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## Supervision Experiences of School Counselors-in-Training: An Interpretative Phenomenological Study

Anita Pool, Kristen N. Dickens, Matthew Lyons, Barbara Herlihy

School counselors-in-training receive university and site supervision during their field experiences. University supervision may be provided by a faculty member or doctoral student who lacks school counseling experience. School counselors as site supervisors may not be trained to supervise. Further, the multiple systems may have differing expectations for supervisees. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to explore the lived experiences of eight master's level school counselors-in-training with supervision. The four super-ordinate themes included: impact of counselor education program, supervisor characteristics, significance of feedback, and characteristics of the supervisee. Findings suggested programmatic changes counselor educators can make to strengthen student preparation.

**Keywords:** supervision, school counselors-in-training, school counseling

Supervision is an essential component of training counselors at the master's degree level, including those who intend to practice in the school setting. School counselors-in-training (SCITs) who are enrolled in programs accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP) must receive individual or triadic supervision as well as group supervision each week for the duration of practicum and internship (CACREP, 2015, Section 3). School counselors-in-training may not be receiving supervision that is tailored to their specific needs, however. University supervision typically is provided by counselor education program faculty or doctoral students who may not have knowledge and experience related to a school environment (Slaten & Baskin, 2014). In addition, the university supervisor may use a clinical mental health-based supervision model that does not account for the unique roles, responsibilities, and systems influencing school counselors (Wood & Rayle, 2006) rather than a school counselor specific supervision model or a model informed by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA; Miller & Dollarhide, 2006). According to Miller and Dol-

larhide (2006), traditional models of clinical supervision do not provide holistic strategies for supervision to facilitate professional identity development for school counseling professionals.

School counselors-in-training must receive supervision from a site supervisor who is typically a school counselor and works in consultation with counselor education program supervisors (CACREP, 2015, Section 3). School counselors providing site supervision to SCITs may lack formal training in supervision methods and techniques and may not be utilizing any model of supervision (Nelson & Johnson, 1999; Swank & Tyson, 2012). Site supervisors may not have received their own clinical supervision because school counselors historically have lacked clinical supervision (Borders & Usher, 1992; Dollarhide & Miller, 2006; Herlihy et al., 2002; Luke et al., 2011). Because school counselors are typically not trained for their role as mentor, they may base their role primarily on personal traits and professional experience (Lazovsky & Shimoni, 2007).

Additional challenges may occur when the skills learned in counselor education programs are

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not facilitated at the internship placement site (Swank & Tyson, 2007). For example, some school counselor site supervisors may not implement comprehensive, data-driven school counseling programs such as those outlined in ASCA's National Model (2012; Dahir & Stone, 2006; Studer & Oberman, 2006). As a result, SCITs may experience cognitive dissonance (Studer & Oberman, 2006). Problems can occur for SCITs due to conflicting goals, outcomes, and time demands placed on them by the multiple specialized systems within which they are functioning, including the university and the school placement site (Murphy & Kaffenberger, 2007). Due to the multitude of factors influencing supervision, SCITs may not be receiving supervision that meets their needs and prepares them for the realities of school counseling.

Although an abundance of literature addresses supervision from the perspective of supervisors, including considerations for SCITs (Lazovsky & Shimon, 2007; Luke et al., 2011; Magnuson et al., 2004; Murphy & Kaffenberger, 2007; Nelson & Johnson, 1999; Schulz, 2007; Slaten & Baskin, 2014; Swank & Tyson, 2012), research from the viewpoint of the supervisee is nonexistent. A literature search revealed no research studies on the impact on SCITs when university faculty and doctoral student supervisors lack school counseling experience and knowledge of the ASCA National Model. Further, research is lacking on the influence of the multiple systems and supervisors on SCITs' supervision experiences. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain understanding of the supervision experiences of SCITs enrolled in CACREP-accredited counselor education programs in Southern Louisiana. We created a conceptual framework to guide the study and facilitate recognition of the interrelated key factors, concepts, processes, and people impacting SCITs (Figure 1). Directional arrows depict the interrelationships among the key factors that impact the centrally located SCITs. The ASCA National Model (2012) is represented as an

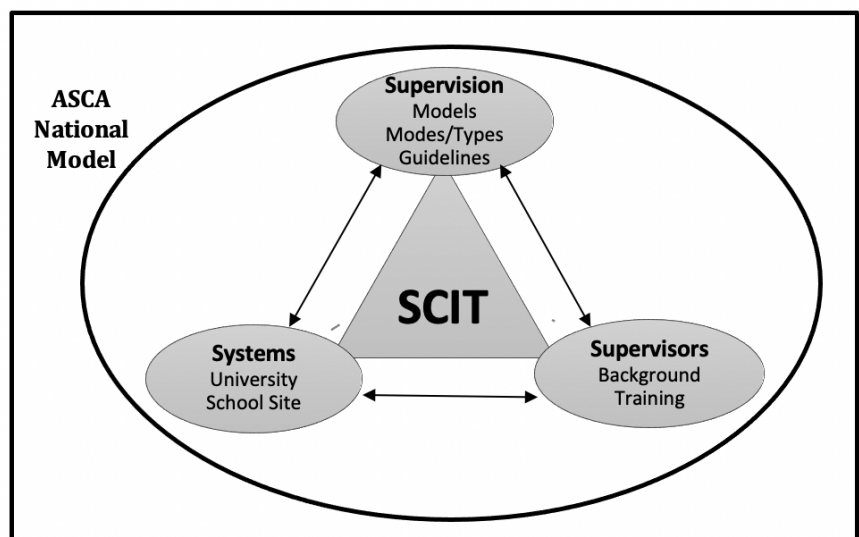
overarching concept, as it affects all aspects of supervision. We hoped that a better understanding of the lived experiences of SCITs would provide valuable insight to counselor educators, university supervisors, and site supervisors regarding the factors that impact supervision, and that knowledge of these factors could lead to improvements in the preparation and supervision of SCITs. Furthermore, we believed that research findings from the perspective of the SCIT could inform the clinical supervision practices of current school counselors. In this study, we explored the perspective of SCITs to provide insight regarding supervision from their viewpoints.

## Method

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to guide data collection and analysis methods. IPA is concerned with examining a lived experience in detail and the resulting meaning that participants make of the experience (Smith et al., 2009). IPA's hermeneutic nature recognizes the role of the researcher in interpreting and making sense of the experience (Smith et al., 2009). The central research question was: What are the supervision experiences of SCITs who recently completed internship while enrolled in CACREP-accredited counselor education programs? Sub-questions were (a)

Figure 1

*Conceptual Framework*



What are the experiences of SCITs with university group and individual supervision? (b) What are the supervision experiences of SCITs with site supervision? and (c) What influence, if any, does the ASCA National Model have on supervision experiences?

### Participants and Procedures

Participants qualified for the study if they had recently completed their first or second internship in school counseling while enrolled in a CACREP-accredited counselor education program, and received university supervision by a faculty member or doctoral student and site supervision by a school counselor. After institutional review board approval was obtained at the researchers' university, an email invitation was sent to the program directors at the eight CACREP-accredited counselor education programs in Southern Louisiana. Directors were asked to distribute the call for participants among students in their programs. We used mixed purposeful and convenience sampling based on location and availability of respondents in Southern Louisiana because we endeavored to conduct the interviews face-to-face. There are 11 programs in Louisiana that have school counseling concentrations; 8 are located in southeastern Louisiana. Snowball sampling was also utilized because some participants referred other individuals. All responses to the solicitation email were screened to ensure that selection criteria were met.

Participants were eight master's-level school counseling students representing five counselor education programs in Southern Louisiana. Sample size was based on the combined recommendations of having 3 to 10 participants for phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2013) and three to six participants for IPA (Smith et al., 2009). The small sample size allowed for a focus on the detailed accounts of individual experiences. Participants were female, ranging in age from 26 to 44 years old, with a mean age of 30.5. One participant identified as Black and seven identified as White. Three attended counselor education programs with doctoral programs and received their university supervision from doctoral students. Five participants were from counselor education programs without doctoral programs and re-

ceived university supervision from faculty members. Thus, both types of university supervisors were represented in the study. All participants attended group university supervision, six participants received individual university supervision, and one participant received triadic university supervision. Six participants were placed at an elementary school for practicum or internship, four were at a middle school, and five were at a high school. Four programs divided internship across two academic semesters; one program allowed students to complete internship in a single semester (Table 1).

### Data Collection

The research team was comprised of three faculty members and one doctoral student with backgrounds in qualitative research design and analysis. The primary source of data collection was semi-structured, one-on-one interviews, as is recommended for IPA (Smith et al., 2009). The interview protocol was semi-structured with open-ended questions to allow for flexibility during the interviewing process (Merriam, 2009; Smith et al., 2009). This format encouraged dialogue and permitted modification of initial questions based on the responses of participants (Smith et al., 2009). Participants were asked to describe their experiences with site and university supervision, discuss their supervisors, describe what was most or least beneficial about supervision, describe their vision of ideal supervision, and discuss the impact on supervision of the ASCA National Model. A final, open-ended question elicited any additional information. Flexibility was permitted to allow unexpected aspects important to the participant to emerge (Smith et al., 2009).

Methods used to establish trustworthiness were member checking, peer review, thick descriptions of participants' experiences, and an audit trail that included the researchers' methodological and reflexive journals (Hays & Singh, 2012). Credibility was achieved by member checking; participants were provided the initial analysis via email and asked to confirm the initial findings (Hays & Singh, 2012). Participants responded and provided feedback. In addition, credibility was addressed through the use of a peer reviewer trained in qualitative research who consulted with us throughout the research pro-

Table 1

*Demographic Information for Participants*

| Participant Pseudonym | Race  | Gender | Age | University Supervision         |                               |                                        | Site Supervision           |                                     |
|-----------------------|-------|--------|-----|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                       |       |        |     | Type of University Supervision | Type of University Supervisor | School Counseling Degree or Experience | Internship Placement Level | School Counselor as Site Supervisor |
| Mandy                 | White | Female | 44  | Individual Group               | Faculty                       | Yes                                    | Elementary High            | Yes                                 |
| Adrienne              | White | Female | 24  | Group Triadic                  | Faculty                       | No                                     | Elementary                 | Yes                                 |
| Hanna                 | White | Female | 27  | Individual Group               | Doctoral Student              | No (one with limited experience)       | Elementary Middle High     | Yes                                 |
| Nicole                | White | Female | 41  | Individual Group               | Faculty Doctoral Student      | No Yes                                 | Middle High                | Yes                                 |
| Dawn                  | White | Female | 27  | Individual Group               | Doctoral Student              | No                                     | Middle                     | Yes                                 |
| Ilene                 | Black | Female | 29  | Group                          | Faculty                       | Yes                                    | Elementary High            | Yes                                 |
| Renee                 | White | Female | 26  | Individual Group               | Faculty                       | No                                     | Elementary High            | Yes                                 |
| Claire                | White | Female | 26  | Individual Group               | Faculty                       | Yes                                    | Middle                     | Yes                                 |

cess to ask provocative questions, challenge the researcher's thoughts, review the researcher's journal, and discuss the participant analyses (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Transferability, or the extent to which the findings may be applicable in another context, was enhanced through the use of thick descriptions of participants' experiences. Dependability and confirmability were addressed through the use of audit trails of the process and product of the research. The audit trail included raw data, data analysis products, a timeline for the study, and our methodological and reflexive journals. The journals included the researchers' thoughts, feelings, and notes on the pro-

cess, and provided justifications for the methodological decisions made throughout the study, thus ensuring trustworthiness for the entire study (Hays & Singh, 2012).

### Data Analysis

IPA data analysis was conducted according to the steps suggested by Smith et al. (2009). Initial analysis began during data collection as individual semi-structured interviews were conducted, and continued during the transcription process for each interview. After all data were collected and interviews were transcribed, each case was analyzed individually following an IPA cyclical approach suggested by Smith et al. (2009).

After reading and rereading each transcript, portions of text that appeared to address the primary and secondary research questions were line-by-line coded and highlighted. This second step of IPA involved analyzed descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments that represented the participants' way of making sense of their experiences. Step 3 entailed identifying emerging themes across the fragmented data that was analyzed in Step 2. Step 4 began with the identification of potential superordinate themes that developed from the multiple connected sub-themes. Care was taken to ensure that each sub-theme accurately fit the superordinate themes, noting where the key thematic words were found in the transcript. A participant

summary with super-ordinate and sub-themes was then created. Step 5 occurred when we replicated Steps 1 through 4 for each participant; Step 6 consisted of the cross-case thematic analysis. We used each participant summary to begin organizing and labeling existing themes and clustered similar themes and super-ordinate themes across cases. Participants' summaries were continually reviewed to ensure that all data were being considered. Four super-ordinate themes with sub-themes emerged from the cross-case analysis. A super-ordinate theme was determined to be salient if it was present for at least half of the participants (Smith et al., 2009).

### Results

Four super-ordinate themes emerged from data analysis: *impact of counselor education program*, *supervisor characteristics*, *significance of feedback*, and *characteristics of the supervisee* (see Table 2). Themes and sub-themes were further developed within each super-ordinate theme and were supported by extracts and quotes from participants.

### Super-Ordinate Theme 1: Impact of Counselor Education Program

The super-ordinate theme of *impact of counselor education program* included the sub-themes of program culture, dynamics of university supervision, and perceived lack of preparedness for world of work. All eight participants spoke about the impact of their counselor education program on their supervision experiences, which addressed the sub-research question regarding university group and individual supervision.

Qualities of program culture included a clear focus on school counseling or clinical mental health, support provided to students, and the quality of the program's relationship with placement sites. Clear focus was related to the number of school counseling-specific courses offered and whether content in other courses was applicable to the school setting. Dawn believed the one school counseling class offered in her program should be two separate classes due to the large amount of content specific to the school setting. Faculty experience was an important component of the program's focus

Table 2

#### Superordinate Themes

| Super-Ordinate Themes                 | Sub-Themes                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Impact of Counselor Education Program | Program culture<br>Dynamics of university supervision<br>Preparedness for world of work |
| Supervisor Characteristics            | Supervisor's background<br>Style of supervision<br>Commitment to supervision            |
| Significance of Feedback              | Quality of feedback<br>Amount and frequency of feedback<br>Source of feedback           |
| Characteristics of the Supervisee     | Intrinsic traits<br>Prior experience in school setting                                  |

on school counseling. Six participants discussed the importance of faculty having school counseling experience. Renee acknowledged that “professors will admit, ‘we don’t know what this looks like in a school setting. I’ve only ever worked in private practice.’” Adrienne stated, “I just believe that you get a lot more knowledge from experience than books, so I think it would be helpful to teach people how to be a school counselor from people who actually know how to be one.” Dawn, describing her faculty supervisor, stated that “He does his best to teach the course but he is not a school counselor .... I feel like there isn’t strength of school counseling experience in our program.”

Support provided to students was further indicative of a program’s focus. Participants described support in several ways. Assistance given to students in finding placement sites was one means of support that Hanna and Nicole believed they lacked. Hanna stated, “It would be helpful for [faculty] to put a little more work into finding supervisors that would be good for school counselors.” Participants also indicated that clear communication from the program was important to feeling supported. Dawn discussed the need for clearer communication regarding school counseling-specific information. She offered as an example the requirement of 700 hours in a school setting during field experiences to become a certified school counselor in public schools in Louisiana, and stated, “One of my peers told me it existed; no professor ever told us about it.”

For most of the participants, a good relationship between the university and placement sites was important. One indication of a good relationship was the counselor education program’s willingness to provide supervision training. At Mandy’s university, supervision training was provided to site supervisors by her program faculty, so that the supervisor’s roles and responsibilities were made clear. She believed that her program was accommodating to the site supervisors because it offered training via PowerPoint, as there was distance between the university and the placement site. Hanna’s program did not offer site supervisor training and she stated, “Site supervisors need to be trained .... I’ve read about things where they can do online training modules .... It would help if [my site supervisor] had that!” Renee also indicated that her program did not

currently provide training to site supervisors, although it was recognized as a need by faculty.

The format, size of supervision group, composition of the group, and requirements of supervision influenced the quality of participants’ supervision experiences. Mandy’s primary supervision was in a group format, and individual supervision with the university supervisor was “if needed, by appointment.” She specified that her faculty supervisor “was very attentive to our needs,” despite not having weekly individual meetings. Nicole expressed confusion about the type of supervision she was receiving and stated that she was receiving all types of supervision. Throughout the interview she interchanged the terms “triadic” and “group.” She seemed to have a clearer understanding that individual meant “one-on-one”; however, she specified that she did not receive that type of supervision.

Four participants identified group size as a significant factor in their university supervision experience. Some preferred large group sizes due to the increased peer feedback, whereas others valued small groups for feedback from a few peers and the university supervisor. Mandy and Ilene preferred the small size of their group; Mandy specified that her group supervision consisted of “four of us and one faculty member.” Renee, who preferred the large size of her supervision group, stated, “For my practicum, we had about 12 or 14 people, which was really big for an internship class, so you got a lot of good feedback.”

Some participants focused more on the composition of their supervision group than on the group size. Mandy and Ilene, who were at the same university and in the same supervision group, said that their group was comprised solely of school counseling students who “were at the same level in the program as us.” Ilene reflected that, had she been placed in a mixed school counseling and clinical mental health counseling group, she “wouldn’t have been able to focus ... time would have been split between mental health and school .... I would have liked to learn the other aspect of it, but I needed to focus on school.” Hanna was also a member of a school counseling supervision group and stated that it “was helpful to have it focused on topics and issues that would be present in different school settings.” She added that it was beneficial to hear what

others were experiencing at different sites, “because it’s way different from school to school” and by having only school counseling students in a group, “you can really focus on what your specialty area is.”

Seven participants discussed the influence of supervision requirements. All of the participants’ programs required videoed or tape-recorded counseling sessions with clients. Two programs required other assignments such as a portfolio and a capstone project for each semester of internship. The video requirement was a source of frustration for the participants. In reference to the logistical constraints, Renee said, “It was just hard to get students one-on-one; either they weren’t there or there wasn’t space for us to videotape.” Hanna referred to the weekly, hour-long tape requirement as “unrealistic.” Dawn referred to the “stress” videotaping caused her “because there weren’t many students whose parents would agree to it .... I was counseling students who did not need counseling.”

Participants expressed concern regarding feeling unprepared for future jobs. Renee discussed the incongruence between her university supervisor’s view of school counseling and the actual responsibilities of school counselors. She described the negative attitudes of some school counselors toward the ASCA National Model, stating that “Some of the counselors were just like, that ASCA stuff, that’s too new .... I’m old school. I don’t want to do that.” Dawn stated that “I feel like I don’t really have a good grasp on what is out there” because of a lack of diversified experiences.

### **Super-Ordinate Theme 2: Supervisor Characteristics**

The super-ordinate theme of *supervisor characteristics* included the sub-themes of supervisor’s background, style of supervision, and commitment to supervision, which addressed the sub-research questions regarding university supervision and experiences with site supervisors. Mandy and Ilene, who had university supervisors with school counseling backgrounds, reported more positive experiences with both a professor and a doctoral student supervisor. Mandy stated, “That makes a very big

difference because you have to be in a school system to know how it operates.” Nicole’s second university supervisor had school counseling experience. She conveyed a more positive experience with this supervisor and stated that “knowledge from a school counselor background” was the most beneficial part of supervision.

Other participants had university supervisors with little or no school counseling experience. Of all of Hanna’s group university supervisors, only one had school counseling experience, which was limited. She believed the lack of school counseling experience and knowledge of the ASCA National Model among university supervisors in her program negatively affected her experience. She stated, “So *that* was lacking ... would have been helpful if we had ... people who were knowledgeable ... so you could talk about it.” She continued, “I didn’t have that experience so it was kind of like you are left to your own to figure it out or network with people that know .... We are focusing on our clinical skills and not really school counseling.” Similarly, Nicole reported that her first university supervisor was not helpful because he “was not well rounded in school counseling so he really didn’t have that much feedback for me.” Adrienne and Renee were from the same program and had one faculty university supervisor for all of their field experiences. He was considered the “school counseling person” among the faculty despite his lack of school counseling experience. Renee reported, “He’s the only person that does the school counseling portion of our program, so I had him for three semesters of supervision.” She was forthcoming about the disadvantages of having the same university supervisor for three semesters, particularly one without a school counseling background. She stated, “He has a mental health background ... so he would want us to do things that were very clinical-based that just wouldn’t happen in a school setting and it was hard for us.”

A supervisor’s age and years of experience mattered for Adrienne, Hanna, Nicole, and Claire. Hanna discussed her negative supervision experience and the large number of administrative tasks in which she was engaged. She thought that the supervisor was “trying to help himself out” by having her

do the tasks since he was “older.” Claire had a positive supervision experience during internship, which she attributed in part to the age and experience of the site supervisor. She stated, “My supervisor ... for my internship was a lot older and she’s been in the field working as a school counselor for eight years .... I feel like she had more guidance.”

Whether a supervisor encouraged autonomy, scaffolded the learning experience, and exposed the participants to a variety of experiences were important aspects of the style of supervision. When all these elements were present in a supervision experience, participants reported more positive experiences and felt better prepared for the realities of the school setting. Participants who had site supervisors who encouraged autonomy enjoyed their internship experiences more than those who felt “held back.” Adrienne reported having a negative experience during internship, and described the site supervisor as treating her “as though she had never worked with a kid before” despite her prior mental health counseling experience. She continued, “It was kind of like a slap in the face because I did have a lot of skills and was confident in what I was doing but I wasn’t able to show her.” She stated, “She was like the mama bird and I was the baby bird [and she was saying], ‘You’re not ready to fly!’ and I’m sitting here like, ‘Let me try!’ and she’s like ‘No, go back in the nest!’”

Those who reported more positive experiences described a flexible supervision style. They were allowed to participate in more activities, the site supervisors communicated trust, and participants felt their needs were met. Mandy reported she was included in all activities at the site and “worked as a team” with her supervisor. An additional factor related to the supervisor’s style of supervision (e.g., site and university) was scaffolding of the learning experience. Mandy described her university supervision experience as a “building process” in which she was walked through “step by step.” Claire stated that the site supervisor was always with her in the beginning and then later “loosened the reins and she kind of backed off a little bit.” Renee reported diverse experiences at her sites and stated, “If I had an idea and it was within the means, I could do it!” Other participants did not believe they were exposed to varied activities.

Participants who reported positive experiences perceived their site and university supervisors as committed to the supervision process. Participants believed that supervision was a priority for the supervisor if the required time was dedicated for supervision and if the supervisor was prepared for the supervisee and had a plan. The quality of the supervision provided was also an indication of the supervisor’s commitment to supervision. Dawn criticized one of her site supervisors because “she constantly forgot that we were supposed to meet.” Hanna shared that her site supervisor “was just kind of busy all the time and didn’t make being a supervisor a priority.”

### **Super-Ordinate Theme 3: Significance of Feedback**

The super-ordinate theme of *significance of feedback* included the sub-themes of the quality of feedback, amount and frequency of feedback, and source of feedback, which addressed the sub-research questions regarding university supervision and experiences with site supervisors. Some of the quality markers for feedback included a focus on counseling skills, the helpfulness, and personalization. Dawn, Ilene, Claire, Mandy, and Hanna indicated that they appreciated feedback that was specific to their counseling skills. Dawn said, “I like when supervisors give concrete feedback.” By contrast, Hanna stated that the feedback that she received from her individual university supervisor “was generic responses ... people might say ... they didn’t know me.”

Participants acknowledged that feedback, whether from peers, the site supervisor, or university supervisor, made a difference to them. Nicole, Renee, and Dawn indicated it was beneficial to receive feedback from peers during university group supervision. Dawn stated, “It made me feel more confident to hear what my peers had to say.” Renee, who attributed the negative feedback from her group supervisor to his lack of knowledge about school counseling, stated, “That was a big point of contention for a lot of us ... he didn’t connect.”

### **Super-Ordinate Theme 4: Characteristics of the Supervisee**

The super-ordinate theme of *characteristics of the supervisee* refers to the participants and the

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traits they brought to their supervision experiences. The sub-themes included intrinsic traits and prior experience in school setting. Mandy, Dawn, and Renee indicated their supervision experience was affected by their personal characteristics, such as a willingness to take initiative. Mandy described herself as “self-motivated and proactive.” She took on extra responsibilities during her internship, which she described as “a huge learning experience for real life.” Renee discussed her efforts to familiarize herself with school staff and build relationships, which was beneficial and resulted in the teachers “referring a lot of students to me, so it was nice. I felt like I was helping them.” Ilene stated that she “didn’t have a high confidence level,” and discussed how she shadowed her site supervisors during her entire experience. She stated that she “was pretty much always with them” and “was nervous” because she was “just starting” and “shy.”

Some participants had previously worked in a school setting and discussed how their knowledge of school culture benefited their experiences as SCITs. Renee, who lacked prior experience in a school, admitted she became “scared” because “the dynamics in the school setting can be very stressful.” Unlike the other participants, Mandy had prior experience in the school as a teacher. She recognized that some aspects of the internship might have been more difficult for her peers who lacked teaching experience. She specifically referred to her knowledge of “the lingo of school,” “the acronyms,” and “knowing how a school in general runs” as helpful aspects of her clinical experiences in schools.

## Discussion

The supervision experiences of school counselors-in-training, both positive and negative, are impacted by their counselor education program, supervisor characteristics, feedback, and the characteristics of the supervisees themselves. The results of this study indicated that the culture of the counselor education program, the dynamics related to university supervision, and the participants’ perceived lack of preparedness for the world of work affect supervision experiences. Previously, studies of counselor program education culture and its related impact on SCIT supervision were missing from the

literature. Two participants believed their programs had a school counseling focus and reported more positive university supervision experiences. By contrast, a participant from a different program, which had a clinical mental health focus, referred to the school counseling students as the “step-children of the program.” In addition to program culture, the dynamics associated with university supervision influenced supervision experiences. This study addressed a gap in the literature related to the size and composition of group supervision and the effect on SCIT supervision. Findings suggested that the size and composition of the group and the requirements and assignments involved with university supervision impacted participants’ experiences. Specifically, the findings indicated that homogeneous groups of school counseling students may meet supervisees’ needs more adequately than mixed groups comprised of mental health and school counseling students. Several participants reported that their experiences were more positive and their individual needs were met because they were in supervision groups comprised solely of school counseling students. Although CACREP Standards (2015) specify the type and amount of time spent in supervision (Section 3), the standards do not stipulate the composition of the group.

The results of the study lend support to previous research that highlighted the dissonance experienced by SCITs related to classroom preparation and field work in school settings (Brott & Myers, 1999). As highlighted in this study, SCITs are at risk of feeling ill-prepared for the realities of their future jobs due to incongruence between what they are taught in their programs and the “real world,” as was the case for several participants. The disconnection between the preparation of school counselors and the realities of their work environment has been described in the literature (Akos & Scarborough, 2004; Brott & Myers, 1999), and was further underscored by our findings.

The supervisor’s background, style of supervision, commitment to supervision, and personal and professional qualities impacted supervision experiences of participants. Supervision that did not utilize a school counseling specific supervision model negatively impacted participants (Wood & Rayle,

2006). Participants with supervisors who were not trained in school counseling, and thus did not utilize a school counseling-focused approach, felt unprepared for their roles and responsibilities in the schools. Two participants, who had supervisors with school counseling experience, reported more positive supervision experiences, regardless of whether the supervisor was a doctoral student or faculty member. Participants thought supervisors who lacked school counseling experience did not connect with them and lacked understanding, which in turn affected feedback and overall supervision experiences. These results lend support to previous findings that SCITs benefit more from working with supervisors with school counseling backgrounds and/or experience working in schools (Magnuson et al., 2004; Slaten & Baskin, 2014).

The supervisor's style of supervision was identified by SCITs as an important factor in helping them practice professional skills they learned in their programs and connect them to the real world. Supervisors who nurtured participants' autonomy and scaffolded learning experiences provided more positive supervision experiences than those who did not. Two participants commented that it was helpful to shadow supervisors and receive more support early in their experience. Additionally, SCITs found it essential to be provided with opportunities to practice their skills and feel a sense of independence, as opposed to feeling "held back" by the supervisor. Further, those who were exposed to real-world activities and experiences at their placement site reported feeling better prepared by the end of their internship and reported more positive and enjoyable supervision experiences. This finding is consistent with the previous works of Magnuson et al. (2004) and Swank and Tyson (2012).

Site supervisors are essential in connecting course content with field experiences (Swank & Tyson, 2012); findings from this study emphasized the importance of site supervisors providing a variety of experiences to SCITs. The findings indicated that exposure to diversified experiences and activities, such as those outlined in the ASCA National Model, is associated with SCIT satisfaction with supervision. Two participants discussed the need to engage in a wide variety of activities and responsi-

bilities reflective of a comprehensive school counseling program. Results of this study indicate the importance of supervisors' personal and professional attributes, as well as their outlook on the profession. Supervisors who were seen as mentors and demonstrated enthusiasm for the profession provided beneficial supervision to participants. Based on these findings, supervisors are encouraged to demonstrate leadership qualities and investment in the profession. The results of this study suggest that a good supervisory relationship leads to greater trust and to a more positive supervision experience, lending support to Schulz's (2007) assertion that the supervisory relationship is one of the most important components of SCIT preparation. One participant stated that her site supervisor "was very good with rapport" and created a "comfortable environment."

The results of this study indicate that ongoing feedback is vital to supervision experiences, and specifically highlight the quality, frequency, and source. Two participants appreciated feedback that was constructive and focused because it helped them identify what they were doing effectively. Two others also stated that receiving an adequate amount of feedback was essential and they valued increased opportunities to receive feedback. Finally, feedback from varied sources was appreciated. Feedback from peers was valued, as was feedback from a supervisor with "background knowledge" of school counseling. Although feedback is considered to be a central activity of supervision, Schulz (2007) suggested that little consideration has been given to its value and use in supervision.

The results of this study indicate that characteristics of supervisees have an influence on their supervision experiences. Two participants, who were self-motivated and chose to take initiative during internship, reported increased involvement at their sites and more positive supervision experiences. Conversely, a lack of initiative and self-confidence resulted in a negative supervision experience for two others. Furthermore, the quality of the supervision experience and the feelings experienced by participants were important and interlinked aspects of supervision experiences. Several participants described feeling included at their sites, and reported positive experiences. Finally, participants reported

that having prior experience in a school setting affected supervision experiences. Those who previously had worked in a school reported fewer challenges and felt more comfortable than those without prior school experience. This result lends support to Peterson et al.'s (2004) finding that counseling students without previous experience in a school setting felt some inadequacy during internship.

### **Limitations**

One limitation of the study is the potential bias of participants. Some participants may have chosen to participate based on particularly positive or negative supervision experiences. An additional limitation of the study is the small sample size and concentrated area of the state from which participants were chosen. Extending the sample to participants from a wider geographical area may have resulted in more diverse participants and, thus, may have represented more diverse supervision experiences. Furthermore, only two counselor education programs in the state have doctoral programs, which limited the number of participants being supervised by doctoral students. A larger geographical area encompassing more doctoral programs could have resulted in more participants being supervised by doctoral students. Due to the limited number of participants being supervised by doctoral students, it is unclear from this study if factors related to doctoral student supervisors may have influenced supervision experiences. A larger representation of participants being supervised by doctoral student supervisors may produce differing results.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Counselor Educators**

The results of this study may inform the design of counselor education programs, and contribute to more adequately preparing SCITs for school counseling careers. We recommend that counselor education programs hire faculty with school counseling experience when possible, and train doctoral students on school counseling focused supervision models for the purposes of supervision. Programs may also consider offering more than one school counseling course to ensure that school counseling

specific content can be adequately covered. Another recommendation is to design requirements, such as taping requirements and other assignments, that take into account the unique needs of school counselors and the setting, systems, mandates, roles, and responsibilities of the school setting. Another suggestion is to provide appropriate supervision by grouping SCITs together for group supervision, matching supervisors and supervisees according to background, and attending to all aspects of the school counselor's role, not only clinical skills. Additionally, supervision forms and evaluations should be designed specific to the school setting and to meet SCITs needs. It is also recommended that counselor education programs provide supervision training for site supervisors and communicate with sites throughout the experience. A final recommendation is for counselor educators to remain knowledgeable and up-to-date on current school counseling trends and practices, including the ASCA National Model. School counselors-in-training will be better prepared for the realities of the school system if the courses and supervision in counselor education programs are specific to and consistent with what is occurring in schools.

#### **School Counselors as Site Supervisors**

The results of the study may also inform site supervision practices. We recommend that school counselors serving as site supervisors understand important aspects of supervision, such as developmental stages of supervisees, theoretical models of supervision, and the value of appropriate feedback. Further, site supervisors should understand styles of supervision and the significance of the supervisory relationship. It is recommended that site supervisors provide diverse experiences and responsibilities to supervisees, such as those outlined in the ASCA National Model. Another suggestion is to orient the intern to the school through introductions to school staff and by providing necessary school information. Finally, site supervisors should be prepared by having a plan for supervision, understanding the counselor education program expectations, and making supervision a priority. Quality site supervision experiences are essential for adequately preparing future school counselors.

## Directions for Research

Future researchers could examine the preparedness of new school counselors. Some participants in this study believed they were well-prepared for their future work as school counselors. School counselors who are new to the field could, after having been in the field for a year or 2, provide a unique perspective on how well they actually were prepared by their counselor education programs and supervision experiences. Another study could also consider the differences in doctoral student supervisors and counselor educators. Future researchers could explore the efficacy of doctoral student supervisors' and their knowledge of school counseling supervision models to use with master's-level supervisees.

## Conclusion

We are hopeful that the results of this study, along with the findings of other research, will help to steer school counselor training and supervision in a direction that meets the unique needs of SCITs. If counselor education programs and school counselors as site supervisors work together, SCITs can be properly trained for the realities of their work environment. Consistent training and supervision can lead to unity in our profession, and ultimately a stronger professional identity of individual counselors.

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