ABSTRACT

BARROW, JENNIFER CAHOON. The Role of Professional School Counselors in Working with Students in Gangs: A Grounded Theory Study. (Under the direction of Dr. Stanley Baker.)

The purpose of this study was to propose a grounded theory that contributed to the understanding of the professional school counselor's role at the secondary school level in working with students in gangs. The study explored the role of the professional school counselor from the first person perspective of the professional school counselor and school based leaders, defined as assistant principals and principals. Additionally, two district level school leaders were interviewed to gain access to the perspective of key informants on the role of school counselors and students in gangs in this school district.

The professional school counselor sample consisted of four females and one male who identified their cultural group as Caucasian/White (n=4) and African-American (n=1). The school leader sample consisted of seven males with highest level of education ranging from bachelor to doctoral degrees. Six of the seven identified their cultural group as Caucasian/White (n=6) and one of the seven identified their cultural group as African-American (n=1).

This qualitative study utilized the coding and thematic data analysis method presented by Corbin and Strauss (2008), and Strauss and Corbin (1998, 1990). Data analysis consisted of a triangulation process combined with the interview, reflective journal, and training and policy manual reviews to discover the following categories: training/education, role development factors, stakeholders in role development, collaboration, and PSCs as
practitioners within school context. Results and implications for practice were based on the categories that emerged through the data analysis process.

While numerous research based publications have devoted attention to school violence, little had been written on the leadership and preventive role professional school counselors may play in working with students in gangs. The professional literature was rich with data on the stages of professional development and perceived and actual role of professional school counselors but was lacking on the impact of specific student populations on the professional development and role of the professional school counselor. This study explored their role, attitudes, skills, knowledge, professional training, and barriers to their work with students in gangs in the secondary school setting.

The American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) National Standards present an ideal framework for the role of the secondary school counselor. The National Standards suggest professional school counselors should provide programming designed to engage students through three domains of practice (i.e., personal/social, academic, and career development). Data from the school counselor sample revealed a lack of attention to the personal/social and career development needs of all students, including those students in gangs.

Non-compliance with the National Standards was based on the school leader's perception of the secondary school counselor role (i.e., academic counselor), expanding professional role, and excessive case loads. Finally, while the National Standards focus on the three domains of practice, the National Model seemingly focuses on academic intervention. Data from the school counselor sample revealed their work with the National
Model was designed to address the academic needs of students in accordance with school leader directives. A focus on academic initiatives left all students, including students in gangs, without access to a comprehensive school counseling program designed to also address their personal/social and career development needs.

The findings expanded the existing research on the general role of the school counselor into an examination of the role as it relates to students in gangs and the use of ASCA’s National Standards and National Model to guide the role and work of the secondary school counselor through the development of a comprehensive school counseling program. Revealing the need for training, collaboration, and counseling based intervention strategies for students in gangs appears to be a significant new finding.
The Role of Professional School Counselors in Working with Students in Gangs:  
A Grounded Theory Study

by
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to 3 families.

For my family of origin, The Cahoon Clan, thank you for loving and supporting me through the hills and valleys of my educational pursuits. Mom and dad, thank you for instilling in me a love of learning just for the sake of learning. Amy and Kylie, I could not imagine travelling through this life without you. Thank you for sharing experiences and memories with me. I love you.

For The Barrow Family, thank you for making me feel like one of your own from our first meeting. Thank you for supporting my pursuits, cheering me along through this process, and holding me accountable for where I was in completing this project. A special thanks to Melissa. Without you Randy and I would not have been able to pursue our dreams.

For my family, Randy and James, thank you for making all that is good and beautiful in this world more so. Thank you for reminding me to be present and to enjoy each moment. This dissertation is complete because of you and it is for you.
BIOGRAPHY

Born and raised in North Carolina, Jennifer Dawn Cahoon Barrow had each region of the state to impact the woman she has become. Born in the northeastern portion of the state, her rural upbringing taught her the value of hard work and community. Hard work and diligence led to a departure from what was familiar when it was time to leave high school. As the oldest child, she learned to be a trailblazer. Leaving home for college was the hardest trail to clear, but necessary to encourage growth.

As a first generation college student, she learned the trail led to fear, self-doubt, but ultimately self-discovery. The path to a bachelor’s degree was filled with excitement and disappointment. In the triad region of North Carolina, Jennifer attended two universities. One she left when her heart told her the environment had become toxic. The second college taught her how to learn. Guilford College provided her the opportunity to critically analyze lessons on and off campus. Frankly, it was under the tutelage of this great college, Jennifer was encouraged to question the generally accepted and to find a personal voice in the discussion of discovery.

Returning to the coastal region for graduate school, Jennifer found mentors for life. The value of a mentor can never be underestimated. Having people believe in you and your abilities expands your horizon. Jennifer’s professors and supervisors at East Carolina University led her to dream the impossible dream.
During the early years of her professional career Jennifer returned to the triad. The place she felt safe and welcome. See the triad region had become home while she pursued her education and again became home when she began her counseling career. The triad region brought her closer to the mountains. In the mountains, she found peace and tranquility in the sights and smells of nature. The mountains are there providing you an opportunity to view something larger than yourself and to value being still. Be present and breathe was the sound echoed from the whispering winds.

Finally, the triangle region marked the end of the formal academic training. A terminal degree and the title of doctor would be earned. Working full time and attending classes was no small feat, but having the support of family, friends, and co-workers led to the achievement of the dream she dared to dream. The triangle region brought her closer to family and the importance of community was reinforced when it was family and community that filled the gaps created by time away for class or completing the dissertation process. At North Carolina State University, Jennifer learned to be a researcher and pushed herself to the limits. The professors and classmates were family. Nudging you when it was necessary and believing in you always.

The road can be long and hard when you are the first to walk the path. The path to the achievement of this dream was no different. It was long and it was hard and sometimes it was lonely. Through hard work, the support of others, and a belief in self this part of the journey is complete.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I began this journey because of three wonderful East Carolina University professors: Drs. Weaver, Ciechalski, and Pinkney. Their belief in me was enough for me to imagine this was possible. They coached me along the early years of my career and their efforts led me to pursue this dream. I am only at this point in my professional and personal life because I stand on their shoulders and I have to say the view is phenomenal. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

I gratefully acknowledge my colleagues at High Point Central High School and Sanderson High School. I have been so fortunate to work with fabulous school counselors. I have learned from the very best in the business.

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Friendships are so very important and especially so when a project of this magnitude regularly pulls you away from those you hold close to your heart. My friends have been my light through this and other life experiences and I humbly state I could not have done this without your love and support. Even though we did not regularly talk I always knew I just had to call and you would be there. For Jennifer, Stephanie, Shaundell, Kelly, Mandy, Heather, Melanie, Nicole, and Amy (Boogie), I look forward to having lunch very soon. I will be calling you to set a date. A special thanks to Kelly for leaving a clear path and
guiding me through this experience. Kelly, you are a wonderful coach, leader, and, treasured friend.

To the professional school counselors and school administrators that participated in this study I thank you for trusting the process and trusting me to get your story right.

Twenty years ago an anonymous donor funded the Luck of the Draw scholarship in a rural high school in northeastern North Carolina. Without that donor, the path to my education would have been littered with obstacles. For you, whoever you are, please know I will never forget your generosity and I do hope you find your early investment in me and my education to be well worth your sacrifices. I cannot honor you by name so I will honor you through my actions. I, too, have and will continue to look for ways to ease the burden of others and clear their path of barriers.

For my NC State classmates, I am in awe of your skills and learned about you and from you through our interactions. A special thanks to my cohort for their support, especially through statistics. Al, Delton, Gwen, Angel, Matt, Mark, and Angela, thank you for sharing this journey. A very special thanks to Angela. We shared so much through this experience including, the birth of our firstborns on the same day at the same hospital and all along the way I knew you had my back. I hope you felt me cheering all the way for you.

For my committee, I have no idea where to begin. I was so lucky to have sat in your classes and to have learned from masters. Dr. Gerler, I still have my letter of admission that you signed. It is a treasured memento of when this journey began. From you I learned to
carefully and intentionally reflect on my impact as a counselor. Dr. Grimmett, through your example I learned the meaning of leading with love. Thank you for reminding me that there is so much more to learn about myself and the world around me. Dr. Fusarelli, your classes led me to discover research methods that matched my personality. When you stop and listen to the story of others you will contribute to your field of study and leave a legacy for those that follow. Your faith in my abilities as a researcher and person lit the way when my own faith waivered. I thank each of you for your patience, support, and guidance as I moved through this most incredible journey. You are the best big elephants ever.

Dr. Stanley Baker, my advisor and dissertation chair, I will forever be grateful for our meetings. From the beginning you wanted to know about me and my experiences. I left each encounter knowing I had been heard and that what I said or felt mattered. You were a source of tranquility when I needed it and you were the force that moved me when I struggled. I was so lucky to have had you as my advisor. Thank you for everything.
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CHAPTER 1
Introduction

Background of Study

Professional school counselors (PSCs) are certified/licensed professionals with a master’s degree or higher in counseling/school counseling. PSCs are uniquely qualified to address the developmental needs of all students as a part of the whole educational system and mission of a school system and/or individual school. PSCs are encouraged to deliver a comprehensive school counseling program designed to encourage and enhance all students’ academic, career, and personal/social development and help all students in maximizing personal achievement (ASCA, 2005). School counseling is an evolving professional field, affected by state and national policies, economics, and school reform movements (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; Paisley & McMahon, 2001).

On a daily basis, professional school counselors (PSCs) are expected to perform a variety of activities designed to enhance the academic, career, psychological, physical, and social development of all students. Students may self-refer or are referred to school counselors by parents, community members or school staff to receive assistance with a number of issues. PSCs serve and advocate for the students on their caseload through counseling activities including, but not limited to, career planning, college planning and applications, academic counseling, course selections scheduling, developing decision-making skills, parent conferences, group counseling, and counseling for personal/social issues.
Compounding the already demanding work of PSCs is the increasing number of violent acts on a school campus. The presence of gangs in the school setting doubled from 1985 to 1995 (Brinson, Kottler, & Fisher, 2004). Gangs in schools are involved in harassment, vandalism, recruitment of new members and illegal activities that may lead to violence. Gang membership in and of itself is not a crime; however, gang members may be involved in crime-related activities. Gang presence in schools adversely impacts the school environment, amount of learning accomplished, and perception of safety by the staff, students, and community (Brinson, et al., 2004).

Campbell and Dahir (1997) stated, "school counselors work with all students, school staff, families, and members of the community as an integral part of the education program" (p. 8). Graduate school counseling training programs and comprehensive school guidance programs are designed to prepare PSCs to competently meet the academic, personal, social, and career needs of all students (Pelsma & Krieshok, 2003). However, do graduate school counseling training programs provide school counselors with the necessary education and training to adequately prepare them to meet the academic, personal, social, and career needs of students in gangs? If not, how are PSCs trained to develop the skills necessary to identify gang presence in their school community? Are PSCs perceived as valued, contributing members of the school’s efforts to combat and intervene with students in gangs?

From a counselor advocacy and social justice perspective, PSCs are to stand in support of all students and create opportunities for equal access and success by serving as
collaborators, consultants, and change agents to bring about positive change in the entire school (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Pelsma & Krieshok, 2003). The professional literature is rich with research that examines the roles and functions of clinical and community counselors; however, research specific to school counselors’ career professional growth and development is almost non-existent (Brott & Myers, 1999). Further, a review of the literature demonstrates a critical lack of research on the training and role of PSCs to adequately and competently work with students in gangs. Could this lack of advocacy stem from feelings of incompetence because of the lack of training in school counselor education programs (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004)? Does it demonstrate a lack of formal or informal professional development pursuits by the working PSC? Or is it a reflection of the role PSCs play in the school environment?

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) does not specify what counselor education programs should teach (ASCA, 2005). The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2009) offers that students pursuing a school counseling specialization must demonstrate knowledge, skill, and practice in the following eight domains: (a) foundations of school counseling, (b) counseling, prevention, and intervention, (c) diversity and advocacy, (d) assessment, (e) research and evaluation, (f) academic development, (g) collaboration and consultation, and (h) leadership. Instruction for the clinical component lists 600 clock hours in a school setting, yet there is no
mention of faculty supervisors needing training in the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005)
or an understanding of the contextual dimensions of the school setting.

Providing quality supervision and training for the professional school counselors and
counselors in training (graduate school) is a responsibility and a challenge. If counselor
educators are to be prepared to meet the challenges of 21st century students, they need to be
current on the trends and developments in the professional school counselors' work
environment (Hayes, Dagley, & Horney, 1996; Murphy & Kaffenberg, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

Courtrooms throughout the United States have seen a rise in juvenile court cases. In
1997, the juvenile court system processed more than 180,000 cases involving youth age 13
years old and younger (Loeber, Farrington, & Petechuk, 2003). One in 12 arrests was for
violent behavior. Youth referred to the juvenile court system at age 13 and younger are more
likely than youth over age 13 years to become chronic offenders. As these statistics
continue to rise, and media attention increases surrounding high profile cases of violence in
schools, a need for awareness and prevention has become the focus for law enforcement
personnel, community leaders, and school leaders. The goal is to combat the youth violence
and juvenile delinquency problem by intervening early and offering awareness programming
in a variety of community settings, including schools (Hernández & Seem, 2004).

The presence of gangs in the school setting doubled from 1985 to 1995 (Brinson, et
al., 2004). In the most recent biennial School Crime Supplement to the Bureau of Justice
Statistics (BJS), the National Crime Victimization Survey completed in 2005 revealed 24% of all students (ages 12-18 years) reported the presence of gangs in their school during the last six months. Gang presence among suburban youth increased 17% from 2003 to 2005. In rural settings, the increase was 33% from 2003 to 2005. In 2005, 36% of students in urban settings reported gang activity in their schools. In the Southeast region of the U.S., there were approximately 9,871 gangs in 2005. The percentage of state and local law enforcement agencies reporting gang activity in their jurisdiction increased from 50% in 2004 to 68% in 2008 (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2009).

In schools, gangs are involved in harassment, vandalism, recruitment of new members, and illegal activities that may lead to violence. Gang membership in and of itself is not a crime; however, gang members may be involved in crime-related activities. Gang presence in schools adversely impacts the school environment, amount of learning accomplished and perception of safety by the staff, students, and community (Brinson, et al., 2004). Unfortunately, what has not changed is the introduction and implementation of discipline policies or educational programming related to gang activity on campus. Nor has the role of professional school counselors been addressed in policies or procedures as they relate to their role as an instrument of change in the school setting.

Research findings support the implementation of preventative intervention as the best means for combating crime and preventing gang activity (Loeber, et al., 2003). Early intervention is essential. Thus, preventive programming should start in elementary school.
Preventive programming may focus on the child, the family, or the school and community. One of the many functions a professional school counselor fills in a school setting is the delivery of such programming (Bonebrake & Borgers, 1984; Furlong, Atkinson, & Janoff, 1979; Miller, 1989; Schmidt, 1999; Sears, 1993). Osher and Warger (1998) suggested that counselors lead the efforts in a school setting for the proposal and adoption of guidance programming designed to provide systemic change within the school setting. Professional school counselors may play an instrumental role in delivering gang prevention and intervention programming because they are strategically positioned to help develop social skills groups, conflict resolution, and peer mediation programs, classroom guidance focused on preventing bullying, and promoting community wide gang awareness and prevention (Hernández & Seem, 2004; Parks, 1995).

Though professional school counselors may be suited to lead efforts related to gang intervention and prevention, they need to possess a degree of efficacy in order to be competent enough to take on the challenge. Currently, evidence-based data are lacking regarding the role of professional school counselors in this area. Evidence is also lacking in relation to school climate and professional development and/or educational programming designed to provide professional school counselors with the information and tools to recognize and cope with the presence of gangs in the school setting. In order to emphasize the importance of gang prevention in the school setting, it is necessary to look at the role of the counselors and the confidence they feel in delivering gang prevention programming.
Professional school counselors may lack the skills to deliver programming specific to one unique population because graduate training programs focus on developing generic counseling techniques based on a variety of counseling theories. Consequently, there is little attention to specific skill sets and counselor efficacy in working with unique populations (Bandura, 1977). These circumstances highlight the need for professional development after the completion of one's graduate school training (Kreiser, Ham, Wiggers, & Feldstein, 1991).

**Significance of the Study**

The school counseling profession has evolved for over 100 years. When first introduced, the primary function of school counselors was viewed as providing vocational guidance. Recently, professional school counselors are expected to provide comprehensive developmental programming and interventions designed to support the mission of the school. As the professional school counselor's role evolves from internal or external stimulus, so should the research being conducted. Knowing how the role is defined and how professional development continues is helpful in understanding more fully the evolution and current state of school counseling as a profession.

The professional literature about counselor development has largely focused on graduate students and counseling professionals working outside of the school setting (Howard, Inman, & Altman, 2006; Jennings & Skovholt, 1999; Mullenbach & Skovholt, 2004; Reising & Daniels, 1983; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2001; Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992). Further, peer reviewed research on the role of the school counselor demonstrates dissonance
in the perceived and actual role of the professional school counselor (Bonebrake & Borgers, 1984; Brott & Myers, 1999; Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Furlong, et al., 1979; Helms & Ibrahim, 1983; Miller, 1989). Although the professional associations, accrediting bodies, and training programs have defined the profession of school counseling through their own lens, the literature indicates that what counselors actually do in the school setting does not always reflect what has been identified as the best practices in school counseling nor does it match what counselors were trained to expect in the school setting (Brott & Myers, 1999; Dahir, 2004; Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Sears, 1993; Tennyson, Miller, Skovholt, & Williams, 1989).

**Evolving role.** The common theme throughout the articles on counselor identity and development is the disconnect between practice and training and that professional development is fluid and cyclical (Brott & Myers, 1999; Hogan, 1964; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). The perceived and actual role of professional school counselors is dependent upon a number of influences, including school leadership, parental perceptions and the perception of fellow counselors, all of which impact the role and professional development of school counselors.

Although school counselors seemingly have an important role in the school community, the specifics of the role are often not clearly defined beyond the generic job description. A primary determinant of the role the school counselor plays is the principal's expectations of the professional school counselor. A comparison of training and
responsibilities for principals and school counselors seems to point to inevitable conflict in practice (Kaplan, 1995). The process of defining one's professional role may further illuminate differences between school counselors and principals. An investigation of these differences may contribute to an understanding of the role and professional development of the school counselor. Defining the role and opportunities for professional development informs choices and decisions that impact the daily delivery of professional services to students.

Incongruence in the role of PSCs is apparent when evaluating what is advocated by PSC training programs and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and the actual duties most PSCs are performing on a daily basis (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Divergence in what is advocated and what is the reality of many PSCs has created a pervasive professional culture of role ambiguity and personal and inter-personal conflict (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). This level of ambiguity has led to increased work related stress and further compounds the role perception of the school counselor. Reising and Daniels (1983) noted “counselor training...arises from changing trainee characteristics and needs” (p. 235). As the needs of students change and the role of school counselors evolve, it is important for counselor training programs and school based professional development changes to meet the needs of both students and professional school counselors.

**Professional development.** The literature on a counselor's professional development has focused on trainees, supervisors, and therapists-counselors (Hogan, 1964; Loganbill,
Predominantly, the literature supports stage models of development and demonstrates the increase in counselors' expertise over the course of their professional career. Little attention has been paid to the professional working years beyond graduate school and especially lacking is the impact of critical incidents on the professional school counselor's development (Howard, et al., 2006).

Sussman (1995) suggested that training programs historically have been remiss in preparing students for the occupational hazards of their future work. More effective education would help to normalize events confronted in the early years of professional practice. It is of utmost importance that faculty, faculty supervisors and local school districts keep current about the trends and developments in the school counseling field and school environment in order to provide the instruction and training necessary to prepare competent PSCs (Hayes, et al., 1996).

Brott and Myers' (1999) international study identified the dissonance between training and counselor preparation and the reality of the work environment as "a major theme that is repeated throughout the literature related to the professionalization of school counseling" (p. 340). Providing quality training for professional counselors to work in a school setting is a responsibility and a challenge, yet it is both critical and imperative if they are to be prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century student (Murphy & Kaffenberg, 2007).
Caldarella, Sharpnack, Loosli, and Merrell (1996) found school counselors do not feel adequately trained or equipped to deal with the level of gang-related activity in their schools; further, almost half had no training whatsoever in gang-related issues. Gang intervention and prevention has become a necessary part of the school’s academic and guidance programming (Caldarella, et al., 1996). Working with troubled youth is necessary and it makes more sense to take a proactive and preventive approach than to react to a gang-related crisis on campus (Sue & Sue, 2003). However, ASCA’s model focuses on primary prevention programming and does not support the needs of students in gangs to receive direct, secondary preventive services to minimize the consequences of gang involvement (Roark, 1987).

Consistent with findings by Ibrahim, Helms, and Thompson (1983) counselors may be apathetic in their desire to work with students in gangs based on their competency level. Further, Ibrahim, et al. (1983) reported “feelings of helplessness caused by confusion regarding the specific role of the counselor” (p. 597). The PSC’s perceived lack of competency and role confusion for working with students in gangs in the school setting further compounds an already growing need for training. This need is not being met by counselor training programs, and this deficiency may be in part because training programs are not directed to provide multicultural training for the development of competencies related to working with students in gangs.

Scholars have suggested that critical incidents are significant learning moments (Howard, et al., 2006). However, the focus has been on the impact of personal
developmental (graduation, marriages, birth of child) and professional stages of such incidents and not specific, actual events, like witnessing acts of violence in schools. Skovholt and McCarthy (1988) suggested, “A major criterion for determining whether an event constitutes a critical incident is whether it is perceived by the individual as having had an impact on her or his work” (p. 69).

As gang membership increases nationally, the presence of gang members will continue to expand in the public school setting and in the local community. Without clear district policies to ensure a safe school climate and programming designed for prevention and intervention, gang activity on school campuses will continue to create an unsafe environment (Kingery, Coggeshall, Alford, 1998). Because of their training in individual and group processes, professional school counselors are in a unique position to offer programming to increase gang awareness on campus among staff members, and conduct individual and group counseling sessions focused on gang prevention and gang intervention.

Given the lack of available information on the professional development of school counselors, a grounded theory study is currently needed to "get close to [the professional development of school counselors] to know what is going on in it" (Patton, 2002, p. 125). The cumulative professional development of school counselors may have a profound influence on their readiness to work with students who are gang members and may demonstrate the need for training. Professional development serves as a frame of reference from which individuals base professional action or inaction. Without a working knowledge
and framework for intervention and prevention, professional school counselors are left without the tools to be effective in combating gang presence in the schools.

This study's goal was to explore the role professional school counselors can play in reaching students in their schools before school-aged students become gang involved. Results from this study may inform school leaders of the need for a programming framework designed for professional school counselors to implement. An additional goal for the present study was to investigate the need for school districts to develop clear expectations detailing the role of the professional school counselor in working with students in gangs.

**Purpose of the Study**

Existing research provided a historical context to place the present study. The purpose of the present study was to explore school administrators and professional school counselors’ perceptions of existing procedures, role definition, and training opportunities in place to inform the PSC’s work and competency needs for working with students in gangs. In order to explore the role professional school counselors may play in working with students in gangs, it was important to first address their professional development needs and what, if any, role the school counselor plays in their school’s efforts for gang intervention.

Because of an apparent lack of professional development opportunities, professional school counselors may be inclined to seek out independent learning opportunities to inform their practice in moments of critical needs. Because existing research focused on the stages of professional development over the career span, there was an apparent lack of research on
how critical incidents or unique populations impact the development of professional school counselors. This study sought to enhance existing research on the professional development of counselors by expanding the scope of inquiry from merely developmental stages into the exploration of how unique populations impact the counselor's development in order to guide practice in working with students in gangs.

A grounded theory study offers an opportunity for better understanding the role of professional school counselors and the phases of inquiry engaged to build competency in their work with students in gangs. From this knowledge, school based and school district leaders may review or design discipline and intervention policies related to gang activity in the school setting; establish procedures for the role professional school counselors may play in prevention, intervention or suppression through the development of programming and guidelines for interaction with students in gangs; and develop training opportunities for school staff members. Knowledge gained may also inform readers if any alternative roles are expected or needed of the professional school counselor to support school district policies, procedures, and programming for a safer school environment.

**Overview of Approach**

Creswell (1998) stated, “The best studies have a strong inquiry procedure, and this procedure can be gained through engaging in field studies…” (p. 27). For the present study, a grounded theory research design was used to explore the professional, lived experiences of professional school counselors as it relates to their work with students in gangs. Corbin and
Strauss (2008) noted a goal of grounded theory is "to develop knowledge that will guide practice" (p. 11). The purpose of the present study was to propose a grounded theory that would contribute to the understanding of professional school counselor professional development needs, as well as the role they may play in working with students in gangs.

Grounded theory is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents as it is discovered, developed and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis. The purpose of grounded theory studies is to discover and reveal experiences of individuals and groups. An effort to discover the participant’s perceptions and experiences led to the use of open-ended interview questions to maximize the use of memories and recollections in order to reveal the experiences of professional school counselors (Reinharz, 1992). Experiences and perceptions were sought out; therefore, the grounded theory method of qualitative research is warranted.

Based on the results from a pilot study that are reported in Chapter Three and using the grounded theory method, the idea that the presence of gangs as defining experiences in the professional development of school counselors and their role with this specific population of student-clients was examined.
Research Questions

Interview questions were standardized, open-ended, and are based on the following research questions:

1. How do educational and/or professional experiences inform professional school counselors of the presence of gangs in the school setting?
2. How do the educational and/or professional experiences of professional school counselor’s influence their willingness to work with students in gangs?
3. What role do professional school counselors play in preventing gang activity in the school setting?
4. What changes need to occur to enhance counselors’ willingness to work with students in gangs?

Definition of Terms

Following is a list of terms essential to understand the professional jargon used within this dissertation on the PSC’s work with students in gangs. They are defined here by the author or as noted in the citations.

1. Efficacy is the belief one possesses certain knowledge and skills, as well as the capability to take necessary action to overcome problems and to succeed under the stresses and pressures of life (Bandura, 1977).
2. A gang is a group or association of three or more persons possessing a common identifying sign, symbol, or name who individually or collectively engage in, or
have engaged in, criminal activity that creates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation in a community. *Criminal activity* includes juvenile acts that if committed by an adult would be a crime (Goldstein & Kodluboy, 1998).

3. *Gang intervention* refers to school based activities directed at youth who are currently in a gang.

4. *Gang prevention* refers to school based activities directed at youth who are not currently gang members.

5. *Gang suppression* refers to the efforts of school districts to enforce school based policies to remove students in gangs from the school setting.

6. *Professional development* are those experiences leading to the completion of a degree program or workshops and seminars enhancing the professional knowledge of professional school counselors.

7. *Professional school counselors (PSC)* are those professionals employed by the school district possessing a master’s degree minimally with a permanent license in school counseling and designates an individual who is engaged in the practice of school counseling (ASCA, 1995).

8. *School leaders (SL)* are those professionals employed by the school district possessing a master’s degree minimally with a permanent license in school administration. The term school leader also includes those individuals working as
decision makers at the central office level. Job titles may include the following: director, principal, or assistant principal.

9. *School/climate safety* is the effective school-wide management of disruptive behaviors and safety for students and staff (Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin, 1998; Scott, 2001). Ideally, it is an environment that fosters and enhances student learning, while maintaining a safe environment for those that both learn and work there.

10. *Validation* is the process by which local law enforcement come to the school and record demographic information, take pictures of tattoos, brands or other body marks consistent with those young people in gangs and recover notebooks, book bags, rosaries, and, etc with gang paraphernalia or gang information (e.g., gang dictionaries, gang constitutions) inside. These items are taken from the student and their name and other demographic information is recorded with the local law enforcement in a system called Gangnet.

**Organization of Chapters**

Chapter One consists of an introduction to the topic of interest, the rationale for completing the study, definition of terms utilized throughout the dissertation, a statement of significance, and a brief overview of the qualitative approach used. This section on the organization of chapters concludes Chapter One. Chapter Two is a literature review and critique of the literature and includes the following: the definition of gang, reasons for joining, gang structure, identifying current and potential gang members, and counselor
specific school based approaches to intervention and prevention. Following the brief
description of counselor specific school based approaches, there is a review of the literature
on professional school counselor's role, as well as a review and critique of two existing
models of counselor development. Chapter Three includes the qualitative procedures that
were utilized in this study, and provides information about the participants in the study, the
process for data collection, and explains the trustworthiness of the data. Limitations of the
proposed method will be revealed at the end of Chapter Three.

The results of the study are presented in Chapter Four. Chapter Five discusses the
results and gives a summary of all data. An evaluation of the study and the author’s own
interpretation are given in relation to the original research questions. Limitations of the study
and implications for future research and practice are also discussed.
CHAPTER 2
Review of Related Literature

Defining Gang Structure

Definitions. A gang is a group or association of three or more persons possessing a common identifying sign, symbol, or name who individually or collectively engage in, or have engaged in, criminal activity that creates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation in a community. Criminal activity includes juvenile acts that if committed by an adult would be a crime (Goldstein & Kodluboy, 1998).

Reasons for joining. Landre, Miller, and Porter (1997) propose that youth may affiliate themselves with gangs as a means of fulfilling needs not met in their environment. Gangs offer a sense of security and belonging. Oftentimes, gangs function as families with older members filling the need for an older sibling and mentor (Horowitz, 1987). Older members will protect the fledgling members from harm, while introducing a neophyte member to the business of being in a gang. The business of a gang may include graffiti, intimidation of nonmembers, rival gang fights, violent crimes, drug trafficking, and recruiting new members. In the family structure of a gang, new members find the family they have lacked in their personal, home environment while also finding role models (Horowitz, 1987; Landre, et al., 1997; Parks, 1995).

Gang members find an identity within the gang structure (Landre, et al., 1997; Parks, 1995). Each member has a role to execute (e.g. drug runner, fighter, and recruiter). Student
gang members may lack a sense of identity through traditional school based groups (e.g. clubs, athletics, volunteer work, extracurricular activities), and the gang provides its members with an identity or sense of self. Gangs also offer youth an opportunity for fellowship with other youth, perhaps in similar personal situations.

Within gangs, members find a sense of respect and honor through intimidation. Members demonstrate allegiance through clothing, tattoos, hand signals, and group affiliation, and each of these marks of identification is overtly designed to instill a sense of fear in nonmembers, community members, and classmates. The sense or rush of perceived excitement gained from intimidation may serve as a means of escalating activity and further members’ need to seek out more deviant behaviors in order to meet their need for excitement (Landre, et al., 1997; Spergel, 1992; Williams, 1992).

Finally, youth may become involved in gangs as a form of allegiance to biological family members. It is not uncommon to find gang members with older siblings, parents, uncles, aunts or cousins affiliated with gangs. Older family members may accept the younger generation affiliating with gangs as a demonstration of loyalty to family (Landre, et al., 1997; Parks, 1995). Additionally, the illicit activities in which gang members are involved (e.g. robbery and drug trafficking) may provide financial assistance to families struggling financially, thereby making it acceptable to be a member of a gang (Horowitz, 1987).
**Gang structure.** According to Landre, et al. (1997), gangs are highly structured organizations with each member playing a role and filling a need or function within the group. Each member has a place based on role, tenure in group, and status based on gang activities. At the core of each gang is the leadership. *Leadership* members are the decision making members. They provide guidance and directives leading the gang members in order to further the growth of the gang (Landre, et al., 1997; Williams, 1992).

Next are *hardcore* members, and they are key to the gang’s existence. They are often the most active members; their activities are the most lethally violent; and the violence is designed to achieve material gain for the gang’s existence (Goldstein & Kodluboy, 1998).

Fringe, associates, and clique members (Landre, et al., 1997) may be grouped under the subgroup of peripherals (Goldstein & Kodluboy, 1998). *Peripheral* members may float in and out of the gang’s structure. They may be a part of some activities, but not others. Participation decisions may be made by senior gang members, or it may be an individual choice. Peripheral membership may last weeks, months or years.

*Wannabes* are the youngest members of a gang (Landre, et al., 1997; Williams, 1992). They aspire to be regular members and gain this status by performing tasks to demonstrate allegiance. Most often, Wannabe activities are less violent and are designed to earn a reputation within the gang.

Finally, there are *Couldbes* (Landre, et al., 1997; Williams, 1992) or *Potentials* (Goldstein & Kodluboy, 1998) members of a gang. Couldbes or Potentials are those
members living within a gang’s territory or neighborhood. They are not members and do not perform any activities or tasks on behalf of the gang. However, if recruited, Couldbes or Potentials may align themselves with a gang in order to gain acceptance or protection in their neighborhood.

**Identifying and responding to potential gang members.** Identifying gang members in a community may include knowing gang graffiti, dress, patterns, signs and symbols (Arthur & Erickson, 1992; Landre, et al., 1997; Spergel, 1992). In a school setting, gang members and potential gang members may demonstrate similar overt patterns of dress and graffiti seen in a community. Dress patterns are utilized to demonstrate collective identity, and the dress patterns are often not contrary to school based dress codes (Goldstein & Kodluboy, 1998).

Dress patterns are a clear method designed to demonstrate gang membership; however, there may be more signs of gang membership easily overlooked. These covert signs may be seen in an academic setting, home setting or through social interaction in the community. In isolation, any of these identifiers alone may not indicate gang membership; however, collectively, they may demonstrate a need to intervene on behalf of student and staff safety in a school setting (Arthur & Erickson, 1992; Landre, et al., 1997; Spergel & Grossman, 1997).

Signs to look for in a school setting may include poor academic progress in school and/or lack of grade promotion, lack of interest in school activities, unexplained absences or truancy, drawing graffiti on projects, desks, walls or assignments, and peer group affiliations.
Frequent conflicts with students resulting in disciplinary action may also demonstrate the potential for gang activities (Arthur & Erickson, 1992; Landre, et al., 1997; Spergel, 1992).

Students may also use more overt signs to demonstrate their membership. Hand signs may be adopted by the gang to communicate allegiance with other members and demonstrate membership to rival gang members. Students may adopt gang attire in their dress patterns (Arthur & Erickson, 1992). This attire may include team jerseys with gang colors, professional or college team names as acronyms for gang allegiance (e.g. UNC for United Nation of Crips) or the manner in which clothing is worn (e.g. cuffed pants, pants leg tucked into sock or shoes). Tattoos, whether professional, homemade or created through pencil eraser burns, are signs of gang membership. Tattoos are often used as a rite of passage or initiation into full gang membership (Landre, et al., 1997).

In speaking with a student during a counseling interview, a professional school counselor may learn that a student has large blocks of unsupervised time. Unsupervised time allows youths to participate in gang activities without being caught by parent or guardian. Often, the unsupervised time is because of parent/guardian work schedules, a perception that the youth is responsible enough to remain at home unattended, or travel responsibilities of the parents’ work (Arthur & Erickson, 1992; Cornell & Loper, 1998; Landre et al., 1997; Spergel, 1992).

Parents may contact professional school counselors to ask for assistance in working with students at home because there is a significant amount of conflict occurring. Conflicts may
arise between youths and adults or youths and siblings, or youths and neighborhood youths (Arthur & Erickson, 1992; Cornell & Loper, 1998; Landre, et al., 1997; Spergel & Grossman, 1997). Professional school counselors may use this information in order to develop groups related to conflict resolution, diversity training or development of appropriate social skills (Parks, 1995; Riley & McDaniel, 2000).

Parents may also call to alert professional school counselors or other personnel of frequent contact by gang members with law enforcement officers. This same information may come from school resource officers (SROs) and school leaders because they are most often involved in school-based violence discipline. School based leaders may ask professional school counselors to see students once they return from a suspension as an additional layer of intervention. Additionally, professional school counselors may be asked to communicate with probation officers in order to prevent further action by law enforcement agencies for students on probation (Horowitz, 1987; Landre, et al., 1997; Spergel & Grossman, 1997).

**Professional School Counselor-Specific School Based Approaches**

**Educate self.** Professional school counselors are encouraged to seek out opportunities to learn more about gang activity in the school setting through consultation with school based law enforcement, workshops and professional conferences (Larson & Busse, 1998). Additionally, a number of communities are implementing gang awareness programs for the general public (Arthur & Erickson, 1992; Spergel & Grossman, 1997).
Professional school counselors may benefit from attending these sessions in order to recognize community based gang activities being reflected in the school setting.

**Professional school counseling practice.** Professional school counselors are encouraged to establish quality relationships with students in order to learn of the potential for gang related activities in school (Arthur & Erickson, 1992). Students may tell a trusted adult of the potential for conflict in order to escape further disciplinary action or to protect peers. The information counselors gain from these individual settings should be shared with an administrator immediately in order to avoid a disruption in the learning environment of the school.

Additionally, when positive rapport has been established, a professional school counselor may be able to ask questions of the gang affiliated youth in order to learn more about the gang structure itself (Arthur & Erickson, 1992; Parks, 1995). It is important to note gang membership is not illegal; however, the activities gangs engage in may be illegal. Counselors should not be afraid to ask the hard questions: What are the real reasons you joined? Who are your friends? Additionally, counselors may find it useful to ask about peer groups, friendship patterns and whether there is a long history of friendship, perhaps going back to elementary school. Confronting irrational thinking is an additional intervention a counselor may utilize in an individual counseling session (Arthur & Erickson, 1992; Spergel & Grossman, 1997). Students join in order to make money, gain respect or seek protection, and counselors may be able to confront these ideas within the counseling session.
Conflict resolution. Adolescents most often resolve conflict in the same manner that conflict resolution is modeled in their home environments. Many children are raised in less than ideal, unstable family system environments. In these dysfunctional environments, conflicts at home are resolved through physical and verbal abuse and, in extreme cases, through the use of weapons (Brinson, et al., 2004). Children in these homes are exposed to socially inappropriate problem solving approaches, and these dysfunctional lessons dictate their reaction to conflict in the school setting. Inappropriate behaviors are rewarded by peers in the school setting through increased visibility, status shifts and demonstrated fear by peers (Landre, et al., 1997; Spergel, 1992). Depending upon their backgrounds, parents will often defend inappropriate action by their children as standing up for self, nuclear or extended family, or neighborhood.

Professional school counselors may implement conflict resolution programming as a part of the school counseling program. One of the most common conflict resolution strategies in the school setting is peer mediation (Arthur & Erickson, 1992; Brinson, et al., 2004; Parks, 1995). In this model, students are trained to mediate peer conflicts among classmates. The training may occur during a class period, after school or as a series of guidance based lessons. Peer mediation is a low cost method for allowing peers to train peers in appropriate conflict resolution skills. Peer mediation groups involve a limited number of students, and each year new members are peer selected and trained as senior members graduate. It is noteworthy to mention that the peer mediators should reflect the
diversity of the school population (Brinson, et al., 2004; Parks, 1995; Spergel & Grossman, 1997).

**Collaboration.** Professional school counselors may gain further insight into community based gang activity through collaborating with local law enforcement agencies (Parks, 1995; Spergel & Grossman, 1997; Riley & McDaniel, 2000). Specifically, school resource officers (SROs) are valuable resources in identifying the nuances of local gang activity with national gang affiliations. SROs, along with professional school counselors, may offer faculty and parent training, collaborate on classroom large-group guidance, and conduct group counseling designed to educate the school community on the presence of gangs in the school setting. SROs and professional school counselors may work together to identify those students in need of assistance. When working together, SROs and professional school counselors may meet many of the personal, social and academic needs of a student body (Ramsey, Rust, & Sobel, 2003; Spergel & Grossman, 1997).

Because of their knowledge of counseling strategies, professional school counselors may utilize the gang expertise of SROs in order to implement established programs in the school setting (Esbensen, 2001; Parks, 1995; Spergel & Grossman, 1997). For example, the Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) program was designed to demonstrate the negative consequences of gang activity. Sessions are conducted in a group setting. These sessions are taught by uniformed law enforcement officers in the school setting. The goal of the program is to demonstrate the negative consequences of gang activity.
Counselors may co-lead these sessions with SROs in order to provide two caring adults in the school setting prepared to confront the irrational ideas associated with gang affiliation, teach social skills, demonstrate appropriate conflict resolution behaviors through role playing and present the legal consequences that gang activity may entail (Esbensen, 1999; Parks, 1995).

Policy shifts. Addressing the school climate through a survey research study design and using interviews of stakeholders is a proactive way for professional school counselors to address safety concerns and school violence issues (Hernández & Seem, 2004). In addition to demonstrating an innovative approach to learning the concerns of parents, students, and staff members, professional school counselors demonstrate their leadership abilities by taking the lead on issues directly impacting the school environment. Interview questions may include administrative responses to discipline, classroom management techniques by teachers, district and school based regulations related to discipline and school violence, response of support staff members and counselors to mediate and provide relevant counseling programming and empowerment levels of staff members. From the responses, the professional school counselor, along with the school improvement team, may evaluate the perceived and actual needs of the staff in order to address school violence. Feedback will allow professional school counselors and school leaders to develop programming relevant to training staff members to deal with potentially violent situations and allow counselors to develop group counseling and guidance lessons to serve the needs of the school setting. Additionally, findings may inform school leaders of the need to provide a procedural
framework or procedural policy defining the role of the professional school counselor as it relates to working with students in gangs. Specifically, is there a need to notify parents and family members that a child in their home may be gang involved? When notifying parents, PSCs need to examine how the established process of notifying parents aligns with professional ethical standards for maintaining confidentiality.

Professional school counselors may also advocate for a zero tolerance policy at the school based and district level (Hernández & Seem, 2004). Zero tolerance policies call for immediate action following a school based rule violation (e.g. weapons, drug possession), and consequences are based on predetermined punishments (Howell, 2003). Professional school counselors demonstrating leadership skills, while implementing policies designed to create safe school environments, promote student academic and personal success and in turn assist the school in meeting its educational goals (Hernández & Seem, 2004).

**Conceptual Models of Counselor Professional Development**

On a daily basis, professional school counselors (PSCs) are expected to perform a variety of activities designed to enhance the academic, career, psychological, physical, and social development of all students. Students may self-refer or are referred to school counselors by parents, community members or school staff members to receive assistance with a number of issues. Through counseling activities including, but not limited to, career planning, college planning and applications, academic counseling, course selections scheduling, developing decision-making skills, parent conferences, group counseling, and
counseling for personal/social issues, PSCs serve and advocate for the students on their caseload.

Compounding the already demanding work of PSCs is the increasing number of violent acts on a school campus. The presence of gangs in the school setting doubled from 1985 to 1995 (Brinson, et al., 2004). In the most recent biennial School Crime Supplement to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), the National Crime Victimization Survey completed in 2005 revealed 24% of all students (ages 12-18 years) reported the presence of gangs in their schools during the previous six months. Suburban youth reported a 17% increase from 2003 to 2005. Students in rural settings reported a 33% increase from 2003 to 2005. In 2005, 36% of students in urban settings reported gang activity in their schools. In the Southeast region of the United States of America, there are approximately 9,871 gangs. The percentage of state and local law enforcement agencies reporting gang activity in their jurisdiction has increased from 50% in 2004 to 68% in 2008 (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2009).

During school hours, gang members attending school are involved in harassment, vandalism, recruitment of new members and illegal activities that may lead to violence. Gang membership in and of itself is not a crime; however, gang members may be involved in crime-related activities. Gang presence in schools adversely impacts the school environment, amount of learning accomplished and perception of safety by the staff, students and community (Brinson, et al., 2004).
Campbell and Dahir (1997) stated, "School counselors work with all students, school staff, families, and members of the community as an integral part of the education program"(p. 8). Graduate school counseling training programs and comprehensive school guidance programs are designed to prepare PSCs to competently meet the academic, personal, social, and career needs of all students (Pelsma & Krieshok, 2003). However, do graduate school counseling training programs provide school counselors with the necessary education and training to adequately prepare them to meet the academic, personal, social, and career needs of students in gangs? If not, how are PSCs trained to develop the skills necessary to identify gang presence in their school community? Are PSCs perceived as valued, contributing members of the school’s efforts to combat and intervene with students in gangs?

From a counselor advocacy and social justice perspective, PSCs are to stand in support of all students and create opportunities for equal access and success by serving as collaborators, consultants, and change agents to bring about positive change in the entire school (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Pelsma & Krieshok, 2003). The professional literature is rich with research that examines the roles and functions of clinical and community counselors, and research specific to school counselors' career professional growth and development is almost non-existent (Brott & Myers, 1999). Further, the present review of the literature demonstrated a critical lack of research on the training and role of PSCs to adequately and competently work with students in gangs. Could this lack of advocacy stem
from feelings of incompetence because of the lack of training in school counselor education programs (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004)? Does it demonstrate a lack of formal or informal professional development pursuits by the working PSCs? Or is it a reflection of the role PSCs play in the school environment?

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) does not specify what educational programs should teach (ASCA, 2005). The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2009) offers that students pursuing a school counseling specialization must demonstrate knowledge, skill, and practice in the following eight domains: (a) foundations of school counseling, (b) counseling, prevention, and intervention, (c) diversity and advocacy, (d) assessment, (e) research and evaluation, (f) academic development, (g) collaboration and consultation, and (h) leadership. Instruction for the clinical component lists 600 clock hours in a school setting, yet there is no mention of faculty supervisors needing training in the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005) or an understanding of the contextual dimensions of the school setting.

Providing quality supervision and training for the professional school counselors and counselors in training (graduate school) is a responsibility and a challenge, yet it is critical if they are to be prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century student (Murphy & Kaffenberg, 2007), making it of utmost importance that faculty supervisors keep current on the trends and developments in the professional school counselors work environment (Hayes, Dagley, & Horney, 1996).
**The professional school counselor.** The designation professional school counselor was introduced in 1995 by The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) as the preferred title for individuals engaged in the practice of school counseling (ASCA, 1995). Professional school counselors (PSCs) are certified/licensed professionals with a master’s degree or higher in counseling/school counseling. PSCs are perceived as being uniquely qualified to address the developmental needs of all students as a part of the whole educational system and mission of a school system and/or individual school. PSCs are encouraged to deliver a comprehensive school counseling program designed to encourage and enhance all students’ academic, career and personal/social development and help all students in maximizing personal achievement (ASCA, 2005). School counseling is an evolving professional field, affected by state and national policies, economics and school reform movements (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; Paisley & McMahon, 2001).

Because the profession has continuously evolved since its inception in 1908, it is important to acknowledge the history that has shaped the school counseling profession and the role of the school counselor. Currently, there is a need to explore current trends in education, from inside and outside of the school, that are impacting the role of the school counselor in order to further the research based on the historical context of the school counseling profession. To understand the professional development of school counselors, insights must be developed and explored, processes need to be discovered, and theories
proposed that address the professional development of school counselors and the role they play in the school setting.

**Historical perspective.** The history of school counseling in the United States is typically traced to Boston. In 1908, Frank Parsons helped to establish the Vocation Bureau (Gladding, 2000; Gysbers & Henderson, 2001). Within the next few years, the Boston public school system appointed individuals, usually teachers, to serve as vocational counselors in every school in the system. Duties of these counselors included encouraging students to stay in school, talking to failing students, and gathering occupational information, along with other tasks.

In 1918, the Bureau of Education (now the Department of Education) stated “the goal of education was effective living in seven areas of human activity: health, fundamental mental processes, home membership, vocations, citizenship, worthy use of leisure time, and ethical character” (Shertzer & Stone, 1981, p. 64). Guidance was born as an attempt by early educators to implement these seven principles (Shertzer & Stone, 1981). Current school improvement agendas and guidance programming may be traced to these seven guiding principles.

In the 1930s, the first theory of counseling was developed by E.G. Williamson and his colleagues in Minnesota. Along with theory development, there was a shift in the counseling profession with the emphasis on educational guidance rather than solely vocational information. By the early 1960s, there was widespread support for counselors in
schools, and the revisions to the National Defense Act provided funding for expansion of programs at the elementary and junior high/middle school levels. In the 1980s, the role of the school counselor changed again, and the focus became the development of comprehensive school counseling programs (Gladding, 2000; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). This movement continues today with the development and implementation of the ASCA National Model and its focus on accountability data and process evaluation (ASCA, 2005).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, evolved from the education reform movement which originated in 1991 as the Educate America Act and was reauthorized in 1994 as the Educate America Act of 2000. In 1997, the Education Trust Act of 1997 focused on the school counselor’s role in closing the achievement gap, and among its initiatives was developing national standards for a comprehensive school counseling program (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). Presently, school counseling programs and professional school counselors continue to play an essential role in school improvement efforts, including closing the achievement gap, with a focus on primary prevention (ASCA, 2005). School counselors are leaders, advocates, collaborators, principal researchers and data analyzers, and agents of systematic change (Education Trust, 1997).

The transition to the current model for comprehensive, developmental and collaborative programming began when the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) adopted and introduced its national model (ASCA, 2005). Prior to this national model, a variety of evolving counseling programs guided professional school counselors in
school-based guidance programming development. One of these models was the Parsonian Model of guidance. At its core, it was a vocational guidance program based on the work of Frank Parsons in 1908. Individuals and jobs were analyzed and compared to match a student with a career, and thus the student’s post secondary plan was developed and discussed (Shertzer & Stone, 1981).

Another model, developed in 1932, was known as Guidance as Identical with Education. This model “emphasized working with secondary schools and organized a series of courses for preparing counselors” (Shertzer & Stone, 1981, p. 63). The term “educational guidance” was introduced to describe the help given to students choosing an area of study and to address students’ academic and school concerns. Schools, according to this model, existed to guide students in both individual and cooperative activities defined by the seven principles of human activity (Shertzer & Stone, 1981).

The Guidance as Distribution and Adjustment was another early model for defining the role of the school counselor. This model viewed guidance as a process to help students cope with school and life. This model also extended its service focus beyond vocational concerns and included areas such as recreational interests and postsecondary planning. Shifting from a vocational focus to include “processes of distribution and adjustment of pupils” led to a refining of the guidance process in the mid 1920’s and extended through the 1930s (Shertzer & Stone, 1981, p. 65). Distribution was concerned with student goal setting and finding suitable, realistic careers. Adjustment was concerned with helping students
adjust when there was a disconnect between self-concept and the environment (Shertzer & Stone, 1981).

Another evolution in guidance programming occurred with the emergence of the Guidance as Decision Making Model in the 1960s. This model viewed the guidance process as more than meeting the vocational needs of students and was concerned with the whole student (Shertzer & Stone, 1981). In this model, guidance is “the help given in making informed choices and adjustments, and in solving problems in critical situations in order to ensure continual development of the ability for self direction” (Shertzer & Stone, 1981, p. 68). Additional models were developed through the years including the Guidance as a Constellation of Services Model, Developmental Guidance Model, and Guidance as Social Reconstruction Model (Shertzer & Stone, 1981). This collection of models has shaped and led to the evolution of the school counselor’s professional role while providing the rationale for the placement of counselors in the school.

**Role and function of the professional school counselor.** Wrenn (1957) stated that the school counselor is an educator; a generalist in roles in the school; an individual who works with students, parents, and school staff; a person who works with groups and individuals; a person who works with normal development in students; and an individual with specialized training in the areas where he or she serves. The school counselor’s job exists solely within the educational system, whose primary function is to educate the youth of today and prepare them for life in the 21st century. This intertwining of role and setting has a
direct impact on the expectations placed upon school counselors and how the role of the professional school counselor is defined and perceived.

As prescribed by the setting, a primary focus on academic achievement may force school counselors to surrender their role as trained mental health specialists. While mental health concerns still exist in the school setting, school counselors must be ready to function in a variety of roles to support the academic, career and personal/social development of their students (Paisley & McMahon, 2001; Studer and Oberman, 2006).

Paisley and Borders (1995) discussed the role and functions of school counselors, calling the “lack of control that school counselors have” over what they actually do day-to-day “the most overriding issue for the school counseling specialty” (p. 151). Paisley and Borders further pointed out that the role defined for the school counselor comes from a variety of sources, most of which have no direct experience or knowledge in what school counselors do.

Using a regional sample, Helms and Ibrahim (1983) looked at the perceptions of the role of the secondary school counselor. Using the 1977 ASCA statement of the role of the secondary school counselor, Helms and Ibrahim developed a questionnaire given to parents of secondary school students in Connecticut. They found six empirically derived factors: public relations, educational counseling, group counseling, job placement, child/parent counseling and vocational/career counseling. Helms and Ibrahim (1985) repeated the study, giving the same survey to secondary school counselors in Connecticut and found that four of
the six factors remained the same, but that counselors gave more importance to personal/educational counseling and to public relations.

Sandhu and Portes (1995) noted school counselors are among the “least visible school professionals” (p. 11), and with the lack of a visible role in mind, Sandhu and Portes urged school counselors to adopt their suggested model for increasing visibility and positive public relations. The Proactive Model of School Counseling encompasses the development of a school counseling program designed for one's specific school, implementation of that program, designing the structure of school counselor’s role, evaluation methods for the program, and personal and professional development needs of the school counselor. Sandhu and Portes recognized that societal pressures to reform education and school budgetary limits make it all too easy to eliminate school counseling positions. Further, Sandhu and Portes suggested that school counselors be proactive in developing and implementing school counseling programs in order to prevent the loss of school counseling positions.

Gysbers and Henderson (2000) recognized four primary components of a guidance program: guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and system support. They offered suggested allocations for counselor’s time and stated that the school counselor’s role should be defined with input from the counselor’s evaluator to determine the actual percentage of time that should be spent on each component.

More recently, Gysbers and Henderson (2002) stated “school based comprehensive guidance programs are those that have tailored or are tailoring each of the program elements
to their local setting by going through the recommended program development process” (p. 3). They identify ten critical issues that guidance programs face. These ten issues are: developing programs, empowering leaders, identifying and displacing non-guidance activities, involving parents, advocating for a comprehensive guidance program, using technology, evaluating comprehensive programs, evaluating school counselors, enhancing programs and initiating effective programming across cultures (Gysbers & Henderson, 2002).

The American School Counselor Association’s (ASCA, 2005) National Model is far from the first model for school based guidance programming; however, ASCA’s National Model was designed to replace the historically reactive and crisis-oriented school counseling programs (Dahir, 2004). Much like the 1997 comprehensive program model developed by Gysbers and Henderson (2002), this new national model shifted the school counseling programming from a service driven to a data driven, competency based, primary prevention model (Studer, 2006). It includes, among other services, a full spectrum of primary prevention programming designed to meet educational and academic goals for all the students in the school (ASCA, 2005; Dahir, 2004).

The ASCA model incorporates previously defined K-12 standards, addressing what students should know and be able to demonstrate as a result of their participation in a comprehensive school counseling program at the elementary, middle/junior high or high school level (Studer, 2006). ASCA’s model is founded on three widely accepted and respected approaches to program models: comprehensive in nature, developmentally
focused, and data driven (ASCA, 2005; Studer, 2006). The standards confirm the importance of three widely accepted and interrelated areas of student development: academic development, career development, and personal/social development (Campbell & Dahir, 1997).

The four program components are (a) outcome based accountability measures, (b) program delivery system, (c) foundation component, (d) and management of the program itself. The accountability piece consists of program measures, outcome based data, performance standards, and the school counseling program audit. The delivery system consists of the school counselor’s guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and system support. The foundation of the program consists of the counselor’s belief and a mission statement tied to the school’s overall mission and value statements. The management system includes the use of an advisory board, program data, action plans, and calendars or timelines. School counselors are encouraged to provide both prevention and intervention programming and to create a model of collaboration that integrates the expertise of professional school counselors and other stakeholders, including the local business community, community leaders, into a complete program (ASCA, 2005).

ASCA’s National Model was based on data driven educational reform movements and seeks to demonstrate the school counselor’s role and function as a part of a school reform process based on measurable accountability (Brott & Myers, 1999; Clark & Horton-Parker, 2002; Dahir, 2004). Successfully tying the work of school counseling programs to the
mission of school has sought to demonstrate and validate the need for counselors to be in the school(s).

**Professional Development of School Counselors**

Several authors have looked at professional development in general. Hogan (1964) was the first to theorize about the development of counselors. His work focused on the development of the counselor in light of their need for supervision across the stages.

**The four stages of counselor development.** Hogan’s (1964) model for counselor development and supervision has been used as the foundation for other counselor development models. Hogan published a brief article describing four stages (levels) of counselor development. Hogan’s (1964) model includes four stages of counselor development.

During *stage one*, counselor development is influenced by the instructors. Counselors in training will strongly adhere to the methods of theories as demonstrated by instructors or peer role plays. Student counselors may have little insight into their own motivation for becoming a counselor and will struggle to apply the skills learned in training (Hogan, 1964). Students in stage one may be anxious or appear rigid in role plays based on their desire to do counseling the right way (Reising & Daniels, 1983).

During *stage two*, developing counselors struggle with a dependency-autonomy conflict. In their pursuit to find their own individual adaptation for the art of counseling, the students “struggle[s] with insight…[and] varies being overconfident in his new skills to being...
overwhelmed by the responsibility of his [sic] profession” (p. 140). These feelings of overconfidence and being overwhelmed lead to conflict with their earlier dependence in stage one. Students are working towards a merging of the learned theoretical techniques and their own personal style. During this stage, motivation fluctuates. Hogan suggests counselors in training seek personal counseling during this stage to address the ongoing interpersonal conflict of the second stage (Hogan, 1964).

During stage three, the conditional dependency stage, there is a heightened sense of professional self-confidence and more personal insight into one’s motivation for choosing to work as a counselor. With this personal insight comes a stronger sense of professional commitment. When compared to previous stages, motivation is more stable.

During stage four, the master counselor stage, students begin to exercise greater personal autonomy with an awareness of personal limitations. A higher level of insight into one’s own motivation for pursuing the profession is stable. Creativity is a hallmark of stage four (Hogan, 1964).

Hogan’s (1964) model focused on the development of the therapist and how supervision is essential to one’s development as a professional counselor. Hogan recommended different supervisory interventions for each stage, such as teaching, interpretation, support, awareness training (Stage 1); support, exemplifications and ambivalence clarification (Stage 2); sharing, exemplifications, and confrontation (Stage 3); and sharing and mutual confrontation (Stage 4). Hogan did not estimate nor suggest the
length of time taken to move from Stage 1 to Stage 4 but suggested that counselors may cycle in and out of these stages over their professional careers. Hogan did not suggest what might precipitate the recycling process.

Reising and Daniels (1983) studied Hogan’s model. They studied 141 “counseling psychology graduate practicum students, interns, and professional staff” (p.237), using the Counselor Development Questionnaire (Reising & Daniels, 1983) to test the validity of Hogan's model. Their results strongly supported the construct validity of Hogan’s model. They found that anxiety, dependence, focus on technique, and willingness to handle confrontation changed as counselors gained professional experience.

**Stage theory across the professional career.** Studying professional development as counselors cannot be done without looking at the seminal work of Skovholt and Rønnestad. The development of counselors in their professional roles was the subject of the theory advanced by Skovholt and Rønnestad (1992). They proposed a stage theory that was not based on the development of counseling skills through supervision but rather on the levels of expertise from the beginning of a career in counseling through retirement.

Using a 23-item questionnaire, Skovholt and Rønnestad interviewed 100 counselors in Minnesota. The counselors were divided into five groups of 20 people each based on level of education and experience from beginning graduate school students to counselors with 40-plus years of experience. Participants were equally divided by sex (50 men and 50 women), but not by ethnic/cultural diversity since there were 96 Whites and four persons of color.
Participants ranged in age from 24 to 71 years with a mean age of 42.4. Group A consisted of 20 persons who were in their first year of graduate school in counseling or clinical psychology. Group B included 20 students in a doctoral program who had been in graduate school for at least 4 years. Participants in Group C had worked approximately 5 years after completion of their doctorates. Group D had approximately 15 years of post-graduate experience, while Group E had approximately 25 years of experience. Each participant was interviewed for 1 to 1 ½ hours (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992).

Skovholt and Rønnestad used the five levels of proficiency theorized by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) as a basis for their stage model. Skovholt and Rønnestad’s model includes four stages that take place before the completion of graduate training. The first stage, Conventional, occurs before the beginning of a counselor/professional training program, but when the person has begun to try to help others with decision-making and interpersonal relationships. The central task is to use the skills that one naturally possesses and the major affect is sympathy. The second stage, Transition to Professional Training, takes place from the time one decides to enter graduate school through the first year of the graduate training program. The central task is to assimilate and apply information and the major affects are enthusiasm and insecurity. Imitation of Experts is the third stage and takes place during the second or third year of graduate training. The central task is to maintain openness while imitating instructors. A central affect is the initial confusion of the stage and later a calmer sense of self as a professional counselor. The fourth stage is that of Conditional Autonomy.
This stage occurs during the student’s internship experience. The central task is to function as a professional counselor while the major affect is variable confidence (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992).

Subsequent stages in the theory proposed by Skovholt and Rønnestad (1992) take place following graduation and during the professional counselor’s years of professional productivity. The fifth stage is Exploration and encompasses the first two to five years of professional experience. The central task is to explore and the major effects are confidence and anxiety. Integration is the sixth stage and includes the next two to five years with the central task being the development of authenticity of counseling practice, and the major effects are satisfaction and hope. The seventh stage is Individuation. This stage includes the next 10 to 30 years of the counselor’s career. The central task is developing deeper levels of authenticity in the counselor’s practice and the major affects are satisfaction and distress. The eighth and final stage is that of Integrity. Lasting from 1 to 10 years, the central task is preparation for retirement and being oneself. The main affect is acceptance.

Skovholt and Rønnestad’s work has been pivotal to the study of counselor development in the years that followed their 1992 study. Skovholt and Rønnestad have completed studies of counselors at varying degrees of experience, maturity and a variety of job settings. Because much of their research has been limited to largely White participants in Minnesota, it may apply to a limited group of people. However, it does assist in understanding the development of counseling professionals over their careers. The
assumptions about their research and the development of their stage model are applicable to counselor training program development (i.e. college and university counseling programs) and working professional counselors.

In 2001, Rønnewstad and Skovholt (2001) conducted a qualitative follow-up study that focused on reflections of senior psychotherapists and the application of their personal and professional lessons for younger, less experienced colleagues. The researchers interviewed 12 senior therapists who had participated in an earlier study of 100 therapists of all ages. The 12 participants in the 2001 study ranged in age from 61 to 84 years, with a mean age of 74 years. Nine of the participants were men and “all were Caucasian United States citizens” (p. 181). Each participant was interviewed by one or both of the investigators. Interviews were audiotaped and lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours. The 23 interview questions were structured. Each interview was transcribed and reviewed individually by each investigator in order to select pertinent content. In searching for a way to organize the data the researchers sought and organized “content into domains reflecting sources of influence for professional development” (p. 182). Four themes were found: impact of early life experience, cumulative influence of professional experience, influence of elder professionals and personal experiences in adult life. Three practical implications were reported: experiences and events in the professional and personal lives of therapists impact professional growth; therapists must process their experiences in order to increase their competency level; and, because of
their experience and expertise, psychotherapy is a viable professional option for senior therapists.

The purposeful sample lacked racial and cultural diversity. Although it may be representative of the cultural and racial groups in the region, the application of the findings outside of the Midwest region of the United States where the study was conducted may be questioned. Even with these limitations, the theory of professional development proposed by Skovholt and Rønnestad encompasses a logical progression of stages for all counselors, including professional school counselors. Moving from an initial desire to serve and help others as a paraprofessional, through the development of professional competency based on educational obtainment and professional experience, each stage is essential to the professional school counselor’s development.

**Professional development.** Professional development is a continual process involving both internal factors (e.g. self-concept, motivation) and external factors (e.g. graduate training, workplace climate, professional development). Kuzmic (1994) examined the socialization of first year teachers and emphasized the importance of understanding the basic organization, culture and “life” within schools. He believed that learning about schools as bureaucratic organizations was essential to the success of the novice teacher.

For professional school counselors, professional development begins with entry into a graduate training program. Stage theorists suggest a student develops a professional identity through crisis. Stages include confusion, anxiety, dependency on peers or instructors,
confidence, competence, and finally a sense of independence and collegiality with the supervisor at the completion of the supervisee’s studies (Hogan, 1964; Reising & Daniels, 1983; Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992).

Much of the previous research has focused on the student’s experiences in a graduate training program and over the career life of a professional counselor with little to no emphasis on the professional development of school counselors, environmental impact on PSC development nor the impact of cultural background on the development of a professional counseling identity (Nelson & Jackson, 2003).

Jennings and Skovholt (1999) developed a model of expertise that included three components: cognitive, emotional and relational. The authors suggest that, in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the qualities of the highly effective therapist, future research should explore the emotional domain of the development of the counselor. Included in the emotional domain are coping strategies and self-care techniques designed to preserve the emotional well-being and thereby encouraging professional vitality. Counselor well-being is particularly important given the number of stressors confronting counselors, including the presence of gangs and resulting school violence.

The debilitating effects of stress on the counselor role have been recognized as an occupational hazard (Freudenberger & Robbins, 1979). Areas of stress may stem from external and internal sources such as professional and personal life experiences, clients’
issues and behaviors, and the work environment. Mullenbach and Skovholt (2004) suggested that managing stress is essential to maintaining professional vitality.

Mullenbach and Skovholt (2004) explored how counselors coped with critical incidents and key stressors through the span of their professional careers. The data analysis identified the lack of competency as a source of stress. Whether an unpredicted critical incident, for example, suicidal clients, or the less intense issues that seemed more chronic and ongoing, the common thread for the participants stress was in regard to their level of competency.

Current trends, future directions. The professional literature presents two seemingly unrelated concepts with a demonstrated undetermined causal relationship. The research suggests that professional development impacts the role of the professional school counselor. Conversely, the role of the professional school counselors impacts their professional development and the professional development opportunities, informal and formal, they may seek out to enhance their role. A benefit of the present critical analysis may be learning how the two concepts are actually intertwined.

The common theme throughout the articles on counselor identity and development is the disconnect between practice and training and that development is fluid and cyclical (Brott & Myers, 1999, Hogan, 1964; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). The perceived and actual role of professional school counselors is dependent upon a number of influences, including school
leadership, parental perceptions and the perception of fellow counselors, all of which impact the role and professional development of school counselors.

There has been extensive research documenting the efficacy of comprehensive school guidance programs (Lapan, 2001). School counselors in training should be familiar with the implementation of a comprehensive guidance program (Luke & Bernard, 2006). In addition to understanding the development of a comprehensive school counseling program, there has also been a call for increased leadership and more effective training of school counselors by local school districts, state level professional organizations and university counselor education programs for the reality of the role of PSCs (Sink & Yilik-Dower, 2001). Yet, school counselors in training and professional school counselors are neither being prepared nor being offered on-going professional development opportunities based on current trends in education designed to assist them to best meet the needs of all the students they serve (Paisley & McMahon, 2001).

Incongruence in the role of PSCs is apparent when evaluating what is advocated by PSC training programs and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and the actual duties most PSCs are performing on a daily basis (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Divergence in what is advocated and what is the reality of many PSCs has created a pervasive professional culture of role ambiguity and personal and inter-personal conflict (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). This level of ambiguity has led to increased work related stress and further compounds the role perception of the school counselor. Reising and Daniels
(1983) noted “counselor training…arises from changing trainee characteristics and needs” (p. 235). As the needs of students change and the role of school counselors, evolve it is important for counselor training programs and school based professional development change to meet the needs of both students and professional school counselors.

Colbert, Vernon-Jones, and Pransky (2006) defined three shifts that need to occur in school counselor training paradigms and work paradigms to allow school counselors to assume their currently defined roles in educational reform. This model includes a change from a service delivery focus on the individual student to a school-wide focus. Second is a transition from primarily responsive services to counseling partnerships. The third transition is to move from working primarily as individuals to developing professional teams. These differences in career focus would seem to have an impact on school counselor professional development. Utilizing existing professional development teams to study the professional needs of school counselors could provide a wealth of data across school and student demographic variables while including counselors from diverse cultural backgrounds in different stages of professional development at these same schools. This level of participant diversity may strengthen existing knowledge on professional development and provide further exploration on how specific populations and situations impact the role of the professional school counselor.

Helms and Ibrahim (1983) noted “the profession of secondary school counseling has been in an identity crisis” and “the public and the school systems are still not clear about the
role and function of the secondary school counselor” (p. 100). Welch and McCarroll (1993) saw the role of the school counselor evolving into one in which the counselor serves as a “conduit between needs and resources” rather than as the “primary provider of direct services” (p. 49). They also recognized that the school counselor may work as a specialist in community resources by developing an area of specialty and a niche for knowledge based on this area of specialty. The researcher’s exploration of this topic has discovered that there may be value examining the role of school counselors since the introduction of the ASCA National Model and the way that the model supports their work as a specialist in the school setting (Welch & McCaroll, 1993).

Sussman (1995) suggested that training programs historically have been remiss in preparing students for the occupational hazards of their future work. More effective education would help to normalize events confronted in the early years of professional practice. It is of utmost importance that faculty, faculty supervisors and local school districts keep current about the trends and developments in the school counseling field and school environment in order to provide the instruction and training necessary to prepare competent PSCs (Larson, 1994; Larson & Busse, 1998; Hayes, et al., 1996). The professional literature demonstrates a need to examine how training programs are preparing PSCs for the realities of the school counselor’s role and their working environment.

**Relevance of studying gang presence in schools.** In the most recent biennial School Crime Supplement to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), the National Crime
Victimization Survey completed in 2005 revealed 24% of all students (ages 12-18 years) reported the presence of gangs in their school during the last six months. Suburban youth reported a 17% increase from 2003 to 2005. Students in rural settings reported a 33% increase from 2003 to 2005. In 2005, 36% of students in urban settings reported gang activity in their school (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2009).

Brott and Myers’ (1999) international study identified the dissonance between training and counselor preparation and the reality of the work environment as "a major theme that is repeated throughout the literature related to the professionalization of school counseling" (p. 340). Providing quality training for professional counselors to work in a school setting is a responsibility and a challenge, yet it is both critical and imperative if they are to be prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century student (Murphy & Kaffenberg, 2007).

Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, and Bryant (2007) addressed the impact one’s individual worldview has on building a productive, supportive counseling relationship. Being cognizant of one’s attitudes, beliefs and values are key components to defining awareness. Especially relevant is the way a school counselor’s awareness and choice of culturally appropriate intervention strategies may impact their work with student-clients from differing racial and cultural backgrounds. According to Sue and Sue (2003), counselors who hold a different worldview from their clients and are not aware of the source for this difference are most likely to attribute negative traits to their clients and their lack of success
in making life changes. Therefore, it is essential to examine how one’s worldview and professional competence impact the counseling relationship.

Caldarella, Sharpnack, Loosli, and Merrell (1996) found school counselors “do not feel adequately trained or equipped to deal with the level of gang-related activity in their schools” further “almost half had no training whatsoever in gang-related issues” (p. 25). Gang intervention and prevention has become a necessary part of the school’s academic and guidance programming (Caldarella, et al., 1996; Larson, 1994). Working with troubled youth is necessary, but it makes more sense to take a proactive and preventive approach (Sue & Sue, 2003). However, ASCA’s (2005) model focuses on primary prevention programming and does not focus on the need of students in gangs to receive direct, secondary preventive services to minimize the consequences of gang involvement (Larson, 1994; Roark, 1987).

Working with students in gangs should not be perceived as being different than working with clients from another racial or cultural backgrounds. There needs to be a level of multicultural competence of the gang subculture in order to effectively work with student clients that are gang involved. Students in gangs abide by a set of rules related to personal behavior, possess language and gestures unique to various groups and follow traditions for attire and initiation separate from other gangs in order to distinguish one another. Therefore, it is necessary for school counselors to gain information through research and practical experiences (e.g., recognizing graffiti, attire) in order to understand their work with students in gangs in the school setting.
Consistent with findings by Ibrahim, et al. (1983) counselors may be apathetic in their desire to work with students in gangs based on a lack of gang awareness and counseling based intervention techniques. Further, Ibrahim, et al. (1983) reported “feelings of helplessness caused by confusion regarding the specific role of the counselor” (p. 597) in working with students in gangs in the school setting further compounds an already growing need for training. This need is not being met by counselor training programs, and a lack of competency may be in part because training programs are too general in nature to provide multicultural training for the development of competencies related to working with students in gangs.

Researchers specializing in adult learning have suggested that critical incidents are significant learning moments (Howard, Inman, & Altman, 2006). However, the focus has been on the impact of personal developmental and rites of passage (e.g. graduation, marriages, birth of child) as critical incidents and professional stages of such incidents and not specific, actual event, like witnessing acts of violence in schools. Skovholt and McCarthy (1988) suggest, “A major criterion for determining whether an event constitutes a critical incident is whether it is perceived by the individual as having had an impact on her or his work” (p. 69). Due to the lack of professional development opportunities, professional school counselors may be inclined to seek out independent learning opportunities to inform their practice in critical moments.
Knowles (1975) originally defined self-directed learning as “a process in which individuals take the initiative without the help of others in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating goals, identifying human and material resources, and evaluating learning outcomes” (p. 18). Because research on adult learning suggests that learning is both cyclical and a lifelong process, it may be useful to interview working professional school counselors about their experiences with student-clients in gangs and their level of exposure to gangs in the school setting (MacKeracher, 2004).

**Chapter Summary**

The history of the counseling profession reveals an evolving profession guided by educational reform movements and societal expectations of the role of the PSC. Role confusion has led to stress and inter-personal conflict and counselor burnout. As the demands of the profession changes, so should the professional development opportunities afforded professional school counselors in order to prepare them for the reality of their day-to-day tasks and work environment.

The research available on the professional development of counselors is based largely on developmental milestones, for example, entering graduate school and entering the profession as a novice. There are many gaps in the literature on professional development, including the use of professional school counselors as participants. The present study used professional school counselors to explore their professional development needs in working with students in gangs.
The existing research on role confusion lacks evidence based research on how the role of the school counselor may change based on the presence of unique populations. A definition of the role of the professional school counselor in working with students in gangs is not currently available in existing professional research. Therefore, the present study explored and conceptualized the school counselor's role for working with students in gangs.
CHAPTER 3

Method

Research Design

The purpose of research is “knowledge for the sake of knowledge” and the researcher’s purpose was to “understand and explain” how the world operates and to explain phenomena (Patton, 2002, p. 215). A qualitative approach was deemed the most appropriate research method for this study because the goal of the present study was to explore the participants’ views of and experiences with their school’s procedures, educational background, and continued professional development as it related to the school counselor as a vehicle for gang prevention and intervention and the need for role definition as it related to gang intervention.

Creswell (1998) stated, “The best studies have a strong inquiry procedure, and this procedure can be gained through engaging in field studies” (p. 27). Qualitative researchers recognize that no single method can ever solve a problem, and the use of triangulation was ideal in gaining data from different sources. Creswell (1998) suggested researchers engage in different procedures, including thick rich description, observations in the field, and data triangulation to produce findings deemed both credible and trustworthy.

In order to gain access to information rich cases, the present study was conducted using a purposeful sample of working school counselors and school leaders (Patton, 2002). All participants were actively working as professional school counselors or school leaders in
a large, urban school district in the southeastern portion of the United States. Professional
school counselors were drawn from the secondary school setting. School leaders consisted of
secondary level assistant principals and principals, as well as district level stakeholders.
Individual interviews were utilized to gather data (Patton, 2002). In order to enhance the
analysis of the role of the school counselor, interviews were conducted of school leaders and
school counselors working at the same school. Interviews were conducted at the jobsite of
the participant counselors and school leaders or at a mutually agreeable location.

Data collection was completed using interviews and journaling. The primary source
of data was interviews using a structured, open-ended approach incorporating an interview
guide as well as observations in the schools. Observations of the school setting, participants,
and reflections of each interview were noted in the research journal of the investigator
(Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glasser & Strauss, 1967).

The logistics of gaining access to schools and to participants followed established
university research policies as well as the research policies of the school district. Issues of
confidentiality were addressed through the use of informed consent and adherence to the
ethical policies for the protection of human participants. See Appendix A. Training
materials, policy manuals, and public relations pieces were accessed from the local school
district’s internal website and used as an additional source of data to inform the researcher of
existing procedures and policies and training available.
**Pilot study.** A pilot study was conducted between September of 2008 and December of 2008 and was completed as a result of a course assignment. The study involved two phases of interviews and the application of a qualitative methodology to gather data, interpret data, and communicate results. The pilot study was used to (a) inform the need for research in the area of school counseling, (b) clarify interview questions, and (c) meet course requirements in demonstrating initial competence of a qualitative method of research. The first phase was a focus group with data being transcribed by the researcher, hand coded, and interpreted to reach conclusions. The second phase of the pilot study consisted of individual interviews completed at the respective job sites of three practicing school counselors. The interviews and observations from phase two provided further evidence, more variation, and a greater understanding of the role of the school counselor in working with students in gangs across school settings (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school).

The pilot study findings revealed that school counselors were trained to recognize the presence of gangs in their settings, but knew very little about how to intervene or if they should intervene. Counselors saw their role of interventionist strongly connected to informing and educating parents about their child's potential for gang involvement based on observed behaviors but not in the identification of gang members in the school setting. Interviews and policy document reviews revealed that school counselors are expected to provide information to parents through pre-designed public relations pieces on gang awareness. According to school district policy, school administrators and school resource
officers at each school were the only staff members possessing the information on gang signs, trends, and names of school aged members.

The findings demonstrated the need for training at the district level for all school staff members to recognize the presence of gangs in the schools in order to improve the school environment for students and staff members. Pilot study participants reported a reluctance to intervene based on personal safety and competency. Beyond basic gang awareness, there needs to be clarity in the role of professional school counselors as interventionists.

Currently, there appears to be no consistent role. Decisions on professional development opportunities and professional role were determined by school based leaders and district level stakeholders. This perceived lack of decision making authority and control leads to ambiguous roles in working with students in gangs. The pilot study revealed there was a need to further explore the counselor's role in gang prevention, as well as their professional development needs.

Participants

The participants were professional school counselors and school leaders working in an urban, public school setting in the southeastern area of the United States.

School counselors. A modified, purposeful sample of five professional school counselors was used (Heppner, Wampold, & Kivlghan, 2008). The population was a homogenous, purposeful sample based on job title and area of state licensure (i.e., guidance) (Patton, 2002). Participants were working in the secondary school setting. In order to
expand on existing research on counselor development the present study sought participants from different high schools with varying years of experience.

The researcher contacted secondary school counselors from the school district by email in order to recruit participants (see Appendix A). The first email correspondence went to their site-based school leader for permission to access their campus. A second email was sent to individual professional school counselors at each site to recruit participants from their respective schools. Participants were selected based on their willingness to allow audio taping of interviews with a concerted effort to gather a sample of participants with varied years of experience. Participants were also selected based on their school leader allowing access to the campus, the school counselor, and other “key informants” (Patton, 2002, p. 237) on the role of the school counselor at their school. Consent from school leaders to access their campus was required by the Evaluation and Research department of the local school district before the initiation of the study. Participation was voluntary and there were no monetary benefits for participation.

The five professional school counselors consisted of four females and one male who identified their cultural group as Caucasian/White (n=4) and African-American (n=1). All five had a master’s degree in counseling and were fully licensed by the state as professional school counselors. Three of the degrees were master’s in education, one counselor had a master’s in science and one counselor had an advanced certificate based on the master’s degree program’s sixty credit hour requirement. The terminal degree was a master’s in
science. None of the counselors interviewed possess the NCC (National Certified Counselor) or LPC (Licensed Professional Counselor) designation.

The years of experience as a professional school counselor were 3, 12, 19, 11, and 33. One entered the profession with a lateral entry certificate and became fully licensed three years ago. One counselor had six additional years of service in the community college setting. Average combined years of counseling was 17. Average age of participants was 52 years. All five counselors had high school experience. Two of the five had experience at both the elementary and middle school level.

The professional school counselors reported participating in an average of 2.8 conferences in the previous 12 months. One counselor had attended no conferences or workshops in the previous 12 months. All the counselors reported reading 1 to 5 hours of professional literature a week, while only one counselor subscribed to a professional journal.

None of the counselors interviewed had experience working as a school leader; however, one professional school counselor completed 12 credit hours toward an administrative license before discontinuing their studies. Two of the counselors were not members of any professional organizations. Two were members of an organization for all educators in the state of North Carolina (i.e., North Carolina Association of Educators) with a national parent organization National Education Association (NEA). One was a member of the national school counseling association, American School Counselor Association (ASCA)
and one was a member of the state level division of ASCA (i.e., North Carolina School Counselor Association).

**School leaders.** A modified, purposeful sample of seven school leaders, defined as assistant principals, school safety stakeholders (i.e., gang intervention specialists), central office staff, and principals was conducted. As noted in Chapter Two, the role defined for the school counselor comes from a variety of sources, most of whom have no direct experience or knowledge in what school counselors do, and the sources include their building level leaders (Paisley & Borders, 1995). The professional literature was extensive in reviewing the role confusion counselors experience on their day-to-day job responsibilities. Interviewing school principals and other stakeholders on the perceived and actual role of intervention with students in gangs sought to further clarify the need for concrete procedures to define the role of the counselor with this unique population of students.

The sample of school leaders was purposeful based on job title and key informants on the role of the school counselor and the presence of gangs in schools (Patton, 2002). The participants with the job title of assistant principals and principals were working in the secondary school setting. A concerted effort was made to access the district’s gang intervention specialists with specific knowledge on gangs in school. In order to protect their anonymity, they were identified as school leaders and pseudonyms were utilized to further protect their anonymity. An initial email correspondence was sent to the school leaders with whom the researcher had previously interacted in a professional manner or based on
recommendations from other school leaders with subsequent emails going to “key informants” (Patton, 2002, p. 237). The initial email sent to the site-based school leaders requested consent to complete the study on their campus. This process was a requirement of the Evaluation and Research department of the local school district before being approved to begin the study. Participants were selected based on their willingness to allow audio taping with a concerted effort to gather a sample of participants with varied perspectives. School leader participants were also selected based on their willingness to allow the researcher access to their campus, the school counselor, and other “key informants” (Patton, 2002, p. 237) on the role of the school counselor at their school. Participation was voluntary, and there were no monetary benefits for participation.

The school leaders consisted of seven males with degrees ranging from bachelor of science to doctoral degrees in education. One had a master’s in science degree, two had a master’s in arts degree, one had bachelor’s in science, and two had doctoral degrees in education. The average years of experience was 10.4. All seven identified themselves as males. Average age of the school leader participants was 42 years. Six of the seven identified their cultural group as Caucasian/White (n=6) and one of the seven identified their cultural group as African-American (n=1). Five of the seven school leaders had worked at the high school level. One was a retired educator from another state. One had elementary experience and two had years of experience at the middle school level as a school leader. Two of the school leaders interviewed interacted with all school levels based on the nature of
their job and their positions in central office. Only one of the school leaders interviewed had work experience as a professional school counselor at the high school level.

**Researcher as the Interviewer**

The researcher was a professional insider, meaning the researcher worked for the school district and was a working professional school counselor. The researcher's position as a professional insider provided her an opportunity to obtain data that may not be available to an individual not employed by the school district. Additionally, the researcher may have had increased access to counselors and school leaders in the district because of professional interactions with those professional school counselors and school leaders interviewed. Being familiar with the interviewer may have offered participants a level of comfort and ease in answering the interview questions. However, it may have been a disadvantage if counselors feared a connection being made to their answers. In order to reduce the anxiety of each participant, a pseudonym was used to protect their identity as well as their place of employment.

A lack of personal gang awareness led the researcher to pursue the present study and led to a level of sensitivity others may not possess (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). While exploring the need for professional development and role clarification, the researcher had to guard against bias in the data collection and the data analysis process. Grounded theory research recognizes that professional experience provides an enhanced level of sensitivity. Sensitivity juxtaposes objectivity in that it requires the researcher to put himself or herself
into the research process. “Sensitivity means having insight, being tuned in to, being able to pick up on relevant issues, events, and happenings in data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 32). Sensitivity comes about as a result of close contact with both “data and people” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 32). Sensitive researchers provide a unique perspective to data analysis because it is “their knowledge and experience that enables them to respond to what is in the data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 33). Corbin and Strauss (2008) indicate three things are essential to remember in analyzing data by a sensitive researcher:

- The first is to always compare knowledge and experience against data, never losing sight of the data themselves. The second is to always work with concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions, because it keeps the researcher focused on the similarities and differences in events and prevents being overwhelmed by descriptive data. A third point is that it is not the researcher’s perception of an event that matters. Rather, it is what participants are saying and doing that is important. (p. 33).

**Subjectivity Statement**

In conducting research, biases exist in both the researcher’s interest and the way in which data was analyzed. There were biases to this research that I possessed. Having worked in a public high school as a high school counselor, I have worked with Wannabe gang members and observed over time their transformation into full gang membership. Additionally, as a professional school counselor, I had a particular bias to the contributions professional school counselors may make in gang intervention and prevention. Sadly, too, I
know time constraints, personal obligations, case loads, and varying job responsibilities impact a professional school counselor’s ability and/or desire to learn more about working with students in gangs.

I have observed and experienced firsthand the chaos and violence gangs create in a school setting. I have heard the roar in the cafeteria or the progression of violence down a school hallway. I know how it feels to be asked to patrol the perimeter of the school campus when a telephone call threatens a drive-by shooting. These experiences led me to want to know more about the appeal of gangs for young people. Out of my professional experiences with these adolescents blossomed an interest to explore gang culture and how professional school counselors may intervene.

My desire to learn more was a form of self-preservation. I wanted to know what I needed to fear, and I did not know what to fear because I did not know about gang culture (e.g., the language, signs, graffiti meanings). From my research, I learned about the what’s and why’s of gang membership, but I never saw how I, as a high school counselor, could intervene on behalf of my students. My research led me to present at both national and regional counseling conferences, and during these sessions I proposed that our primary role should be to educate self. This desire to know more about how I can help led to this study.

**Instrumentation**

According to Creswell (1998), “The qualitative approach allows the researcher to study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in
terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 15). This allowed the researcher to explore the thoughts, perceptions, and beliefs of participants concerning their training and perceived and actual role in working with students in gangs.

Interviews using standardized open-ended questions were the primary data source (see Appendix B) (McCaslin & Scott, 2003). The interviews began by obtaining consent to tape the conversation before recording the session. Interviews were conducted at the participant's job site or at a mutually agreeable location (e.g., public library, quiet study room, classroom). A digital voice recorder was used to record data offered through the participants’ own words. Non-verbal communication and observations were recorded in the investigator's journal. All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim by an external transcriptionist. Appendix B provides a list of all the interview questions.

**School counselor questions.** In order to address the research questions, a series of questions were developed to gain clarity on the role of the school counselor in working with students in gangs as well as their professional development needs to feel competent to work with this unique population. In order to address research question number one (How do educational and/or professional experiences inform professional school counselors of the presence of gangs in the school setting?), interview questions number 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10 were used. Questions 6, 7, 8, and 10 addressed research question number two and addressed counselor’s willingness to work with students in gangs (How do the educational and/or professional experiences of PSC’s influence their willingness to work with students in
gangs?). Research question number three (What role do professional school counselors play in preventing gang activity in the school setting?) was addressed through questions 1, 2, 3, and 4. Research question number four addressed changes that need to occur (What changes need to occur to enhance counselors’ willingness to work with students in gangs?) and interview questions 9, 10 and 11 sought to explore the counselor's needs in order to guide practice.

**School leader questions.** As presented in Chapter Two, the role of the counselor is determined by a number of entities, including assistant principals and principals. In order to provide richer data expanding on existing research related to role dissonance, the present study explored the perceived and actual role of counselors in working with a unique population from the school leader's perspective. In order to address the research questions, a series of survey questions were developed for school leader participants. The focus of interview questions for school leaders was related to research questions three and four. Research question three (What role do professional school counselors play in preventing gang activity in the school setting?), the actual role of the school counselor, was addressed through questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7. Research question number four (What changes need to occur to enhance counselors’ willingness to work with students in gangs?) addressed changes that need to occur and interview questions 3, 4, 5, and 9 sought to explore the need for role clarification and to guide intervention efforts.
**Demographic questionnaire.** A demographic questionnaire provided an opportunity to provide quantitative data based on participant's level of education, years of experience, and amount of professional development professional school counselors are currently engaged. Questions were designed to address research questions number two and four. How do the educational and/or professional experiences of PSC’s influence their willingness to work with students in gangs? What changes need to occur to enhance counselors’ willingness to work with students in gangs?

**Procedure**

**Successive phases of the inquiry.** Completing qualitative research involves multiple phases and this study included multiple phases in its development and completion. This section summarizes the work from the early stages of survey question development through data collection, and finally, data analysis, including coding and theme development and addressing validity and reliability in qualitative research.

**Preliminary phase.** Phase one of the study was the development of interview questions related to my research questions (see Appendix B). Topical areas addressed included counselor perception of role, actual role, school based policies, and counselor professional development (Umbach, 2005).

The researcher sought authorization from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) from North Carolina State University (see Appendix A). After submitting IRB documents, the
researcher concurrently contacted the Evaluation and Research division of the school district for permission to complete the present study.

A digital voice recorder was used to record all interviews in an attempt to gain insight and to facilitate the transcription process.

**Data collection.** According to Patton (2002), a general interview guide can be used to provide a common set of topics from which the data was collected to determine exact wording or sequencing of interview questions. The qualitative approach to research design offers flexibility to pursue emergent themes through open-ended questions. Interviews were conducted in the summer to avoid conflicts with end of year testing, to be least impactful to the work day, and to maximize participation.

A hallmark of the grounded theory approach is its constant comparative data analysis processes, coined constant comparative method, which calls for a continuous and simultaneous interaction between data collection and data analysis. The researcher entered the field of study to collect initial data, and then analyzed the initial data and later returned to the field to collect more data and analyzed the data while comparing the results to previously collected data and so on. Data collection and data analysis are seamless processes designed to increase conceptual density with the achievement of saturation of reoccurring categories or themes and allowing for discovery of unexpected categories or themes for follow up and further analysis. The emerging theory is continuously tested against data that has been systematically collected and analyzed (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glasser & Strauss, 1967).
The rigor of findings from a grounded theory study rest upon the criteria of evaluation of the collected data. Strauss and Corbin suggest that evaluation of the rigor of the research process is accomplished by the following criteria:

(a) How was the original sample selected?  (b) What major categories emerged?  (c) What were some of the events, incidents, or actions which pointed to these major categories?  (d) Did theoretical formulations guide the data collection?  (e) What were some of the hypotheses pertaining to conceptual relations, and upon what grounds were they formulated and validated?  (f) Were there instances in which hypotheses did not explain what was happening in the data?  (g) How were these discrepancies accounted for?  (h) Were hypotheses modified as a result?  (i) How and why was the core category selected?  (j) Was this collection sudden or gradual, and was it difficult or easy?  (k) On what grounds were the final analytic decisions made? (p. 268).

In an effort to discover the perceptions and experiences of participants involved, standardized open-ended interview questions were used to maximize the use of school based experiences and recollection (McCaslin & Scott, 2003; Patton, 2002; Reinharz, 1992). An interview guide was used to organize the sequence of questions (Patton, 2002). Participants were offered the choice to conduct interviews at their worksite or away from their worksite at a mutually agreeable, public location. Each interview occurred at the participant’s workplace. The interviews took place during end-of-year workdays and during the summer months of employment in order to minimize the impact on each participant’s day-to-day job
functions. The time commitment of individuals was approximately 60 minutes to answer standardized open-ended interview questions and respond to a participant questionnaire with demographic questions to be used as descriptive data (see Appendix B).

Participants were provided the interview questions in the moments immediately preceding the beginning of the interviews. Allowing a review of the interview questions provided participants an opportunity to view questions and record answers or emerging thoughts as needed. This process was in place as an adjustment to a pilot study of similar questions in which the group participants requested an opportunity to see the questions. Participants used the hard copy or paper copy of questions to write down answers to questions or to record thoughts prompted by a previous question.

During the interviews, participants were offered an opportunity to answer all of the questions. The researcher used a research journal to make field notes after each interview regarding participants’ body language, physical environment, and for jotting my own thoughts and impressions. All observations and participants’ interview sessions were included in the data collection and data analysis processes. Reflectivity during data collection is a valuable tool as defined by Corbin and Strauss (2008) and was used in the present study. Interviewing is a dynamic process of interactions between the researcher and participant (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Both the researcher and the participant bring emotional and cognitive reactions to an interview that are of value in the data analysis process. Reflectivity is “now considered essential to the research process, the meaning that the
researcher gives to reflectivity and the extent to which it is carried out is variable” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 31). During the interviews, the researcher reflected on the impact of her presence and examined personal reactions to promote richer insight. Notes pertaining to reflectivity were kept in a journal. During the present study all data was stored in a locked fire safety box in the researcher's home office.

Training materials, policy manuals, and public relations pieces were pulled from the school district’s internal website in March of 2008 to inform the researcher during a personal inquiry. Policies were reviewed in the district’s student/parent handbook, and these documents were available in English and Spanish language versions. In reviewing the collection of data, the data could be divided into categories: policy, presentation, and training materials; guidance curriculum; and parental public relation pieces and general population awareness public relations.

**Data analysis.** Qualitative data analysis is a time consuming, but intriguing, process for those committed to the method and the usefulness of data collected. Interviews were completed in cycles of time in order to allow the researcher to gather, evaluate, and analyze emerging themes throughout the study. Each individual interview was tape recorded and later transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist. Each interviewed was played and reviewed immediately after the interview. Interviews were read twice before themes were highlighted and noted in the margins. Interview data was read by participant group (i.e., all PSCs and all SLs) with themes noted between groups. Interview data was read by
school based pairings (i.e., PSC and SL at same school) with themes noted from each pair. Hand coding was used to analyze data gathered from transcribed interviews with a focus on capturing essential concepts (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The process of hand coding involved coming up with the codes and then the emerging themes. The transcribed interview data was hand coded on paper.

A constructivist framework was used to interpret the qualitative data. This type of analysis stems from hermeneutics, whereby knowledge is socially constructed by all involved with the research process, and research was a product of the researcher's understanding and interpretation of participants’ experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Moustakas, 1994). Hermeneutics goes beyond a general descriptive look at core concepts and essences in data to discover meanings within everyday life experiences and practices. Focus should be on what humans actually experience and the meanings attached to those experiences rather than on what they are aware of consciously (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Moustakas, 1994).

Qualitative research can have several purposes: description, conceptual ordering or theory development, all of which build upon one another (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Descriptions use ordinary vocabulary to convey ideas about things. They are needed to communicate what is going on in the setting, what is occurring, what is not occurring, nonverbal language, and time frames. The descriptive process was subjective, not objective, in nature, with details chosen by the storytellers based on what they hear or experience.
Descriptions embody concepts that are the basis for more abstract interpretation of data known as conceptual ordering.

Conceptual ordering is the organization of data into discrete categories. In order to make sense of large amounts of data, researchers organize them according to classificatory schemes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Conceptual ordering leads to theory development. Low level concepts point to, offer details about, or relate to, higher level concepts called categories. Concepts provide ways of making comparisons, talking about, and arriving at shared understandings among professionals. Corbin and Strauss (2008) stated, "If you don't have language you can't talk" (p. 8). Lower level concepts are tied together to create categories. Categories are more abstract concepts designed to have broader application.

The final construction of theory requires that ideas be fully explored and considered from a variety of perspectives. The final "cohesiveness of the theory occurs through the use of an overarching explanatory concept, one that stands above the rest" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 55). The final theory along with the other concepts explains "the what, how, when, where, and why of something" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 55).

Grounded theory’s data analysis depends on a structured set of coding procedures that connect theory and method. Data analysis was the interplay between researchers and data (Patton, 2002). It is important that the relationships among concepts are derived from actual data (e.g., interviews or observations) related only to that phenomenon. Corbin and Strauss (2008) offer:
Concepts and theories are constructed by researchers out of stories that are constructed by research participants who are trying to explain and make sense out of their experiences and/or lives, both to the researcher and themselves. Out of these multiple constructs, analysts construct something that they call knowledge (p. 10).

Grounded theory is developed through the concept of conceptual density. Conceptual density, or saturation, is concerned with achieving a basic framework of understanding in order to “develop each category/theme fully in terms of its properties and dimensions and to account for variation” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 195). After eight transcripts had been analyzed, it appeared that data saturation had been achieved; however, to affirm category development, the interviews continued through number 12.

There are four essential features of grounded theory. First, the researcher was constantly interacting with the data and the data collection process, asking questions of the data, generating additional questions to explain and generate insight and lead to theory development. Second was the use of theoretical sampling to ask questions that led to filling in gaps in the emerging theory. Third, the use of a systematic coding procedure and organizing the codes was used to demonstrate a relationship of the codes and emergent themes to each other, creating an integrated theory. Analyzing data included the use of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The final feature was continuously seeking answers to questions in the data that allowed for conceptual saturation of the central phenomenon being studied (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).
Coding and themes. This study utilized the coding and thematic analysis method presented in Creswell (2007), Corbin and Strauss (2008), and Strauss & Corbin (1998, 1990). Codes are tags or labels given to units of meaning of descriptive or inferential information gathered in qualitative research, attached to groups of words, phrases, whole sentences, or paragraphs (Basit, 2003). The specific type of coding that the researcher used was open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding is the initial stage for data analysis in the grounded theory method of qualitative research. Open coding involved “breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 195) and involved brainstorming. Axial coding involved looking for relationships among the concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Selective coding served to move the data from description to theory by integrating categories to form a grounded theory. Selective coding involved: (a) explicating the story line, (b) relating subsidiary categories around the core category by means of a paradigm, (c) relating categories at the dimensional level, (d) validating those relationships against data, and (e) filling in categories that may need further development (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Validity and reliability. This study utilized triangulation of sources (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Patton, 2002). There were three data sources used to inform this study: interviews with school counselors, interviews with school leaders, and a reflective journal. Triangulation of sources allowed the researcher to strengthen the validity of the study's findings (Merriam, 2002).
Patton (2002) stated that triangulation does not imply the different data sources will produce the same result. Triangulation is used as a consistency test. Inconsistent findings may further support the use of qualitative research in which the "relationship between what exists in conscious awareness and what exists in the world" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 27) may be different for the participant based on the meaning attached to perception and experience.

One method that the researcher offered to ensure validity of the study was member checks of the transcribed interview (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher did not, however, provide participants with access to the interpretation of transcribed data. Morse (1998) cautioned researchers in allowing member checks with analyzed data. Morse noted interpreted data generates "nuances, paradoxes, and intricacies that may not be evident to the participants themselves" (Morse, 1998, p. 444). As an additional safeguard the data was reviewed by an external auditor. The auditor was used to ensure personal bias had not entered the data analysis presentation.

**Limitations of the Study**

There are several limitations to the present study. A primary limitation was the researcher's status as a neophyte to qualitative research. The use of dissertation committee review hopefully minimized this limitation.

Generally, qualitative studies utilize a limited number of participants. This grounded theory study was no exception because it used a limited number of professional school counselors and school leaders representing one school district in an urban setting. This
limitation may have been minimized by using school leaders and school counselors from the same schools in order to maximize comparative data and enhance the richness of data collected. All of these schools are governed by the same district wide policies; however, each also has site based management; therefore, there are some variations in the execution of procedures, professional development offered, the development of a comprehensive counseling program and the use of the ASCA National Model in the development of the counseling program, and how the role of the counselor is defined.

The study was dependent upon the involvement of the participants and their ability to talk freely about school procedures, parties defining the counselor’s role, and availability of training in their school district. A limitation of this study may be the participants’ lack of detailed knowledge about gang presence in their school or the procedures practiced by school leaders for intervening with and disciplining youth exhibiting behavior reflecting gang involvement.

School districts across the country are considering training programs for their staff. The district the researcher studied is no exception. This district had previously sponsored one form of training (i.e., lecture style, voluntary participation for continuing education credits). Participation in the district sponsored training may provide a bias in responses because the role of training and the need to know more about gangs may have been addressed and, therefore, impact their beliefs, experiences, and responses. In order to explore the impact training has on the professional development of school counselors, more professional
school counselors need to be asked questions about their training and background. Previously, during the pilot study, the North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) advised me to eliminate any questions on training for the focus group participants, and this request was honored during the pilot study. For the present study, a focus group was not being utilized, and questions related to training met the needs of the IRB.

**Chapter Summary**

In an effort to address an area in need of further examination, the present study sought to add to the knowledge about gang intervention by exploring the role of professional school counselors and their professional development. Specifically, the researcher examined the perceptions of practicing professional school counselors from one area of the southeast region of the United States of America about the role they play in gang intervention and how their school leaders encourage their role. A grounded theory study of individuals with similar same job titles and job description was conducted.

This chapter outlined the grounded theory method of qualitative research. Data sources used in the present study and the role of the researcher were all detailed. In addition, the data analysis process and steps taken by the researcher to ensure validity were briefly explained. Finally, the biases held by the researcher, ethical concerns, and limitations of the study were discussed.
CHAPTER 4

Results

This chapter reports the findings from the second study and is divided into three sections. The first section is a series of participant profiles. The second section describes the findings of the study as told from the perspective of the PSC or the school leader. In some cases, the findings are reported using pairings of the PSCs and their supervising school leaders. Revealing the findings in pairs was designed to show the strength of the response based on similarities and differences in perspective. Finally, the third section describes the major theoretical categories and the core category (Collaborative C.A.R.E.) that were generated from the data. Within section three, the theory will be presented as a process for the development of Collaborative C.A.R.E. The findings revealed concepts that emerged as a result of the interview questions, and those concepts were essential in the development of the theory. See Appendix C.

Participant Profiles

Professional School Counselors

Beth. Beth was a 56-year-old White female. She had worked in schools for 19 years, but only three of those were as a fully licensed school counselor. Beth had worked in a variety of clerical positions before she pursued her Master’s degree. Beth was the only participant to have worked at the same school for her entire career. Beth was the only PSC to enter the career as a lateral entry school counselor. Beth was not an NCC or LPC.
credentialed school counselor. In the last year she attended three conferences or workshops. Beth did not subscribe to any professional journals; however, she devoted one to two hours each week to reading professional literature. Beth was a member of North Carolina Association of Educators. Beth’s school counseling experience was limited to the high school level. Beth’s school leader associate was Stan.

**Sasha.** Sasha was a 40-year-old White female. She had worked in schools for 12 years. Sasha was the only participant to have completed her Master’s training outside of North Carolina. Sasha was not an NCC or LPC credentialed school counselor. In the last year, she attended four conferences or workshops. Sasha did not subscribe to any professional journals; however, she devoted five hours each week to reading professional literature. Sasha was not a member of any professional organizations. Sasha’s school counseling experience was limited to the high school level. Sasha’s school leader associate was Joe.

**Stacey.** Stacey was a 46-year-old White female. She had worked in schools as a professional school counselor for 19 years. Stacey was not an NCC or LPC credentialed school counselor. In the last year she attended one to two workshops. Stacey did not subscribe to any professional journals and devoted one hour each week to reading professional literature. Stacey had professional school counseling work experience at all three school levels (i.e. elementary, middle, and high/secondary), including grant funded
positions. Stacey was a member of the North Carolina School Counselor Association. Stacey’s school leader associate was Jake.

**Trevor.** Trevor was a 59-year-old African-American male. He had worked in schools for 11 years and was the only participant to have community college counseling work experience. Trevor was the only PSC participant that worked as his school’s Dean of Student Services. Trevor worked on a high school campus with four separate high schools and four separate school leaders. Trevor was not an NCC or LPC credentialed school counselor. In the last year he attended five workshops. Trevor subscribed to one professional journal and devoted one hour each week to reading professional literature. Trevor had professional school counseling work experience at all three school levels (i.e., elementary, middle, and high/secondary). Trevor was a member of the North Carolina School Counselor Association, American School Counselor Association, and North Carolina Association of Educators. Trevor’s school leader associate was Frank.

**Judy.** Judy was a 59-year-old White female. She had worked in schools for 33 years and was the only participant to have worked as a school social worker. Judy was also the only participant to have completed graduate hours toward a Master’s in School Administration. She discontinued her studies after completing 12 credit hours. Judy was not an NCC or LPC credentialed school counselor. In the last year, she attended no workshops. Judy did not subscribe to any professional journals and devoted one hour each week to reading professional literature. Judy had professional school counseling at the high school
level. Judy was not a member of any professional organizations. Judy’s school leader associate was Barkley.

**School Leaders**

**Joe.** Joe was a 36-year-old White male. Joe had five years of experience as a school leader. He had worked as a teacher before going to graduate school to become a school administrator. Joe’s school-based leadership was limited to the high school level. Joe was the only participant to request a copy of the study’s final findings. Joe found the topic interesting. Joe’s PSC associate was Sasha.

**Barkley.** Barkley was a 45-year-old White male. Barkley had 12 years of experience as a school leader. He was the only school leader with experience at all grade levels (i.e., elementary, middle, high/secondary). Barkley’s PSC associate was Judy.

**Derek.** Derek was a 40-year-old White male. Derek had nine years of experience as a school leader and 10 years in law enforcement. Derek was the only participant with only a Bachelor’s degree. Derek met the researcher at his office in a middle school but had offices at other locations. Derek was considered a central office stakeholder. Derek’s school leader associate was Sam.

**Jake.** Jake was a 57-year-old White male. Jake had 15 years of experience as a school leader. Jake had previously worked as a teacher in another state. He retired from that state before coming to North Carolina. Jake was one of two participants possessing a
doctrinal degree. Jake had only worked as a school leader at the high school level. Jake’s PSC associate was Stacey.

**Frank.** Frank was a 35-year-old African-American male. Frank had nine years of experience as a school leader. All of his experience had been at the high school level. Frank had worked outside of the state as a school leader before returning to North Carolina. Frank’s PSC associate was Trevor.

**Stan.** Stan was a 40-year-old White male. Stan had 10 years of experience as a school leader. Stan had worked as a school leader at both the middle and high school levels. Stan’s PSC associate was Beth.

**Sam.** Sam was a 42-year-old White male. Sam had 13 years of experience as a school leader. Sam was the only school leader with work experience as a professional school counselor. Sam was based at central office. Sam was one of two participants with a doctoral degree. Sam’s school leader associate was Derek.

**Perspectives of Professional School Counselors**

**Factors in PSC Role Development**

In exploring and examining the role of the professional school counselor, it was evident from the professional literature presented in Chapter 2 that there are perceived and actual roles of the working professional school counselor based on parental expectations, principal/school leader expectations, and student expectations. This study sought to explore both the perspective of the Professional School Counselors (PSCs) and the school leaders
(SLs), and findings are reported both individually and collectively where a comparative answer strengthened the findings to each question.

**Job titles or descriptions.** In response to the leading question, “What factors determine the role you play in your school?,” in the PSC group, two counselors stated that their job title or job description was a factor in determining their role, while five of the school leaders noted job description (including job title) was a factor. Three counselors reported the needs of their school were a factor compared to two school leaders stating the needs of the school determined the role of the school counselor. Two of the PSCs and two school leaders noted the strengths and weaknesses of the counselors were a factor in determining their professional role. Interestingly, the PSCs and the school leaders in both cases were members of the same school-based team. Two school leaders noted the role of the school counselor was closely tied to their service to the academic needs of their students. Only one counselor saw her years of service as a factor in her role as a PSC.

The PSCs interviewed provided a number of different responses. Answers were broad and simply stated as in the case of Beth (PSC). Beth stated, “I do what I’m asked to do, basically.” Beth’s school leader, Stan, said the job description was a factor in the counselor’s role, but he also looks to the dean of student services and other counselors to “determine specific day-to-day tasks or responsibilities.” With 17 years of experience in counseling, Trevor (PSC) offered more detail when he stated:
I haven’t really given that a lot of thought …the factors that determine my role in the school is defined by my job description…so my role is very varied from talking about meeting parents, enrolling students, registration process, going to different schools, talking about registration and what we do – the courses we offer.

In line with using the job description as a factor in determining the role of the PSC, Stacey (PSC) added, “Well, I guess the standard course of study for counselors from DPI [Department of Public Instruction]. Barkley (SL) added, “The students, the counselor skills, the number of counselors, the needs of the students. There’s a multitude of factors” impacting the role of the school counselor. Sam (SL) said:

As it gets to the school level, a lot of it's going to be the expectations of the administrator and just the different responsibilities that they see for a school counselor. We hope that they understand the appropriate role of the school counselor, and we try to provide education on that.

**Academic role.** The academic role of the school counselor was discussed at length by two of the school leaders as a primary factor determining their role. Jake (SL) stated:

Our school counselors do a lot of different things. They are academic counselors primarily, but they also deal with social issues and social matters that involve kids. They do a lot of different work when it comes to intervening and problems between students and things of this sort. They do have a little bit of a role in testing. Their role is not major as it relates to testing. But, primarily, they are academic counselors.
When asked by the researcher if being primarily academic counselors was a decision he made or one that he inherited from a previous school leader, Jake’s (SL) response was:

To be perfectly honest, I think it’s just the nature of being a school counselor. Most school counselors are not really trained in the social-psychometric issues that the students deal with like a psychologist would be. So they’re primarily trained as school counselors. Now, they’re certainly trained to deal with minor issues; however, if a major issue comes up, it has to be farmed out to the appropriate source. So the decision, I think, has kind of been made by the nature of counseling courses and counseling programs.

Frank said his counselor’s work was about “50/50” academic and personal/social. Joe (SL) noted the primary factor in their [counselors] role was to serve as academic counselors. He also noted their role was not limited to academic issues:

Most of it’s going to be academics from start to finish…I would like to say it’s purely academic, but I also know that they in large part have – a lot of them do individual counseling because of the relationships that they have built with their students that they track throughout their high school career. Many of the students will go to them with personal issues, be it family, be it grief counseling, be it this, that, or the other. While Jake (SL) felt our training was limited to addressing “minor issues,” Derek (SL), a central office school leader, noted that counselors are trained to address more than the
classroom teacher. Derek saw a student’s behavior as a factor in determining the role of the school counselor:

What I see is definitely the kids’ behavior. The main thing is the behavior of a young man/young lady. Teachers – I know they have to have classroom management, and they have to monitor certain behaviors, but there are certain things that they are not equipped to do professionally that the school’s [counselors] are. They can’t slow down learning for a student but maybe if we could funnel that young man/young lady to a counselor, it would help impact not only the classroom. But then you identify through a counselor other issues that are contributing to the classroom but also what’s going on in their life and in the community. Everything’s going to come back to the center.

**Data-driven planning.** Recognizing the ever-expanding role of the PSC, Joe (SL) noted the increasing use of data to guide program planning and the implementation of new programming, while removing other programming aspects based on data:

In fact, they [PSCs] keep getting a more increased role. Everything from, for example, from tracking at-risk students to a student data notebook through evening programs that we constantly review at the end of every year. In fact, we did yesterday; we will today: What can be consolidated? What can be changed? What can be improved upon? Heavily into data.
The use of quantitative data seems to support the role of the secondary school counselor as primarily an academic counselor. Sam (SL) said the PSC’s role may be altered by “using data to determine what are the needs of the school.” However, the researcher noted in her reflective journal she was “encouraged to hear Joe (SL) state [that] academics was not their [counselors] only role” at his school, but rather an examination of what individual PSCs are good at:

There is no defining role that says (pause) it’s more of a feel as they go through it. Sometimes they will make recommendations to visit our SAP if they feel that: You know what? This is starting to get out of my (pause). And let’s face it. Every single counselor is going to be different with respect to their strengths and weaknesses. Some will be able to go ahead and take on more of a person’s personal load if they come to them in crisis. Certain counselors, based off of their strengths, will be able to You know what? I’ll take it on. I’ll sit there and listen because this is something that I’m good at. Whereas others are like You know what? It may be time for you to speak to our SAP who might be a little bit more comfortable and probably better equipped to handle you. But certainly, the academic piece – the reason why it’s pushed so much is just because that’s our track and focus here.

**Individual characteristics.** One of the counselors Joe (SL) directly supervises also commented on the strengths and weaknesses of each department member and data as factors determining the role each department member plays. Sasha (PSC) stated:
Well, I guess what we’ve done here is look at everybody’s strengths and weaknesses and the needs of our building. It was a while ago that we did a needs assessment, but we’re split alphabetically across all grade levels, so a lot of what I do here is based on (pause) we look at data from the year before and figure out who’s gonna do what, and what we’re gonna work on as a team.

While looking at each counselor’s strengths and weakness, Joe (SL) and Sasha (PSC) mentioned pursuing professional development opportunities designed to improve their effectiveness. Joe stated, “They [the PSCs] have become very tech driven because one of the things we looked at was technology training this past year. Everything they could possibly need to make their role more efficient, but always stemming back to the academics.”

**High stakes testing.** As noted in Chapter 2, the introduction of high stakes testing has been an especially impactful factor in the role of the school counselor. In the wake of high stakes testing, an immediate factor impacting the school counselor’s role has been the use of data to inform practice. Secondly, high stakes testing has both morphed and imposed time limits on the scope of services and programming offered by professional school counselors. Stacey (PSC) noted:

For instance, if we wanted to go in and do classroom guidance, that would be very difficult here because of just the way they [the teachers] guard their classroom time, and especially EOC [end of course exams] classes. But the ones that are referred to us by teachers or parents are because they’re having academic issues. We see that
through the teachers and PEP’s (Personalized Education Plans) and all that. We pull them out of classes to meet with them. We usually try to keep it to just ten to fifteen minutes so they don’t lose much class time.

**Influence of school leaders.** Factors impacting the role of the PSC at Sasha’s (PSC) school seem to include the regular involvement of their school leaders. Sasha stated their supervising school leader, Joe, “comes to our weekly meetings so he knows what we’re involved in pretty much on a weekly basis.” Sasha further noted, “They look at our planning and they see (pause)” [what counselors are doing on a weekly basis and their goals for the year based on data from the previous school year]. Joe supported knowing what was occurring within the department from year to year when he commented on their progress through the American School Counselor Association’s Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) process. Joe (SL) noted:

> One of the great things that they do is (pause) we actually (pause). They started with an advisory committee last year that pulled in members from the community. They did that twice last year, twice this year. This year I was blown away. I was very impressed with the work that they have done. Not because of the advisory committee itself, but literally because of the substance within it. It was very data driven. You could literally see all of the aspects that they play as a counselor and then how their data supports exactly how it’s improved a particular function within our school.
**Non-academic factors.** While the role of the professional school counselor may be seen as primarily academic, other factors impact their role, including the perception of their school leaders. Frank (SL) noted the role of tradition as a factor at his school. Joe (SL) had the strongest praise of any of the school leaders interviewed. Joe noted:

One of the things that we talked about a lot and one that I tried to have discussions with them is, You guys have a very, very large, crucial, and, in some cases, a very quiet role behind the scenes which doesn’t get as much credit as it deserves. And yet I know from (pause) because, you know, it’s something that I supervise, oh my gosh, without them, you know, it would (pause) the school would fall apart, as it would be with any other position in a school.

Throughout the interview, Joe (SL) described the value of having school counselors in the building. Immediately after the interview, the researcher reflected in her journal the number of compliments heard, “Joe seems to really appreciate the counselors he supervises. They [the counselors] are lucky to have a supervisor value their role.” Upon listening to the interview the researcher noted in her journal:

The appreciation this school leader has for his counselors may be born out of his direct contact with them, but it is so encouraging to hear a co-worker/supervisor comment on the critical role you [counselors] play and have an appreciation for the role you play despite the increased role and number of factors impacting the role and the effectiveness of the school counselor.
Three of the participants (two PSCs and one school leader) addressed the demographics of the students they serve as factors guiding the role of the professional school counselor. Joe (SL) stated, “Certainly, some of the factors that are going to play that role is where the kids are coming from.” Stacey (PSC) furthered this by saying, “The demographics of the school that you’re in determine a lot about what kind of role you’re going to be playing, I think.” Judy (PSC) noted the “number of students, the priorities determined by the dean and the principal, the team itself” determined the role of the PSC at her school. Judy (PSC) was the only counselor interviewed that mentioned she played a part in determining the professional role she played at her school.

Role Definition

Stakeholders. When addressing the second interview question (Who is involved in determining the role of the PSC?) the answers covered a variety of stakeholders both in the school building and outside of the school. All five PSCs said the principal determined their role. The collaborative work of the administrative team and counseling team in determining the role of the PSC was mentioned by two school leaders, and while administrators and dean of student services were noted as separate entities, none of the PSCs interviewed spoke to the collaborative nature of the school leadership team and the counseling department working together in determining their role. Two counselors noted the role of the local community in playing a part in their role. Only one PSC mentioned parents. One PSC mentioned the role she played in determining her role. The varied role of the PSC may be best noted by Joe
(SL). Joe’s answer demonstrated the number of entities impacting the role of the PSC in the secondary school setting:

Well, you name it. I would think that all stakeholders specifically are going to affect what they do in their primary role as a counselor on a day-to-day basis, and those stakeholders are going to be parents, the kids, obviously the staff here, which means admin [administrators] and teachers…

Stacey (PSC) offered a ranking of those impacting the role of the professional school counselor at her school, “…our principal, our administration is probably the major factor, and then, of course, our dean or head counselor. Needs assessments, I guess, help us out.” Stacey went on to say, “We don’t always do those [needs assessments] like we should but every now and then we get them done.”

Needs assessments are a component of the ASCA National Model, and Sasha (PSC) reported completing the RAMP process led to the inclusion of community members as members of a team guiding the programming and goals of the counseling department:

We did RAMP this year. As part of that, we had an advisory committee and on that we have a lot of different members, including parents, students, town people, [and] community members. So it’s a wide range of people. Yeah, they’re all involved.

**Role of community.** Two counselors noted the role of the community in determining the role of the professional school counselor. Trevor (PSC) stated:
The community does play a role because the perception gets out there, just like it is about any other school in our county, that some people might think that the schools in the north or out near [city name deleted] may be better than another school. So we have to (pause) they already have perceptions about our schools.

While Sasha’s (PSC) department was using community members to be proactive in guiding programming, Trevor’s team seemed to be reacting to community perceptions. Combating negative perceptions was a reactive response in the use of the community as a factor guiding the role of the professional school counselor. Based on Trevor’s response, the researcher noted community perception on the list of those factors determining the role of the professional school counselor.

**Impact of parents.** Joe (SL) noted the impact of parents on the role of the school counselor. In noting the role of parents, he noted parents also impacted the role of the school leader. Joe remarked, “A lot of parent issues that sometimes drive what they [counselors] do on a day-to-day basis from working with kids. And a lot of times, it’s the same thing that we get bogged down with as an administrator.” His comments led the researcher to note there may be a, “kinship in the difficulties of the job of the school counselor and school leader.” Joe (SL) went on to say there was no limit to the direction in which issues come to the office of the administrator/school leader or the school counselor. The source may be inside the building (i.e., teachers), or from outside the school building (e.g., parents or other stakeholders):
Just things from above them that push down and things from below and sideways. A lot of things from teachers as well. …their [counselors] recipient to (pause) many of the things that teachers come down and say… This child does not belong in my class for this, that, or the other reason. …They [counselors] get directed in a lot of different ways while still trying to maintain the best interest of that student for whatever reason.

Jake (SL) furthered the conversation on the directionality of various parties impacting the role of the professional school counselor. In Jake’s comments it was evident there are decisions about the role of the school counselor coming from a stakeholder outside of the school and then this suggested role was further defined by site based management (i.e., principal or other school leaders). Jake stated:

To be honest, our Central Office primarily determines their [counselors] professional role. Certainly, within the school itself, we make adaptations as to what we want them to do and how we want them to handle certain situations. But, overall, generically, that pretty much comes from Central Office as to what their function will be.

**Role of school leaders.** The role of the school leader was a dominant response in interview question two (Who is involved in determining your professional role?). Among counselors and school leaders the first answer was twice the principal. Working at different schools, Barkley (SL) and Beth (PSC) noted the principal first. Barkley’s response to, “Who
is involved in determining the role of the professional school counselor was, “Here, it’s our (pause) the principal, first and foremost, the administrative staff, and the dean of students who works collaboratively together. Beth’s sole answer was, “…the principal.”

Trevor (PSC) served as the dean of his counseling department and his response focused on his leadership role in defining in his professional role. The needs of his department directly impacted his role:

I think the counselors would be involved in determining my professional role also because they would need to let me know what it is they feel uncomfortable with, what they need help with, what other professional development they need, what other professional development we need as a team so that we can make sure that we’re helping students and parents and all of our stakeholders.

As a department leader, Trevor (PSC) was the public face of the department for the school community. He knew he served an essential function as the liaison to his school’s leaders. Trevor noted the role of communication in building a relationship with the school leaders and other stakeholders, while also supporting the needs of his department.

**Actual and Potential Role When Working with Students in Gangs**

One of the goals of this study was to explore the role professional school counselors can play in reaching students in their school that are gang involved. In order to explore the PSC’s role, the researcher asked about the current role and what role PSCs may play. First, general comments made about the presence of gangs in schools in this district as noted by the
participants will be addressed. Second, the answers to interview question number three will be addressed, “What role do counselors play in identifying gang presence or providing intervention in the school setting?” Finally, the answers to interview question number four, “Tell me what role you think counselors might play in identifying and providing intervention for those students who are currently involved in a gang,” will be presented.

**Presence of gangs in district.** Addressing school violence is not a new problem for public schools across the country. As gangs become more prevalent in both rural and urban school districts, school leaders will need to develop policies and programming designed to prevent violence in the school setting. The school district in the present study was not unlike others struggling to balance suppression with prevention in order to maintain safe schools. This section will review the school district in this study's approach to preventing and intervening the infiltration of gangs in the hallways.

**Study the local situation.** In addressing the work of PSCs with students in gangs, it is important to explore the nature of the problem in the local district as well as the historical response to the presence of gangs in this school district. With 10 years of experience with this school district and another nine years of experience with local law enforcement, Derek (SL) was asked about his history with the district and his personal interest in the topic of gangs. Derek addressed the current state of gang intervention by referencing the past and moving into where the local law enforcement and schools are today:
First we had to admit we had the problem. For a long time we didn’t have gangs; it was a gang-like activity. First I had to say that, it was gang-like activity. Then it was Oh my gosh. The sky is falling. That’s not where we’re at. …I think in [name of county deleted] County we got a good start. We have a system in place; we just need to do a much better job communicating. We need to find a clearinghouse of some sort. …there’s the [name of county deleted] County Gang Professional Partnership out there but for some reason sometimes that just doesn’t seem to work. It’s not their fault. They do a good job. We just need to get people to that in order to understand the resources that are within the county.

*Look for early signs.* While working with another officer, Derek (SL) was told to pay attention to the early signs of gang activity in the county. His coworker previously worked in Chicago and told Derek, “You need to realize what’s going on here. It’s coming.” Derek went on to say it was:

Out of necessity, being the area I worked, I took his advice and started learning it; reading and just interacting with a lot of law enforcement agencies in the area, and [the] stuff I learned has benefited me quite a bit.

*Nature of gangs is dynamic.* Derek (SL) spoke of the evolving nature of gangs in the schools. He noted that when he first started his career in the school district, a lot of his interaction with students in gangs or those exhibiting gang behavior in violation of school policy was at the high school level. “But now a lot high, a lot middle, and some in
elementary. So I’ve watched it actually trickle down…” During the present study, Derek found his work included going to “talk to kids who are playing Bloods and Crips on the playground at elementary schools or just emulating.” While Derek does not think they were hardcore gang members, he did believe they were “definitely being exposed” in the neighborhood. Surprisingly, Derek reported he “can name two young men right off the bat who I would say, if they could be validated, they would be validated as elementary school kids. They are that involved.”

Derek spoke on the evolution of gang participation, severity of infractions, and the more aggressive recruitment practices. The evolving nature of gangs created challenges in addressing the presence of gangs in the schools. Derek was not alone in the school leader group to note the difficulties in recognizing and enforcing policy. Frank (SL) noted, “…gang stuff is real fluid and it changes weekly, monthly, and the information [given]…to a large degree can be outdated.” Barkley (SL) commented on the fluid nature of gangs when asked about enforcing policy. Barkley described it as an “evolving science” and recognized the challenges of getting students out of gangs. He did not find the interactions to be simple:

I don’t like just matter of fact saying, Okay. You are this because you do this. You know. And that’s (pause) it’s tough. It’s tough to try to get kids out of that and find other avenues for ‘em when oftentimes they don’t even want to admit and say it.

**Level of participation.** Derek (SL) was asked to comment on the levels of participation he had observed in grades kindergarten through twelfth grade. He noted the
severity of the infraction “does evolve” but stopped short of saying it was based on the age of
the student because, “There are so many different stages of gang involvement. Are they a
wannabe, gonnabe [gang member]?” He found the severity of the infraction, “really depends
on the child, the exposure and the willingness of the gang, and the need of the gang to reach
out to get a particular student.” Derek went on to say, “Primetime recruiting is … 12-18
[years].” Locally, he noted there had been a “push by the Crips or the Folk Nation to combat
the numbers of the Bloods that they [gang members] were starting to go younger” in
recruiting new members.

Derek (SL) and Barkley (SL) both worked in areas that can be described as inner city.
In contrast, Joe (SL) worked in a more rural part of the county that was continuing to see
expanding population growth in the local community. Joe recognized the presence of gangs
in schools; however, at his school Joe found the presence of gangs was not an obvious one.

I don’t think that there’s any school in the county or in the nation at large that can say
that they don’t have some sort of a gang presence in some capacity. Now, having
said that, at our particular school, and again my personal perception is that we don’t
have one that you can walk in the courtyard and readily identify individuals that are
there [as students in gangs]. They’re just not there.

Joe (SL) went on to say he believed the absence of gangs was the result of having a “very
strong staff, from counselor to admin [administrators] to teachers to everything, even the
students, that [is] one of the things we preach is holding each other accountable.”
Like Joe (SL), Jake (SL) worked in a more rural part of the county that was also seeing expanding population growth, and Jake recognized his school had “gangs on campus” and believed, “virtually say every middle and high school in the county has some type of gang presence.” For Jake (SL), gang members on campus are not the problem:

The problem for us is not that they dress in their …gang colors. The problem for us is not that they are here. The problem for us is when their actions from outside in the community start to ebb into the school.

He noted they do not allow them to flag and required students to remove their “handkerchiefs, or whatever it may be, and put them away. We do not allow them, if we catch them, stacking or signing and things of that sort, and they are subject to disciplinary action from the school.” The administrator or other school leader could address the concern based on the severity of the infraction. Joe (SL) explained:

Sometimes it’s simply You can’t do that. Or if it’s leading to an altercation then and we have two different groups signing at each other, then we deal with that. Now, if it’s the type of signing or stacking that is threatening towards another group of students, we deal with it as a threat.

The fluid nature of gangs and the severity of infractions were both complicating factors in addressing the intervention and prevention efforts of law enforcement, school officials and professional school counselors. Sasha (PSC) may have put it best when she said, “I realized how huge it is and how organized and how…well like I said, generational.
Their grandfathers were in these gangs, and then fathers and sons. It just became really big, I guess.” Students in gangs are a big problem and one that should be addressed, but who is ready, willing or capable of addressing the issue?

**Actual Role of Professional School Counselors**

In Chapter 2, it was noted that there are perceived and actual roles of the working professional school counselor. Exploring the role of the school counselors in their work with students in gangs is no different. There is an actual role and a perceived or potential role. In this section, the actual role of the professional school counselor will be discussed from the perspective of school counselors and school leaders.

**Limited work with gangs.** The fluid nature of gangs has already been introduced and the fluid nature of the PSC’s role was reflected in the first interview conducted with Beth (PSC). Beth noted a concerted effort, “about four or five years ago to help us identify the tags and the things they wear in order to identify gangs.... I don’t think the counselors here have been asked to work a lot with the gangs. Beth’s school leader, Stan, said, “I would say they [school counselors] don’t really have a specific role in identifying gang presence” and “it wouldn’t be something that I would put under their job description. Beth (PSC) also noted that interactions with students in gangs was limited to an awareness that students may be involved with a gang because any intervention or interaction was something “that the assistant principals work with a lot.” Again, Stan’s (SL) comments mirrored those of his school counselor. Stan (SL) stated, “If it’s a discipline issue, then it [the student issue] would
stick with the administration.” Stan’s PSCs would be involved if the student needed “more of a counseling type component where the student needs assistance or is seeking help from us, the school.” Sam (SL) would like to see PSCs:

Find out more about how much involvement they have. What are the behaviors in the involvement and really talk with them about issues of safety; and if they ever feel like they’re in jeopardy, where to go to for a safe place and those types of things. And also talking with them about how gang involvement can escalate and how it can really lead you to a lot of really serious problems, including incarceration … and sometimes death.

Frank (SL) said:

I can’t say I’ve ever met a counselor I would trust to even give me that type of [gang] information because they tend to be so ignorant of that type of information that they may give you false information and lead you on a wild goose chase.

He went on to say, “So I’m not very trusting of that [information coming from PSCs] at this point. I don’t think they’re [PSCs] involved.”

Sam (SL) found the PSC role tied to safety issues:

The counselors often are going to be involved in that [intervention and prevention] as students come to them either with concerns about maybe their safety or perhaps someone else’s safety. Or they might be gang involved themselves and might be coming to a counselor to get assistance with that, of how to navigate that.
Sasha (PSC) said she worked with students in gangs, but their gang affiliation was “not what we’re working on.” Beth (PSC) agreed:

The thing is…if a kid is coming to you with a specific problem, you help them with that specific problem whether he’s a gang member or not because my goal is to make them at least trust me enough to tell me something or ask for help.

Beth went on to say her actual role as a PSC limited her ability to interact because in her opinion, “if a kid was deeply entrenched in a gang, we’re not going to be able to get them out of that gang.” Derek (SL) agreed that the degree of involvement complicates the intervention, but goes on to say the intervention was not based on a:

- Particular age because no kid’s lost. But at the same time, there are kids that, once they reach a certain point, it is going to be very difficult – I’m not going to say impossible – but it’s going to be very difficult to get ‘em back.

Because the immediate need for a student to seek a counselor’s assistance was rarely, if ever, gang related, Beth (PSC) noted her form of intervention was about helping the student obtain his/her diploma. Beth goes on to say:

- If he is here and attempting to get an education, behaving himself and not fighting and doing all the gang (pause) and not tagging the school and doing all that stuff, then my role would be to help him get what he needs from the school system as long as he is playing by our rules.

The role of the counselor continues to come back to the academic component of the job.
**Collaboration.** Jake (SL) noted collaboration as a part of the function of the school counselor’s work with students in gangs although he did note that the level of collaboration would be limited to the degree of the gang involvement and its impact on the school environment. Jake stated:

I don’t know that they play in role in identifying gang issues unless somebody comes to them with a situation, unless a parent contacts them with a situation. I don’t know that they themselves go out and take on the role of identifying gang problems. Now, once a gang problem has been identified, they certainly may be called in to mediate; they certainly may be called in to talk to students. However, primarily at that point, they will be working in conjunction with an administrator who will be dealing with whatever the gang issue may be. If it’s simply a matter of gang dress or flagging or something of that sort, then the counselors can deal with that aspect of it. But if it’s a situation that involves some sort of gang activity as it may have occurred on campus or something like that, or even if it occurred out in the community, an administrator may be involved in it because of the implications that it may have for some sort of school disruption.

One of the counselors at Jake’s school concurred with his assessment. Stacey (PSC) noted:

We don’t do a lot in identifying the gang presence. We may have suspicions that someone is in a gang or we may hear from another student: Well, he’s in a gang or
She’s in a gang. Whatever. And then sometimes they may wear a color in their hair or something and I say, I wonder. But the administration and the resource officer tend to be the ones dealing with that. I have never had a referral because of some kind of activity. Usually they are out of here.

Stacey (PSC) went on to say addressing students in gangs was handled by administrators with no communication coming to the counselors about those students that may be involved in a gang. Stacey said, “I don’t remember them (administrators or school leaders) ever communicating, “Oh, this student in your part of the alphabet is in a gang.” The communication at Stacey’s school was not going from school leader to counselor nor was it going from PSC or teacher to school leader. Stacey explained, “I can’t remember anyone here ever talking about making that kind of referral.”

Like Stacey (PSC), Trevor (PSC) did not see referrals coming to his office from teachers. The PSC participants interviewed reported that those students violating school policy were referred to an administrator. Most referrals for confirmed concerns based on attire or language were directed to the administrative team if they come to the counseling office first. Trevor explained the process of referrals at his school:

I think they [teachers] would probably first, if they knew for sure they were in a gang, they were in a gang and they saw signs, I think they would refer that to an administrator. In fact, if they were to call us and say, I know this student’s in a gang, we would say, You need to talk to administration. But if they say, I suspect the
student’s in a gang, then we would want to talk with the student and then we would alert the administrator that, It’s been brought to our attention it’s been said this student might be in a gang; we just want to kind of let you know.

When asked what Trevor would do during a counseling session if he had a sense or confirmed knowledge a student-client was involved in a gang, Trevor (PSC) stated his personal process:

Well, I think we play a role if we hear a student talking about I’m involved in a gang or if we see students wearing gang regalia or if we see them flashing signs. Not that we always know what they mean. Or if we see them wearing gang colors, then we need to be proactive and point that out to administrators, and if we hear things about a gang fight that’s going to go on after school or in the community – sometimes we don’t have a lot to do with those in the community once they go home – but if we know there’s going to be a big gang fight in the community, then we need to alert administrators and it will be up to them to contact the local authority and let them know what’s going to happen. But we do play a big role because sometimes those are the (pause) students come to us and tell us about these kinds of things first.

As a counterpoint, Trevor’s school leader, Frank, stated:

I can’t say I’ve ever met a counselor I would trust to even give me that type of information because they tend to be so ignorant of that type of information that they may give you false information and lead you on a wild goose chase.
Joe (SL) and Sasha (PSC) worked at the same high school, and both concurred that the actual role of the school counselor was minimal. Joe’s perception of the PSC role in working with students in gangs follows:

Probably minimal. I doubt very much that we have an active role in identifying gang presence because it’s not something that has been that strong. Now, having said that, you know, why be reactive to the situation in the future at any school that [gang presence] could potentially grow? So, it does bring up the question: is that something that we need to be a little bit more active in and identifying and getting these kids together and trying to counsel them?

Sasha concurred that the role was minimal at her school but also mentioned that her personal interest had led her to become aware of the presence of gangs in her school.

I think we really don’t play a role in that. Honestly. My personal interest has driven me to look at some things but we have not addressed it. It’s not a topic we’ve discussed and we’re not involved in that.

The researcher followed up by asking, “Do you think that’s [no role for PSC] deliberate?” Sasha shared her thoughts, “I don’t know why they wouldn’t consider us. But I don’t think it’s deliberate. I don’t really know if it’s even a consideration.” When comparing answers of the two staff members, the researcher noted it may not be deliberate, but the heavy use of data to guide programming may be the reason PSCs are not considered. This reflection was based on Joe’s response, “In hindsight, you want to try, and anything that you do, you want
to tackle so you can effect the greatest change over a population. So because we have low numbers to begin with, would it be worth it?”

Barkley (SL) perceived the actual role of the school counselor to be "... through the relationships that they build with students" in individual counseling or communicating with students in the hallway and, "that type of thing," and not on identifying the presence of gangs school-wide. Barkley also noted the identification of students often comes “through administrative usually, through some type of interaction the administration has with the students: the classroom behavior, hallway behavior, just communicating, and developing relationships with kids and that type of thing.”

Frank (SL) also found the relationships counselors created to be key in gang intervention at his school. Frank said:

I think if they’re [PSCs] having the type of interactions with the children where building certain relationships and students feel free to communicate to them about things going on with them and issues and what’s going on with other students, things they’re [students] concerned about, then the counselors could play a better role in gang suppression and prevention of gang behavior.

The role of collaboration in the actual role of PSCs was mentioned frequently. In the participants’ responses, there was a lack of collaboration and referrals from the school leader level down to the PSC, especially if the student had committed an infraction leading to disciplinary consequences. Based on the responses of the participants, often the students in
gangs were addressed by the school leader, and there was no follow up from inside the school.

**Actual Role of the School Leader**

**Clarity of school leader’s role.** According to Trevor (PSC), professional school counselors, "are on the forefront, and we play a vital role in trying to help students to stay away from gangs, and I think that’s our big role – to try to provide interventions that will help them.” While the actual role of the school counselor may be perceived as vital, the variety of responses led the researcher to conclude that the role was really ambiguous. The PSC’s role ambiguity was in stark contrast to that of the school leader. During the interviews, Jake (SL) was asked to describe the role he played in working with students in gangs. He emphatically stated:

> To be honest, by the time a kid gets to me with a gang issue, they’re probably pretty much on their way out the door. They’ve already received a warning, they’ve already been suspended, they’ve already been counseled on what we will and will not accept, what we will, what we will not tolerate, and by the time they get to me, they’re being recommended for long term suspension simply because they refuse to follow any of our rules. They’ve used their position as a member of a gang to create havoc, to try to cause some disruption in the school and this type of thing. So by the time it gets to me, it is purely a disciplinary issue. My role is imminently clear. I am charged with two things primarily. I’m charged with a lot of things, but two of my primary duties
that I’m charged with is providing a safe and orderly environment and providing an environment in which learning can take place. So to me my role, it’s imminently clear. But gang activity within the school, threatens the security and safety of the students, and it threatens the learning environment. So my role, to me, is imminently clear.

The clarity of Frank’s (SL) role seemed clear to students at his school, too. Based on his comments on his work with students in gangs, Frank said, “They [students in gangs] know that my goal is to enforce school policy,” and “they know exactly what I’m gonna do if I find out that anybody is exhibiting gang behavior or recruiting for gangs or wearing gang paraphernalia.” Frank said he had found that board policies had “gotten more lenient, in the sense that there’s been a push to not long-term [suspend] or suspend as many kids.”

The safety of the learning environment and the limited prevention and intervention was supported by Derek's (SL) comments on the role he played. Derek said, "the role I play is strictly suppression. We come in, we fix the problem; move on."

Other school leaders, like Joe, use interactions with students in gangs as an opportunity to address the entire student and not the one infraction that led to their interaction.

One of the first things I do–and I know I keep coming to this academic piece–it’s the first thing that I look at for any student, and this is just a personal thing that I do. I pull up their grades. I pull up their attendance. Those are the first two things I look
at. I don’t care about what they’ve been suspended for, what their discipline history looks like. I’m telling you, if it’s their first tardy or whether it’s an out-of-school suspension because of a gang-related activity, I want to know what their grades are.

Joe (SL) also mentioned preferring the high school setting because he “can be pointblank and have a rational discussion,” by saying:

Look. Whether you belong to a gang, obviously, we don’t approve, the law doesn’t approve, but it’s your choice, and my focus always turns back to the academic side of it. You know. What you do outside of school is your business and not me, not your parents, not anyone else is going to be able to change this as much as we like.

**Policies.** School leaders were asked about the policies they used to guide practice, and Jake (SL) found that, "policies have been consistent" and "easy to enforce because they were very clear." To this point in time, a student, "received a gang warning; after a gang warning, if they continued the same type of action, then they received a suspension and it could lead to a long-term suspension" and "By and large, most of our kids once we gave them a gang warning, then they were fine, and the actions that they’d perpetrated would stop." However, he expected to see some policy changes as a result of the district hoping to reduce the number of suspensions.

Sam (SL) recognized that the policies had been clear despite not being in a position to enforce board policy. He also noted:
My perception is maybe a little bit skewed, I guess you could say. There, for a while, what I was hearing from some schools is that the policy was so directed that they had to suspend kids when there was a potential of gang involvement. Now, the policy says that you don’t have to, but I was hearing from administrators they felt that they did have to if the student demonstrated some of the characteristics that were listed in the gang involvement. But when they revised the policy a few years back, the revision was around not having to suspend kids for just a...maybe they were wearing colors one time or something to that effect. But we could probably still use training and discussion around consistency around the policy.

Barkley (SL) had found the policies had been "clear enough," and went on to say:

school policies can create unintended conflict with parents when parents and students are asked to abide by system wide policies. It’s just that’s a difficult policy [to enforce]. ..I’ve had conversations with parents coming in, and rosary beads as an example....I’m not saying students can’t have a rosary. They can certainly have a rosary, it just can’t be worn around their neck and displayed.

In addition to the school policy, Barkley recognized the fluid nature of gang paraphernalia as an obstacle to enforcing policy. Barkley noted issues of clothing could “get a little bit clouded” because “communications don’t support some of the information we get from police and security about ‘Oh, this is a gang-related issue or paraphernalia or dress’ or whatever.”
Stan (SL) found gangs to be prevalent when he arrived at his school four and a half years ago. He stated, “One of the things that we’re pretty clear on are we don’t tolerate it [gang activity]”. Like Joe (SL), Stan (SL) provided a warning and was frank in saying, “You do it again, it’s ten days. You do it again, you’re going home for the whole year.” He attributed his staff sticking to policy to “lessen[ing] the amount of incidents we have on our campus.” Stan found that “being open and communicating with your kids that we just don’t do that here and following through then when consequences are necessary.” Stan went on to say, “I would certainly advocate for other schools that are having an issue to replicate a similar type stance.”

A part of Derek’s (SL) job was to support school leaders in the interpretation of the board's policy. Derek, too, has noted some changes to the "board's policy [number deleted]" and was awaiting news of new changes to the policy. Derek mentioned:

It [Board policy ….] used to be three or more persons with identifying signs, signals, whatever, violation of criminal acts and/or Board policy. They took out the word ‘Board policy’ so it was ‘in violation of criminal acts’. There are some changes coming up. But yes, you could not represent at a school. You couldn’t have a bandanna. You couldn’t have flag beads. No beads. Lacing the shoestrings a certain way. Flying their belt a certain way. A certain hat. You know. Just tipping their (pause) and there are so many things that they couldn’t do that you can do out on the street.
Derek went on to share his concerns about changes in board policy and the school leaders’ perception of students in gangs on campus:

We’re becoming more accepting and I actually had a principal tell me, We know it’s here but we have so many other things. As long as they keep it out of here. Well, that’s great but those kids are still bringing it not only to your school but also in the community. And basically as a school we’re an extension of the community. But I think the current policies are actually becoming more lenient.

**Ambiguity for school counselors.** While Jake’s (SL) role was "imminently clear" there are no policies or procedures in place to guide the PSCs in their work with gangs. The ambiguity led to personal biases guiding practice. Judy (PSC) said, “I don’t know really what my role is supposed to be with gangs.” Trevor (PSC) did not hesitate to contact parents. Beth (PSC) noted personal safety prevented her from asking or inquiring about a student’s level of gang affiliation. Stacey (PSC) noted, “I don’t think I would be afraid of working with them, but I just don’t know if I feel like I have the tools.” In a school with counselors filling the role of academic counselor, Stacey stated:

Quite frankly, if something was going on with a gang…if there was gang activity or if there was a student we suspected of being in a gang and we felt like that student really needed to be worked with or we were going to try to help him and try to get them to see that this is not a healthy thing to do, I think our SAP counselor would be more likely to handle it. Yeah. Here, we are just so academically college planning
driven because of the population, and I’m sure that’s true at a number of schools, and I guess I feel ill at ease thinking about dealing with it.

A level of frustration was noted about referring students to an SAP, who is often also licensed as a school counselor, to do the work of the school counselor. Sam (SL) concurred that the “traditional counselor and the SAP often have the exact same training, so the SAP’s not the only person who can deal with these [student in gang] issues.” Data analyses from interviews clarified the researcher’s reflection. Similar training and different job titles do not make up for the difference in the actual and perceived role of the PSC. PSCs in this district, although trained to address the immediate mental health issues of student-clients, were not encouraged to do so based on the priorities of the school or counseling department, the presence of SAPs (Student’s Assistance Program Coordinators), or the PSCs elect to do nothing based on perceived lack of appropriate training or personal and professional strengths.

In order to clarify the role differences between PSCs and SAPs, Sam (SL) was asked if the presence of SAPs made the role of the school counselor more academic in nature. Sam said:

In some cases it has. In some cases and I’ve heard this somewhat more from SAPs is that the SAP says, The counselor refers anything to me that’s not an academic issue. Whereas, that’s really not been the design. That wasn’t the intent of the SAP program. The SAP program was around substance abuse and prevention as well as
crises and students who had some real specialized needs. But the role of the
counselor really should be academic, career, personal, social and then looking for
outcomes around those areas.

Sam (SL) went on to say:

SAP’s have been the ones who have been somewhat the go-to person around gang
activity, so often they are partnering real closely with the SRO or the administrators
around either intervention or prevention activities for gangs. At that point [secondary
school level], it tends to be more intervention than prevention.

When asked if the reliance on SAPs was a result of site-based leaders' perceptions
that the SAP was better trained, Sam (SL) stated:

Possibly better trained or just with more time to deal with it. I think that’s where I
hear it the most is they say the counselors who are dealing with transcripts, college
admissions, or registering new students, these types of things. They see the SAP with
more flexibility and really more time to deal with some of the personal/social issues.

While SAPs may be working with student in gangs, PSCs are left with fewer
interactions to necessitate professional development. Stacey (PSC) may have said it best
when she addressed the frequency of contact that impacted her competency level or desire to
seek out information:

Once again, I think it’s just that I don’t feel like that’s going to be something that I’m
going to be hit with on any kind of regular basis. But maybe I should at least become
a little more knowledgeable about it in case I do. But I think other things are such a
greater priority here and…I shouldn’t say priority, but it’s just that’s not something
that comes up.

**Different Perceptions of the Potential Role for School Counselors**

Because of the perceived “very low profile” of students in gangs or considering gang
affiliation at Joe’s (SL) school, he saw the potential role of PSCs being tied to the data:

Again going back to the data my question would be: What’s the link between those
individuals that are in either category, whether you belong or wish to belong to a
gang, and How do you do academically? Is there a direct link between how you do in
school versus your affiliation with a gang?

Joe’s perception was that there are not enough students in gangs or those that are affiliated
are, “... keep[ing] a very low profile,” to warrant intervention or PSC involvement, and Sasha
(PSC) contended they don’t play a role because it had never come up in conversations with
the school leaders.

The researcher noted, "If there is an absence of collaboration between school leader
and school counselor, how would one follow the data to guide intervention or prevention?
The levels of gang affiliation may present a challenge in tracking data as well as how
disciplinary data are recorded. There are no subgroup categories for students in gangs, and
the data collection process is inconsistent and, therefore, not a reliable source of data to direct
prevention and intervention efforts.”
In the case of Stacey (PSC), she did not expect gang membership to come up in conversations with her students. She noted that her perceived role was tied to what was addressed in the counseling session, "I mean we might have suspicion but it’s just hard for me to imagine someone coming in here and talking about that [gang involvement]. She went on to share what she perceived her role to be if she were faced with working with a student in a gang:

If a student came in here and started talking about that they were considering joining a gang, I could see us trying to talk with them about what, why is this? You know. What is it that you think you’ll get from this? and talk with them and try to provide guidance about the negatives and doing such and such is bad.

Stacey's school leader, Jake, spoke at length about the potential role of the school counselor as an interventionist in both the small group and individual counseling setting:

Well, I think this is a great opportunity for counselors once students have been identified as either gang members or as potential gang members and before anything actually occurs to sit down with them individually or as a group, as the case may be. And maybe not inter-gang groups but to sit with them in smaller groups and kind of counsel them into the appropriate behaviors, the appropriate actions, what administration may accept, what administration will tolerate and what they will not tolerate, without getting the administration involved in it at that point. Because once
they flag, once they sign, once they stack, once they tag something, then the counseling side of it, while still important, will take on a secondary role.

Frank (SL) said he would like his counselors:

To be able to identify those type of kids and be able to notify their parents, talk to them about the situation to a degree, try to mentor them and let them know the downfall of that type of behavior.

Derek's (SL) role was one of suppressing gang activity and saw the need for someone in the school to intervene and connect students to outside agencies in order to prevent more serious gang involvement. He said PSCs could play a:

Huge role in identifying gang[s] and what I find when I talk with these young men and young ladies, if you actively listen. They want to be heard. If you don’t shut ‘em out. Once you establish that relationship I really feel you have the potential actually for change, and I think counselors are in place and are willing, and that’s what they are there to do.

Derek (SL) saw the need for a clearinghouse for students in gangs and believed the PSC is uniquely positioned to "become an extension of the school into the [county name deleted] County Gang Intervention Partnership." He found that his role and training did not lend themselves to the prevention and intervention aspects of tackling the presence of gangs in the schools. However, he perceived that the PSC had a role based on his/her training to change behaviors and to serve as the school's "liaison to prevention/intervention."
Role of Graduate Training

Four out of the five PSCs interviewed attended graduate school in the state of North Carolina. Only one of the counselors interviewed mentioned having any graduate school training on gangs, and she attended graduate school outside of North Carolina. Sasha (PSC) shared, “Yeah, as a part of a class,... but I don’t even remember the class it was in ...there wasn’t a class called ‘Gangs’. It was just how you deal with kids in gangs.” Trevor (PSC) said, “Yes,” initially and then went on to clarify his training was, “…actually, when I went to the North Carolina School Counselors’ Conference, they talked about gangs, so that was very good.”

Beth (PSC) completed her graduate degree three years ago and described her training program as, “pretty much boilerplate.” Based on her tenure in the same school in a variety of other positions, she noted gangs “were very prevalent [during her graduate training years], and I’m sure there was some information (pause)...But nothing about how you deal with or how you would go about actually walking into a situation and dealing with gangs" was discussed in her training program. Stacey (PSC) completed her graduate training almost twenty years ago, and she did, “not remember that at all. I really don’t.”

Sasha’s (PSC) work in a group home with students in gangs fed her desire to enter a graduate training program "because the students would leave the group homes and go back into the same environments and so we’d be seeing them again later.” She stated she found the topic of gangs to be:
Interesting and it probably came from what I’d seen in movies because I wasn’t living it. I didn’t have friends that were in gangs. I wasn’t involved in it. So it must have come from that and then learning more when I was in college about what it meant or how old gangs were and how organized they were and just…I mean that was kind of fascinating to me and so I wanted to go and work with those kids.

And it was during her graduate training that Sasha (PSC) recognized the scope of the gang issue. “I realized how huge it is and how organized and how…well like I said, generational. Their grandfathers were in these gangs and then fathers and sons. It just became really big.”

**Post-Graduate Professional Development**

Beth (PSC) recalled a push four or five years ago to identify the presence of gangs at her school, but since that training she noted, “It’s not an interest of mine” and went on to say she was “… good without knowing” because “They don’t pay me enough…” and will look to other staff members to “… handle that stuff.” Although Sasha (PSC) continued to have an interest in gangs, she was unclear if any professional development opportunities had been offered at the district level. Her comments included, “I don’t think the school has provided anything. The district maybe has had something. I don’t think I’ve done anything in this district.” Sam (SL) shared that “an email blast” and posting on an internal staff development site were “the main mechanisms for communicating” professional development opportunities.
Sasha’s (PSC) post graduate gang awareness training at the school level had occurred in other counties, “I have done things in others [schools]. They’ve brought other trainings in and I’ve gone to some trainings. But I don’t know if I’ve been to anything here. When asked if her school’s need for training was an obstacle to having training at the school level, Sasha stated, “we’re close to -- gang activity is not just in the city. It can filter out. …there is a need, but maybe it’s just not the highest on the list of priorities.” While Sasha worked in a more rural part of the district and was not receiving training at the school level, Barkley (SL), worked “in the city” and said:

They [the school district] do a good job. It’s usually through (pause) it’s mostly through security as opposed to guidance and social work. So it’s mostly about identification and then basically I think it’s just through our individual efforts here at school, trying to find, and the prevention and programs or interventions to use to help the kids.

Barkley’s (SL) experience was different from that of his school leader peers. Frank (SL) worked in a rural setting and found that the district had not done any training recently and found the training at the school level did “more harm than good” and most of what he knew “is based on experience.” Jake (SL) also worked in a more rural part of the county, and his experience had been:

Central Office, in and of itself, has not done a lot in terms of training, backing staff and things of that sort with gangs or about gangs, gang-related activities and things of
that sort. Most of the training occurs at the local school level. Over the last five years, we’ve done a couple of different trainings. Our SRO has done some training in relationship to it and we have…and last year we brought a couple of folks in from a local law enforcement agency that works primarily with gangs and they did some training for us. It’s a mixed bag, to be honest. Some of the trainers are better than others, and, therefore, the training is better. Some of the trainers are not very personable or very engaging and it loses the teachers and the staff members as a result. It just doesn’t always work out.

Sasha’s (PSC) supervising school leader, Joe, noted the training from the district is “probably limited, to be honest.” Joe (SL) stated as a school leader, “I don’t receive training for gangs or gang-related activity. Most of what I know is either self-taught or stuff that we pick up along the way because we’re placed into that position as administrators.” Joe said much of what he had picked up "unfortunately it’s reactive but that’s also predicated upon the levels that we deal with here, which is not very much” and "so some of that [training] is from our SRO."

While Joe (SL), personally, used his SRO, his school based peers may not have, “again it depends on the individual.” Joe’s inquiry involved asking questions, “as far as identifying things so we can nip things in the bud before it even rises up.” This proactive approach was due to an SRO that “has been pretty good and forthcoming about, ‘Here’s what you need to look out for.” Joe recognized the value of consulting with his school resource
officer in the absence of formal district level training “because they know what’s going on out in the community so they can give us heads up as to things going on.”

Joe (SL) sought the information in order to better inform his role as a school leader, while Stacey (PSC) thought, "my not having enough training...is probably because I haven’t sought it out because I didn’t think it was important to be…I mean, yes, I think I need to be aware, but I guess as far as having the training to work with a gang member or someone that is thinking about joining a gang, I just have never sought that out." Stacey went on to say she did not feel like she had the training to intervene. Besides an interest in the topic, Stacey (PSC) said personal finances and work load impacted her ability to seek out training and professional development opportunities:

Well, the first issue is the money that's involved and more of it has to come out of our pockets now to go to these things. But the other thing is the time factor of just being away and getting hit harder when we get back.

Stacey’s (PSC) concerns about time and money were echoed by Judy (PSC). When asked what had prevented her from attending professional development opportunities, Judy (PSC) plainly stated, “It was time, a lack of time.” Judy (PSC) went on to say “because it’s not walking in my door every day” and not a “major problem” at her school, she did not seek out more information. Like Judy, Frank (SL) had not seen students in gangs; however, he felt, “...it’s always something you want to be cognizant of. You know. I would always put it in the Top 5 because you always want to maintain awareness of it.”
In order to help his school staff, Stan (SL) had a training planned for the following fall for his entire staff and the staffs of other area schools. To date, the district training had been “kind of overview sessions,” and there had not been any “specific counselor/admin gang training.” Stan’s administrative staff was “kept abreast through school security of incidents or local things” that the school leaders needed to be aware of.

As a school leader, Frank (SL) found that the training “creates panic,” and “There has been some school-wide stuff [training] in the past but mostly what I know is based on experience. I don’t feel like the training did anything for me anyway.” Frank went on to say his relationship with students had helped, “I think having dealt with the kids and knowing them and some of the patterns and things like that is more helpful than anything they’ve [the school district] provided me.”

**Mutual Appreciation of Each Other’s Role**

Because site based school leaders play an important part in the actual role of the school counselor, each school leader was asked, “During your graduate school training, were you provided any opportunities to learn about the role of the school counselor?” Frank’s (SL) program did not offer training on the role of the school counselor. Frank’s perception was based on his experience as a teacher and a school leader. Since graduate school, Frank’s (SL) experience led to this statement, “I didn’t really think too much of the majority of counselors I worked with as a teacher, and I don’t think too much of ‘em now, for the most part.” Frank (SL) was frustrated by those counselors that “put themselves in a box” and
stated “at certain schools you need to expand certain roles and decrease certain roles.” Frank concluded that the “unwillingness in many counselors to do that [to expand and decrease roles]…leads to some of my dissatisfaction with what goes on in the counseling department.”

Frank found in his experience counselors “don’t want to come across as the bad guy” and left discussions on rule infractions to the school leaders. Frank found that:

If you take the right approach, regardless of whether or not you’re coming down on the kid or not, they’re going to come to you because kids don’t stop coming to me because I come down on them. And that has been the biggest, I guess, issue I’ve had with most counselors, is that balance right there.

At the end of the interview Frank (SL) added:

I think the role of a school counselor is important and I know that I have kind of a negative spin on it to a large degree because of some of my experiences with school counselors. But I think it’s more of the individuals I work with and their feelings toward what they should be doing as opposed to what a counselor is supposed to do. So I think that has caused more misunderstandings that anything else.

Only two of the school leaders had doctoral degrees; however, more advanced degree programs did not lead to covering the role of the school counselor. Jake (SL) stated his training offered:
Very little, to be honest. Neither my master’s degree program did they talk a whole lot about the role of the school counselor; and even when I did my doctoral program, they didn’t talk about so much the role of the school counselor.

In looking at responses on the gang-related content of training programs and exploring the level of preparation counselors receive, I (the researcher) reflected on my own training and noted a lack of appreciation for the role of the school leader, largely because of a lack of exposure during my own graduate school training. Reviewing data based on the perceived and actual role of PSC led the researcher to add a question for the school leaders about the mutual appreciation for the distinct and difficult role the PSC and school leader play in the school setting. Frank (SL) plainly stated:

I think there’s always really [been] a lack of understanding between the administrators and the counselors because nobody really sees what the other one is doing so you kind of question whether they’re actually doing what you feel they should be doing. Sometimes the roles just aren’t clearly spelled out so I think sometimes that leads to a little bit of…misunderstanding.

Sam (SL) said:

I think in some cases there is greater appreciation and in other cases it’s a greater understanding of the role of the counselor and really having an understanding [of] the difference between an administrator and a counselor and then understanding what it is that a counselor can do to really help the school deal with issues that are facing the
school. But if principals and assistant principals don’t have any training [and] most of the time they don’t have training about what a counselor does and that’s a real gap in administrative training that if that were focused on it would really help a lot.

Sam (SL) believed the use of data helped school leaders appreciate the role of the PSC:

Because when they see counselors using the data to make decisions, that really helps them to have an understanding that the counselors and administrators are working towards some of the same goals. We go about it differently but we’re working towards some of the same goals.

Like Sam (SL), Jake (SL) recognized location impacted mutual appreciation for each other’s roles in the school:

It depends on where you’re at. I think at most places, the school counselors appreciate the school administrators. I think at some places, the school [counselors] believe they operate as independent contractors and not within the confines of the entire school program. School counseling, for me, is like any other department. They have a role to play within the school.

In order to support the idea that the departments of the school are a part of a "school program" Jake (SL) "would like to see more collaboration between counselors and the department[s]" he has "encouraged our counselors to attend professional learning community meetings of other departments so that they can be aware of what’s going on...and I don’t
know that that’s happening as fully as much as I would like it to happen.” The burden of collaboration does not fall on the shoulders of the PSCs alone, he stated that he:

Would like to see them [counselors] more involved with other departments within the school so that they [counselors] can fully understand what’s going on in the classroom and so that the classroom teachers can fully understand what’s going on in the counseling office.

Jake also noted:

Years ago you couldn’t become a counselor unless you had taught for three years. That’s no longer the requirement anymore....To me, I think that puts a…that’s a bit of a stigma when it comes to teachers and their trust of counselors, especially if there’s a counselor who’s not been in a classroom and they’re trying to tell a teacher about something academically.

Jake (SL) considered himself "fortunate" to have a dean of students with a teaching background because "she has a great understanding of what classroom teaching is like."

Jake (SL), like other administrators and school staff members, relied on internship and paid work experience to inform them of the role of the PSC. Jake noted, “I think, by and large, most of us learn about school counseling and changes that take place in school counseling just as we go through the program.” Having worked in another state, Jake mentioned the different job responsibilities counselors fill in different schools and different
states, “I think in places, the school counselors are different than others and some places the school counselors do the master scheduling.”

Having worked as a teacher, Joe (SL) mentioned his lack of interaction with counselors when he was a teacher:

You’re going to have those teachers like myself who, when I was in front of the classroom, just dealt with all their own stuff from beginning to end. Rare was the occasion when I went to a counselor, and it was only times when I was like Something’s wrong here. I can’t connect with this student. Do you have any information on this person, period?...It just helped me to know that yeah, there is something going on. End of story, I don’t need to know anything else.

Joe’s (SL) Master’s program in School Administration lumped counselors in with other school stakeholders. He found the role of the school counselor was:

One of those things that you appreciate more as somebody who supervises...because you really find out what truly goes on and how much we rely on the counselor throughout a student’s career. But did I ever receive training? No. Should we have? Yeah. In hindsight, being 20/20 and knowing everything that goes on and how much work that counselors do, yeah, it would have been useful.

When Joe was asked if his perception had changed because he now supervised them directly, Joe declared, “Absolutely, it has.” He went on to say:
So knowing what they go through, from everything from the beginning of the year – from registration to all of the managing, all of the crises that students come to them with, to maintaining academic proficiency for all of the students, all the way up to scheduling for the next year, and everything in between you certainly understand and begin to appreciate exactly what they do, and it’s such a prominent role within the school.

The researcher noted in her reflective journal, “It is clear that this school leader has an appreciation for the role of the school counselor. Although not a direct quote, one of my favorite comments Mr. Joe Smith (SL) made after taping was, "Rarely is the school counselor’s foot off the gas."

Stan (SL) received a single seminar style presentation during his Master’s program. However, Stan said, “I don’t think the seminar taught me anything about what a school counselor does. My perception has always been one in teaming with, so I don’t think that’s really changed much.” Stan went on to say, “Now that I’m in a role where I can implement, I think I feel stronger about the relationship.” Barkley (SL) noted his perception has “not really” changed. Barkley was the only school leader with experience at all three levels: elementary, middle and high school. He stated, “…I think highly of our counselors and always have and always utilize them. Especially in high school, they play a vital role in so many different facets.” So while his perception had not been impacted, Barkley noted:
It’s just the function changes [at different levels] and so I think my perception still doesn’t change; it’s just the role. In the elementary school, you don’t have the letters of recommendation and the college planning and this and that. You have more time to do the other roles of building up and development. Whereas in high school, sometimes that is not (pause) there’s more administrative type roles that take up time. And so it’s just different at each level.

This change in function may have impacted Barkley’s (SL) ability to implement the collaborative services he had preferred at other levels:

I think my (pause) one of my interests in graduate school was really collaborative services and coordinated services, and so, for me, that was always key, is to get all of our players together. I think I did a better job at the middle and elementary schools with the small environment of (pause) we used to have weekly coordinated service team meeting. So the one day that the nurse was on campus, I made sure that my social worker was on campus; I made sure the school psychologist was on campus, and then the counselors and I and our administrative team always met and we would bring all of our students we were concerned about and tried to say, Hey, this might be a medical [issue]. How about you target this student or Maybe we need to do this. So we haven’t done that as much.
Counselor as Collaborator

The level of appreciation may be tied to the amount of collaboration occurring between the school leaders and the PSCs at each school. Sam (SL) noted the amount of collaboration “varies so much from school to school.” Sam went on to say:

But the best case scenario, they are really tight. The counselors are either working with assistant principals or principal around issues. They’re reviewing data. They’re looking at how their specific roles can support the goals of the school. So yeah, we encourage that to be a real strong relationship. In some cases, it is. In other cases, unfortunately it’s not.

A best case scenario seemed to be at Stan (SL) and Beth’s (PSC) school. Stan’s (SL) team of administrators and PSCs meet weekly. He found that, “We just have a pairing or groups of pairings here that work well together.” Stan’s pairings of school leader with a PSC “meets weekly and then the entire team meets monthly. So we’ll have a big session once a month where we all kind of bring what’s going on and bigger issues to the table.” Stan’s team tries “to keep those meeting [times] protected as much as we can so we can communicate with our partner about the kids we deal with.” Frank (SL) also met with his school counselor weekly to talk about “Students we’re concerned about, academics, grades, giving her projects, and so forth.” As a school counselor at Frank’s school, Trevor (PSC) readily collaborated with his school resource officer, too. When asked, “Do you find that your SRO’s are a valuable resource?” Trevor stated, “Oh, absolutely. I wouldn’t want to be
here without ‘em.’” Trevor went on to say the collaboration between PSCs and SROs extended to a personal relationship, too. Trevor said, “They (SROs) are extremely valuable and they get to know us on a pretty personal level…” and this extends to a professional collaboration with the PSC receiving referrals from his SRO:

And sometimes they’ll come to us about a situation they’ve noticed and they’ll bring it to our attention and then we’ll follow up with the student. It might not even be about a gang. It could be about a lot of different kinds of things they see that’s going on that a student might need some intervention. They’ll find out who the counselor is.

Trevor (PSC) noted there was, “A lot of collaboration,” at his school, “And it is needed.”

As previously mentioned, the level of interaction a counselor had with a student identified as a gang member could be based on the source of the referral. For example, Trevor (PSC) shared, ”sometimes parents call us and tell us, ‘Well, I know my child is involved in a gang because I see this and I see that,’ and so that’s when we have to talk with the child….” However, if the source of the referral was coming from a school leader, a referral may be dependent upon perceived need and level of discipline infraction leading the student to meet with the school leader. Joe (SL) said, "If it’s something very small, we think we [school leaders] can manage," the interaction was contained at the school leader level and did “not warrant bleeding out to other stakeholders, because sometimes, for their own
protection, they [students] may not need or want the stigma that comes with it [staff members knowing they are affiliated with a gang]."

Sasha (PSC) also saw her role limited by the lack of collaboration "if we were collaborating with peoples [with gang knowledge], [people in a position of] authority, officials" because:

Sometimes kids say things openly. It could be out in the courtyard or it could be anywhere. Sometimes we’re just trained to see things too and ask some questions that maybe other people aren’t or are just kind of ignoring.

Barkley (SL) encouraged his staff to look beyond the school’s walls to identify sources of help. He found that his staff did a lot of "follow up" and "if there’s somebody who really wants to get out or just through our school," he wanted his counselors to try to "hook them up with various after school programs or things like that. We might work with athletics or different clubs to try and hook them up into something else, like keep ‘em here instead of going home." Looking for positive redirection was restated by Barkley’s PSC, Judy. Judy (PSC) stated, “rather than focus on gang …we could focus on our international or those populations and provide positive opportunities for them and not focus on who’s in what gang.” She went on to say, “It might be mentoring. It might be more contact with parents. It might be club[s]. It might be a group.”

Beth (PSC) found that collaboration could come in the form of partnering with students. At her school, Beth had found students would share information with staff "if they
think somebody’s in danger. I think if they’re worried about a kid, if a kid shares that there’s gonna be a fight.” She was encouraged by the fact that students were "really great..[and] they will let us know." Beth went on to say they have had fights go off campus, and because a student trusted a staff member, the school was "able to get some support from the community and go over there and stop it." This was an example of collaboration not spoken of before. Most of the participants talked about collaboration among peers, but at Beth's school she saw the students as a part of the team collaborating to improve school safety.

Obstacles to Involvement and Intervention

The myriad responsibilities counselors are expected to address during their workday was noted in Chapter 2. Working with students in gangs is not a primary focus of school counselors given that they must cover the personal/social, academic, and career concerns of their student-clients. Looking more closely, students in gangs are in need of all of the domains of the PSC’s practice. However, there are obstacles to professional school counselors addressing the needs of students in gangs, including the self-disclosure of gang affiliation by the student-client. Beth (PSC) noted if she said something even close to the topic of gang affiliation, students “just clam up,” and in a group counseling setting, gang related topics “Shut ‘em down. And on an individual basis, if you allude to it, they will smile and nod or something but they won’t talk about it [gangs].” Beth’s experience had been that students did not volunteer the information that they are gang involved, and she found comfort in their silence because she found, "It’s almost like they’re protecting you. ...They do not
want you to know. They’re kind of like ashamed. They want you to think that they’re just a regular person. They don’t want you to know that piece of them."

Safety was commonly mentioned as an obstacle to interaction. Sasha (PSC) said training was an obstacle because as a PSC she did not know "exactly what are we working on and how to deal with that and how to stay safe as well." It was safety that led her to decide she “needed more training because we were not in safe roles." Beth (PSC) would not ask if a student was gang involved because as she said she is, "… good without knowing” because, “They don’t pay me enough…” and would look to other staff members to “… handle that stuff.” Beth (PSC) clearly stated, “Personally, it would be a safety issue."

**School Environment as a Barrier**

The school environment may serve as an obstacle to effective intervention based on the limits of the relationship and confidentiality. Sasha (PSC) explained that the school environment limits what she might say to a student, "Maybe [if] they’re my neighbor or friend or something, I would probably speak with them differently and not have those constraints of what can I say, what can’t I say, what can I do with them, what can’t I do."

Sasha (PSC) also addressed the desire of school leaders to know the content of a counseling session, especially if the student was referred by the school leader to see the counselor. Sasha said:

We’d have to have some clear guidelines about what we would be sharing or not sharing. You can’t really tell the student exactly, You can tell me whatever but I’m
going to go back and report back to the principal. So I do think it would be very tricky.

In order to avoid a conflict with the school leader and to avoid a confidentiality dilemma, Sasha (SL) believed her co-counselors would probably avoid the topic of gangs:

> Because if an administrator is directly referring somebody to me because they think they could be involved in a gang and that’s the answer that they want, they want me to see them for that reason, and a student reveals a million things including that and we haven’t talked about the fact that I might be sharing this with someone else, then yeah, that puts me in a really difficult situation.

Sasha’s concerns about confidentiality may be warranted because Joe said, "if it does begin to affect the mission of this school or the safety of the students, then yeah, in my opinion, it warrants it [sharing information]."

At Barkley’s (SL) school, there is no follow up with the counselors once a referral is made. He trusted the counselors to act appropriately and to address the nature of the referral without the need for a follow-up to ensure that the PSC saw the student or to reveal the content of the conversation. Barkley’s PSC’s experience was in line with the expectation of her school leader. With over 30 years of experience, Judy said:

> I think my ethics and confidentiality say that if a child is gonna harm himself or someone else I am obligated to report. I don’t see where being in a gang is something
I report. I do not ethically feel that I have to tell someone a student is in a gang unless I think they are going to hurt someone or themselves.

Judy also stated that, “the pace of the high school goes so fast that we tend to we counselors and we administrators tend to ‘Let me tell you what’s going on’ and then we move on to the next thing to put out.”

In contrast, without question, Jake (SL) said that at his school, "Yes. We want to be notified of any type of gang presence." Stan (SL) expected counselors to “let the administrator know first of all” if during a counseling session the student discussed being involved with a gang.

Being in the position of school leadership may offer more freedom to share information about a student's gang involvement. Derek (SL) said there were no limits to his confidentiality and that freedom from ethical standards led him to call parents and he would like for counselors to feel free to tell others, too. Derek (SL) went on to say, he had:

Actually had situations where we’ve had issues in the neighborhood with gang stuff and they’ve told me counselors were aware of it but the counselor didn’t bring it forth because, I’m assuming, of confidentiality reasons. But information (pause) and this was told by parents/students that the student had talked to somebody and when we traced it back, you know, it’s to a counselor. So if a counselor couldn’t (pause) now, whether or not (pause) I don’t know all the rules and regulations for you all, but
whether or not they could or couldn’t tell, the information just did not get back. You know. Would it have stopped? I don’t know. But we could have tried.

Derek (SL) and Trevor (PSC) both mentioned the limits of confidentiality when school safety was a priority for school leaders. Derek believed "if we could share information a little sooner or a little more freely, there’s potential that it could make a difference in a young man or young lady’s life."

Sam’s (SL) work was based in central office and away from the school site. He recognized that working with students in gangs created unique challenges for the PSC and issues of confidentiality. Sam said:

That’s [knowledge of a student being in a gang] a bit of a gray area and in some cases it may not be [a reason to break confidentiality]. But if the counselor has any reason to believe that someone is in danger, then they should break that confidentiality. In a lot of cases it may be kind of “wannabe” type situations where the student might be tangentially involved and we want to try to steer them away from further involvement if possible. Or they may want to identify as gang involved and it may not really be. But it’s very dangerous and so I think counselors, maybe, if they feel there’s any potential danger, then they would need to break confidentiality.

Judy (PSC) doesn’t think she had to intervene “unless they bring it to school and it jeopardizes the safety of children.” Trevor (PSC) spoke at length about school safety and looking at "the greater good." He went on to say:
I think that when it comes to school safety that it can be kind of clouded and can be a little bit confusing, but I think that what I have to do and what most counselors have to think about, Well, what is the greater good? If Trevor doesn’t say anything, as a counselor to the student, or to the administrator, and something happens, then it may be brought back on Trevor because he didn’t say anything about it when he clearly could have said something. So I think you have to look at the greater good. So the confidentiality piece is highly critical because (pause) but I think in these kinds of instances when we don’t always know all the facts, then we have to go on and proceed and do what we feel is going to be in the best interest of the student and the school, because there could be a lot of lives [are] at stake.

Trevor (PSC) relied on his training and experience to guide his actions:

I think in my training, in my former training and in my graduate program, and also in some of the workshops that I’ve gone through for the county, you know, they talk about confidentiality a lot and when it can be broken. So I think it’s part of my training first and then sometimes I have to move outside my training and think about What does history tell me about these kinds of students?

Increased communication may lead to unfair labeling of students and a heightened sense of alarm by faculty and staff members. Beth (PSC) appreciated a student's desire to remain a student in her office and in the school and not a gang member. Despite having “gang influence in their life” and noticing from their conversations “they don’t want to be the
gang member” when they are at school, “They just kind of want for somebody to treat ‘em like What are you doing in school? and How can I help you do this? and not that whole other thing.” Beth (PSC) found that when a former student came to her “he likes that and I’ve never pushed because they’ll tell me if (pause) think they trust me.”

For Sasha (PSC) and Joe (SL), school wide gang awareness training may impact the learning environment for the student that was in a gang. Sasha recalled at another school, "one of the trainings...they did some things to look for and so any kid who had a bandanna or any kid who had some writing on their hand or something, they were automatically associated with a gang." Sasha went on to say that training an entire staff may be "tricky."

Her supervising school leader, Joe, believed:

Most people can handle, Hey, watch out for this, that, or the other, you also have people that don’t necessarily need or can cope with that sort of thing. So again, it’s got to be a very (pause) you have to use discretion with respect the timing of it and whether it’s warranted in the first place, because when you take a step back our primary role is still going to always be academics. So the last thing you want to do is have somebody worried about, Wow. If it’s coming from the dean or assistant principal, does that mean I have to be now concerned about this? I mean I’m trying to prepare for this lesson or get through the day.
Joe went on to say, “that once you attach or associate a label on a particular student, ...does that student now hold a chance to be successful in your classroom?” Beth (PSC) addressed labeling a student from the PSC’s perspective:

It’s not that you don’t want to know that they’re a gang, but you don’t want that to be the first thing you see when you see a kid. You just want to see a kid who is maybe thinking he’d like to graduate from high school and maybe if he knows that we care enough to help him with that and we’re not judging him based on what (pause)…Because what he’s dealing with in his own community a lot of them can keep it very separate and they should be allowed to keep it very separate. As long as they don’t come here and do stuff that is detrimental to the school, maybe they’ll get a high school education and then at some point maybe they’ll go back and they’ll get away and they have the tools they need. So I tend to…I mean it’s nice to know, I guess, if they’re in a gang, but that doesn’t affect how I would want to help them.

Judy (PSC) seemed to sum up all of the barriers PSCs face in working with students in gangs:

Number of students. Time. Expectations to do multiple things. What do you want me to do with kids in gangs? Am I supposed to make gangs go away? Am I supposed to cure children of being in a gang? I mean I don’t know what, whose expectation is of us. I’m a little fuzzy on that.
Training

Insufficient training noted. As previously mentioned, four out of the five graduate training programs represented in this study did not address working with students in gangs as a part of their program's curriculum. Beyond having experienced awareness training, the PSCs expressed repeated concerns about their lack of intervention tools. Sasha (PSC) said she was in need of:

Some strategies to work with…and what are you working on? Are you working on trying to get them out of a gang or are you working on how do you cope with being part of a gang? I guess it’s just like how (pause) we get them because of how it’s affecting them in the school and so generally it leads to academics and attendance and if there are discipline issues or whatever. But it still has to have the school slant to how we work with them.

Judy (PSC) concurred that training had “been mostly awareness and information” and lack of urgency to learn more left her lacking the skills and techniques to intervene:

What am I intervening? Now maybe if I lived in New York City, where they shoot each other every day, or in Durham, I don’t know. Maybe it would be a bigger issue, or they fight every day on campus. There would be more of How do I intervene? But I guess because I’m not there or haven’t had that, I don’t know that yet. I tend to address/prioritize what I’m dealing with mostly versus maybe what society is saying
is going on. I’m looking at what is in this building and in this community and how I can better impact it.

Derek (SL) spoke of his concerns about the decreased amount of training occurring at the district level:

I’d say four to five years ago I was doing several trainings a year, and the last couple of years there’s a decrease due to the new constraints with the staff not being able to leave for training or everything having to be around education as far as the PLT’s (professional learning teams) or whatever. So we are not being invited in, ‘we’ being people who are talking about gangs. So we’re not being allowed in for what I would consider awareness training. I think we might have done (pause) I think (pause) went from doing over 40/50 a year down to 5, and, for me, communication and awareness is where it starts, and I’ve seen that decrease over the last two years.

The duration and content of the training began to change even before it was not being offered, Derek (SL) continued:

First, it started out as a one-day course. It was all what we did, and then the next year we actually added a prevention/intervention piece where we brought in Prevention Services and we brought in Second Chance boxing and we had that piece to come in with us. That is no longer. We no longer offer that because of some of the constraints. I see a need but I understand why they may have slowed down. But we’ve got to figure out a way to still get that training to the schools.
Sam’s (SL) view mirrored Derek’s (SL):

There has been quite a bit of gang prevention training and gang intervention training within the past five years for student support workers, you know, counselors, social workers, psychologists, that type of thing. Now, the past couple of years the staff development has dropped off pretty heavily, with budget issues and that type of thing, so there’s not been as much training in this area as probably there needs to be.

While the awareness training was useful, the researcher noted hearing the need for specific strategies for prevention and intervention that were lacking in any of the training in which PSCs had previously participated. Stacey (PSC) stated that the limited training she received had been maybe "one or two instances" consisting of "signs or signals." Sasha (PSC) noted she had not been trained to intervene but believed part of the problem was the nature of gangs because they may be, "generational and I don’t think anybody really knows how exactly [to] intervene." When speaking about the role of training, Judy (PSC) quite frankly stated:

If you’re going to provide me training, does that imply that I then own the problem? I mean it’s like somehow or another if you’re training me, you’re giving me the problem and how am I supposed to solve it.

**ASCA National Model.** The ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005) had been widely utilized in the local school district to guide preventative programming being offered at each school in the present study. Questions about utilizing the ASCA National Model for gang
intervention ideas resulted in many responses from the PSCs and school leaders related to the systems support component of the model rather than the responsive services component.

Trevor (PSC) noted:

What we would want to do is to bring in our resources the experts that could talk about those things and then what we would talk about with the students would be the interpersonal piece where they always have somebody they can come to and talk to about these kinds of thing.

As a school leader, Jake also spoke on the need for system support, “our counselors need (pause) we’ll need training” and “I don’t know that that model really adds anything to what our counselors need....[in]meeting the needs of our students who are in gangs.”

Joe (SL) recognized value in training because, "Obviously, you can never have enough information or training," but the training needs to be, "something that you can actually take away that’s actually good." When evaluating professional development needs of the staff at Joe’s (SL) school they ask, "Is it helping in any way, shape, or form? with respect to their [students] grades or attendance if that is an issue," and because "A lot of the stuff that gets tricky with respect to gangs is very subjective that you can’t place a number on, and that becomes complicated" when determining if training is needed by the staff.

Sasha (PSC) noted that the use of data may show the lack of a need for intervention with students in gangs at her school. She went on to say, "It would be hard trying to
determine a goal…it would be tied to a lot of different things: academics, attendance, and discipline. But using the ASCA National Model could work.” Judy (PSC) said the:

ASCA model is a framework. It has really good theoretical ideas. But in day-to-day, having the time to come up with goals and objectives, and I know that’s all critical to where we are at this twenty-first century. But it is challenging. I’ll just leave it at that. It is very challenging to find the time to [complete the model] if I do that then I am not going to have time to spend with students and I’ve got too many students that they get the priority. We chose not to renew National Model this year. We just don’t have enough time to sit there and come up with all the steps and then have the proof and do the pretty three-ring binder notebook. As a team, we did not make that our priority this year. We were more interested in what was in front of us. Immediate needs.

Stan (SL) noted the ASCA National Model does not speak:

Specifically about gang[s], but on student intervention. So from a student intervention perspective it’s supportive of [students in gangs] and I would assume that a gang bullet would fall under that and be something that working with our counselors we would continue to monitor and adapt if necessary.

Sam (SL) said the ASCA National Model:

Gives counselors the opportunity or really a framework to address these issues. It helps them to think about what data to look at and then once they have some data to
look at there are tools in there. You know, developing action plans – whether it’s closing the gap or a curriculum whole school kind of thing. So there are tools in there that would help them to frame how prevention and intervention is going to be delivered. So it can definitely be a very helpful tool in structuring some gang prevention and intervention activities. The issue with gangs is data can be a little bit tricky to get. We can look at suspension data for gang activity but that leaves a lot of uncovered territory as far as issues that are out there. The students are not being identified. They have not been suspended for it so the school or the counselor may not know that they’re gang involved.

Lack of data on gangs as an academic subgroup and the lack of consistent practices in reporting gang based discipline infractions impeded the potential for ASCA’s National Model to be an effective tool to address the needs of students in gangs. Suspensions and disciplinary consequences were recorded as events based on the board policy being violated. If gang attire was evident, then gang involvement was additionally coded, but the lack of concrete evidence or accurate data created difficulty in identifying a group of students with whom to work in the schools. Barkley’s (SL) comment on the lack of concrete academic data demonstrated the difficulty in using the ASCA National Model as a tool for change:

You have an ‘F’. You have something on the table we can all see. You failed this class. Whether it’s attendance or whether it’s poor grades, whether it’s not studying, whether it’s not homework. You have something. You can’t just throw You’re a
gang member out on the table and we all discuss. Like okay, you don’t have a flat out fact like an ‘F’ in front of you and that’s where…I think what it comes to is information....

Role Limitations

Role-related frustrations. Having a key role for suppressing gang activity in the schools, Derek (SL) was asked what he would like to see occurring in the schools. Repeatedly, Derek mentioned a county-wide clearinghouse for receiving the names of students in need of services and assistance to avoid or remove themselves from the attraction of gangs through connections with experienced professional staff, paraprofessionals, and members of community groups. He was frustrated by his suppression role because he did not see anyone doing prevention and intervention. Derek believed in a comprehensive model to address the presence of gangs in schools. He found that the school setting is where it all starts because:

What does every kid have in common? They go to school. The natural clearinghouse is the school system. It’s not [name of county deleted] County Gang Professional Partnership. It starts in the classroom with the teacher and then I also think and... then the counselors are crucial because those are the first (pause) in my (pause) those are boots on the ground, people dealing with these kids day in, day out. Teachers can identify, counselors…and whatever, if it’s prevention/intervention. Teachers that understand what they’re doing, can send them in the direction of counselors who then
could understand what’s going on with the [name of county deleted] County Gang Prevention model. Us coming in and doing training or people coming in doing training. You hit it from all angles. And right now I see this person doing this, this person doing this, this person doing this without everybody understanding.

**Recommendations.** Derek’s (SL) goal was to "see prevention and sort of like you do the D.A.R.E. program. I would like to see ...prevention models upper elementary, middle, and high." Derek would also like to see a "policy that says, This is what happens, next and I would like to see forced education to the parent. I would like to see forced education for the student through something. He would like to see those students facing disciplinary action be sent to a class in lieu of suspension.” According to Derek (SL), the student:

- Comes in and is educated. Then at that point you can funnel them through a counselor. They have to go through a program, come back in, meet, whatever, and you just keep the lines of communication open because there’s a void in that person’s life. There’s just not that process in place to correct it. I think if we identify it in front of that young man and young lady and then bring it back in and they become connected so then they’re part of the school community and then we can extend that outward to the actual community.

**Need for Parental Involvement**

The community component could consist of parental involvement. Frank (SL) stated that he wanted his counselors to, “Ideally, you want them [PSCs] to be able to identify those
type of kids and be able to notify their parents, talk to them about the situation to a degree.”

He went on to say that was the ideal “but I haven’t seen any of that going on.” Frank’s ideal appeared to be going on at his school without his knowing. Trevor (PSC), a counselor at Frank’s school, clearly stated early in the interview the connection he made to parents as a part of the process he followed when working with students in gangs or students considering gang membership. Trevor (PSC) shared the presence of just one barrier to his work with students in gangs:

I think the only barrier would be if they did not want me to tell their parents. That would be a huge barrier because it needs to be a family…we need to work as a team. So that would be a barrier if the student says, I don’t want you to tell my parents. Then I would have to try to work through that piece. But I see that as being the greatest barrier because you’ve got to have everybody on board and to be able to work through this thing together. ... for them to say, I don’t want you to tell my parents a...that would probably put me in not such a good position at that point but I would still work with the student and then I would hopefully develop an even greater rapport with the student where I could tell the student, Look. It would be best to tell your parents because they need to know how to protect you.
Trevor (PSC) wanted to impress upon students the importance of letting their parents know by emphasizing:

Do your parents know about these kinds of things? You need to talk to your parents. You need to make sure that if you’re in a gang that you tell your parents, and if you want to get out of a gang they need to know so they can follow the right steps to get you out of the gang.

Trevor (PSC) shared his process for notifying parents:

Normally what I would do (pause) I would ask the student do they want to call the parent or do they want me to call, and a lot of times, of course, they want me to call and I say, Well, do you want to be in the room when I call or do you want to be out of the room? We don’t do a lot of this but I will let them have the option of being in the room or being out of the room and then I will meet with the parents to talk about some options and talk about how we need to let the administrators know and what we need to do to go on from there. We need to tell them to get the police involved and make sure that there’s a follow-up meeting because it can be a frightening experience.

When asked about the parent's response, Trevor (PSC) said some parents are receptive to this new information and said, "I know my child’s involved in a gang and I tried to work with them and I don’t know what to do," and at this point Trevor would begin to ask about positive influences in the young person's life in the form of neighbors and mentors in order to build a network of support around the student.
Derek responded (SL) in a similar fashion. He wanted to talk to a parent right away. "I love to get the parent...I try to get the parent on the phone when I’m there, talk with them, tell them about the [name of county deleted] County Gang Prevention Partnership.” He went on to say that sharing community resources was the one chance he had at intervention, and he wanted the students to be present for the conversation with their parents so they heard a school leader "give the parent something more" rather than just calling to say, “Hey, here’s a problem.” Derek (SL) wanted to “educate the kid and have the parent as a piece of that.”

Stan (SL) wanted contacting the parents “In most cases” to be a part of the intervention process. Contacting parents was a part of the discipline process for Stan’s school leadership team. Barkley (SL) found an obstacle to sharing information with parents was that:

At this age kids don’t want to admit anything, and so it’s that identification and then just the careful path you have to trod by saying, Okay, you’re a gang member. And unless they come out and tell us they’re a gang member, even if they have all the signs or do all the (pause) it’s a sticky slope to say, You’re a gang member. Let’s get the parents in here and let’s talk about the interventions when [a parent says] My kid’s not in a gang.

Barkley found that parents could benefit from a presentation on gang awareness for their use in noticing behavior changes in their child(ren). Jake (SL) agreed. When asked, "Do you find that there’s anything you still need to combat the gang problem?" Jake said:
I think there needs to be more community outreach from the system and the communities. I think there needs to be more community education about the gang issue that we have and the problems that it’s created. I think, by and large, within our community, there needs to be more education as to what’s taking place. It can be done through the schools, it can be done through the churches, it can be done through civic organizations, it can be done through any number of different avenues. But I think there needs to be some sort of gathering of the minds between the schools, the churches, civic organizations, communities themselves, and get this information out there and not pretend that it doesn’t exist. And I don’t know that anybody pretends that it doesn’t exist, but nobody really seems to be all caught up in it until something goes wrong.

**Future Implications for Practice**

During the interviews and sometimes at the conclusion of the interviews, the PSCs or school leaders offered insights into what they would like to see happen. Beth (PSC) said, "I would be curious about which high schools (pause)...But I’d be curious to know how the gang activity is from one high school to another."

Derek (SL) talked about the need for a clearinghouse with trained counselors serving as" the foundations of something." He was not asking “a counselor to put themselves out there with hard core gang [members]" but he would ask them to be involved in identifying "If they feel comfortable," and then implementing "whatever criteria is put in place, how do we
do this? I just think that’s more of a natural fit for a counselor to do it rather than an administrator or a teacher.”

Derek envisioned levels "Level 1, 2, 3,...based on suspension, type of incident, whether it was criminal related, violent, ... where is a young man or a young lady at in a recruitment or in the process, and then decide "what type of program would benefit them and how would you steer them?" based on the levels and accompanying criteria. Derek noted, "a counselor is different than law enforcement, we [law enforcement] listen but we’re listening for different things.” Derek suggested law enforcement was:

Listening to Band-Aid the problem, safety issue right now. ...I’m here to eliminate a threat. I’m not here to change the person. I’m not here to change the threat. I’m not here to change behavior. I think where a counselor steps in is they actually have the ability to start changing, help somebody…I know the person changes but they help the person start understanding what it takes to make a change. And I think it’s no different with gangs.

Derek suggested counselors:

Could play such a (pause) they could be at the foundation of something, that they could really impact gang involvement or when it comes (pause) prevention, yes. But intervention, absolutely. I think that they could play a vital role in changing the gang environment at a school.
Currently, Derek found the intervention and prevention piece was missing, "unless you happen to find a counselor or if I’m involved, that piece is being missed."

In summary, data from the twelve interviews was rigorously coded based on the procedures presented in Chapter 3 and resulted in the findings presented in this section. The direct quotes of the participants were used to develop the concepts that emerged from the coding process. These concepts were organized into central categories. The resulting central categories led to the core theoretical category presented in the next section.

**Core Category as Collaborative C.A.R.E.**

A grounded theory study provides the researcher theoretical categories during the data analysis process. Concepts and themes that emerge during the open coding stage of data analysis are organized under theoretical categories during the axial stage of coding. Selective coding moves the data from description to theory by integrating the categories to form a grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The resulting substantive theory accounts for the interaction of each of the categories. Grounded in the data, the theory emerged from constant comparative coding and a rigorous data analysis process.

The emergence of a core category was essential in generating theory that appeared to have the “greatest explanatory relevance and highest potential for linking all of the other categories together (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 104). It is important to define theory as a “set of well-developed categories (themes, concepts) that are systematically interrelated
through statements of relationship to form a theoretical framework that explains some
phenomenon” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 55).

Once the major categories (i.e., role development factors, stakeholders in role
development, training/education, collaboration, school environment limitations), were
developed and linkages were made, the analysis turned to the development of the core
category. See Appendix C. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggested the following questions to
guide core category development: What theme is reflected over and over again in the data?
What do I think is the main problem that counselors are dealing with in providing
intervention for students in gangs? What do all of the other categories seem to lead to?
Returning to the experiences of each participant and then retelling his/her story around the
categories led to the development of Collaborative C.A.R.E as the core category.

Collaboration was the category both present and notably absent in the stories of the
PSCs and the school leaders. The acronym C.A.R.E was borne out of the categories that
developed during the axial coding process. It was also a word (i.e., care) the researcher
returned to time and again based on a comment by Derek (SL). Derek noted, “no kid’s lost.”
Students in gangs are in need of assistance from a caring advocate and adult in their life. For
many students, the source of caring adults may be those with whom they interact in the
school setting. The categories revealed a lack of or the presence of communication with
community resources, teachers, school leaders, PSCs, law enforcement officials, students,
and parents. The categories revealed a need for PSCs working in the secondary school
setting to *advocate* for policies, procedures, programming, training and clarity in their role as interventionists for students in gangs. The categories revealed the need for PSCs to actively provide *responsive services*. PSCs should consult with other professionals, provide individual and group counseling, actively engage parents and other stakeholders, and refer to community resources. The categories revealed the need for *education*. PSCs need to educate themselves, their school staff, and the local community on the dangers of gang involvement while providing resources for assistance. Additionally, PSCs need to actively educate their school leaders on the essential role PSCs play in the school. In turn, the school leaders should educate PSCs on the school leader's role in order to build stronger relationships between essential members of the school community.

Theoretical sampling was used throughout the coding process to identify, develop, and relate emerging concepts from the data. Theoretical sampling is about sampling concepts and not participants. “Data collection leads to analysis. Analysis leads to concepts. Concepts generate questions” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 144). The use of a reflective journal allowed for the researcher to never “get too far ahead of analysis” because the observations and data from previous interviews was guiding the questions in the next interview (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 145). Certain concepts proved relevant because they were repeated or notably absent in the experiences of the PSCs and school leaders. Theoretical sampling guided the data analysis until each category and then the core category had depth and a clear relationship.
Data analysis was complete when the interview data did not produce any new information to describe the role of the PSC in working with students in gangs. At this point, theoretical saturation had been reached, and the categories were considered complete. The **Collaborative C.A.R.E.** core category had theoretical saturation when the data clearly described the context and conditions of the PSC's work.

**Summary**

A grounded theory was systematically and inductively generated by studying the phenomenon it represented and explored while developing knowledge that would guide practice. A substantive theory evolved from the study of the phenomenon in a particular context (i.e., schools) (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The findings of this study provided a substantive theory for **Collaborative C.A.R.E** that explored the role of the secondary professional school counselor. The process for the development of **Collaborative C.A.R.E.** took place as a dynamic interplay of a number of stakeholders with the school providing the contextual backdrop for the role of the professional school counselor to work with students in gangs.
CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to propose a grounded theory that would contribute to an understanding of school administrators’ and professional school counselors’ perceptions of existing procedures, role definition, and training opportunities in place to inform professional school counselors’ (PSC) work with students in gangs. The review of literature presented in Chapter 2 demonstrated the long history of counseling and the evolving nature of the secondary school counselor’s function in the school setting. Chapter 2 also provided an overview of the professional development of counselors. This study explored the views of five professional school counselors and seven school leaders to investigate the evolution of the professional school counselor’s role with students in gangs and explore their training to address the needs of students in gangs. The study population was secondary school counselors.

This chapter summarizes the findings of the grounded theory generated from the data. Explanations of the findings will integrate this study into the long history of the counseling profession. The chapter will also provide recommendations for PSCs and school leaders to improve their practice as agents of change for students in gangs. Finally, implications for future research are suggested to continue the exploration of the role of the professional school counselor and their work with students in gangs. This study attended to the following research questions:
1. How do educational and/or professional experiences inform professional school counselors of the presence of gangs in the school setting?

2. How do the educational and/or professional experiences of professional school counselors influence their willingness to work with students in gangs?

3. What role do professional school counselors play in preventing gang activity in the school setting?

4. What changes need to occur to enhance counselors’ willingness to work with students in gangs?

In order to explore the research goals and answer the research questions, twelve educators were interviewed. Five of those interviewed were professional school counselors with between three and thirty-three years of experience. Seven of those interviewed were school leaders with five to fifteen years of experience. Two of the seven school leaders had jobs based out of central office, while the remaining five worked as site-based school leaders. Participation was voluntary and included a semi-structured interview and the completion of a demographic questionnaire. The semi-structured interviews allowed detailed data to be collected, and the demographic questionnaire provided further insight to the participants’ educational and professional development and experience levels for use in the analysis process.

In order to ensure quality and validity of the research study, there were procedures in place during the dissertation process. First, the taped interviews were transcribed by an
external transcriptionist and reviewed by the researcher to ensure professional jargon was accurate. Second, to ensure validity, the researcher kept a reflective research journal throughout the entire research and analysis process. This journal provided the researcher an opportunity to keep her own biases out of the research process, including post-interview reactions, the physical layout of the school environment, and locations of interviews. Journaling to accomplish content validity is called researcher reflectivity. As an additional safeguard, an audit was completed on the data presented in Chapter 4 to ensure that personal bias had not entered into the data analysis presentation. Third, a thick, rich description was sought in the interviewing process to allow clear information to be gathered. The goal of this qualitative research study was to achieve thick, rich description. It appeared thick, rich data saturation was achieved after interview eight; however, to affirm category development, the interviews continued through number twelve. Finally, triangulation of all three forms of data collected (semi-structured interview data, review existing policies, training materials review, and the reflective journal) was undertaken to complete the validity methods utilized in this research study.

**Summary of Results**

**Communication**

In the ensuing presentation, participants who were professional school counselors are designated by the acronym PSC, and those who were school leaders by the acronym SL.
The common themes discovered in research question one (How do educational and/or professional experiences inform professional school counselors of the presence of gangs in the school setting?) were *procedural policies, assessment, and common expectations.* All of these emerging themes coincided with the idea of *communication.*

The ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005) provides a framework for guidance programming. An additional benefit of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005) is the use of a common language between counselors and other school stakeholders. Sam (SL) agreed that the model has “given some common language to talk with administrators and to district level leaders…around the role of the counselor.” However, Sam (SL) noted, “If principals and assistant principals don’t have any training [and] most of the time they don’t have training about what a counselor does and that’s a real gap in administrative training.” The lack of training on the role of the school counselors may hinder the amount of communication occurring between school counselors and school leaders because neither has a clear appreciation for the essential role of the other. The lack of communication between school counselors and school leaders furthers the confusion of the essential role PSCs offer to their school, while also preventing students in gangs from receiving intervention-based counseling services.

PSCs in this school district did not have a common language related to their roles with students in gangs. Additionally, PSCs in this study were involved in gang intervention on a need to know basis. The apparent lack of communication from school leader down to
the school counselor level limits the amount of intervention possible. Largely handled at the school leader level, PSCs were not involved with students in gangs as interventionists because students exhibiting gang behavior were seen as a threat to school safety and were addressed solely by school leaders. The lack of intervention-based procedures and the perception that PSCs are academic counselors hinders their ability to interact with students in gangs.

Communicating with other school stakeholders also presents a counseling dilemma. The findings revealed that PSCs are expected to communicate to school leaders the identity of those students they know to be involved in a gang. The potential presence of imminent danger limits a school counselor’s ability to maintain confidentiality (ACA, 2005); however, the revelation that a student is gang involved presents what Sam calls a “gray area.” The opinion of this researcher is that membership in a gang is not a reason to breach student confidentiality, but the apparent lack of clear procedures and policies led counselors in this study to align their role with that of the school leader to ensure safety.

This alignment with the school leader’s role conceivably violates the counselor’s code of ethics expectations to maintain client confidence (ACA, 2005); however, the student’s status as a minor further complicates the issue of client confidence (Lawrence & Robinson Kurpius, 2000). At least one school leader stated his counselor would ideally connect with parents. Lawrence and Robinson Kurpius (2000) recommended “that counselors, when possible, involve the parents,” but went on to state that when student
clients are hesitant to disclose information to parents, the counselor should “motivate them to disclose by helping them understand the relevance and possible benefits of disclosure” (p 134). Communicating with parents is important in order to intervene with students in gangs because the responsibility for care extends beyond the school’s walls. The findings revealed a clear need to develop procedures to guide the role of the school counselors as instruments for intervention and communication.

The lack of a common language between PSCs and school leaders in this study further complicated relationships with other school stakeholders who wished to provide intervention for students in gangs. Ideally, the use of a common language with clear procedures would enhance the effectiveness of the PSCs as effective interventionists or instruments for prevention beyond the school setting. Extending communications to include community resources, local law enforcement personnel, other students, parents, teachers, and school resource officers provides students in gangs with multi-modal services across many aspects of their lives.

Advocacy

The common themes discovered in research question two (How do the educational and/or professional experiences of professional school counselors influence their willingness to work with students in gangs?) were school setting limits, reactive nature of counseling, and procedural inconsistencies. All of these emerging themes coincided with the idea of advocacy. The lack of procedures was previously discussed, and in this section the lack of
consistent training is highlighted. How the school setting provides barriers to serving students in gangs and the reactive nature of school counseling in the secondary setting will also be addressed.

Four of the five counselors in this study had not received training related to working with students in gangs during their Master’s degree programs. Two of the five reported attending workshops after graduate school, and the remaining three had not sought out training because working with this population was uncommon at their schools. The training that had been offered by the school district seemed to be unknown to the PSCs in this study. Although there had been training provided by the district on gangs in schools, it was limited to enhancing awareness with no coverage of counseling-based techniques designed to reach students in gangs in a collaborative manner. As reported by the two central office based school leaders, the training had decreased in frequency because of budget constraints.

The best training for PSCs appears to be that which is intervention based with community strategies in place (Koffman, Ray, Berg, Covington, Albarran, & Vasquez, 2009; Venkatesh, 1999; Ward & Bakhuys, 2010). Like other students, students in gangs most likely need personal/social, academic, and career counseling (ASCA, 2005). Having an awareness of gangs alone does not prepare counselors for conducting personal/social, academic, or career counseling with students in gangs. Gang awareness training does help PSCs identify students who are involved in gangs; however, PSCs are encouraged to advocate for training specific to working with these students via their counseling function in order to ensure the
student's personal/social, academic, and career development needs are being met. Meeting these needs will possibly increase the already overextended work responsibilities of many PSCs, and PSCs should not feel it is their responsibility alone. As noted by Judy (PSC) in this study:

If you’re going to provide me training, does that imply that I then own the problem? I mean it’s like somehow or another if you’re training me, you’re giving me the problem and how am I supposed to solve it?

The presence of gangs in local communities should not be seen as only the school’s responsibility to resolve. Working with community agencies and existing community-based programs, PSCs can coordinate referral services for their work with students in gangs as well as all other students. The findings in this study revealed a knowledge gap of existing community based programs designed to provide intervention and prevention beyond the school setting. Professional school counselors are challenged to advocate for larger networks for intervention and training and to seek out information on those community agencies providing research-based prevention and intervention strategies for students in gangs.

Beyond potentially excessive caseloads and expanding roles, many PSCs are expected to provide brief, short-term counseling to all their students in order to support the academic mission of the schools where they work (ASCA, 2005). Seemingly, the personal/social and career needs of students are secondary to academic needs in today’s high stakes testing school environment. Although not always clearly stated, PSCs in this study
were expected to limit the duration and frequency of counseling sessions in order to support the school’s academic mission and, therefore, recognize that opportunities for therapeutic counseling are limited.

Sasha (PSC) reported the confusion the school setting creates for her in working with students in gangs. Students most often arrived in her office for academic reasons related to performance or attendance. Sasha (PSC) found the school setting to be a barrier to her work with students in gangs because she was left questioning, “What are you working on? Are you working on trying to get them out of a gang or are you working on how do you cope with being part of a gang?” Because the counseling “has to have the school slant to how we work with them.” In contrast, Sasha (PSC) went on to report that, if she was talking to a young person in a gang outside of the school setting, she “would probably speak with them differently and not have those constraints of what can I say, what can’t I say, what can I do with them, what can’t I do.”

The “school slant” to the practice of counseling leads to the reactive nature of counseling in the secondary school setting. Judy (PSC) noted the fast paced and reactive nature of the high school setting when she stated:

I find that in the high school, the pace of the high school goes so fast that we tend to we counselors and we administrators tend to Let me tell you what’s going on and then we move on to the next thing to put out and so it’s like, Let me give you a piece of the information. Deal with it as you feel best.
The ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005) has provided tools to engage students in relevant preventive programming based on data; however, the reality of the secondary school setting seems to be reactive in nature. It is the opinion of this researcher that the ASCA National Model was designed to address the personal/social, academic, and career domains of our practice; however, the accompanying workbook focuses on academic interventions (ASCA, 2005). Personal and social crises in a student’s life may often lead to academic disappointment and failure. Data related to personal and social intervention may be difficult to gather because it may be confidential in nature, limited to individual cases, difficult to quantify, and seemingly temporary in nature, whereas, data related to academics is quantifiable and evident in comprehensive testing reports that endure the test of time. Placing the focus of counseling programming on academic interventions seemingly ignores those personal and social impediments to academic success. Reacting to personal and social crisis, rather than being proactive, is not an effective approach to designing counseling-based programs for all students, including students in gangs, because it ignores the need for prevention. While the personal/social and career needs of students are not apparent in the data, the impact of not addressing these domains may be evident in disappointing reports on the academic progress of students. PSCs are challenged to find ways to demonstrate the need for personal/social and career counseling for their students while demonstrating that PSCs are qualified to provide short-term counseling for their students in the school setting.
Three of the five counselors in this study reported not seeking out training or information on gangs in schools because it was either not an interest or there was no apparent need. As Judy (PSC) noted the presence of gangs in her schools was something “I think in this school that I presently work in we react to.” Derek (SL) noted, “First, we had to admit we had the problem.” Then, we can develop and advocate for students in gangs. The presence of gangs in schools alone is a problem because “student behavior diverts teachers from classroom instruction” (Larson & Busse, 1998, p. 373). Provided with the awareness that a problem exists in our schools and local communities, schools and their PSCs can be an essential part of the first line of prevention and intervention because as Derek (SL) noted, “What does every kid have in common?” They go to school,” and because every student has school as a common denominator in his/her life, the school setting can play an essential role in preventing and intervening with students in gangs.

At all grade levels, PSCs are challenged to advocate for clarity in their function as an instrument of change for students in gangs. They are also challenged to ask for training designed to address the personal/social, academic, and career development needs of those students in their caseload that are affiliated with gangs. A lack of interest does not equal the lack of need, and school districts are challenged to prepare quality training in order to enhance awareness and design counseling-based strategies for gang prevention and intervention. Seemingly, gang intervention needs a proactive approach, not one guided by reactions to increased gang presence in the school setting (Larson & Busse, 1998). Finally,
PSCs should advocate for a definitive role. The perceived lack of training for working with students in gangs as reported by PSCs in this study led to role ambiguity and a set of vague and varied approaches. School districts are challenged to review their approach to the presence of gangs in their schools and to clearly define the role of school leaders, school counselors, and teachers in order to provide efficient and effective intervention. The roles may be based on an intervention concept or preventive in nature. On the other hand, the role may be based on a suppression principle. Regardless of conceptual foundations of their current role regarding working with gang members, the role of each stakeholder should be clear. PSCs should be provided with the tools and training to execute their clearly defined roles.

**Responsive Services**

The common themes discovered in question three (What role do professional school counselors play in preventing gang activity in the school setting?) were *role rigidity, perceived role, and professional empowerment*. All of these emerging themes coincided with the idea of *responsive services*.

The perceptions of PSCs and school leaders revealed that the role of the secondary school counselor was to be an academic counselor first and foremost. One school leader (Jake) noted PSCs are not prepared in their counseling programs to address “social-psychometric issues” or major issues. He believed that, in the event a student needed personal/social or career counseling, the counselor should refer to other community
resources. This perception may lead school counselors to feel boxed in professionally and to determine over the course of their professional career that their role is fixed and rigidly academically focused. School counselors are challenged to provide school leaders with information on the personal/social and career counseling services they are trained to offer in the school setting. This goal may be accomplished through in-service training, observations, public relations, and/or case studies to name a few methods to inform school leaders of their diverse training and expertise.

In this study, a challenge to meeting the needs of students in gangs was variability in data collection. The need for intervention may not be evident when examining school records. A primary source of data on the presence of gangs in this district’s schools is discipline reports. As a discipline infraction occurs, each school leader may choose to include a violation of the district’s gang paraphernalia policy to the discipline report; however, reporting the presence of gang paraphernalia may be a challenge for the school leader not trained to notice the nuances of gang behavior. Or, the presence of gang paraphernalia is secondary to reporting the primary reason for the discipline referral (e.g., fight, weapon on campus, assaulting a staff member). The lack of consistent reporting may lead the need for programming and training to be inconsequential based on data.

Communication between school leaders and PSCs was also a real challenge to PSC's work with students in gangs in this study. Based on the initial contact with students in gangs, a school leader may refer the student to a PSC for additional intervention or the student may
be provided a disciplinary consequence with no other intervention occurring by the PSC. Two PSCs reported seeing students in gangs after they were seen by an administrator for discipline purposes. Although interactions with students in gangs occurred in this study, school leaders infrequently or never referred students in gangs to school counselors. Additionally, the knowledge that the student was gang involved was not communicated to the PSC. The reason for the referral to the PSC was not the student’s gang membership but rather academic in nature. School leaders reported sharing information on a need to know basis in order to prevent students being labeled and, therefore, impacting the teacher’s perception of their abilities as students. The limited information available to stakeholders impacted the PSCs ability to work with students in gangs.

With communication as an obvious challenge, compounded by unreliable data and inconsistent or even vague reasons for student referrals, meeting the needs of students in gangs was further complicated by site-based management decisions to withhold information critical to meeting the needs of students in gangs. The challenges of communicating data supported the findings of Park and Datnow (2009). School leaders play a critical role in collecting and translating data and then allowing other school-based decision makers to be privy to the data being collected. In order for data to be used to make improvements, PSCs need to feel empowered about their own abilities to bring about change. A participant in Park and Datnow’s (2009) study stated that developing working relationships was essential in making data relevant and went on to state that “without collaboration and collegiality, data is
impossible” (p. 488). Park and Datnow’s (2009) study found that data-driven decision-making involves multiple stakeholders at the school and district level. In order to give data relevancy, site based school leaders should also share decision-making authority in order to empower staff members to utilize their expertise to guide improvement.

Because school leaders do not always note gang-related policy violations when reporting disciplinary infractions, inconsistent communication, unreliable data, and site-based management make it nearly impossible to identify those students in gangs in need of counseling services. As Sam (SL) noted, “Each administrator may identify different issues for a suspension, for instance. So that can lead to some inconsistent data.” Data are essential to the school leaders desiring better results in their building; however, school leaders are not the only school-based stakeholders using data. Through the use of the ASCA National Model (2005), PSCs use data to guide decision-making on counseling programming, and this study revealed that students in gangs may not be identified or not perceived to be worthy of targeted intervention because their numbers are invisible on paper.

A narrow perception of the role of school counselors related to working with students in gangs limits the services PSCs may provide and may negatively impact the services they feel qualified to offer. If PSCs have cause to question their competence as their careers evolve, their self-efficacy will be increasingly diminished (Holcomb-McCoy, Harris, Hines, & Johnston, 2008). The perceived role limitation of PSCs in this study as academic counselors may threaten their self-efficacy, leaving PSCs to feel ineffective to address the
personal/social or career development needs of all students, including students in gangs.

While the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005) addresses the need for counselors to provide responsive services based on the academic, personal/social, and career development needs of students, site-based school leaders have more influence on the role of the PSCs and ultimately impact the comprehensive nature of counseling-based services and programming based on available data and the leader’s directives on the PSC’s role in the school.

**Education**

The common themes discovered in research question four (How do the educational and/or professional experiences of professional school counselors influence their willingness to work with students in gangs?) were *self-preservation, actual role, and limits of training.* All of these emerging themes coincided with the idea of *education.*

Two of the PSCs reported safety being a primary concern in their work with students in gangs. The lack of perceived safety led one of the school counselors to avoid asking questions related to gang involvement. As Beth (SL) noted, “I’m good without knowing.” The perceived lack of safety prevented the school counselors from engaging in counseling relationships with confirmed gang members. Knowing who those students are in the schools did not seem to be a secret to the PSCs in this study, but eliciting confirmation of their affiliation was avoided. As Judy (PSC) reported:
Walking up and down the hall you know who some are. They’re very proud of who they are. Some will admit it. I don’t necessarily go ask any student that walks in my office: Are you in a gang? If they want to volunteer that, that’s fine, but I don’t ask it.

Three of the PSCs reported training as a barrier to their work with students in gangs. All five of the PSCs reported receiving some form of gang awareness training. This training was provided by a source outside of the local school district. Despite the district’s efforts to communicate professional development training opportunities through “email blasts” and internal websites, the PSCs reporting knowledge of the district sponsored training was limited to two of the five in this study.

A significant obstacle to training was time away from work and the cost of attending the training. While obstacles to training were reported, there seemed to be an underlying sense of frustration about the training that had been offered. The training from the district and conferences was designed to make school personnel aware of the presence of gangs in the schools. The participants reported not knowing what to do with students in gangs and wondering what the goals of the counseling relationships were if students were involved with gangs. This paucity of research-based interventions and strategies in the professional development offered by the district left the PSCs without the tools needed to effectively work with students in gangs. Interactions with students in gangs was primarily left to school leaders whose primary concern was suppression, and continued policy violations caused students to be removed from the school setting.
A common theme evident within each category (i.e., communication, advocacy, responsive services and educate) was **collaboration**. Collaboration, or the lack thereof, presented itself in each of the thematic categories. Four of the site-based school leaders noted the importance of collaboration; however, only three were actively collaborating with their professional school counselors. One school leader met with his team of PSCs weekly as a part of the counseling department’s regularly scheduled meetings. One school leader met monthly as a team with all school leaders and all PSCs present, while the school leader and PSC pairings were encouraged to meet weekly. One met one-on-one with his school counselors to provide them with school-based projects. One site-based school leader experienced greater collaboration at the middle school and elementary level. On the other hand, collaboration at the high school level was limited to periodic referrals based on a reactionary philosophy. Presented as an ideal, one of the school leaders (Sam) who was based at the central office, noted that in a, “best case scenario, they [PSCs and SLs] are really tight,”; however, Sam went onto say, “In some cases, it [the relationship] is [tight]. In other cases, unfortunately it’s not.” The reality of the work experience for both school leaders and PSCs at the secondary school levels seemed to be one of reaction to events and needs. The lack of consistent collaborative communication prevented the development of proactive initiatives designed to improve the school experience for students in gangs.
Collaborative C.A.R.E.

The grounded theory Collaborative C.A.R.E. was developed through the use of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding involved “breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 195) and involved brainstorming. Axial coding involved looking for relationships among the concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Selective coding served to move the data from description to theory by integrating categories to form a grounded theory. Selective coding involved: (a) explicating the story line, (b) relating subsidiary categories around the core category by means of a paradigm, (c) relating categories at the dimensional level, (d) validating those relationships against data, and (e) filling in categories that may need further development (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998).

The categories developed were training/education, role development factors, stakeholders in role development, collaboration, and PSCs as practitioners within school context as noted in Appendix C. The categories led to an overarching core category grounded in the data collected. Collaboration was both present and notably absent and was a category noted that needed further development in order to establish a more productive relationship between school leaders and PSCs. C.A.R.E was an acronym relating all the categories and stands for communication, advocate, responsive services, and education.
Recommendations for the Role of the PSC and the School Leader

Based on the findings and the development of the grounded theory, several practical recommendations based on the perspectives of each participant group in this study are offered herein.

Professional School Counselors

The perceived role as academic counselors drives the actual role of PSCs. This morphing of perceived role into actual role limited the opportunities PSCs had to address the personal/social and career needs of all the students in their case loads. Limiting the PSC's role to that of an academic counselor leaves students seeking assistance with personal/social issues most often from student assistance program (SAP) counselors. With similar training as PSCs, SAPs in this school district are filling the void created by overworked secondary school counselors carrying excessive student caseloads with an emphasis on academic counseling. When asked, “Do you think that the presence of the SAP in this district makes the role of the counselor more academic in nature?” Sam (SL) responded:

In some cases it has. In some cases and I’ve heard this somewhat more from SAPs is that the SAP says, The counselor refers anything to me that’s not an academic issue. Whereas, that’s really not been the design. That wasn’t the intent of the SAP program. The SAP program was around substance abuse and prevention as well as crises and students who had some real specialized needs. But the role of the
counselor really should be academic, career, personal, social and then looking for outcomes around those areas.

Sam (SL) was a school leader who presented the ideal role for PSCs. He believed that PSCs were trained to address the academic, personal/social, and the career needs of their students. PSCs are trained to offer a comprehensive set of services. Unfortunately, more limited roles are too often defined by their school leaders. PSCs are challenged to seek opportunities to inform school leaders of their comprehensive training and expertise.

The PSCs in this school district may enjoy the role of an academic counselor or may be frustrated by the lack of variety in the student concerns they address. Regardless of the general feelings of the PSC population, the counselors in this study were not offering responsive services for students in gangs because they were not: (a) allowed to so, (b) empowered by their school district’s in-service training, (c) provided clear roles, and (d) provided research based interventions to guide their counseling practices with students in gangs.

PSCs are challenged to advocate for the collection of accurate data on the number of students in gangs in order to track their academic, personal/social, and career development needs. Like all students, those in gangs can also benefit from comprehensive counseling services and should not be denied those services because ineffective data collection systems cause them to be invisible.
PSCs are challenged to advocate for their training needs, including funding to attend training relevant to the practical challenges of counseling students in gangs in the school setting. PSCs are challenged to work collaboratively with school leaders to define their role and to enhance communication in order to better meet the needs of students in gangs. PSCs are challenged to request accurate information from school leaders on the nature of referrals in order to meet the personal/social, academic, and career development needs of students in gangs. PSCs should be allowed, encouraged to attend, and offered training based on a variety of issues impacting their work with the 21st century student. Each new initiative brings a change to the PSC’s role, but the need for training to be effective does not change. With each new responsibility, PSCs are challenged to advocate for research based strategies providing a clear procedural role, effective communication, a collaborative role with school leaders, and role clarity to enhance their work as counselors in the school setting.

**School Leaders**

School leaders are directed to fulfill the academic mission of the district, while providing a safe environment for learning to occur. The school leader role in this study was associated with a maintenance of order concept. It was evident from the data that their role with students in gangs was clearly and narrowly focused on ensuring school safety. This restricted point of view created an apparently short-sighted view of how other professionals, such as PSCs, could be helpful in working with students in gangs. There was no clearly
defined role for PSCs regarding services to gang members, and, sadly, communicating with PSCs about gang members was not perceived as necessary or important.

Compounding the narrow role for school leaders regarding gang members and the absence of a role for school counselors was the lack of mutual appreciation for each other’s role. School leaders are challenged to seek out opportunities to learn more about the role that the school counselors are trained to fill in the schools. School leaders are also challenged to offer suggestions for and participate in training programs focusing on collaborative relationships for responding to gangs in schools. Because the PSC role was influenced most often by the school leaders’ narrow control-focused response patterns, gang members did not seem to have as much access to academic counseling as students in the general population. Also, worth noting, all students, not just gang members, are not receiving much personal/social or career counseling from PSCs.

School leaders are challenged to support joint training for PSCs and school leaders. School leaders direct the professional development of their school and have a voice at district level meetings to communicate the training needs of their school. While increasing collaboration, joint training may expand the school leader’s perception of the role of the PSCs and recognize them as more than academic coaches. School leaders are challenged to find opportunities for more specific training for PSCs to meet the needs of the students they serve, including students in gangs.
The limited role of the PSC and the narrow control-focused role of the school leaders hinder the opportunity to communicate the need for the development of procedures to clarify and expand each other’s roles. Given the potential for working together with gang members, but with little communication and limited collaboration, both school counselors and school leaders are locked in a dysfunctional relationship. The lack of collaboration leads to a lack of appreciation for each other’s role. Furthermore, the absence of collaboration does not allow for both PSCs and school leaders to communicate their role expectations, need for training and research-based procedures to understand their mutual contributions for students in gangs. School leaders are encouraged to communicate with PSCs and are challenged to be receptive to school counselors serving as advocates for their profession and the students they serve. Improving the level of collaboration naturally leads to increased communication between PSCs and school leaders. Both PSCs and school leaders may find a partner in their work to improve the school environment while meeting the academic goals of the school.

School leaders are encouraged to develop procedures for determining the threat level of students in gangs to determine the level of service required. Services for students in gangs may extend beyond the school’s walls, but through the development of a threat level assessment, the role of the PSC may be clarified and determined to be an essential partner with community agencies. PSCs are uniquely qualified to address the developmental needs of all students as a part of the whole educational system and mission of a school system and/or individual school. PSCs may offer programming designed to prevent or intervene for
students in gangs. PSCs may also serve the essential role of collaborator. Connecting students to community agencies and services designed to intervene in the lives of students in gangs will serve to improve the safety of the school and local community.

The data from this study suggested that school leaders want PSCs to serve as disciplinarians in their work with students in gangs and other students to improve the safety of the school. Serving as disciplinarians may impact the PSC’s relationship in the future with students in gangs and all other students. School leaders are challenged to develop clear procedures for addressing the needs of students in gangs and clearly communicate their expectations for the role of the PSC as a partner in addressing discipline concerns.

Each school leader and professional school counselor brings a unique perspective to the school setting. No perspective is necessarily better than the other, and each perspective should be valued for its contribution to the academic success of all students. Working together with other stakeholders, school counselors have the potential to have a greater impact on issues related to students in gangs.

Integration of Findings with Existing Literature

Comparisons with Extant Literature

The results of the present study do connect with previous research studies. The perceived and actual role of school counselors has been extensively documented; however, the PSCs perceived and actual role with a specific population of students was lacking in professional literature leading to the development and completion of the current study.
The predominant role of the secondary school counselors in this study was to provide academic intervention and coaching for the students on their caseloads. The presence of school assistance program (SAP) counselors and heavy workloads led to much of the personal/social work to be referred to SAPs or outside counselors. Counseling to enhance career development occurred in conjunction with academic counseling or not at all.

**Relation to Hogan’s Counselor Development Model**

Hogan’s (1964) model for counselor development and supervision includes four stages of counselor development. The first stage of Hogan’s model was relevant to the experiences of the professional school counselors in this study while the other stages did not seem to apply.

Hogan’s (1964) *stage one* is characterized by rigid roles and anxiety. Counselor development is influenced by instructors. In this study, role rigidity was influenced by school leader supervisors and lack of in-service training. The professional school counseling participants were perceived to be academic counselors. Being perceived as academic counselors led the PSCs to fill the role of academically focused school counselors based primarily on the perceptions of their school leaders. In her story, Beth (PSC) revealed a preference for the student’s gang membership not to come up in the counseling session. She preferred for “that whole other thing [membership in a gang]” to be addressed by “the SAP or for somebody else.” Sasha’s (PSC) stating, “I mean I might work with students who are in gangs but not that’s not what we’re working on,” led to concluding that the focus of
interventions was academic and in line with the perceived role of the PSC. Thus, the personal/social needs of the student in gangs was left to the school leaders or school resource officers and their responses were limited to disciplinary consequences or warnings of impending disciplinary action if the gang-related activities did not cease. Anxiety associated with working with students in gangs was a result of the lack of intervention-based counseling techniques and perceived concerns for one’s safety. As Judy (PSC) stated, “I mean it’s like somehow or another if you’re training me, you’re giving me the problem and how am I supposed to solve it?”

Hogan (1964) suggested that counselors may cycle in and out of the stages. In this study, the counselors seemed to be locked into a role preferred by their school leaders, thus, leading them to stagnate in Hogan’s stage one. Hogan suggested that counselors receive supervision in order to further their professional development. Specifically, in stage one, Hogan suggested that supervisors provide interventions based on teaching, support, and awareness training. Hogan’s recommendation for supervisors can also apply to the school leaders in this study. School counselors need procedural support and clear awareness of the expectations for their work with students in gangs.

**Relation to Skovholt and Rønnestad’s Professional Development Theory**

Skovholt and Rønnestad’s (1992) stage theory consists of four stages before the completion of graduate training and four additional stages occurring after graduate training. The professional school counselors in this study had an average of 17 years of experience;
however, they seem to be in the fifth stage (the first stage after graduate training) of Skovholt and Rønnestad’s stages regarding working with gang members. The fifth stage is *Exploration* and generally encompasses the first two to five years of professional experience. The central task is to explore, and the major affects are confidence and anxiety (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992). While the professional school counselors seemed to have confidence in their role as academic counselors in stage 5, there was a sense that working with students in gangs led to a lack of confidence based on training and a concern for personal safety resulting in anxiety. Sasha (PSC) stated that personal safety concerns led her to seek more training because counselors are “not in safe roles.” Beth (PSC) simply stated, “Personally, it would be a safety issue,” when asked what barriers existed for her work with student in gangs. The lack of self-efficacy and safety may result in counselors avoiding specific populations of students such as gang members.

In a follow up to their 1992 study, Skovholt and Rønnestad (2001) suggested three practical implications for counselors as they move through the stages of their professional career. Those same implications apply to the professional school counselors in this study. First, counselors need to recognize how their experiences and life events impact professional growth. For example, the school counselors in this study may have a greater concern for personal safety based on the birth of a child or previous experiences with students that left them professionally uncertain and concerned for their personal safety. Some personal life events such as marriage, divorce, and birth of a child are impactful on a counselor’s personal
development and professional growth. Future research using Skovholt and Rønnewstad’s professional development theory may address the following questions: What life events impact PSC’s willingness to work with students in gangs? What role does personal safety play in a PSC’s work with students in gangs?

Skovholt and Rønnewstad (2001) suggested that counselors process their experiences in order to increase their competency levels. Professional school counselors may reflect on what personal and professional experiences are impacting their work with students in gangs in order to become more competent practitioners. Finally, because of PSC’s experiences and expertise pursuing psychotherapy may be useful to explore how personal developments impact professional growth and practice. Also, seeking supervision is a viable option for therapists interested in evaluating their work with students in gangs (Skovholt & Rønnewstad, 2001). While it was not the intent of this study to examine the PSCs' need for psychotherapy and supervision, it was clear the PSCs need opportunities to consult and collaborate with other professionals in order to increase their gang knowledge and counseling-based strategies for greater self-efficacy. Increased self-efficacy may lead to greater impact with students in gangs.

**ASCA’s National Model and the Role of the Professional School Counselor**

The American School Counselor Association presented its National Standards in 1997 to advance the profession through the use of a universal vision designed to guide the practice of school counseling (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). The standards included
competencies related to three domain areas (a) academic development, (b) career
development, and (c) personal/social development. In 2003, The American School
Counselor Association released its National Model and revised this same model in 2005.
The ASCA National Model provided a framework for designing, implementing, and
evaluating standards-based, data driven school counseling programs (ASCA, 2005). While
the National Standards (Campbell & Dahir, 1997) address the three domains to guide the
development of a comprehensive counseling program, the accompanying National Model
(ASCA, 2005) seemingly focuses on academic development to guide the counseling
program’s initiatives. The National Model’s (ASCA, 2005) limited focus on academic
development does little to highlight the PSCs work in the career and personal/social
developmental areas of the students they serve as stated in the National Standards (Campbell
& Dahir, 1997).

Dahir, Burnham, and Stone (2009) conducted a study to assess counselor readiness to
implement ASCA’s National Model (ASCA, 2005). The results demonstrated gaps in the
school counselor’s ability to implement the vision presented in the National Standards
(Campbell & Dahir, 1997). Elementary school counselors ranked classroom guidance and
group counseling as a higher priority than their secondary school counselor counterparts. In
contrast, secondary school counselors rated monitoring academic performance, identifying
educational options, and career planning higher than elementary and middle school
counselors. Further, the results highlighted that high school counselors are more often
engaged in the traditional practice priorities of addressing career awareness, academic, and career planning (Dahir, et al., 2009). The counseling profession was based on a vocational model for aiding clients in their career search. Today, more than a century later, secondary school counselors place a higher priority on the traditional role of counselors as vocational and academic coaches to prepare students for post-secondary opportunities (Dahir, et al., 2009).

Results from the present study enhanced the research of Dahir, et al. (2009) study. The PSC participants in the present study were employed by a district that uses the ASCA National Model to guide program development; however, their primary function was to serve as academic counselors. The ASCA National Model initiative may have assumed that enhancing and documenting school counselor productivity would lead to a move from the traditional role of the school counselor. However, the role of the secondary school counselor in the present study was directed by the school leader’s expectations.

Professional literature is saturated with research demonstrating dissonance in the perceived and actual role of PSCs (see Bonebrake & Borgers, 1984; Brott & Myers, 1999; Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Furlong, et al., 1979; Helms & Ibrahim, 1983; Miller, 1989). This contrast was not the case in the present study. The PSC's actual role was that of academic counselors as perceived by their school leaders to be their primary function in the secondary school setting. Results from this study highlighted the limited potential for PSCs to address the personal/social and career development needs of the high school level students.
they served. Seemingly, the ASCA National Model’s (ASCA, 2005) focus on academic achievement contrasts with the National Standard’s interest in addressing personal/social and career development (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). Further, for the PSC participant group in the present study, implementation of the ASCA National Model has done little to support the role they may play in the development of programming designed to address the personal/social and career development needs of gang members.

Limitations

First, the researcher was a novice. Every effort was made to ensure accuracy in the data analysis in order to remain true to the analysis processes shared by Corbin and Strauss (2008). Frequent references to their work and other studies using the grounded theory methodology were used to ensure validity of this study’s findings and to the presentation of findings in a qualitative study.

The sample size was adequate for the completion of a qualitative method study and ambitious for a novice researcher. Persistence was necessary to complete the study within the restricted timeframe provided by the school district and to meet the scheduling needs of each participant. Thankfully, persistence resulted in data saturation, and a thick, rich description was achieved within the time constraints. However rich the findings, the sample of participants was limited to one school district.

Racial diversity was limited by there being only one African-American in each group (one school leader and one PSC). Gender diversity was not achieved in the school leader
group. The voice of a female school leader’s perspective was not present in this study. In hindsight, during the data collection process, there were only five female site-based school leaders in a district with 25 high schools. While seeking diversity in high school demographics, the gender of the participants was not considered when recruiting participants. Finally, this study was limited to the secondary school setting.

**Implications for Future Research**

Further research is needed about students in gangs. The role of the professional school counselor is continuously evolving based on school policies and initiatives at the local, state, and federal levels. Over their professional career, PSCs may see a shift in the issues their students bring to the counseling relationship. For example, 10 years ago, PSCs were not dealing with issues of cyber-bullying. Cultural and economic shifts in society lead to changes in the issues students are forced to address, and changes in the lives of students challenge PSCs to expand their expertise in order to be more effective practitioners.

Several interesting preliminary discoveries about the role of the school counselor working with students in gangs were made in the present study. By no means is the work done. Further research on gangs in schools is needed from the perspective of other school districts and PSCs in elementary and middle schools. Are PSCs in elementary and middle school engaged in gang prevention? Is the role of the elementary and middle school counselor limited to academic interventions?
Utilizing the grounded theory categories discovered in this study, future researchers may study the same categories. In the area of communication, future research may answer the following questions: How does perceived role impact communication? How do educational and professional experiences impact communication between PSCs and school leaders? This study’s findings highlighted the lack of training by PSC’s and school leader’s training programs to inform both groups of the essential role each plays in the school setting.

Research questions related to advocacy may include information generated from the following questions: By nature, school counselors are helpers at the level of advocacy in which they are engaged. Are less experienced PSCs more or less likely to advocate for a role working with students in gangs? Does communicating with parents about their child’s membership in a gang violate student-client confidentiality?

Responsive services address the immediate needs and concerns of students. Responsive services incorporate both direct and indirect services. Further research involving responsive services may address the following questions: How is role development impacted by existing procedures and policies? In order to study how procedures and polices impact the role of the PSC in working with students in gangs, an interested researcher may explore how the role of the PSC is different in a district with a procedure for addressing the needs of students in gangs versus a district lacking the same procedures. The gross lack of school-based interventions for students in gangs makes it necessary for school counselors to collaborate with community resources to ensure they are known to students, school staff
members, and parents. Examining the PSC’s role as community collaborator may further research on the responsive services component of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005).

Paraphrasing Derek (SL), each student has attendance in school as a common life experience. School officials and community stakeholders are challenged to recognize this commonality; by doing so, perhaps these independent entities will see the benefit in working together to prevent and intervene. Because students in gangs have lives that are influenced by the community in which they live, utilizing the community as context will further the research started in this study. Additionally, expanding research in the area of community and collaborative services may enhance the role of the PSC while developing a clear role for the PSC as an essential collaborator for intervention in the school and into the community.

Education was a central category in the data collected and analyzed. The lack of training focusing on gang intervention strategies led counselors to avoid the topic in counseling sessions and to engage in vague and inconsistent intervention methods. Research questions for the education category may include: What role does in-service training play in the role of the PSC? How are counselor’s professional development needs addressed in the school setting? Examining the professional development needs of PSCs, addressing personal safety, and exploring the role of other school based stakeholders may increase the self-efficacy of school counselors by including them as decision makers. Until counselors feel secure in the role they were trained to fill, PSCs may continue to follow the academic role directed by school leaders and experience lower levels of self-efficacy (Dahir, et al., 2009).
Of all the areas of research regarding students in gangs, research seems to be most needed from the gang member’s perspective. Without gang members as participants, the voice of students in gangs will continue to be silent, and prevention efforts may be wasted because they lack the depth provided from the first-person perspective. Studying students in gangs to understand how school staff members can influence changes in their lives may provide valuable information to further the research begun in this study. A minor child student’s perspective may be difficult to access but worthy of a researcher’s time and effort. Regardless of age, accessing current gang members to explore their needs may result in discovering sources of prevention and inform intervention strategies in the school and local community. The information that can be gained from the first person perspective will benefit the development and direction of prevention and intervention programming. An interested researcher may explore the following questions: What role may school staff members play in preventing gang affiliation? How are the personal/social and career development needs of students in gangs addressed in the secondary school setting?

**Concluding Remarks**

The role of the PSC evolves over time based on education reform at the federal, state, and local levels of government. The ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005) sought to guide the role of the PSC through the use of a framework for universal implementation. While the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005) attempted to enhance the academic, career, and personal/social development of all students, the findings in this study indicated that the role
of the secondary school counselors was limited to meeting the academic needs of their students. Additionally, students in gangs were not being addressed as a cultural group because their identity was shared on a very limited basis with the PSCs in this study.

The heavy emphasis on academic development leads PSCs to not address the unique personal/social and career development needs of students in gangs. As such PSCs are challenged to attempt to meet the academic, career, and personal/social development needs of all their students, including those students in gangs. Unfortunately, circumstances at the settings where the PSC sample worked prevented this level of comprehensive services from occurring. A heavy emphasis on their role as academic counselors left PSCs in this study to limit professional development to the immediate needs of their students. Feeling overwhelmed and powerless to enact change, PSCs complied with their perceived role of academic counselor for students. School leaders’ narrow expectations of the role of the school counselor led them to not share the names of students with PSCs for counseling intervention, therefore, continuing to leave students in gangs without access to the services of a school-based counselor.

The findings expanded the existing knowledge of the general role of the school counselor into an examination of the role as it relates to students in gangs. Revealing the need for training, collaboration, and counseling based intervention strategies for specific subgroups of students, specifically students in gangs, appears to be a significant new finding. Working behind the scenes, PSCs dedicate innumerable hours and exhaust great energy
serving the students in their caseloads in order to support the academic mission of the schools in which they work. PSCs are uniquely talented individuals desiring the skills and knowledge to better serve all students in their schools. However, much of the staff development being offered seemingly focuses on the classroom environment. The apparent lack of sufficient training left the PSCs in this study to not interact with students in gangs based on concerns for personal safety and the lack of specific counseling based interventions to be employed with students in gangs.

Instead of limiting the scope of the counseling relationship to that of academic coach, school counselors could better serve the personal/social, academic, and career needs of students in gangs if they are aware of students' membership in this subculture. While school leaders are responsible for school safety, PSCs and all other school staff members are keenly interested in preserving a safe school environment as well. School leaders should not bear the burden alone in identifying students in gangs. With proper training, all school staff members may be made aware of the presence of gangs in their schools. Continued staff development may enhance the intervention efforts by defining what to do with the knowledge that a student is in a gang. With research-based intervention strategies and clear expectations, PSCs are uniquely positioned to deliver individual and group counseling to meet the academic, career, and personal/social needs of students while working to support the mission of the high school. Like students, school leaders cannot ignore how personal circumstances impact academic performance. Rather than minimizing the essential role of
the school counselor, school leaders are challenged to recognize the broad scope of services PSCs are trained to offer.

School leaders are challenged to recognize that the presence of gangs in the school setting is a problem. When asked if students in gangs was a top five or top ten issue at his school, Frank (SL) plainly stated, “I would always put it in the top five because you always want to maintain awareness of it.” Students in gangs are a reality for the schools in which they attend and the communities where they live. The impact of their presence can be as quiet as a piece of clothing declaring their loyalty. In contrast, their presence may be demonstrated in violent acts designed to recruit members and instill fear and gain the respect of non-members. Regardless of their behaviors, students in gangs need help, guidance, and support. It is not the school’s responsibility alone, nor is it the community’s sole duty to address the problems gangs bring to the local community. However, schools and communities are challenged to work together to combat the presence of gangs. This study’s findings highlighted the apparently rigid roles of PSCs and school leaders. The same may be true of the school setting and the local communities, each looking to the other to solve the problems gang presence brings to local communities. Schools can establish a working relationship with community agencies to address the presence of gangs by providing intervention and prevention efforts that are comprehensive and impactful beyond safety concerns.
Just as gangs evolve, so does the role of the PSC. Local, state, and national initiatives continue to shape the role of the PSC. While these initiatives dictate changes in the role of the PSC, one unfortunate theme has emerged: The role of a school counselor should not remain rigidly centered on academics. Limiting the role of the PSCs to one of academics disregards their training as counselors prepared to address matters of heart and mind. Nor should the role of the PSC remain behind the scenes. Instead, the role of PSCs should be acknowledged, celebrated, and supported by the school and its stakeholders. PSCs should speak out and speak up. Seizing every opportunity to advocate for their role, PSCs should regularly demonstrate the effectiveness of their comprehensive program through the use of data demonstrating their work in the academic, personal/social and career domains of practice. Hopefully, this dissertation will encourage more research on students in gangs and the role of the school counselor and spark interest by school districts to develop collaborative, effective partnerships with the professional school counselors in their school district in order to broaden the scope of intervention and, thereby, strengthen existing intervention efforts through partnerships and collaboration.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study: The Role of Professional School Counselors in Working with Students in Gangs: A Grounded Theory Study
Principal Investigator: Jennifer C. Barrow
Faculty Sponsor (if applicable): Dr. Stanley Baker, Dissertation Committee Chair

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this study is to determine your role and the impact training/education has on your work with students in gangs in the secondary school setting.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
By agreeing to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview. Content of interview(s) will be audio taped using a digital voice recorder. This is a one time commitment for approximately 60 minutes. Following our interview the researcher will have the contents of the interview transcribed by an external professional entity. Pseudonyms will be used to protect anonymity. Interviews will be conducted at a setting convenient for you (e.g. work setting, public library). This research will help the researcher complete the requirements of a doctoral program in counselor education and supervision.

Risks
There is some professional risk of your answers being viewed by administrators or school leadership. Direct quotes from your interview may be used in reports about the research, and while a pseudonym will be used to protect your identity, details in your answers may identify...
you. In order to further reduce your risk I will not ask you to identify your school specifically and ask that you not mention anyone by name, but rather use their job titles as identifiers.

Interruption of the work day may be prevented by conducting interviews after school/work hours and off campus. Scheduling on-site interviews during work hours is only an option at traditional calendar schools during the months of June and July.

**Benefits**
Participants may recognize the need for additional professional development in order to work with students in gangs. Existing research does not recognize the role the school counselor may play in working with students in gangs in the school setting. The researcher’s hope is to demonstrate the role professional school counselors may play in working with students in gangs in order to make the school environment safer for all students and staff.

**Confidentiality**
The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be stored securely in a locked security box in the researcher’s home office. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. A copy of your transcribed interview will be provided at your request.

**Compensation**
You will not receive anything for participating.

**What if you have questions about this study?**
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Jennifer Barrow, at 919-772-2412.

**What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**
If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514), or Carol Mickelson, IRB Coordinator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-7515).

**Consent To Participate**
“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may withdraw at any time.”

Participant's signature __________________________ Date ______________
Investigator's signature __________________________ Date ______________
Recruitment Letter for Professional School Counselors

May 25, 2011

Dear Fellow School Counselor,

I hope this letter finds you doing well and enjoying the conclusion of the school year. I am presently pursuing my doctoral degree in Counselor Education and Supervision at North Carolina State University. I am also a practicing school counselor at Sanderson High School. In order to meet graduation requirements I will complete a dissertation.

My research interest is the role of professional school counselors in working with students in gangs. This study will examine the impact of professional development on the counselor’s willingness and competence level to work with students in gangs. The goal of this study is to increase our awareness and understanding by describing the school counselors’ professional development and role in working with students in gangs in the high school setting. My hope is to use your responses related to role and professional development to complete my dissertation requirements.

I would like to conduct structured open-ended interviews with professional school counselors concerning your role and professional development. Interviews will last approximately one hour. Interviews will be audio taped. The interview will occur at a mutually agreeable time away from, or at, your job setting, but will not reasonably impede with work hours. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity.
I am seeking your assistance in completing this graduation requirement in order to earn a doctoral degree. If you are interested in participating please contact me by phone at 919-XXX-XXXX or by email at XXXXXX@nc.rr.com.

Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Barrow, MS, NCC, LPC
Recruitment Letter for School Leaders

May 25, 2011

Dear School Leader,

I hope this letter finds you doing well and enjoying the conclusion of the school year. I was provided your name by a colleague as a possible participant for my dissertation research project. I am presently pursuing my doctoral degree in Counselor Education and Supervision at North Carolina State University. I am also a practicing school counselor at Sanderson High School. In order to meet graduation requirements I will complete a dissertation.

My research interest is the role of professional school counselors in working with students in gangs. This study will examine the impact of professional development on the counselor’s willingness and competence level to work with students in gangs. The goal of this study is to increase awareness and understanding by describing the school counselors’ professional development and role in working with students in gangs in the high school setting. My hope is to use your responses related to school counselor role definition and professional development to complete my dissertation requirements and generate discussion.

I would like to conduct structured open-ended interviews with assistant principals, principals and other school safety stakeholders concerning your perceptions of the school counselor’s role and professional development as they relate to their work with students in gangs. Interviews will last approximately one hour. Interviews will be audio taped. The
interview will occur at a mutually agreeable time away from, or at, your job setting, but will not reasonably impede with work hours. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity.

I am seeking your assistance in completing this graduation requirement in order to earn a doctoral degree. If you are interested in participating please contact me by phone at 919-XXX-XXXX or by email at XXXXXX@nc.rr.com.

Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Barrow, MS, NCC, LPC
Appendix B

Interview Guides / Participant Questionnaires
Interview Questions for Professional School Counselors

*The Role of Professional School Counselors in Working with Students in Gangs: A Grounded Theory Study*

1. What factors determine the role you play in your school?

2. Who is involved in determining your professional role?

3. In your opinion what role do professional school counselors currently play in identifying gang presence and providing intervention in your school?

4. Tell me what role you think counselors may play in identifying and providing intervention for students currently involved in a gang or considering gang membership.

5. What role has the school or school district played in providing professional school counselors with training specific to gang activity in the schools?

6. During your graduate school training, were you provided any opportunities to learn about gangs in schools?

7. Since graduate school have you been provided or sought out opportunities to learn about gangs in schools?

8. In your own words describe your work with students in gangs.

9. What barriers exist impacting your effectiveness in working with students in gangs?

10. In what ways do you seek out information to inform your work as a professional school counselor?

11. How might the ASCA National Model support your efforts to prevent or intervene with students in gangs?

12. Is there anything you care to add?
Interview Questions for School Leaders

The Role of Professional School Counselors in Working with Students in Gangs:
A Grounded Theory Study

1. What factors determine the role school counselors play in your school?
2. Who is involved in determining their professional role?
3. In your opinion what role do professional school counselors currently play in identifying gang presence and providing intervention in your school?
4. Tell me what role you think counselors may play in identifying and providing intervention for students currently involved in a gang or considering gang membership.
5. What role has the school or school district played in providing professional school counselors and school faculty with training specific to gang activity in the schools?
6. During your graduate school training, were you provided any opportunities to learn about the role of the school counselor?
7. Since graduate school has your perception of the role of the school counselor changed? How so?
8. In your own words describe your work with students in gangs.
9. How might the ASCA National Model support your school’s efforts to prevent or intervene with students in gangs?
10. Is there anything you care to add?
School Counselor Participant Questionnaire

_The Role of Professional School Counselors in Working with Students in Gangs:_

_A Grounded Theory Study_

The following information is confidential and will not be used as identifying information:

Selected pseudonym ________________________________________________________

Mailing address _____________________________________________________________

Home phone ____________________ Work phone ________________________________

The following information will be used as participant descriptive data in the research study:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Highest college degree earned (PhD, EdD, EdS, MS, MEd)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Please indicate the department/field of your highest degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The year in which you earned your degree in school counseling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The year in which you earned your degree in education leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Are you a fully licensed school counselor in NC?  YES NO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Certified counselor (e.g. NCC) and/or Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) (circle response(s)</td>
<td>NCC LPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Number of conferences or workshops attended in previous 12 months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Approximate number of hours devoted to professional reading each week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Number of professional journal subscriptions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Number of years of experience as a professional school counselor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Number of years of experience as a school leader (assistant principal, principal, district leader)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>M F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Ethnic/cultural group with which you identify (e.g. African American, White, Latino)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Number of years you have spent as a school counselor at each of the following levels

______ Elementary ______ middle or junior high ______ high school

Number of years you have spent as a school leader at each of the following levels

______ Elementary ______ middle or junior high ______ high school

Please list your professional memberships (e.g. American School Counselor Association, American Counseling Association, North Carolina School Counselor Association, NCAE)
School Leader Participant Questionnaire
*The Role of Professional School Counselors in Working with Students in Gangs: A Grounded Theory Study*

The following information is confidential and will not be used as identifying information:

Selected pseudonym ______________________________________________________

Mailing address __________________________________________________________

Home phone ________________ Work phone _________________________________

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<td>M</td>
</tr>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>Ethnic/cultural group with which you identify (e.g. African American, White, Latino)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Number of years you have spent as a school leader at each of the following levels**

_____ Elementary  _____ middle or junior high  _____ high school

**Number of years you have spent as a school counselor at each of the following levels**

_____ Elementary  _____ middle or junior high  _____ high school
### Categories from data analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category/dimension</th>
<th>Current role</th>
<th>Optimal role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Training/Education</td>
<td>Trainer centered; Broad perspective of counseling profession taught; strategies taught blend with teacher roles; Generalist approach</td>
<td>Learner centered; teaching introduces expanded role of PSC and presents current trends, policies, and procedures; provides research based intervention strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role development factors</td>
<td>Wide range of factors impacting role has decreased PSC effectiveness</td>
<td>Narrow range of factors impacting role to increase effectiveness, clarify role, and decrease behaviors associated with counselor burnout; use essential factors to improve effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholders in role development</td>
<td>External sources; clarity of role is clouded by number of stakeholders guiding role; varied expectations</td>
<td>Internal sources; PSC is empowered to educate others on role and encouraged to shape role; leads to clarified expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Role rigidity; narrow focus on immediate needs; limited collaboration</td>
<td>Cross training broadens appreciation for professional roles of others; increases collaborative services and improves communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSCs as practitioners within school context</td>
<td>School environment limits role to one of academic coach with breaches of confidence occurring</td>
<td>Role includes personal/social and career domains of practice; supports professional ethics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>