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## Preservice Teacher Perceptions of School Counsellor Responsibilities

### Perceptions des responsabilités du conseiller scolaire chez les professeurs futurs

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#### ABSTRACT

Teachers have tremendous impact on school counselling service utilization in terms of teacher-counsellor consultation and student referral. Thus, ensuring that teachers understand the roles and responsibilities of school counsellors is critical. As teachers' understanding of the school counselling role can be impacted during preservice teacher training and little has been published on preservice teachers' views of school counselling, the authors of the current study opted to explore preservice teachers' perceptions of school counsellor responsibilities. Ninety preservice teachers from Newfoundland and Labrador completed the survey. Results suggested that although preservice teachers appear to have a moderate degree of knowledge regarding a subset of school counsellor responsibilities, more effort is needed to systematically inform preservice teachers about the responsibilities of the school counsellor role. Implications for training and for school counsellor practice are discussed.

#### RÉSUMÉ

Les professeurs ont une influence énorme sur l'utilisation des services de counseling dans leur école en ce qui concerne leur façon de consulter eux-mêmes les conseillers et de leur envoyer leurs élèves. Il est donc capital de s'assurer que les professeurs comprennent le rôle et les responsabilités des conseillers. Comme cette compréhension du rôle des conseillers peut être influencée par la formation initiale des professeurs, les auteurs de cette étude ont choisi d'examiner les perceptions des responsabilités du conseiller scolaire chez les professeurs en formation. Quarante-vingt dix professeurs futurs de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador ont rempli le questionnaire. Il y a peu d'études consacrées à la perception des professeurs futurs du rôle du conseiller d'école. Les résultats du sondage suggèrent que, bien que les professeurs en formation semblent avoir un niveau modéré de connaissance d'une partie des responsabilités du conseiller scolaire, il faut faire un effort plus systématique pour renseigner les professeurs futurs sur les responsabilités et le rôle du conseiller scolaire. Les conséquences potentielles pour la formation ainsi que pour l'exercice du rôle du conseiller scolaire font également partie de l'étude.

Dougherty (2000) discusses the importance of school-based collaboration where school personnel work together to address student development and learning goals. The school counsellor is an integral part of this team. Counsellors can offer

expertise in many areas, including personal, social, academic, and career, which in turn can help teachers better understand their students' strengths and needs and foster student success (Beale, 2003). The classroom teacher spends more time with students than any other professional in the school and is the most likely to influence students (Nugent, 1990).

Indeed, teachers have a large impact on students' uptake of school counselling services (Nugent, 1990). Teachers' perceptions of the responsibilities and roles of the school counsellor can influence the likelihood of them making referrals to school counsellors, consulting with school counsellors, and can even impact on the overall success of the student, as well as the school counselling program itself (Beale, 2003; Clark & Amatea, 2004; Ginter, Scalise, & Presse, 1990). The formation of teacher attitudes toward other school-based professionals begins early and is certainly impacted during teacher preservice training programs (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000).

Welch (1998) states that most school professionals such as counsellors, principals, and teachers are trained separately and do not always have a good understanding of other professional roles in the school. As a result, they may be less likely to appropriately utilize the services of other professionals. While some research has explored teachers' and school administrators' perceptions of school counsellor responsibilities (e.g., Beesley, 2004; Cooper, Hough, & Loynd, 2005; Davies, Howes, & Farrell, 2008; Dimakos, 2006; Zalaquett, 2005), few studies have examined the perceptions of *preservice* teachers regarding the responsibilities of the school counsellor. The current article presents results from a study that examined preservice teachers' perceptions of the school counsellor and presents implications for the training of preservice teachers and preservice school counsellors, school counsellor practice, and areas of future research.

#### SCHOOL PROFESSIONALS' PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL COUNSELLING AND RELATED SERVICES

##### *Teacher Perceptions*

Although there is a dearth of literature about preservice teachers' perceptions of the role of the school counsellor and related service providers (e.g., school or educational psychologists), the perceptions of other professionals in the school community have been examined. For example, some research has focused on practicing teachers' perceptions of the responsibilities of the school psychologist and how these perceptions impact their use of this service (Davies et al., 2008; Farrell, Jimerson, Kalambouka, & Benoit, 2005; Gilman & Gabriel, 2004; Watkins, Crosby, & Pearson, 2001). A number of studies indicated teachers do not always have a positive view of the role of the school psychologist or they view the position as less valuable than the school counsellor (Dean, 1980; Gilman & Gabriel, 2004; Gilman & Medway, 2007). However, the authors of these three studies noted that their participants reported having limited knowledge of school psychology services and infrequent contact with school psychologists, and thus

may not have fully understood school psychologist responsibilities. Farrell et al. (2005) and others (Dimakos, 2006; Watkins et al., 2001) found that the majority of teachers interviewed in their studies valued the services of their school psychologist and wanted more access to such professionals.

Teachers' perceptions of the responsibilities of the school counsellor have also been studied to some extent. Beesley (2004) surveyed a group of K-12 classroom teachers regarding their perceptions of the effectiveness of school counselling services. Results indicated that although teachers were generally satisfied with counselling services, the degree of satisfaction varied across grade levels and depended on the specific service area provided by the school counsellor (e.g., career counselling, community referral).

Cooper et al. (2005) conducted two separate studies that surveyed secondary school teachers' attitudes and views toward school counselling. In the first study, teachers were asked to rate how important they felt it was for there to be a school counsellor based in their school. Forty percent of participants indicated they felt having a school counsellor was essential while only 7% felt a school counsellor was not essential at all. Further evidence was found in Cooper et al.'s second study in which participants had, on average, high levels of agreement that counselling services can make a difference in the lives of students, counselling can help students think about their problems in a more positive way, and counselling can help students learn strategies and coping skills for use in different situations. Cooper et al. also noted that many of the secondary teachers in their study viewed counselling as advice-giving, a common misperception of what counselling entails.

Aluede and Imonikhe (2002) surveyed secondary school teachers and their students to determine how they perceived the responsibilities of the school counsellor. Results indicated that although teachers and students could readily identify roles of the school counsellor, there was a lack of consensus between the two groups. Students saw the role of the school counsellor as mostly involving academic counselling activities while teachers viewed the school counsellor as someone to provide career information to students and advise them on disciplinary matters. Based on the available research evidence, it appears that many experienced teachers do not have a full understanding of the responsibilities of the school counsellor.

Langford (2006) is one of the few researchers who has studied preservice teachers' perceptions of the responsibilities of the school counsellor. She compared preservice teachers' perceptions from several elementary and secondary training programs. A group of 212 preservice teachers from two large universities were surveyed to determine how much knowledge they had regarding the responsibilities and functions of the school counsellor as recommended by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model. In this study, the researcher provided participants with a set of counselling activities, some of which were recommended in the ASCA Model (e.g., crisis intervention counselling; referring to outside agencies; and career awareness, exploration, and planning) and some that may be performed by some school counsellors but would not be viewed as

appropriate in the ASCA National Model (e.g., scheduling of all students and computing grade point averages).

Langford (2006) asked participants to indicate which of the above activities were part of the counselling role. Over 30% of participants in the study reported that no training or information had been provided to them during their teacher education regarding appropriate functions of the school counsellor. However, results from the study indicated that preservice teachers had some understanding of the responsibilities of the school counsellor, with over 50% of participants reporting the counsellor functions endorsed in the ASCA National Model as important. Results also suggested that the more highly the preservice teachers regarded the responsibilities of the school counsellor in general, the more likely they were to report a willingness to collaborate with school counsellors in their future practice.

### *School Administrator Perceptions*

The perception of school administrators toward the responsibilities of the school counsellor has also been studied. Administrators generally view the responsibilities of the school counsellor in a positive manner (Zalaquett, 2005). Interestingly, some studies suggest there are discrepancies in the expectations held by school administrators regarding school counsellor practice. Monteiro-Leitner, Asner-Self, Milde, Leitner, and Skelton (2006) found that the perceptions of counsellors, counsellors-in-training, and principals about the responsibilities of the school counsellor in a rural community were very similar (e.g., consulting on referrals, individual/group counselling). However, the amount of time that they perceived should be devoted to specific duties varied between the participant groups, with principals suggesting that school counsellors should spend 4.4 hours per week on Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and 2.32 hours per week on administrative duties (e.g., supervision), while counsellors and counsellors-in-training felt they should not spend any time on either of these types of activities. Furthermore, while counsellors and counsellors-in-training indicated that they should spend 17.7 and 18.5 hours per week, respectively, on counselling and professional development, principals reported that they felt that devoting 12.3 hours per week to these activities was adequate.

Role confusion and the assignment of school counsellors to non-school counselling responsibilities are not uncommon and have the potential to impact the counsellor-principal relationship as well as the success or direction of the school counselling program (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000; Leuwerke, Bruinekool, & Lane, 2008; Sink & Yillik-Downer, 2001). It is interesting to note the diverse perceptions of the role/responsibility of the school counsellor among practicing educational professionals. However, it is not clear in the literature where such perceptions originate, and thus capturing a snapshot of preservice teachers' perceptions may help us better understand preservice teachers' perspectives prior to entering the profession and ultimately provide us with useful information to understand teachers' perceptions of the school counsellor role.

### *Study Purpose*

While the above-noted studies contribute to the literature in this area in important ways, very few studies actually address the perceptions of *preservice* teachers regarding the responsibilities of the school counsellor. The perceptions of preservice teachers are critical, as such perceptions have important implications for student success (e.g., whether student needs are addressed through appropriate referrals), teacher training (e.g., where do knowledge deficits exist for preservice teachers regarding school counselling services, what are the existing attitudes of preservice teachers toward school counselling services), and also for school counsellor practice.

With such a heavy emphasis on accountability, collaboration, and learning communities in today's education system (American School Counselor Association, 2005; Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, Department of Education, 2011; National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2001; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 1995), preservice teachers entering the teaching profession will be expected to collaborate with and consult with other professionals as they make decisions about their students (Williams, 2004). The inclusive classroom teacher cannot independently address all of the needs of the diverse learners (e.g., students with learning disabilities [LDs], autism spectrum, cognitive delays) in our schools (Marlow, 2000). The inclusive classroom teacher needs to know how to access the supports available to assist him/her in teaching. Thus, the current study sought to assess preservice teachers' perceptions regarding the responsibilities of the school counsellor in order to inform teacher and school counsellor training and practice.

### METHOD

As noted above, few studies have explored preservice teachers' perceptions of school counsellor responsibilities. In addition, the studies that do exist tend to present participants with lists of potential school counsellor responsibilities. It was the current authors' view that a survey method of measurement of preservice teachers' perceptions of the school counsellor role, without the provision of prompts to participants, would be a critical addition to this emerging literature base. To accomplish this, and thus to offer a unique measure of preservice teachers' knowledge of school counsellor responsibilities, the participants in the current study were administered a survey that required them to provide open-ended responses without any specific prompting to the following two questions:

1. What would you consider to be the typical daily duties/responsibilities of a school counsellor?
2. Do you perceive a need for school counsellors to be more involved in any particular area(s)?

With the absence of prompts, the current authors were able to assess preservice teachers' perceptions without providing participants with potential answers

that they may not have considered without the prompting, thus accessing what participants readily know about the role. This was critical in order to reduce any potential bias associated with the nature of the measurement instrument itself.

### *Participants*

Undergraduate students completing a required course in their final term of an intermediate/secondary bachelor of education program were invited to participate in the survey. In total, 172 students were enrolled in the five sections of this course, with 120 students being present during survey administration. Of the 120 students present, 90 completed the survey (75% response rate; 36 male [40%], 54 female [60%]).

### *Procedure*

Permission to conduct this research was obtained from the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) at Memorial University. The instructors of the course provided time during class for the survey to be distributed and completed. An envelope, the research consent form, and a copy of the questionnaire were distributed to all potential participants. One of the researchers provided an overview of the research and consent process and asked that the questionnaire be placed in the envelope provided and returned to the front of the classroom upon completion of the survey.

### *Instrument*

The questionnaire was developed by the researchers and consisted of two sections (see Appendix). The first section sought background information about participants such as gender, education level, perceived knowledge of the responsibilities of a school counsellor (measured on a 5-point Likert scale), work/volunteer experience in a school context, experience with a school counsellor, whether they would make a referral to a school counsellor, whether they would consult with a school counsellor, and whether they were interested in becoming a school counsellor. The second section of the survey asked two open-ended questions that required participants to draw upon their own knowledge/perceptions of the responsibilities of a school counsellor. No prompts regarding potential responsibilities were provided.

### *Data Analysis*

Data from the first section of the survey were managed and analyzed through SPSS Version 17.0. Descriptive statistics and frequencies were utilized to represent the demographic information. Data from the second part of the survey were managed through the use of Microsoft Word. The responses to the open-ended questions were entered verbatim into Microsoft Word by a graduate-level research assistant. Data were aggregated and grouped by survey question.

The responses were then broken down into units of analysis. For units of analysis, we used a unit of meaning or a “statement or continuous set of statements,

which convey one identifiable idea” (Aviv, 2001, p. 59). We then utilized open coding to assign labels (codes) to the units. Open coding requires the “breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing” of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61). For example, one unit of meaning from our study was labelled “academic and career counselling.” Numerous other units of meaning were given the same label, as many of the participants highlighted this area. Another unit of meaning was labelled “teaching.” After all units of meaning were labelled, those with similar labels were grouped together.

Throughout the results section, the authors have clearly indicated the frequency at which various coded groups were reported by participants. It is important to note that overlap will exist between some of these coded groups. For example, student personal growth and awareness is found under the unit of analysis called “student and teacher education/support,” but it could also fit under the “personal counselling” unit. Following the initial independent reviews by two of the researchers, all three researchers met and sought consensus around the coding. This was done through open discussion between the researchers and involved revisiting the raw data and units of analysis to facilitate consensus among the raters.

## RESULTS

### *Participant Background Information*

#### PERCEIVED KNOWLEDGE OF SCHOOL COUNSELLOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Participants’ perceived level of knowledge regarding the responsibilities of the school counsellor varied from 1 (*no knowledge*) to 5 (*extremely strong knowledge*) on the 5-point Likert scale. Of the sample, 72% ( $n = 65$ ) responded with a 3 (*moderate degree of knowledge*). Approximately 9% ( $n = 8$ ) indicated they felt they had strong to extremely strong knowledge about the responsibilities, and about 19% ( $n = 17$ ) indicated they felt they had very little or no knowledge about the responsibilities of the school counsellor.

#### EDUCATION AND FUTURE ASPIRATIONS FOR SCHOOL COUNSELLOR EMPLOYMENT

When asked about a previous degree, 25% ( $n = 22$ ) of participants indicated that they had a previous degree in science, 63% ( $n = 57$ ) in arts, and 12% ( $n = 11$ ) in physical education. When asked whether they had taken elective course(s) that discussed the responsibilities of a school counsellor, 38% ( $n = 34$ ) of participants indicated they had taken such a course. When participants were asked if they were planning on becoming a school counsellor, 18% ( $n = 16$ ) responded “yes,” 72% ( $n = 65$ ) responded “no,” and 10% ( $n = 9$ ) indicated that they were unsure.

#### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Of the sample, 7% ( $n = 6$ ) indicated that they had no experience working in a school while the remaining 93% ( $n = 84$ ) indicated that they had some experience in one or more school settings. Of the 84 participants who indicated they had some

experience, 81% ( $n = 76$ ) indicated school experience from their internship, 7% ( $n = 7$ ) reported “actual” teaching experience, and 3% ( $n = 3$ ) indicated teaching overseas. A few respondents also indicated school experience came from areas such as tutoring, coaching, or volunteering ( $n = 5$ ) or involvement with community groups ( $n = 2$ ). As indicated, some respondents reported more than one type of school experience.

#### CONTACT WITH A SCHOOL COUNSELLOR

Most participants indicated they had either personal or professional experience working with a school counsellor. Of the participants, 37% ( $n = 32$ ) reported contact with a school counsellor for personal reasons, and 39% ( $n = 33$ ) reported professional contact with a school counsellor.

#### UTILIZATION OF SCHOOL COUNSELLING SERVICES

When the participants were asked to imagine themselves as working teachers and consider whether they would refer a student to a school counsellor, roughly 99% ( $n = 89$ ) indicated they would refer a student to a school counsellor. Additional written comments made by participants who indicated they would refer a student to a school counsellor varied. Examples of such comments included “A guidance counsellor is a trained professional who can provide help to students in areas that are beyond my depth as a teacher,” “It [likelihood of referral] would depend on how well I knew the guidance counsellor and how confident I would be in him/her being able to help the student,” and “Guidance counsellors have more specific training.” One participant indicated an unwillingness to refer a student to a school counsellor and stated “I cannot imagine a situation wherein a guidance counsellor would be useful to a student in a way that I would not be.”

When participants were asked to imagine themselves as working teachers and consider whether they would consult with a school counsellor, 93% ( $n = 83$ ) stated they would consult. Those participants who indicated they would consult commented that they would do so “to gain insight on approaches to dealing with troubled kids,” “to ask advice in dealing with situations in the classroom,” “because the guidance counsellor had more training and it is good to communicate with colleagues,” “if I thought a student might have an exceptionality...” and “to help not carrying things (issues) home and to my class.” Two participants did not respond either “yes” or “no” to the question and indicated that they did not feel they knew enough about the school counsellor’s role to respond. Two of the participants who indicated they would not consult with a school counsellor did not provide a written reason as to why they would not consult. Of the participants who did provide a written reason as to why they would not consult, 2 appeared to have interpreted the question as asking whether they would consult the counsellor for their own personal reasons (“keep business/personal life separate,” “I would seek help outside of the school”) while a third stated, “There is no situation wherein this would give me useful or increased information.”



### *Perceptions of School Counsellor Responsibilities*

The first of the two open-ended questions asked preservice teachers to identify what they considered to be the “typical” daily duties or responsibilities of a school counsellor. Out of the 90 surveys completed, 86% ( $n = 77$ ) included some written response to this question. The following *units of meaning* were identified by the researchers.

#### ACADEMIC/CAREER COUNSELLING

Of the sample, 61% ( $n = 55$ ) provided a written response that indicated that they perceived the provision of academic and career counselling to be a typical responsibility of school counsellors. Responses in this area fit into one of the following three groups: (a) providing counselling to students regarding their current academic program and progress (sample quotes from participants: “helping students with getting acquired graduating credits,” “course selections and graduation requirements”), (b) providing counselling to students regarding post-secondary studies (“guidance for grade 12 students to university,” “information on post-secondary schooling”), and (c) providing counselling to students regarding their career options or opportunities (“provide advice for students on career choices,” “career development/planning”).

#### PERSONAL COUNSELLING

In the sample, 56% ( $n = 50$ ) gave responses that were considered to reflect personal counselling activities in that they involved helping students deal with problems of a personal nature that occur either within or outside of the school setting (“to counsel, console, and help students with coping with possible traumatic events as well as adolescent issues such as self and body image and esteem,” “sit and talk with troubled students,” “should be available for students to talk through their personal problems with,” “perhaps dealing with teen pregnancy, addictions, behavioural issues,” “assist students in emotional issues,” “to help students who have emotional difficulties,” “guidance on personal issues like bullying, academic stress/anxiety, problems at home, financial struggles, etc.”).

#### ASSESSMENT

In the sample, 37% ( $n = 33$ ) responded that they perceived conducting assessments with students to be a typical responsibility of a school counsellor (e.g., “Assessment of students to put on different pathways,” “Give tests/screen for learning disabilities,” “Administer IQ tests and other tests, interpret results,” “They may also provide assessment for students with exceptionalities,” “Mostly assessment from guidance counsellors I know”). Some participants also provided responses that suggested they felt that school counsellors spend too much time doing assessments (“I understand that guidance counsellors are required to take part in assessing students in regards to exceptionalities and disabilities,” “I think currently there is too much time being spent by guidance counsellors to assess students,” “I know in most cases they do a lot of work but sometimes more assessment than actual counselling”).

#### PARTICIPATING IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF COMPONENTS OF AN INDIVIDUAL STUDENT SUPPORT PLAN (ISSP)

In this sample, 27% ( $n = 24$ ) of participants provided responses indicating that they perceived the provision of support to students who have been identified as having an exceptionality or are struggling academically as part of school counsellor responsibilities (“Help with Pathways, IEPs,” “They also have the role of working on ISSPs and IEPs,” “Supporting students on IEPs,” “Developing ISSPs,” “Deal with learning disorders or other exceptionalities”).

#### WORKING WITH TEACHERS

In the sample, 26% ( $n = 23$ ) indicated that they perceived part of school counsellors’ responsibilities as being able to work with the teachers in their school. This category consisted of a number of activities, including mediation/conflict resolution (“working through conflicts between teachers and students,” “a mediator between student and teacher”); support (“professional support for teachers,” “mainly be there for the support of teachers”); collaboration (“collaborate with teachers when problems arise,” “working with teachers regarding students behaviour or exceptionality,” “meeting with other staff members in regards to student needs”) and consultation (e.g., “to be available for consultation with teachers,” “consultation with teachers”).

#### WORKING WITH PARENTS

In the sample, 13% ( $n = 12$ ) of participants gave responses that suggest they perceived the school counsellor role as involving some form of interaction with students’ parents (“deal with parents,” “consultation with parents,” “parent meetings,” “collaboration with parents,” “discussing issues with parents,” “talking to parents,” “getting calls from parents”).

#### COORDINATION/FACILITATION/PROVISION OF PSYCHOEDUCATION

Of the participants, 13% ( $n = 12$ ) gave responses indicating that they perceived the provision of psychoeducational sessions or events, either given by the counsellor or through the coordination/use of external agencies, as a typical responsibility of a school counsellor (“organizing events (against bullying, MADD-sponsored, informative),” “in charge of Healthy Living type programs at school,” “organize personal well-being days for students (i.e., leadership day),” “promoting and organizing guest speakers, community representatives, presentations on such things as safe sex, entrepreneurship, career planning,” “promote awareness of issues like bullying and suicide”).

#### ACTING AS A LIAISON

In the sample, 11% ( $n = 10$ ) of participants indicated that they perceived school counsellors as responsible for contacting, referring to, or consulting with appropriate outside agencies as needed (“working with social workers, police,” “call proper authorities if students need outside help,” “being the link between school

and other institutions (Health, Justice, Social Services),” “act as a liaison between students and specialists (speech pathologists, etc.”).

#### ADMINISTRATION AND TEACHING

Very few participants reported administrative and teaching duties as falling under the responsibilities of school counsellors. Nevertheless, 7% ( $n = 6$ ) did report such responsibilities, so they are presented here. About administrative duties they commented, “the typical role is as a secondary assistant principal but with a “softer” approach to discipline,” “paperwork,” “there is the administrative side of being a high school counsellor. You sometimes deal with the principal more than any students”. Reporting on teaching duties, they said, “some guidance counsellors have to actually teach courses in the class setting,” “teach certain subjects,” “teaching also”.

#### *Perception of Need for Additional Time Investment in Certain Responsibilities*

A second open-ended question asked preservice teachers whether they perceived a need for school counsellors to be more involved in a specific area. For this question, 24% ( $n = 22$ ) of participants did not answer, and 30% ( $n = 30$ ) answered “No,” indicating that they did not perceive a need for school counsellors to be more involved in a specific area. Of the 38 students who responded “Yes,” 95% ( $n = 36$ ) provided written responses to this item from which the following units of meaning were derived.

#### ACADEMIC/CAREER COUNSELLING

In the sample, 13% ( $n = 12$ ) of participants stated that there is a need for school counsellors to be more involved in the provision of career and academic counselling (“more academic roles rather than just helping individual problems,” “academic advising,” “career planning,” “promoting career planning and passing along info about career decision process,” “with helping students to find out information about the universities and courses they may want to attend after high school”).

#### PERSONAL COUNSELLING

Of the participants, 11% ( $n = 10$ ) indicated a need for the provision of more personal counselling by school counsellors (“I feel they could be more productive if they were available for more one-on-one time with a student who needs counselling,” “personal issues especially abuse, neglect”).

#### STUDENT AND TEACHER EDUCATION/SUPPORT

This unit of meaning was developed to capture responses that were provided by only 8% ( $n = 7$ ) of participants, yet we felt this finding to be worthy of mention. Activities included in this area of focus were (a) outreach (“kids from less fortunate homes, those who don’t have as much parental/guardian support”); (b) psychoeducation (“educating students on certain dangerous, high risk activities [drugs, drinking and driving, etc.],” “student personal growth and awareness e.g.,

drugs/alcohol, stress, depression, abuse, eating disorders"); (c) working with special needs students ("in deciding placements of special education students," "students with LDs"); and (d) teacher education ("more involved in teacher training/internships by giving info about policies, IEPs, typical issues, etc.").

### *Visibility and Interaction*

In addition to identifying areas in which school counsellors need to be more involved, 8% ( $n = 7$ ) of participants also indicated that they felt school counsellors should be more visible within schools ("make teachers aware of what they do so teachers can make the best use of them," "be advertised so students know what they offer and that they are available to them, and exist for them") and should interact more frequently with students in general ("being involved in the general school environment so the guidance counsellor gets to know students," "guidance counselling should be a fundamental part of school life").

## DISCUSSION

### *Participant Demographics, Knowledge of School Counsellor Responsibilities, and Likelihood of Utilization of School Counsellor Services*

Similar to the findings in Langford (2006), most of the participants in this study had previous degrees but many had not taken any courses that explicitly discussed the responsibilities of a school counsellor. As the majority of participants indicated they did not complete a course specific to the responsibilities of the school counsellor, it was not surprising that only 9% of the participants in the current study indicated that they felt they possessed strong to extremely strong knowledge of the responsibilities of school counsellors. While 71% reported moderate knowledge, the remaining 19% reported very little to no knowledge of the responsibilities. Thus, a large majority of the participants in this study self-reported as having little to moderate understanding of school counsellor responsibilities.

Participants reported that knowledge about the responsibilities of the school counsellor was obtained through experiences such as working in a school or through involvement with a school counsellor either professionally or personally. It appears that such knowledge of school counsellors' responsibilities may have been acquired mostly through experiences they had in their internships or in experiences they, themselves, had as students in school. Given the need for collaboration between teachers and school counsellors, providing an opportunity for teachers to have a solid grounding in the nature of school counsellor work is important.

One option to provide this awareness of school counselling is to offer preservice teachers coursework in the area of school counselling during their teacher training or perhaps require preservice teachers to work with a school counsellor during their internship. Cooper et al. (2005) and Langford (2006) found that preservice and in-service teachers' attitudes about counselling were positively correlated with their knowledge of school counsellor responsibilities, with higher levels of knowledge suggesting more positive attitudes. It is paramount to the welfare of

students, and the school counselling profession, that teachers be educated about this important role in the school.

When asked if participants in the current study would refer a student to a school counsellor or consult with a school counsellor, the great majority of participants indicated they would refer a student and consult with the school counsellor. This is in line with several previous studies that found that teachers held relatively positive perceptions of the responsibilities of the school counsellor and related service providers (Aluede & Imonikhe, 2002; Gilman & Gabriel, 2004; Gilman & Medway, 2007; Langford, 2006). In fact, Watkins et al. (2001) reported that teachers perceive counselling as a vital and necessary service for students, especially those with emotional problems.

Cooper et al. (2005) found that teachers valued the responsibilities of the school counsellor and felt their specialist skills and impartiality (i.e., not connected to teachers/parents directly) would make students more receptive to counselling support. This, in part, speaks to the importance of collaboration between teachers and school counsellors, a finding highlighted by the participants in the current study. This collaborative practice orientation is in line with the literature and is the foundation of a successful school program (e.g., Beesley, 2004; Clark & Amatea, 2004; Langford, 2006). Preparing preservice counsellors, administrators, and teachers with the skills to collaborate and build strong working relationships with one another would help to support the success of the school counselling program and the overall welfare of the students it serves. It is interesting to note that only some participants perceived the counsellor as being involved in some form of interaction with parents.

The literature suggests that when the question is asked, consultation/collaboration with parents is seen as a priority (Clark & Amatea, 2004; Zalaquett, 2005). It is not clear why many participants in this study did not highlight parent consultation as a responsibility of counsellors. It is possible that the participants of this study subsumed parent consultation within the confines of the other responsibilities they listed (e.g., developing IEPs). It is also possible that as the student population matures, teachers may see a somewhat diminished need for parent contact. This finding suggests a need to ensure all school staff and parents understand the critical role of parent consultation for students of all ages.

As with the current study, other studies (Cooper et al., 2005; Montgomery, 2003) have noted a small percentage of participants who were not supportive of the responsibilities of school counsellors and indicated they would not refer or consult with a school counsellor. Of the participants in the current study who did provide a written reason for referral refusal, 2 appeared to have interpreted the question as asking whether they would consult the counsellor for their own personal reasons and indicated they would prefer to seek help outside of the school. The 1 participant in this study who reported that he/she would not consult with or refer to a school counsellor indicated that he/she did not think the school counsellor had any expertise to offer. This attitude may come from a poor personal experience with a school counsellor, or it may be that this individual is not familiar with the

responsibilities of a school counsellor. Langford (2006) discussed the difference between the knowledge of the elementary and the junior-high preservice teacher, noting that the elementary preservice teacher had significantly more knowledge about the responsibilities of the school counsellor than did the junior-high preservice teacher.

These findings could have implications for teacher training and how students' needs are best met. If preservice teachers are to be prepared to meet the diverse needs of the students they work with, they need knowledge about the responsibilities of the people who support them and their students in the school system. While preservice teachers' overall perceptions of the responsibilities of school counsellors tend to be positive, there needs to be a more thorough and consistent understanding of the responsibilities so that the service can be accessed appropriately. This knowledge can be obtained both in teacher training (e.g., through completion of school counselling coursework) and in the school setting (e.g., through in-servicing on the role). In the school setting, the school counsellor can provide information about the counselling program to staff at the beginning of each school year. This would help to ensure that even with turnover, all staff would have knowledge of the responsibilities of the school counsellor.

While knowledge of the responsibilities of the counsellor is critical, there must also be some degree of consensus among stakeholders as to what those functions include and the importance placed on each responsibility. Confusion about responsibility or lack of clarity regarding the role has been an ongoing issue for the profession of school counselling for many years, with administrators, teachers, parents, and even school counsellors differing in their perceptions of school counsellors' responsibilities (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). Organizations such as the American School Counselor Association (2005) and the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association continue to strive to help establish this identity.

### *Preservice Teacher Perceptions of School Counsellor Responsibilities*

The current study has highlighted preservice teachers as having various perceptions of what common school counsellor responsibilities include. The finding that participants in this study most frequently identified academic, career, and personal counselling as the typical responsibilities of a school counsellor is consistent with the results from previous research that indicate that teachers (Reiner, Colbert, & Perusse, 2009), principals-in-training (Chata & Loesch, 2007), and leaders within the counselling and school counselling professions (Perkins, Oescher, & Ballard, 2010) identify personal/social development, academic development, and career guidance as the most important responsibilities of the school counsellor.

Almost three quarters of the present sample identified academic and career counselling as a typical area in which the school counsellor has a role to play. Indeed, this was also an area highlighted by some participants in the sample as needing to be increased. These findings were not unexpected in that previous studies suggest that perceptions of the responsibilities of school counsellors differ

depending on the school level that the individual being surveyed is most familiar with (Monteiro-Leitner et al., 2006), and participants in the present study were training to be intermediate/secondary teachers.

In addition, Coogan and DeLucia-Waack (2007) report that university students in general tend to perceive school counsellors as providing career counselling more than other types of assistance. Research on teachers' perceptions of the responsibilities of the school counsellor within this teaching level suggests career counselling is an important aspect of the school counsellor's responsibility (Aluede & Imonikhe, 2002). Beesley (2004) also found that classroom teachers felt career/academic counselling services offered by counsellors could be improved. Most preservice teachers appear to see the importance of this service, especially in this global economy where access to potential career opportunities is far-reaching and career decision-making more complex.

A few participants felt that counsellors could be more involved with general outreach and psychoeducation. Comments from a few participants suggested counsellors should be more involved with students around issues such as drug education, abuse, neglect, stress, tragic events, and eating disorders. One participant indicated that school counsellors are needed in junior high because "students are going through so many changes." Although preservice teachers understand some of the needs of the junior high population, it is not clear why some of them felt these services needed to increase. It is possible that this view may be related to their experiences as students in the system or other personal or professional experiences. It is also possible that they are aware of the high incidence of drug abuse and other mental health issues in this population and the need to address these concerns as early as possible (McGee et al., 1990). A few participants suggested more involvement with "kids from less fortunate homes, those who don't have as much parental/guardian support." This presents an interesting collaborative opportunity with other related disciplines (e.g., social work) and also speaks to the need for such training. A few participants focused on the provision of services for high-risk students; this certainly supports other research (e.g., Harris & Jeffery, 2010; Langford, 2006) regarding the function of the counsellor.

A few participants indicated that counsellors are involved in student special services, and some suggested they would like to see counsellors more involved in the decisions regarding placements and programming for special needs students. Other research in this area has found varying views on the responsibilities of school counsellors with regard to special services. Aluede and Imonikhe (2002) found that teachers felt counsellors should not administer assessments or provide data to support student programming/placement. However, Monteiro-Leitner et al. (2006) reported that the counsellors they surveyed in the field estimated that 50% of their time was devoted to responsibilities related to special services. Some felt too much time was devoted to this area at the expense of time that should be devoted to counselling.

Langford (2006) reported that the preservice teachers she surveyed felt that work related to special services, including working with IEPs and testing, were

part of school counsellors' roles. Preservice teachers' perceptions of the need to increase counsellor time in this area is interesting and will certainly impact their attitude toward their school counsellor, especially if they do not perceive him/her as doing enough to help students in this capacity.

Preservice teachers may not have a full understanding of the counsellors' responsibilities in the IEP process as well. This may relate to the ongoing confusion or lack of clarity surrounding the responsibilities of the school counsellor (for a review, see Lambie & Williamson, 2004). How much importance or emphasis is placed on each of these responsibilities in the system may vary from school to school, leading to unrealistic expectations of the counsellor by both teachers and administrators and to what Ross and Herrington (2005-2006) refer to as "counsellor role-drift." Ross and Herrington state that without a solidly rooted vision of the counsellor's role in the school, the responsibilities of the counsellor will constantly change with each newly arising incident. This has implications for training programs, as counsellors can develop the values and skills required to be aware of and prevent counsellor drift. As well, professionals at the preservice training level as well as in the school system could be in-serviced or informed about the role/responsibilities of the counsellor.

A few preservice teachers noted that counsellors should be more visible and involved in the school. Clark and Amatea (2004) highlighted the theme of visibility in their research and found both teachers and preservice counsellors felt that the visibility of the counsellor was important to the overall school counselling program and that it would allow students to be more aware and willing to access the service. Ponec and Brock (2000) discuss the importance of counsellors moving about in the school and not remaining in their counselling office. It seems some preservice teachers feel that the counsellor should be more involved in everyday school activities, such as assemblies and school events, in an effort to be an integral part of the school community. This is certainly important information for counsellors and counsellor training programs. Counsellors and counsellors-in-training need to be aware of the importance of their visibility in the school, not only for students but also for the success of the entire school counselling program.

### *Limitations*

Caution must be used when generalizing the results of this exploratory study. The sample size for this study was moderate and focused strictly on a sample of intermediate-secondary preservice teachers. As well, although the data collected were informative and descriptive in nature, some of the results uncovered and discussed throughout the article are based on a very limited number of responses. The format of the survey allowed the researchers to access what information participants had about the responsibilities of the counsellor without prompts. However, the format did not allow the researchers to access other information participants might have disclosed about school counsellor responsibilities if prompted. In addition, the percentage of time devoted to each school counsellor responsibility was not assessed. Thus, it is unknown how much preservice teachers know regarding



the depth of responsibilities of school counsellors or how much time they believe school counsellors spend on the various responsibilities.

### CONCLUSIONS

Little research exists on preservice teachers' perceptions of the responsibilities of school counsellors. The current study utilized a survey method to explore preservice teachers' perceptions of the responsibilities of the school counsellor. The measure used in the study was unique, as it required preservice teachers to provide open-ended responses without any specific prompting to several questions.

Results indicated that preservice teachers generally have a positive perception of the responsibilities of the school counsellor and appear to have a moderate degree of knowledge regarding a subset of school counsellor responsibilities. Participants also commented on a number of areas that they felt counsellors could be more involved with, such as career or academic counselling. While further research is needed to study and expand our knowledge of preservice teachers' perceptions about the responsibilities of the school counsellor, the present study suggests that there is a need for preservice teachers to be more systematically informed about the role and responsibilities of the school counsellor. As well, counsellors and counsellors-in-training need to be made aware of how their programming may be improved so as to facilitate their presence or visibility in their schools.

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Appendix

*Preservice Teacher Perceptions of the Role of the Guidance Counsellor*

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1. Sex                    M       \_\_\_\_\_       F       \_\_\_\_\_

2. How knowledgeable do you consider yourself to be about the role of the guidance counsellor?

1	2	3	4	5
No Knowledge	Very Little Knowledge	Moderate Knowledge	Strong Knowledge	Extremely Strong Knowledge
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

3. Have you had experience working in a school?       Yes    \_\_\_       No    \_\_\_  
 If so, in what capacity? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Have you had an experience working with a guidance counsellor for personal or professional reasons?

Personal:	Yes    ___       No    ___	Professional:	Yes    ___       No    ___
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If yes, indicate how often?	If yes, indicate how often?
1-3 times       _____	1-3 times       _____
4-7 times       _____	4-7 times       _____
8-10 times      _____	8-10 times      _____
10-20 times     _____	10-20 times     _____
Greater than 20 times    _____	Greater than 20 times    _____
Additional Comments: _____	

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5. Imagining yourself as a working teacher, would you refer a student to a guidance counsellor if that student needed the service?      Yes \_\_\_      No \_\_\_  
 Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. Imagining yourself as a working teacher, would you consult with a guidance counsellor if there was a need?      Yes \_\_\_      No \_\_\_  
 Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. What is your previous degree (s)? \_\_\_\_\_
  
8. Have you ever taken a course(s) which discussed the role of the guidance counsellor?  
 Yes \_\_\_      No \_\_\_      If yes, which course(s)? \_\_\_\_\_
  
9. Do you plan on becoming a guidance counsellor?  
 Yes \_\_\_      No \_\_\_      If yes, how soon? \_\_\_\_\_
  
10. Have you taken any prerequisite courses necessary for entrance into the Counselling Psychology program at \_\_\_\_\_ University? (e.g., Introduction to Counselling; Introduction to Career Counselling/Education; Exceptionalities; Assessment)  
 Yes \_\_\_      No \_\_\_      If so, which course(s)? \_\_\_\_\_
  
11. What would you consider to be the “typical” daily duties/responsibilities of a guidance counsellor? Please be as detailed as possible.  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
  
12. Do you perceive a need for guidance counsellors to be more involved in any particular area(s)?  
 Yes \_\_\_      No \_\_\_      If so, what area(s)? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

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