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High School Counselors' Views of Their Leadership Behaviors: A Q Methodology Study

There has been a growing body of professional literature regarding the importance of school counselors behaving as leaders in schools. This study builds on that professional literature by investigating how high school counselors perceive their own leadership behaviors. Q methodology was used to develop 40 opinion statements reflecting school counselor leadership behaviors, and 49 high school counselors then sorted the statements. Data analysis identified four distinct viewpoints of school counselor leadership behaviors. Implications for school counselors and counselor educators are discussed.

In a relatively short time, professional literature pertaining to school counselor leadership has grown rapidly in scope and depth. Counselor educators have advocated for school counselors functioning as leaders in schools to better meet the increasingly complex academic, personal, and social needs of students (Bemak; 2000; House & Hayes, 2002; Lee & Wagner, 2007). The call for school counselor leadership has been driven by school reform initiatives to improve academic achievement for all students and to close gaps for minority and low-income students (Education Trust, 1997). These reform initiatives demand that schools refocus their missions and practices and this leadership process requires the inclusion of school staff members beyond the principal (Elmore, 2003; House & Martin, 1998; Lambert, 1988, 1998). School counselors are optimally situated by virtue of their position, training, and skills to be leaders (Borders & Shoffner, 2003; Dahir, 2001; Dollarhide, 2003; Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; House & Hayes).

The ASCA National Model® (American School Counselor Association, 2005) for comprehensive counseling programs embodies much of the professional literature on school counselor leadership. Having absorbed some primary elements and dispositions of the Education Trust's Transforming School Counseling Initiative, the ASCA National Model includes four themes: advocacy, collaboration, systemic change, and leadership. These themes can be interpreted as providing the context of school

counseling practices described by the model (Dollarhide, Gibson, & Saginak, 2008). If the primary components of the operational structure of the ASCA National Model—foundation, management system, delivery system, and accountability—represent the *how* of comprehensive school counseling programs, then the four themes of advocacy, collaboration, systemic change, and leadership represent the *why*.

These themes of the ASCA National Model (2005) are synchronous with those found in the professional literature regarding school counselor leadership. For instance, the functioning of school counselors as leaders in schools has been cited as being vital for the advocacy of multiculturalism in schools as well as the capacity to challenge intolerance (Grieger & Ponterotto, 1998; Walker, 2006). The importance of school counselors expanding their leadership roles in order to better serve and advocate for students in urban settings also has been proposed and described (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2008; Bemak & Chung, 2005; Capuzzi & Gross, 2000).

Likewise, Myrick (1997) suggested that the credibility and institutional power of school counselors as leaders might be bolstered through collaboration with other educational stakeholders around data use. When school counselors use data effectively—particularly to identify achievement and opportunity gaps that might exist between groups of students—they demonstrate their willingness and capacity to join in collective school leadership efforts that seek educational reform (Stone & Dahir, 2006). This spirit of working collaboratively with other educators in schools is echoed by others (Clark & Stone, 2000; Sears, 1999; Walker, 2006), who have posited that when school counselors work with others to initiate and implement practices and programs that improve student learning, they may be perceived as educational leaders.

Finally, it has been contended that there is an ethical imperative for school counselor leadership that facilitates systemic changes in schools (Erford,

2003). Leading as a systems change agent entails many things, but it has been articulated that being an effective resource to others (Stone & Dahir, 2006) and using data effectively are important elements (Stone & Dahir, 2007). The importance of school counselors challenging systems of schooling so that they better serve students, as well as being reflective practitioners, was echoed in findings in an informal survey of school counselors considered by others to be leaders (Borders & Shoffner, 2003).

Although there are many voices within the profession advocating the importance of school counselors functioning as leaders in schools, few have provided specific, proscriptive descriptions of leadership practices or behaviors. One recent exception is DeVoss and Andrews' (2006) Integrative School Counselor Leadership Model. This model utilizes concepts derived from numerous leadership constructs to identify 16 leadership behaviors. Given the dearth of explicit models for viewing school counselor leadership, the Integrative School Counselor Leadership Model is a useful conceptual framework that begins to operationalize school counseling leadership.

Taken as a whole, this growing body of school counselor literature on leadership tells an increasingly nuanced and robust story that might inform school leadership practice. However, this story of school counselor leadership is mostly being told *about* school counselors, not by them. What are largely absent from the professional literature regarding school counselor leadership are the perspectives of the school counselors themselves.

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

Current models and suggested behaviors of school counselor leadership are primarily conceptual in nature. While important and informative, these suggested leadership models and behaviors have been developed largely without the subjective input of practicing school counselors. This study of high school counselors' perceptions of their leadership behaviors has the potential to help school counselors better understand various ways in which they lead—from the voices of practicing high school counselors. By illuminating the perspectives of school counselors regarding their leadership practices within their schools, the current study might accomplish two aims. This study can contribute to the identification and development of new principles or models that are based on actual practice—thus giving practitioners voice in the continuing evolution of school counselor leadership. Additionally, this study also might highlight gaps in school counselor leadership practices that could then inform changes to preservice and in-service training.

METHOD

The focus of this study was to identify a range of high school counselors' subjective perspectives of how they behave as leaders in schools. Q methodology provides a framework through a "distinctive set of psychometric and operational principles that, when conjoined with specialized statistical applications of correlational and factor analytic techniques, provides researchers with a systematic and rigorously quantitative means for examining subjectivity" (McKeown & Thomas, 1988, p. 7). Instead of factoring tests or traits, Q methodology factors participants and their perspectives or viewpoints on a given topic. This provides researchers with the opportunity to examine response patterns across individual participants, rather than variables, in order to systematically identify groups of people with common structures to their perspectives. As a result, Q methodology was chosen to identify, describe, and examine high school counselors' perspectives of their leadership behaviors.

Instrumentation

In Q methodology, the research instrument is referred to as *Q sample*. The Q sample is a set of stimulus items, in this case a set of statements reflecting leadership behaviors, that participants rank order in a forced distribution that can later be factor analyzed (Brown, 1993). The Q sample for this study was developed from two sets of sources. Statements reflecting leadership behaviors were collected from interviews with 8 high school counselors from three states: Florida, Michigan, and Ohio. Four of these high school counselors were female and 4 were male. Four of these participants described themselves as White, 3 as African American, and 1 as Latino American. Two of these high school counselors described their school setting as rural, 4 described their school setting as suburban, and 3 described their school setting as urban. Five of these high school counselors had 5 or less years of experience working as a school counselor, 1 had between 6 and 10 years of experience, 1 had between 11 and 15 years experience, and 1 had more than 15 years of experience. These eight interviews were transcribed and 209 statements regarding leadership behaviors were compiled from these transcriptions. An additional 48 statements were derived from items selected from professional literature pertinent to leadership behaviors. Notably, this literature included some of the leadership behaviors identified in DeVoss and Andrews' (2006) Integrative School Counselor Leadership Model. Within Q methodology, this collection of statements about a given topic is referred to as the *concourse*.

The Q sample was then developed from the 257

Counselor educators have advocated for school counselors functioning as leaders in schools to better meet the increasingly complex academic, personal, and social needs of students.

Table 1. Q Sample Statements and Factor Arrays

No.	Statement	Factor Arrays			
		A	B	C	D
1	“I educate the principal about the scope of my training as a school counselor and how I can best impact students”	-4	-3	2	-4
2	“I perform many counseling duties in ways that make me highly visible to others in the school”	0	0	-1	3
3	“I advocate for social justice within the school”	-1	-4	3	1
4	“I communicate and operate from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling”	2	-1	1	2
5	“I establish clear goals and keep those goals in the forefront of the school’s attention”	-2	-1	-3	-2
6	“I discuss and promote the importance and value of comprehensive school counseling programs”	-2	-2	0	0
7	“I establish and facilitate strong lines of communication with and among principals, teachers, and students”	2	3	0	2
8	“I establish a set of standard operating procedures and routines for the counseling department”	-2	3	-4	-1
9	“I demonstrate my awareness of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school by using this information to address current and potential problems”	-4	2	4	-1
10	“I have quality contact and interactions with teachers and students”	3	4	3	2
11	“I ensure that staff is aware of the most current theories and practices and I make the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school’s culture”	-4	-4	-1	-3
12	“I demonstrate empathy to teachers and staff”	1	3	1	4
13	“I utilize systems thinking and develop interdependent relationships that promote the school’s guiding vision”	-2	-1	-2	-4
14	“I demonstrate my knowledge about current classroom curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices”	-3	-3	2	-2
15	“I use data to monitor the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning”	-3	-1	-1	-4
16	“I emphasize my shared commitment with other school leaders to the educational mission of the school”	-1	0	-2	0
17	“I value and promote harmonious relationships through cultural competence, celebration of differences, and services to others”	3	-2	-2	1
18	“I lead by example”	4	2	0	-3
19	“I develop my leadership from within based on my values and life principles”	4	0	-1	0
20	“I take on challenges”	2	-1	1	1
21	“I actively challenge the status quo when necessary”	-3	-4	4	3
22	“I learn and grow as a leader through experience and reflection”	4	1	1	-3
23	“I take responsibility for everyday operations of the counseling department”	0	4	-3	2
24	“I seek out, maintain, and develop relationships with mentors”	0	-2	-2	-1
25	“I adapt my leadership behaviors to the needs of the current situation”	2	1	3	-2
26	“I search for opportunities to address student and school needs by seeking innovative ways for myself and others in the school to change, grow, and improve”	0	-3	-3	-1
27	“I challenge others to set high expectations for themselves and encourage them to meet those high expectations”	-1	-2	0	-3

No.	Statement	Factor Arrays			
		A	B	C	D
28	“I recognize and celebrate accomplishments within the school”	0	0	-4	2
29	“I share leadership with others in the school”	1	0	2	0
30	“I work collaboratively with other leaders in the school by developing supportive and cooperative strategic alliances”	1	2	3	3
31	“I foster shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation”	0	0	-2	-2
32	“I do what is necessary for greater student success—even if those things involve nontraditional school counselor roles and activities”	2	1	0	-2
33	“I take initiative to do things in the school”	-1	1	1	0
34	“I engage other school leaders in conversation around academic issues”	-2	-2	2	0
35	“I belong to professional organizations”	-1	-3	-3	1
36	“I make an effort to get to know the community and the people in it”	-3	1	-4	1
37	“I act as a liaison between outside resources and students and staff”	1	2	-1	4
38	“I skillfully perform essential school counseling activities”	3	4	2	3
39	“I demonstrate to staff and students that I am a helpful resource”	3	3	4	4
40	“I advocate for the counseling program and the services that it provides”	1	2	0	-2

concourse items in this study by condensing concourse statements that expressed identical or similar content while preserving those statements that seemed to express unique viewpoints. During this systematic process of instrument development, the concourse statements were reduced to the distilled, 40-item Q sample. These statements were then randomly numbered from 1 to 40 (see Table 1).

Participants

As stated earlier, in Q methodology, participants have the status of variables, rather than the Q sample statements that the participants sort (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). As a result, Q methodology focuses intensively on a smaller group of participants who need not be randomly sampled. Brown (1993) posited that the results of a Q methodology study are highly generalizable in terms of the overall range of opinions and perspectives elicited regarding a given topic. Therefore, it is desirable to elicit the widest range of expressed opinion statements in order to uncover the broadest possible span of perspectives on a topic. In this spirit, care was taken to ensure a wide breadth of representation among participants (person sample) based on gender, ethnicity, the state in which they worked, years employed as a high school counselor, and the type of school in which they worked (urban, suburban, or rural).

Forty-nine participants sorted the 40 statements

that composed the Q sample. Thirty-three of the participants were female and 16 were male. Thirty-nine participants described themselves as Caucasian, 6 as African American, 2 as Hispanic American, 1 as Native American, and 1 as other. Twenty-two of the participants worked in Michigan, 15 in Ohio, 8 in Florida, 3 in Pennsylvania, and 1 in Massachusetts. With regard to years of experience as school counselors, 18 had 5 or less years of experience, 9 had between 6 and 10 years of experience, 7 had between 11 and 15 years experience, and 15 had more than 16 years of experience. In terms of the school setting in which the participants worked, 13 described their work setting as rural, 23 as suburban, and 13 as urban.

Procedures

Each participant sorted the 40 leadership behavior statements, printed on small cards, into a forced distribution ranging from “least representative of my leadership behavior in the school” to “most representative of my leadership behavior in the school” (see Figure 1). A scale ranging from -4 (least representative) to +4 (most representative) was provided to aid participants as they sorted the statements within a forced quasi-normal distribution. McKeown and Thomas (1988) stated that “the recommended quasi-normal distribution is merely a device for encouraging subjects to consider the items more sys-

Your Perceptions of Your School Leadership

“Least representative of my leadership behavior in the school”

“Most representative of my behavior in the school”

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4

Figure 1. Q-sort response grid.

tematically than they might otherwise,” and that essentially “the shape of a Q-sort distribution is methodologically and statistically inconsequential” (p. 34). Each grid had three spaces available under the end points, six spaces under the 0 column, and the rest scattered proportionately to resemble a normal curve. Participants also were asked to respond to a series of questions intended to gain deeper understanding of their perspectives while they sorted the cards (e.g., “Describe how the items you placed at the [+4] end of the continuum are important to your leadership”).

Data Analysis

Each of the 49 sorts was entered into MQMethod 2.06 freeware for Q analysis (Schmolck & Atkinson, 1997). Using this software, data were correlated and then principal component factor analysis was used with varimax rotation in order to identify associations among the 49 different Q sorts (Brown, 1980). MQMethod 2.06 (Schmolck & Atkinson, 1997) extracts up to eight factors from a correlation matrix. According to Brown (1999), the initial extraction of the unrotated factors does not usually lead to a view of the data that is helpful to the

researcher. The Kaiser-Guttman rule (Guttman, 1954; Kaiser, 1960) uses an eigenvalue of at least 1.0 as a standard often utilized to choose which factors are included in analysis such as factor rotation. However, Brown (1978) noted that the application of this standard is inappropriate for Q methodology because it is not based on sampling theory. Nonetheless, Q studies often employ this standard anyway. For this study, the eigenvalues of the first four factors were each over 1.0 (see Table 2).

Varimax factor rotation is commonly used to manipulate the data mathematically in order to “maximize the purity of saturation” of as many Q sorts as possible and thus reducing any “muddling” that occurs when individual Q sorts either load on more than one factor or fail to load on any (McKeown & Thomas, 1988, p. 52). Importantly, varimax rotation optimizes separation among the factors without altering the relationship that underlies them, as expressed by the correlation matrix. The process of varimax rotation, then, provides a “more focused view” of the factors (Brown, 1999, p. 616), and this procedure was adopted for this study.

For this study, three- and four-factor rotations were selected for comparison. The researcher identi-

Table 2. Correlations Between Factors and Factor Eigenvalues

Factor	A	B	C	D
A	1.000	0.4762	0.0989	0.3754
B	0.4762	1.0000	0.0458	0.3744
C	0.0989	0.0458	1.000	0.1825
D	0.3754	0.3744	0.1825	1.000
Eigenvalues	12.8854	3.462	3.2467	2.6471

Note. The eigenvalues are the values for the unrotated factors.

fied the four-factor rotation as a more satisfactory solution than the three-factor rotation based on a couple of considerations. The four-factor rotation accounted for a higher amount of the total variance explained (45%) than did the three-factor rotation (40%). Additionally, more participants loaded on the four-factor rotation (41) than on the three-factor rotation (which had 38 participants load significantly). Finally, in the process of determining the significance of a factor, McKeown and Thomas (1988) cautioned against applying “purely statistical criteria” because doing so “may lead one to overlook a factor . . . that may hold theoretical interest” (p. 51). McKeown and Thomas further stated that from a practical standpoint, the significance of a factor is best determined within the context of the “problems, purposes, and theoretical issues” involved in the research. In addition to the statistical criteria used in the selection of the factor solution for this study, the four-factor rotation produced factors that were determined to be of theoretical and contextual significance. The four-factor rotation seemed to result in perspectives that were relatively lucid and distinct.

This four-factor rotation resulted in 12 participants who had high factor loadings on two or more factors. These participants’ sorts with high loadings on two or more factors indicated fairly equal agreement with two or more views concerning how they led in schools as expressed in two or more factors. In order to produce a more distilled view of the data, those 12 Q sorts were omitted from the analysis. This resulted in lower correlations between the factors and increased the distinctiveness of the factors. Correlations can range from -1.0 to 1.0 , with a 1.0 correlation indicating complete agreement and a -1.0 indicating complete disagreement. Correlations of less than $.5000$ would indicate lower levels of agreement or relatedness between two factors, whereas correlations greater than $.5000$ would indicate higher levels of agreement or relatedness

(Brown, 1999). For this study, the highest correlation between factor scores was between Factors A and B (.4762). The relatively high correlation between these two factors suggested some similarities in how participants in those two factors perceive their leadership behaviors. Overall, the four factors have relatively low correlations. These relatively low correlations indicate that the factors represent perceptions of high school counselor leadership that are fairly distinct from one another. MQMethod then generated factor “arrays” or model Q sorts for each factor (Table 2). Each of these four factor arrays, or model Q sorts, were then examined individually and in comparison to one another.

RESULTS

An analysis of the four factors resulted in groupings of perspectives that represented four distinct viewpoints of how high school counselors perceive their leadership behaviors. These four factors were named (a) Self-Focused and Reflective Exemplar, (b) Ancillary School Counseling Program Manager, (c) Engaging Systems Change Agent, and (d) Empathetic Resource Broker. Together, these four factors accounted for 45% of the variance. Following the procedure to distill the four factors explained above, 28 of the 49 participant sorts were significantly represented solely in one of the four perspectives. The four factors are described below along with the demographics of participants who made up each factor in order to facilitate an understanding of the viewpoints contained within each factor regarding ways that high school counselors perceive their school leadership behaviors.

Factor A: Self-Focused and Reflective Exemplar

Factor A accounted for the highest amount of explained variance in this study (16%) and 13 of the 49 participants loaded exclusively on this factor. Eleven women and 2 men made up this factor. Nine

This study can contribute to the identification and development of new principles or models that are based on actual practice—thus giving practitioners voice in the continuing evolution of school counselor leadership.

of the participants on this factor were Caucasian, 2 were African American, and 2 were Hispanic/Latino. These participants had experience as a high school counselor that ranged from 1 to 29 years, with the mean of 8.0 years of experience. Nine of the participants worked in suburban schools, while 3 worked in rural high schools, and 1 worked in an urban school.

The high school counselors who made up this factor seemed to perceive their leadership behaviors through a very personal lens, focusing a great deal on the importance of developing leadership from inner values and principles. In this perspective, just as leadership behaviors seemed nurtured through reflection on one's life principles and values, there also appeared to be recognition that these same values and principles can serve as a means to influence others through modeling. Statements that were most representative (+4) of this viewpoint were "I develop my leadership from within based on my values and life principles" (statement 19), "I learn and grow as a leader through experience and reflection" (statement 22), and "I lead by example" (statement 18).

The least representative statements (-4) in the factor array supported this perspective of high school counselor leadership as a fundamentally personal activity that affects others vicariously. Statements that were least representative (-4) of this viewpoint were "I educate the principal about the scope of my training as a school counselor and how I can best impact students" (statement 1), "I demonstrate my awareness of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school by using this information to address current and potential problems" (statement 9), and "I ensure that staff is aware of the most current theories and practices and I make the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture" (statement 11). Each of the three statements that occupied the "least representative" anchor point involved, either explicitly or implicitly, extensions of more direct leadership behaviors.

Factor B: Ancillary School Counseling Program Manager

Factor B accounted for the second highest amount of explained variance in this study (13%) with 9 of the 49 participants loading exclusively on this factor. Seven women and 2 men made up this factor. All 9 of the participants on this factor were Caucasian. These participants had years of experience as a high school counselor that ranged from 1 to 28, with a mean of 12.0 years of experience. Five of these participants worked in rural high schools, 3 worked in suburban high schools, and 1 worked in an urban high school.

The Factor B viewpoint of how school counselors behave as leaders seemed rooted in the importance

of taking responsibility for the administrative details of school counseling roles, performing those roles well, and interacting with others in caring and meaningful ways. Statements that were most representative (+4) of this viewpoint were "I take responsibility for everyday operations of the counseling department" (statement 23), "I skillfully perform essential school counseling activities" (statement 38), and "I have quality contact and interactions with teachers and students" (statement 10).

This viewpoint also indicated an absence of leadership behaviors that could challenge the thinking or behavior of other school personnel. Statements that were least representative (-4) of this viewpoint were "I ensure that staff is aware of the most current theories and practices and I make the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture" (statement 11), "I advocate for social justice within the school" (statement 3), and "I actively challenge the status quo when necessary" (statement 21). The statements that best described this viewpoint seemed to emphasize the meeting of some of the daily responsibilities of a school counseling program, although in a manner somewhat ancillary to broader, systemic school issues. For instance, those with this viewpoint expressed a reluctance to engage in leadership behaviors that might challenge the status quo within the school.

Factor C: Engaging Systems Change Agent

Factor C accounted for 7% of the explained variance in this study and 3 of the 49 participants loaded on this factor. Two men and one woman made up this factor. Each of the 3 participants on this factor was Caucasian. These participants had years of experience as a high school counselor that ranged from 4 to 16, with the mean of 8.3 years of experience. Two of the high school counselors on this factor worked in a rural school setting and 1 worked in a suburban school.

The high school counselors who made up this viewpoint seemed to value leadership behaviors that focused more on impacting larger systems (school, community, society) than on individual students within those systems. Representative statements in this viewpoint were "I demonstrate my awareness of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school by using this information to address current and potential problems" (statement 9), "I actively challenge the status quo when necessary" (statement 21), "I demonstrate to staff and students that I am a helpful resource" (statement 39), and "I advocate for social justice within the school" (statement 3).

This viewpoint seemed to represent a departure from Factors A and B in the respect that the most characteristic leadership behaviors focused outward on the system of schooling, rather than on self, other

staff, and responsibilities inherent in the role of school counselor. Interestingly, this composite viewpoint also expressed a lack of focus on more relational aspects of leadership as well as on the function of procedures and routines involved with school counseling work. Statements that were not representative of this viewpoint were “I establish a set of standard operating procedures and routines for the counseling department” (statement 8), “I recognize and celebrate accomplishments within the school” (statement 28), and “I make an effort to get to know the community and the people in it” (statement 36). This viewpoint emphasized the importance of more politically assertive leadership behaviors, rather than on those expressions of leadership that are both more relational and procedural.

Factor D: Empathetic Resource Broker

Factor D accounted for 9% of the explained variance in this study, and 3 of the 49 participants loaded on this factor. Two women and 1 man made up this factor. Each of the 3 participants on this factor was Caucasian. These participants had years of experience as a high school counselor that ranged from 5 to 22, with the mean of 14.0 years of experience. One of the high school counselors on this factor worked in an urban school setting, 1 worked in a suburban school, and 1 worked in a rural school.

The 3 participants with the Factor D viewpoint seemed to principally conceptualize their leadership behaviors as providing resources both to students and staff in caring ways. Most representative statements in this viewpoint were “I act as a liaison between outside resources and students and staff” (statement 37), “I demonstrate to staff and students that I am a helpful resource” (statement 39), and “I demonstrate empathy to teachers and staff” (statement 12).

Expressions of leadership behaviors that reflect more of a systemic focus were absent within this viewpoint. Least representative statements included “I educate the principal about the scope of my training as a school counselor and how I can best impact students” (statement 1), “I use data to monitor the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning” (statement 15), and “I utilize systems thinking and develop interdependent relationships that promote the school’s guiding vision” (statement 13). The participants on Factor D expressed interrelatedness in their leadership behaviors involving their functioning as resource brokers and their extensions of empathy. That is, their ability to be empathetic seemed to allow them to recognize unique needs of others that might require additional resources, which they could either connect them to or provide themselves.

DISCUSSION

This study described and examined four distinct viewpoints regarding how high school counselors perceive their leadership behaviors. Across these viewpoints, there are not only distinctions, but also commonalities. Aside from comparisons between these viewpoints, each of the perspectives on leadership resonated, to greater or lesser degrees, with those perspectives found in previous professional literature and the ASCA National Model (2005).

Although the viewpoints of high school counselor leadership behaviors in this study were distinct in many ways, they also shared similarities. Each emphasized the importance of performing traditional counseling practices well, but each also seemed to de-emphasize a few behaviors associated with systemic change. For example, each of the viewpoints found the statements “I skillfully perform essential counseling activities” (statement 38) and “I have quality contact and interactions with teachers and students” (statement 10) to be highly representative by placing them near or at the extreme right column of the distribution. These two behaviors seem to represent essential school counseling practices that had deep resonance for the participants across the four viewpoints. For each of the four viewpoints, practices that were rooted in having skillful performance of counseling activities and high-quality interactions with others in the school seemed to serve as preconditions to effective leadership. Perhaps this consensus across the viewpoints should not be surprising. The importance each of the viewpoints placed on performing essential counseling activities—interpreted by most participants to be individual and group counseling and classroom guidance—has long formed the foundation of the work of school counselors. Many of the high school counselors in the study elaborated that the skillful extension of these practices helps them establish the basic credibility and professionalism necessary for being viewed as leaders by others.

All four of the viewpoints also had some agreement regarding the placement of the statements “I ensure that staff is aware of the most current theories and practices and I make the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school’s culture” (statement 11) and “I use data to monitor the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning” (statement 15). However, these two statements each occupied spaces in the left column in the distribution, meaning that these practices were less representative of these high school counselors’ leadership. That these practices regarding data use and staff education were not representative of the participants’ leadership behaviors also warrants some discussion and conjecture. At first glance, it could be

**The Engaging
Systems Change
Agent viewpoint
was deeply
congruent with the
notions and
propositions that
school counselor
leadership can
create and support
systemic changes
fueling school
reform and
advocacy for
students.**

Familiarity with a number of leadership behaviors, practices, models, and theories can enhance the effectiveness of school counselors' leadership.

interpreted that the system change orientation of these two practices might offer some explanation as to why they were not viewed as being representative of how these school counselors lead. These statements represent behaviors that are aimed at systemic changes in schools—one through the extension of knowledge through discourse with staff and the other through analyzing the educational efficacy in more complex ways. Both the use of data and involvement in staff education and development represent extensions of school counselor performance beyond most previous historical conceptions. Given the relatively recent revisioning of the school counseling profession and the emergence of professional literature regarding how leadership might occur under this vision, it may be that these practices have yet to filter significantly down to the practices of many of the high school counselors in this study and, by extension, many school counselors working today.

However, there were other Q sample statements in this study reflecting school counselor behaviors that were systemic in nature that were highly representative of at least some of the viewpoints (e.g., statements 3, 9, and 21). Given this discrepancy, another interpretation seems to be warranted. That many school counselors feel uneasy with their knowledge and skills regarding both educational theory and practice (House & Hayes, 2002) and for analyzing and using data (Stone & Dahir, 2007) has been discussed elsewhere in the professional literature. It might be that school counselor insecurity related to these two practices also was reflected across the viewpoints in this study.

Although each of the viewpoints contained characteristics resonant with professional literature and the ASCA National Model (2005) regarding school counseling leadership, the Engaging Systems Change Agent viewpoint bears most resemblance to the collective emphasis on leadership that contributes to systems change. This viewpoint was deeply congruent with the notions and propositions that school counselor leadership can create and support systemic changes fueling school reform and advocacy for students (ASCA, 2005; Stone & Clark, 2001; Dollarhide, 2003; House & Hayes, 2002). Additionally, the importance this viewpoint alone placed on advocating for equity and justice within the school—particularly for the disenfranchised and disadvantaged—also resonated with the ASCA National Model and the professional literature (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2008; ASCA; DeVoss & Andrews, 2006; Lee & Wagner, 2007).

This study identified and described four viewpoints of how high school counselor behave as leaders as well as common characteristics and distinct differences among those viewpoints. Both of these ana-

lytic approaches attest to the multidimensional nature and complexity of school counselor leadership. Given that the high school counselors in this study viewed their leadership in multidimensional and complex ways, it is important to consider what contributed to this diversity and nuance. A closer examination of the participants who made up the Ancillary School Counseling Program Manager viewpoint might provide a partial explanation.

Although the primary research objective of Q methodology is not to explore the distribution of populations among viewpoints in a more definitive way associated with traditional survey research, results of Q investigations often suggest patterns of “common or different viewpoints related to certain demographic characteristics” (Brown, 1999, p. 599). The Ancillary School Counseling Program Manager viewpoint seems to represent such a suggested pattern—one that may hold some contextual significance to how participants with this view behave as leaders in schools. Five of the 9 counselors making up this viewpoint worked in rural high schools. Two of these participants who worked in rural schools also noted that they are the sole school counselor in their respective schools. Additionally, 2 other high school counselors making up this viewpoint also served as chairpersons of their counseling departments. Although the context of their jobs were different, these school counselors with added administrative responsibilities and lone counselors in their schools seemed to feel elevated pressure to be accountable in their jobs. Thus, a focus on the administrative and procedural aspects of school counseling seemed to be a critical filter through which the high school counselors in this viewpoint perceived their leadership behaviors. Other occupational contexts may have impacted how those participants making up other viewpoints in this study behaved as leaders in the school.

IMPLICATIONS

Implications emerging from the findings of this study center around two main themes: (a) School counselors behave as leaders in diverse ways that have distinct strengths, and (b) the school context informs and impacts how school counselors lead. These themes have implications for professional school counselors and counselor educators.

Implications for School Counselors

There is no singular model for leading in schools, just as there is no definitive general leadership theory. The idiosyncratic nature of human services such as schools often renders our theories and techniques ineffective (Schön, 1983). Therefore, familiarity with a number of leadership behaviors, practices,

models, and theories can enhance the effectiveness of school counselors' leadership. Knowledge of multiple theoretical and conceptual leadership lenses can equip school counselors with a larger set of approaches that will allow them to practice leadership in new ways—especially when new situations and new contexts do not seem conducive to one particular conceptualization of leadership. Given the importance of knowing multiple ways of understanding and practicing leadership, continued professional development in this area is important. This could be more formal professional development through school district in-services and training or continued education at the university level, and it also could be as informal as making sure that literature regarding educational leadership occupies importance similar to more traditional school counseling practices.

The unique situation of each school and each school counselor's role in it requires distinct leadership approaches. Context matters. The context, or situation, in which leadership occurs has a reciprocal relationship with school leaders. The situation impacts leaders and, in turn, school leaders impact their situations (Spillane, 2006). Just as the ASCA National Model (2005) "is not meant to be replicated exactly," but rather to serve as a framework to be applied to each unique school setting (p. 10), school counselors should first consider and develop understandings of their own school and community landscapes and their roles in them, before enacting leadership approaches and resultant behaviors.

Implications for Counselor Educators

The diversity represented by the four viewpoints suggests that school counselor leadership might be most effectively discussed and taught around the notion that there is probably not a set of *best practices* or a definitive and monolithic school counselor leadership model. Rather, the unique characteristics and strengths of each of these four perspectives seem to signal that effective expressions of leadership are myriad, and so exposure to as many different expressions as possible might better equip school counselors to draw on these multiple perspectives in order to fit the current context of their environment. In order to increase students' knowledge of leadership, counselor educators should ensure that they are infusing their curricula with professional literature on leadership that has not only emerged from counselor education, but from other disciplines—particularly educational leadership. Students also should be required to apply and reflect on this diverse leadership content through case studies and experiential projects and tasks.

Given the apparent importance the context of particular school settings seemed to have for how some

participants demonstrated their views of representative leadership behaviors, the exploration as to how school counselors might best adapt their own leadership behaviors to fit the unique contexts of their schools also would be meaningful and helpful. As a result, the skills required to identify the leadership requirements of a given school, and the ability to adapt leadership practices to meet those requirements, might be a prominent focus of any school counselor training program. Again, authentic learning tasks should be designed to allow students opportunities to analyze possible leadership requirements of particular school settings—both through case study and throughout student practica and internships. Reflection on leadership practices and the context in which they are performed should occur with intentionality in both content and field courses. Examples of such purposeful reflection on leadership might be reflective journals or dedicated time in supervision.

CONCLUSIONS

Two primary limitations of this study emerged during analysis of the data that might have impacted the results of this study. The participants in this study consisted solely of volunteers. Although the snowball sampling technique drew participants from five different states, across wide school settings, and from diverse demographic backgrounds, the fact that they were all volunteers might have skewed the participants toward those who already had elevated interests in school counselor leadership. This, then, may have made these participants more inherently interested in the topic of study than others who chose not to participate. The results of the study, and the representative views of the 49 volunteer participants, might have been different had a different sample of high school counselors participated.

Possibly more significant to the results and analysis of this study, the numbers of defining variables, or individual participants who loaded significantly, on Factors C and D were relatively low. Only 3 participants defined both of these last two factors, thus increasing the probability that the 3 significantly loading participants for each of the last two factors may not have as accurately represented the views of school counselor leadership expressed in those factors. Put another way, more defining variables on Factors C and D might have helped to create a clearer conception of the unique perspectives of those factors.

Future research regarding school counselor leadership might rely less on subjective perceptions and self-reports and more on the observations of others who are in close proximity to school counselors—students, other staff, principals, and so forth. Also,

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qualitative studies might create deeper understandings in regard to the contextual variables that seemed to dictate the leadership behaviors in which some of the participants in this study were engaged. Additional research also might focus on the impact that various expressions of school counselor leadership behaviors have on the school climate. This study focused exclusively on leadership behaviors. However, behavior is just one aspect of leadership. Possibly as important as how one behaves as a leader is the question: What fuels and motivates one's leadership behaviors? Future studies might examine the dispositions and values that underlie the leadership behaviors of school counselors.

Finally, it was the intention of this research by its design and choice of methodology to bring forth additional voices regarding school counselor leadership—those voices that have been largely absent from the professional discourse to date—the voices of practicing school counselors. Future research also might strive to continue to explore and unravel the subjectivity of practicing school counselors in order to elevate more of their voices and produce even more authentic research that might impact and engage the profession at a practitioner level. ■

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