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Comprehensive School Reentry After a Disciplinary Alternative School Placement: A Phenomenological Study of Secondary School Counselors' Perceptions and Experiences

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COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL REENTRY AFTER A DISCIPLINARY
ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL PLACEMENT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF
SECONDARY SCHOOL COUNSELORS' PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

by

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Dedication

To my husband, Kelvin. Because my hopes and dreams have always been yours. Thank you for gifting me with a love that sustains. This work is, because you are.

To my daddy, Donnie. Because I've always believed you hung the moon, I've never doubted I could reach the stars.

Abstract

The American School Counselor Association calls upon school counselors to address the needs of all students; this includes students once served in DAEPs. However, the experiences and perspectives of school counselors working with students re-entering school after a mandatory DAEP placement is not widely understood. Employing a qualitative design, this phenomenological study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of perceptions and experiences of school counselors that serve students transitioning and re-entering back into comprehensive school after a DAEP placement.

Keywords: school counselor, re-entry, transition, discipline, alternative school

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Chapter 1: Introduction

School counselors are essential stakeholders in schools (Moore et al., 2008). As leaders, advocates and change agents, school counselors work to address students' needs by "designing, implementing, evaluating and enhancing a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes and enhances student success" (ASCA, 2019, p. 1). School counselors provide educational, preventative and intervention services that promote the acquisition of attitudes, knowledge and skills that lead to student success, presently and in the future (ASCA, 2019). Moreover, school counselors aim to cultivate a school environment that bolsters student achievement through culturally responsive services (i.e., individual counseling, group counseling, classroom guidance, school-wide intervention).

In schools throughout the country, the school counselor is often regarded as the resident expert on matters related to students' mental and emotional well-being and academic achievement (Carlson & Kees, 2013; Kaffenberger & O'Rorke-Trigiani, 2013). Poverty, discrimination, homelessness, violence, bullying and issues related to mental health are only a few of the potential barriers students encounter in their pursuit of academic and personal success (Lambie, 2011). As these barriers become more apparent, effective school counselors help schools shift from viewing the student as the problem to addressing institutional and systemic issues that impede student success (Erford, 2016). The American School Counselor Association (2019) requires school counselors to promote equity and access for all students; this includes those students re-entering

comprehensive school after placement in disciplinary alternative education programs (DAEPs).

As noted by Lehr et al. (2004), a DAEP is a "short-term intervention program designed to develop academic and behavioral skills for students who have been removed from the regular school" (p. 9). In many school districts, DAEPs are often a temporary, intermediate placement between the comprehensive school and expulsion. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, over half of the United States' school districts report having at least one disciplinary alternative education program (DAEP) for vulnerable students (Carver et al., 2010; Tajalli & Garba, 2014).

The factors that contribute to a student's DAEP placement are various and complex. In the era of zero tolerance, schools have become progressively intolerant of student misconduct (Carver et al., 2010; Skiba, 2000; Vanderhaar et al., 2014). Originally designed to address consequences for major offenses, zero tolerance policies have recently been stretched to incorporate comparatively minor, but more subjective, infractions (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). Bias and discrimination also frequently play a role in students' referral into a DAEP (Skiba, 2000). Beyond systemic factors, individual, academic and family dynamics are also common contributors to a student's placement into a DAEP (Mullen & Lambie, 2013).

Students enrolled in DAEPs can, and often do, struggle with issues related to their mental health: substance use, depression and suicidal ideation (Lehr et al., 2004; Mullen & Lambie, 2013). Moreover, although certainly not true for all, these students face many academic challenges (Miles & Stipek, 2006). For students involved in DAEPs, there is typically a cumulative history of poor grades, reduced achievement on standardized tests

and an overall loss of self-confidence as they contend with prolonged challenges in the classroom (Lange & Sletton, 2002; Tsang, 2004). Additionally, like most students, the dynamics involved in a student's family system may act as an impediment to their success; students served in DAEPs are more likely to be from homes with only one parent present (Lehr et al., 2004). Considering all of these factors, students involved in DAEPs tend to be among the most vulnerable.

If one were to search existing literature for a demographic composite of the student most likely to be mandated to enroll in a DAEP, a clear profile would easily emerge (Vanderhaar et al., 2014). Above all else, students' race, gender, grade level, socioeconomic status and academic ability level are the greatest indicators of their likelihood to be mandated to attend a DAEP (Gregory et al., 2010). Overwhelmingly, students mandated to attend DAEPs tend to be disproportionally African American males in secondary school who are eligible for free/reduced lunch and served through special education programs (Hoffman, 2014; Gregory et al., 2010; Skiba et al., 2002). Although DAEPs can offer a lifeline to students temporarily displaced from comprehensive schools, those charged with attending to the welfare of students must work to develop interventions, policies and practices that promote structure and cultivate a positive and safe school climate without being overly punitive, exclusionary or discriminatory towards minority students. School counselors and other related service providers must also contend with how to best serve these students as they transition and reintegrate back into the comprehensive school setting after a DAEP placement.

Over the years, the transition from DAEPs and re-entry into the comprehensive school has garnered far less attention than the reasons for initial placement and the

demographic profile of the students involved in this process. Despite comprehensive school re-entry being centered as the goal for most students, recidivism, dropout and other post-placement barriers continue to threaten students' long-term success (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Unruh, et al., 2009). Even when students have been successful in alternative education programs, for a variety of reasons, that success has often not been transferrable (Shannon & Hess, 2019). DAEPs are, at best, temporary placements for vulnerable students (Risler & O'Rourke, 2009). Although DAEPs are charged with helping students remediate counterproductive behavior and develop prosocial skills, comprehensive schools must remain invested in these students' reintegration and long-term success (Cole & Cohen, 2013). With more school districts reliant on DAEP placements for vulnerable students, successful transition and reintegration must become a priority. Moreover, because students enrolled in DAEPs are typically among the most at-risk, school counselors may be uniquely positioned to support these students as they work to reintegrate into the comprehensive school.

Statement of the Problem

Presently there is a dearth of literature regarding students' comprehensive school re-entry experience post DAEP placement, particularly as it relates to the role of the school counselor. In instances where the role of the school counselor in school reentry has been addressed, it has often been approached from the perspective of school reintegration after a student's bout with a prolonged illness or incarceration (Cole & Cohen, 2013; Kaffenberger, 2006). To date, no studies have sought to understand the perceptions and experiences of school counselors as front-line service providers for students reintegrating into the comprehensive school after a mandatory DAEP placement.

Much of the available literature on DAEPs is centered on student demographics and circumstances related to the initial DAEP placement (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Hoffman, 2014; Vanderhaar et al., 2014); systemic supports and hindrances to post-placement success have been largely overlooked. To date, only a few studies have examined students' post-placement experiences (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016), even less have utilized qualitative methods (Kennedy et al., 2019; Shannon & Hess, 2019; Cole & Cohen, 2013) and none have focused on the role, perceptions and experiences of school counselors that serve students involved in this unique transition. Without empirically-based data, many school counselors are left to blindly navigate their way through supporting students and families involved in this process (Mullen & Lambie, 2013).

Significance of the Study

According to the ASCA National Model (2019), three sets of standards define the school counseling profession. The ASCA Mindset and Behaviors for Student Success (2014) outlined the tenets for student achievement, the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors (2016) specified the obligation to maintain high standards as it relates to professionalism, integrity, and leadership and the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies (2019) established the guidelines for school counselor effectiveness. These standards highlighted the need for school counselors to use data-informed decision-making and interventions to address achievement and opportunity gaps so that they may facilitate equitable outcomes for all students.

School counselors are charged to advocate for vulnerable students and address obstacles that hinder students' growth (ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors, 2016). However, school counselors searching for resources that specifically address

individual and systemic issues related to school re-entry for this population may be astonished by the scarcity of literature. Within counseling literature, there is a noted gap related to current perceptions, practices and experiences specific to school counselors engaged in this work. Current research pertaining to DAEPs focuses heavily on reasons for referrals and what takes place during the DAEP tenure, not post-DAEP placement experiences.

     For counselor education programs accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), it is mandatory that school counselors-in-training be prepared to facilitate school transitions and that they have the skills to strategically examine the links between social, familial, emotional and behavioral problems and school performance (CACREP, 2016). Additionally, CACREP (2016) standards require counselor education programs to inform counselors in-training on matters related to social and cultural diversity (CACREP, Standard 2.2) and counseling and helping relationships (CACREP, Standard 2.6). These standards require that counselors demonstrate an awareness regarding how their views, attitudes and experiences impact their work and that they are prepared to identify and confront overt and covert impediments and prejudices that discriminate against and oppress students. Despite these mandates, Mullen and Lambie (2013) noted that very few school counselors are prepared to engage and support students re-entering school post DAEP placement.

Furthermore, as noted by Carver et al., 2010, 95% of school districts have policies in place that students may return to the comprehensive school after successfully completing a mandatory DAEP placement; however, only 68% of school districts identify

comprehensive school re-entry as the primary reason for a student leaving a DAEP. In a longitudinal study of students placed in DAEPs or similar continuing education programs, fewer than half of students returned to comprehensive schools and stayed enrolled for more than one school year (Gurantz, 2010). Returning to a DAEP, transferring into a detention facility and dropping out of school altogether accounted for a significant portion of post-placement possibilities for students served in DAEPs (Carver et al., 2010). The impact of dropping out of school can be severe, long lasting and may have implications not only for the individual student but for the larger community in which they are members.

Students that drop out of school are more likely than high school graduates to feel depressed, isolated and to abuse drugs and alcohol (Maynard et al., 2015). According to Maynard et al. (2015), students that prematurely leave school are also more likely to be involved in gang activity, commit acts of violence and become incarcerated as adults. Over time, these students are more likely to be under/unemployed or earn salaries that are lower than those who graduated from high school (Koc et al., 2020). These implications shed light on the importance of systemic investment. Students eventually become adults. Adults, at their best, become productive, contributing members of society. Therefore, ensuring students' successful transition into the comprehensive school environment after a DAEP placement, and that they go on to graduate, could have a larger, longer-lasting positive impact.

The diverse and complex needs of this population dictate the need for deeper understanding of the perspectives and experiences of school counselors and should galvanize a call to action for more empirically-based research. Although school

counselors should not be directly involved in the execution of disciplinary policies or procedures, they may be able to substantially contribute to the development of policies and protocols that support students' successful transition (ASCA, 2013). If school counselors hope to do impactful work with this population, research that seeks to better understand this phenomenon from their perspective is needed. School counselors may benefit from considering the perspectives and experiences of their colleagues as they seek to better understand and, ultimately, address the complex needs and challenges these students face in a meaningful way. This study seeks to fill a gap in current counseling literature by focusing explicitly on the perceptions and experiences of school counselors that work with students as they transition and reintegrate out of DAEPs and back into their home schools. The findings of this study may potentially benefit both school counselors currently in practice and counselor educators serving school counselors-in-training.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a movement and theoretical framework provides a platform to consider and challenge the ways in which race and power permeate every aspect of American culture. CRT is grounded in critical theory yet responsive to the realities of racial politics (Delgado & Stefanic, 1998). Rooted in the legal system, CRT emerged from the work of critical legal scholars that worked together to develop a comprehensive theory to combat subtle and pervasive forms of racism in the United States. Although undoubtedly the result of the collective efforts of many, it is the works and writings of Crenshaw et al. (1995) that sparked the CRT movement.

As noted by Crenshaw et al. (1995), critical legal scholars and critical race scholars alike critique the inequitable effects of capitalism on experiences of class and race and civil rights law (e.g., anti-discrimination law, equal employment opportunity, equal education opportunity, etc.) and the role of the judiciary in failing to advance progressive reforms. Dissatisfied with the progress of racial reform in the United States in particular, critical legal scholars theorized about the effects of liberal approaches (an individual rights-based approach) to civil rights law and the absence of white compliance post Brown versus The Topeka Board of Education (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). These scholars asserted that those who were critical of the lack of progressive reforms must address the role of race and racism in their analysis alongside their critiques of capitalism and the judiciary.

Since its inception, CRT has transcended disciplinary boundaries; CRT has not been confined to the courtrooms or the legal system. Educational researchers have noted its applicability to better understanding the experiences of students of color, uncovering racial microaggressions and developing best practices (Parker & Stovall, 2004; Solórzano et al., 2000). In the mid-1990s, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) introduced CRT to the field of educational research and practice. CRT has since been used as a theoretical framework to assess inequity in education (Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). There are many conceptual foundations to CRT; some include: (1) the endemic nature of racism; (2) the centrality of narrative in communicating knowledge and experience, often represented in the form of counter-storytelling; (3) Whiteness as property; (4) interest convergence; (5) a critique of liberalism; (6) the myth of colorblindness and (7) the myth of meritocracy (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-

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Billings, 1998). When used as a theoretical framework, CRT helps researchers investigate how both individual and institutional interactions reproduce and reinforce racial hierarchies and power structures (Solórzano, 1997).

Using CRT as a theoretical framework for this study, I focused primarily on one of the aforementioned conceptual foundations embedded in CRT: the myth of colorblindness. CRT scholars presume that racial oppression is endemic to American culture/society. From the CRT scholar's perspective, commitments to white supremacy, capitalism and enslaved labor formed the very institutions and democracy that make the United States the United States. Subsequently, CRT scholars argue that white supremacy is present in all institutions (i.e., courts, housing, businesses, schools, etc.) and is perpetuated, both consciously and unconsciously, by the individuals within those institutions (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

The false assertion that one does 'not see color' provides basis for Bonilla-Silva's (2009) theory of colorblind racism. Lewis (2001) argues that "[c]olor-blindness enables all members of the community to avoid confronting the racial realities that surround them, to avoid facing their own racist presumptions and understandings, and to avoid dealing with racist events by deracializing them. Moreover, the myth of colorblindness does all this as it "enables people to feel as if they are on righteous racial terrain…" (p. 801). Bonilla-Silva (2015), further asserts that by using a color-blind lens, even well-intentioned individuals may unintentionally dismiss or downplay the impact that racial differences have on outcomes. Colorblindness, or the notion that all students are treated equally regardless of their race, as exhibited by educators can have impacts similar to that

of implicit bias. Individuals operating from a color-blind perspective may inadvertently support and perpetuate policies and practices that result in inequitable outcomes.

As a theoretical framework, CRT affords me the opportunity to "identify, analyze and transform the structural, cultural and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the subordination of [students] of color" (Solórzano, 1998, p.123). Because the majority of professional counselors are White (Granello & Young, 2012) and the majority of students mandated to attend DAEPs are primarily Black and Brown (Gregory et al., 2010), it is impossible to ignore the potential role that race may play in the function, perspectives and experiences of school counselors (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). As such, CRT provides a theoretical lens to more deeply explore how the individual perspectives of school counselors may impact their work and, ultimately, student outcomes.

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Operational Definition of Terms

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School Counselor

A school counselor is a certified/licensed educator that works full-time in a public comprehensive school and is responsible for improving outcomes for all students via the development and delivery of a comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA National Model, 2019).

Comprehensive School

A comprehensive school or home school is a publicly funded school that refers a student to a DAEP and re-admits the student after the satisfactory completion of a mandatory DAEP placement. A comprehensive school is not a private, parochial, virtual,

charter, juvenile detention center school or any other alternative educational program (U.S. Department of Education, 1997).

Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP)

A DAEP is "a short-term intervention program designed to develop academic and behavioral skills for students who have been removed from the regular school" (Lehr et al., 2004, p. 9).

Reentry or Reintegration

Reentry or reintegration refers to the transitional process of exiting a DAEP, and undergoing the educational and psychosocial adjustment of re-enrolling and re-acclimating into the comprehensive school environment after prolonged absence (Altschuler & Armstrong, 2002; Goldkind, 2011).

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Research Question

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While enrolled in DAEPs, with the support of educators and related service providers, students seek to remediate maladaptive behavior and improve academic skills (Lehr et al., 2004). However, when students return to the comprehensive school environment, they often struggle with poor teacher and peer relationships, academic challenges and recidivism (Kennedy et al., 2019). The American School Counselor Association (2019) calls school counselors to address achievement and opportunity gaps so that they may facilitate equitable outcomes for all students; this includes those students re-entering comprehensive school after placement in a DAEP.

To date, little is known about the perspectives and experiences of school counselors that work with this population. The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the school counselor experience as it relates to their work with

students transitioning and re-entering back into comprehensive school after a DAEP placement. The study was guided by the following research question:

(1)   What are the perceptions and lived experiences of school counselors working with students re-entering the comprehensive school after a mandatory DAEP placement?

Research Design

The aforementioned question was best answered via qualitative inquiry. In general, qualitative research is "an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that helps us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (Merriam, 1998, p. 5). This is in contrast to quantitative research, which typically uses manipulation of variables and statistical analysis to predict and interpret data (Heppner et al., 2015).

A phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2008) was used to gain an understanding of the perceptions and lived experiences of school counselors charged with serving students returning to the comprehensive school after a mandatory DAEP placement. McLeod (2001) asserts that the purpose of phenomenology is "to produce an exhaustive description of the phenomena of everyday experience, thus arriving at an understanding of the essential structures of the 'thing itself', the phenomenon" (p. 38). Phenomenology focuses on understanding the phenomenon through the perspective of those who have direct experience with it (Hays & Wood, 2011). Moreover, phenomenological studies aim to more clearly understand the lived experiences of those involved in the phenomena of interest (Wertz, 2005).

<center>**Research Method**</center>

Population and Sampling Procedures

Due to the nature of phenomenological inquiry, criterion-based purposive sampling was used to select appropriate participants (Creswell, 1998). For this study, participants were school counselors. Inclusion criteria for this sample included in-service school counselors that: (a) currently certified/licensed in their respective state as a school counselor, (b) working full-time as a school counselor, (c) serving students in a comprehensive school (i.e., not private, virtual, parochial or otherwise alternative), (d) serving students at the secondary level (e) working in a United States school district where DAEP enrollment is involuntary (f) had direct experience working with one or more students transitioning/re-entering the comprehensive school environment after a mandatory DAEP placement and (g) had engaged in at least two of the following activities when serving students transitioning/re-entering the comprehensive school environment after a mandatory DAEP placement: academic advisement/planning, advocating for student(s) at hearings/review meetings, consulting with teachers on students(s) behalf, consulting with DAEP personnel on student(s) behalf, counseling with parents on student(s) behalf, individual counseling, small group counseling.

The phenomenological approach does not mandate an absolute number of participants (Heppner et al., 2015). According to Wertz (2005), the "…number of participants cannot be mechanically determined beforehand or by formula…Rather, deliberation and critical reflection considering the research problem, the life-world position of the participant(s), the quality of the data, and the value of emergent findings with regard to research goals are required in a continuing assessment of adequacy" (p.

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171). Thus, while this study aimed to identify 5-10 eligible participants (Polkinghorne, 1989; Stark & Trinidad, 2007), interviews were discontinued when data saturation (i.e., no new information discovered during analysis, redundancy) had been achieved.

Data Collection Procedures

Upon approval from the university Internal Review Board (IRB), eligible participants were screened, provided with a copy of the letter of invitation, asked to complete a demographic questionnaire (i.e., gender, race, age, years in-service, graduate of CACREP accredited program, etc.) and prompted to schedule their first interview. For this study, two semi-structured interviews were conducted; one via Zoom video conferencing software, the other via asynchronous, electronic format. The semi-structured interviews consisted of open-ended questions; however, participants were permitted to freely elaborate on their experiences. Additional probing questions were incorporated as appropriate. All interviews were recorded. At the conclusion of each interview, interview data was professionally transcribed verbatim. The audio recordings were transcribed using Rev. Rev is a web-based program used to transcribe audio data. The use of web-based software has been documented in literature (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011; Zamawe, 2015). All audio recordings were destroyed at the completion of the research process.

Data Analysis

As outlined by Moustakas (1994), I used the following guidelines to frame the analytic process for this study: (1) record my own experiences with the phenomenon prior, during, and after data collection (i.e., bracketing, epoche); (2) highlight significant statements that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the

phenomenon (i.e., horizontalization); (3) develop clusters and thematic labels related to significant statements and themes (i.e., cluster of meanings or invariant constituents); (4) validate clusters and thematic labels using verbatim data; (5) use significant statements and themes to explore and refine the meaning and depth of the experience for each participant (i.e., individual textural description); (6) utilize significant statements and themes to describe the context that influenced how participants experienced the phenomenon and to illuminate potential tensions and alternative meanings within individual textural descriptions (i.e., imaginative variation, structural descriptions); and (7) using thick descriptions, develop a composite description that presents the essence of the phenomenon for participants as a collective (i.e., composite textural-structural description).

Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), establishing credibility (i.e., believability), confirmability (i.e., neutrality of researcher) and transferability (i.e., external validity) is essential to achieving trustworthiness in qualitative research. There are many strategies that can be employed in qualitative research to establish trustworthiness, but not every approach is appropriate for every qualitative paradigm (Cope, 2014). In an effort to establish trustworthiness for this phenomenological study, bracketing, member checking, the use of a research team, peer debriefing, reflective journaling and thick descriptions were utilized (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Prior to the collection of data, I used "epoche to bracket and question all assumptions" regarding the phenomenon (Heppner et al., 2008, p. 270). Bracketing was used to maintain awareness of my personal assumptions, attitudes, beliefs and

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experiences that could impose on the experiences presented by the participants (Merriam, 2002). To reduce the impact of researcher bias on the analytic process, the brackets of my initial assumptions and judgements were continuously consulted throughout the research process. Member checking allowed participants to challenge my biases, correct misinterpretations and helps to ensure an accurate representation of participants experiences (Kornbluh, 2015). Like member checking, the establishment of a research team helped to increase credibility (Hays & Singh, 2012). In addition to reviewing transcripts and offering feedback, the research team members served as consultants for peer debriefing. Peer debriefings were used to help uncover hidden biases and assumptions that may impact the research process but that may not be easily discovered via other means (Hays & Singh, 2012). Peer debriefings were particularly useful throughout the analytic phase of this study (Shenton, 2004).

Reflective journaling acted as an audit trail, and ultimately helped to establish confirmability. In an electronic journal, I recorded memos related to significant decisions made throughout the research process. Lastly, upon a satisfactory member check by participants, a detailed description of the school counselors' perceptions and experiences were presented. Phenomenological methods require that collected data be synthesized and richly described (Moustakas, 1994). As Lincoln and Guba (1985) posits, by describing school counselors experience of the phenomenon in *vivid detail* (Whittemore et al., 2001), consumers of this research may have the opportunity to evaluate the extent to which the presented offerings are relatable to others.

Positionality

As noted by Hay (2005), "A researcher's social, locational, and ideological placement relative to the research project or to participants will undoubtedly impact their work" (p. 290). Glesne (2016) contends that embodied factors (i.e., race, gender, class, early experiences, etc.) inevitably impact researchers' positionality. As a woman, a woman of color, a woman of color that has lived in both lower and upper socio-economic classes, a woman of color that was a student that wore the label of "other" and "at risk", my interest in this subject is undoubtedly personal. As an emerging researcher and scholar, a former school counselor and a member of multiple minority communities, I am professionally, personally and politically committed to expanding the understanding of and service to under/never served populations through both scholarship and service.

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Ethical Considerations

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There were several ethical aspects that were considered as it relates to this study. Despite steps that were taken to protect participant's privacy, a slight risk of breach of confidentiality remained. To protect participant's confidentiality pseudonyms were used in place of participants and school names. Additionally, participants were invited to participate in interviews after school hours to further protect their confidentiality. All study records/data were stored on a password protected computer. Furthermore, all participants were given an explanation of the study and a consent document, informing them of their rights and the voluntary nature of their participation. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw consent at any time.

Potential Limitations of the Study

Like all research, limitations are inherent to qualitative studies. For this study, researcher bias was one of the most significant limitations. Because, as a school counselor, I have worked with students involved in this transitional process, my experience could have potentially biased my interpretations and understandings, and ultimately, the findings of the study. Although bracketing, the use of a research team, peer debriefing, reflective journaling, member checking and thick descriptions were implemented in the study as safeguards to trustworthiness, how and to what extent my assumptions and judgments were introduced and impacted the study's results must be considered (Creswell, 2006). Although limitations must be acknowledged, this study was still worth undertaking.

Chapter Summary

This chapter delineates the role of the school counselor, factors that contribute to DAEP placement, a demographic composite of students most impact by mandatory DAEP referrals and the impact that unsuccessful comprehensive school re-entry can have on students' long-term success. The paucity of current literature on the role, experience and perspectives of school counselors working with students re-entering the comprehensive school after a mandatory DAEP placement highlights the need for more in-depth understanding. Additionally, this chapter describes the research design, data collection procedures, research question and potential limitations for this study. A more detailed discussion of the literature and methods are undertaken in Chapters Two and Three.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Through the examination of literature, Chapter Two aims to substantiate the rationale for this investigation. It must be noted, that the school-based literature related to the experiences of school counselors working with students as they re-enter comprehensive schools after a DAEP placement is exceptionally limited. With such limited empirically-based information in the school-based literature, a broader context is explored. In addition to school-based literature, this review includes literature focused on once incarcerated youth and school re-entry after a significant medical event.

To account for the scarcity of literature, the available research is covered in depth. The literature review is organized into three sections: characteristics of students traditionally served in DAEPs, barriers to successful school re-entry post DAEP placement and juvenile incarceration or a prolonged illness. As available, this literature review contains both qualitative and quantitative investigations and conceptual works centered on students' demographics, the impact of policy on initial and reoccurring DAEP placements, school re-entry issues after prolonged absence and common post-placement outcomes.

Contributors to DAEP Placement: Demographics, Policy and Other Factors

Kennedy-Lewis et al. (2016) conducted a mixed method study investigating educators' perceptions on the purpose of a DAEP, justification for recommending students attend a DAEP and the extent to which student outcomes post DAEP placement reflect educators' intentions. For the qualitative strand of the study, Kennedy-Lewis et al.

(2016) interviewed 29 educators (i.e., counselors, administrators and teachers) at the comprehensive school and the DAEP. For the quantitative strand of the study, the authors analyzed five years of data on all sixth thru twelfth grade students that had been enrolled in the DAEP between the years 2008 and 2014; particular interest was focused on student outcomes post DAEP placement. To obtain descriptive information regarding student outcomes post DAEP placement, Kennedy-Lewis et al. (2016) quantitatively analyzed five variables, three academic and two behavioral (i.e., unweighted GPA, scaled state test reading and math score, out of school suspensions per year, disciplinary referrals per year).

Findings from the quantitative portion of this study indicated that scores on state standardized math test decreased while students unweighted GPAs increased post DAEP placement. For behavioral variables, placement into a DAEP did not impact disciplinary referrals per year pre or post DAEP enrollment. However, there was a reduction in out of school suspensions per year after DAEP placement. Furthermore, the findings from the qualitative strand of this study highlighted the incongruence between the perceptions of DAEP educators and educators in comprehensive schools and contradictions regarding the role and capacity of DAEPs. Kennedy-Lewis et al. (2016) noted that comprehensive school educators believed DAEPs should serve both a punitive and rehabilitative function; these educators stated that DAEPs are the best option when students' needs exceed the capacity of the comprehensive school. Ultimately, comprehensive school educators believed DAEP placement benefitted the comprehensive school and the student. The comprehensive school was relieved of the student, and in turn, the student would be receiving needed support and intervention. In contrast, while DAEP educators

viewed themselves as providers of emotional support for students, they remarked that the DAEP lacked the structure and resources to address the individual and systemic causes of students' challenging behavior, and they struggled to achieve the success expected by comprehensive school educators.

These findings expose the tensions between DAEP and comprehensive school educators' intentions, expectations and the purpose, capacity and impact DAEP placement has on student outcomes. Kennedy-Lewis et al. (2016) help to build the foundation of the impact educators have on the referral and outcomes of students DAEP placement. However, although administrators, teachers and counselors serve very different functions, the authors combined their perceptions regarding this phenomenon. Therefore, this study exclusively considered and examined school counselors' perspectives.

Hoffman (2014) employed a quasi-experimental design to study the impact expanded zero tolerance policies have on disciplinary outcomes for students from different racial groups. More specifically, Hoffman (2014) sought to examine the racial differences in the number of secondary students recommended for expulsion and the proportion of days that they were suspended for any reason in one mid-sized urban school district. At the time of the study, the local school board had abruptly adopted a new policy that expanded their zero tolerance guidelines. The school board members stated that the purpose for the expansion was to reduce subjectivity in the application of policy. The researcher hypothesized that, in comparison to White students, the expansion of zero tolerance policies would significantly increase the number of African American students recommended for expulsion and the number of days they were suspended.

Hoffman (2014) collected six years of data related to school expulsion and suspension; three years before the policy change and three years post change. Employing a difference-in-difference strategy, in addition to analyzing the aforementioned data set, the researcher compared the data to similar neighboring districts that did not alter their policies related to discipline. The sample included 37 secondary schools; 15 schools from the district with the expanded zero tolerance policy and 22 comparison schools with unaltered policies. The results of the study indicated that the expanded zero tolerance policies did have an effect on expulsion recommendations and the number of days a student was suspended, especially for African American students. After the implementation of the new stricter policy, expulsion recommendations increased for all students, and suspensions increased for African American students in particular.

While this study does not specifically address school re-entry, it does emphasize the impact of disciplinary policy on students' lives. Since many school districts utilize DAEPs as intermediary placements between the comprehensive school and expulsion, zero tolerance policies not only stand to influence the possibility of a student being mandated to attend a DAEP, but these policies also impact a student's ability to remain in the comprehensive school environment post a DAEP placement. The descriptive data reported in this study provides general information on the role of policy on disciplinary outcomes and underscores the need to more deeply understand how policies and practices specifically impact school counselors' work with individual students.

Vanderhaar et al. (2014) conducted a longitudinal study examining the impact student demographics (i.e., race, gender, lunch status), instances of out of school suspension, school mobility, school attendance grade retention, disability status and

reading scores on state standardized test has on students being mandated to attend a DAEP and their subsequent involvement in the juvenile justice system. Vanderharr et al. (2014) extracted ten years of student level data for 7,668 students, an entire cohort of third grade students, enrolled during the 1997 to 1998 school year in one large, ethnically diverse urban school district in the United States. The data that was extracted included all variables and movements for each student between their third and twelfth grade year (1997-1998 to 2007-2008).

The results of this study indicate that one out of ten students in the comprehensive school setting will be mandated to attend a DAEP placement. Utilizing a statistical model technique, regardless of the grade level, the results of this study illustrated that students that are African American, receive free/reduced lunch, were labeled as emotionally or behaviorally disabled, have frequent out of school suspension and score below average in reading on state standardized test are over-represented in DAEPs (Vanderharr et al., 2014). Additionally, students that attended two or more different schools within the same school year, had higher instances of absenteeism and that were retained in any grade were significantly more likely to be mandated to attend a DAEP. Although the middle school years mark the peak for DAEP placement, early placement in DAEPs increased the likelihood of juvenile detention (i.e., students mandated to attend DAEPs in the 5th grade were 56% more likely to be incarcerated after a DAEP placement). Furthermore, African American males were disproportionately represented in the population of students subsequently detained as juveniles. More than that, the authors highlighted the high instances of re-entry into a DAEP after the initial placement.

The findings of this study confirm the need to more deeply understand transition and re-entry (Vanderharr et al., 2014). In their call for future research Vanderharr et al. (2014) stated, "Due to consistent findings of repeat entrances into disciplinary alternative schools, exploration of the contributing factors to recidivism can help identify policies and factors in these schools and at the regular schools they return to that may facilitate recidivism" (p. 23). While the descriptive results produced in this study provided valuable information regarding a variety of student variables and potential outcomes, it does not provide the context needed to fully understand students' experiences post DAEP placements. The findings of this study confirm the need for qualitative inquiry.

Similarly, Booker and Mitchell (2011) examined the relationship between student demographics and the reasons for DAEP placement (i.e., mandatory versus discretionary) and recidivism in three DAEPs located in both urban and suburban school districts in the Southwest region of the United States. More specifically, the researchers investigated the relationship between student's ethnicity, gender, grade level, special education status and students being mandated to attend a DAEP for violations that clearly mandated a DAEP referral versus those offenses that were more discretionary or subjective in nature. Booker and Mitchell (2011) also explored the relationship between students' demographics and recidivism. Through the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS), the researchers collected demographic and DAEP placement data for 269 secondary students. Using descriptive statistics, a general profile for the sample was developed.

According to Booker and Mitchell (2011), 80% of students in the study were mandated to attend DAEPs for discretionary reasons. Additionally, 50% of students in the

study were labeled as recidivists (i.e., they were mandated to attend a DAEP more than once during the same school year). More specifically, in their findings Booker and Mitchell (2011) noted significant variations in the reasons for placement and recidivism among students from different ethnicities, genders and grade levels. The researchers discovered that when compared to White students, African American and Hispanic students were much more likely to be referred to a DAEP for discretionary reasons. In comparison to girls, boys were twice as likely to return to a DAEP after their initial placement. Furthermore, instances of recidivism are elevated for high school students versus middle school students. The results reinforced the notion that disparities among different demographics of students, as it relates to initial and outcomes post DAEP placements, do indeed exist. While this study highlighted aggregated trends related to reasons for placement and recidivism, a deeper, more contextualized, understanding of this data is warranted.

The aforementioned literature provided valuable foundational and descriptive information for this study. These available studies supported the rationale to focus on school counselors' work with former DAEP-affiliated students. The literature also confirmed that recidivism and incarceration continue to be issues post DAEP placement and underscored the need to better understand the role of the school counselor.

School Re-Entry After DAEP Placement

Kennedy et al. (2019) sought to understand students' experiences as they transitioned back to the comprehensive school after a DAEP placement and to contextualize educators' decisions to assign students to these placements. Kennedy et al. (2019) noted that zero tolerance policies and the discourse of safety have led to a

disproportionate number of students of color being mandated to attend DAEPs. The researchers suggested that many of these students have difficulties reintegrating into comprehensive schools, noting that issues related to institutional racism, subjective and inconsistent perspectives on what constitutes poor behavior, dehumanization and adultification are major contributors. They asserted the need to understand the qualitative nature of students' experiences in an effort to contextualize educators' decisions to assign students to DAEP placements.

Combining counter-narrative storytelling and a qualitative case study design, and using CRT as a theoretical framework, the researchers utilized interviews, classroom observations and document analysis as methods of data collection. Nine secondary students participated in the study; 8 African American, 1 White, 5 males and 4 females. Students were interviewed before they left the DAEP, when they first returned to a comprehensive school and after completing a transition semester. Administrators and teachers were interviewed at the DAEP and at each comprehensive school regarding each student's transition. Classroom observations were conducted in at least two of the students' academic classes when possible and consisted of one 50-minute observation per class during which field notes were recorded. Student work, cumulative records, current grades, program information and email correspondences were among the documents that were analyzed.

In their findings, the researchers noted that students both perceived and faced bias and discrimination regarding their DAEP placement; this included educators' subjectivity in assigning discipline referrals, identifying objective offenses and determining when students could return to comprehensive schools. Moreover, the researchers stated that all

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students faced school-related barriers to post-placement success; this included disadvantageous school and course placement decisions and inadequate pedagogy. The researchers highlighted that after their DAEP placement many students were placed in schools and classes with teachers that were not conducive to their academic/social success. Lastly, students involved in this process reported having to navigate two extremes, being invisible and hyper-visible simultaneously; the authors presented two themes to capture this experience "surveillance and discrimination" and "pressure to 'fly below the radar'" (p.142-143). The researchers also noted that students being assigned to Black teachers/administrators did not, in and of itself, make a positive difference on students' experience; they write "We also noted that Black administrators had pervasive deficit perspectives, engaged the myth of meritocracy, and disregarded the role of institutional racism in these students' situations" (p. 143). By incorporating the voice of the student, Kennedy, et al. (2019) bring an important, and often missing, perspective to the conversation as it relates to school re-entry post DAEP placement. However, their inquiry did not fully address my research question. While the researchers do highlight some post-placement barriers, they did not address the role of the counselor in the transition or reintegration process.

School Re-Entry After Juvenile Incarceration

The paucity of school-based literature centered on the role of the school counselor as it relates to school re-entry post DAEP placement, necessitated an expanded search. Published literature related to juvenile criminal justice system involvement or prolonged school absence due to a chronic illness offered some perspective as it relates to school re-entry. Although subsequent involvement in the justice system for students once enrolled

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in DAEPs has been documented, any noted similarities between the school re-entry experiences of incarcerated youth and those of students mandated to attend DAEPs is, at best, tentative. Furthermore, a student's prolonged absence from comprehensive school due to a chronic illness and a student being absent from comprehensive school due to a mandatory DAEP placement are not parallel experiences. However, with limited research available specifically related to comprehensive school re-entry and the role of the school counselor, this broadened literary context offered useful insights.

Cole and Cohen (2013) conducted a qualitative case study to better understand juvenile justice personnel perspectives on school re-entry. By engaging juvenile justice personnel, the researchers sought to introduce a different voice and interpretation on the barriers and challenges faced by incarcerated adolescents as they re-enter the public-school system. Specifically, Cole and Cohen (2013) wanted to investigate the inner workings of the school-to-prison pipeline from the perspective of juvenile justice personnel. The site for this study, a juvenile detention center in the US, does share some similarities with DAEPs. The juvenile detention center was experiencing a rise in student placements, served adolescents age 10 to 21 for a temporary period of time (the average stay was five to seven months) and African American males were over-represented. The 31 participants in this study were employees of the juvenile detention center and assumed both administrative and other professional roles (i.e., chief and deputy chief administrators, site managers, directors of programs and services, probation officers, social workers and detention center teachers). The researchers utilized both individual and group semi-structured interviews as their primary method for data collection. In their findings, Cole and Cohen (2013) identified three main themes as it relates to barriers to

school reentry for students in juvenile detention centers from the perspective of juvenile justice personnel: school leadership concerns, regressive labeling and stigmatization and access to information. Even with the local school district providing the staff for the educational program and enrollment at the detention center, the willingness to work with students transitioning back into the public-school setting varied based on principals' attitudes, school culture and the administration's understanding of the juvenile detention center's programming. Cole and Cohen (2013) noted that many school districts become disengaged once a student becomes involved in the juvenile justice system. However, many of the juvenile justice personnel stated that students transitioning into districts with a strong, collaborative relationship with the juvenile detention center had the best chance at successful re-entry. Additionally, Cole and Cohen (2013) reported that one of the greatest barriers to students' successful re-entry was the stigma and discrimination faced for their involvement in the juvenile justice system. Even in instances where students made significant academic or behavioral improvement in the juvenile detention center, this progress was often not transferable. Similar to the findings of Kennedy et al. (2019), because of their association with the juvenile justice system, many students were highly surveilled in the public-school setting, and any infraction was swiftly, and often harshly, punished. After a student has been involved in the juvenile justice system, school personnel often looked to probation officers to remove students instead of collaborating to develop possible solutions to help the student remain in school (Cole & Cohen, 2013). The third theme, the lack of access to information, served as an impediment to student's successful re-entry into the public-school setting. Cole and Cohen (2013) reported that the requirement that students withdraw from the public school, enroll into the juvenile

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detention center school for the duration of their incarceration (even if it is only for one day) and re-enroll in the public school equated to "logistical hopscotch" (p. 29). As a consequence, students re-entering school after incarceration often encountered delays in enrollment, course misplacement and the loss of school records. The researchers noted that students in school districts with a transition coordinator on staff may encounter fewer administrative barriers as they re-enter school. It must be noted that with interviews serving as the only source of evidence, the results of this study must be considered with hesitancy. Nevertheless, the findings in this study are in line with many of the discoveries documented in the school-based literature regarding the demographic characteristics of students served in DAEPs and the barriers these students encounter as they re-enter the comprehensive school after a DAEP placement. Much like other qualitative studies regarding this topic, the school counselors' voice remained absent. While the perspective of the juvenile detention center personnel certainly provided valuable insights, to truly gain an in-depth understanding of students' transition and re-entry experiences back into the comprehensive school, the voice of the school counselor is a necessary part of the dialogue.

School Re-Entry After Chronic Illness

Although the result of very different circumstances, much like a DAEP placement, a prolonged illness can lead to an extended departure from comprehensive school. Kaffenberger (2006) published a conceptual work on the impediments to assisting families and students with chronic illnesses and the unique ways in which school counselors may offer support. Asthma, cancer, diabetes, and other health impairments commonly keep students away from school for lengthy periods of time. According to

Kaffenberger (2006), the longer a student is absent from the comprehensive school, the more difficult the transition back. Much like students involved in DAEPs, students with chronic illness are more likely to exhibit behavioral problems (i.e., internalizing, depression, somatic complaints, social withdrawal, high anxiety, etc.) (Boekaerts & Roder, 1999). Although many of these students qualify for special education services (i.e., 504 plans, classroom modifications, etc.), educators may be apathetic or unresponsive to students' needs for specialized care as behavioral issues tend to be perceived as a lack of motivation rather than a consequence of their health.

Kaffenberger (2006) posited that there are three primary obstructions to the process of school re-entry for chronically ill students: (a) poor communication, (b) a lack of information and training, and (c) unsupportive policies. Families and medical staff are often unfamiliar with the services schools can provide and students' rights to those services. On the other hand, educators are frequently uneducated regarding students' diagnosis, unprepared to manage new demands related to the students' health and are ill-equipped to deal with questions or bullying that may arise with other students. Moreover, educators' previous personal experiences with chronic illness may directly impact their work with sick students. Inflexible policies that mandate each student receive services or participate in school in the exact same way are often restrictive and exclusionary. Kaffenberger (2006) contended that school counselors are uniquely positioned and are professionally responsible for an active role in the student's school re-entry process. Kaffenberger (2006) recommended that school counselors make early contact with the family and collaborate with other related services providers to negotiate the details of service, initiate frequent communication amongst stakeholders, provide counseling

services and facilitate educational workshops for the school community. Although not a cure all, these suggestions may help school counselors assume their role in the reintegration process.

In an earlier quantitative study, Kaffenberger et al. (2002) surveyed 250 school counselors about their work with chronically ill students. Although many school counselors reported being responsible for providing a wide range of services for students re-entering school after a prolonged illness, many of the school counselors stated that much of the organizing and preparation took place just before a student was set to return. Eighty-three percent of secondary school counselors reported feeling unprepared to receive students back into the comprehensive school environment. Overwhelmingly, secondary school counselors stated that they would welcome some training and support in this area. School counselors are often regarded as experts on students' issues; however, in order to be effective, school counselors need learning opportunities as they work to develop and refine the skills necessary to manage student needs.

Kaffenberger (2006) writes, "Professional school counselors, by virtue of their training and knowledge of social, emotional, and academic needs of students, are ideally suited to play a greater role in school reentry for students with chronic illness. Professional school counselors, however, will not be prepared to assume this role without training and the support of supervisors and school administration" (p. 226). As previously acknowledged, no direct comparisons can be made between these two groups. However, Kaffeberger's offerings are worth pausing to considering whether any of these challenges, barriers and strategies for success are relevant to school counselors working with students formerly involved in DAEPs. While being absent from school due to an

illness and being removed due to a mandatory DAEP placement are indeed very different circumstances, comprehensive school reintegration is a process school counselors must consider for both groups.

Chapter Summary

Chapter One provided a brief overview and statement of the problem. This chapter, through the review of literature, substantiated the rationale for this study. Throughout the school-based and related literature, there is a strong body of data to suggest zero tolerance policies, subjective referrals, school culture, educators' intentions and attitudes and their willingness to work with vulnerable students significantly impact students' initial placement into DAEPs and outcomes post placement. The literature also underlines the over-representation of students that are labeled African American, male, disabled and impoverished in DAEPs. Additionally, the current literature makes it clear that recidivism and juvenile incarceration threaten student achievement post DAEP placement. As such, a greater understanding of the role of the school counselor as it relates to students' transition and reintegration back into the comprehensive school, through this research, helped to shed new light on ways to help students avoid returning to DAEPs or becoming incarcerated. However, most studies related to DAEPs have ignored the topic of comprehensive school re-entry post placement.

In instances where school re-entry post DAEP placement has been addressed, researchers have neglected to include the voice of the school counselor. Consequently, the guiding research question for this study (i.e., What are perceptions and lived experiences of school counselors working with students re-entering the comprehensive school after a mandatory DAEP placement?) has not been adequately answered.

Moreover, in much of the available literature, comprehensive school counselors, in some capacity, are involved with students served in, or returning from, DAEPs. Although juvenile justice researchers and those interested in the experience of students returning to school after a chronic illness have sought the perspectives of personnel, the role of the school counselor in the school re-entry process post DAEP placement remains unclear.

From a methodological perspective, while several studies have applied a qualitative case study design, no study has utilized phenomenological methodology to examine this phenomenon. The complexity and potential implication of this process and the diverse needs of students mandate the need to better understand the perspectives and experiences of the school counselor. The following chapter, Chapter Three, outlines the methodological procedures that were used in this study to gain a contextualized understanding of the perceptions and lived experiences of the school counselor working with students as they transition from DAEPS and re-entry the comprehensive school.

Chapter 3: Methods

Chapter Three outlines a detailed account of the methodological approach utilized to capture, analyze and present the lived experiences of comprehensive school counselors engaged in re-entry work with students post mandatory DAEP placement. In so doing, I present the research design, the means by which I collected data and the procedures that were utilized to analyze collected content. In this chapter, I also address the process for population sampling. Finally, in this chapter I describe my role as researcher, present my epistemological orientation, outline steps taken to establish trustworthiness and delineate strategies implemented to minimize risk for participants involved in the study.

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions and experiences of school counselors that serve former DAEP students as they transition and re-enter comprehensive schools. This study was guided by the following research question: What are the lived experiences of school counselors working with students re-entering into the comprehensive school environment after a mandatory DAEP placement? To answer this question, an inductive, qualitative, descriptive phenomenological approach was employed.

Research Design

Denzin and Lincoln (2011), in the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, define qualitative research as:

> …multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural

setting, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals lives (p. 3-4).

Moreover, Merriam (1998) identifies five common characteristics of qualitative research: (a) seeks to understand the meaning people have constructed regarding their experiences and their world, (b) is concerned with the context of data gathering (i.e., a naturalistic setting), (c) the researcher is the primary tool for data collection and analysis, (d) undertakes an inductive approach and (e) the final product of inquiry is richly descriptive; instead of numbers, words and pictures are used to convey the researchers learning about the phenomenon.

Creswell (1998) asserts that there are several instances in which a researcher may conduct a qualitative study:

a) when the research questions start with a how or what so that initial ventures into the topic describe what is going on;

b) when a topic under investigation needs to be explored because variables cannot be easily identified and theories need to be developed;

c) when there is a need for a detailed view of the topic;

d) when there is a need to study individuals in their natural setting; and

e) when there is a desire to emphasize the researcher's role as an active learner

who can tell the story from participants point of view rather than as an "expert"

who passes judgment on participants (p. 17-18).

Paradigms in Qualitative Research

Similar to the methodological diversity in quantitative research, as it relates to

qualitative inquiry, there are various paradigms. Phenomenological, grounded theory and

case studies are but a few of the qualitative strategies researchers may employ. Each

approach to qualitative research has unique aims and methods.

Charmaz (2000) argues that "Grounded theory methods consist of systematic

inductive guidelines for collecting and analyzing data to build middle-range theoretical

frameworks that explain the collected data" (p. 509). The goal then of grounded theory is

to inductively derive a substantive theory that is rooted (i.e., grounded) in data (Merriam,

2002). In ground theory research, the phenomenon under investigation is observed as it

takes place, with the researcher using probing and questioning to fully expose

participants explanation of the experience (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). For this study,

grounded theory was not appropriate since my research question seeks to understand

participants experience with the phenomenon rather than theory.

Unlike grounded theory approaches, a case study is a vehicle for intensive

description and analysis of phenomenon or social unit (Merriam, 1998). A qualitative

case study "investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its

real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context

may not be clearly evident" (Yin, 2014, p. 16). Merriam (1998) defines a case study as "a

qualitative approach to studying a case (as the unit of analysis) where the case is a

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bounded system, a single entity, or a unit around which there are boundaries" (p. 27). As noted by Cohen et al. (2007), with consideration for real-life context and by using many sources of data, qualitative case studies aim to convey contextuality. A qualitative case study is not appropriate for answering my research question because I am not seeking to understand 'what it is like' to be in a particular situation, organization or process (Cohen et al., 2007). Instead, the focus of this study is to understand school counselors' perceptions of and lived experience working with former DAEP students to uncover its essence.

Phenomenology

Phenomenological approaches within qualitative inquiry are concerned with discovering and describing the meaning or essence of an individual's lived experience (Patton, 2002; Wertz, 2005); this methodology is concerned with understanding the individual and collective human experience (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; McCaslin & Scott, 2003). Phenomenology diverges from other qualitative paradigms in that it seeks to understand how individuals discuss and deal with difficult situations by exploring participants intentionality or internal experience of being conscious of a specific phenomenon (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

Rooted in philosophy, phenomenology as a concept was developed by Immanuel Kant in the 18th century and later popularized by Edward Husserl. Husserl believed that the human experience could not be sufficiently addressed via quantitative methods alone; his work legitimized the relevancy of focusing on the individual experience (van Manen, 2016). To understand the phenomenon being studied from a different conceptual viewpoint, Husserl's transcendental phenomenological method challenges researchers to

refrain from allowing judgements, values, assumptions, prior firsthand experiences and

presuppositions to distort their inquiry. Instead, researchers are encouraged to move

towards a more descriptive and transcendental experience that more fully captures the

phenomenon's essence as it is experienced by others.

Since Husserl, philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Heidegger and others

have helped to expand the philosophical constructs that make up phenomenology

(Groenewald, 2004; McLeod, 2001). The aforementioned scholars encouraged

researchers to shift the focus of phenomenology from descriptive to interpretive,

emphasizing both the essence of experience and the person in relation to that experience

(Moustakas, 1990). Focusing less on participants descriptions and perceptions,

interpretive or heuristic phenomenology seeks to better understand how participants make

sense of or assign meaning to a phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Unlike

transcendental or descriptive phenomenology, heuristic researchers aim to utilize their

personal experience rather than minimize or suspend it as they interpret participant's

experience and meaning-making (Moustakas, 1990). Mihalache (2019) highlights six

distinct differences between descriptive and heuristic phenomenology:

1. Bracketing, epoche, or phenomenological reduction are not required in

heuristic research.

2. In the descriptive phenomenological method, bracketing results in a distancing

from the phenomenon being studied; whereas, heuristic inquiry involves

connecting with the phenomenon and co-researchers.

3. Personal experience of the phenomenon investigated is not required in

descriptive phenomenology but is required in heuristic inquiry.

4. The phenomenological method is grounded in philosophy. Heuristic inquiry is

grounded in humanistic psychology and nondirective counseling approaches.

5. In descriptive phenomenology, self-reflection is used by the researcher as a

preparatory phase before bracketing; whereas, the heuristic researcher employs

self-reflection throughout the study.

6. "Phenomenology ends with the essence of experience; heuristics retains the

essence of the person in experience" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 43).

Although divergence exists on the specific philosophical aspects of phenomenological

inquiry, the common thread among phenomenologist is the value of subjective experience

and the connection between self and the world.

As noted by Glesne (2016), phenomenological studies "are an in-depth inquiry

into a topic with a small number of homogeneous participants. The researcher seeks to

understand the experiences and perceptions of each participant, and to examine

similarities and differences across cases" (p. 290). For decades, phenomenological

methodology has been applied in both the fields of counseling and education,

investigating an array of topics. In her dissertation research, Wallace (2019) utilized

interpretative phenomenology to examine experiences of wellness among African

American women that identify with and manifest the characteristics of the archetype of

the Strong Black Woman. In their phenomenological investigation, Singh et al. (2010)

examined the resiliency strategies of South Asian immigrant women in the United States

that survived childhood sexual abuse. Findings from these phenomenological studies

could be useful in helping to improve services for potentially vulnerable populations.

In the field of education, using an inductive, phenomenological design, Backman et al. (2012) sought to better understand the aspects necessary for promoting a positive school environment from the perspective of secondary school students. Worley and Cornett-Devito (2007) employed phenomenological methods to better understand how college students with learning disabilities perceive and respond to their teachers' use of power. Using phenomenology, both these studies indicate ways in which educational stakeholders can create a more productive environment for students.

More specifically, phenomenological inquiry has also been used to capture the perceptions and experiences of school counselors. Grimes et al. (2013) set out to capture the essence of experiences of rural school counselors that adopt a social justice advocacy approach to meet the existing and growing needs of their students. Schaeffer et al. (2010) utilized phenomenological methods to understand how school counselors describe and define advocacy as it relates to increasing access for students traditionally underrepresented in four-year colleges. Employing a descriptive phenomenological design, Mathews (2013) investigated the experiences of secondary school counselors to better understand how work-related pressures manifest into experiences of emotional exhaustion and professional burnout. Throughout school counseling focused research, the use of phenomenological methodology is well documented.

Descriptive phenomenology involves approaching a phenomenon with fresh perspective, through the eyes of participants that have direct, immediate experience with it to discover and describe the meaning essence of participants' lived experiences. Phenomenological research aims to capture a "complex, holistic picture" (Creswell, 2006, p.15).

Research Method

Population

School counselors that work directly with students re-entering the comprehensive school after a mandatory DAEP placement were the target population for this study. A school counselor is a certified/licensed educator that works full-time in a public comprehensive school and is responsible for improving outcomes for all students via the development and delivery of a comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA National Model, 2019). School counselors, by their professional nature, are advocates for vulnerable students and are responsible for addressing obstacles that hinder student growth. I chose to study this population because of how infrequently the experience and perspective of the school counselor, as it relates to this phenomenon, has presented itself in professional literature. I aimed to better understand the perceptions and lived experiences of school counselors who work directly with formerly DAEP involved students transitioning back into the comprehensive school to add a layer of professional specificity that is currently unavailable in the literature.

Sampling Procedures

Due to the nature of phenomenological inquiry, purposive, criterion-based sampling was used to identify appropriate participants for this study (Creswell, 1998). Criterion-based sampling is a specific purposive sampling strategy that selects participants who have experience with the phenomenon or event under study. Purposive sampling techniques utilize a careful, nonprobability selection process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Participants that were selected for this study were willing and able to

express and articulate their perspectives and had a stated interest in sharing their knowledge and experience.

To be eligible for participation, school counselors had to respond 'yes' to the following pre-screening questions:

(1) Are you a certified/licensed school counselor?

(2) Are you currently working full-time as a school counselor?

(3) Do you serve students in a comprehensive school (i.e., not private, virtual, parochial or otherwise alternative)?

(4) Do you serve students at the secondary level?

(5) Are you employed in a United States school district where DAEP enrollment is involuntary?

(6) Do you have direct experience working with one or more students transitioning/re-entering the comprehensive school environment after a mandatory DAEP placement?

In addition to answering affirmatively to the first six criteria, potential participants had to identify at least two professional activities outlined in the ASCA National Model (2019) that they engaged in when serving students transitioning/re-entering the comprehensive school after a mandatory DAEP placement (i.e., academic advisement/planning, advocating for student(s) at hearings/review meetings, consulting with teachers on student(s) behalf, consulting with DAEP personnel on student(s) behalf, counseling with parents on student(s) behalf, individual counseling, small group counseling).

Only those that responded affirmatively to all pre-screening questions, including having engaged in at least two of the outlined professional activities, were invited to participate in the study (Polkinghorne, 2005).

Sample Size

Qualitative inquiry does not mandate a set number of participants (Crabtree, 2006; Guest et al., 2006; Wertz, 2005). However, the suggested sample size for phenomenological studies range between 5 to 25 participants (Polkinghorne, 1989; Creswell, 2006). Prior research utilizing phenomenological methodology also provides some guidance as it relates to sample size. Moran and Bodenhorn (2015) interviewed 10 school counselors to better understand the perceptions and experiences of school counselors' collaborative efforts with community mental health providers. In their study of rural school counselors as social justice advocates, Grimes et al. (2013) sample included seven school counselors in four southeastern states. In a study of school counselors focused on their description of professional burnout and emotional exhaustion, Mathews (2013) interviewed 10 school counselors from one rural school district in North Carolina. Cole and Grothaus (2014) interviewed 10 school counselors in one mid-Atlantic state to better understand urban school counselors' perceptions of low-income families. Schaeffer et al. (2010) examined the experiences of high school counselors' advocacy practices as it relates to increasing college access for underrepresented students; their sample consisted of 12 secondary school counselors from one moderately sized school district in the southeastern United States. In the professional literature, the sample sizes for phenomenological studies involving school counselors have typically stayed within the range set forth by qualitative scholars.

Considering the guidelines established by qualitative scholars (Polkinghorne, 1989; Starks & Trinidad, 2007) and the precedent that has been informally established by previous phenomenological studies of school counselors, the target sample size for this study was 5 to10 participants. While a smaller sample size was set to achieve depth of understanding about the phenomenon by maintaining an intent focus on individual experiences while fully appreciating each account, data saturation was ultimately the determining factor for the overall number of participants for this study (Hays & Singh, 2012). As Hays and Singh (2012) note, saturation is the point in the research process where "a researcher or a research team identify no "new" data in subsequent participants' transcripts (p. 350). When all new incoming information begins to confirm what previous participants have shared, saturation is thought to be achieved (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Hence, 7 participants were obtained for this study.

Data Collection Procedures

IRB approval was secured prior to the start of data collection for the study. Collected data for this study included semi-structured interviews and a focus group. An explanation of recruitment strategies and rationale for utilizing the aforementioned data collection methods are presented in the succeeding sections.

Recruitment

Mack et al. (2005) argued that a recruitment plan is a project-specific strategy for identifying and enrolling people to participate in a research study. Miles and Huberman (1994) presented 16 types of purposeful sampling methods. I employed three purposeful sampling techniques to engage participants.

Many phenomenological studies focused on school counselors have recruited their samples from southeastern states (Grimes et al., 2013; Mathews, 2013; Schaeffer et al., 2010, etc.). For consistency, I chose to recruit school counselors from the southeastern states of the United States. By reaching out directly to school counselors in these regions, I hoped to identify a homogenous sample to secure more comprehensive insight as it relates to the phenomenon under study. This recruitment strategy yielded seven inquiries.

Secondly, a request for dissemination and a copy of the electronic recruitment flyer was sent to the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) Minority Doctoral Fellows. These fellows are a diverse group of counselor educators and counselor education doctoral students committed to serving vulnerable communities. NBCC Minority Fellows represent all counseling sub groups (i.e., community, mental health, school, etc.). Because they provide leadership to the counseling profession through education, research and service that directly impact under/never served populations, their connections to the school counseling community stood to further broaden the participant pool. This recruitment strategy yielded one inquiry.

Lastly, I recruited participants using a snowballing technique to encourage participation through a word of mouth strategy (Creswell, 2008). As school counselors expressed their interest in participating, I asked them to refer a fellow colleague that they believe may also be interested in participating (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2002). An electronic copy of the recruitment flyer was emailed to all referred school counselors. This recruitment strategy yielded four inquiries.

A total of 12 inquiries were received in response to the call for participants, 8 were deemed eligible. All potential participants responded to the call via the hyperlink that was provided on the recruitment flyer; this link directed potential participants to the electronic pre-screening questionnaire (Appendix B). Within the electronic pre-screening questionnaire, participants were asked to enter demographic information (i.e., name, email address and phone number) and respond to the aforementioned pre-screening questions. Participants that responded affirmatively to all pre-screening criteria and those that indicated that they had engaged in a at least two of the outlined professional activities were deemed eligible. Do note that potential participants were unaware of the minimum number of professional activities required for eligibility. While the electronic pre-screening form immediately closed to disqualified individuals, once eligibility was determined, participants were automatically directed to the letter of invitation, demographic questionnaire and scheduling page.

Demographic Questionnaire

As a part of the onboarding process, qualified participants were asked to respond to an electronic demographic questionnaire. The self-report questionnaire consisted of demographic inquires specific to state of practice, age, gender, race, whether masters'/doctoral degree was received from a CACREP accredited program, whether participant served as a solo counselor or member of a counseling team, the number of students on participant's caseload and years of school counseling experience. While some inquiries were unique to this study, much of the information collected on the demographic questionnaire is similar to that of demographic surveys found in other studies of school counselors (Cole & Grothaus, 2014; Mathews, 2013; Moran &

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Bodenhorn, 2015). To establish trustworthiness, during the pilot interview, along with the interview protocol (Appendix A), the demographic questionnaire was also scrutinized for accuracy, ease and participant's comfort level with the inquires; no substantive changes were required.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Individual interviews are the most utilized method of data collection in qualitative research (Nunkoosing, 2005). Within phenomenological research, the overall objective of the semi-structured interview is to elicit the participants' story (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). As noted by Glesne (2016), in-depth interviews facilitate an opportunity to learn more about what cannot be seen and to further explore other explanations for what is seen. Interviews in phenomenological research present an opportunity for participants to discuss their understandings of their world and to express, from their personal view point, how they regard certain situations or events. In this way, the aim of the interview is not simply to collect data about an experience; it is an opportunity to capture uniqueness, illuminate subjective facts and better understand participant's worldview (Cohen et al., 2007). With consideration for the aims of this investigation, interview data was necessary and appropriate to help answer the research question.

As noted by Hays and Singh (2012), semi-structured interviews, also known as in-depth interviews, commonly involve the use of an interview protocol which serves as a guide and starting point for the interview process. Patton (2002) argues, "Collecting the same information from each person poses no credibility problem when each person is understood as a unique informant with a unique perspective" (p. 347). The use of standardized open-ended questions in this study provided a vehicle by which each school

counselor was granted the opportunity to elaborate on their experiences and perceptions as it relates to their work with students transitioning from DAEPs back into the comprehensive school.

Critical Race Theory and the offerings presented in the aforementioned school-based and related literature were heavily considered in the formulation of interview questions. Within the available professional literature there appears to be a strong body of data to suggest zero tolerance policies, educational stakeholders' perceptions and attitudes and their willingness to work with vulnerable students significantly impact students' outcomes post DAEP placement. While the aim of this study was neither to prove or disprove theory, this intentional development of the interview protocol provided a platform to investigate the presence of these elements in the later stages of the analytic process.

Prior to the start of interviews, a pilot interview was conducted. The pilot interview was conducted with a school counselor familiar with the topic being investigated and that would have otherwise been eligible for full participation in the study. As was the case with all initial interviews, the pilot interview was conducted via Zoom (Seidman, 2013). The interview protocol was followed in its entirety during the pilot interview. Through the pilot interview, I sought to identify and address flaws, limitations and general weaknesses within the interview protocol prior to the full implementation (Kvale, 2007). Completing a practice interview also provided an opportunity to refine interview questions. The pilot interview did not result in any changes to the protocol for either interview.

The aim of the initial interview was to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions and experiences of school counselors engaged in re-entry work, with particular consideration given to the aforementioned concepts. The primary goal of the second interview was to enhance trustworthiness of the data via member checking. More information regarding the second interview can be found in the subsequent section titled 'Member Checking Interview'. Interview protocols can be found in appendices.

At the start of each interview, I reiterated the purpose of the study. Each participant was granted the opportunity to select a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality. Additional pseudonyms (or omissions) were assigned in instances where names, or any other identifiers, were discussed as part of the interview. The average length for initial interviews was 64 minutes. At the conclusion of each initial interview, audio files were uploaded to Rev.com for professional transcription. As transcripts were completed, they, along with the audio file of the interview and a coding template, were uploaded to a shared, secure, electronic folder.

The use of semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection supports my epistemological views. As a constructivist researcher, I believe that reality and knowledge are co-constructed via our interactions with others and the world around us (Lincoln et al., 2011). Interviews for this investigation were interactive in nature (Glesne, 2016). Through the use of open-ended and probing questions, I encouraged reflection as I sought to gain a better understanding of the experiences and perceptions of school counselors serving students in the comprehensive school post DAEP placement (Legard et al., 2003).

Focus Group

As Lambert and Loiselle (2008) assert, focus groups are valuable sources of data collection as "group interactions may accentuate members' similarities and differences and give rich information about the range of perspectives and experiences" (p. 229). The goal of the focus group was to determine whether early salient themes captured the essence of participants' collective lived experiences (Kress & Shoffner, 2007). During the focus group, emergent themes were presented. Participants were invited to provide feedback/clarity, challenge/question and offer their own analysis of the presented data. In this sense, the focus group served as a means of triangulation and member checking, helping to establish dependability and credibility of the data. Moreover, the focus group helped to center the participants as experts of their own collective experience. Overwhelmingly, during the focus group, participants noted that the presented themes were indeed reflective of their perspectives and experiences. At the conclusion of the focus group, no thematic changes were made.

It must be noted that focus groups are not without limitations. The collection of data via focus group is often criticized for not offering the same depth as individual interviews (Berg, 2004), especially when it is the primary or sole source of data collection in an investigation. Recognizing the limits of focus groups and the vitality of trustworthiness to qualitative inquiry, a second individual interview was conducted.

Second Member Checking Interview

Although the focus group presented a unique and necessary methodological opportunity, it is well documented that participants may be less likely to express opinions that counter the group majority or that they believe would be displeasing to the researcher

(Kress & Shoffner, 2007). As such, following the focus group, each participant was invited to participate in a second interview via electronic format for the purpose of individual member checking. The focus group provided participants with an opportunity to visually view and challenge the collective representation of their lived experiences as it related to the phenomenon under study. However, nuance existed across each case, and the second interview provided participants an opportunity to review their initial responses, provide clarification and challenge findings. Each participant was emailed a link to a secure copy of their transcript from their initial interview, a conceptual map that visually synthesized clusters and labels specific to them and an individual narrative (Appendix C) of their unique lived experience with the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). After reviewing their files, participants were prompted to respond to the three questions presented in the interview protocol via a secure, HIPPA compliant, electronic form. In addition to providing an opportunity for member checking, the second interview provided space for participants to see themselves as individuals in a collective experience. Participants' responses during this interview did not result in any thematic changes.

Data Analysis

Phenomenological data analysis differs from other qualitative methods in that phenomenology's sole focus is to understand the depth and meaning of participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The data analysis process for this investigation followed the guidelines presented by Moustakas (1994).

Phenomenological data analysis requires immersion with the data; as such, Hays and Singh (2012) highlight bracketing as a critical pre-data analysis step. In following the

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first step of the analytic process, each member of the research team recorded their own biases, assumptions and experiences with the phenomenon (Moustaskas, 1994). The research team met to discuss how pre-conceptions may help or hinder the analytic process. These brackets were referred to throughout the data analysis process to ensure that the participants' descriptions were prioritized. With initial bracketing completed, the second step of the analytic process, horizontalization, began. The process of horizontalization in phenomenological research is twofold, preliminary listing/grouping and reduction/elimination (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) recommended that in order to carry out this step, the researcher needs to be "receptive to every statement of the co-researcher's experience, granting each comment equal value" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122). In their presentation of Moustakas' (1994) guidelines for phenomenological data analysis, Hays and Singh (2012) argue that during this step in the data analysis process, researchers should "test each expression for two requirements: (a) Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it? (b) Is it possible to abstract and label it?" (p. 354). Significant statements were reviewed to ensure that overlapping or repetitive statements were eliminated; remaining statements became the invariant constituents of the experience.

In step three, clusters and thematic labels were developed. Significant words and statements (i.e., invariant constituents) were clustered and tentative thematic labels were assigned. These clusters and labels eventually became the core themes for the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). During step four of the data analysis process, clusters and themes were validated. As a team, we confirmed that the clusters and thematic labels that were developed were either clearly corroborated or explicitly

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stated in participants' own words. Any cluster or thematic labels that could not be validated were considered irrelevant to participants' experience and eliminated. To strengthen validation and enhance data organization, in addition to line-by-line coding, transcripts were imported into NVivo (Version 12). NVivo is a software program that aids in the analytic process (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011; Zamawe, 2015). NVivo helps qualitative researchers highlight and organize codes across multiple data sources into one central file. Using NVivo, I was able to further search for patterns and dimensions. The thematic labels developed during this phase of analysis were later presented to participants for member checking.

With clusters and labels synthesized and organized, in step five, individual textural descriptions were constructed. These textual descriptions represent each of the individual participant's perceptions of the experience being investigated. In this step, according to Moustakas (1994), participant's own words that are verbatim examples from participant's transcripts were included in order to convey their unique perceptions of the investigated phenomenon. This step of the analysis process helped to better illuminate not only uniformed aspects of the collective experience with the phenomenon under study but unique factors specific to each individual case. This step moves beyond data validation; essentially, these textural descriptions fundamentally provided the "what" of the experience.

The goal of the next step, step six, was to construct a structural description of the experience for each participant utilizing imaginative variation. Moustakas (1994) asserts that imaginative variation requires that the researcher view the phenomenon from a variety of perspectives so that they can understand the essence of the participant's

experiences. By creating individual narratives or structural descriptions for each participant, I was able to better refine and more clearly understand the essence of participant's experience engaging in re-entry work with students post DAEP placement (Hays & Singh, 2012). Before moving to the final phase of analysis, the individual narratives developed in step six were sent to each participant for member checking.

The final step of the analytic process was to consolidate individual textural and structural descriptions into one composite description that represented the lived experiences of all participants involved in the study. This thick, rich description presented in the findings represented the essences of the phenomenon under investigation. The aim here was to open a window into a world not previously accessible. After reviewing the composite description, my hope is that a reader would have a better understanding of what it is like to be a school counselor in the comprehensive school setting serving students as they re-enter after a mandatory DAEP placement. However, it is important to note that the essence of the composite description is not exhaustive but simply representative of one group's perspective at a particular time and place (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

Synonymous with validity and reliability in quantitative research, trustworthiness is vital to rigorous qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted that establishing credibility, confirmability and transferability are the cornerstones of trustworthiness in qualitative research. Analogous to internal validity in quantitative research, credibility or believability in the truth of findings is essential (Cope, 2014). Confirmability refers to the neutrality of the researcher or the degree to

which findings are consistent and can be replicated (Cope, 2014). Transferability is the extent to which findings are applicable to individuals in other settings and situations (Cope, 2014). Although generalizing results is not the aim of qualitative research, generating rich, detailed descriptions of the phenomenon under study aids in the transferability of the work.

The trustworthiness procedures and protocols used in phenomenological research may be similar but not identical to those used in other qualitative paradigms (Cope, 2014). For this phenomenological investigation, strategies utilized to establish credibility, confirmability and transferability included bracketing, member checking, utilizing a research team, peer debriefing, reflective journaling and the creation of thick, rich descriptions.

Member Checking

Phenomenological research values the voice of the participants (Creswell, 2013). As such, member checking requires involving participants in the research process in an effort to ensure the accurate portrayal of their intended meanings as it relates to their perceptions and experiences. Member checking entails more than having participants review transcripts; it is asking them how well the ongoing data analysis represents their experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Member checking helps to clarify and amplify participants' voice. This strategy then has the potential to help balance the power differential that is inherently present in research by creating an opportunity for participants to validate developing content (Williams & Morrow, 2009). In phenomenological research member checking is a key strategy in the establishment of credibility.

As it pertains to member checking, I was invested in having participants go beyond the review of transcripts. I wanted to know how well the developing data was representative of their experience. I invited participants to challenge my assumptions, correct misinterpretations and to expound upon beliefs and perceptions that they felt captured the true essence of their experience (Kornbluh, 2015). Requesting participant feedback at various points throughout the analytic process helped to establish trustworthiness and collaboration between the researcher and participants (Williams & Morrow, 2009)

Research Team

According to Hays and Singh (2012), in qualitative research, the use of a team in the analytic process increases credibility and helps to establish trustworthiness. Research team members were recruited and trained prior to the start of the analytic process. The team consisted of myself, as principal investigator, and two additional researchers; one male and one female. The male self identifies as African American and recently completed his Master's in Counselor Education; he currently works as a school counselor at the high school level. The female also self identifies as African American and is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Counselor Education. Both members of the research team were familiar with the qualitative research process but not intimately knowledgeable as it relates to the phenomenon under study. Each brought a unique and necessary perspective to the analytic process.

Peer Debriefing

In addition to reviewing transcripts, research team members acted as agents for peer debriefing. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that following an encounter with a

participant, peer debriefing is a process by which a researcher's implicit thoughts are presented to peers in an analytical manner. According to Crabtree (2006), peer debriefings present an opportunity for researchers to uncover biases in their assumptions and perspectives. Because peer debriefers often serve as sounding boards, they were particularly useful throughout the data collection and analysis process (Shenton, 2004). Throughout the analytic process, peer debriefings took place during weekly, virtual research team meetings. Because much of the dissertation process transpires in isolation, as Amankwaa (2016) posits, peer debriefing sessions afforded me the chance to discuss, challenge and process feelings, thoughts, revelations and ideas.

Reflective Journaling

Reflective journaling helps to develop an audit trail and ultimately confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Glesne, 2016). Because significant consideration is given to the role of the researcher in phenomenological inquiry, keeping notes and reflections throughout the data collection, analytic and descriptive phases of the research process is vital (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Reflective journaling provided intentional space for me to consider all the ways in which data collection and analysis were being impacted (Hays & Singh, 2012). Amankwaa (2016) suggests that reflective journaling take place after each significant activity in the research process (e.g., post participant interviews, during data analysis, as themes are produced, etc.). As Hays and Singh (2012) suggest, entries for my reflective journal were centered on my "reactions to participants and settings involved in the research…hunches about potential findings, and descriptions of how data method, source and analysis plans may need to change" (p. 205). Reflective journaling also helped me to maintain a trail of helpful reminders as to why significant

decisions were made throughout the research process. Engaging in reflective journaling via video was an opportunity to explore tensions, discuss difficulties and consider different paths in real time. Reflecting via video also made it more convenient to review journals throughout the research process.

Thick Descriptions

Denzin (1989) delineates four components of a thick description: "(1) it gives context of an act; (2) it states the intentions and meanings that organize the action; (3) it traces the evolution and development of the act; [and] (4) it presents the action as a text that can be interested" (p. 33). Moreover, Morse (1999) added, qualitative research must "add something more to the participants' words for it to be consider a research contribution, whether it be a synthesis, interpretation, or development of a concept, model or theory" (p. 163). Phenomenological methodology requires that collected data be synthesized and richly described (Moustakas, 1994). Throughout this investigation, thick descriptions of participants' accounts were collected and refined throughout the analytic process to demonstrate credibility and dependability. These thick, rich descriptions were then embedded into the findings as evidence of trustworthiness. By describing school counselors' experience of the phenomenon in vivid detail (Whittemore et al., 2001), consumers of this research have the opportunity to evaluate the extent to which the presented offerings are relatable to others (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

As a phenomenological researcher, I acknowledge both the implicit and explicit interaction between myself (as an instrument) and the impact my "being" may have on the rigor and trustworthiness of this research. With this acknowledgement, at the start of this research, I accepted my responsibility to, and the limitations of, minimizing such

distortions in data collection and analysis. In an effort to establish and maintain trustworthiness, every effort was made to continuously scrutinize the data and my "being" in a way that welcomed opposing and multiple views and that captured and honored the experiences and perspectives of participants.

Positionality

A constructive paradigm shaped this investigation. According to Lincoln et al. (2011) researchers that ascribe to a constructive paradigm adhere to a transactional and subjectivist epistemology as well as a methodology that is inductive, dialogic and dialectical. From this perspective, I believe that reality and knowledge are co-constructed via our interactions with others and the world around us. This view is relevant to the purpose of this study as I aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the process of school reentry post DAEP placement from the perspective of the school counselor. In other words, I sought to improve practice through the description and mutual understanding of school counselors' experience (Lincoln et al., 2011).

Positionality then is defined as the social, locational and ideological placement of the researcher in relation to the research project (Hay, 2005). As Flax (1990) postulates, "we cannot know the real without recognizing our own role as knowers" (p. 191). My interest in this work, with this population is no coincidence; it is undoubtedly the result of both personal and professional experiences. Although as a K-12 student I did not participate in a DAEP, as an African American female who is the product of un-wed teen parents, a first-generation college student that was raised in a low income, working-class neighborhood, I have personally worn the "at-risk" and "other" labels. Throughout my academic career, school counselors have positively impacted the trajectory of my life. My

middle school counselor was, and remains, an integral part of my life. My middle school counselor enrolled me in etiquette classes, helped me complete my first application for financial aid and supported me as I applied to and went through graduate school. Undoubtedly, the impact my middle school counselor has had on my life extends beyond the school environment. My personal experience with my school counselor is the reason I chose a career in the counseling/education field.

Prior to returning to graduate school to pursue full time doctoral studies, I served as a school counselor for seven years, serving students at the middle and high school levels, as well as students in the adult education setting. Throughout my time in public schools, both before and after DAEP placements, I have personally worked with a number of students mandated to attend DAEPs. Whether attending hearings, working through the social and academic issues that present themselves post DAEP placement or helping students move beyond their DAEP experience, I am perpetually inspired by these students' resilience.

I acknowledge that I, as a scholar, am an instrument and a human being, susceptible to all of the advances and limitations thereof. I acknowledge that professionally, personally and politically, I am committed to expanding the understanding of and service to under/never served populations through both scholarship and service. I believe that school counselors possess skills that are vital to supporting whole children as they work to become healthy adults. I believe that these students matter: their experiences, their needs, their lives. I believe that these students are more than their one experience, and I believe that school counselors have an obligation to positively impact these students' lives.

While my beliefs about and prior work with this population may have served as an asset in some capacity, it may have also served as a hindrance. My position as a researcher of similar professional and ethnic background to many of the participants seemed to aid in the establishment of rapport and created space for participants to express themselves freely. Study participants seemed to take comfort in the idea that I could intimately understand them and their experience. However, despite my best attempts at setting aside my previous knowledge, assumptions and biases, perhaps my familiarity with the phenomenon made it impossible for me to see them and their stories with untainted ears and perspective.

Employing empathy, respect, genuine curiosity, personal awareness and critical reflection throughout this investigation, I worked to balance my roles as human, counselor, scholar and advocate. The utilization of a research team, peer debriefing, reflective journaling and member checking were strategies that were intentionally employed to balance what I know based on my academic, personal and professional experiences and what I hoped to discover through the perspectives and stories of participants.

Ethical Considerations

Whether known beforehand or discovered throughout the research process, all research has potential risk and benefits. As noted in the ACA Ethical Standards (2014) and outlined in the IRB's mandates, it was incumbent on me as the researcher to inform participants of the potential harm, risk and benefits of their participation in the study. In an effort to mediate harm, I adhered to the human subjects' protocol as approved and outlined by the IRB.

There were no known risks associated with participating in this study except a slight risk of breach of confidentiality, which remained despite steps that were taken to protect participants' privacy. To protect participants' confidentiality, participants were permitted to select pseudonyms in lieu of participant and school names. When identifiable names were mentioned, they were omitted. Also, participants were invited to participate in interviews virtually/outside of school hours to further protect their confidentiality. Any information that was collected via electronic form was done so using secure, HIPPA-compliant software/programs. Study information was securely stored in locked files and/or stored on a password-protected computer.

School counselors were informed that unsolicited inquiry regarding their participation in this study was possible. Participants in this research study were also notified of their rights, provided with an explanation of the study and informed of the voluntary nature of their participation. Participants were also made aware that they were free to discontinue their participation at any time for any reason without negative consequences.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 details the methodological trajectory for this investigation. Justification for the use of phenomenological methodology, sampling techniques, data collection methods and analytic procedures were presented. The subsequent chapters, chapters four and five, present the results of the investigation and discusses implications, as well as limitations.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this qualitative dissertation was to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of school counselors engaged in re-entry work with former-DAEP affiliated students. Specifically, I sought to understand the perceptions and experiences of school counselors as front-line service providers for students reintegrating into the comprehensive school after a mandatory DAEP placement. Understanding school counselors' experiences with the phenomenon adds insight beyond student demographics and circumstances related to the initial DAEP placement (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Hoffman, 2014; Vanderhaar et al., 2014). Chapter One described the importance of this investigation to the fields of counseling and education as a measure to address achievement, opportunity and training gaps. As such, I sought to deepen professional knowledge of school counselors' experiences as it relates to re-entry work with implications for not only professional development but student outcomes. A review of extant literature in Chapter Two provided a foundation for direction of this study by demonstrating the need to expand the knowledge base from a simplistic understanding of the role of student demographics and the mechanical execution of zero tolerance policies that frequently lead to students' DAEP placements to a more nuanced understanding of the re-acclimation experience from the perspective of the school counselor. This understanding considers context and highlights systemic factors that better shape the experience and specificity of re-entry work as a contextual phenomenon. Phenomenological methods were employed to describe participants' lived experiences.

To secure rich and detail descriptions of participants' accounts, in-depth, semi-structured interviews and a focus group were utilized. Examination of participants' lived experiences revealed important insights into how participants described their function as it relates to re-entry work with students post DAEP placement. Specifically, the findings illuminated core beliefs, the role of relationships, culture, race, racism and policy play in participants' experiences and student outcomes.

Research Question

The primary research question addressed in this study was:

What are the lived experiences of school counselors working with students re-entering into the comprehensive school environment after a mandatory DAEP placement?

Utilizing both reflection and probing added layers of richness and depth to the interviews and the focus group as participants explored their role and perspectives as it relates to re-entry work.

Since validating theory was not the aim of this work, I took an inductive position as it relates to data collection (Glesne, 2016). As such, participants were provided the necessary space to provide rich descriptions of their experience.

Data Collection

Interviews and a focus group were the sources of data collected for this investigation. Excluding the pilot, a total of 14 interviews and one focus group were conducted. Participants were able to schedule their own interviews via the link included on the recruitment flyer. The recruitment flyer can be found in Figure 4.1. All initial, semi-structured interviews were conducted via video conferencing using the Zoom Video

Communications, Inc. software platform. Although I originally planned to conduct two synchronous, semi-structured interviews with each participant, conducting research during a global and racial pandemic (i.e., broadcasted killings of people of color by law enforcement, divisive race-based discourse by political figures, nationwide protest, etc.) demanded both flexibility and compassion. At the conclusion of the initial interviews, participants were asked to identify dates/times that they could be available for a second individual interview. In the early phases of data collection, it became apparent that participants were managing much uncertainty as it related to their availability. Although in years past, many of the participants in this study worked professional contracts that guaranteed them time off during the summer months, the demands associated with a global pandemic required that they quickly adapt to an ever-changing, and often exhausting, schedule. After contacting each participant individually, it was determined that they could all be available on one date at the same time. To accommodate participants' fluid schedules, and to provide additional options for data triangulation and member checking, along with one synchronous semi-structured interview, one focus group was conducted. Also, instead of foregoing the second member checking interview the format was transitioned to an asynchronous format. All participants agreed that these changes were essential to their ability to continue their participation in the study.

　　　　With one exception, all participants were present for the focus group. Moreover, one member of the research team was present; the research team member did not interact with participants but served as a process observer. After a welcome, statement of objectives and a confidentiality disclaimer, participants were invited to review core themes. As a means of including participants in the analysis and interpretation of the data

(Seidman, 2013), participants were asked to consider the following prompts as they offered feedback:

1. First reactions. As you listened, what thoughts, feelings, reactions arose?

2. Are there any themes that really resonated with you? Are there any themes that you feel do not reflect your experience? If so, which ones and why?

3. Do the presented themes capture your collective experience and perspective? If so, in what ways? If not, what is missing?

Similar to the dynamics present in group counseling, as participants responded to the presented themes and elaborated on their experiences, there was an almost immediate sense of cohesion amongst participants. Many participants seemed to find comfort in the universality of the experience, remarking that they were relieved to know that the triumphs and struggles related to re-entry work were not unique to them.

Lastly, after the focus group, instead of participating via Zoom in real time, participants engaged in the second member checking interview via written format. Though the focus group provided an opportunity for collective member checking, the second interview was a chance for participants to see themselves as individuals and to share in a way they may not have otherwise felt comfortable. Participants were emailed a link to access a secure copy of their initial interview transcript, conceptual map and individual narrative. Because email can be particularly vulnerable to privacy breeches, to protect participants' confidentiality, participants were asked to respond to the questions outlined in the second interview protocol via a secure, HIPPA compliant web-based form. Participants were given one week to review their documents and to respond to the questions. All participants responded.

Data Analysis

        Data analysis for this study followed the format described in Chapter 3. The seven step analytic process, as outlined by Moustakas (1994), provided the framework for this investigation. Through the phenomenological process of epoche, prior to the start of data collection, I, along with the research team, attempted to purposefully set aside any preconceived knowledge or everyday beliefs that might be used to explain the phenomenon being investigated. To accomplish this, each member of the research team wrote their own individual positionality statement as it related to the topic under investigation with special consideration given to any biases or assumptions. During the first research team meeting, positionality was discussed. Research team members were courageous in their offerings, noting experiences and ideals that may have impacted analysis and interpretations. Adopted, fatherless, and a recipient of special education services with first-hand experience of re-entering a comprehensive school after expulsion, one member of the research team noted a complicated relationship with school; valuing knowledge but believing that school, as an institution, can be harmful to students of color. The child of a retired school teacher, one research team member disclosed a deep admiration for teachers and the protective role *good teachers* play in students' lives. Moreover, collective assumptions and biases were noted (i.e., comprehensive school re-entry is better than alternative school, teachers want to help, administrators must consider greater good versus individual needs, etc.). By bracketing, the aim was to approach the analytic process in an open and naïve manner.

        The second step in the analytic process encompassed horizontalization of the data. As such, each participant's transcript was first analyzed using in-vivo coding (Glesne,

2016). Each member of the research team, prior to meeting as a group, listened to each audio recording and reviewed and coded each transcript independently (Saldaña, 2015). Statements that could be abstracted, labeled and those that contained content necessary to understand the experience were highlighted and entered into the coding document (Moustakas, 1994). The research team met each week to discuss each transcript line-by-line, giving specific attention to salient points, emerging patterns, as well as divergent elements, tensions and discrepancies. Although consensus is not necessary in phenomenological research, statements were further endorsed as salient when coding was congruent amongst team members.

In step three, significant words and statements (i.e., invariant constituents) were clustered, and tentative thematic labels were assigned. These clusters and labels, with some refinement, eventually became the core themes of the investigation (Moustakas, 1994). The fourth step of analysis involved the validation of clusters and thematic labels using verbatim transcript data from participants' initial interviews. In addition to corroborating clusters and thematic labels with participants' own words, data validation was supplemented, and ultimately strengthened, via the use of NVivo (Version 12). Using NVivo, I was able to further search for patterns and dimensions that may have been overlooked or overstated via manual coding. The use of NVivo also afforded me the opportunity to more easily ascertain the frequency in which words, phrases and statements appeared both within and across participants' transcripts.

Prior to moving to the next phase of analysis, thematic labels were presented to participants via focus group for the purpose of collective member checking. Unlike the individual transcripts from individual interviews, audio from the focus group was not

transcribed or coded by the research team. Instead of line-by-line coding, myself and the research team member that served as process observer met to discuss the process of the focus group and participants' responses to the presented prompts. Participants' offerings did not result in any changes to the content of core themes as collectively they agreed that the presented themes captured the essence of their experience. However, during this step of the analytic process, thematic titles were adjusted to incorporate language used by participants during the focus group. For example, the sub-theme titled "collaborating with teachers" was changed to "combating symbolic Scarlett letters." By using participants' language, authenticity and validation were enhanced.

During step five, individual textural descriptions were created. For each participant, significant statements and themes were listed and verbatim phrases were bulleted underneath. For a visual illustration, conceptual maps were also constructed for each participant. An example of a conceptual map can be found in Figure 4.2. In step six, bulleted lists were expanded into narrative form to create individual narratives (i.e., structural descriptions). In step six, utilizing imaginative variation, structural descriptions provided space to explore the context that influenced how participants experienced the phenomenon and potential tensions and alternative meanings (Moustakas, 1994). In the second interview participants were invited to review, critique and challenge their specific individual narratives. Moustakas (1994) asserts that the invariant meanings and themes of every participant are necessary in depicting the group as a whole. As such, during the final phase of analysis a composite description that presents the essence of the phenomenon for participants as a collective was created. Throughout analysis consideration was given to theory however, theory was not used to confirm or invalidate

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participants' offerings. The composite description is presented in the subsequent Findings and Summary of Findings sections.

Throughout the early analytic stages of this investigation, the research team met weekly via Zoom. Over 16 hours were invested by the research team, reviewing and analyzing data; this excludes hours independently invested by the principal investigator. Immersion in the data (i.e., listening to audio recordings, manually annotating and coding transcripts, NVivo coding, developing conceptual maps, writing textural and structural descriptions, weekly research team meetings, debriefing) afforded me a solid working knowledge of each case and ultimately added to the overall quality of the investigation.

Participants

A total of 12 inquiries were received in response to the call for participants; eight were deemed eligible. All potential participants responded to the call via the link to the electronic pre-screening questionnaire that was provided on the recruitment flyer. Participants that responded affirmatively to all six criteria and that could respond that they had engaged in at least two relevant, professional activities were deemed eligible. While the electronic form immediately closed to disqualified individuals, eligible participants were automatically directed to the electronic letter of invitation, demographic questionnaire and scheduling link. Of the eight that were deemed eligible, only one participant did not respond to follow up contact regarding the missed initial interview. As such, there were seven total participants involved in this investigation.

Each participant was employed full time at the secondary school level. All but one participant served high school students; one worked in a school that served both middle and high school students. Six participants reported serving as a member of a school

counseling team, and one reported being the only school counselor in her building. All participants reported practicing as a school counselor in the southern region of the United States. All participants earned their Masters' from CACREP accredited programs. Of the seven participants, five identified as Black/African American, one identified as White and one identified as American Indian/Alaska Native and Hispanic. Six participants identified as female, and one identified as male. Participants' ages ranged from 35 to 59. Counselors' caseloads ranged from 120 to 600 with the average number of students on a participant's individual caseload being 321. The average years of school counseling experience was 10. See Table 4.1.

Findings

Throughout this section, direct quotes from participants are applied to the support themes and sub-themes; these themes and supporting quotes answered the guiding research which focused on the perceptions and lived experiences of school counselors working with students re-entering the comprehensive school after a mandatory DAEP placement. Four core themes emerged from the data and captured how participants describe their experiences with re-entry work: (1) Functions and Core Beliefs, (2) Impediments, (3) Success (4) Race and Culture. Sixteen sub-themes also emerged. Within the first core theme, there were four sub-themes. Within the second core theme, there were five sub-themes. Within the third core theme, there were two sub-themes. Within the fourth core theme, there were five sub-themes. A visual illustration of the grouping of themes and sub-themes can be found in Table 4.2. The names used are pseudonyms selected by the participants designed to protect their confidentiality. If

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instances occurred where participants referenced potentially identifiable information, that content was omitted.

Core Theme 1: Functions and Beliefs

Analysis of collected data revealed salient points that were clustered to form the first core theme, Functions and Beliefs. The first core theme described participants' primary role and fundamental beliefs. To provide needed context for their unique lived experience with the phenomenon, each participant was asked about their specific role in the re-entry process, what it was like to be a school counselor that works with students re-entering the comprehensive school after a DAEP placement in their building/district and to elaborate on the perceived impact. Four sub-themes, along with supporting participant statements, helped to uncover the essence of participants' experiences with re-entry work: (1) Administrative vs. Clinical, (2) Belief in Redemption, (3) Instill Hope and (4) Relationships Matter.

Sub-Theme 1A: Administrative vs. Clinical: They're back, you get them in the class, fix their schedule, send them on their way. **vs.** *I meet with them for counseling for 30 minutes a few times in that first month.*

Participants noted stark variance in their function as it relates to transition and reintegration. Each participant perceived their role as students first transition back as pointedly different from the role that they assumed in helping students reacclimate into the comprehensive school environment long term.

Sara: *We have two high schools in our district and it has been the same at both high schools. They go to the alternative school and there's no good process to*

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bring them back to the home school. I have not been involved with transition as a

school counselor.

Daniella: *The admin is invited to transition meetings. I haven't seen really a*

counselor per se be invited. I think we're supposed to be but our schedules. Things

happen and our schedules have not matched very well. The admin will come to us

just to get some information.

Tia: *So then I think these adults make these decisions and they aren't really kid-*

centered decisions. They're not thinking about how the kid is going to adjust,

which is typically the first thing I think about because as a school counselor it's

just what we think about. My first thing is oh my gosh when I read the email about

them coming back, I'm like what? We aren't even going to have an orientation or

a meeting? I don't have any input? I can do more than make schedules.

Luther V: *They're back, you get them in the class, fix their schedule, send them on*

their way.

Once a student has transitioned back to the comprehensive, participants reported a

pivot in their role.

Tia: *I really just try to provide a space for them when they come back. Some*

programming, something. I meet with them for counseling for 30 minutes, a few

times, in that first month.

Sasha: *All the students that transitioned back from alternative, are automatically*

placed on our triage list. So, we have a weekly triage meeting with the school

counselor, the administrator, and the student individually to talk about goals, to

talk about attendance, to talk about grades, talk about any concerns that they may

be having with teachers.

Sub-Theme 1B: Belief in Redemption: You are not a bad person because you did a bad thing.

   All participants shared the core belief that students are redeemable. Overwhelmingly, participants underscored the importance of believing that students are more than the sum total of the infractions that led them to a DAEP. Luther V explained:

   Oh my goodness. It is often core to what we do as counselors because in today's

   society, kids face so much and can be beat up on so much verbally and otherwise

   that it's important for them to understand, nobody's perfect, we're all fallible. And

   that is part of the growing process and we're here to help and support you. You're

   not a bad person because you did a bad thing. It's not a life sentence. So that's

   core to what we do with young people.

Daniella elaborated on her mindset as she approaches her work with students re-entering the comprehensive school after a DAEP placement:

   You can tell when they're ready to get rid of a kid from out of the school. I always

   say, "I see the good in that kid. You're going to have to show it's terribly, terribly,

   terribly wronggone," something like that, for me to say, "Yeah, kick him out. Let's

   get rid of them." I can't go there. Now, when I really feel it might be a better

   placement for a kid, I will say that. But I'm a person who says every day is a new

   day, like the Bible says. Every morning is new. Every time I see you, you're new to

   me. So, whatever you did, it doesn't matter. You're new to me every time I see you.

   "I know what you're all about, that you might have done something last week. I

don't want you to ever think that that's on my mind. "You might be a good doctor

one day". I tell them, I say, "I'll be looking for your name".

Sasha noted: *I have the ability to recognize that at the end of the day, you're still a*

child, and it is still my job to help you grow, and evolve, and mature. I don't have

a hard time forgetting the action that got you there, and not everybody can do

that. I'm able to wipe the slate clean, and we're here, let's move forward, and

what you did prior to isn't lingering in the back of my mind.

Sub-Theme 1C: Instill Hope: You're their lifeline.

Universally, participants viewed their primary goal in re-entry work was to

support students and to instill hope.

Sara: *I support. I assess the needs, adjust, and support where I can.*

Lisa Lynn: *"Ms. Lisa Lynn, you really think I'm going to graduate?" I said, "You*

going to graduate because Ms. Lisa Lynn is going to make sure you graduate."

Daniella: *You're their lifeline. You're the one who was still hopeful. You still say,*

"You can do this." When you find that one slimmer of that hope thing that they

want, and you try to help navigate them to get it. I'll say, "Yes, I've been trying to

help young kids in this system for 20 years." I say, "And I haven't given up hope,

so you're not going to give up hope in these next two years. You're not going to do

that."

Sasha: *They have to know that you believe in them and that they can, they have to*

know that you believe that they can be better. I can't tell you how many times I've

had former students say, "if it wasn't for you, I probably wouldn't have made it"

or "if it wasn't for you, I wouldn't be in college. I didn't see myself being able to

go to college until we sat down, and had these conversations. Whatever it takes,

but if I don't speak positive affirmations over you, then you may or may not see it

in yourself. I think we take for granted how much of an influence we have on these

kids, whether it's positive or negative, and we have to be intentional about

ensuring that it's positive.

Sub-Theme 1D: Relationships Matter: …you have got to get them connected to

somebody, to have a relationship with them in the school that keeps them coming back.

All participants indicated that the early establishment of strong, positive rapport

and meaningful relationships was fundamental to re-entry work.

Lisa Lynn indicated: *I have an open-door policy. So, if something's going wrong,*

come. You're [student] always welcome. I don't care what I'm doing. So, my

availability and keeping a good relationship are big practices for me.

As teachers struggle with student's re-entry post DAEP placement, Nina explains

to teachers, "*if you can't tell me who their grandma is, then you don't get to write*

them up. You don't know the kid, you have no relationship…".

According to Sasha, "*We have a plethora of resources, but they don't always*

work, for all the students. It takes knowing your kids and kind of navigating and

seeing what needs they have, and which resource we can best connect them to

that's going to serve them the way they need to be served."

Daniella explained, *I think the main thing still too yet, is they know, if I say I am*

going to be checking on you, and I do it every week... you may think these boys

don't care, they do. They do. I think that's the main thing.

In these participants' experience, their relationships with students alone were not enough to sustain the momentum that is necessary for re-entry work. Collaborative working relationships with other professionals and helping students to connect with other stakeholders was were essential post DAEP placement. Nina explains: …*you have got to get them connected to somebody, to have a relationship with them in the school that keeps them coming back*. When discussing a student on her caseload re-entering the home school after a DAEP placement, Lisa Lynn notes *If I'm not there, I'm having somebody check on him*. According to Sasha, her collaborative relationship with her principal supports her re-entry work: *I think married together, it works because it all comes together, but it also allows me to know what the administrator is saying and how he's helping that student, and the administrator to kind of see things through my lens and see how I'm helping that student. So, I think it works and that student sees us as a team. If they cannot get to me, they're comfortable with going to their administrator and knowing that it isn't going to necessarily mean more disciplinary action because they see us working together*.

Core Theme 2: Impediments

The second core theme to emerge developed as participants responded to questions related to supports, hinderances and the role of policy as it relates to re-entry work. This theme elicited thick descriptions from participants. Through the process of reflecting on lived experiences, participants described unique barriers to re-entry work. Within this core theme are five sub-themes. Each sub-theme is anchored by a participant's statement: (1) Combatting Symbolic Scarlett Letters, (2) Collaborating with

Parents, (3) Continuum of Access to Resources, (4) Training and (5) Zero Tolerance

Policies.

Sub-Theme 2A: Combating Symbolic Scarlett Letters: There is a stigma that they have
when they come back to the school with teachers…

Participants reported that they often struggle to help students secure a fresh start

with teachers upon return from a DAEP placement. Participants noted that teachers'

inflexibility, resentment and bias towards formerly DAEP-affiliated students impact re-

entry work. Daniella explained:

> *I have conversations with students and I say "Let's not let that one teacher take*
>
> *your whole life away." It's a system that you don't have control over, and I don't*
>
> *either. A lot of the teachers feel that their classroom is their classroom. I think*
>
> *they're [teachers] so rigid sometimes, that, "It's got to be this way." I'm not giving*
>
> *him no sweat." I said, "Look, I'll stay until four o'clock and sit here, and give him*
>
> *the test that he missed. Can I do that?" "No, I'm not giving him that test." Teacher*
>
> *inflexibility. I mean, come on.*

Tia noted, *I don't necessarily tell teachers stuff that's going on, even when kids*

come back from alternative school, because I really don't want kids to be judged. That's

very important for me. Lisa Lynn recalled her attempts to *let the kids and the teachers*

know we [they]have an opportunity for a fresh start when students re-enter the

comprehensive school after a DAEP placement. However, Lisa Lynn admitted that

That's hard. That's hard for the teacher.

In her reflection, Nina noted:

There is a stigma that they have when they come back to the school with the

teachers, because then they're already going to be labeled "that kid that got back

from [alternative school]"and the teacher is already mad because the teacher

had to spend all this extra time doing whatever modules, online stuff, so that the

student can stay on track and that's extra work for the teacher who then takes it

out on the kid.

In a final illustration of this sub-theme, Sasha recalled an experience with a

teacher that was harboring resentment towards a student re-entering the home school post

DAEP placement:

Just recently I had a teacher call me, last week, and said, "Oh, well, this student

has a 55 in my class and I don't think that it would benefit him any to retake the

course next year. What do you think I should do?" I said, "Well, I'm not sure

what you expect me to say, because I can't tell you how to grade. If that's what

you're calling for, I don't have an answer for you." I said, "If he has a 55, he's in

credit recovery range, so if you feel like he won't benefit from sitting in the class

again, he could possible qualify to enroll in summer school, or if you feel like you

want to give him additional work, or if there's some work you may not have

graded, or there's some extra credit points laying around. As the teacher, you're

responsible for that grade, I can't sway you one way or the other on that." Then

she said, "Well, you know what? I don't know. I'll see. He may just keep a 55,

because he was extremely rude to me, and he was disruptive in my class, and I

just felt like he didn't like me, and I left work many days frustrated at him,

because I feel like he hijacked my class, so maybe he just deserves this 55." And

so I said, "Well, let me stop you right there, because as a teacher, your job is to

grade the student based on the mastery of the content that you're responsible for

teaching him. You do not grade him based on whether or not you like him, or his

actions towards you, or how you perceive his personality. That is not at all fair

and I have a problem with that." She stopped and she said, "You know what,

thank you for telling me that. You're absolutely right. I apologize and I'm going to

do some soul searching, because I can't say that I have not done that previously

with other students.

Sub-Theme 2B: Collaboration with Parents: We're working with students and there is no support at home.

Emerging from the data was the influence collaboration with parents has on

participants' reintegration efforts. All participants shared accounts with parents that

significantly impacted their experience.

Nina contended that *worn out, tired parents* and *the lack of them being willing*

and able to collaborate often complicates her efforts to assist students with

reintegration. Nina recalls *There's one kid in particular, he was one of those*

frequent flyers and he had a bipolar diagnosis I think, but was self-medicating

with weed. And the mom was just at her wit's end and always trying to meet with

me to try to figure something out, but never in person, it was always on the phone.

So, I don't think she had access to either come up or she was working. So access

and availability can be an issue, it makes it hard to work with parents when

students get back.

Sasha indicated: *We're working with students and there is no support at home. The parents won't answer the phone, parents don't come to the readmit meeting. That's very difficult, because when you're trying to get the student reacclimated and you're trying to keep them focused and not to return back to the [alternative school], but you don't have parent support at home to reiterate what it is that you're doing at school. It's frustrating.*

Daniella: *These students are a lot of times from divorced families and the parents aren't getting along. You can just tell. Even when they come in for a meeting, to try to discuss the best option, you can see the tension and the aggravation between the two of them, which makes the kids aggravated and frustrated. That's why a lot of them act out. They want to punch a wall when they see their parents acting out in front of their counselor. You can just tell, you're trying to talk about their kid and they're cutting each other down like, "It's your fault," or, "If you had given them back to me and let me raise them ... " You hear all that in there, so yea, it makes it hard.*

Lisa Lynn: *The parents don't really have time to nurture these kids.*

Sub-Theme 2C: Continuum of Access to Resources: *We have a lot of resources.*; *I have these two hands and 27 years of experience. That's all I got. That's all I got.*

Access to resources that supported re-entry work were significantly unbalanced amongst participants. While Daniella, Sara and Sasha noted having a plethora of resources at their disposal, Tia, Lisa Lynn, Nina and Luther V reported that they had very limited access to resources to aid in re-entry work.

Daniella: *We have mentors. We have community mentors who have reached out. We try to pair them up with a male mentor that comes into the school. We do have one male counselor on our staff, so sometimes I will say, "Maybe you need to talk to Mr. [omit] over there. Maybe I'm not seeing it." So sometimes I refer to the male counselor."*

Sara: *There's just an array of resources that we can reach out to. We have mental health counselors here on the school grounds so if that need arises we can refer to the mental health counselor. We have a school psychologist, if that need arises we can reach out to them. Of course, it's going to be based on the student needs but I would say the number one resource that we have that we use most often is our social worker. We have something that we've been working on for I guess the past year and a half, that's our district transition team is what we have called it. The transition team consists of an administrator from the school, from the home school of the student, a career coach, career coach at the high school and career coach at the alternative school, a career development facilitator and social worker. That transition team I think they can include a teacher that the student had if they had a teacher for a good amount of time at the home school.*

Sasha: *We have a lot of resources. I mentioned our behavior interventionist and her role is twofold, her role is to work as mediator between student and teacher. We also have a district family intervention services department. They offer family intervention services, counseling, the counselor-interns actually work with our students, they're housed in our building. And then we have a mentor program. So, for students who are interested, because mentorship doesn't work if it isn't a two-*

way partnership, that is something that we have at our disposal if the students and their parents are interested. So, those are all things that we do, and then, like I said, definitely the resources that come along with triage. We have a social worker, a mental health counselor, a school psychologist, and then five school counselors....

When asked "*What resources do you have to support these students, support your work with them?*":

Lisa Lynn stated: *I feel like I have nothing*.

Tia: *As far as resources, we have mental health that comes in so I could do a referral. We have SRO, which I don't like to use because the district doesn't really have a true policy, well they do. The district policy is that if someone says it seems that they might kill themselves or thought they might or have any ideations, that they take them to the hospital in a police car. Yeah. Obviously a counselor didn't make that rule*.

Nina responded: *My gut, my therapeutic gut, just my relationship with them*.

Luther V: *I have these two hands and 27 years of experience. That's all I got. That's all I got.*

Sub-Theme 2D: Training: We do a lot of PD trainings but I don't know that we've done anything just for this population.

Upon reflection, participants were unable to recall any instances in which they received formal training as it relates to managing the multidimensional nature of re-entry work.

Sara: *In my graduate training we had classes that touched on resources and talking with students and reaching out to community resources. In our PD training, I'm trying to think back. We do a lot of PD trainings but I don't know that we've done anything just for this population.*

Tia: *The district did a PD where they gave us a whole bunch of data basically talking about how bad the kids were, like their offenses. Do I feel like that helped with transition? No. They're were like, "We just want you to know who your students are and how you can help them." I'm like, "This doesn't really help me because I could have looked that up in Powerschool myself."*

Sasha: *I finished my Masters in 2008. From 08 til now, in real practice and experiences, I can't say we covered alternative school in school. Maybe so, but nothing stands out right now in 2020 that I can pinpoint back to and say, oh, that was it. No. There's learning how to monitor and adjust, as a school counselor, to best serve the students.*

Lisa Lynn: *I have not had any training that I can think of about the alternative placements or students coming back. Not in my grad program or the district. It's been a lot of on the job training. But to say specifically targeted for the alternative school transition, I don't think I've ever been in any formal training.*

Luther V: *Honestly, there has been no training directed at reintegration. No, no training whatsoever. You do what you do.*

Sub-Theme 2E: Zero Tolerance Policies: It takes away the individual treatment of that child.

Further analysis of participants' lived experiences revealed the emergence of the perspective that zero tolerance policies hinder re-entry work; that is, zero tolerance policies equals zero flexibility. As Nina contends, *I think they put the kids in a deficit that they have to overcome already. The zero tolerance policies give no flexibility at all.* Luther V, Sara, Tia and Daniella also elaborated on their perspectives regarding zero tolerance policies:

> Luther V: *I've had those discussions with the Assistant Principal, a couple of the different APs, they'll take the kid over, same offense, same type situation, but different hearing officer. And, what I'm hearing in [this district] is that the hearing officers are often retired administrators who come back and volunteer their time. So those policies are not applied uniformly across the board. And there are some that suggest that it could be due to race, it could be due to gender, social economic status.*

> Sara: *I do feel like the no tolerance rules take away options. It takes away the individual treatment of that child. You can't base your decision off of their particular situation when you have a zero tolerance rule. The blanket doesn't always fit everybody.*

> Tia: *…there's also that subjectivity in why did this kid get three days? Why did this kid get five days out? Then why is this kid given 45 days, 90 days, or 180 days? Who decided that this... what happened? In our district, there are some schools that utilize the alternative school program more than others.*

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Daniella: *I mean, where in society, do we set a zero tolerance for anything? I mean, where in society ... I think that's what's gotten us all in this whole mess that we're in, it is because we feel there's zero tolerance. You take that same attitude and put it in the culture, in your neighborhood. You say, "I have zero tolerance for anybody stepping in my driveway. If you're going to get out on the street, zero tolerance if you have to step into my driveway to do it." It, to me, just doesn't make any sense. Zero tolerance.*

I know students feel it's an unfair policy. I tell the kids a lot of times, "I feel something, but this where we find ourselves. What do we need to do to navigate in this while we're here?" I think it has a major effect. Major issue.

In addition to delineating the ways in which zero tolerance policies complicate re-entry work, participants noted that zero tolerance policies were often insufficient in their capacity to reform student's behavior.

Luther V: *I don't think the zero tolerance policy has much effect on behavior though. With these young people and the impulsivity that they often deal with, they're not thinking of the policy if I do something again. They're not thinking of the results of their behavior. [Rio], for instance, he's over there already for substance abuse offense. The previous year, starts a year out over there, comes back and it was actually a homecoming dance where he shows up with this girl and he's intoxicated. He ends up back in trouble. With that, he wasn't thinking about the policy. It was a school dance and he got caught. So I don't think the policy necessarily affects a student's behavior or long-term success.*

Tia: *Policy doesn't change behavior, people do.*

Core Theme 3: Success

Collectively, participants were unable to settle on a singular definition of success. However, almost all participants agreed that comprehensive school reentry was not the pinnacle of success in re-entry work post DAEP placement.

Sub-Theme 3A: Success is Relative: … success is defined differently for each of us.

Convergent across all participants' lived experiences, success is a relative concept in re-entry work.

In Tia's experience, quantifiable metrics were no indicator of success. For her, observing students engaged in typical behavior is a true measure of successfully re-entry.

> Tia explains, *I feel like if they've gotten involved, if I see them at a basketball game or something like that, I feel like they're reintegrating back pretty good. I keep my eye out for them doing normal student things, if that makes sense. Sitting with the crowd at lunch, laughing and playing outside, doing TikTok's over in the corner. I look for them to be doing the norm.*

> For Luther V, *when behavior is better and corrected, when they are successful academically, whatever success is for them, if the 65 is successful in geometry, then that's success. If they pass all the credits they need to move on to the next grade, that's success. And of course, if they come back and they successfully graduate, that is definitely success. So academics, behavior and just seeing that maturity as it happens from 9th to 10th, to 11th to 12th, that is also success.*

> However, Luther V proclaims that ultimately, *success is defined differently for each of us. And I try to let that student dictate what success is for him or her*.

Sasha shared a similar sentiment, *I mean, for that person, for that kid, it was*

college but for another kid, it could be making it throughout the rest of the school

year without any referrals, or making a 60 and being promoted to the next grade,

and that's fine.

Nina was candid about the tensions that often exist between school counselors

engaging in re-entry work that is best for students and that which is best for educational

stakeholders. Nina wondered *… How do we push them into their own direction of life*

versus our district numbers? And what makes us look good in the schools is graduation".

For Nina, the absence of recidivism or participation in graduation was not an exclusive

marker of her, or her student's, success post DAEP placement. From Nina's perspective,

failing to consider long-term outcomes as it relates to re-entry work had material

consequences, she recalls:

> *…specifically with one kid, he was one of my [alternative school] kids, he kept*
>
> *coming in and out and I tried so hard with him the whole time he was in high*
>
> *school with me and we got him to graduate and that was a huge milestone for*
>
> *him. But then two months later he gets shot down in [city omitted] at a gas station*
>
> *buying drugs. And that kid, I carry him with me and he's one of the reasons that I*
>
> *went back to [graduate school], was to figure out where are we failing these kids*
>
> *at. We're missing them and we're letting them go down that road without doing*
>
> *anything.*

Sub-Theme 3B: Comprehensive School Re-Entry and Success Are Not Synonymous:
…we're more likely to get him graduated if we can keep him out of the building,
unfortunately.

Analysis of the data revealed that participants described comprehensive school re-entry as sometimes complicated and problematic for themselves and students.

Sasha: *We have a very, very intense master schedule, because we have two IB programs, dual enrollment program, an international arts program, and a health science program. I try my very best, when students return back to not place them in the classes with teachers or students that they may have had contact with, but it's difficult. With everything that we have going on, it's difficult. We even have kids and parents who request school choice to stay at the [alternative school] because our high school has about 1400 kids in it. Our [alternative school], of course, is very small and some of them just prefer the smaller setting, the one-on-one, because they can't focus and don't really have the discipline to not veer off and get caught up in things that are going to get them referred to the [alternative school].*

Daniella: *… they transition back to the regular school, but they [students] feel that the [alternative school] was a better environment.*

Sara: *I've noticed that some of the students that go to alternative school do better. They do better academically. That gives them a taste of success and I think that's awesome. For a lot of students that's the first time they've had that and I think that's one reason that they feel like it's better, they get attached to that structure because they see success for one of the first times and it's attached to that*

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structure. Just in my opinion I feel like that's one reason that the students stay or

return, they feel like they need that structure because they don't want to let go of

that success. Most of the students do better academically and again, it's got a lot

to do with the number of students in a classroom, the more individualized

attention, the teacher knows them by name, the administrators at the alternative

school know them by name. I'm not saying that our administrators here at our

home school don't try to do that but here at the home school we have over 1900

students. That individualized attention is almost turned off like a switch sometimes

and the teachers need to understand how that can affect the students.

Tia: *…we're more likely to get them graduated if we can keep them out of the*

building, unfortunately.

Core Theme 4: Race and Culture

The final core theme, race and culture, emerged as participants responded to

questions related to the role of race in re-entry work. Participants were also asked to

describe the demographic, social and emotional composition of the student they were

most likely to serve throughout the re-entry process. This theme elicited thick

descriptions and strong responses from participants as they shared how race, racism,

culture and class impacted their work and student outcomes. Within this core theme,

there are five sub-themes: (1) Race, (2) Cultural Disregard, (3) Cultural Leverage, (4)

Expectations and Treatment and (5) Student Profile. To support sub-themes, a direct

quote from participants is attached to each.

***Sub-Theme 4A: Race: I don't think race has a place in this because our
population is so diverse here. vs. How do I do this without being seen as an angry
woman of color?***

Participants' descriptions of their lived experiences as it relates to the role of race
in their re-entry work offered varied perceptions. For Sara and Sasha, race was
insignificant to the comprehensive school re-entry experience.

Sara*: I don't think race has a place in this because our population is so diverse
here. We have 11 different languages that are spoken here at our school. I mean,
we are very diverse and like I said, the population at the alternative school is
diverse. I mean, you can't just look at either of the schools and say, "This is
mainly one race or the other race."*

Sasha: *I don't think race plays much of a part, because the teachers that can be a
hindrance, they don't discriminate. They do not discriminate and they don't care
what color your skin is. I don't think it plays much of a part. I do think that we
have a larger amount of African American students being sent to the [alternative
school], so of course that number is going to be larger with them returning, but
we do have some Caucasian, Hispanic, Asian students that are sent as well, but
that doesn't play a part in how well they get acclimated back or how successful
they are.*

However, for five of the participants, their lived experiences with this
phenomenon have required them to contend with race and racism, not only as advocates
for students, but as people of color themselves.

Lisa Lynn: *It took a little bit of getting over the hump of racism. This year is my third year. Everybody's smooth, for the most part. I got a new principal. So some of the kids who, they still feel a little privileged, they would tell him, "I want this done and she didn't do it." And he would say, "Okay, I'll get it done." I had to tell him, "No, no, no." It took a good year and a half for them to understand this is how the ball rolls. I don't want you to mess that up. Because if so, here come the barriers again, when it deals with race. So, that was the main barriers. Just sometime Caucasian people can feel privileged and get disrespectful.*

Nina: *Some of the school counselor interns that I supervise, one in particular had a problem with the kid and they're in eighth grade, and they got sent out. It was a kid of color, the behavioral team came in and they were like, "Oh no, they need to go back to alternative school. We don't have a plan for them." I'm like, oh, okay. But if there was a White boy, you're in the highest paying district in the [omit], you wouldn't send them out. But even telling her, as a woman of color, we have to navigate those waters. "How do I do this without being seen as an angry woman of color?"*

Sub-Theme 4B: Cultural Disregard: It's a cultural difference. It's not a negative thing.

Throughout the analytic process, the discussion around race was often intertwined with class and culture. When asked explicitly about race and re-entry work, Nina recalled how she has witnessed cultural expression result in different outcomes for different students.

Nina: *I think like the dress code, if you do X amount of dress code violations you're out, and to me I'm like, well, you don't take culture into perspective. You*

could have a girl with all these, a goth girl, with plugs in her ears and dark

makeup, but then that's them expressing their culture. But you could have a kid

with, I mean, okay, maybe gang colors. But I mean, they're not allowed to wear

red, solid red, solid blue. And I'm like, why? It has to be a Polo type with a logo.

I'm like, okay, so that's fancy money to buy a shirt that's blue with a logo, versus a

plain tee from Walmart, so to me those were not, just not. Because the Polos had

a little pony or whatever, a little alligator or crocodile, if it was on brand, and

those were okay. But if it was a solid color with nothing on it, then that's a gang

affiliation…

Sasha did not center race or racism as significant to her re-entry work or a

student's ability to be successful post DAEP placement; instead she identified cultural

misunderstandings as a cause for student mistreatment. Daniella and Lisa Lynn shared

similar sentiments.

Sasha: *They don't always get a fair shake and then when you don't understand the*

culture, you don't understand that I'm not being disrespectful to you.

Daniella: *I would hate to say that I don't think race matters. I do think we have a*

lot of work to do with helping teachers and administrators understand that

cultural differences aren't negative. You know what I'm saying? It's a cultural

difference. It's not a negative thing. Just because he walks like that, or just

because he comes in high fiving or a little bit loud. Little Black boys, or young

Black men, or teenage boys, can be a little bit ... They're active and they're lively.

That's not saying they're wrong. I think they just need to understand that we've got

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style to our communication. We've got style to how we might act, or laugh, or

talk. Just appreciate that.

Lisa Lynn: *I think at this point, after this school year, I do think they need some*

type of culture training or something. Like PDs about the various cultures. Or

even being aware of African American cultures. Because some things that I

wouldn't deem disrespectful, they deem disrespectful. I think that's really

important, as far as teachers in my building. And having a little bit more patience

with the student.

Sub-Theme 4C: Cultural Leverage: *I think I understand them better than I would*
students who come from privilege.*

Many of the participants did not attempt to divorce their re-entry work from who

they are, fundamentally, as cultural beings. Participants recalled instances where they

utilized cultural familiarity as a resource in their work.

Luther V: *We have one African American administrator AP. And so, I remember*

a young man coming back and we go into the conference room to do the behavior

contract with him and his mom. And you know how we have those kitchen

conversations, now boy, this is the second chance for you. And so she and I will

tag team and just have that down home dirty black folk around the picnic table

conversation with the kid, while at the same time, letting them know that we're

here for you, you run into anything, you come see me or you go see her. We want

you to be successful. You know those conversations. We have those and I think

they help, it helps the kids know that they've got someone in their corner in the

building…

Sasha: *I come from a very small town, we have one stoplight and one grocery store, everybody knows everybody, and I think I understand them better than I would students who come from privilege. And then also, a lot of my colleagues don't look like them and they don't understand them, so the kids don't always get a fair shot when it comes to expressing themselves and how they feel and not feeling judged. I can separate how you deliver the message from the core of the message*.

Daniella: *For those that I know that transition back, have a tough time, I give them that latitude. I give them that latitude. Like I said, they'll come in, they'll cuss a bit, and I say, "I can do a little bit of cussing, but I'm not going to take too much shit."*

Sub-Theme 4D: Expectations and Treatment: …there's a greater expectation that White students are going to be successful once they return.

This sub-theme was mentioned nine times across six interviews. Participants perceived that educators' expectations and treatments differ for students of color and white students.

Lisa Lynn: *It's a majority of them African American kids that go to [alternative school] from my school. I work in a population where, let's see how nicely to put it, my black kids, they don't understand that they can't act like that down there, or they're going to end up at the alternative school. There's no, "Don't do that. Let me talk to you again." They're going to send you back to the alternative school. Like this year, I had one senior who, I knew he was going to end up there. COVID-19 saved his life because he was going to end up back at the alternative school. Because students don't really understand that you have to control your*

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mouth. You need to live a different type of life, and not really be like the White

children that are there. Because your result is not going to be like their result.

Sasha: *I think with African American students, there are more referrals that are*

written, because teachers may brush off those actions of a White kid, or they get

more chances.

Luther V: *I feel that there's a greater expectation that white students are going to*

be successful once they return. I've had white students who are honors and AP

students who've gotten in trouble and gone over and spent down their time and

come back. And the expectation is that they're going to be fine now. Whereas I see

African American students who go and come back and I feel that the expectation

is that he or she is still trouble, got to keep an eye on them. And if you would ask

me for concrete evidence of that, I could only say that I picked that up from

conversations with teachers about the students.

Sub-Theme 4E: Student Profile: I feel like there's a group.

For Sara and Luther V, the students they were most likely to serve via re-entry

work met no patterned criteria.

Sara: *You can't say that it's mainly white males. You can't say that it's mainly*

black females because it's not. It is completely an array of mixed demographics.

There are females, there's males, there's African Americans, there's Caucasians,

there's Asians, Latinos, Hispanics. A complete array of students. I mean, it really

surprises me that it's just a complete mixture.

Luther V: *So on my caseload, the majority of mine that go over there and return*

are white kids.

Although some divergence was present as it related to the racial and gender profile, the majority of participants, as it relates to formerly DAEP affiliated students, offered a more homogenous description of the students and issues that they are most likely to encounter in re-entry work.

Lisa Lynn: *They don't have that home structure that is really needed to help them be successful. The only other thing I think, is the systemic family issues, a lot of them need some family counseling, and they don't get it. They don't. A lot of times, I have tried my best to say, "I think family counseling would help this whole situation." It would help them not be so angry, or not be so angry to get back into this situation where you all are just saying every day, he's running out the house, police are called. He comes to school mad, now he's got no time for school. Something is not right even at home.*

Daniella: *It's going to be a male student. It's going to be a student who does have some home life issues. It's mainly going to be African American males, where I work, a few Caucasian, but majority male, for me. In the three years I've been at this school, I don't think I've had a female student, Black or White.*

Sasha: *Most of them are African American, male. Most of them do have IEP or 504s. The few females that usually end up at the [alternative school] end up there for fighting each other. For the boys, more so drug possession, blatant disrespect, continuous, but the buildup of disrespectful actions and things of that nature.*

Tia: *And again, like I said, I feel like there's a group. You've got your black males. Then you've got your poor white males at my school that I feel they're targeted just in a different kind of way. Some of them also have some learning disabilities.*

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Sara: *We are dealing with children. I mean, we are at a high school level but we're dealing with children and if the children have grown up in an environment where mom and dad have always done drugs then that's a problem.*

Luther V: *I've got a young man who was involved in a fight and has a history of some aggressive behaviors. And after meeting with his mom, he's another one. I think his fatherlessness, dad's not in the home and mom probably overcompensates and he's got some anger issues that come out inappropriately. This is common. And I'm trying to get to that nerve, that thing that causes issues, whether it's no father or stepdad or abuse or drugs or whatever it might be, depression, anxiety, whatever it might be.*

This investigation was undertaken to better understand the phenomenon of re-entry work through the lens of the secondary school counselor. To provide participants with the necessary space to describe their experience, an inductive stance was employed (Glesne, 2016). Through vivid descriptions and detailed accounts, participants were able to answer the primary research question for this study (i.e., What are the lived experiences of school counselors working with students re-entering into the comprehensive school environment after a mandatory DAEP placement?). Participants' perceptions of their role and responsibilities were congruent with those outlined within the ASCA National Model (2019). Participants believed that they, along with other relevant stakeholders, were responsible for maximizing students' opportunities for achievement via supportive and advocacy measures. In their re-entry work, participants engaged in academic planning/goal setting, short-term counseling, collaborated with families/teachers/administrators/community and advocated on behalf of students to

facilitate student success post DAEP placement. Participants' accounts of their experiences added an important context, context that was vital to understanding re-entry work with secondary students after a mandatory DAEP placement. Participants viewed themselves and students as more than avatars. Many participants expressed the notion that re-entry work was difficult, both professionally and personally. Teachers, administrators, *bad systems*, racism, stigma and restrictive policies make the facilitation of re-entry onerous. Much like the students they serve, participants noted that deficiencies within their schools, districts and personal knowledge were not always conducive to effective re-entry work.

Although convergence was evident in the findings, school counselors are not a monolith. School settings and size, interpersonal dynamics and personal experiences color and layer re-entry work. No one definition of success exists. While participants were able to recognize gaps and shortcomings, they resigned themselves to the reality that no one solution will remedy all the issues surrounding re-entry work. Instead, school counselors perceived that healthy rapport, the use of self, serving students holistically and choosing to see the best in students were their best resources.

Within this phenomenological paradigm, participants' recollections of their situated, immediate activities and encounters in everyday experience helped to illuminate their perceptions and experiences. By better understanding participants' first-hand accounts and impressions of living as a secondary school counselor engaged in re-entry work, service design and delivery may be positively impacted.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, data collected from interviews and a focus group was analyzed using phenomenological methodology (Moustakas, 1994). Emerging from participants' accounts were four core themes that captured the lived experiences of school counselors engaged in re-entry work with students post-DAEP placement. Core beliefs, perspectives and experiences were highlighted. In Chapter Five, I summarize the findings of this investigation and explain its relevance. Implications, limitations, considerations and recommendations for future research conclude the chapter.

Table 4.1 Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Race	Exp	CACREP	State	Solo/Team	Caseload
Daniella	58	F	AA	20	Yes	SC	Team	200
Lisa Lynn	42	F	AA	6	Yes	SC	Solo	363
Luther V	59	M	AA	21	Yes	SC	Team	270
Nina	35	F	AI/AN/His	7	Yes	TX	Team	600
Sara	43	F	W	1	Yes	SC	Team	328
Sasha	35	F	AA	11	Yes	SC	Team	120
Tia	36	F	AA	5	Yes	SC	Team	370

Table 4.2 Core Themes and Supporting Quotes

Core/Sub Themes	Supporting Quotes
Core Theme 1: Functions and Beliefs	
Sub-Theme 1A: Administrative vs. Clinical	• *They're back, you get them in the class, fix their schedule, send them on their way. vs. I meet with them for counseling for 30 minutes a few times in that first month.*
Sub-Theme 1B: Belief in Redemption	• *You are not a bad person because you did a bad thing.*
Sub-Theme 1C: Instill Hope	• *You're their lifeline.*
Sub-Theme 1D: Relationships Matter	• *...you have got to get them connected to somebody, to have a relationship with them in the school that keeps them coming back.*
Core Theme 2: Impediments	
Sub-Theme 2A: Combating Symbolic Scarlett Letters	• *There is a stigma that they have when they come back to the school with teachers...*
Sub-Theme 2B: Collaboration with Parents	• *We're working with students and there is no support at home.*
Sub-Theme 2C: Continuum of Access to Resources	• *We have a lot of resources.* • *I have these two hands and 27 years of experience. That's all I got. That's all I got.*
Sub-Theme 2D: Training	• *We do a lot of PD trainings but I don't know that we've done anything just for this population.*
Sub-Theme 2E: Zero Tolerance Policies	• *It takes away the individual treatment of that child.*

Table 4.2 Core Themes and Supporting Quotes

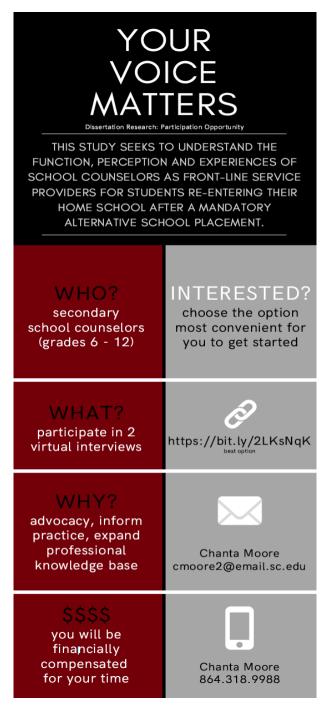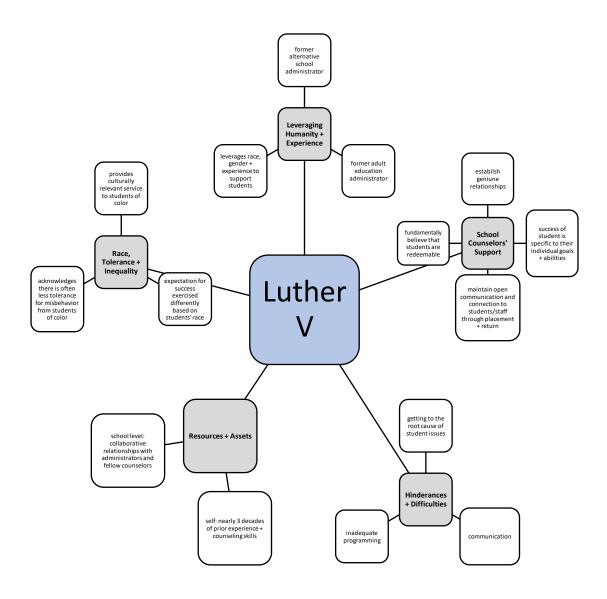|	
Core Theme 3: Success	
Sub-Theme 3A: Success is Relative	• *… success is defined differently for each of us*
Sub- Theme 3B: Comprehensive School Re-Entry and Success Are Not Synonymous	• *…we're more likely to get him graduated if we can keep him out of the building, unfortunately.*
Core Theme 4: Race and Culture	
Sub-Theme 4A: Race	• *I don't think race has a place in this because our population is so diverse here.* • *"How do I do this without being seen as an angry woman of color?"*
Sub-Theme 4B: Cultural Disregard	• *It's a cultural difference. It's not a negative thing.*
Sub-Theme 4C: Cultural Leverage	• *I think I understand them better than I would students who come from privilege.*
Sub-Theme 4D: Expectations and Treatment	• *…there's a greater expectation that White students are going to be successful once they return.*
Sub-Theme 4E: Student Profile	• *I feel like there's a group.*

Figure 4.1 Recruitment flyer

Figure 4.2 Conceptual map

Chapter 5: Discussion

This descriptive phenomenological study was conducted to gain a better understanding of the perceptions and experiences of school counselors as front-line service providers for students re-entering the comprehensive school environment after a mandatory participation in a DAEP. Although there is a vast amount of research on initial DAEP placements, there is very limited research related to comprehensive school re-entry and none that focus exclusively on the perspectives and experiences of school counselor. Overall, the findings of this study offer a unique glimpse into the lived experiences of school counselors engaged in re-entry work with secondary students post DAEP placement.

Summary of Findings

Functions and Beliefs

All participants described a distinguishable contrast in their role throughout the re-entry process. For participants, transition and reintegration seemed to be two separate processes, and their role in each stage was markedly different. According to collective descriptions, transition was focused on the act of students physically returning to the home school after a mandatory DAEP placement; this part of the process typically encompassed formal hearings with district level personnel or re-admit meetings with school-level administrators. Beyond academic advisement/planning, participants described being disengaged/disregarded in the transitional process or being involved in an exclusively, administrative capacity.

Participants noted that once a student was physically back in the comprehensive school setting the process of re-integration began. According to participants' descriptions, reintegration was the process of re-acclimation, the academic, social and emotional adjustment that students undergo once they have physically returned to the home school after a mandatory DAEP placement. Participants indicated that in the reintegration phase of the re-entry process, their role shifted from administrative to more clinical. Although no formal protocol or procedure seems to exist, many participants served and monitored students' process through informal, but consistent, "check-in" meetings.

Through their offerings, participants described core beliefs that they thought were central to their re-entry work: belief in redemption, the instillation of hope and the belief that relationships matter. Each participant thickly described holding a belief that students were more than the offenses that precipitated their mandatory DAEP placements. Collectively, participants centered the belief that students possess the ability to overcome and improve as paramount to their experience and work. Participants were intentional about detaching past actions or mistakes from students' worth or ability. In this sense, participants seemed to prioritize personhood and absolution.

Furthermore, participants believed that the instillation of hope was a central component of re-entry work. Even when students struggled to share their perspective, participants described encouraging students to believe that they could transcend their DAEP placement, go on to graduate and lead successful, productive lives. In these participants' experiences, the early establishment of rapport and maintenance of meaningful relationships with students post-DAEP placement were significant.

Participants explained how significant relationships with students helped them to make decisions regarding programming and intervention. By getting to know students personally, participants were able to see students from a more holistic perspective. Participants also acknowledged the importance of collaborative relationships as their relationships alone were often inadequate for the level of students' needs. Many participants described their efforts to connect and partner with other professionals. Similar to the findings presented by Cole and Cohen (2013), participants perceived that collaborative relationships helped to support successful re-entry post DAEP placement. By ensuring student access to social capital, participants help bridge the disconnect that often exists between students and the comprehensive school.

The findings revealed within these core and sub-themes do not appear in extant literature. Prior to this investigation, the function and core beliefs of school counselors as it relates to the re-entry work with students post-DAEP placement were largely unknown. The vivid details provided by participants help to uncover an important element regarding the essence of participants experience with this phenomenon (Whittemore et al., 2001).

Impediments

Through their accounts of their lived experiences, participants identified several factors that made the facilitation of re-entry work onerous. Participants reported experiencing difficulties when helping students establish a fresh start with teachers upon their return to the comprehensive school after a mandatory DAEP placement. Participants acknowledged that once students had transitioned back to their home schools, many had to contend with the symbolic scarlet letters figuratively attached to them because of their association with a DAEP. From their perspective, teachers were often inflexible in their

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policies, practices and attitudes towards them and students post DAEP placement. Many participants recalled instances where teachers were rigid and unwilling to make any concessions to support students' progress. Others identified occurrences where teachers were resentful of the additional duties sometimes assigned to them in support of formerly DAEP-affiliated students. Moreover, several participants described accounts where it had been necessary to directly challenge a teacher regarding the bias and discrimination displayed towards students.

In addition to difficulties with teachers, collaboration with parents sometimes acted as an impediment to re-entry work. Participants cited an array of reasons that partnering with parents could be difficult. In their accounts, participants explained that it could be difficult to get in contact with parents, that parents sometimes had unreasonable expectations and that some parents were disconnected not only from the re-entry process but from their students in general. While participants expressed frustration with the difficult nature of collaboration with parents, they did not condemn parents. There were obvious considerations given to contextual factors that limited or prevented parental engagement; participants did not assume that parents were disinterested or disengaged by mere choice. Many participants noted that parents were often exhausted from managing multiple responsibilities, contending with transportation issues that hindered their ability to be physically present, working schedules incongruent with school hours, or navigating untraditional parenting arrangements and dissensions in co-parenting. Because participants recognized the importance and power of parental presence and involvement, participants appeared resolute in their willingness to continue to try to engage parents in the re-entry process despite the difficulties.

In their accounts, participants reported navigating two extremes; some having an abundance of resources at their disposal, while others had very limited access to services, programming and interventions. Sasha and Sara noted having access to an array of resources to support their re-entry work: mentoring programs, mental health counselors, social workers, in-district family counseling, etc. To the contrary, in the absence of formal resources, other participants revealed that they often relied on more intrinsic means of support. Nina and Luther V noted their reliance on their experience and *therapeutic gut*, leveraging their instinct and professional familiarity to help guide their work. For solo and less experienced counselors, meager access to resources presented as particularly problematic. Lisa Lynn, the only participant in this study to work as a solo counselor, expressed that she sometimes worried that her limited access to resources in her rural community potentially stunted her students' progress. Lisa Lynn explained that she often wonders if students' outcomes would be improved if she was better positioned to connect them with more supportive programming and people. The offerings of participants as it relates to resources and access is an important point to consider as it relates to re-entry work.

According to participants' descriptions, regardless of access to resources and hinderances related to collaboration, the dearth of focused professional development and training further exacerbated re-entry efforts. Only two participants could recall a discussion of DAEPs in their graduate training. While all participants could recollect occasions of district-level professional development, no participants could recall receiving professional development specifically related to DAEP transition or comprehensive school re-entry. In instances where participants did attend professional

development sessions regarding formerly DAEP affiliated students, participants

expressed that the information that they received was uninformative, stereotypical and

presented from a deficit-based perspective. Similar to their experiences with limited

resources, participants highlighted their reliance on on the job training or learning by trial

and error. While in the absence of adequate training, participants found these methods

helpful and indicated that reactive learning required more time and left them and students

more susceptible to avoidable mistakes. Overwhelmingly, participants shared a similar

sentiment; focused training related to comprehensive re-entry was needed.

Thick descriptions of participants' lived experiences revealed the emergence of

the perspective that zero tolerance policies, both pre and post DAEP placement, are often

subjectively and arbitrarily enforced, are applied with bias, inhibit flexibility and restrict

student success. Participants' accounts labeled zero tolerance policies as ineffective and

problematic to re-entry work. Many noted that the utilization of zero tolerance policies

significantly impacted their ability to advocate for students. From the participants'

perspective, zero tolerance policies impeded their ability to solicit consideration for

students as individuals specifically as it related to contextual factors or extenuating

circumstances that may have contributed to students' misbehavior. Participants asserted

that zero tolerance policies constrain their re-entry work and facilitated inequitable

outcomes for students but ultimately did not prevent, reduce or improve student

misconduct.

Findings in this core theme and accompanying sub-themes echoed the work of

earlier researchers (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Carver et al., 2010; Hoffman, 2014;

Kaffenberger, 2006; Kennedy et al., 2019; Mullen & Lambie, 2013; Skiba, 2000;

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Vanderhaar et al., 2014). Many reported that all students faced school-related barriers post DAEP placement. In review of those earlier works, according to these scholars, some of these barriers included disadvantageous school and course placement, deficient pedagogy, being placed in schools and classes with teachers that were unwelcoming and not favorable to their academic/social success, being subjected to bias, discrimination and unsupportive polices as a prolonged consequence of their DAEP placement. Moreover, schools continue to employ zero tolerance policies to address student misconduct.

Although the goal of this investigation was not to align with or challenge existing research or theory, details captured via participants' accounts of their experiences revealed undeniable resemblances. However, the findings of this investigation go further than the existing literature by unveiling impediments that comprehensive participants, not just students, face as they engaged in re-entry work. In this sense, the findings here do more than echo earlier research, they extend it. Extant literature acknowledges achievement and opportunity gaps for students (ASCA, 2019). Moreover, ASCA (2019) calls upon participants to address these achievement and opportunity gaps so that they may facilitate equitable outcomes for all students. Through thick descriptions, participants uncovered that they, too, must contend with gaps and face disparities and inequities in their attempt to answer this professional call. Participants disclosed that they are acutely aware of the bias and discrimination students face as many recalled their own difficult experiences with teachers when attempting to advocate for students. Participants explained that they, too, contended with individual and systemic factors that impact re-entry work, partnering with parents and other relevant stakeholders, a lack of information and training and unsupportive policies (Kaffenberger, 2006). Much like formerly DAEP-

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affiliated students must deal with deficient pedagogy, participants must navigate limited access to resources and training. Finally, similar to students once mandated to attend a DAEP, participants engaged in re-entry work must traverse the hazards of zero tolerance policies. In this sense, the essence of participants' experiences uncovered unique parallels between participants' experiences and that of their students re-entering school after a DAEP placement.

Success

Viewed from both a rehabilitative and punitive lens, for school districts, comprehensive school re-entry has been the greatest indicator of student success post-DAEP placement (Carver et al., 2010; Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016). However, for participants, success as it relates to re-entry work and student outcomes is not so easily measured. Through participants' accounts, tensions were revealed. Participants were aware of district and school level metrics for success (returning to comprehensive school, the absence of recidivism, graduation). However, participants' perceptions of success were much more nuanced. Success was relative to each circumstance, each student and often considered long-term factors beyond graduation. For some participants, successful re-entry work was not quantifiable but could be observed when witnessing students gain the ability to engage in or return to activities deemed developmentally normal for students. For others, success involved helping students self-define what success personally meant for them; a definition that was not anchored in adult-led goals. However, perhaps most poignantly, success meant helping students stay alive after graduation. Regardless of the individual offerings, overwhelmingly, participants subscribed to the idea that success, as it relates to re-entry work and student outcomes,

was a relative concept that could not be defined or confined by any singular definition or metric.

For a variety of reasons, participants indicated that comprehensive school re-entry could be complicated and problematic. Participants noted that logistical and scheduling constraints presented challenges for both students and participants. Many remarked that students returning to the comprehensive school craved the more supportive structure, smaller class sizes, more manageable curriculum and individualized attention provided by DAEPs. In these participants' experience, students were often able to experience a success that was foreign to them in the comprehensive school setting; a success that was fleeting and often difficult to duplicate upon return. Participants perceived that students often preferred DAEPs. For participants, this preference was easily understood.

The findings reported in this sub-theme are similar to those reported by Kennedy-Lewis et al. (2016); participants believed that students received needed support and intervention at DAEPs. In these participants' experience, remaining or returning to a DAEP was not a dereliction of duty. Instead, it strengthened the likelihood of students' academic and long-term success. Further, the findings divulged in these core and sub-themes provided a new perspective as it relates to success and re-entry. While the majority of school districts highlight comprehensive school re-entry and graduation as aims for students post-DAEP placement (Carver et al., 2010), these goals disregard context and individuality. The findings included within this theme uncover incongruence between the objectives and commitments of school districts and participants. For school districts, success can be measured in graduation and recidivism rates. However, for participants and the students that they serve, success is much more elusive and

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significantly more nuanced. Fundamentally, comprehensive participants seem to hold the belief that the true measuring stick for their work is their ability to assist former-DAEP affiliated students in acquiring and applying their personal definition of long-term success. Prior to this investigation, the concept of success post DAEP placement was only vaguely understood. The vivid details provided by participants helped to shed new light on an important aspect of this phenomenon (Whittemore et al., 2001).

Race and Culture

Participants' descriptions of their lived experiences as it relates to the role of race and racism in their re-entry work resulted in an assortment of perceptions. For some participants, race was an insignificant factor as it relates to the comprehensive school re-entry experience. For a minority of participants, serving in a diverse comprehensive school setting and being able to identify students involved in DAEPs that were not African American minimized or eliminated the impact of race on the re-entry process. However, for the majority of the participants, their lived experiences with this phenomenon required them to contend with race and racism, not only as advocates for students but as people of color themselves. In addition to describing the racism and discrimination that students often face upon their return, participants indicated that they also had experiences that paralleled that of their students. Lisa Lynn was candid about the racism that she encountered as one of few people of color on staff at her rural school. Lisa Lynn vividly recalled instances where white parents used race-based language in a disrespectful manner and challenged her competence and professional decisions as it relates to re-entry work. Nina recounted times that she has had to consider how her advocacy for students of color would be received by white administrators. Even in

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instances where Nina recognized unfair and unequal treatment of students of color, as she prepared to challenge those prejudices, she paused to consider how her doing so may potentially give others undue permission to view her in stereotypical ways. In this way, there seemed to be no middle ground for participants as it relates to race and re-entry work. For participants, race was either inconsequential or had an undeniable influence on their experience.

Throughout participants' accounts, their responses as it relates to race were often intertwined with class and culture. Although not all participants directly centered race, racism or discrimination as problematic to re-entry work, several identified cultural misunderstandings as a cause for student mistreatment and poor student outcomes. In instances where teachers did not understand a student, their behavior or expression was immediately labeled as bad or problematic. In a poignant illustration, Nina described accounts in which students of colors were labeled as gang-affiliated and punished for wearing solid blue or red t-shirts void of any recognizable branding, while others students were viewed as expressing their culture when they presented with ear plugs, dark makeup and goth girl type clothing. Also, as Sasha asserts, when students of color refuse to concede or demand reciprocal respect in their interactions with adults, their behavior is often viewed as disrespectful and results in a struggle for power. Many participants shared the perspective that teachers and administrators do not take culture into perspective when interacting with or disciplining students, and this negligence often results in poor outcomes for students of color. Consistent throughout the findings related to this sub-theme, many participants remarked that teachers and school administrators

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could benefit from cultural sensitivity training and a more intentional focus on cultural regard.

For participants, it was impossible to divorce their perspectives regarding this phenomenon from who they are, fundamentally, as human beings. Nearly all participants described ways in which they, knowingly and unknowingly, leveraged their race/ethnicity, gender and communal familiarity, as well as their professional and personal experiences, to color and support their work with students transitioning back into the home school environment post mandatory DAEP placement. In an effort to mitigate harm and support progress, participants used personal resources to facilitate relevant re-entry work. Luther V explained how he takes a communal, familial approach in his work with students, particularly students of color. In collaboration with another African American administrator, he hosts intimate, culturally relevant interventions with students upon their return. Sasha discussed how her upbringing in a small, rural community and her understanding of language and expression unique to students of color have helped her to better understand student's perspectives. Evident in this sub-theme is participants' inclination not to disassociate the personal from the professional. As evidenced by their thick descriptions, participants were not afraid to be counselor, mother or father-figure and/or extended family to students/families in need.

Emerging from participants' accounts was a recognition that educational stakeholders had greater expectations of success for white students versus students of color post DAEP placement. Participants indicated that in their experience there was a willingness by educators to excuse the disruptive behavior of white students but hold students of color to higher behavioral standards while having lower expectations for their

success. Whether overtly or covertly, there was a presumption amongst educators that upon return, white students had been rehabilitated and were capable of successfully reacclimating into the comprehensive school environment. To the contrary, students of color did not receive the same benefit of the doubt. Participants noted that upon comprehensive school re-entry post DAEP placement educators continued to view students of color as threats to school order and requiring perpetual surveillance.

Moreover, participants perceived that educators' treatment of students differed depending on students' race. As Lisa Lynn explained, *students of color need to live a different type of life, and not really be like the White children ….* Because as Sasha noted, *teachers may brush off those actions of a white kid, or they get more chances*. Participants recalled numerous instances where white students were offered multiple opportunities to rectify misbehavior before being penalized, whereas students of color were more swiftly and harshly punished for similar offenses. Throughout participants' accounts, perceptions of contradictory expectations and treatments of students based on race were evident. Of interesting note, while participants clearly identified differential expectations and treatments amongst white students and students of color by educators, in their recollections, the majority of participants did not make a distinction in the race of the educators perpetuating this differentiation.

Participants noted that the students most likely to be involved in the transition and re-integration process were students of color, male, from lower social-economic backgrounds and/or served via special education programs (i.e., IEP, 504). Repetitive minor infractions (i.e., failure to obey, cell phone violations, dress code violations, etc.) and infrequent but major offenses (i.e., fighting, drugs, inappropriate sexual behavior,

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etc.), in their experience, were the most common infractions responsible for students'

referral/return to DAEPs. Participants reported that these students were more likely than

others students on their caseload to struggle academically, to have familial issues (i.e.,

divorced parents, domestic violence, etc.), to live with a grandparent and to struggle with

undiagnosed/untreated mental health and substance abuse issues.

Findings from this current investigation extend existing literature. Many of the

characteristics outlined by these participants are well documented in the literature

(Kennedy et al., 2019; Lange & Sletton, 2002; Lehr et al., 2004; Miles & Stipek, 2006;

Mullen & Lambie, 2013; Tsang, 2004; Vanderhaar et al., 2014). However, these findings

go beyond demographic descriptors; they provide further context to better understand the

disproportionality. Findings from the current study also add weight to existing literature

by endorsing the idea that students matching these demographics are not inherently more

troubled. As evidenced across participants' accounts, these students are more likely to be

unsupported, targeted and discriminated against by teachers and other educational

stakeholders. Lastly, these findings help to unearth the role that race, racism, culture and

differential expectations and treatment have on students, participants and re-entry work

post DAEP placement.

Theoretical Considerations

The overrepresentation of Black and Brown students in DAEPs is well

documented in both school buildings and literature alike; participants' accounts

reinforced this notion. By employing CRT as a theoretical framework, I was able to better

consider how cultural and interpersonal aspects of the educational experience manifest

within the process of comprehensive school re-entry work (Solórzano, 1998).

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In their reflections, participants acknowledged that educators enforced different standards and punishments for students of color and that this differentiation imposed consequences that are detrimental to former DAEP students' re-entry and long-term success. Participants were also able to identify instances in which educators' biased and discriminatory behavior impacted not only the experiences of their students but them as well. This was especially evident in the sub-themes specific to race and cultural disregard. However, for some participants, race nor racism was significant or problematic to re-entry work or the re-entry process.

Failing to see color is not a neutral stance (Solomona et al., 2005; Wilder, 1999). According to Thompson (1998), "colorblindness…is parasitic upon racism: it is only in a racist society that pretending not to notice color could be construed as a particularly virtuous act. In a society that is both culturally diverse and racist, colorblindness is a willed ignorance of color, that although well intended, insists on assimilating the experience of people of color to that of whites" (p. 534). It is not enough for school counselors to be able to name racist acts; they must acknowledge how they themselves contribute to pervasive deficit perspectives, maintain the myth of meritocracy, perpetuate the myth of colorblindness and maintain the standing of institutional racism. Furthermore, as illustrated in this work and the work of Kennedy et al. (2019), having teachers and administrators of colors, does not, in and of itself, positively impact students' experience or outcomes. In order to do effective re-entry work, school counselors must consider the ways in which they have been silently and subconsciously trained to maintain the superiority of the majority.

Implications

Findings presented in this study shed light on the lived experiences of comprehensive participants engaged in re-entry work with students after a mandatory DAEP placement. School counselors' functions and perspectives within re-entry work have been largely understudied. As evidenced by works such as Cole and Cohen (2013) and Kaffenberger (2006), in instances where school reentry and the role of the school counselor have intersected, it has been approached from the perspective of school reintegration after a prolonged absence due to illness or incarceration, not after students' mandatory placement into a DAEP. Prior to this investigation, literature pertaining to DAEPs focused primarily on reasons for referrals and DAEP placement, not what occurs post-DAEP placement and not the ways in which school counselors influence that process. This study takes one step towards filling that gap by demonstrating specificity in the experiences and practices of re-entry for one group of secondary school counselors. The findings from this phenomenological study offered new insights and had implications for both school counselors and counselor educators.

Implications for School Counselors

School counselors are professionally obligated to advocate for vulnerable students and to address obstacles that hinder students' growth (ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors, 2016; ASCA Mindset and Behaviors for Student Success, 2019; ASCA National Model, 2019). Although certainly an aspect of the aforementioned obligation, re-entry work is the responsibility of all educational stakeholders and should not be conducted in isolation. While school counselors are uniquely trained to address the barriers that collectively impact students' social, emotional and academic development,

the individual and systemic issues embedded in comprehensive school re-entry post DAEP placement requires an interdisciplinary approach. In collaboration with mental health counselors, social workers, psychologists and others, school counselors should be prepared to provide trauma-informed and culturally relevant care and wraparound services. Operating within an interdisciplinary team, and from a holistic perspective, school counselors are better positioned to respond to their professional obligations by meeting the needs of the whole student.

A similar approach should be applied when working to address the systemic and institutional barriers that impact re-entry work and student outcomes. Through consultation and psychoeducation, school counselors are well positioned to support teachers and administrators as they shift towards and adopt beliefs similar to those described in the findings of this investigation; beliefs that anchor and guide re-entry work in a positive manner. In collaboration with counselor educators and community-based leaders, school counselors should develop and facilitate relevant workshops, trainings and educational material to be executed at the school level. Although relevancy is relative, school counselors may consider educating others on topics such as applied multicultural sensitivity, restorative justice practices and ways in which emotional and mental health issues may manifest as dysregulated or disruptive behavior. School counselors hoping to effect meaningful change may do so by helping stakeholders recognize the ways in which their behaviors, biases, beliefs and school policies perpetuate discrimination and limit progress. In preparation for this work, school counselors would do well to commit to the continual refinement of their personal awareness, knowledge and skills as they become subject matter experts as it relates to the aforementioned topics.

To support re-entry work, many school counselors utilize mentoring programs. In conjunction with, or perhaps as. an expansion of existing mentoring programs, school counselors should consider developing school-based programs loosely modeled after that of the court appointed special advocate (CASA) or guardian at litem (GAL) volunteer initiatives. Typically assigned by a judge, CASA and GAL volunteers serve as advocates on behalf of vulnerable children; they remain an active part of each case until it is closed. The CASA/GAL best-interest advocacy model has five main goals for its volunteers: learn, engage, recommend, collaborate and report. The aim of re-entry work is certainly not to criminalize the process of comprehensive school re-entry. However, when infused into mentoring programs, this model may be beneficial to school counselors and the students and families that they serve. In collaboration with others, school counselors can train mentors to specifically support students and families throughout the reintegration process. In addition to helping students and families navigate the bureaucracy of transition and re-acclimation (i.e., hearings, re-admit meetings, behavioral contracts, policy, due process rights, etc.), mentors can support re-entry work by remaining connected with the students and families for multiple school years. In this sense, because school counselors are with students/families for a finite number of years, by revamping mentoring programs with intentionality, school counselors are able to provide a better continuity of care. School counselors have acknowledged that parents play an essential role in student outcomes but that engaging parents can be difficult. School counselors have also acknowledged the disparities that exist in the access to resources. By infusing a best-interest advocacy approach into their mentoring programs, school counselors may be better equipped to bridge the gap between school and home.

For some students, comprehensive school re-entry, not the initial DAEP placement, is the biggest threat to their success. If comprehensive school re-entry is not be best option for students and in some instances proves to be harmful, school counselors should work with stakeholders to normalize individualized transition and to develop alternatives. When the physical return to a comprehensive school jeopardizes a student's progress and long-term success, school counselors should consider staggered re-entry options (Moore et al., 2020). Also, although not all students returning from a DAEP qualify for special education services, school counselors could consult and collaborate with district level personnel to determine the appropriateness of home-based or homebound services on a temporary bases until a more suitable and sustainable plan can be developed.

Considering the guidance provided via CRT, school counselors should also partner with building and district administrators to incentivize comprehensive school re-entry. If school counselors are able to help decisionmakers recognize the ways in which effective comprehensive school re-entry benefits their goals (i.e., interest convergence), perhaps school counselors stand a chance to impact the policies that impact them and students. Given the typical composition of the student profile most impacted by comprehensive school re-entry (i.e., racial/ethnic minority, financially underprivileged, served in special education programs) and the reality that many of these students face bias and discrimination, school counselors should consider the larger implications of their work. In addition to viewing re-entry post-DAEP through a CRT lens, school counselors should consider incorporating an anti-bias, anti-racism approach. Undeniably there is a social justice/advocacy component to re-entry work that cannot be ignored.

To truly address achievement and opportunity gaps and facilitate equitable outcomes for all students, school counselors must remain committed to personal and professional growth. In the absence of focused graduate training and professional development opportunities, school counselors should seek clinical supervision. Whether via peer supervision or consultation with a licensed clinical supervisor with a background in school counseling, consistent participation in clinical supervision stands to improve self-efficacy and ultimately outcomes for school counselors and students.

Implications for Counselor Education and Supervision

Findings from this study support CACREP standards mandating school counselors-in-training be prepared to facilitate school transitions and that they have the skills to strategically examine the links between social, familial, emotional and behavioral problems. The CACREP standards that dictate that counselor education programs inform counselors in-training on matters related to social and cultural diversity and counseling and helping relationships are also supported by the findings of this investigation. Counselor educators then have a responsibility to develop curricula that prepare school counselors-in-training to effectively serve the diverse populations that they will inevitably encounter throughout their work. This can only be accomplished through inclusive pedagogy and exposure to instructional material that inform students not only on traditional components of comprehensive school but alternative education as well. Although CACREP standards require that counselor education programs offer graduate students at least one course in multicultural counseling, counselor educators should be intentional about infusing multicultural training into all aspects of school counselors-in-training's academic and practical experiences. In doing so, school

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counselors may be better prepared to identify and confront overt and covert impediments and prejudices that inhibit and oppress students.

Results from this investigation also highlight the need for counselor educators to actively invest in school and community-based efforts. If teaching, research and service are the cornerstones and mantra of academia, service cannot be an afterthought. At the school and community levels, counselor educators should provide professional development opportunities for school counselors in the field. After completion of graduate training, school counselors must often contend with limited access to academic journals and current research. Counselor educators are well positioned to deliver trainings and workshops specific to comprehensive school re-entry. In addition to addressing the service component of their responsibilities, counselor educators can enhance learning opportunities for not only practicing school counselors but for school counselors-in-training as well by inviting them to help develop and facilitate the aforementioned seminars. In this way, these efforts address both teaching and service. Counselor educators should also encourage school counselors-in-training and doctoral level students to engage in research, particularly participatory or action-based research. By doing so, counselor educators are helping to fill the existing gap in the professional literature while training the next generation of clinicians and counselor educators to develop research agendas that are timely and meaningful. Lastly, at the national level, counselor educators should work with national organizations such as ASCA to develop a position statement regarding comprehensive school re-entry and the role of the school counselor post DAEP placement. In collaborating with school administrators and school counselors, counselor

educators can help to develop a well-articulated stance that offers a uniformed position on the topic.

In summary, based on the aforementioned implications, the following action items are recommended: (1) school counselors should offer six to eight week small group options for teachers and administrators specific to comprehensive school re-entry; these small groups should run concurrently with small groups for students re-entering the comprehensive school post DAEP placement, (2) school counselors should be intentional about tracking data specific to formerly DAEP affiliated students (i.e., length of DAEP stay, assigned teachers, discipline referrals, parent contact, etc.) in order to provide targeted support and to demonstrate how deliberate support impacts referrals, recidivism, school disruptions and outcomes and (3) school counselors should develop partnerships with clinical supervisors, community leaders and local universities to strengthen their skills and reach as social justice advocates. In applying these recommendations, school counselors move from the implications of this work to tangible actions.

Future Research

Despite the contributions of this investigation, a paucity of literature surrounding comprehensive school re-entry after a mandatory DAEP placement and the school counselor remains. As such, future studies should investigate exemplar school counselors to help uncover policies, practices and programs to establish a baseline for universal best practices. Equipped with a better understanding of best practices, future quantitative investigations should focus on implementing and examining training, interventions and consultative measures specific to best practices.

Through this investigation, it was discovered that success within the context of this phenomenon involves more than improved graduation rates and reduced rates of recidivism; what it means to be successful from the perspective of the student remains largely unknown. Therefore, employing a mixed methods design, future studies should research how students define and actualize success post mandatory DAEP placement. Finally, future studies should consider the utilization of participatory action and action methodology to better understand and change the process of re-entry for the better.

Limitations and Considerations

As a responsible researcher, acknowledging limitations is essential. In doing so, consumers may consider how findings presented in the investigation are relevant to them. In addition to presenting known limitations, it is my aim to inform readers regarding my decision-making as it relates to participant recruitment strategies, data collection methods and the role of the researcher and context surrounding this investigation.

In this investigation, participants were recruited using snowballing sampling. In an effort to expand the participant pool, this technique allowed eligible participants to recommend potential participants. What occurred as a result of this recruitment strategy was a participant pool consisting primarily of school counselors of color. While this may have been due to happenstance, this recruitment strategy undoubtedly impacted the makeup of participants and may have limited access to participation for some who may not have been known to initial participants.

The use of web-based software has been well documented in literature (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011; Zamawe, 2015). Due to the restrictions associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, virtual modalities were the only viable means of data collection. Although

the incorporation of technology facilitated the ability to complete this research, one has to wonder how or if face-to-face exchanges would have altered participants' interactions with me, their response to questions and ultimately the findings of this investigation.

While the focus group provided an essential opportunity to engage in collective member checking and data triangulation, only 6 of the 7 participants were present. Despite all participants being given the opportunity to engage in a second member checking interview, there is no way to know if or in what ways the absence of the one participant had on the dynamics of the focus group or the findings of this investigation. Furthermore, due to other commitments, one member of the research team was unavailable to attend the focus group. Because only one member of the research team was present for the focus group, all three research team members were not involved in the analysis of the focus group content. Much like the absence of the one participant from the focus group, there is no way to know how that absent research team members' observations or offerings could have impacted the findings of this investigation.

As a woman of color, researcher and school counselor, my worldview is an amalgamation of my culture and experiences. Armed with this awareness, every attempt was made to maintain and establish trustworthiness via various strategies (i.e., bracketing, the use of a research team, peer debriefing, reflective journaling, member checking and thick descriptions). Despite my best efforts, I acknowledge that my personal and professional experiences offered resources and insights that likely influenced the analytic process. Having served students involved in the re-entry process, my experiences could have potentially biased my interpretations and understandings, and ultimately, the findings of the study. Although it was my aim to take a curious stance

when engaging with the data, how and to what extent my prior knowledge, assumptions and judgments were introduced and impacted the study's results must be considered (Creswell, 2006).

Lastly, the context in which this study was undertaken must be given proper consideration. Throughout this investigation, several significant world events transpired: (a) the outbreak of the novel coronavirus which resulted in a global pandemic and public health crisis and (b) the incessant killings of unarmed people of color at the hands of law enforcement prompting widespread civil, political and social unrest in the United States and abroad. I describe these details under this section as there is truly no home in this text to discuss these facts. In retrospect, there is no way for me to know or to quantify with any degree of certainty the impact that the aforementioned events had on this investigation or its findings. What I can report is that the conversations regarding race and policy shifted after the public release of video footage capturing George Floyd's murder at the hands of police. There were times when participants could not contain their anger or their heartbreak. What I do know for certain is that participants were not immune to the professional and personal impacts of the coronavirus. As participants discussed students' struggles with the re-entry process, they found it impossible to ignore their own fears and anxieties. Many of them were preparing to re-enter the same buildings they left just months earlier yet in a global pandemic, this territory felt so unfamiliar they were worried that they would be unable to find their way. When you are trained to support, it is difficult to ignore pain. The role of the researcher requires the development of new reflexes, ones that I am still developing. No matter how much I attempted to distance myself from participants and from the realities of the world during

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this time, throughout this research, I was constantly reminded of my humanity and the humanity of the participants. Similar to classrooms and the therapeutic relationship, research is a microcosm of the larger world. There is no immunity. Absolute objectivity cannot exist in this space. With humility, I leave it up to consumers to decide if this context acts as a limitation or if it colors the research in a way that adds unforeseen depth and humanness.

Despite these limitations and considerations, this study was still worth undertaking, and it is my hope that these offerings extend the conversation and study of school counselors' commitments, struggles, sacrifices and resilience as it relates to re-entry work.

Conclusion

This investigation explored the perceptions and experiences of secondary school counselors engaged in re-entry work with students returning to the comprehensive school after a mandatory DAEP placement. Important insights were gained that expanded the understanding of school counselors' functions, beliefs and struggles. It is my hope that this body of work will help school counselors, counselor educators and researchers consider the unique and multidimensional realities of re-entry work.

As a school counselor and researcher who has served formerly-affiliated DAEP students, I am pleased with the increased insight that I have acquired through my immersion in this work. My understanding of the perspectives, challenges and hopes of these school counselors has been expanded and my eyes have been opened to the ongoing need for research and support. Moving forward I hope this work also challenges others to truly and meaningfully engage in the process of re-entry as this work matters.

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Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Initial Interview:

1. Describe the process of transition and reintegration as it occurs in your building/district.

2. Tell me what it is like to be a school counselor that works with students re-entering the comprehensive school after a disciplinary alternative.

3. What, if any, impact do you as the school counselor have on student's reintegration outcomes?

4. As it relates to reintegration, how do you determine if you have been successful in helping a student transition back into the comprehensive school environment after a mandatory DAEP placement.

5. What factors serve as supports as you work with students reintegrating into the comprehensive school environment after a mandatory DAEP placement?

6. What factors hinder your work with this population?

7. How would you describe/characterize the students on your caseload that have re-entered the comprehensive school after a mandated DAEP placement?

    a. Possible prompt: Consider standard demographics (race, gender, etc.) and other unique characteristics.

8. What, if any, role does race play in a student's successful re-entry into the comprehensive school?

9. What, if any, impact does zero tolerance policies have on your work with students re-entering the comprehensive school after a DAEP placement?

10. Whether in your graduate training program or at post-graduate professional development conferences or seminars, what training have you received that supports your work with this population?

11. What else should I have asked you about your experiences working with students reintegrating into the comprehensive school after a mandatory DAEP placement?

Second/Member Checking Interview:

1. After reviewing your files, what questions, if any, do you have as it relates to the content of your first interview?

2. After reviewing your files, what concerns, if any, do you have as it relates to the content of your first interview?

3. Are there any additional comments you would like to make as it relates to the files presented to you or your work with this population?

Appendix B: ePre-Screening Questionnaire

UNIVERSITY OF
South Carolina
College of Education

Name *

First Name   Last Name

Email *

example@example.com

Phone Number *

Please enter a valid phone number.

Are you a certified/licensed school counselor? *

○ YES
○ NO

Are you currently working full-time as a school counselor? *

○ YES
○ NO

Do you serve students in a comprehensive public school (i.e., not private, virtual, parochial or otherwise alternative)? *

○ YES
○ NO

Do you serve students at the secondary school level (i.e., grades 6 - 12)? *

○ YES
○ NO

Are you employed in a United States school district where enrollment in a disciplinary alternative education program/school is involuntary? *

○ YES
○ NO

Do you have direct experience working with one or more students transitioning/re-entering the comprehensive school environment after a mandatory DAEP placement? *

○ YES
○ NO

Which of the following activities have you engaged in when serving students transitioning/re-entering the comprehensive school after a mandatory DAEP placement? *

☐ Academic Advisement/Planning

☐ Advocating for Student(s) at Hearings/Review Meetings

☐ Consulting with Teachers on Student(s) Behalf

☐ Consulting with DAEP Personnel on Student(s) Behalf

☐ Consulting with Parents on Student(s) Behalf

☐ Individual Counseling

☐ Small Group Counseling

☐ I have not engaged in any of the aforementioned activities.

Number of Activities Selected

[   ]

Letter of Invitation

Please carefully review this document.

Dear Participant,

I am Chanta Moore, a School Counselor and Doctoral Candidate in the Educational Studies Department at the University of South Carolina. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my PhD in Counselor Education and Supervision and I would like to invite you to participate.

I am studying the function, perception and experiences of school counselors as front-line service providers for students returning to the comprehensive/home school after a mandatory disciplinary alternative school placement. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a pre-screening questionnaire to determine your eligibility and a demographic survey about your age, gender, race, Masters' degree certification, years of school counseling experience, your status as a counselor in your building (i.e., whether you are a solo counselor or team counselor) and the number of students on your caseload.

As a part of your participation, should you choose to move forward, you will also be asked to meet for two separate interviews. During the interviews you will be asked questions about your role, your perceptions of students and your experiences engaging in this work. You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. Each interview will take place virtually (i.e., Zoom), at a mutually agreed upon time. The interview(s) should last between 30 and 60 minutes. The interviews will be audio/video recorded so that I can accurately transcribe what is discussed. The recordings will only be reviewed by members of the research team and will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

Participation is confidential. At the start of the first interview, you will be asked to select a pseudonym to identify yourself. Study information will be kept in a secure location. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your/school identity will not be revealed.

You will receive $10.00 for participating in each interview for a total of $20.00 for the study.

We are happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me (864.318.9988, cmoore2@email.sc.edu) or my faculty advisor (Dr. Dodie Limberg, 803.777.6311, dlimberg@sc.edu).

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you would like to participant, please select 'Next' to be directed to the Demographic Questionnaire and to schedule your first interview.

Please note, that a copy of this letter will be emailed to you.

Regards,

Chanta Moore, EdS, NCC, LPC/I

College of Education | Department of Ed Studies

Demographic Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

State of Practice *

Age *

Gender *

○ Female   ○ Male

○ TransFemale   ○ TransMale

○ Gender Non-Conforming   ○

Race *

☐ American Indian/Alaska Native   ☐ Asian

☐ Black and/or AfricanAmerican   ☐ Caucasian/White

☐ Hispanic   ☐ Native Hawaiian/PacificIslander

☐

Masters' received from CACREP accredited program. *

○ Yes   ○ No   ○ Unsure

In my building/school *

○ I am the only counselor.

○ I am a member of a team of school counselors.

Number of students on my individual caseload. *

Schedule Interview

You may choose a time that is convenient for your schedule.

Appendix C: Individual Narrative

Luther V

Leveraging Humanity + Experience
Luther V is a 59-year-old, African American male with nearly three decades of experience in counseling and education. Throughout his career, Luther V has worked as a School Counselor and Administrator in both the comprehensive and alternative school setting. To understand Luther, it is impossible to divorce his perspective regarding school reentry from who he is, fundamentally, as a human being. Luther V leverages his Blackness, his manhood and his professional and personal experiences to color and support his work with students transitioning back into the home school environment post mandatory DAEP placement.

Recognizing academics as only one part of the student experience, Luther V prioritizes the emotional and social needs and struggles of students' pre/post comprehensive school transition. As the only male counselor in his department and this research project, he was the only one to explicitly discuss fatherlessness and the emotional impact that absence has on students' lives. Luther seems to be keenly aware of the impact that home/life instability (i.e., fatherlessness, parental disputes, grandparents as sole custodial providers, substance use/abuse, untreated mental health, etc.) can have on initial DAEP placements, reentry experiences and long-term success. Luther describes the transformational change that can take place when students have their *love tanks filled*. In an effort to mitigate harm and facilitate student progress, Luther V is not afraid to be School Counselor, father-figure and/or extended family to students/families in need.

Luther V takes a communal, familial approach in his work with students, particularly students of color. Similar to the *village mentality* often employed in child rearing practices within communities of color, Luther V invites students and other stakeholders of colors to participate in intimate, culturally relevant interventions. Luther V recalls, *We have one African American administrator AP. And so, I remember a young man coming back and we go into the conference room to do the behavior contract with him and his mom. And you know how we have those kitchen conversations, now boy, this is the second chance for you. And so she and I will tag team and just have that down home dirty black folk around the picnic table conversation with the kid, while at the same time, letting them know that we're here for you, you run into anything, you come see me or you go see her. We want you to be successful. You know those conversations. We have those and I think they help, it helps the kids know that they've got someone in their corner in the building...* Luther V not only leverages his manhood to assist students, he chooses not to disassociate his race from his work.

Race, Tolerance + Inequality
Upon reflection, Luther V was reminded of instances that he has chosen to hold White administrators accountable by helping them recall their willingness to excuse the disruptive behavior of White students and of their tendency to hold Black students to higher behavioral standards while having lower expectations for their success. As Luther V put it, "*I feel that there's a greater expectation that white students are going to be successful once they return. I've had white students who are honors and AP students who've gotten in trouble and gone over and spent down their time and come back. And the expectation is that they're going to be fine now. Whereas I see African American students who go and come back and I feel that the expectation is that he or she is still trouble, got to keep an eye on them. And if you would ask me for concrete evidence of that, I could only say that I picked that up from conversations with teachers about the students…in conversation with teachers, teachers often come to me, I won't say often, but in some cases come to me with their negative concern sometimes about an African American student who's come back from the alternative school and I don't get that as much with white students*". From Luther V's perspective, both racism and the subjective enforcement of zero tolerance policies negatively impact academic experiences and outcomes for these vulnerable students. Luther contends, *I've had those discussions with the assistant principal, a couple of the different APs, they'll take the kid over, same offense, same type situation, but different hearing officer. And, what I'm hearing in [this district] is that the hearing officers are often retired administrators who come back and volunteer their time. So those policies are not applied uniformly across the board. And there are some that suggest that it could be due to race, it could be due to gender, social economic status. Parents go to the hearing and they're given an opportunity to say things. So it's probably for various reasons that those policies are not applied the same across the board.*

Two Hands and 27 Years of Experience
Though breakdowns in communication between educational stakeholders, scarce programming/training and, at times, his inability to uncover root causes for issues that may be limiting or hindering student's progress/success, Luther V remains resolute in his desire to meet students where they are and to support them as they work to determine where they ultimately want to go. Equipped with "*two hands and 27 years of experience*", Luther V uses his biggest resources, himself and his collaborative relationships with other stakeholders, to promote positive reentry experiences for students returning to the comprehensive school environment after a mandatory DAEP placement. Luther V's experiences heighten and expand his understanding of what it means to truly support student's school reentry.

Despite the obstacles Luther V and his students face, his core beliefs seem to keep him and his students moving forward. Throughout the years, Luther V has supported many students in their effort to thrive post DAEP placement. However, according to Luther V, students should be allowed to define the specifics of success for themselves. Years of experience seems to have convinced Luther V that student success is a relative concept; he notes *success is defined differently for each of us. And I try to let that student dictate what success is for him or her*. Moreover, perhaps even more poignant is Luther V's

conviction that School Counselors subscribe to the belief that all students are redeemable. Luther contends "*in today's society, kids face so much and can be beat up on so much verbally and otherwise that it's important for them to understand, nobody's perfect, we're all fallible. And there is part of the growing process and we're here to help and support you. You're not a bad person because you did a bad thing. It's not a life sentence. So that's core to what we do with young people.*"