10-21-2025

School Counselors Lived Experiences with Executing Child-Centered Play Therapy in High-Diversity Elementary Schools

Ruth DeVito
Walden University

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Health

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Ruth Elena DeVito

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Shelli Friess, Committee Chairperson, Counselor Education and Supervision Faculty
Dr. Melissa Earls, Committee Member, Counselor Education and Supervision Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2025

Abstract

School Counselors Lived Experiences with Executing Child-Centered Play Therapy in High-Diversity Elementary Schools

by

Ruth Elena DeVito

MA, Argosy University, 2022

BA, University of South Florida, 2016

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Counselor Education and Supervision

Walden University

November 2025

Abstract

Minority students are often omitted from social, economic, cultural, and political life due to ethnicity or poverty, which increases their risk of adverse childhood experiences, such as abuse or neglect, and increases their likelihood of discrimination that can obstruct their normal childhood development, including academic performance. Child-centered play therapy (CCPT) is a multiculturally appropriate approach that creates a safe and nonjudgmental environment, supporting adjustment and coping. However, many school counselors are not using CCPT. The research question was as follows: What are the lived experiences of school counselors who use CCPT in their work at high-diversity elementary schools? This study used a hermeneutic phenomenology to understand the experiences of six school counselors from different states with CCPT training and experience. Through a Gadamerian analysis, themes were identified to support the needs of school counselors working in high-diversity elementary schools. Results showed CCPT benefits with diverse students and highlighted school counselor barriers that hinder their ability to fulfill their roles within the schools, such as a lack of partnerships in practice, administrative burdens, balancing demands and availability, resource limitations, and gaps in professional preparation. Moreover, results emphasized that by heightening the use of CCPT, students will also improve their overall experiences and well-being. Future research is recommended to focus on male counselors and the newer credential of school-based registered play therapists. Additional studies would also benefit from measures that will further strengthen the use of CCPT and inform policy and program development.

School Counselors Lived Experiences with Executing Child-Centered Play Therapy in High Diversity Elementary Schools

by

Ruth Elena DeVito

MA, Argosy University, 2022

BA, University of South Florida, 2016

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Counselor Education and Supervision

Walden University

November 2025

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my parents, who have been supportive and encouraging all my life. They have always inspired me to reach my goals and look towards a brighter future. Through their sacrifice and their own hard work, I am the woman I am today. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for your love, guidance, and belief in me. I love you both.

Acknowledgments

First, I want to thank God for allowing me to reach this milestone in my life. Again, thank you, Mom and Dad, for being there for me with love and support. To my husband, whose support and patience have sustained me from the start of this journey. Thank you for your unconditional love. Thank you to my sister, who has always been my personal cheerleader. To my mother and father-in-law, who have shown me nothing but love and kindness. Thank you to the six participants in my study. Without your willingness and conversations, this would not have been possible.

Finally, I want to thank my committee members, Dr. Shelli Friess and Dr. Melissa Earls. I would have been lost without your knowledge, support, guidance, and commitment in helping me get to the finish line. Dr. Friess, I appreciate the times we had our meetings and the encouragement. You kept me accountable and motivated. Dr. Earls, I appreciate your insights and feedback that helped strengthen my study. You both have been an inspiration throughout this dissertation process. I feel so lucky to have found such wonderful mentors.

Table of Contents

List of Tables v

List of Figures vi

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study 1

Introduction 1

Background 2

Problem Statement 4

Purpose of the Study 5

Research Question 6

Conceptual Framework for the Study 6

Nature of the Study 7

Definitions 7

Assumptions 11

Scope and Delimitations 11

Limitations 12

Significance 13

Summary 13

Chapter 2: Literature Review 15

Introduction 15

Literature Search Strategy 16

Conceptual Framework 16

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts 17

The Importance of Play Therapy 17
The Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences 20
Minority Children and Schools 22
Academic Success and CCPT 23
Importance of School Interventions 25
School Counselors and CCPT 26
American School Counselor Association and CCPT 27
Caring School Communities 29
Current Research 31
Summary and Conclusions 33
Chapter 3: Research Method 35
Introduction 35
Research Design and Rationale 35
Central Concepts 36
Role of the Researcher 40
Methodology 41
Instrumentation 43
Data Collection 43
Data Analysis Plan 44
Issues of Trustworthiness 45
Credibility 45
Transferability 46

Dependability 46
Confirmability 47
Intra-Coder Reliability 47
Ethical Procedures 48
Summary 49
Chapter 4: Results 50
Introduction 50
Setting 50
Demographics 51
Data Collection 52
Data Analysis 53
Evidence of Trustworthiness 56
Credibility 56
Transferability 57
Dependability 57
Confirmability 57
Results 58
Emerging Concept 1: School Counseling 59
Emerging Concept 2: CCPT 60
Emerging Concept 3: Caring School Community 62
Theme 1: CCPT Benefits 65
Theme 2: SC Barriers 69

Summary 73
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations 75
Introduction 75
Interpretation of the Findings 75
Theme 1: CCPT Benefits 76
Theme 2: SC Barriers 79
Limitations of the Study 82
Recommendations 83
Implications 84
Conclusion 86
References 88
Appendix A: Recruitment Email 99
Appendix B: Interview Guide 101

List of Tables

Table 1. Participants' Demographics 52

Table 2. Summary of Key Categories and Aligned Themes 55

List of Figures

Figure 1. Data Analysis Plan 54

Figure 2. Resulting Themes and Supporting Subthemes 56

Figure 3. School Counseling Roles and Realities 60

Figure 4. Insights into the Role of CCPT in School Settings 62

Figure 5. Building Blocks of a Caring School Community 64

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

In the realm of school counseling, understanding the complicated interplay of interpretive methods and contextual meanings is paramount. This hermeneutic study explored child-centered play therapy (CCPT) in elementary schools, seeking to uncover deeper insights into school counselors' (SCs) use of CCPT. This study was needed to understand SC's experiences of any barriers or challenges that might be stopping the use of CCPT within the schools and the benefits SCs experienced.

Given that children spend a significant percentage of their time at school, it is unsurprising that schools are the most effective places to deliver mental health services to them. This shows the important role SCs play in advocating for and ensuring the implementation of services that address children's developmental and emotional needs (Van Horne et al., 2018). This discovery can lead to various positive social implications, including enhanced socioemotional development, reduction in behavioral issues, improved academic performance, stronger school-community relationships, advocacy and policy change, awareness and training, and equity in mental health services (Pereira & Smith-Adcock, 2013).

In this chapter, I will summarize the research literature as it relates to the scope of the study. Next, I will discuss the research problem and purpose of the study. I will then state the research question. Additionally, I will explore the conceptual framework for this study, including the logical connections among key elements from the literature. The

nature of the study will be discussed further. Lastly, I will discuss the assumptions, delimitation, limitations, and significance of the study.

Background

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are the continued exposure of children to potentially traumatic events that could have immediate and lifelong impacts. ACE exposure remains very prevalent within the United States. Risk factors include economic hardship, divorce or separation, living with a family member with mental health or substance abuse issues, domestic violence, community violence, and natural disasters. Higher ACE rates have been linked with greater risk of school learning and behavioral problems, such as repeating a grade, absenteeism, and lower school engagement (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018). In 2017, the National Survey of Children's Health, excluding economic hardship, reported that about 30% of children experience one ACE and 14% experience two or more. However, the 2018 Child Trends brief, including economic hardship, reported that about 45% of children have experienced at least one ACE. Of these children, 61% were Black, 51% Hispanic, 40% White, and 23% Asian (NCSL, 2022). ACEs lead to behavioral, cognitive, and emotional impairments because they affect the structure and function of a child's developing brain. Research shows that minority children are at an even higher risk of developing ACEs. A consistent relationship with a caring, attentive, and predictable adult can act as a shield to ACEs, increasing a child's ability to self-regulate, and ultimately increase the child's resilience (Post et al., 2019).

Play therapy (PT) is a form of treatment geared towards children by utilizing the language of play. PT is the balance of symbolic play and language expression. As the child plays, they learn more adaptive cognitive means to handle future difficulties (Kool & Lawver, 2010). Elementary-age children have a limited ability to think abstractly, so PT is a beneficial intervention to use because play is how children naturally express themselves. It also allows for a strong therapeutic alliance between the child and the counselor. Clients who feel understood by their therapists have been known to have better therapeutic outcomes (Van Horne et al., 2018).

A popular approach to PT is Child-Centered Play Therapy (CCPT). As the name indicates, CCPT is based on the person-centered theory that says that the child is capable of self-enhancement if provided with a safe, non-threatening environment. Previous literature has demonstrated the effectiveness of CCPT in elementary schools. It has been linked with greater academic achievements and improved externalized behaviors and relationships (Ray et al., 2015). For example, it has demonstrated positive outcomes for children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, aggression, and self-concept (Van Horne et al., 2018). Studies have also shown a between emotional development and academic success. CCPT has been proven to be a developmentally appropriate intervention because it is sensitive to cultural issues, and it allows the child to explore their world and resolve problems using their natural capacity for self-direction and growth (Post et al., 2019).

However, a gap remains between the implementation of CCPT and traditional school counseling practices. School counseling often focuses on academic guidance and

behavioral interventions, which do not fully address the underlying emotional and psychological issues that can impact a child's academic and social development. As stated above, CCPT is a specialized therapeutic approach designed to meet the unique social and emotional needs of children through play. Despite having training, SCs may be faced with a lack of resources to effectively utilize this method (Pereira & Smith-Adcock, 2013). Bridging this gap not only requires dedicated professional development but also support for SCs to incorporate CCPT techniques, ensuring a more holistic approach to student well-being and learning potential.

Furthermore, to help address the needs for additional credentialing, the Association for Play Therapy (APT) established a new qualification specifically for SCs, the school-based registered play therapy (SB-RPT) credential, requiring SCs to undergo clinical supervision of their play therapy work (Van Horne et al., 2018). Given that this new credential was established in 2016 (APT, n.d), there has not been enough time for an extensive body of research to be developed. In fact, researchers may still be in the early stages of studying its effectiveness and impact. This also means that there may be a smaller pool of practitioners using it, leading to fewer opportunities for research. As more SCs pursue and apply the credential, more data will become available for study.

Problem Statement

The school is the most effective setting to deliver mental health services to children. School counselors have an active role in advocating for and ensuring that adequate services are put in place to meet children's developmental and emotional needs. However, despite the literature that points towards CCPT as an effective intervention to

use in schools, many do not practice it (Van Horne et al., 2018). Additionally, social, emotional, and behavioral issues can hinder academic achievement. By recognizing and supporting the social and emotional development of young children through the therapeutic approach of CCPT, their learning potential in the classroom is maximized. Addressing the mental health needs of children is crucial for their ability to absorb academic information (Blanco et al., 2017).

Pereira and Smith-Adcock (2013) conducted a quasi-experimental study that showed that knowledge of CCPT significantly increases school counselors' skills and attitudes toward children. Indeed, CCPT has been shown to be a viable option for use in the school setting to help promote the social and emotional needs of children. However, it has been found that their tasks of helping children succeed in school can be overshadowed by the different demands of the job, i.e., school politics, administration, or collaboration with faculty and parents. By shining light on how CCPT in high diversity schools can improve children's socioemotional development, this hermeneutic inquiry study could help bridge the gap between CCPT and school counseling.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the needs of school counselors while highlighting the benefits that CCPT has on students. I was able to understand the experiences of school counselors' use of CCPT with minority children and to explore what needs to be done for these benefits to continue in the schools. After interviewing and collecting the stories of SCs at high diversity elementary schools throughout various states, I am able to describe the SCs specific needs that limit their use

of CCPT within the schools, given adequate training. As a result of this study, it is easier to understand the barriers they have within the schools when conducting CCPT and emphasize the need for multiculturally appropriate interventions in schools.

Research Question

RQ: What are the lived experiences of school counselors who use CCPT in their work at high diversity elementary schools?

Conceptual Framework for the Study

The framework that guided this study was hermeneutic phenomenology. Hermeneutics is the study of understanding how an individual from one culture understands the experiences of an individual of another culture or period. It considers all aspects of the human experience: cultural, spiritual, and physical. Hermeneutics arose from the lack of understanding of texts. In 1989, Hans-Georg Gadamer further developed hermeneutic phenomenology. His approach was not just that of further developing its method or interpreting texts. Instead, his focus was on all modes of understanding by addressing three questions: How is understanding possible? What kinds of knowledge can understanding produce? What is the status of this knowledge? In other words, it is about hearing beyond just words? Gadamer believed that the process of understanding is more than just getting inside an individual's head; it is a fusion of horizons, and the interpreter's meaning becomes revised because of the hermeneutical conversation with their original understanding (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). This results in a deeper grasp of our shared traits instead of being concerned with problems of method. It allows the interpreter to become mindful of their own assumptions or prejudices, thus allowing for

genuine understanding. By utilizing a hermeneutic approach, I was able look deeper into the experiences of SCs.

Nature of the Study

This study relied on a hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenological approach. Hermeneutics states that understanding comes from perspective and is always a subject of interpretation. Additionally, hermeneutics not only aims to develop understanding, but does so within a historical and cultural perspective. Researchers must recognize their own biases to allow the text to uncover its distinctiveness and establish its own truth, independent of the researchers' preconceptions. It is a cyclical and open-ended process that examines both parts and the whole (Suddick et al., 2020) to understand SCs' experiences, my analysis, and ultimately the phenomenon that becomes evident through this work.

This design was selected because there is not much research specific to SCs or SB-RPT and their use of CCPT, and my goal was to better understand and highlight their experiences related to CCPT in schools. I used semi structured interviews to collect the data. I interviewed 6 SCs across the United States of America to understand their experiences and interpretive processes. Criterion sampling was used to obtain my participants. In other words, I deliberately chose the participants for this study based on the specific criteria that I set based on the phenomenon under study.

Definitions

Academic: Enhancing self-concept and confidence as learners, which is crucial for academic success (Ray, 2011).

Career: Developing decision-making and problem-solving skills that are foundational for future career planning (Ray, 2011).

Child-Centered Play Therapy (CCPT): CCPT is a nondirective play therapy approach based on Carl Rogers' person-centered therapy. CCPT aims to provide a safe relationship between a child and an adult so that the child has the freedom to be their authentic self (Landreth, 2020).

Diversity: According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2024), diversity is defined as "the quality, condition, or fact of being diverse or different." It can account for an array of components from social and ethnic backgrounds to different genders and sexual orientations. For the purpose of this study, diversity refers to the different races and ethnic groups within the public elementary schools.

Elementary School Counselor: Elementary school counselors are educators with specific training in child development, learning strategies, self-management, and social skills. By implementing a school counseling program that understands and promotes success for today's diverse students, elementary school counselors provide education, prevention, and intervention efforts that serve as the foundation for a student's future success (ASCA, 2019b).

Fusion of horizons: According to Gadamer, a fusion of horizons takes place during the interpretation process. It is the new understanding that comes out of the researcher's and participant's fusing together their horizon of understanding and meaning, providing a justified interpretation of shared meanings and common practices (Dibley et al., 2020).

Hermeneutic circle: In a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, the hermeneutic circle begins as soon as study of interest is picked. It is a circular and reflexive process of analysis where themes emerge, prompting the researcher to revisit and re-read the data repeatedly. Dasein, commonly referred to as the consideration of one's being in the world and how we understand ourselves and our relationship to it, consists of converging conversations between existing knowledge and understanding and what was newly revealed from the research data. In other words, the researchers engage in converging conversations that are brough together as cycles of understanding, interpretation, and critique (Dibley et al., 2020).

Registered Play Therapist (RPT): RPTs are licensed mental health professionals from counseling, marriage and family therapy, psychiatry, psychology, or social work practices who are able to independently practice in their states (APA, n.d).

School-Based Registered Play Therapist (SB-RPT): SB-RPTs are professionals who have an active individual license or certificate from their state's department of education to independently practice as a school counselor or school psychologist (APA, 2017).

School counselor: School counselors are the professionals in a school who offer different resources to their students, such as supporting academic careers or acting as a mediator. For the purposes of this study, a school counselor follows school counseling practices and standards adopted by individual states across the United States and aligned with the American School Counselor Association's National Model. The following are the requirements:

- Hold a license specific to school counseling to work in an elementary school
- To be licensed, one needs a master's degree or certification in school counseling from an accredited university and pass the Professional School Counselor Praxis exam

Socioeconomic Status (SES): SES indicates the quality-of-life attributes and opportunities offered to people within a society. It not only represents income, but also education, occupation, and individual viewpoints of social status and social class (APA, 2024). This study refers to SES as an individual's location within the social hierarchy that dictates their accessible resources. The higher the status, the more accessible the resources one has. In other words, SES has to do with how much privilege and prestige one has (Fujishiro et al., 2010).

Social/Emotional: Addressing emotional and behavioral issues, fostering resilience, and promoting positive peer relationships (Ray, 2011).

Social emotional learning (SEL): SEL is a learning process involving the development of crucial skills to understand and regulate emotions, set and accomplish positive objectives, value others' viewpoints, build and sustain healthy relationships, make responsible choices, and navigate social situations effectively (Naslund-Hadley et al., 2023). SEL adopts various forms of inequity and empowers children and adults to construct successful educational environments as well as safe, healthy, and fair communities (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2024).

Assumptions

This study was to better understand school counselors' experience with CCPT. It was assumed that participants were honest in answering. However, there was a risk of social desirability. Participants could have responded according to what they thought would be the right answer, and not what they truly felt or thought. There was also a risk of participants dropping out in the middle of the study, or who are reluctant to participate. Perhaps they did not want others to find out that they were saying something that might affect their job. However, there were no dropouts. There could have been the opposite reaction. Participants may be too eager to participate because they have something to gain. Perhaps positive results in this study will help them with their current position. This was not clear during the interviews. It was also assumed that researcher biases were maintained through journaling and field notes.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of lived experiences of a specific group, SCs. The SCs for this study worked with elementary students of diverse backgrounds, specifically, they worked with minority students. The SCs were also knowledgeable about CCPT and RPT or SB-RPT. Participants were recruited from different states throughout the United States.

This study did not utilize school-based counselors (SBC) as the participants because I wanted to address the distinctive challenges SCs have, given their specific training and competencies of working with minority students, prior to getting a licensed counselor involved. SCs differ from SBCs in that their scope is to improve and support

students' preparedness for academic and career, social-emotional development, and behavioral concerns on a tier system. SCs are available to all students throughout the day. If a student needs ongoing therapeutic services, they will need to be referred out (ASCA, 2024). SBCs, on the other hand, are licensed clinical mental health counselors, psychologists, clinical social workers, or marriage and family therapists. They provide students with a wide range of psychological needs, including school safety, wellness and prevention initiatives, substance abuse, and crisis prevention within the schools (North Carolina Collaborative for Children, Youth, and Families, 2020).

Limitations

In a phenomenological study, some of the common limitations include small sample sizes, time limitations, and biases in participant sample or researcher bias (Peoples, 2021). This study had six participants, which can make data saturation challenging since, according to a hermeneutic stance, there is always something new that remains outside the scope of study. Instead, I paid attention to the recurring patterns/themes that came up, which are sufficient to answer the research question. Another important factor within Gadamer's hermeneutics is that the use of our biases or prejudices is what can lead us to understand how we create a new situation when ideas come together. For this reason, a researcher must be mindful of their pre-understandings, both positive and negative, and manage them with reflexivity and rigor. There could also be concern for participant bias simply because of my presence or participants answering in such a way to make themselves or their schools look good (Dibley et al., 2020).

Significance

This study is intended to advocate for school counselors to ensure that they can get what they need in order to better serve children who are at high risk of socioemotional impairment. To have better school achievement, schools need to be able to provide for the needs of all children. SCs have multiple supporting roles within schools, including a student's academic, career, and social/emotional development. SCs are tasked with being both efficient and effective in the delivery of their services, given the increase in psychological distress reported by K-12 students. Ten years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was already a 40% increase in students' reports of hopelessness, sadness, and suicidal ideation. Over the last 2 years, this trend has only increased and included emergency room visits for self-inflicted violence (Slaten et al., 2024). Thus, the need to incorporate effective methods has become increasingly important. CCPT can be used as an evidence-based, targeted approach for addressing achievement, socio-emotional concerns, and mental health needs of school-aged children (Slaten et al., 2024). The use of an age-appropriate and effective therapeutic modality, such as CCPT, can lead to positive social change, including improved socioemotional development, a reduction in behavioral issues, resulting in a more positive and conducive learning environment for all students, and long-term positive effects on student's mental health, decreasing the likelihood of mental health issues in adulthood (Pereira & Smith-Adcock, 2013).

Summary

In conclusion, this chapter introduced CCPT and its importance for elementary-aged students, particularly those who have had to go through ACEs. The purpose of the

study was to understand the experiences of SC's use of CCPT through a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, built upon key assumptions and delimited by boundaries. Additionally, I explored its limitations, such as sample size and participant bias. The study's significance was discussed, and how it offers insights into getting CCPT more into the schools. In Chapter 2, I conduct a comprehensive review of relevant literature, where key terms and scholarly perspectives are explored.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter goes over several points found in the literature pertaining to the importance of Child-Centered Play Therapy (CCPT) in elementary schools. First, I will address the search strategy utilized to facilitate the literature review. Secondly, I will discuss the importance of play therapy in general. I will then address the conceptual framework used for this study. Next, I will explain how adverse childhood experiences affect the development and academic success of elementary-aged children. Additionally, I will provide an overview of how CCPT can positively affect academic success. Finally, I will explore the importance of having appropriate school interventions in place and what role school counselors play in these interventions.

The efficacy of CCPT for at-risk elementary school students was demonstrated in a quasi-experimental study (Massengale & Perryman, 2021). Children at higher risk of school failure include those from minority groups and low-income families due to a higher likelihood of trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) that impact their development (Post et al., 2019). However, despite the literature that points towards CCPT as an effective intervention to use in schools, many SCs do not practice it due to various external variables that inhibit the use of CCPT in schools, such as financial, space, or time constraints (Trice-Black et al., 2013). Moreover, CCPT has positive effects on marginalized children regarding their externalized behaviors, self-esteem, and academic achievement. Whether through their verbal expressions, play activities, or demeanor within the playroom, children communicate their experiences. Child-centered play

therapists utilize these interactions to foster relationships with children, thereby strengthening their resilience in navigating personal challenges (Post et al., 2019). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences and better understand elementary school counselors' use of CCPT with minority children and what hinders or promotes the use of CCPT in high-diversity elementary schools.

Literature Search Strategy

A literary search of these topics was conducted. I completed a search spanning the past 10 years. I utilized the Walden University online library databases, including Supplemental Index, SocINDEX, Education Source, Social Sciences Citation Index, Journals@OVID, Gale Academic OneFile Select, and APA PsychInfo. The following search terms were used to find articles related to the study: *child-centered play therapy (CCPT); elementary schools; adverse childhood experiences (ACES); hermeneutic phenomenology; Gadamer; play therapy experiences; school-based mental health interventions; school counseling;* and *school counselors.*

Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in Hans Georg Gadamer's (1975) hermeneutic phenomenological frameworks. Hermeneutic phenomenology involves the skill of comprehension and the principles of explanation, with a focus on the lived human experiences. Gadamer's version is much more than just a way of understanding. It is a way of highlighting the conditions that allow for understanding, perception, experience, and knowing to take place (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021). Gadamer examines what is common to all forms of understanding by responding to the following: How is understanding

possible? What kinds of knowledge can understanding produce? What is the status of this knowledge? Additionally, Gadamer's methodology acknowledges that the result of the understanding of other traditions or cultures is inseparable from the researcher's own cultural context or horizon of meaning. Through the process of understanding, the researcher fuses his or her horizon of meaning with that of the text or historical act that was obtained, known as a fusion of horizons (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004).

The logical connection between the framework presented and my study's nature is that it allowed me to uncover the experiences of school counselors. Hermeneutic phenomenology was taken through careful thinking and openness that otherwise would be overlooked or inauthentically characterized. Hermeneutic phenomenology acknowledges people's perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and emotions. This allowed for increased understanding and illuminated the meaning and significance of the use of CCPT in high-diversity elementary schools. Hermeneutic phenomenology was able to illuminate the experience of counselors who have used CCPT to gain a better understanding of the variations of CCPT use (Dibley et al., 2020). Further exploration of these connections will be covered in Chapter 3.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

The Importance of Play Therapy

Play therapy (PT) is a mental health intervention geared towards children to help them process their emotions using play and toys. Considering that children's verbal abilities are not fully developed, PT accounts for children learning through play, thus making it a developmentally appropriate approach (Blalock et al., 2019). Play is at the

heart of childhood. It is a dynamic process that enables children to express themselves in their own ways, to get in touch with other children, and to become socialized. Playing as a free and effortless expression of life is of vital importance for children because they can develop their imagination through it. Children are also guided to new ways of viewing everyday life. Play is a way of exploring and getting to know both the interior and the outside world. Play is also a basic part of children's development, and it is as important as the maternal hug (Boucher et al., 2014).

PT is defined as the systematic use of a theoretical model that establishes an interpersonal process, in which trained therapists use the therapeutic power of play to help children prevent or resolve psychosocial difficulties and achieve optimal growth. PT is a form of psychotherapeutic approach for children and a psycho-diagnostic tool (APA, 2018). Since 1903, the symbolic aspects of play have been highlighted. Friedrich Fröbel proposed that play allows the child's soul to freely express itself. Play is more than just for recreation; it is rich with significance and importance. Moreover, the first reported case describing the therapeutic use of play was in 1909 with the case of Little Hans, a 5-year-old boy with a phobia. Here, Sigmund Freud administered treatment by counseling Hans' father on appropriate responses, offering suggestions derived from the father's observations of Hans' play. Following Freud's work, multiple contributors to PT arose. In 1919, Melanie Klein started using play as a part of analyzing children under six. Hermine Hug-Helmuth, in 1921, emphasized the importance of providing children with play materials to express themselves as essential in child analysis. In 1946, Anna Freud began using play to get the child to form an alliance with her. Furthermore, in 1947, with

the work of Carl Rogers, his student Virginia Axline tailored and put into practice his philosophy and principles for interactions with children in PT. Thus, nondirective or CCPT was born (Landreth, 2012).

CCPT aims to achieve a balance between age-appropriate symbolic play and language expression for the child's benefit. Play is used as a creative outlet that blends imagination and reality, through which the therapeutic relationship deepens, and the child is provided with the freedom to release and express unconscious ideas about an event. As the therapist observes and communicates what is happening in the playroom and to the child, catharsis and potential future scenarios can be discovered through play. This process enables the child to begin cataloging their emotions with words in affective education, resulting in emotional regulation that becomes a more flexible defense mechanism and coping strategy (Kool & Lawver, 2010). By employing the Rogerian principles of unconditional positive regard, empathy, congruence, and self-actualization, the therapist supports the child's innate drive toward optimal functioning (Salter et al., 2016). Axline believed that a play experience offers therapeutic benefits through a secure relationship between a child and an adult, enabling the child to express themselves freely, exactly as they are in the present moment, in their own unique manner and at their own pace (Landreth, 2020). CCPT aims to enhance self-perception and assist children in reorienting themselves psychologically and behaviorally (Salter et al., 2016). The therapeutic relationship in CCPT is the primary healing factor, allowing for a safe environment in which the child can naturally move towards positive growth and healing. Key elements of this relationship include the use of reflections on feelings, meaning, and

content; setting limits; encouragement; and returning responsibility. Such responses enable the child to cultivate an internal sense of control, enhance their capacity for self-regulation, and improve their ability to recognize emotions in both themselves and others (Wilson & Ray, 2018). Furthermore, CCPT is the most frequently explored approach of school PT due to its being developmentally and culturally responsive for children. Multiple research studies have demonstrated its effectiveness as a comprehensive school counseling approach (Jayne & Ray, 2016). Bratton's 2010 meta-analysis of 165 studies on PT in schools published between 1940 and 2008 found that CCPT was the most frequently explored approach to school PT. Furthermore, Ray et al. (2015) found that school-based CCPT can be a beneficial short-term intervention. Blanco and Ray (2011) further revealed that children who were identified as academically at risk showed improved outcomes on an academic assessment following 16 sessions of CCPT.

The Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) exposure is prevalent within the United States. In 2012, the National Survey of Children's Health stated that 48% of children faced at least one ACE, and 22.6% had two or more ACEs. Risk factors include economic hardship, divorce or separation, living with a family member with mental health or substance abuse issues, domestic violence, community violence, and natural disasters. Higher ACE rates are linked with a greater risk of repeating a grade, absenteeism, and lower school engagement. It has also been associated with school learning and behavioral problems. Previous research has found a connection between

one's racial group membership and ACE exposure with non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic populations at greater risk (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018).

ACEs impact the development of children because they affect the structure and function of their developing brains. Thus, this leads to these behavioral, cognitive, and emotional impairments. According to Post et al.'s (2019) research, minority children are at a higher risk of developing ACEs. A consistent relationship with a caring, attentive, and predictable adult, similar to those found in CCPT, can act as a shield against ACEs, enhance a child's ability to self-regulate, and ultimately increase the child's resilience.

Childhood trauma is the most important health challenge in the United States. Not only does being exposed to ACE negatively impact a child's emotional, social, and cognitive development, but it also increases their likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors and having health risks such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. Without effective interventions, they can extend into adulthood leading to depression, alcoholism, risky sexual behaviors, domestic violence, and higher rates of suicide attempts (Parker et al., 2021). The use of CCPT in schools has had positive outcomes for children with many different problems, including aggression, self-concept, academic performance, social-emotional competency, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (Van Horne et al., 2018).

CCPT has been demonstrated to be a developmentally appropriate intervention that emphasizes the therapeutic relationship. Tuning into a child and acknowledging their emotions goes beyond cultural boundaries, constituting a multicultural form of communication. It is about empathizing with the child's perspective, regardless of the

presenting issue or cultural background (Landreth, 2012). Through a safe, nonjudgmental environment created by CCPT, therapists meet the social-emotional needs and promote the resilience of minority children (Post et al., 2019). When faced with a new relationship, children who have experienced trauma have a heightened sense of feeling unsafe and the need to protect themselves. Thus, for trust to begin, an adult should respond differently to the child's defensive or closed-off behaviors. By responding with empathy and understanding, as is done in CCPT, the therapist surprises the child's brain by detecting something different and ultimately overrides "the neurons that drive their pain-based learning" (Parker et al., 2021, p. 4).

Minority Children and Schools

U.S. minority students are being under-identified as having disabilities and are less likely to receive special education services as compared to White children exhibiting similar needs (Morgan et al.,2017). The increased vulnerability of minority children to gestational, economic, and environmental factors, shaped by oppressive forces such as culture, race, and socioeconomic status, underscores their heightened risk for disabilities (Post et al., 2019). These disabilities include learning disabilities, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, emotional disturbance (ED), intellectual disabilities, and speech or language impairments. Schools are more likely to medicalize the struggles of White children and criminalize those of minority children and identify White children as being gifted among those who are similarly high achieving. These findings are consistent with public health studies stating that minorities are less likely than Whites to be

identified and receive treatment for health conditions, despite displaying similar or greater clinical needs (Morgan et al., 2017).

In this context, CCPT becomes a key intervention, as it offers a culturally sensitive and holistic approach that addresses the diverse needs of minority students who may be overlooked or misidentified within traditional systems of assessment and support. When using CCPT, the SC utilizes empathic attunement which emphasizes and supports each child in assessing their own identity and cultural background (Cochran & Cochran, 2017b).

Academic Success and CCPT

In the United States, there are about 20% of children experiencing a behavioral, emotional, or mental health disorder. Academic success is positively linked to a child's behavioral, emotional, and social needs. The Children's Institute says that social-emotional (SE) skills are the ability to manage feelings, concentrate, follow directions, and relate to others. These skills are essential in becoming a healthy, functioning adult. Students with higher SE skills have a higher potential for school success and reduced social isolation, lower incidents of bullying, improved self-esteem, lower risk of negative body image, and reduced depressive symptoms. Both genetics and environmental factors come into play in the neurological development of children (Perryman & Bowers, 2018). It has been found that children exposed to poverty during childhood have a greater likelihood of poor self-regulation when entering school, thus leading to academic failure. African American and Latino students are at an even greater risk of academic failures due to their significantly higher rates of living in poor financial households (Caughy et al.,

2018). Additionally, results showed that the school environment the children with poor behavioral self-regulation positively affected their academic achievement. Schools that are not supportive of the child's needs, have inadequate resources, and are disorganized cause added stressors to the child's already fragile and chaotic world, thus negatively impacting the child's self-regulation development. These schools are usually of extreme poverty and found in neighborhoods with higher crime rates. Low-poverty schools are 22 times more likely to reach high academic achievement than high-poverty schools (Cochran & Cochran, 2017). It would be important for these schools to have the appropriate interventions in place to help these students' resiliency and overall growth. CCPT is an intervention mostly done with children ages 3-12 and has been proven an effective modality within the school setting. In fact, Massengale & Perryman (2021) did a study to examine the long-term impact of the use of CCPT on at risk elementary students. It was found that after a 10-week CCPT treatment, students slowed their academic decline and began to match the growth trajectory of their peers in upcoming academic years.

CCPT was primarily used in private practice settings for children with an inability to adjust to the high demands of their environments. However, academic performance is said to be improved when students learn to identify emotions and strengths and gain confidence, which are part of the goals within CCPT. For this reason, CCPT is effective to maladjusted children and is a great preventive approach to children with healthy functioning but are academically at risk. Previous research results suggested that ongoing

use of CCPT in students has a gradual increase in overall early academic composites (Blanco et al., 2017).

Importance of School Interventions

Early detection and intervention in behavioral, emotional, social, and cognitive issues is important for healthy development in children. 13% of students between 8 and 15 have at least one mental health diagnosis during their school years. Children with emotional issues are at a higher risk of violent behavioral patterns towards others that can seep into adulthood. Unfortunately, most of these children do not always get treatment straight away due to family having lack of resources, knowledge, or time. Since children spend most of their time in school, it is usually the first point of identification for these issues and the start of their treatment. For these reasons, it is important for schools to have effective methods for recognizing students at risk and have developmentally proper programs/interventions in place, such as CCPT (Perryman & Bowers, 2018).

A meta-analysis of 23 studies suggested the use of CCPT as an effective elementary school intervention. Results showed that when compared to alternative interventions, children who were engaged in CCPT performed .20 standard deviations over their peers and compared to control conditions, children in CCPT performed .38 standard deviations over their peers. In other words, students engaged in CCPT improved problematic behaviors or characteristics at a statistically significant level than that of their peers who had no intervention $z=5.21, p < .05$ (Ray et al.,2015).

School Counselors and CCPT

The fact that children spend majority of their day in schools means that school counselors have the duty to advocate and provide services that meet the developmental and emotional needs of children (Van Horne et al., 2018). This becomes even more important given the fact that in most cases, school counselors are the only mental health professional contact children will have. Thus, leading to the importance of understanding school counselors' experiences.

Since there is growing research that supports the use of PT to promote students' emotional, behavioral, and academic development, the Association of Play Therapy (APT) added the school-based registered play therapist (SB-RPT) credential in 2016 and supports the use of CCPT as an evidence-based approach for working with children (Shin & Gonzalez, 2018). SB-RPTs provide specific PT services via a structured intervention procedure. SB-RPTs can administer play interventions in various formats, including short-term individual sessions, small group sessions, classroom lessons, large group activities, and schoolwide interventions. There are several barriers to the use of CCPT amongst school counselors (SCs) (Shin & Gonzalez, 2018). Particularly, there is a significant relationship between SCs and play therapy training. SCs do not feel confident enough to use it given the lack of training they have had. After a one-day workshop for school counselors, results revealed two major themes: 1) SC changed their perceptions about PT, thus increasing their awareness and 2) SC valued their experiences in attending the workshop. Despite the support that CCPT has gained, there is minimal literature on the current practices of it by SCs (Shin & Gonzalez, 2018).

Within the school environment, CCPT is most used as an individual or small group intervention. It was found to be effective as a short-term intervention and that children get more benefits with intensive PT over a shorter duration of time (Jayne & Raye, 2016). Since school sessions are often limited, a 30 min CCPT session matches a school's daily rhythm. By using CCPT, SCs can also teach students in empathetic responses, fostering greater acceptance and support for one another by demonstrating and employing CCPT skills, thereby expanding the therapeutic atmosphere into the entire school (Jayne & Ray, 2016).

American School Counselor Association and CCPT

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) (2023) was put in place to help guide school counselors in designing and delivering school counseling programs that improve student outcomes. ASCA delivers ethical and professional standards and competencies that will help school counselors meet the pressures of the school counseling profession and the needs of pre–K–12 students. The ASCA National Model defines the school counselor's role within four sections: 1) *define* entails the SB-RPT's task of determining how play aligns with ASCAs' standards; 2) *manage* encompasses identifying program focal points and structuring the program to embody those principles; 3) *deliver* refers to the delivery of actual PT services, with 80% of the SC's time is spent in direct and indirect support to students; and 4) *assess* involves the SB-RPT evaluating the efficacy of interventions, programs, and their own performance (Tilman, 2023).

In addition to the above, ASCA introduced a Multi-Tiered System of Support based on the student's responses to core instruction and interventions. Tier one

interventions are the educational guidelines that support all students across academic, social, and behavioral domains. It is the fundamental level which establishes the basis for student education and emphasizing high-quality teaching techniques. Tier two targets students who are not responding to school-wide support, such as students who have ADHD symptoms, aggression, or other disruptive behaviors. Tier two includes small groups (up to six students) aiming at specific skills necessary for those students unable to achieve success at tier one to achieve proficiency. Tier two interventions need to be consistent on a biweekly basis and structured, such as in group-centered PT (GCPT). When students engage in GCPT, they begin to not only address challenges but also increase peer relationships within a constructive and encouraging environment that is being established by the SCs use of empathy and acceptance. The third and final tier is provided for students who need more intensive work beyond what is received at tier two. Students requiring tier three interventions need more individualized sessions to closely monitor their progress, such as weekly CCPT (Winburn et al., 2017). Indeed, PT and play-based techniques can be successfully used as a preventative and responsive intervention to address academic, social/emotional, and career development domains for all students (Trice-Black et al., 2013). *ASCA ethical standards (*2022) also state that SCs have a responsibility to not only provide culturally responsive counseling to students but also advocate for equitable, anti-oppressive, and anti-bias policies and procedures. CCPT can help maintain these standards. CCPT is a developmentally appropriate approach to use within all the above tiers, especially for the last tier, since as previously mentioned, some students do not receive services in the community (Van Horne et al., 2018).

Elementary SCs are specifically trained to create and implement a counseling program geared towards this developmental period. They hold a master's degree and state certification in school counseling. The counseling programs created aim to remove possible barriers to learning and the development of social/emotional needs. SCs are mindful that not all students learn the same and deliver a program designed to meet students' unique needs. These programs include leadership, advocacy, and collaboration with school staff, administration, and community. (ASCA, 2019b). Furthermore, an effective school counseling program depends on forming a relationship, fostering trust, and inspiring motivation within the student to modify behavior or circumstances, fundamental principles within CCPT (Pereira & Smith-Adcock, 2013).

However, due to the SCs evolving duties over the last several decades, it has become a challenge for SCs to implement these comprehensive programs and student outcomes. SCs coming in are educated on the necessary responsibilities required to address students' academic, career, and social/emotional needs. Nevertheless, their practical responsibilities in the field, such as administering tests, filling in for teachers, supervising buses and lunches, and handling clerical tasks, frequently deviate from the guidelines outlined in the ASCA National Model (Fye et al., 2017).

Caring School Communities

A caring school community (CSC) is an environment that fosters a feeling of inclusion and creates a nurturing environment conducive to fostering positive student development. CSCs follow the ASCA National Model and have been shown to benefit all students and include developmentally appropriate strategies. The core elements of a CSC

include connectedness, empowerment, safety, collaboration, consistency, shared ownership, respect, and fun. SCs can aid in the creation of CSCs across the k-12 years (Lindwall & Coleman, 2008). This can be achieved with socio and emotional learning (SEL). SEL encompasses instructional practices aimed at fostering comprehension and regulation of emotions, nurturing prosocial behavior within supportive relationships, imparting skills for goal setting, and cultivating the ability to make responsible decisions. SEL competencies align with that of CSCs by creating a positive school climate. These competencies include self-management, self-awareness, problem solving, and relationship skills which can enhance school and life success. SEL has also been linked with improvements in youth mental health and improved development trajectories (McDaniel et al., 2022).

CSCs are important for students to be able to internalize positive school-related behaviors that ultimately lead to positive outcomes in performance and graduation. Studies done at urban high schools serving low-income and minority students have shown that instilling a school-wide culture of compassion, with an emphasis on respectful and trusting connections alongside, one of the principles in a CCPT therapeutic relationship, academic excellence, resulted in elevated levels of student involvement, social and emotional proficiency, academic success, and graduation rates (Tichnor-Wagner & Allen, 2016).

Additionally, creating a CSC involves the engagement in positive classroom management strategies. Classroom management is used to enhance the effectiveness of classroom lessons, aiming to cultivate a positive classroom atmosphere, boost student

involvement, and ultimately improve outcomes. According to the ASCA National Model, classroom lessons are a means to address the academic, professional, and social/emotional requirements of students. These classroom lessons are a fundamental aspect of the duties of SCs, being widely adopted nationwide, because they serve as the initial encounter with SCs for numerous students and are a proactive and preventive approach for SCs to engage with all students. Research has shown that SCs also value the use of classroom management strategies, specifically acting proactively, engaging students, implementing positive reinforcement, using varied modalities, and utilizing discipline. Moreover, they highlighted personal traits that contributed to their classroom management techniques, such as maintaining composure, displaying confidence, adhering to consistency, and demonstrating authenticity, qualities that align closely with the principles of CCPT. Implications for using effective classroom management included the lack of classroom management support and experiential learning within their graduate preparation (Goodman-Scott, 2019).

Current Research

It has been found that person-centered and experiential therapies are effective modalities to use when working with children. CCPT is both a preventative and responsive, age-appropriate approach that can be used when working on the emotional and social development of children. About 20% of students require mental health services and only one in five will receive these services. This is where school counseling becomes important. SCs who are trained in CCPT have reported a higher frequency of providing effective services to students at school. After undergoing structured training like what the

SB-RPT program offers, SCs have noted a boost in their confidence and capacity to address students' mental health requirements (Maddox et al., 2022).

SCs agreed that play plays a vital role in human development across the life span. The utilization of play was discovered to aid in easing students' defense mechanisms, relieving tension, and fostering disclosure. Additionally, the following of counselors was found to be conducive to the use of PT - positive core values driving its usage, successful experiences reinforcing practice with students, adaptations via various methods, flexibility, and consultation to overcome resource constraints, and the presence of a receptive human environment (Shen, 2017).

As previously mentioned, SCs face the task of delivering suitable services, like PT, to students from diverse cultural backgrounds, encompassing factors such as ethnicity, gender, and special needs. SCs who have utilized both PT and talk therapy strategies observed that PT elicited a greater response from majority of students across various cultural backgrounds. Moreover, SCs noted that students from various ethnic groups, those with special needs, and of both genders demonstrated a greater level of responsiveness to PT compared to relying solely on talk therapy. Furthermore, a statistically significant and positive correlation was found between counselors' exposure to a specific cultural group and their observations regarding the groups' favorable responses to PT as opposed to talk therapy, $r\ (7)=.73,\ p<.05$. These findings suggest the importance of SCs' cultural competence in tailoring therapeutic approaches (Shen, 2016).

Overall, providing a child with a CCPT environment contributes to positive improvements through safety, support, freedom, and unconditional acceptance.

Counselors who consistently use CCPT, such as a SB-RPT, have shared positive experiences with its use despite challenges that arise (Crumrine, 2013). When first starting to use CCPT, counselors have found that it can be a slow process due to the child's social dynamic resistance and parallel play avenue. They have found that one needs to be patient, which can take six to eight sessions, for the child to feel comfortable in this new environment. Counselors have also agreed that the relationship, environment, and counselor's role are the most important aspect of CCPT that allows for progress and improvement in children. They feel that it is important to educate others on CCPT for it to become a smoother process. It can become frustrating when parents and other professionals do not have a clear understanding of what CCPT is and what it can offer. It is also important that others understand that it can be a slow process, leading to skepticism. However, having parents on board encourages positive parent-child interactions, continued therapy, and a stronger support system once therapy is terminated (Crumrine, 2013). An additional challenge that counselors have found includes resource constraints. Counselors often must adapt or modify climate and materials. Although schools might have a set budget for counseling material, the budget may not be sufficient for what the counselors needs. Often, majority of play materials is not supplied by an official budget and not all environments will have the space required to support a playroom, especially if it is within a poor school district (Shen, 2017).

Summary and Conclusions

The nature of this study aimed to understand the experiences of SCs who have used CCPT and gain a better understanding of the nuances of its use. In this chapter I

dived into the important aspects surrounding the significance of CCPT within the elementary school setting. Through the literature review, the importance of PT as a foundational element in promoting child development was addressed. The role of CCPT in fostering positive academic outcomes, highlighting its potential to reduce the adverse effects of early life challenges was discussed. Furthermore, the literature showed that by facilitating a therapeutic and supportive environment, CCPT emerges as a valuable tool in addressing the unique needs of students, enhancing their overall well-being, and contributing to their academic success. Finally, the pivotal role that SCs play in implementing these interventions and creating a nurturing educational environment for every child was addressed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences and better understand elementary school counselors' experience with the use of CCPT with minority children and what hinders or promotes the use of CCPT in high diversity elementary schools. To do this, I employed a hermeneutic phenomenological framework. This revealed the insights of school counselors, bringing to light aspects that might otherwise be neglected or inaccurately portrayed, through thoughtful consideration and openness (Dibley et al., 2020). It also illuminated the experience of counselors who have used it to gain a better understanding of the nuances of CCPT use.

In this chapter, I explore the research design and rationale, along with the conceptual framework guiding the study, articulating its key objectives within the context of educational psychology and pedagogy. Next, I examine the role of the researcher, discussing the researcher's positionality and ethical considerations inherent in this research. The methodology section outlines the systematic procedures employed for data collection, analysis, and interpretation, including the rationale for qualitative methods, sampling strategies, and analytical approaches. Finally, I highlight the importance of ethical procedures throughout the research process.

Research Design and Rationale

The phenomenon of interest was to understand the experiences of those using CCPT and why it is not used more often in a school setting. I wanted to highlight the benefits of the use of CCPT with minority children and how we can help SCs to engage

in this intervention. To accomplish this, the approach used for this study was hermeneutic phenomenology (HP). HP is an approach that seeks to understand and evaluate meaning by the examination of the structure of a sentence (Dibley et al., 2020). This examination is done by revealing experiences as they naturally manifest and are articulated through thoughtful consideration and openness. I aimed to discern elements that might otherwise be disregarded or inaccurately portrayed with a quantitative method. Using HP, I looked at SCs' experiences through an individual and social perspective.

I further expanded on this philosophy by following a Gadamerian framework. Hans-Georg Gadamer believed that awareness of our own prejudices or pre-understandings does not occur while they remain hidden and unquestioned. Our prejudices need to be challenged or disrupted to come into view. This understanding then results from a fusion of horizons, the coming together and influence of two perspectives or horizons (Dibley et al., 2020). By using this approach, I enhanced comprehension of the significance of human experiences and practices among SCs. Specifically, this framework allowed for a deeper exploration of how SCs make sense of their practice in context, emphasizing that their understanding of CCPT is not fixed but continually negotiated through dialogue with students, colleagues, and institutional constraints. Thus, this led me to be able to find common themes that will help to better advocate for SC's use of CCPT within the schools.

Central Concepts

In this section, I present the central concepts, which are the key elements that guide this study. I will review who elementary school counselors are and the training that

they require. I will then discuss what a registered play therapist (RPT) is and what it means to have those credentials. This will be followed by a description of a school-based registered play therapist and what it means to hold those credentials. Lastly, I will explain what child-centered play therapy (CCPT) is and why it is an effective and appropriate therapeutic modality when working with children.

Elementary School Counselors

The elementary years are crucial for the development of academic self-concept and feelings of competence and confidence as learners (Schunk et al., 2008). During this period, students start to develop essential skills in decision-making, communication, and life, as well as character values (Eccles, 1999). They also begin to form attitudes towards school, self, peers, social groups, and family (Berk, 2013). Elementary school counselors are educators uniquely trained in child development, learning strategies, self-management, and social skills, who understand and promote success for today's diverse students (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2019). They implement comprehensive school counseling programs to support students through this critical developmental period. These programs offer education, prevention, and intervention activities that are integrated into all aspects of children's lives (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). The programs teach the knowledge, attitudes, and skills students need to acquire in academic, career, and social/emotional development, forming the foundation for future success (ASCA, 2019). School counselors receive training based on the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies, which are organized by mindset standards, behavior standards, and competencies. The standards are broader topics that

describe the knowledge, attitude and skills school counselors need to implement a school counseling program.

Registered Play Therapist (RPT)

The credential for RPT is awarded to a licensed clinician who has met the Association for Play Therapy's (APT) standards for credentialing and demonstrated specific play therapy competencies and skills. These standards enable ethical practice, establish tangible learning goals for education and training, and clarify the public's awareness of the role and functions of the play therapist. RPTs understand the therapeutic powers of play and how it can help prevent or resolve the client's psychological strains to achieve optimal growth and development. This credential was formalized in 1993, and in 2020, APT developed a phase model for the credentialing process, which includes specific indicators that evaluate the play therapist's effectiveness for specific presenting problems and diagnoses across different populations and clinical settings (Turner et al., 2020).

School-Based Registered Play Therapist (SB-RPT)

The credential of SB-RPT is given to licensed or certified school counselors or school psychologists. This credential lets the public, schools, parents, and other professionals know that you have the required play therapy (PT) knowledge and specialized training to use PT. SB-RPTs are only allowed to practice on school grounds as described by their State Department of Education (APT, 2017).

Child-Centered Play Therapy (CCPT)

CCPT was adapted by Virginia Axline from Carl Roger's principles of person-centered counseling to children. In CCPT, the therapist utilizes similar core conditions as person-centered, such as being nondirective, empathy, and unconditional positive regard. CCPT enables the child to self-express and process experiences within a sensitively developed therapeutic relationship, as well as through play. CCPT is an effective tool in helping children overcome a variety of clinical difficulties, including trauma, and across different cultures (Cochran et al., 2024).

Elementary school counselors should use Child-Centered Play Therapy (CCPT) as part of their school counseling program, according to the ASCA National Framework, for several key reasons. The ASCA National Model emphasizes the importance of meeting students' developmental needs. CCPT is particularly effective for young children because it aligns with their natural mode of communication and expression—play. Through play, children can express emotions, develop problem-solving skills, and improve their social interactions in a developmentally appropriate manner (Landreth, 2012). The ASCA framework outlines three domains of student development: academic, career, and social/emotional. CCPT supports these domains (Ray, 2011).

The ASCA model advocates comprehensive school counseling programs that provide education, prevention, and intervention activities. CCPT serves as an effective intervention strategy that can be integrated into a comprehensive program. It offers a non-intrusive way to address and mitigate issues such as anxiety, trauma, and behavioral problems, which can impede academic and social success (Bratton et al., 2005).

Gadamerian Analysis

A Gadamerian analysis involves gaining understanding through conversations with texts. The first step started with ensuring that the research question allowed for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The second step was completed prior to the data collection. Here, preunderstandings or prejudices were identified to remain open and not limit the horizon of understanding, which underestimates further understandings of the phenomenon. The next step involved data collection, or gaining understanding, as Gadamer preferred to use. This step involved not only engaging in conversations with participants but also analyzing the text (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021).

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative studies, the researcher adopts the stance of an instrument or tool during the process. The researcher brings their own values and identity into the study. Their roles can fall from observer to participant, depending on the type of design used (Salkind, 2010). In HP, the researcher becomes the source of the question. There is a notion that researchers have an ontological and epistemological view of the world, shaping our engagement with and enthusiasm for the research they undertake. Our existence within the world is characterized by experiential, contextual, and individualized perceptions shaped by the personal comprehension and encounters of the observer and their essence of 'being' (Dibley et al., 2020).

In this study, my roles were not limited to those of a researcher, but also included those of a graduate student, an interviewer, and a data analyst. I was a graduate student at Walden University, participating in this research study. As a hermeneutic researcher, I

was connected to this phenomenon on a professional level. Dibley et al. (2020) explain that in other methodologies, this situatedness presents a problem. However, in HP, the researcher is part of the research design, and through my presence and interpretive analysis, I was able to produce findings that incorporate my own lived experiences. Interviews were conducted for this study to facilitate collaborative dialogues in which language reveals and conveys meaning. After the interviewing process and data collection, my role became that of an analyst, as I engaged in analyzing and coding the interviews and field notes. Researcher bias was managed through field notes and researcher memos, which enabled me to engage in structured reflexivity (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Additionally, there were no known conflicts of interest.

Methodology

Since my research question concerns SCs' experiences with CCPT, I interviewed SCs who work in highly diverse elementary schools. First, I checked the websites of several schools to obtain contact information for the school counselor(s). Then I sent the SCs a recruitment email to see if they would be willing to participate in my study, see Appendix A. When the participant replied that they would like to participate, I emailed them the consent forms and provided them with different dates and times to schedule the interview at that time. Additionally, since I did not obtain enough participants through the email process, I was able to check the North Carolina Association of Play Therapy (NCAPT) website to get contact information of school counselors in various states. Since I am a member of NCAPT, I had the ability to use the recruitment email under the "play

therapy research" forum. I was also able to conduct a directory search of NCAPT branch members who are SB-RPT and obtain their contact information.

Typically, sample sizes for qualitative methodologies cannot be easily calculated. When calculating my sampling size, the following was taken into consideration as recommended by Dibley et al. (2020):

- Overall purpose of the research
- Relationship between rarity of topic and sample size
- Depth and completeness of data being collected
- Method of analysis being used

As an HP researcher, my goal was not to prove or disprove, rather it was to gain insight into understanding SCs' experiences with CCPT. Sample size thus became a balance between research objectives, the size of the accessible population from which the sample can be drawn, and the willingness of individuals within that population to participate in this study. The suggested appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is 6 to 12 participants. However, the ultimate factor was saturation, at 6 participants, or when I reached a point where no new information was obtained from my participants (Kim, 2016).

In HP, it is important for participants to have had the experience with the phenomenon to be able to provide relevant data. Thus, I utilized a purposive sampling method, specifically criterion sampling. In other words, I chose the elements that will be included in my sample. The following was the criteria:

- Hold a license/certificate in school counseling with experience working in high diversity elementary schools
- Are or have been an RPT or SB-RPT
- Have training on and used CCPT strategies and techniques.

Instrumentation

In qualitative designs, instrumentation refers to the source or sources for data collection, such as interviews, journals, audio recordings, etc. I used semi-structured individual interviews, audio, and observation sheets of the interviewee's reactions for my data collection.

Data Collection

As mentioned, I interviewed SCs who have had training in CCPT. My participants were from various states spread out across the U.S. I emailed them the invitation along with informed consents, see Appendix B, as outlined by the IRB. Participants then emailed me back with "I consent" to participate in the study. I conducted face-to-face individual in-depth interviews via a virtual platform such as Zoom, based on the mutually agreed-upon conditions. The use of in-depth interviews strengthened my study because it helped me gain and explore my participants' experiences, motives, and opinions. It also made it easier for me and those reading my study to see the world through SC's perspectives (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The purpose of using interviews is to draw out the participants' experiences to uncover the phenomenon with their narratives. These interviews were audio-recorded for later transcribed using TranscriptionPuppy. Results were made available to participants upon request.

Additionally, I utilized an interview guide during the interviews, see Appendix C. The interview guide is a list of questions or issues that were explored during the interview. It allowed for uniformity between participant interviews. Interview protocols are like a checklist to have on hand to make sure that all relevant topics and issues are covered (Patton, 2015). The interview guide also served as a way for ethics committees to ensure that participants were being protected by seeing this interview schedule.

Furthermore, I used summative techniques, audio recordings and field notes. This allowed me to have all these resources available to me when I did my data analysis. Fieldnotes and journals are a good way to capture not only the participants' nonverbals or feelings, but also what the researcher is feeling in the moment and after the end of the interview or while listening to the recording. These techniques not only helped me identify themes, but they also captured the meanings behind the process. This helped give the results a deeper meaning (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006).

Data Analysis Plan

The interpretive process in a HP requires the researcher's receptiveness and involvement to comprehend the participants' narratives, employing language, reflection, and inquiry. These narratives mirror both a contextualized encounter with the phenomenon and our own horizon of understating, a hermeneutic stance. In other words, the researcher listens to the story and reflects on that which needs to be thought about. The first phase of the data analysis incorporated the transcription of the interviews, which included being validated or member checked for accuracy and de-identified by removing direct identifiers. Once the transcription was complete, initial coding began. At this time,

participants had the opportunity to member check. Initial coding included highlighting or making a comment to the side. From here, I developed a list of emerging themes and patterns. An interpretive summary was then written for each interview to summarize the story and participant's main points. As part of the hermeneutic stance, I engaged in rereading all the original data and let it sit in my mind, allowing for ideas and thoughts to come up and question and reveal what was hidden, a method known as bubbling up. This rereading of the data is known as the hermeneutic circle, which I had to remain within it continuously, though I had the flexibility to move back and forth within the circle throughout the entire process. Finally, the converging conversations that resulted leads to a fusion of horizons, the interpretations of common meanings and shared practices (Dibley et al., 2020). This was completed by connecting participants ' perspectives beside my own reflections, thus allowing for new understanding to emerge through dialogue.

Issues of Trustworthiness

These constructs can be measured through credibility or confidence in the truth of the results; transferability or showing that these results are applicable in other areas; dependability or showing the results are consistent and can be repeated; and confirmability or the degree that the results ae shaped by the participants and not research bias, motivation, or interest (Amankwaa, 2016).

Credibility

Credibility is a measure of confidence in the results. In this step, I would consider all the complications that presented themselves within the study and deal with the patterns that are not easily explained. Though, none were present for this study. It is

directly related to the research design, instrumentation, and data. I measured credibility through my committee debriefings and triangulation of both the interviews and other sources, such as observation sheets. During the research process, I also engaged in strategies such as member checking or having an external auditor, such as my committee members.

Transferability

Transferability has to do with how well the research is descriptive and full of context-relevant statements. To make sure that this study had transferability, I engaged in thick description. Thick description involves carefully and clearly describing the study's contextual factors (including cultural norms, body language, tone of voice, and social institutions), participants, and experiences to produce complex interpretations and findings.

Dependability

Dependability deals with the stability of the data. Data is considered dependable if they are consistent and stable over time. I ensured that I had a reasoned argument for how I am collecting the data and that the data are consistent with the argument. I followed a step-by-step process based on Gadamerian analysis. I engaged in dependability through the triangulation process. In the dissertation, I also took part in sequencing methods and engaged in an inquiry audit that allowed my committee members to examine my process and results.

Confirmability

Confirmability has to do with the idea that qualitative researchers do not claim to be objective. Instead, they seek confirmable and subjective data. They do not let biases or prejudices get in the way of data interpretations. Once again, I was able to engage in this through the triangulation process, as well as the reflexive process. The triangulation process was done with the use of multiple data sources and converging them to common themes or categories. Reflexivity was achieved as I reflected on my role in the research process, particularly in relation to data collection. Researcher memos are a form of engagement throughout the writing process known as structured reflexivity. It is a way of fostering meaning-making and serves as a chronicle of a researcher's emerging learning and thinking (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). By maintaining a researcher memo and dialogic engagement with my committee, I was able to structure this reflexive engagement.

Intra-Coder Reliability

Intra-coder reliability estimates the degree of consistency in judgments made by the same coder over time (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). It refers to the consistent manner by which I have coded, and I looked at whether the interpretations and coding of the data remained stable and consistent throughout the analysis process. To enhance and assess intra-coder reliability, I engaged in recoding, memoing, maintained detailed documentation, maintained a consistent manner in coding across different coding sessions, and continued to engage in reflexivity as described above.

Ethical Procedures

All research studies need to follow current codes of ethics. Guidelines have been set up to help the researcher meet these standards. In alignment with these standards, this study received approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Walden University's IRB approval number for this study is 10-22-24-1028825.

Some of the concerns that I thought might happen were animosity, threats of bias, or even expectations with site and participants. There might have been a chance that the participants' colleagues find out who they are once they read the research article. Given that schools in NC may serve as a potential work site, I ensured I gained appropriate access so that I do not have any problems in the future if I want to enter those schools as an employee. However, I did not anticipate any conflict of interest as I did not interview individuals I supervise or work with. I ensured that I set my biases aside as best as I could to allow for the participants' stories to be heard as is.

Since I was looking into the lives of SCs and their unique insights, it was important that I was able to provide confidentiality and informed consent. From all my readings and literature reviews, I understood that there was a chance of there being a breach of confidentiality. For example, there could have been a chance that the colleagues of SCs might recognize them. To reduce this from happening, I removed any identifying information from the data and assigned code names instead of real names. I also redacted any details that could potentially identify a participant, such as the name of the specific school, and only presented results in an aggregated form rather than individually. Aside from the informed consent process, participants were told what the

study was about and what the goal was. They were provided with information about whether or not they would get something out of helping the interviewer. I wanted participants to understand that their participation would be worth it and appreciated. I wanted to let participants know what the expectations, if any, of participation are. Finally, participants were told about any and all the possible risks that they might be subjecting themselves to.

Summary

In this chapter, I explored my research design grounded in hermeneutic phenomenology, aimed at exploring the lived experiences of SCs in high-diversity elementary schools. I discussed my role as multilayered, involving not only the facilitation of data collection but also active engagement in the interpretive process. Additionally, I discussed participant selection as purposeful, guided by criteria that ensure representation of diverse perspectives relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. The use of data collection methods was described to capture rich and nuanced accounts of SCs' experiences. Through iterative analysis, themes and patterns emerged, shedding light on the underlying meaning structures inherent in the data. Finally, trustworthiness was explored through various means, including prolonged engagement with the research setting, member checking to verify interpretations with participants, and the use of reflexivity to acknowledge and lessen potential biases. In the next chapter, I will provide the results of my study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

In this chapter, I will present the findings based on interviews conducted with SCs who work or have worked in a high-diversity elementary school and have experience with CCPT. This study is guided by the research question: What are the lived experiences of school counselors who use CCPT in their work at high-diversity elementary schools? The aim of this hermeneutic study was to explore and understand the experiences of SCs who engage in CCPT with minority students. This exploration identified the needs of SCs, highlighted the benefits of CCPT for all students, informed practice and policy, and contributed to the literature.

I will discuss the setting or the conditions, if any, that influenced participants or their experiences at the time of the study, which may have influenced the interpretation of the results. Next, I will describe the demographics and characteristics relevant to this study. I will then review the data collection and analysis. Additionally, I will provide evidence of trustworthiness. Finally, I will address the research question and present the data to support the findings.

Setting

The study consisted of interviews conducted over Zoom. The length of the interviews was approximately 60 minutes. Each interview was conducted in a private space and at the participant's comfort level. Some were done at their offices, while others were done at home. The interviews were conducted during a busy season for school counselors, at the end of the school year and into the summer.

The interviews took place during the summer, a period that often disrupts student access to mental health services due to limited follow-through on referrals for external care. Many parents and guardians lack consistent follow-through when it comes to seeking outside counseling for their students. This means that many high-risk students may be left without support for months (De Vito, 2017). Ultimately, it could have led to SCs adopting a more reflective mode during our interviews, thus resulting in more emotionally charged responses. During this time, SCs may also have heightened awareness of student progress throughout the year, expressing more gratitude for the benefits of CCPT.

Demographics

For the purposes of this study, interviews were completed with six different SCs from various states, including North Carolina, New Orleans, Ohio, Texas, and Virginia. Each of the schools these SCs work at or have worked in had a high number of minority students, including Title 1 schools or schools with a high population of students who live in poverty (Institute of Education Sciences [IES], 2025). The participants in this study were composed of 83% Caucasian counselors and 17% Hispanic counselors. Of these participants, the majority (83%) were female counselors. All participants were dually credentialed/licensed in their respective states; two of them even held licenses for a state in which they did not reside. All participants either went to a program to obtain their MA in school counseling or, if they went for mental health counseling, later obtained their certification through the national credential for school counseling. Not only did they have multiple years of experience working as a school counselor, but they also had experience

working in different settings. Some of these experiences include working as a teacher, music teacher, private practice clinician, and faculty member at the graduate level. Finally, all participants not only had extensive experience with PT and CCPT, but also in trauma approaches, sand tray, and cognitive behavioral therapies. Table 1 provides an overview of the main demographics relevant to this study.

Table 1

Participants' Demographics

Participant	Gender	Race	Length of Experience	Credentials	RPT or SB-RPT	Home State
Megan	F	W	7 yrs	LCMHC-A/ SC license	RPT	NC
Karen	F	W	15 yrs	LPCS/SC certified	RPT	NO
Kayla	F	W	10 yrs	LPC/SC Certified	RPT	OH
Juliet	F	W	15 yrs	LPC/SC certified	RPT	TX
Laura	F	H	17 yrs	LPC/SC certified	RPT	TX
Carter	M	W	5 yrs	LPC/ SC certified	SB-RPT	VA

Data Collection

Participants were obtained via the Association for Play Therapy member forum, word of mouth, and elementary school directories. Data saturation was obtained once I had concluded six interviews. Interviews lasted about 60 minutes. They were held and audio-recorded via the Zoom platform according to the participants' schedules. Audio was then submitted to TranscriptionPuppy for transcription of each. Interviews were conducted only once, and the transcription was emailed to participants who requested a copy.

Obtaining this data took approximately two months, during which I waited for participants to respond to my flyers and posts. The original inclusion criteria were for those in NC and currently working in high-diversity elementary schools. However, after several participants replied stating that they met part of the inclusion criteria or provided no replies at all, and after consulting with my chair, a decision was made to expand my inclusion criteria to all states outside of NC, as well as to SCs who have previously worked in elementary schools.

Data Analysis

Once the transcription was obtained, the data went through a manual coding process. This process required taking a hermeneutic stance. Since my conceptual framework is Gadamer's Hermeneutic Phenomenology, this meant that during the interpretive process, I brought my own openness and engagement, which reflect not only the stories that participants brought but also my own horizon of understanding. It is an experience that is always expanding, focused, ongoing, and questioning (Dibley et al., 2020).

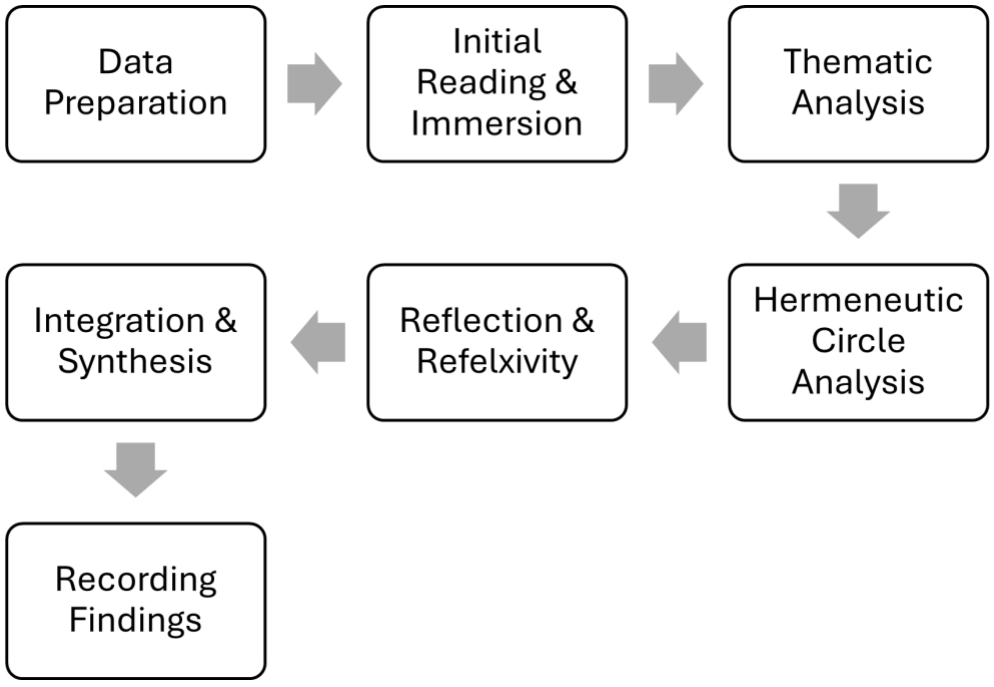
Several steps were taken as part of the analysis plan (Figure 1). This included data preparation where I obtained a transcription of each interview and organizing the data sources; initial reading and immersion where I began the initial coding and contextual understanding; thematic analysis which involved grouping codes based on emerging patterns and themes; hermeneutic circle analysis to engage in the hermeneutic circle, followed by integrating my understanding with that of the participants to achieve a fusion of horizons. My background in school counseling and as an RPT-S significantly informed

my interpretive lens throughout the research process. These professional experiences allowed me to recognize the nuances in participants' descriptions that might otherwise be overlooked. I came into the process with my own understandings of the relational, emotional, and systemic dynamics present in school-based mental health work. Thus, shaping how I made sense of participants' reflections on the interview questions. Ultimately, that is how the themes began to emerge and were informed by the interactions of my professional worldview and the lived experiences of SCs in the study.

Once these steps were completed, reflection and reflexivity began. I engaged in self-reflection on my own biases and assumptions, and how they might have influenced the interpretation of the data. Finally, integration and synthesis were completed, and the data went through a narrative construction, followed by detailed reporting.

Figure 1

Data Analysis Plan



Themes grounded in practices working with minority students were categorized based on the impact of school counseling barriers, experiences working with minority students, and CCPT benefits (Table 2). The themes identified demonstrate how SCs recognize the practical challenges and opportunities associated with providing CCPT, as well as how these intersect with broader SC needs, particularly in supporting diverse student populations. Additionally, subthemes (Figure 2) were developed through a continued interpretive engagement, consistent with the iterative and dialogic nature of Gadamerian analysis.

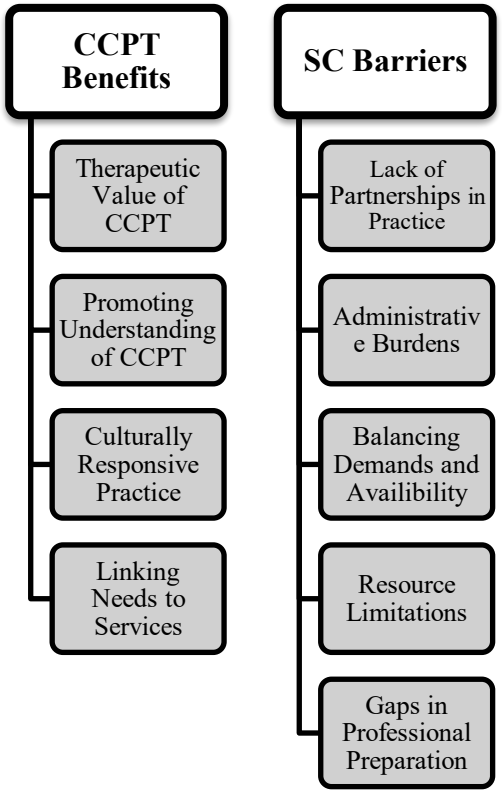
Table 2

Summary of Key Categories and Aligned Themes

Category	Definition	Theme
Positive Student Impact	Increase in overall student wellbeing (behavioral & emotional)	CCPT Benefits
Collaborative Process	Working with school administrators, teachers, and parents	SC Barriers
Non School Counselor Roles	Engaging in tasks and activities that are more administrative	SC Barriers
Time Restraints	Lack of adequate time spent on student MH or Interruptions during 1:1 session	SC Barriers
Bringing Awareness	Providing advocacy to reduce stigma and resistance from families and staff	CCPT Benefits
Multiculturalism	Knowledge about the cultural differences and being respectful towards each	CCPT Benefits
Funding Restraints	Not having enough in the budget to be able to adopt enough counseling resources	SC Barriers
Bridging Gaps	Ability to meet student where they are and feel safe to process	CCPT Benefits
Training/Supervision	Understanding that PT should be something added to school counseling preparation programs	SC Barriers

Figure 2

Resulting Themes and Supporting Subthemes



Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility refers to how accurately results reflect the truth in the population being studied as opposed to influences from methodological errors. This study was conducted using a HIPAA-compliant virtual platform, Zoom, and transcription services. Zoom made sure that no other outside data was picked up or went missing through the use of an Advanced Encryption Standard specific to each session. Additionally, Zoom stores audio recordings to Zoom's cloud, which are passcode-protected. Furthermore, committee debriefings and triangulation were conducted to reduce any of these errors from impeding

data interpretation. Member checking was offered, although it was not completed as participants did not request to engage in it.

Transferability

Transferability refers to how much the insights from one study could be relevant to other contexts (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). A lack of transferability would mean that my results would not be applicable to the broader context of school counseling settings. To avoid concerns with transferability, I engaged in thick description as mentioned in Chapter 3. I also ensured that all contextual factors were addressed through reflexivity, fusion of horizons, and contextual framing, using participants' own words to provide rich, credible insight into their engagement in CCPT.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency and stability of data results over time. One of the best ways to test this is through method triangulation (Carter et al., 2014). This was achieved by collecting data from several sources – interviews, observations, and notes. I was also able to follow a step-by-step data analysis plan guided by Gadamerian hermeneutics, see Figure 1. I was also able to complete an inquiry audit. My research committee members examined the process of data collection, data analysis, and the results of this study.

Confirmability

When discussing confirmability, the researcher is talking about the systemic and transparent measures taken to obtain interpretations. For this study, triangulation, reflexive journaling, audit trails, and fusion of horizons were used to ensure

confirmability. I used multiple data sources to validate and analyze findings. I was able to reflect on my own biases and perspectives as both an RPT-S and a school counselor. The use of audit trails provided a transparent record of methodological choices. Finally, by engaging in a fusion of horizons that integrated participants' perspectives with my own, I provided a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

Results

Results were organized based on the goal of this study, to highlight CCPT and understand SC experiences. After going through the six interviews, I started noticing the common codes and patterns. Saldaña (2016) describes coding as a method of capturing elements of the research story that, when put together, enable the development of categories, making it easier to analyze and connect. Once these codes are placed in a systematic order, this becomes codifying. Codifying then leads to categorizing – the grouping of these codes based on similar characteristics. This categorizing is done based on classification reasoning, in this case, the interview questions, as well as my own intuitive senses, to determine which data look and feel alike.

Within these categories, I identified several concepts, see figures 3,4, and 5. These concepts encompass participants ' understanding of school counseling, CCPT, as well as the meaning of a caring school community. The emerging concepts regarding school counselors can be seen in Figure 3. The emerging concepts regarding CCPT can be seen in Figure 4. The emerging concepts of a caring school community can be seen in Figure 5.

Emerging Concept 1: School Counseling

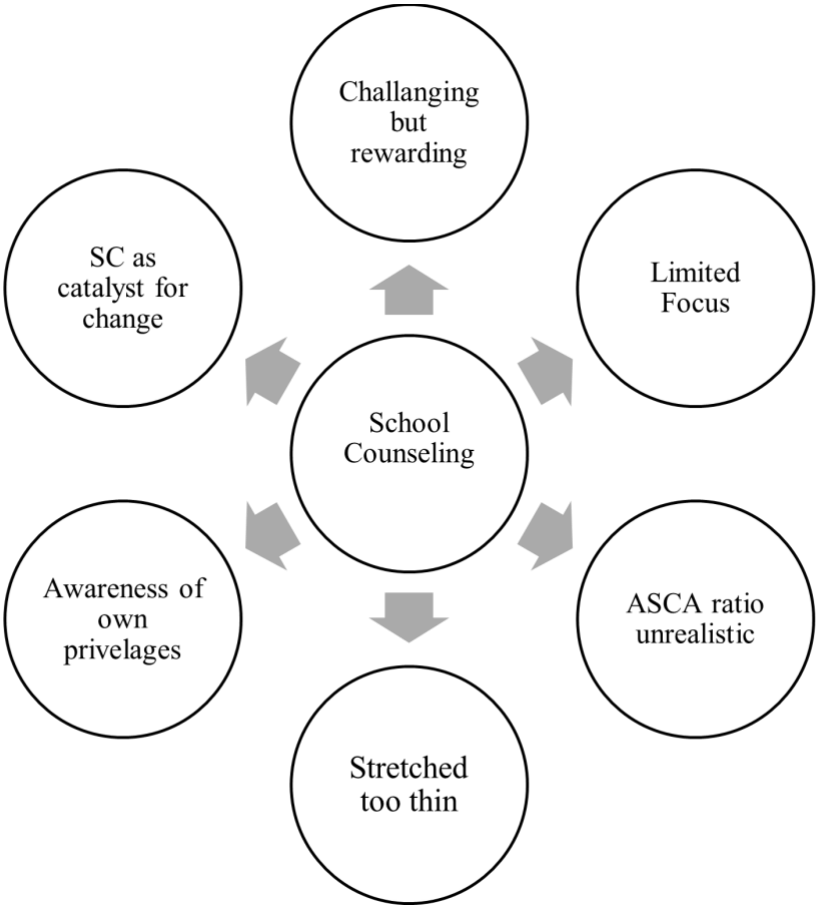
Figure 3 below summarizes the key concepts shaping school counseling practices. These concepts demonstrate the role conflict experienced by SCs. Participants reported that their role is extremely significant yet demanding, especially as they navigate some of the unrealistic expectations, such as the ASCA-recommended student-to-counselor ratio of 250 to 1 (ASCA, 2023) and the competing responsibilities of an administrative role. Despite these structural challenges, SCs have been able to reflect on their own identities, privileges, and biases, recognizing their unique position as catalysts for systemic and student-level change within limited defined roles.

Participants indicated that school counseling can be a challenging but rewarding experience. Not only does ASCA state that the role of SCs is to improve student success through the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2023), but once a SC comes into the school building, SCs begin to wear different hats throughout the day, which makes them stretch too thin. Megan described how she is required to teach 3 grades per quarter, student support, create lesson plans, as well as respond to crisis situations. “It’s hard to have it both ways. I don’t want the work that I do here while I’m alive to be meaningless or to be like just to make money.” Since their school days can vary depending on the day or the time of year, some begin to have a limited focus. Kayla stated, “It also kind of limits you if you just focus on those roles and think, ‘wait a minute. There’s like a bigger picture, too. And I think every school needs something different.” Participants explained how it can be hard to work within the ASCA roles and ratio. When working as a school counselor, Laura added that it’s a way to

become a catalyst for change. “Trying to meet that spirit of like caring for someone, and making someone feel like they belong, and we want to see you well.”

Figure 3

School Counseling Roles and Realities



Emerging Concept 2: CCPT

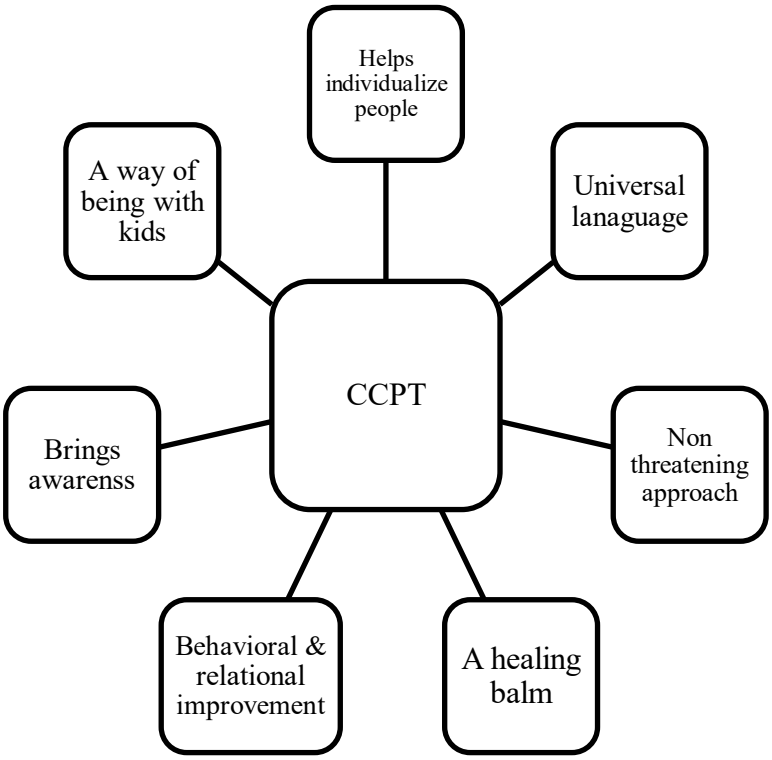
Figure 4 illustrates the emerging concepts related to the integration and impact of CCPT in a high-diversity elementary school setting. These concepts reflect its strength as both a therapeutic modality and a relational stance. Described as a way of relating with kids, CCPT fosters connection through a non-threatening, universal language that

transcends verbal communication (Landreth, 2012). Participants highlighted its role in honoring each student's individuality, offering a healing and affirming space that supports behavioral and relational growth. Lastly, CCPT was seen as a tool for increasing emotional awareness for both students and counselors, thus supporting its gentle yet powerful pathway for holistic development.

Participants all concluded that CCPT is a way of being with kids that uses a universal language. They all agreed that it is a non-threatening approach that works with a wider range of children than other modalities. Juliet added, "it (CCPT) forces you to kind of have an understanding of different cultures and also the child development and how kids develop through play, that really makes it a huge impact in how you work with kids." Not only does CCPT bring awareness of different cultures, but also, they have found that unstructured play helps build students' confidence & motivation. Carter described it as "a universal thing. It is not a culturally bound thing. It looks different in every culture… there are so many things we learn through play as we adjust."

Figure 4

Insights into the Role of CCPT in School Settings



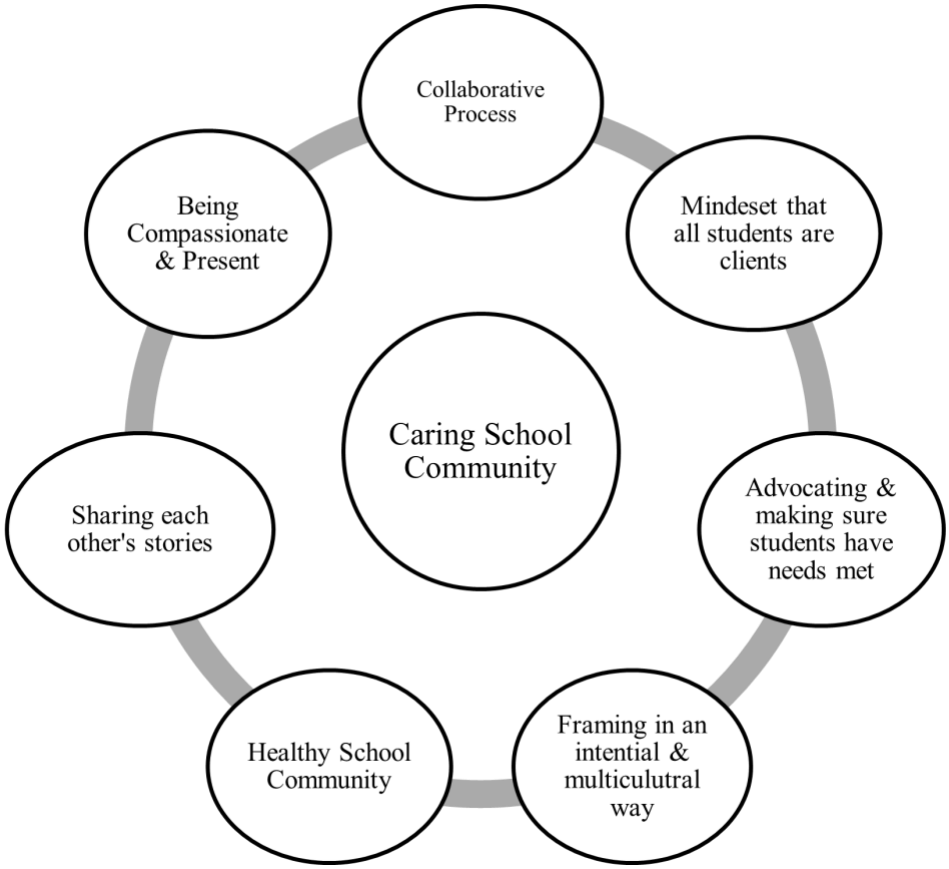
Emerging Concept 3: Caring School Community

Caring school communities (CSC) is a way for the school environment to foster a culture of safety and communication between students, teachers, and administration. Thus, ensuring that students' needs are met, resulting in more commitment from students to the school by behaving according to its goals and values (Battistich et al., 1997). Figure 5 outlines the concepts that appeared during analysis related to the development of a CSC. These concepts emphasize a collective and intentional approach to student support.

Participants all agreed that it was a relational process that includes working together and getting away from resistance. Megan finds this challenging and reported, "Getting people on board for changes that might need to be made or to try something new has been very hard." Karen has found that creating a CSC is about "being present and finding ways to connect with the kiddos." Additionally, Juliet believes that "it's showing a lot of compassion." It is also about being an advocate and the heart of the school. Kayla described this as "the whole school and the culture are important, and that it's inclusive and inviting for everybody." She also added that for her, being a SC in a CSC also means being "someone to advocate and speak up" for students struggling. According to Carter, it is also about being able to engage with students and "kind of engage with the multiple identities many of them held." He further elaborated that "it's very important to think of all students that I serve as my clients, not just the students I see individually or things like that." Finally, participants all agreed that it is an opportunity to make a difference and make sure that students have their needs met.

Figure 5

Building Blocks of a Caring School Community



Furthermore, the main categories were based on the definitions and descriptions articulated by participants during the data collection. Table 2 illustrates the categories & themes I identified. Two overarching themes emerged – CCPT benefits & SC barriers.

Theme 1: CCPT Benefits

The first theme that emerged was on the benefits of CCPT. An approach based on Carl Rogers' person-centered theory. Developed by his student, Virginia Axline, it reflects both a child's natural capacity for achieving growth and perfection, and an attitude based on a deep and enduring belief that children can lead their own development in a positive direction. By allowing children to make their own decisions and experience limit setting for inappropriate behaviors within the CCPT process, children's self-concept increases, and we start seeing psychologically and behaviorally positive outcomes (Heshmati et al, 2023).

Positive student impact showed up repeatedly during my review of the transcripts. Participants noticed that students started to grow and move towards improvement in both behavioral and emotional aspects. They all mentioned that CCPT brings forth the foundational skills needed to achieve these conditions. Karen outlined,

> I think it helps, too, with the communication and validation piece. I think that's one of the biggest things to help kiddos navigate in the school environment. A lot of it's just letting the kiddo lead and making sure I have the tools that they need to express themselves.

Play not only gives kids the words they need, but it also improves relational and interpersonal skills. Karen pointed out that "we need to be playing because it helps us

socialize and develop conflict resolution skills and build resiliency and communication skills." Juliet described being able to

> see students come in and process their trauma and go from screaming and kicking to not wanting to come in the school door to few weeks later where they are just skipping down the hallway and they are enjoying coming to school, so those things mean a lot and being able to incorporate those things in a school setting. Again, I wish PT training were something that was mandatory for SCSs.

Additionally, one of the most rewarding experiences SCs have had is to watch their students grow. Kayla mentioned,

> I just remember all of the relationships with the kids and how that warms your heart. And I've been in it long enough to see how they've grown and developed and are thriving. And so the longevity of having been in a school for a long time is also pretty amazing. You get to sit through the hard times and be strong enough to show there is another side to this.

Counselors who use CCPT believe that the most important element in changing a child's emotional disorder is accepting and understanding the child's expressions and feelings (Heshmati, 2023). SCs in this study mentioned that it has been an invaluable tool for them and their work with students. Kayla stated,

> Just honoring their little people, and they are strong, and they are resilient, and they are suffering, and their little hearts hurt, and they feel powerless. But to celebrate the moments where you see it and where they're doing and where they're playing or where their artwork is or something they did in class, those

> moments to just hold on to them and go, you worked really hard for that. I just think that changed me as a person, too.

Participants all indicated how they are the heart of the school. Laura mentioned, “Being the living, breathing advocate and the living breathing entity that cares and really looks out for students, and kind of that regard has always been something that for me has just been really vital and really important.”

Experiences such as these have not only made them more compassionate but have also increased their advocacy initiatives by increasing their confidence and understanding. Kayla said, “and I feel like it gave me good skills to fall back and not just pound out questions, but to sit and observe the whole. I think every counselor should have that in their tool bag now.” Megan mentioned, “I think it’s made me more willing to challenge people’s assumptions (and) taken a lot of the judgmental self that I would have had one (out).’’ Kayla was noted to have a strong opinion on advocating.

> I think I take the one person can make a difference. One person can be a voice. One person can be an advocate. But it can’t be pushing against the system. It has to be in tandem with the system.

Multiculturalism was another common code that I found across all six of my interviews. Multiculturalism recognizes the many cultural identities that are present within an individual. These identities are important to understand because they tell the different experiences individuals and groups have (Kolfosky, 2015). Karen stated, “I think CCPT is so important, especially for kids from minority populations. One, because

I am the majority white population. So, I'm very aware of that component." Kayla reported,

> I've gotten a really larger view. I learned so much and changed and grew as an individual because these people were willing to share their stories. I was open to my privilege being in the way of seeing, hearing, and understanding the struggles, and that my life and the way I grew up is not the way it is here.

Additionally, Carter described CCPT as a

> universal language. Play is something that, no matter what cultural background the child is coming from, their play might look different, but it gives me a chance to engage with a child, even if we don't speak the same language. It doesn't rely on the client engaging in my language.

Thus, through this multiculturalism, CCPT bridges gaps. Kayla believes that school counseling and its role in creating a caring school community is about recognizing everyone,

> not just the best star student. It was beyond the boundaries of the school, but not losing sight of the student, never losing sight of the individual kids and how we can help them while at the same time making sure that the community is a safe, stable place for that one student to thrive to the best of their ability.

When working with minorities, there's also a need for trauma-informed care. Karen described how some of the minority populations may be facing cultural isolation,

> not because of the majority population not wanting to know, but just more of almost some of the curiosity and the majority not doing their own work or not

> realizing you need to do your own work before you just ask a one-person question, that then you assume they know everything about their culture. And that's a very heavy load to carry for some of our minority kiddos.

Karen expressed that this is where CCPT can "help kids process things at their own pace with their experiences, (without) being rushed and being respected for where they're at, whether that's developmentally or emotionally." Indeed, PT is important for students. Juliet stated,

> I think that (PT) helped tremendously with bridging those gaps and being able to get them to open up to me and be able to get them to communicate with me non-verbally. The use of play therapy is very helpful in helping kids to build that trust and that rapport with their school counselor.

Theme 2: SC Barriers

A second theme which emerged within the data was that of SC barriers. A SC's role is to help students navigate the multiple stressors that may interfere with their ability to learn. PT has been found to increase the self-efficacy in students needed for school success (Ebrahim et al., 2012). However, SCs in this study have found the following support and/or resources necessary for their use of CCPT within the school to be more frequent and effective.

There are a lot of moving parts when working in a school. Megan said, "We have a lot of different viewpoints. (And) there is very little attention paid to what a kid is going through." It is important that everyone in the school works together to ensure meaningful work and student support. Often, it feels as if teachers and administration do not respect

the mental health of kids. SCs are often faced with resistance from school staff or are skeptical of the use of PT. Laura explained how there are times when people come into her office while with a student, despite a sign saying there is a session going on. Laura further exclaimed,

> Counselors should have an office without a double because how are you going to do what you need to do when it doesn't even look appealing. It looks like you're an afterthought. I have seen how it seems like there's often not a respect for mental health for children, because, like, if that were an adult, they wouldn't be doing that (interrupting the session).

Kayla emphasized, "I think having your principal understand the process is important. I mean, teachers are great, but I really think it comes down to the principal because they are the final say." Megan declared, "There's a lot of collaboration from others that you'll need. And yeah, that can be hard when you're like a solo person". Kayla added,

> So I guess, that's the way I've always viewed it and seen it and collaborate with anyone who's willing to get on board to make the school and the individuals, and the families feel important and empowered and part of what's happening.

She further expanded that school counseling, "was always student-focused and always started from a perspective of the students in their homes and their communities." For this reason, efforts are being made to bring in families and "push our vision beyond just that academic hurry." Unfortunately, it was noted that at times, there seems to be a disconnect between getting parents on board and wanting the student to succeed. Megan reflected that "the biggest thing that I've had to fight against are people who don't see the value in

it." Karen provided examples of times when parents didn't want her to see their child in 1:1 or even participate in specific school talks, like suicide prevention. "I think some families are really guarded. And so, then you know they don't see me as an advocate for help. They see me as a barrier, which is like the totally opposite thing that I want to be." There was frustration noted as she discussed further examples of how she's seen a lack of mental health beliefs in some families, which prevents her from working with students.

Furthermore, participants would find it easier and less challenging if more school counselors were added per school. Karen discussed her desire to add additional SCs.

> We're expensive, but I think worth it. And we can only go so far. You know I can't provide a traditional child-centered play therapy experience to every kid I work with. So, I think, just the resources of people, having enough school counselors in a school, to successfully serve the community. You know, ASCA says 1 to 250, which is still crazy. And the majority of school counselors are not 1 to 250.

Kayla pointed out,

> there's a slippery slope when the ASCA model says that we don't do counseling and we don't do individual. That mode can work against us in some of the finer details of what we do. It also kind of limits you if you focus on those roles.

Time restraints and multiple duties were also brought up as one of the most challenging parts of the job. Participants mentioned that each day can look different, even if they come in with a plan. From student support to teaching guidance lessons in the classroom

to parent meetings to even lunch duty can distract them from their work with students. Juliet shared her thoughts on these challenges.

> ASCA recommendation is the 250 to 1, it's unrealistic. So, I think for me, it's the time constraints. It's being stretched too thin. While you want to build a strong program, it does take years to do that, and it takes time, and it takes a lot of support. So, I would say that it's not necessarily that the guidelines or expectations are unrealistic. But to say that this is ideal.

Funding was another challenge for participants. Megan identified how funding usually comes from "donations or begging." Karen acknowledged these financial restraints.

> It takes a lot of money (to maintain roles), and we barely have me as a school counselor there. So, to get funding for quality programming is not available. So you know my administration is very supportive, but there's also, you know, monetary limits.

Kayla talked about how she would love it if there were "endless resources" available to be able to provide more mental health support to students.

Finally, all participants mentioned how beneficial school counselors' work would be if PT were made a requirement in their programs. As Laura put it, PT is "relevant to children," thus it is relevant for school counseling training programs. Juliet explained that

> play therapy is just. It is a valuable tool. I wish that again, if this were a mandatory course, just like ethics and theories, then in my opinion, I feel like we'd see a lot more valuable mental health support on the campus level.

Kayla elaborated,

> It's so important to have training, and when you're working with a young population like elementary age students, play therapy is amazing. It is that nonverbal bridge. It helps build rapport, relationships, trust, and confidence in kiddos. Because talk therapy is great if you're an adult, right? I'm able to do talk therapy with my 14-year-old students, but not when I worked with five-year-olds. They weren't going to sit there; they didn't have the sustained attention. They didn't have the vocabulary to be able to express how they felt.

Laura not only feels it would be a great foundation for SCs to have but also feels it would be beneficial to be able to have the ongoing supervision, resources, and training more accessible.

> From a practical standpoint, if someone is more of a purist, I think that something that's necessary is just resources to engage. And I didn't have, for instance, a playroom. I think most child-centered play therapists and school-based play therapists, I would suspect, are using their own materials rather than school-bought materials. Definitely also just more ability to engage in training and supervision. We don't have, typically, a supervisor at our school. So, if I became an SB-RPT, I had to pay a supervisor for all my SB-RPT supervision. There wasn't really a whole lot of time off. I had to find a way to fit that into the year.

Summary

Overall, this chapter provided the results obtained from my engagement in data collecting. I provided a brief introduction to the study's purpose and research question. I

then described the conditions in which participants' experiences might have been influenced and thus influenced the interpretation of the results. The demographics and characteristics relevant to this study were presented. Moreover, my process of data collection was presented. Finally, I discussed the codes and categories that were found based on this process. Overall, these findings showed the various experiences and understandings SCs have relating to the use of CCPT, school counseling, and working with minority students. The major themes that showed up included the benefits of CCPT and barriers that SCs have that work against them and their roles. Within these themes, several concepts and subthemes appeared. These concepts and subthemes encompass participants' understandings about school counseling, CCPT, and caring school communities.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this hermeneutic study was to explore and understand the needs and experiences of SCs who implement CCPT in high-diversity elementary schools. Through this exploration, I hoped not only to understand the challenges SCs may face but also to highlight the support and resources needed to utilize CCPT appropriately and effectively. This study also aimed to examine how CCPT influences students' social, emotional, and academic outcomes by providing evidence of its effectiveness. The results presented in Chapter 4 demonstrate two key themes: the needs of school counselors and the observed benefits of CCPT. Building on these results, this chapter will offer an in-depth interpretation of the findings and their broader implications. Furthermore, I will discuss the study's limitations and offer recommendations for future research and practice.

Interpretation of the Findings

Guided by Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy, I developed interview questions to facilitate a dialogical process through which participants and I engaged in a fusion of horizons. This fusion of horizons allowed for a deeper understanding of the meaning participants assigned to their experiences as school counselors and their interpretations of the use of CCPT with diverse students. Participants' narratives were not approached as objective reports, but rather as evolving interpretations shaped by both the participants' and my own background and assumptions. By engaging in the hermeneutic circle, I identified two main themes: CCPT benefits and SC needs.

As an SC and RPT-S with the therapeutic lens of CCPT, I was able to recognize and understand these benefits and needs. In my work, I appreciate the fact that when using PT, it is not just about the play but also about the shared space between my understandings and the child's worldviews. My work in a private school does not involve many administrative responsibilities or duties; however, they do still occur on occasion, and these duties then become a necessary part of my work. When this happens, I am reminded of the many complexities and challenges of navigating systemic dynamics and our own professional standards in the capacity of being fully present for the students. This integration of my professional experiences with the insights and narratives shared by participants emphasized the necessity of advocating for environments that foster both effective practice and authentic connection. Thus, creating a fusion of horizons where diverse perspectives converge to foster a shared understanding. The following paragraphs will discuss these themes and concepts in relation to the literature presented in Chapter 2.

Theme 1: CCPT Benefits

Virginia Axline developed CCPT to create a caring relationship between the therapist and the child. Gary Landreth further advanced the CCPT approach by emphasizing the importance of therapeutic safety, relational attachment, and the central role of play in children's emotional expression and self-discovery (Blanco & Ray, 2011). In other words, CCPT therapists meet the children where they are. Data showed that SCs who engaged in CCPT recognize that kids need to be kids, as well as participants, and have an understanding that play gives kids words. Of note, three of the six participants admitted that prior to being trained in CCPT, they felt that something was missing in how

they approached students and that they were initially skeptical of using PT. Two of the six participants agreed that after being trained in CCPT, they are now better SCs. One participant not only describes CCPT as "relevant to children" but also that "you are the most important toy in the room," meaning that as an SC, you are a catalyst for change. Moreover, participants found that by using CCPT, they are better able to build rapport right away with their students.

Parker et al. (2021) discuss how childhood trauma is one of the most significant health struggles in the United States. Children with higher ACEs have harmful consequences for children and the adults they become. Childhood trauma has significant impacts on the brain and body. Bratton et al. (2005) completed a meta-analysis demonstrating the effectiveness of PT across a wide range of populations and issues, such as trauma, behavioral concerns, and emotional regulation. They further concluded that PT is an effective intervention for a wide range of children's problems and is uniquely responsive to a child's developmental needs, particularly as it has positive effects on children's behaviors, social adjustment, and personality. Not only has CCPT been linked with decreasing the negative effects on children while increasing caregiver-child relationships, self-efficacy, and academic performance (Conroy & Perryman, 2022). Participants explained how CCPT is a trauma-informed approach that provides the distance needed for students to process any trauma and their identities.

Regarding participants' experiences using CCPT with students of ACEs, they reported the following on how it has influenced their understanding of its effectiveness. Participants found that it has increased their own patience and compliance; there is the

opportunity to tailor the CCPT components based on the child's needs. Participants also reported having an increased value of expression and engaging in experiential modalities. There was also the realization that there needs to be more trauma-informed care.

Additionally, participants shared how, through their interactions with students, they have seen some of the differences between minority and nonminority students, which is that they do have more "tough circumstances to work through." Being part of a certain racial group has been linked with a higher risk of ACEs as well as lower academic achievements and engagement (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018). This work with students has also helped participants become more aware of the cultural differences and of their own biases by bridging gaps.

Previous research has shown that CCPT not only provides a safe space for children but also has a positive impact on children's behaviors and self-esteem, regardless of ethnicity (Phipps et al., 2019). SCs in this study expressed how invaluable CCPT has been to them and their students. They further believed that using CCPT forces you to understand different cultures, thus bringing forth more awareness and reducing cultural isolation. Through participants' interactions with minority students, they have seen students transition from being shy and terrified to engaging and happy about coming to school. Indeed, participants noted that CCPT has improved socializing, builds resiliency, and student communication skills.

Participants were asked to describe what it means to promote a caring school community (CSC) and share their experiences in fostering a CSC within the schools. The literature shows that CSCs are an effort to provide a supportive environment for students

to positively develop. They assist in promoting a sense of belongingness within students, which in turn facilitates prosocial behaviors, including positive attitudes and involvement in their K-12 academic experiences (Lindwall & Coleman, 2008; Jayne & Ray, 2016). Through the use of the core tenets of CCPT, such as empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence, SCs can aid in further developing a school culture that prioritizes trust and respect, thus laying the foundation for a CSC.

Participants described CSCs as being able to work together, being present, giving students the foundational skills, showing compassion, and being multiculturally aware. Some of the significance these experiences hold for them includes fostering community, showing care, continuing to learn and develop, and witnessing students succeed. Moreover, participants all expressed that using CCPT can ensure that meaningful work is being done.

Theme 2: SC Barriers

CCPT is a humanistic philosophy used for working with children. It has received support and attention for its effectiveness in decreasing externalizing behavior problems. Furthermore, it has been shown that CCPT is a preventative and responsive intervention within the school setting. Despite these findings, there are barriers that are preventing its use in schools (Shin & Gonzalez, 2018). Former studies found that SCs do value PT; however, due to a lack of time, lack of physical space, lack of funds, lack of supervision, reduction in the number of SCs per school, and a misconception of school staff and parents, they do not use it (Ebrahim et al., 2012). Additionally, Pereira and Smith-Adcock (2013) further discuss that the SC role becomes minimized by navigating classroom

operations or the administration of academic and classroom assessments. Crumrine (2013) explained how the consistent use of CCPT enables counselors to have positive experiences with its use, despite ongoing challenges.

Kestly (2016) describes the need for presence and resonance to allow for the desired deep connection and emotional attunement that defines effective PT. Presence is defined as a way of being open, receptive, and engaging in continuous growth, both in relation to the internal and external world. Resonance is defined as a dynamic interaction between systems that are influenced by one another and form a unified, functioning whole. When both of these states are achieved, conditions are created for clients to experience a profound sense of being seen and "feeling felt." However, within a school-based setting, the above systemic barriers often compromise the ability and consistency to cultivate this ideal therapeutic environment. Consequently, it impacts the depth of engagement and the potential for positive outcomes.

Participants were asked to reflect on their understanding of the ASCA roles of an elementary school counselor and the challenges that they face in maintaining these roles, as well as being a PT. All participants agreed that one of the hardest challenges they face is being asked to do "non-school counselor-related tasks" because they feel that it takes them away from the students. Megan expressed disappointment, stating that when she's in a classroom providing SEL lessons and is constantly being pulled out by administration, it sends the message to the students that what she is doing in there is not as important. Participants felt that there is still a lack of mental health beliefs among staff and families. There are times when they feel rushed, are constantly interrupted during

their one-on-one sessions, feel isolated, and are stretched too thin. Due to the reliance on a heavy administrative piece, participants find it challenging to find a way to structure and balance.

When asked how participants have been affected by these challenges, they agreed that it feels like they lose the essence of their professional identities. The data highlighted a sense of frustration that participants felt when trying to show their value and worth. Participants' accounts illustrated an ambivalence of being a helper vs. not having all the answers. Carter describes this as a "weight of the structural things" that he takes home more than the students' stories. He also finds it difficult to recommend this field to his master's level students.

As supported by the literature, participants also described a challenge with budget and funding restraints. If grants are not in place, SCs must buy their own PT materials. With low finances comes a lack of space (Ebrahim et al., 20212). Participants stated that it is important for counselors to have an office to do their work, rather than sharing space with another teacher or having pipes exposed on the roof or walls. This was perceived by participants as further evidence of the lack of respect for children's mental health. Participants pointed out that they are being asked to meet more expectations than the school is willing to fund. Additionally, their schools are only budgeted for one SC to fill all these expectations, thus making the ASCA ratio unrealistic.

Trice-Black et al. (2013) found that there are numerous external variables, such as financial, space, or time constraints, that limit the use of CCPT within schools. Participants were asked what support or resources they believe are necessary for the use

of CCPT in schools to be more frequent and effective. Their responses were consistent with those of prior research by Crumrine (2013) and Shen (2017), stating that having parent support and a lack of resources were associated with these outcomes. Participants would like more collaboration from everyone, more school counselors per school, respecting the space, funding for endless resources, and would like to see there be more availability for supervision and training. Their insights further expanded on the research by emphasizing that it is important to know how to advocate, have your own support system in place, and that more psychoeducation for teachers and parents is needed for them to understand the process of CCPT, as well as better understand SCs roles.

Limitations of the Study

As stated in chapter 1, some of the limitations of a hermeneutic study include time and participant and researcher biases. There was potential researcher bias and subjectivity, which may have influenced how much participants responded and how I interpreted the data. I do have knowledge of CCPT and working in schools. However, by using Gadamer's hermeneutic stance, this emergence of experience and shared practices, along with reflexivity, is what is necessary for obtaining a meaningful result. I engaged in ongoing reflexivity by maintaining notes and revisiting the transcripts to check that interpretations aligned with participants' intended meanings. Part of the notetaking included pausing after each interview to note where my own lens may have influenced probing questions. Participant bias was also considered. SCs may have overreported positive engagement or minimized challenges in CCPT to appear competent. To reduce

this, I made sure to provide confidentiality assurances, have open-ended questions, and offered member checking.

Not only are these methodological considerations important in the interpretation of the findings, but also certain demographics and the professional characteristics of the sample, which were not evenly composed. One male SC was among the participants interviewed. This limits awareness of how male-identifying SCs experience these dynamics. There were also more RPTs than SB-RPTs. The SB-RPT credential was created specifically for SCs to work with students. Given the differences in how they are trained, this could have influenced the nature of the themes that developed. For instance, those with the RPT credential may have brought a stronger emphasis on clinical PT application, vs SB-RPTs, who have more of a specialized school setting training (APT, 2017). This could have shaped the discussion of CCPT implementation, benefits, and challenges that differ from the perspectives of SB-RPTs. As Carter pointed out, SB-RPT is still new and is "the odd child in the PT world."

Recommendations

Since the SB-RPT credential is a newer credential offered by the Association of Play Therapy, it was hard to recruit SB-RPTs. It would be good for future research to focus on this credential, given their specialized training for using PT in schools. It would also be helpful to gather more insight from male SB-RPTs and their interaction with students, as well as their use of CCPT. Furthermore, the use of mixed-methods approaches combining qualitative insights with quantitative measures of student well-being, academic growth, or counselor effectiveness will further enrich our understandings

of the impact of CCPT in diverse school settings and strengthen the evidence base for policy and program decisions. In addition, the use of cross-cultural studies following the long-term impact of CCPT on student outcomes would provide a deeper understanding of the effects on diverse student populations. Kumara and Subramani's (2024) research suggests that there is a gender preference towards female counselors, as well as the stereotypical characteristics of them being warm and understanding. Including more male voices in future research can deepen the understanding of how gender influences the practice and availability of SB-RPT services.

Implications

As previously mentioned, this study was intended to understand the needs of SCs by exploring their experiences implementing CCPT in highly diverse elementary schools. By understanding these experiences and the challenges that are faced daily, one can become better equipped to serve minority children. Perryman & Bowers (2018) suggest that for SCs to effectively do their jobs with children of all races, they need to be equipped with the tools necessary to promote emotional, behavioral, or mental illness. The school environment is the perfect place to enhance a child's self-regulation since they spend the majority of their day here (Caughy et al., 2018). This study highlights the experiences of doing the important job that SCs are doing within the schools, but also the inclusive and nonthreatening approach that they are using to achieve overall school success for children who may not otherwise have access to mental health services. These findings provide insight into the resources and support that SCs require to provide CCPT for it to become more frequent and effective.

This study not only enhances the understanding of the importance of CCPT within the schools but also underlines the need for school staff and policymakers to recognize the value of CCPT and provide the structural and material support necessary for its implementation. Carter pointed out that this work can be difficult due to the structural challenges.

> One of the things that really makes it difficult to recommend to some people (as a counselor educator) like staying in the school system or working in the school system is the challenges that you do face structurally as far as things like the balance of ratio, the amount of your time spent on administrative tasks, (or) the pushback in certain states against school counseling."

Results found will inform district-level decision makers to make informed choices about staffing ratios, ensuring a more adequate counselor-to-student ratio that will support PT interventions and student connections. SCs are clearly doing important work and facing ongoing challenges, and so school systems could improve in how they distribute resources. Budget allocations can be enhanced to provide sufficient resources for PT materials and training necessary to continue this important work.

Findings further strengthened that the success of CCPT also depends on the increased collaboration among school staff and parents to create a school-wide culture that prioritizes emotional well-being. Not only are collaborative efforts between schools and parents important, but also those between practicing SCs and counselor education programs, where the integration of CCPT and multicultural competence into courses can establish a strong foundation for future SCs. Shin et al. (2018) found that SCs have

increased self-efficacy after being provided with adequate CCPT training and can confidently apply it with their students. This can be possible not only through training but also through mentoring and supervision efforts.

By enhancing CCPT support, elementary students will also be able to enhance their experiences, outcomes, and overall well-being. This would allow for greater access to a therapeutic intervention that is both supportive in emotional and social development. When SCs have the ability for enough resources to support their engagement in CCPT, then there will be more consistency and effectiveness of PT strategies and techniques that allow for students to process their feelings, manage stress, and develop coping skills without interruptions. Ultimately, by providing adequate space and conditions needed for CCPT, students will also gain the support necessary for improving both emotional and social skills, which can indirectly improve classroom behaviors, peer interactions, and focus on learning.

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the interpretation of the study's findings, shedding light on the lived experiences of SCs implementing CCPT in highly diverse elementary school settings. By engaging with the data, valuable insights surfaced about the challenges faced, understandings of using CCPT, as well as the essential role that SCs play in supporting students' emotional well-being. Key limitations of the study were explored, including small sample size, researcher positionality, and underrepresentation of male SCs and SB-RPTs. Next, recommendations were offered to strengthen future research and practice, including the need for administrative support and increased male counselor

representation. Finally, these insights showed information on how CCPT can be effectively and equitably implemented to meet the mental health needs of all students.

References

Alsaigh, R., & Coyne, I. (2021). Doing a hermeneutic phenomenology research underpinned by Gadamer's philosophy: A framework to facilitate data analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods,* 20, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211047820

American School Counselor Association. (2022). *ASCA ethical standards for school counselors.* https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/44f30280-ffe8-4b41-9ad8-f15909c3d164/EthicalStandards.pdf

American School Counselor Association. (2024). *The school counselor's role in student mental health.* https://www.schoolcounselor.org/Magazines/September-October-2022/The-School-Counselor-s-Role-in-Student-Mental-Heal

American School Counselor Association. (2023). *The role of the school counselor.* Role-Statement.pdf (schoolcounselor.org)

American School Counselor Association. (2019). *The ASCA National Model: A framework for school counseling programs* (4th ed.). Alexandria, VA.

American School Counselor Association. (2019b). *The essential role of elementary school counselors.* Why-Elem.pdf (schoolcounselor.org)

American Psychological Association. (2024). *Socioeconomic status*. https://www.apa.org/topics/socioeconomic-status

Association for Play Therapy. (2014). *About APT.* https://www.a4pt.org/page/AboutAPT

Association for Play Therapy. (n.d.) *Frequently asked questions: RPT credential.* https://www.a4pt.org/general/custom.asp?page=FAQRPT#:~:text=In%20January

%20of%202016%2C%20APT%20launched%20its,new%20credential%2C%20the%20School%20Based-Registered%20Play%20Therapist%E2%84%A2%20%28SB-RPT%E2%84%A2%29.

Association for Play Therapy. (2017). *Frequently asked questions: School-based registered play therapist (SB-RPT).* *https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.a4pt.org/resource/resmgr/credentials/2020_credentials/sb-rpt_faq_master.pdf*

Battistich, V., Solomon, D., Watson, M., & Schaps, E. (1997). Caring school communities. *Educational Psychologist*, *32*(3), 137–151. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep3203_1

Berk, L. E. (2013). *Child development* (9th ed.). Pearson Education.

Blalock, S. M., Lindo, N., & Ray, D. C. (2019). Individual and group child-centered play therapy: Impact on social-emotional competencies. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *97*(3), 238–249. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12264

Blanco, P., Holliman, R., Muro, J., Toland, S., & Farnam, J. (2017). Long term child-centered play therapy effects on academic achievement with normal functioning children. *Journal of Child & Family Studies*, *26*(7), 1915–1922. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-017-0701-0

Blanco, P., & Ray, D. (2011). Play therapy in elementary schools: A best practice for improving academic achievement. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 89, 235–243. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2011.tb00083.x

Blodgett, C., & Lanigan, J. D. (2018). The association between adverse childhood experience (ACE) and school success in elementary school children. *School Psychology Quarterly, 33*(1), 137–146. https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000256

Boucher, S., Downing, J., & Shemilt, R. (2014). The role of play in children's palliative care. *Children (Basel, Switzerland)*, *1*(3), 302–317. https://doi.org/10.3390/children1030302

Bratton, S. C., Ray, D., Rhine, T., & Jones, L. (2005). The efficacy of play therapy with children: A meta-analytic review of treatment outcomes. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 36*(4), 376–390.

Bratton, S. (2010). Meeting the early mental health needs of children through school-based play therapy: A review of outcome research. In A. Drewes & C. Schaefer (Eds.), *School-based play therapy* (2nd ed., pp. 17–58). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Carter N, Bryant-Lukosius D, DiCenso A, Blythe J, Neville AJ. (2014). The use of triangulation in qualitative research. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, *41*(5), 545–547. https://doi.org/10.1188/14.ONF.545-547. PMID: 25158659.

Caughy, M. O., Mills, B., Brinkley, D., & Owen, M. T. (2018). Behavioral self-regulation, early academic achievement, and the effectiveness of urban schools for low-income ethnic minority children. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *61*(3/4), 372–385. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12242

Cochran, J. L., & Cochran, N. H. (2017). Effects of child-centered play therapy for students with highly-disruptive behavior in high-poverty schools. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, *26*(2), 59–72. https://doi.org/10.1037/pla0000052

Cochran, J. L., & Cochran, N. H. (2017b). Pre-post demographic study of child-centered play therapy for students with highly disruptive behavior in high-poverty schools. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Counseling*, *3*(2), 88–102. https://doi.org/10.1080/23727810.2017.1294919

Cochran, J. L., Spangler, G. D., Wynn, M. K., Cochran, N. H., & Gantt, H. S. (2024). Explaining child-centered play therapy through a cognitive–behavioral lens to increase caregiver buy-in. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, *33*(2), 81–92. https://doi.org/10.1037/pla0000215

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. 2024. *Fundamentals of SEL*. https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/

Conroy, J & Perryman, K. (2022). Treating trauma with child-centered play therapy through the secure lens of polyvagal theory. *International Journal of Play Therapy, 31(3), 143–152. https://doi.org/10.1037/pla0000172*

Crumrine, L. R. (2013). *Exploring the experiences of play therapists working with children diagnosed with autism* (Order No. 3567531). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global Closed Collection; ProQuest One Academic. (1417766862). https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/exploring-experiences-play-therapists-working/docview/1417766862/se-2

De Vito, K. (2017). Schools fall short: Lack of therapeutic continuum of care in public schools. *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping*, *23*(4), 4–19.

Dibley, L., Dickerson, S., Duffy, M., & Vandermause, R. (2020). Data analysis and interpretation. In *Doing Hermeneutic Phenomenological Research: A Practical*

Guide (pp. 113-134). SAGE Publications Ltd, https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529799583

Ebrahim, C., Steen, R. L., & Paradise, L. (2012). Overcoming school counselors' barriers to play therapy. *International Journal of Play Therapy, 21(4), 202–214.* https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029791

Eccles, J. S. (1999). The development of children ages 6 to 14. *The Future of Children*, 9(2), 30-44.

Fujishiro, K., Xu, J., & Gong, F. (2010). What does "occupation" represent as an indicator of socioeconomic status?: Exploring occupational prestige and health. *Social Science & Medicine*, *71*(12), 2100–2107. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2010.09.026

Fye, H. J., Miller, L. G., & Rainey, J. S. (2017). Predicting school counselors' supports and challenges when implementing the ASCA national model. *Professional School Counseling, 21*(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X18777671

Goodman-Scott, E. (2018). Enhancing student learning by "building a caring climate": School counselors' experiences with classroom management. *Professional School Counseling*, *22*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X19852618

Gysbers, N. C., & Henderson, P. (2012). *Developing & managing your school guidance & counseling program* (5th ed.). American Counseling Association.

Halcomb, E.J. & Davidson, P.M. (2006). Is verbatim transcription of interview data always necessary? *Applied Nursing Research*, *19*(1), 38–42.

Heshmati, R., Esmailpour, K., Hajsaghati, R., & Barenji, F. A. (2023). The effect of

child-centered play therapy (CCPT) on the symptoms of oppositional defiant disorder in preschool children. *International Journal of Play*, *12*(2), 193–205. https://doi.org/10.1080/21594937.2023.2209240

Institute of Education Sciences (IES). *Title 1: Fast Facts*. https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=158

Jayne, K. M., & Ray, D. C. (2016). Child-centered play therapy as a comprehensive school counseling approach: Directions for research and practice. *Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapies*, *15*(1), 5–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/14779757.2015.1132757

Kestly, T. A. (2016). Presence and play: Why mindfulness matters. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, *25*(1), 14–23. https://doi.org/10.1037/pla0000019

Kolfosky, S. (2015). Multicultural counseling. In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Intercultural Competence* (Vol. 2, pp. 638–641). SAGE Publications, Inc., https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483346267.n207

Kool, R., & Lawver, T. (2010). Play therapy: Considerations and applications for the practitioner. *Psychiatry*, *7*(10), 19–24.

Kumar, S., & Subramani, D. (2024). Bridging Perspectives: Exploring Challenges of Male Therapists/Counsellors in the Indian Context. *Indian Journal of Health & Wellbeing*, *15*(2), 252–257.

Landreth, G. L. (2012). *Play therapy: The art of the relationship*. Taylor & Francis Group.

Lewis-Beck, M. S., Bryman, A., & Liao, T. F. (2004). Hermeneutics. In *The SAGE*

Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods (Vol. 3, pp. 455–457). SAGE Publications, Inc., https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412950589

Lindwall, J. J., & Coleman, H. L. K. (2008). The elementary school counselor's role in fostering caring school communities. *Professional School Counseling*, *12*(2), 144.

Maddox, R. P., II, Carnes-Holt, K., & McKim, C. (2022). Impacts of an intensive child-centered play therapy training workshop for school counselors. *Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapies*, *22*(2), 191–208. https://doi.org/10.1080/14779757.2022.2104752

Massengale, B., & Perryman, K. (2021). Child-centered play therapy's impact on academic achievement: A longitudinal examination in at-risk elementary school students. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, *30*(2), 98–111. https://doi.org/10.1037/pla0000129

McDaniel, S. C., Bardhoshi, G., & Kivlighan, D. M. (2022). Universal SEL implementation to improve community and prosocial skills: A pilot study. *School Community Journal*, *32*(2), 57–76.

Morgan, P. L., Farkas, G., Hillemeier, M. M., & Maczuga, S. (2017). Replicated evidence of racial and ethnic disparities in disability identification in US schools. *Educational Researcher*, *46*(6), 305–322. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X17726282

Näslund-Hadley, E., Mateo-Berganza, M., Santos, H., Cabra, M., & Vélez, L. (2023). Socioemotional learning in early childhood education: Experimental evidence from the think equal program's implementation in Colombia. *Early Childhood*

Education Journal. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-023-01503-w

National Conference of State Legislatures. (2022). *Adverse Childhood Experiences.* https://www.ncsl.org/health/adverse-childhood-experiences

North Carolina Collaborative for Children, Youth, and Families. (2020). *School based mental health.* https://nccollaborative.org/school-based-behavioral-and-mental-health/

Oxford English Dictionary. (2024). *Diversity*. https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=diversity

Parker, M. M., Hergenrather, K., Smelser, Q., & Kelly, C. T. (2021). Exploring child-centered play therapy and trauma: A systematic review of literature. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, *30*(1), 2–13. https://doi.org/10.1037/pla0000136.supp

Patino, C. M., & Ferreira, J. C. (2018). Internal and external validity: Can you apply research study results to your patients? *Jornal Brasileiro de Pneumologia*, *44*(3), 183. https://doi.org/10.1590/S1806-37562018000000164

PeoPeoples, K. (2021). *How to write a phenomenological dissertation: A step-by-step guide.* SAGE.

Pereira, J., & Smith-Adcock, S. (2013). An evaluation of a child-centered play therapy workshop for school counselors. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, *22*(3), 129–142. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033388

Perryman, K. L., & Bowers, L. (2018). Turning the focus to behavioral, emotional, and social well-being: The impact of child-centered play therapy. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, *27*(4), 227–241. https://doi.org/10.1037/pla0000078

Post, P. B., Phipps, C. B., Camp, A. C., & Grybush, A. L. (2019). Effectiveness of child-centered play therapy among marginalized children. *International Journal of Play Therapy, 28*(2), 88–97. https://doi.org/10.1037/pla0000096

Ray, D. C. (2011). *Advanced play therapy: Essential conditions, knowledge, and skills for child practice*. Routledge.

Ray, D. C., Armstrong, S. A., Balkin, R. S., & Jayne, K. M. (2015). Child-centered play therapy in the schools: Review and meta-analysis. *Psychology in the Schools*, *52*(2), 107–123. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21798

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I.S. (2012). *Qualitative interviewing: The art if hearing data* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. (3rd ed). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Salter, K., Beamish, W., & Davies, M. (2016). The effects of child-centered play therapy on the social and emotional growth of young Australian children with autism. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, *25*(2), 78–90. https://doi.org/10.1037/pla0000012

Schunk, D. H., Pintrich, P. R., & Meece, J. L. (2008). *Motivation in education: Theory, research, and applications* (3rd ed.). Pearson Education.

Shen, Y.-J. (2016). A descriptive study of school counselors' play therapy experiences with the culturally diverse. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, *25*(2), 54–63. https://doi.org/10.1037/pla0000017

Shen, Y-J. (2017). Play therapy with adolescents in schools: Counselors' firsthand

experiences. *International Journal of Play Therapy, 26*(2), 84–95. https://doi.org/10.1037/pla0000037

Shin, S. M. & Gonzalez, J. (2018). A child-centered play therapy workshop for professional elementary school counselors: An exploratory study. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, *27*(3), 134–145. https://doi.org/10.1037/pla0000072

Slaten, C. D., Wachter-Morris, C., Williams, M. S., Lee, J., Haberski, J., & Hovey, S. (2024). School counselors' current experiences in the classroom in a post-pandemic era: A mixed-methods study. *Professional School Counseling*, *28*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X241247165

Suddick, K. M., Cross, V., Vuoskoski, P., Galvin, K. T., & Stew, G. (2020). The work of hermeneutic phenomenology. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *19*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920947600

Tichnor-Wagner, A., & Allen, D. (2016). Accountable for care: Cultivating caring school communities in urban high schools. *Leadership & Policy in Schools*, *15*(4), 406–447. https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2016.1181185

Tilman, A.L. (2023). Ten things school counselors want you to know about being a SB-RPT. *Play Therapy, 18 (1),* 24–27.

Trice-Black, S., Bailey, C. L., & Riechel, M. E. K. (2013). Play therapy in school counseling. *Professional School Counseling*, *16*(5), 303–312. https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X1201600503

Turner, R., Schoeneberg, C., Ray, D., & Lin, Y.-W. (2020). Establishing play therapy competencies: A Delphi study. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, *29*(4),

177–190. https://doi.org/10.1037/pla000013

Van Horne, J. W., Post, P. B., & Phipps, C. B. (2018). Factors related to the use of play therapy among elementary school counselors. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, *27*(3), 125–133. https://doi.org/10.1037/pla0000073

Wilson, B. J., & Ray, D. (2018). Child-centered play therapy: Aggression, empathy, and self-regulation. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *96*(4), 399–409. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12222

Winburn, A., Gilstrap, D., & Perryman, M. (2017). Treating the tiers: Play therapy responds to intervention in the schools. International Journal of Play Therapy, **26**(1), 1–11.https://doi.org/10.1037/pla0000041

Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Subject line:

Invitation to participate in a hermeneutic study on school counselors use of CCPT while working in high diversity elementary schools

Email message:

Dear [Counselor's Name],

I hope this message finds you well. My name is Ruth DeVito, and I am a PhD student at Walden University. I am reaching out to invite you to participate in an interview study focused on understanding the unique challenges and strategies of school counselors working in high diversity elementary schools and the use of CCPT.

Your expertise and experience as a school counselor in a diverse educational setting make you an invaluable resource for this study. I aim to explore effective practices, challenges, and support systems that can enhance the educational experience for students from diverse backgrounds.

About the study:

- One 60-minute Zoom interview that will be audio recorded
- We will coordinate a time that best suits your availability
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- 18 years old or older
- Be a school counselor in high diversity elementary schools

- Hold a license/certification in school counseling
- Are or have been a RPT or SB-RPT
- Have training on and used CCPT strategies and techniques

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Interviews will take place during June.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me at ruth.devito@waldenu.edu.

Thank you for considering this opportunity to share your valuable perspectives. Your contribution will significantly enhance our understanding of the critical role school counselors play in fostering inclusive and supportive educational environments. The researcher will follow up with all volunteers to let them know whether or not they were selected for the study.

Warm regards,

Ruth DeVito, MA, LCMHC-QS, RPT

Doctorate Student

Walden University

Appendix B: Interview Guide

The Interview

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Your insights and experiences are incredibly valuable, and I appreciate your willingness to share them with me. Before we begin with the questions, I want to remind you that this interview is part of a hermeneutic study aimed at understanding the experiences of school counselors working in high diversity elementary schools. The information you provide will be used to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and strategies involved in your role.

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. I am interested in your personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Everything you share will be kept confidential, and your identity will be anonymized in any reports or presentations that result from this research.

If at any point you feel uncomfortable or need a break, please let me know. You are also free to skip any questions you prefer not to answer. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time.

Do you have any questions before we start? (pause)

Let's start with getting a little information about you. Could you please state what your credentials are and how long you have been in the field?

Awesome. Let's begin.

1. What does being a counselor in a school setting and promoting a caring school community (CSC) mean to you personally?
2. Describe a typical day at your school from your perspective.

3. Can you share your personal experiences in fostering a CSC within the schools?
4. What significance do these experiences hold for you?
5. Reflecting on your understanding of the ASCA roles of elementary school counselors, what challenges do you find most difficult in maintaining these roles?
6. How have these challenges affected you personally as a school counselor?
7. In what ways has your training as a school-based play therapist (SB-RPT) or registered play therapist (RPT) influenced your roles and shaped your experiences?
8. Can you provide specific examples of how you have applied this training in your work with students?
9. How do your personal experiences shape your understanding of the importance of play therapy for students?
10. Describe your experience with CCPT as a school counselor in a high diversity elementary school and the meaning these experiences hold for you.
11. Can you describe your experiences using CCPT with students who have ACEs? How have these experiences influenced your understanding of its effectiveness?
12. How has your understanding and experience with CCPT impacted your role and interactions with minority students?
13. How would you interpret the differences between working with minority students and working with other students/settings?
14. What support or resources do you believe are necessary for your use of CCPT in schools to be more frequent and effective?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me or add about this topic?

Closing

Once again, thank you so much for doing this for me. How are you feeling after all that and the process of being interviewed? Would you like for me to send you a copy of my notes/transcripts to make sure that that I got your thoughts straight? Is it ok if I contact you if I need any additional clarifications on the answers that you provided? Again, please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any additional questions or concerns.