiences of the participants described the importance of having a working relationship between the school counselor and principal. It was also evident that shared leadership was vital. Further, the concept of advocating for the role of the school counselor was expressed.

Relationship

As seen in chapter one of this study, the principal-counselor relationship is ever changing and evolves over time in response to the needs of the school (College Board et al., 2011). There is value in building relationships among leaders in the school. Within the findings of this research examining the theme of relationship from the point of view of SA1, the administrators view was more centered around their role as the overall building principal and their responsibility to foster the relationships between school counselors and the assistant principal that they most closely work with. Giving time and attention to building working relationships has an effect on the system within the school as a whole. Making implementation of programs smoother, strengthening trust and bonds with teachers and support staff, as well as being able to better understand the students from all sides. These are

just a few benefits of improving the working relationship of school counselors and principals. As previously discussed in chapter two, by Edwards et al. (2014), it is important that principals and counselors maintain a strong working relationship and have the greatest impact possible on the school environment.

The viewpoint from the administration side of this relationship takes on the responsibility to facilitate the relationship and grow the members of the team. The school counselor viewpoint seen from SC1 points out that, [school counselors] bring a lot to the table and have a high level of education that is valuable within a school setting. So where is the disconnect in translating this knowledge in to practice? Advocacy and intentional relationship building. School administrators need to be educated on the skills and strengths of the school counselors they are working with either from pre-service education during graduate preparation programs or from the act of getting to know your team members through relationship building activities, both formal and informal. Blame is not being placed on either side, this is rather a call to action for all parties to educate each other on their skills and strengths and to be receptive to utilizing team members through shared leadership in order to best serve students, families and teachers.

These findings relate to Edwards et al., (2014) assertion that a proper understanding of [principals and school counselors] by the other has a positive impact on the learning environment. Adding more training to school administrator's pre-service curriculum will give them a foundational knowledge on the role and professional preparation of the school counselor but the real benefit lies in the relationship building that happens in real time. Principal and counselor teams need to make a concerted effort to communicate and work together to problem solve with students, parents and teachers. It is important to maintain the

boundaries of each position and not put school counselors in a supervisory position with teachers. The relationship between school counselor and administrator should be more collaborative than supervisory.

Another aspect that we must consider is how we structure our physical work space, when possible, due to the impact that proximity can have on the relationship between principal and counselor. This is one area that may give the freshman academy an advantage over other programs. It was evident through the interview with SC2 that the physical space of the freshmen academy played a significant role in the relationship between SC2 and the freshmen academy principal. School counselor 2 asserted that from the ability to catch the administrator before they leave for the day, to the convenience of knowing they're on the other side of the wall if you need to consult them, proximity is monumental. It was very clear across both school counselor participants that the physical location of the principal and counselor team had a profound impact on their relationship. As noted in the literature, Duslak and Geier (2016), counselors articulated that having frequent interaction with their principal made them feel like they had a stronger relationship. When principals and counselors' offices are in close proximity the frequency with which they collaborate is likely to increase, strengthening the relationship between them. Often times with relationships the little things can have big impact.

Shared Leadership

The literature shows the importance of carefully and intentionally selecting the leadership and staff of the freshman academy as being a major key to its success (Killebrew, 2016). Both SC1 and SC2's lived experience evidenced that in their current situation they felt there was no opportunity for shared leadership within their respective freshman academy

settings, despite attempts to initiate opportunities and projects with their administrator in a shared leadership capacity. Both the school administrator and the school counselor need to be interested in relationship building and working collaboratively to foster success in the school environment. This notion is highlighted in the literature: "Shared leadership occurs when all members of a team are fully engaged in the leadership of the team and are not hesitant to influence and guide their fellow team members in an effort to maximize the potential of the team as a whole" (Pearce, 2004, p. 52). While SA1 expressed that it was important in their role to "help [freshman academy principals and counselors] have a really great team between them and balancing all of their tasks and having a great dynamic between them." When ideas were presented by both school counselors in this study they were heard and accepted, but attempts were never made by administration to bring them to fruition in a collaborative way. Great care and attention needs to be given to placing the proper leaders in the places of highest need in order to have the most profound impact on student and teacher success in the classroom.

According to College Board et al., (2011) while principals and school counselors both believe that it is important that counselors participate in school leadership, they have very different perceptions regarding how well this is happening in their own schools.
This connection is seen from the data with SA1 as she seemed to believe there was a great opportunity in the freshmen academy for shared leadership when SA1 referred to the freshmen academy team as "freshmen specialists". Administrators should be actively evaluating the effectiveness of the administrators in their relationship building with their school counselors and be willing to make adjustments as needed. According to College Board et al., (2011) while principals and school counselors both believe that it is important

that counselors participate in school leadership, they have very different perceptions regarding how well that is happening in their own schools. All relationships take work to build and grow and we must not overlook this foundational belief in order to function to the fullest capacity by serving families and supporting teachers as effectively as possible. To further connect the literature to the findings, Killebrew's (2016) study emphasized that the staffing and structure of the freshman academy is key to its success. This finding shows how the specific choices taken in assembling a principal and counselor team, lie in one that is passionate about, and gifted at, working with freshmen, and can create a multitude of opportunities for shared leadership.

Roles

As evidenced in chapter two by Armstrong et al., (2010), and Dollarhide et al., (2007), the differing understanding of the roles of principals and counselors can place school leaders at a disadvantage as their relationship has far reaching influence within schools. While shared leadership is ideal in strengthening and best utilizing a school counselor in the freshman academy, one must also be mindful of the role of the school counselor and be certain that they are not being put in a leadership role as the school disciplinarian. While SC2 spoke fondly of the working relationship with the freshmen principal, SC2 also spoke of having to assist with disciplinary matters. School counselors should be included where appropriate, such as in restorative practices and wholistic consideration of the child, but should never be put in the position to decide consequences or punishment for behavior. School counselors' roles have to be preserved. First the school counselor should be diligent about educating others about the facets of their role. At the same time, the school administrator must work to ensure that school counselors are not saddled with things like

standardized testing and data entry so that their skills and training can be best utilized to serve students and families. As Edwards, et al. (2014) found, when school counselors' roles are properly understood, these leaders can form a very powerful alliance in academic achievement.

School counselor 1 did not report feeling best utilized by the freshmen principal, and noted a sense of frustration with the lack of supports in the freshmen academy. School counselor 1 stated they "haven't seen much desire to implement more structure beyond [their] ideas or thoughts". This speaks to the importance of roles because the school counselor approached the school administrator wanting to work collaboratively and instead was not included in further action. School counselor 1 further described how, without support for new ideas and strategies from the freshmen administrator, the idea of the freshmen academy could be more detrimental, than helpful, to the students, as it would cause them to have to transition to a whole new school environment once again. This is evident when looking back at SC1's lifeworlds reflections. "I don't feel like [the freshman academy] is functioning in the way that it could be, and maybe that it should be. There is no point to it, it's not helping the kids because they just have to transition all over again." School counselors are beneficial to the leadership team in that they are programmed to think of the social and emotional effect on students. School administrator 1 talked about how even though school administrators and school counselors often have very strong personalities it is imperative that they build that relationship and work well together because their common ground is that they both care about kids. School administrator 1 went on to say, "the expectation is that we find a way to work together, and we do it the right way." When brought together with intention these two roles can work together in a complimentary format.

Tying all of these themes together, it is evident that if principals and school counselors do not have a good understanding of each other and the skill set that each position brings to the table, they will not feel comfortable or compelled to share leadership opportunities with each other. School administrators need to lift school counselors up in to leadership roles in order for them to be seen as a valuable resource and support in navigating this complex landscape of education and student learning. School counselor 1 reminds us that "the administration has to be on board with lifting school counselors up in to that role". While school counselors have to advocate for their proper use of time and skills, school administrators have to make an effort to include them in initiatives in valuable and meaningful ways. It would be beneficial to know each other's roles, in order to build relationships and share in leadership.

Implications for Practice

The purpose of this study was to further help educators understand their working relationship as principals and counselors in a freshman academy setting. When I began my career as a school counselor, I never imagined that one of the most pivotal components of my feeling successful in my job would be the relationship I felt with my school administrator. What we can learn from this study moving forward is that school administrator preparation programs would benefit from a focus on relationship building and the most ideal utilization of the human capital within their supervision. Educational administration preparation programs should incorporate a focus on the role of the school counselor in schools and how they should be used. Principals should be aware of the American School Counselor Associations National Model for school counseling programs, emphasizing that 80% of a school counselors time be spent in direct service to students. Through better understanding

of the National Model administrators would be more inclined to preserve school counselors time to serve students and limit the extraneous activities that could be performed by support staff or other individuals in the building. Having the human resource skills, and a desire to best utilize those working within your building, a greater positive impact will be evident in educational outcomes.

At the same time, school counselor preparation programs would benefit from a greater focus on self-advocacy. Educating school counselors on how to appropriately advocate for their role and responsibilities, as well as emphasis on how to have difficult conversations, in an effort to build and establish relationships with principals and teachers. School counselors by nature tend to avoid conflict, and while self-advocacy should not naturally include conflict, it is often something that counselors feel uncomfortable with. Advocacy can look very different at the building, district, state and national levels. More attention should be given to this topic in pre service school counselor programs.

Within schools, attention should be given to intentional relationship building and working environments, such as proximity, of principal and counselor teams. It is evident through this study and the review of literature, that when possible having school counselors and principals work spaces near each other on a daily basis leads to greater opportunities for shared leadership and collaboration. It is not reasonable to suggest that schools rearrange the layout of their buildings in order to accommodate this relationship. However, when possible, care and thought should be given to the work space of principal and counselor teams. As noted in the literature review, Duslak & Geier (2016) found the most significant factor in their study impacting the quality of the principal-counselor relationship was the frequency

with which they met. Collaboration between principals and school counselors creates shared leadership.

Contribution to Research

The guiding research question for this study explored: What are school counselors' and principals' lived experiences as school leaders working within a public high school freshman academy. This study adds to the existing literature on the principal-counselor relationship by providing a snapshot of the lived experiences of school counselors and school administrators in these roles. This research contributes to the larger understanding of practice as it takes a candid look at the reality of the relationships between principals and school counselors. Data in the form of numbers give us just one aspect of the relationship. Exploring the lived experiences of each participant gives us a more robust understanding of this relationship.

The focus on the intentional environment of the freshman academy gave us a glimpse into a concentrated environment intent on addressing challenges that students currently face. This focused environment can give us insight in to best practices that can then be applicable to the principal-counselor working relationship at any level. A closer look should be given to the benefits of the structure within schools of principal and school counselor teams and how they serve families. While freshman academy systems exist in order to address well documented issues surrounding dropout prevention, the benefits of this structure implemented at other levels, mirroring this shared leadership format across the building or district, could result in serving families more holistically and increased positive educational outcomes for all.

Summary

Just because someone sets aside a space in a building and call it a freshman academy, and just because they put principals and counselors in that space, does not make these individuals function as a cohesive leadership team. Care should be given to creating and growing a relationship between the principal and counselor in order to work in a shared leadership format and take on the large job of creating a safe space for teachers and students to engage in the learning process. With a rise in the impact of ACEs in our classrooms and the emphasis on trauma informed practices, school counselors are needed more than ever to deliver prevention and intervention services and to assist in the professional development and support of staff in managing these factors in the classroom. This is a crucial time for school administrators to stand up and advocate for the role of the school counselor and how they are spending their day-to-day time. By investing in school counselors, administrators will in turn benefit through the reduction in discipline and increase in academic achievement. "The principal-counselor relationship sets the tone for the building and impacts student success as well as teacher effectiveness" (Edwards et al., 2014, p. 38). It is imperative that we let school counselors be school counselors. Counselors and administrators alike must advocate for the protection of this position to be able to function in its rightful capacity in order to best serve and support the school as a whole.

There continues to be large number of students enrolled in public school and budget sizes continue to be inadequate limiting the number of personnel able to be hired in school buildings, as such it could be argued that administrators need to best utilize the individuals within the existing structure in a more effective manner. This is especially important when dealing with the implications of educational reforms, such as Multi-Tiered Systems of

Support (MTSS), and when considering interventions to address current issues facing students and families, such as the increase in trauma informed practices. Allowing school counselors to share in the leadership of these initiatives is evidence to all stakeholders that these programs and issues are important and are being addressed from all angles in order to best serve students and families.

Suggestions for Future Research

It would be my suggestion that school districts give special attention to the placement and organization of principals and counselors at each level and site. While remodeling our school sites is not what I am suggesting as that is not a feasible solution, I would implore building leaders to give thought to the power of proximity in building stronger principal-counselor relationships that will empower these individuals to engage in shared leadership. The proximity of their working space seems to have a tangible impact on building their working relationship. Transferring this concept outside of the freshman academy to the connections between assigned counselors and principals with common groups of students will make for more intentional interventions, supports and discipline. The smaller more focused structure of the freshman academy presents an opportunity to mimic the model that we often see in the elementary and middle schools currently. Often elementary schools have one principal and one counselor, whereas middle schools and junior highs often have one principal and counselor assigned to each grade. Transferring this concept to the freshman academy has proved to be a strengthening factor in the freshman academy leadership team and much can be learned, and potentially applied to principal and counselor relationships across all levels.

Future studies on the principal-counselor relationship would benefit from a larger sample size in order to get a deeper understanding and a broader perspective on the implications of the principal-counselor relationship. This study chose to look at a concentrated environment where there was likely to be a more intentional relationship. However, expanding the research to other high school settings would be beneficial to see if the shared leadership model is emerging as a result of the principal-counselor relationship. Additional research needs to be done to examine the principal-counselor relationship outside of the freshmen academy in order to identify opportunities for shared leadership at other levels for better application in overall school building settings. In conclusion, this research finds there is a need for continued research, and advocacy efforts, on the principal-counselor relationship in order to better understand the impact this relationship can have on the educational environment as a whole.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Email:

My name is Melanie Hayes. I am a doctoral candidate in Educational Administration, Curriculum, and Supervision (EACS) program at OU. I would like you to talk with me about your lived experience as a school counselor [school administrator] in a freshman academy setting. I am interested in leadership roles and working relationships among principals and counselors. This research is being conducted through the University of Oklahoma, where I am a current doctoral student. You were identified as a possible participant because you work in a high school freshman academy setting in Oklahoma. I ask if you will consider volunteering to participate in my study. The process will entail an interview with me about your experiences as a school counselor [administrator] in a freshman academy setting. There will be no information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored securely and only approved researchers and the OU Institutional Review Board will have access to the records. Your name will not be released or linked with your responses. I will not share your data or use it in future research projects. To assist with accurate recording of your responses, interviews may be recorded on an audio recording device. You have the right to refuse to allow such recording without penalty. Interviews should take approximately one hour and follow up interviews will be scheduled on an as needed basis. Interviews will take place at a mutually agreed upon location. If you are willing to participate in this research project please reply to this email melaniehayes@ou.edu

Appendix B

Research Question and Focus

Research question: What are school counselors' and principals' lived experiences as school leaders working within a public high school freshman academy?

Research focus: My research aims to shed light on the relationship between the school counselor and principal working in a freshman academy model.

Interview Protocol

Introduction: Thank you for your time to participate in my study about the principal-counselor working relationship and leadership roles in a freshman academy setting. I will start by reviewing the protocol for informed consent pertaining to you volunteering to participate in my study.

I will begin by asking you some background information as it pertains to your work.

Participant Background Information

1. Number of total years in public education.
    a. Number of years as a class room teacher, if any?
    b. Number of years as a school counselor [school administrator]?
2. How long have you worked in a freshman academy at this site?
    a. Have you worked at another freshman academy site prior to this one? If yes, number of years at another freshman academy site?
3. Recall your leadership experiences prior to entering the freshman academy.

Interview Questions

Primary Question:

Tell me about your experiences as a school counselor working with your school administrator [school administrator working with your school counselor] in a leadership role in a freshman academy setting.

Possible follow up questions:

- Can you further describe your experience specific to your role in the freshman academy.
- How does this experience help you understand your role as a leader in the freshman academy?
- Can you speak to the concept of leadership relationship vs. role from your view point and can you draw on your experience working with other counselors and principals.
- Thinking back to your previous experience is there a particular moment that led you to working in a freshman academy?
- Clarify… [follow up to statements made during interview]
- Tell me more about…. [follow up to statements made during interview]

Appendix C



Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Initial Submission – Exempt from IRB Review – AP01

Date: February 07, 2020 **IRB#:** 11493

Principal Investigator: Melanie Elaine Hayes **Approval Date:** 02/07/2020

Exempt Category: 2

Study Title: THE PRINCIPAL-COUNSELOR RELATIONSHIP AS SCHOOL LEADERS WITHIN A FRESHMAN ACADEMY: A HERMENUETIC PHENOMENOLOGY

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed the above-referenced research study and determined that it meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications as changes could affect the exempt status determination.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Notify the IRB at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,



Fred Beard, Ph.D.
Vice Chair, Institutional Review Board