The Experiences of School Counselors Who Integrate Yoga into a Comprehensive School Counseling Program: A Phenomenological Approach

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Counselor Education and Supervision at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

THE EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS WHO INTEGRATE YOGA INTO A COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAM: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

By Julia V. Taylor, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Counselor Education and Supervision at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore the experiences of school counselors who implement yoga into a comprehensive school counseling program. Over the past decade, yoga has gained popularity as a prevention and intervention tool in public school settings. Prior to this study, the role of the school counselor in this process has not been explored. This study investigated the lived experiences of 10 school counselors who integrate yoga into a comprehensive school counseling program. Through data analysis, five significant themes and subsequent subthemes emerged: 1) intentionality (personal experiences with yoga impacts professional intentions, yoga intentionally tied with comprehensive school counseling goal); 2) yoga integration (organic commonalities between school counseling and yoga, methods of yoga delivery, overlap of yoga philosophies and ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors standards); 3) logistics of yoga integration (accessibility of yoga, managing yoga myths and stereotypes, program supports); 4) perception of yoga impact, (overall impact on school, impact on student, examples of students taking yoga “off the mat”); and 5) impact of yoga integration on school counselor (yoga as a self-care strategy, yoga is a meaningful aspect of school counselor role).
Findings from this study suggest that yoga is a viable and valuable tool to include in a comprehensive school counseling program. Moreover, as the yoga in schools movement continues to grow, school counselors should be regarded as essential stakeholders in the development, implementation, and evaluation process. Results from this study provide a foundation for future research concerning school counselors and yoga.
CHAPTER I

Over the last century, the school counseling profession has evolved from providing vocational guidance to a few students, to the development of a comprehensive school counseling program that meets the academic, career, and social/emotional needs of all students (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012; Herr & Edford, 2007; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). The field of school counseling has developed alongside the educational reform movement (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012), resulting in a demand for school counselors to demonstrate accountability for their services (Baker & Gerler, 2004). As accountability standards in education continued to reform, school counseling professionals responded with a transformational framework designed to improve the quality of school counseling services.

In an effort to help school counselors define their roles and functions, in 2003 the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) published *The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs* (ASCA, 2003). The ASCA National Model highlights the components of a comprehensive school counseling program and provides school counselors with a framework to connect program goals and objectives to local, state, and national accountability standards (ASCA, 2003). The ASCA National Model challenges school counselors to serve as advocates, leaders, and partners in systemic change in order to provide equitable services to all students.
School counselors are expected to produce data to demonstrate how students are different as a result of their work (ASCA, 2003; ASCA, 2005; ASCA, 2012). This task involves the development of a data-driven, comprehensive school counseling program that meets the needs of all students. Working within the framework of the ASCA National Model, a comprehensive school counseling program emphasizes student growth and development to ensure long-term success (Dahir & Stone, 2012). School counselors are tasked with providing direct and indirect services within each quadrant and theme of the ASCA National Model, which includes the implementation of evidence-based school counseling programs that focus on impacting the whole child.

In schools, mind-body awareness programs and interventions are gaining traction as we learn more about the potential benefits to students. Over the past decade, yoga implementation within the K-12 school setting has grown at a tremendous pace (Berger, Silver, and Stein, 2009; Black, Clarke, Barnes, Stussman & Nahin, 2015; Busch, 2007; Conboy, Noggle, Frey, Kudesia, & Khalsa, 2013; Chaya, Nagendra, Selvam, Kurpad, & Srinivasan, 2012; Berger et al., 2009; Ehud et al., 2010; Galantino, Galbavy, & Quinn, 2008; Kaley-Isley et al., 2010; Mardesich, 2007; Steiner et al., 2012). Yoga is considered to be an ancient practice of universal health aimed at developing the mind, body, and spirit (Balasubramaniam et al., 2013; Douglass, 2007; Ehud, An, & Avshalom, 2010; Flynn, 2013; Williamson, 2012). Hyde (2012) argues when implemented in a school, yoga offers a “socially transgressive pedagogy” (p. 110) that has the power to remove systemic barriers that ultimately lead to oppression. Hyde (2012) further asserts, “…the movement to include yoga and meditation in schools contributes to a revise discourse on the goals of public education, on that attends to the health and wellness needs of ‘the whole child’” (p. 100). While more empirical research concerning yoga in schools is
needed, current studies suggest yoga can reduce stress levels, relieve tiredness, dissipate excess energy, increase attention span, improve physical health, lengthen concentration, and refine mental clarity (Peck, Kehle, Bray, & Theodore, 2005); all potential barriers to student achievement. Although new studies continue to emerge regarding the yoga in schools movement, continually absent from such literature is the role of the school counselor in integrating yoga in schools, specifically as part of a comprehensive school counseling program.

**Need for the Study**

As research continues to emerge citing the benefits of yoga for youth, the industry has received a substantial amount of national attention. In addition to schools, the practice of yoga has been introduced in numerous venues such as juvenile detention centers, after school clubs, nonprofit organizations for youth, and fitness facilities (Busch, 2007). Empirical research presented in Chapter II highlight the statistical significance of yoga for youth, and a growing number of studies suggest offering yoga in schools a cost-effective, valuable tool with the potential to impact global student success. While researchers continue to work out methodological concerns that limit transferability and generalizability, the general consensus is that yoga can benefit students in a myriad of ways.

Walton (2013) asserts that the implementation of yoga in schools could be a solitary factor between student success and failure. With the increasing amount of pressure placed on youth, yoga can help mitigate life stressors and offer students positive coping skills to improve self-regulation. Yoga has been researched in a variety of school settings (elementary, middle, and high) and with numerous populations (urban, alternative, rural, special education, and suburban). Moreover, research studies have highlighted the roles and functions of educational stakeholders in the process of implementing yoga in schools; for instance, students, teachers, administrators,
and parents (Mendelson et al., 2013). The continual missing link is the school counselor’s role in the yoga in schools movement. Despite organic commonalities between potential yoga outcomes and the role of the school counselor, to date, no research exists concerning the school counselor’s role in integrating yoga into a comprehensive school counseling program. To fill this void in the literature, more information is needed from practicing school counselors who currently integrate yoga in their schools.

**Statement of Problem**

The main role and function of a school counselor is to remove potential barriers to student success (ASCA, 2012). A comprehensive school counseling program is data-driven and rooted in standards concerning the academic, career, and social/emotional development of all students (ASCA, n.d.; Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2016). Through the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program, school counselors are able to offer intentional programs and interventions to positively impact student success. The aforementioned benefits of yoga align with school counseling standards and the ultimate responsibility of a school counselor: to help students become “productive, well-adjusted adults of tomorrow” (ASCA, n.d., para. 1).

As educational standards continue to reform, and stress in students continues to climb, students need a variety of healthy outlets. The ability to self-regulate and cope with a continuum of minor and significant stressors impacts student outcomes (Walton, 2013). Bose (as cited in Walton, 2013) contends that educators have an obligation to teach children to favorably alter their stress responses, and yoga can be a powerful tool to assist with this task. Due to access and affordability issues, the school setting is an ideal place to offer yoga. However, the lack of research regarding the school counselor’s role in the yoga in schools movement leaves many
questions to be answered. Therefore, it is necessary to gain a rich understanding of this process from school counselors who have effectively integrated yoga in their particular settings.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of school counselors who integrate yoga into a comprehensive school counseling program. The primary research question of focus was: “What are the experiences of school counselors who integrate yoga into a comprehensive school counseling program?” In this study, I sought to understand specific and creative ways school counselors use yoga in their schools, along with perceived benefits, limitations, program supports, and future directions for school counselors, counselor educators, and researchers.

**Significance of the Study**

Educators have become increasingly charged with educating the whole child, and school counselors have an ethical duty to do so. Due to the paucity of research regarding the role of school counselors in integrating yoga into their school counseling program, this study offers numerous benefits. To date, there is only one conceptual article linking school counselors and yoga. In this piece, Dye (2014), a former school counselor and registered yoga teacher (RYT ®) detailed the process of implementing yoga in her school. She attests that yoga had a positive impact on the school’s culture and improved cohesion between school faculty members. While this article was not research-based, the author perceived that yoga improved self-regulation skills in students. Furthermore, Dye (2014) posits that it is both feasible and beneficial for school counselors to use yoga to as a prevention and intervention tool for all students.

This phenomenological qualitative study offers a greater understanding of the roles and functions of school counselors who integrate yoga into a comprehensive school counseling
program. The results demonstrate the feasibility of using yoga as part of a school counseling program, and will help other school counseling professionals understand the facets of developing a yoga program that aligns with their school counseling curriculum. This study provides insight to logistics of yoga implementation and importance of student, staff, and community buy-in, which could prevent potential implementation obstacles.

Lastly, to date, this is the first study to investigate the school counselor’s role in yoga integration as it relates to integration within the framework of a comprehensive school counseling program. The premise of phenomenological qualitative research is similar to the practice of yoga: there is no goal, it is just a process. The yogic concept of self-reflection involves individuals remaining open to anything, as everything is always unfinished. The results of this study offered several implications to help school counselors, counselor educators, and researchers understand potential next steps in continuing to examine this important topic.

**Definition of Terms**

**School Counselor** – For the purpose of this study, a school counselor is an individual who is currently licensed by their State Department of Education and works in a K-12 school setting.

**ASCA National Model** – The ASCA National Model (2012) offers a framework for a comprehensive, data-driven school counseling program and promotes the social/emotional, career, and academic success of all students.

**Comprehensive School Counseling Program** – For the purpose of this study, a comprehensive school counseling program refers to a school counseling program that is equitable, driven by data, and supports student development in academic, social/emotional, and career development (ASCA, 2012; CACREP, 2016). School counselors who integrate yoga into a comprehensive school counseling program will have yoga integration listed as either a departmental, SMART
(Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-focused, Time-bound), ASCA National Model goal, or secondary intervention (i.e., Tier I, II, or III) related to an aforementioned goal.

**ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors Standards** – The ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors standards are the most current research-based standards of the school counseling profession (ASCA, 2014a). These standards can be applied to any of the three domains of school counseling: academic, career, or social/emotional. Based on the program or activity the school counselor engages in (individual, group, classroom), they select one of the 35 standards and align it to the goals and objectives of their lesson.

**Yoga** – Yoga is a 5,000-year-old discipline designed to improve physical and mental health, happiness, and provide individuals with a greater sense of self (Flynn, 2013; Kaley-Isley, Peterson, Fischer, & Peterson, 2010). The term yoga is derived from the Sanskrit root yuj, which means to unite (Iyengar, 2005). Yoga incorporates moving postures, breathing techniques, and ethical disciplines to encourage physical and mental balance. In addition to a physical practice; yoga is designed to be a way of life, carried off of the mat and into the world.

**Philosophy of Yoga** - The *Yoga Sutras* were crafted over 3000 years ago by Sage Patañjali and are known to be the philosophical system of yoga (Iyengar, 2005). They consist of 195 aphorisms, presented in eight stages, or limbs, to form the structural framework of yoga. The eight-limbed path of yoga aims to help individuals reach the highest state of self-regulation by controlling unpleasant thoughts that disrupt contentment. Iyengar (2005) describes the eight limbs as: 1) Yama (moral observances; our social interactions with the world); 2) Niyama (self-discipline; our interactions with self); 3) Asana (posture); 4) Pranayama (awareness and regulation of breath); 5) Pratyahara (sensory withdrawal); 6) Dharana (concentration); 7) Dhyana (meditation); and 8) Samadhi (a state of super-consciousness; peace).
**Yamas** – The Yamas are considered to be the first of Patanjali’s eight limbs that form the framework for the practice of yoga (Adele, 2009). The Yamas are considered to be an ethical discipline offering guidance in universal morality or how individuals should treat one another. They include non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, non-excess, and non-possiveness. The Yamas should be taken out of the context of the practice of yoga and applied to everyday life.

**Niyamas** – The Niyamas are considered to be the second of eight limbs that form the framework for the practice of yoga. Similar to the Yamas, the Niyamas are considered to be an ethical discipline and are based on personal observances aimed at treating oneself with kindness and compassion. The Niyamas consist of cleanliness, contentment, self-discipline, self-reflection, and surrender. The Niyamas, too, should be taken out of the context of the practice of yoga and applied to everyday life.

**Organization of the Study**

This chapter presented the background, purpose, and significance of this study that investigated the experiences of school counselors who integrate yoga into their comprehensive school counseling programs. Chapter II provides a review of the literature related to school counseling and yoga, along with the two theoretical frameworks used to inform this study: Theory of Mindset (Dweck, 2006) and Social Cognitive Theory of Self-Regulation (Bandura, 1991). Chapter III includes a description of the methodology that was employed for this study. In chapter IV, results of the study are included, along with a description of the themes and subthemes that emerged during data analysis. Chapter V provides a discussion of each theme and subtheme as they relate to the literature, limitations of the study, and implications for school counselors, counselor educators, and future research.
CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

The review of the literature in this chapter is organized into three main sections. Section one begins with an overview of the evolution of the school counseling profession. Pertinent historical influences in school counseling are addressed, along with the current roles and functions of school counselors. In addition, the school counselor’s role in implementing a comprehensive school counseling program using the framework of the ASCA National Model is explored. The second section provides a brief history of yoga and the ethical disciplines as they relate to the context of this study. This section continues with an overview of the benefits of yoga for youth, particularly in school settings. Barriers to implementation are discussed, along with specific empirical research regarding yoga in schools, methodological limitations, and implications for future research. The final section introduces the two theoretical perspectives that guided this study: 1) Theory of Mindset (Dweck, 2006) and 2) Social Cognitive Theory of Self-Regulation (Bandura, 1991). An overview of each theoretical perspective is provided, along with each theory’s relationship to this study.

Evolution of the School Counseling Profession

The discipline of school counseling has evolved tremendously over the last century (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012; Herr & Edford, 2007; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). The profession has developed from a strict focus on vocational guidance to a strategic focus on the development of a comprehensive school counseling program. Modern day school counselors are
expected to design school counseling programs that meet the social/emotional, career, and academic needs of all students.

**Early History**

During the early 1900’s, guidance was informally introduced as part of the educational curriculum with the goal of positively impacting the vocational, educational, and moral development of students (Baker & Gerler, 2004; Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). In 1908, Frank Parsons, known as the “Father of Guidance” (Tang & Edford, 2004, p. 12), coined the term “vocational guidance” (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012, p. 4), which focused on assisting young men with the transition from school to work (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). According to Parsons, vocational counseling would help students determine their own vocational path and provide a greater opportunity for a suitable career match. In 1909, Parsons published *Choosing a Vocation* where he described numerous techniques to assist students with in-depth personal and vocational exploration. It was after this publication that vocational counseling was officially declared to be a separate discipline (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012; Savickas, 2011). After this transition, counselors were afforded the opportunity to focus solely on preparing students for the transition from school to work.

Despite the introduction of vocational guidance into the public school system (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012), there was no formal institutional training in the new profession of guidance and counseling (Savickas, 2011). To fill this void, in 1908 Parsons developed an education program for counselors to take at the Boston YMCA. Due to the growing interest and success of the YMCA course, the Boston School Board designated staff members to design an additional course in vocational guidance specifically for Boston Public Schools (BPS) teachers (Savickas, 2011). Afterward, all but one elementary school principal designated a teacher to serve as a
vocational counselor in addition to his or her teaching duties, but without additional merit or pay (Baker & Gerler, 2004; Gysbers & Henderson, 2012; Savickas, 2011).

The growing success of vocational counseling prompted Meyer Bloomfield, social worker and head of the Civic Service House, to formalize the field by offering the first college course in counselor education at Harvard University in the summer of 1911 (Miller, as cited in Tang & Erford, 2004; Savickas, 2011). According to Bloomfield (1913), a formal department dedicated to training students in vocational guidance was necessary for the discipline to achieve success. Following the trends of similar fields, such as psychology, economics, education, and social work, Bloomfield formulated educational goals and established uniformed training and credentialing for the forthcoming university courses. Bloomfield asserted that uniformity was necessary in order for counselors to construct an occupational identity and formally professionalize the discipline.

The university course at Harvard was offered as an open-enrollment, non-degreed vocational guidance course to 41 teachers in the greater Boston area (Savickas, 2011). The course consisted of 10 lectures that focused on vocational guidance techniques and was in great demand. Due to the popularity, after a few years the course was accepted as credit toward an associate degree in arts. The associate degree requirements included the following topics: “influence of school and home on choice of a vocation, the need for vocational guidance, duties of the vocational counselor, techniques of vocational guidance, how to investigate occupations, placement, problems in vocational guidance, and case studies” (p. 501).

While Harvard University offered the first university course in counselor education, the University of Chicago was the first institution to offer a graduate level course in vocational guidance (Savickas, 2011). Similar to Harvard University, the University of Chicago course was
created due to the popularity of and demand for vocational counselors, along with a need for
specified training in this area. Numerous schools, such as Columbia University, University of
Missouri-Columbia, and Boston University, followed suit, which eventually expanded to 20
colleges and universities offering graduate courses in vocational guidance.

In these early stages of the school counseling profession, university training in vocational
guidance was the exclusive focus and led to the development of the National Vocational
Guidance Association (NVGA) in 1913 (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012; Lambie & Williamson,
2004). NVGA membership consisted of professionals from a variety of fields, including:
business, government, education, psychology, and community service (Super, 1955, as cited in
Lambie & Williamson, 2004). From this point forward, the profession continued to develop and
divide into specialties, expanding from a focus on vocation, to a focus on relationships and the
specific role of the counselor in the counseling relationship (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012;
Lambie & Williamson, 2004).

Mid-Twentieth Century

During the mid-twentieth century, several key theorists helped articulate the role of the
school counselor, including: John Dewey, E.G. Williamson, and Carl Rogers (Lambie &
Williamson, 2004). Dewey’s work in cognitive development influenced schools to promote
Williamson is best known for creating the trait and factor theory, the first theory in guidance and
counseling, and Rogers is known to counseling professionals as the “Father of Counseling”
(Lambie & Williamson, 2004, p. 125). In 1942, Rogers published Counseling and
Psychotherapy: New Concepts in Practice, which took a distinct stance on separating people
from problems, and led to the informal replacement of the term guidance with counseling. This
verbiage reflected a new, holistic approach to the social/emotional component of the counseling profession (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). During this time period, there was a push to formally institutionalize guidance and counseling in public schools. The emphasis on formal institutionalization helped clarify the roles and expectations of the school counselor (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012).

The late 1950s through the 1960s was a critical era in the evolution of the school counseling profession (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012; Herr & Edford, 2007; Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Savickas, 2011). In 1953, ASCA was formed and the field’s first journal, School Counselor, was published. Notably, the launch of Sputnik in 1957 largely influenced and solidified school counseling as a profession (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). The United States responded favorably to Sputnik by committing to advancing the design of innovative technology, which led to the development of the National Defense Education Act of 1958 (NDEA). This legislation provided extensive funding to create positions for high school counselors to identify gifted students in order to provide them with additional assistance in planning for college (Baker & Gerler, 2004; Lambie & Williamson, 2004), which inadvertently led to a substantial increase in funding to colleges and universities to develop school counseling training programs (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012; Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Savickas, 2011). Additionally during this time period, the U.S. Office of Education created the Pupil Personnel Services Organization of the Division of State and Local School Systems (Herr & Edford, 2007). This move helped to further expand the profession from vocational guidance to school counseling.

The 1960s era focused largely on the professional identity of school counselors (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). Additional school counseling graduate programs were developed, which led to an increase in the employment of school counselors, particularly at the elementary level
(Tang & Edford, 2004). The school counseling profession shifted focus from the position of a school counselor, to the multiple roles and functions of a school counselor in an educational setting (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). In 1962, C. Gilbert Wrenn published *The Counselor in a Changing World* (1962), which criticized the secondary-guidance movement for being hyper-focused on the remedial needs of a few students, instead of the developmental needs of all students (Baker & Gerler, 2004; Gysbers & Henderson, 2012; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). In response, Wrenn advocated for school counselors to implement developmental goals to address the comprehensive needs of all elementary and secondary students (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). This time period was filled with rapid role-definition and repositioning of school counselors as technological advances and new legislation highly influenced the profession.

**Legislative Reform and the Impact on the School Counseling Profession**

In 1965, shortly after Wrenn’s report, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was signed into law (Klein, 2015; USDOE, n.d.), extending funding to support elementary guidance and counseling programs (Herr & Erford, 2007; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). ESEA aimed to ensure funding was provided to state educational agencies to help school districts that served low-income students. For example, funding assistance helped purchase text and library books, create special education centers, and provide scholarships for low-income college students (USDOE, n.d.). In 1968, Congress added programs to the ESCA for migrant, neglected, and/or delinquent children, while subsequently passing the Bilingual Education Act (Klein, 2015). These legislative actions led to the development of the Vocational Education Act Amendments (VEAA) of 1968, which provided career services for students with disabilities and disadvantaged youth (Herr & Erford, 2007). Furthermore, funding from VEAA expanded the
role of guidance and counseling by adding more counselors in elementary schools and providing professional development for counselors at the local, state, and national level. After the implementation of VEAA, federal legislation movements targeting guidance and counseling programs plateaued. Numerous legislative events began again in the late 70s, increasing the necessity of school counseling services.

ESCA was reauthorized in 1978 and specified that schools serving over 75% of low-income students could use their funding to initiate school-wide programs (Klein, 2015). This change reflected a contrast to the previous allocation of ESCA funds, which went solely to individuals, not programs or initiatives. Moreover, the aftermath of the Civil Rights and Women’s Liberation movement led to an increase in school-based career development, multicultural diversity, and attention to students with special needs (Herr & Erford, 2007), all functions related to the school counseling profession. Finally, in 1983, A Nation at Risk was published by the National Commission of Excellence in Education (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). This publication highlighted the deterioration of public education and student achievement. As a result, the testing and accountability movement began to boom.

In 1988, ESCA moved toward expanding student testing and accountability, requiring schools unable to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward statewide proficiency goals to develop improvement plans (Klein, 2015). This expansion greatly impacted the school counseling profession, leaving school counselors with duties related to standardized test coordination, scheduling, and record keeping (Cinotti, 2014; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). The public interest in educational accountability continued to be fueled by politicians and federal legislation. In 1994, President Bill Clinton signed another renewal of ESCA titled the Improving America’s Schools Act (Klein, 2015). This mandate required all states to develop educational
standards and align standardized tests to meet each standard. The pressure felt by school personnel began to rise, as each school district was required to single out any school who failing to meet AYP. Legislative mandates continued to loosely define and expand testing and accountability, until the inception of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001.

The Accountability Era

NCLB was signed into law on January 8\textsuperscript{th}, 2002, with the purpose of closing the achievement gap in education (NCLB, 2002). NCLB required rigorous measures of student accountability and validated results (Dahir, 2004). Federal funding for education became dependent on academic progress, as assessed by state-designed standardized tests. To help students meet the arduous testing requirements, NCLB mandated states to offer free tutoring and public school choice to families, and required public school teachers to be highly qualified in their specific areas of instruction and/or service (Klein, 2015).

NCLB legislation and the introduction to high-stakes testing significantly impacted the school counseling profession, particularly in the areas of accountability standards, academic-related counseling, and inappropriate duties, such as test coordination (Dollarhide & Lemberger, 2006). Academic achievement was a paramount theme in NCLB, with four-year high school graduation rates the ultimate indicator of AYP (Kroninger & Studer, 2015). Despite the controversy surrounding NCLB, this legislation led to a positive shift regarding school counselor accountability and an increase of school counseling positions (Dollarhide & Lemberger, 2006; Herr & Erford; 2007). For example, a provision of NCLB provided grants for local educational agencies to either create or expand elementary and secondary school counseling programs (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). Many provisions of NCLB provided funding for school counseling specific areas, such as: drop-out prevention, substance abuse counseling, student
transitions, the identification of gifted students, and providing additional services for students who were at-risk for academic failure or social/emotional concerns (Dahir, 2004; Herr & Erford, 2007).

In 2009, funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act pushed ESEA to receive major educational provisions, including Race to the Top, which awarded grants to states willing to prioritize school turnarounds, data systems, standards, assessments, and teacher evaluations (Klein, 2015). In 2011, the Obama administration offered NCLB waivers to states that embraced standards in the areas of college and career readiness, teacher evaluations, and school improvement; these waivers were authorized in 40 states and the District of Columbia. In addition, grants have been awarded to states willing to design new standardized tests and adopt the Common Core Standards (Common Core, n.d.). While school counselors were not specifically named in federal legislation such as NCLB, Common Core, or Race to the Top, these mandates clearly impact student success, academic achievement, and college and career readiness.

Currently, 43 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the Common Core State Standards (Common Core, n.d.). The Common Core Standards were developed to ensure that all students graduate from high school prepared for post-secondary success. They represent a set of rigorous academic ideals in the areas of mathematics and English language arts/literacy. In states where the Common Core Standards have been mandated, it is imperative for school counselors to understand the implementation process and how student achievement is both measured and impacted under the mandate (ACA, n.d.). Furthermore, best practice reflects the alignment of school counseling program standards with Common Core Standards to ensure support of student outcomes and college/career readiness.
Accountability and Comprehensive School Counseling Programs

Despite not being formally named in any educational reform movements, the school counseling profession has increasingly felt pressure to quantify the results of their work (Hatch & Chen-Hayes, 2008; Myrick, 2003). Schellenberg (2008) further stated that the scarcity of research to validate the role of the school counselor is the “impetus behind the absence of school counselors in education reform agendas and school improvement initiatives” (p. 43). The accountability movement first impacted the school counseling profession in 1970 when Arbuckle (as cited in Baker & Gerler, 2004) published an article titled “Does the School Really Need Counselors?” Arbuckle argued: 1) there is a gap in preparation and practice of school counselors; 2) school counseling services could be rendered by other professionals; 3) little to no research exists citing the effectiveness of school counselors; and 4) many school counselors do not participate in professional organizations, leading to concerns about professional loyalty and identity (Baker & Gerler, 2004). This publication resulted in an increased need for school counselors to clearly define their role and demonstrate accountability for their services.

Concurrently, an interest in developing comprehensive, systematic approaches to school counseling programs began to emerge (Gysbers & Henderson; 2012). Shortly after Arbuckle’s publication, the University of Missouri-Columbia received a U.S. Department of Education grant to help each state develop, implement, and evaluate comprehensive school counseling models (Gysbers, 2004; Gysbers & Henderson; 2012). The grant led to the transformation of numerous theoretical models into more practical, useable models to be followed by practicing school counselors. After this transition, school counselors began to implement comprehensive approaches to their programs. School counselors were expected to evaluate and measure student outcomes in alignment with current educational trends. As the notion of comprehensive school
counseling programs gained traction, the role of the school counselor slowly started to see a paradigm shift (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). School counselors began to see more clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and standardization of the profession became a more widespread topic.

Historical descriptors of school counselors and school counseling programs include: vocational counselor, guidance and counseling, and guidance counselor (ASCA, 2003), which reflect the continual evolvement of the role of the school counselor. In 1990, the Governing Board of ASCA voted unanimously to change the verbiage from “guidance counselor” to “school counselor” and “school counseling programs” (ASCA, 2003, p. 9). This change in verbiage reflected the renewed focus on the holistic approach to school counseling programs that focused on the academic, career, and personal/social needs of all students.

A comprehensive school counseling program is preventative, developmental, and assists all students in acquiring academic, career, and social/emotional skills (ASCA, 2003; Dahir, 1997). Historical trends in the profession reflect school counselors’ spending a large percentage of time on a small percentage of students (ASCA, 2003). A well-designed comprehensive school counseling program ensures all students receive direct services in the form of individual counseling, small group counseling, or classroom guidance. Moreover, a comprehensive program requires school counselors to work collaboratively with other educational stakeholders, monitor student progress, use data to inform program decisions, and promote the profession by sharing successes (ASCA, 2003).

The school counseling profession and accountability movement have experienced a myriad of revisions over the past century (Cinotti, 2014; Klein, 2015). The rise in accountability standards continually impacts the roles and functions of the school counselor (Dahir & Stone,
2003; DeVoss, 2004; Gysbers, 2004). It is expected that these standards will continue to play a pivotal role in education and impact the school counseling profession (Dahir & Stone 2009; Gysbers, 2012). As the profession stands, Myrick (2003) defines school counselor accountability as:

- Being responsible for one’s actions and contributions, especially in terms of objectives, procedures, and results. It involves describing goals, and what is being done to meet them. It entails collecting information and data that support any accomplishments that may be claimed…Every counselor must ask and answer a few basic questions: What am I trying to make happen? How do I do that? Am I effective? Are they better ways of achieving the same thing? How can I be counted as part of the total school program? (p. 174)

School counselors are expected to use data to evaluate and determine the effectiveness of their school counseling programs (DeVoss, 2004; Gysbers, 2004; Whiston, 2002), yet many have not fully embraced the accountability movement and have failed to align data-informed best practices with national or state standards (Dahir & Stone 2009).

State and national level reforms call for promoting academic success of all students (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012), which includes a holistic approach in addressing educational, vocational, and social/emotional needs of all students (Gysbers, 2012). Brown and Trusty (2005) clarify that not all components of a comprehensive school counseling program should be entirely devoted to improving academic achievement. Other components, such as social/emotional development, serve as an intervention or complement an academic goal. Responsive services, such as individual and group counseling to address personal concerns, consultation, and crisis counseling are also directly linked to academic achievement.
In addition to the numerous social/emotional concerns of today’s youth, school counselors are tuned in to the school, community, and family issues that impact academic success (Northwestern University, n.d.). Furthermore, national tragedies (e.g., Columbine and other school shootings, the September 11th attacks, Hurricane Katrina, and the Iraq and Afghanistan wars) contribute to the concerns of our youth. School counselors can integrate targeted and preventative school counseling curricula into academic curricula, and choose desired skills and learning outcomes for students (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012).

School counselors have a responsibility to determine the effectiveness of their programs and how school counseling goals align with educational standards (Dahir, 2004). Erford (2007) affirms, “School reform hinges on an understanding of what is and isn’t working” (p. 35). Although school counselors may believe they are effective, without data, they run the risk of losing their positions (Dahir, 2004; Whiston, 2002). Whiston (2002) states, “I firmly believe that most school counselors are helpful to students and have a significant influence on their development. I do not believe, however, that there is sufficient evidence or documentation of the positive effects of school counselors” (p. 148).

Current literature suggests that evaluative methods are not going anywhere, and that school counselors need to design, implement, and evaluate comprehensive school counseling programs to not only demonstrate their effectiveness, but to continue to move the profession forward (Gysbers, 2012). Furthermore, Gysbers (2012) asserts that “…future students and their parents in school districts across the country will continue to benefit from having fully implemented school counseling programs. Embrace the past, welcome the future” (p. ix). In order for the school counseling profession to continue to grow and align with educational
standards, it is imperative for school counselors to design data-informed, evidence-based, comprehensive school counseling programs that holistically impact student growth.

The American School Counselor Association and the ASCA National Model

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is the governing body for school counseling professionals and supports school counselor’s efforts to contribute to the academic, career, and social/emotional development of all students (ASCA, n.d.). In a purposeful and collaborative effort to join the educational reform movement, ASCA published Campbell and Dahir’s (1997) *Sharing the Vision: The National Standards for School Counseling Programs*. This publication was the first set of national standards to address the comprehensive role of the school counselor. In March of 2001, the ASCA Governing Board voted to build on the national standards by developing a unified framework for school counseling programs, a logical step in an effort to standardize the school counseling profession (ASCA, 2003; ASCA, 2012). ASCA Governing Board Members, Dr.’s Judy Bowers and Trish Hatch, developed *The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Professions* (ASCA, 2003). This publication emphasized the school counselor’s role in developing a data-driven, comprehensive school counseling program to assist all students in achieving academic success.

The ASCA National Model (2003, 2005, 2012) is the framework of the school counseling profession and outlines the specific components of a comprehensive school counseling program (i.e., foundation, management, delivery, and accountability). This framework (2003) was initially developed based on the designs of three other evidence-based models: the comprehensive guidance model by Norm Gysbers and Patricia Henderson, the results-based model by Sharon Johnson and Curly Johnson, and the developmental guidance model by Robert Myrick. The convergence of these three models served as a template for school counselors to
transition from a traditional, service-oriented approach to a comprehensive, developmental, and standardized program to serve all students. In addition to the comprehensive school counseling program components of the ASCA National Model, four themes (i.e., leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change) outline this framework. These themes came into fruition in the late 1990’s when the Education Trust (1997) introduced the National Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI). During this time, the TSCI served as a springboard for the school counseling profession to focus on these critical areas in order to foster and improve student success (ASCA, 2012; House & Martin, 1998).

The ASCA National Model (2003) fosters the unification and standardization of the school counseling profession and promotes the concept of “one vision and one voice” for school counseling programs (p. 8). This shift required school counselors to develop new paradigms and deliberate approaches to developing school counseling programs, which includes collaboration with educational stakeholders (ASCA, 2012). School counselors do not work in isolation; they collaborate with other school counselors, teachers, administrators, parents/guardians, students, and other community members to garner support for student success. Collaborative and advocacy efforts foster student growth and development, which directly impacts student success.

Since the first edition of the ASCA National Model was introduced in 2003, it has evolved to reflect current best practices as they align with current education reform efforts. The framework of the ASCA National Model (2003, 2005, 2012) guides states, districts, and schools in the development, implementation, and evaluation of comprehensive school counseling services. The 2012 ASCA National Model lists the following components of a comprehensive school counseling program, which are driven by data and rooted in standards in academic, career, and social/emotional development:
The ASCA National Model:

- Ensures equitable access to a rigorous education for all students
- Identifies the knowledge and skill all students will acquire as a result of
- the K-12 comprehensive school counseling program
- Is delivered to all students in a systematic fashion
- Is based on data-driven decision making
- Is provided by a state-credentialed school counselor (p. xii).

The framework of the ASCA National Model operates under four components: foundation, management, delivery, and accountability.

**Foundation.** The foundation component is designed to help school counselors to select a program focus, teach student competencies, and to identify professional competencies (ASCA, 2012). The focus on program encourages school counselors to design meaningful vision and mission statements that explain core values and beliefs about student success. Student competencies are measurable outcomes that guide the development of social/emotional, academic, and career goals. Finally, professional competencies ensure that school counselors possess the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to successfully implement a data-driven school counseling program.

**Management.** The management component involves school counselors utilizing tools and assessments that reflect their school’s specific needs (ASCA, 2012). For example, school counselors: self-evaluate areas of strength and areas to improve, develop agreements with administration around the organization and goals of their program, hold advisory meetings to review goals and progress with educational stakeholders, develop action place that impact
achievement, behavior, and attendance, and allot 80% or more of their time in direct and indirect service to students.

**Delivery.** The delivery component is composed of direct and indirect services provided to students, parents, school employees, and the community (ASCA, 2012). Direct services are considered face-to-face interactions with students while implementing the school counseling core curriculum, providing individual student planning, and responding to the immediate concerns/needs of students. Indirect services are areas that directly impact students, such as: providing referrals, consultation and collaborations with the community and/or educational stakeholders, and advocating on behalf of a student.

**Accountability.** Lastly, accountability refers to the school counselors’ ability to demonstrate the effectiveness of the school counseling program in measurable terms (ASCA, 2012). School counselors are encouraged to use data to determine how students are different as a result of their work. School counselor performance is evaluated based on expected standards of practice and the successful implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2012) and it is essential for school counselor educators to have the knowledge of school counseling models and competencies to promote a more unified profession (ASCA, 2014).

The ASCA National Model reflects a comprehensive approach to the foundation, delivery, management, and accountability of school counseling programs (ASCA, 2012). This framework establishes a vision of excellence for comprehensive school counseling and provides a template for the continued push for standardization of the school counseling profession. Implementation of the ASCA National Model reflects the current role of the school counselor and requires professionals to maintain high standards and expectations, focus on success for all students, and proactively respond to the emerging needs of 21st century learners. Working under
this framework involves a systematic approach of delivering equitable, comprehensive school
counseling services to all students to promote academic and postsecondary success. Essentially,
school counselors are asked to step out of their positions, and into their programs.

**Current Roles and Functions of School Counselors**

Over the last century, the school counseling profession has seen a dramatic shift from
position to program (Gysbers & Stanley, 2014). Influenced by legislative policy, education
reform, and accountability standards, comprehensive school counseling programs compliment
current education initiatives by working congruently with stakeholders to ensure student success.
School counselors provide counseling to students to help remove barriers to success (position),
while developing a comprehensive school counseling program that meets the needs of all
students (program).

To date, all school counselors are required to hold a minimum of a master’s degree in
school counseling (ASCA, n.d.). School counselors are employed in a variety of settings,
including elementary, middle, and high schools; district level school counseling supervisor
positions; and in school counselor educator positions. ASCA mandates all school counselors to
meet state certification and licensure standards, and strictly abide by both state laws and the legal
and ethical standards set forth by ASCA and other professional counseling associations.
Although not required, many school counselors choose to attend a CACREP-accredited graduate
program to ensure they receive quality program standards that meet the requirements for state
licensure (CACREP, 2016). CACREP accreditation is considered the gold standard by
counseling professionals and endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for
Higher Accreditation. School counselors who graduate from a CACREP-accredited program
have met national standards that require school counseling students to be trained to design,
implement, and evaluate a comprehensive school counseling program that meets the academic, career, and social/emotional success of all students.

While the push toward accountability in the field of school counseling is historically high, it does not negate the importance of the key role of a school counselor: counseling. The current paradigm for school counseling is based on a comprehensive program that gives emphasis to student growth and achievement (Dahir & Stone, 2012). School counselors are charged with creating a salient social justice agenda in order to narrow the achievement gap for underserved and/or underrepresented youth. ASCA (2012) suggests that school counselors spend 80% or more of their time providing direct and indirect services to students. Doing so allows for school counselors to address issues that interfere with learning via individual counseling, small group counseling, and classroom guidance. In addition, indirect services allow school counselors to consult with educational stakeholders to advocate for the needs of all students.

Many students who struggle with significant challenges and/or mental health concerns do not receive the specialty services they both need and deserve (Auger, 2013). Moreover, mental health conditions in youth are often undiagnosed, misdiagnosed, or ineffectively treated. Finally, when an appropriate referral is made to an outside provider or agency, some families lack the resources or insurance benefits to follow through. A comprehensive school counseling program stresses the importance that all students face normal, age-appropriate challenges; while other students experience additional challenges that may significantly interfere with learning (Dahir & Stone, 2012). For example: abuse, bullying, divorce, gender/sexuality issues, grief, homelessness, incarcerated parent/s, low self-esteem, mental health disorders, physical disabilities, pregnancy, poverty, sexual assault, substance abuse, thoughts of suicide, trauma, and
more that impede academic performance. School counselors are charged with the important role of implementing preventative and intervention services that interfere with learning by holistically addressing the whole child.

Yoga

Now, more than ever, schools are responsible for integrating social and emotional learning into educational curricula. The current national focus on educational reform provides standards that address specific components to promote student health and wellness (Hyde, 2012). School counselors are organically familiar with this concept, as wellness promotion is often woven into graduate programs and considered a current role and function of a school counselor (ASCA, n.d.). The yoga in schools movement is a response to the national reform agenda that promotes student wellness initiatives (Hyde & Spence, 2013). Flynn (2013) explains, “Yoga, by nature, supports and maximizes the learning process” (p. 25) and has numerous benefits to increase the likelihood of overall academic success.

Structure and Purpose of Yoga

Originating in India over 5000 years ago, yoga is the one of the oldest practices of holistic health (Balasubramaniam, Telles, & Doraiswamy, 2013; Flynn, 2013) aimed at developing the mind, body, and spirit (Douglass, 2007; Ehud, An, & Avshalom, 2010; Williamson, 2012). According to Iyengar (2005), the term yoga was originally derived from the Sanskrit root yuj, which means to “bind, join, attach and yoke, to direct and concentrate one’s attention on, to use and apply” (p. 1). The practice of yoga generally links postures with breathing techniques in order to encourage physical and psychological balance (Butzer et al., 2015; Frank, Bose, & Schrobenhauser-Clonan, 2014; Khalsa, Hickey-Schultz, Cohen, Steiner, & Cope, 2012; Noggle, Steiner, Minami, & Khalsa, 2012; Toscano & Clemente, 2013). Yoga
incorporates synchronized breath, poses, and alignment to become a purposeful form of moving meditation (Mendelson et al, 2013; Steiner, Sidhu, Pop, Frenette, & Perrin, 2013). In yoga, the mind and body are regarded as one unified whole that work succinctly to achieve a steady state of presence and contentment (Rybak & Deuskar, 2010). Extending far beyond posture and breath, yoga is thought of as curative, preventative, and a purposeful way of being.

The unique philosophical structure of yoga is designed to bring individuals heightened awareness of both body and thought (Adele, 2009). The *Yoga Sutras* were crafted over 3000 years ago by Sage Patanjali and are known to be the structural framework of yoga (Iyengar, 2005). They consist of 195 aphorisms, presented in eight stages, or limbs, to form the structural framework of yoga (Iyengar, 2005). The aim of this path is to help individuals reach the highest state of self-regulation by controlling unpleasant thoughts that disrupt completeness and contentment. Iyengar (2005) describes the eight-limbs of yoga as: 1) Yama (moral observances; our social interactions with the world); 2) Niyama (self-discipline; our interactions with self); 3) Asana (posture); 4) Pranayama (awareness and regulation of breath); 5) Pratyahara (sensory withdrawal); 6) Dharana (concentration); 7) Dhyana (meditation); and 8) Samadhi (a state of elevated-consciousness; peace).

In this study, I focus primarily on the Yamas and Niyamas, first two of Patanjali’s eight-limbed path. (Iyengar, 2005). Adele (2009) defines the Yamas and Niyamas as ten ethical guidelines that provide “the practical guidance to make skillful moment to moment choices in our daily lives” (p. 12). Practitioners of yoga often refer to the practice as a way of living, with the Yamas and Niyamas serving as a foundational aspect to the yogic thought process. In other words, yoga extends off the mat and into the world.
The Yamas consist of ethical disciplines toward others: non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, non-excess, and non-possessiveness, while the Niyamas consist of ethical disciplines toward self: cleanliness, contentment, self-discipline, self-reflection, and surrender (Adele, 2009; Iyengar, 2005). As described in the *Yoga Sutras* (Iyengar, 2005), the Yamas and Niyamas are complex and difficult concepts for children to grasp. Flynn (2013) translated the Yamas and Niyamas into child-friendly language to provide a framework for youth to comprehend, and in turn, cultivate the ethical principles of yoga:

**Yamas**

- **Practice Peace.** Surround yourself with love and kindness. Be gentle and peaceful in your thoughts and actions. Be respectful. Show kindness. Do not harm anyone or anything. Practice tolerance.
- **Be Honest.** Be truthful in your actions, thoughts, and speech. Tell the truth. Be yourself. Be true to you.
- **Be Generous.** Share. Do not take what is not yours.
- **Practice Moderation.** Remember to do all things in moderation. Practice self-control.

**Niyamas**

- **Be Clean.** Take care of yourself, body and mind. Take care of your surroundings, community, and earth.
- **Be Content.** Be content with yourself. Celebrate your uniqueness. Maintain a positive outlook. Have an internal sense of peacefulness. Practice gratefulness.
- **Work Hard.** Be disciplined. Always try your best. Establish good habits. Finish what you start. Persevere: do not give up!
• Have Alone Time. Be reflective. Spend time with yourself. Know yourself. Take the time for quiet. Be still.

• Believe in Something Bigger. Think about or even commit to something larger than yourself based on your beliefs. Or, simply connect with all things. Aspire to and appreciate that ideal. Provide a purpose, focus, or backbone, for your values, principles, and actions (pp. 47-53).

The practice of yoga, including sequences, postures, and breath, are connected to these universal concepts. In addition to being fundamental practices of yoga, the Yamas and Niyamas support character development, self-respect, kindness toward others, and concepts of healthy living (Flynn, 2013). Furthermore, these concepts are the cornerstones of evidence-based, preventative programs implemented in schools (i.e., character education, bullying prevention, Second Step®, etc.) and have the potential to positively impact youth.

Yoga for Youth

Over the past decade, yoga has become a popular activity for youth (Berger et al., 2009; Black et al., 2015; Busch, 2007; Conboy et al., 2013; Chaya et al., 2012; Berger et al., 2009; Ehud et al., 2010; Galantino et al., 2008; Kaley-Isley et al., 2010; Mardesich, 2007; Steiner et al., 2012). Yoga services for youth have been introduced in schools, juvenile detention centers, churches, group homes, fitness facilities, private yoga studios, and as a supplement to athletic teams and training (Busch, 2007). Yoga can serve as an antidote to the stress and hurriedness of modern day living that continually places an exorbitant amount of pressure on children (Toscano & Clemente, 2013). In addition to the steady rise of academic pressure prevalent in our society, youth are faced with complex and often traumatic issues such as: school shootings, gun violence, sexual violence, mental health disorders, drugs, divorce, etc. (Busch, 2007). The discipline of
yoga can reduce the impact of significant stressors and mitigate trauma by teaching children to relax, self-regulate, and be present (Harper, 2010; Butzer, van Over, Noggle & Khalsa, 2015; Toscano & Clemente, 2013; Williamson, 2012). Moreover, yoga helps youth develop the ability to regulate emotions that can be applied across multiple settings and build a foundation for lifelong healthy habits (Frank et al., 2014; Noggle et al., 2012; Toscano & Clemente, 2013).

Although the yoga industry as a whole is growing, Mardesich (2007) claims the yoga for youth market is underutilized. According to Yoga Alliance® (2015), there are over 35,000 registered yoga teachers in the United States. In 2002, that number was substantially less at 2000 (Mardesich, 2007). To become a certified yoga instructor, a minimum of 200 training hours must be completed (Birdee, Yeh, Wayne, Phillips, Davis, & Gardiner, 2009). However, currently there are no national standards regarding the delivery of yoga to youth. Because of this void, many yoga centers now offer specialty training specific to this area (Steiner et al., 2012).

Despite the emerging trend, little research exists concerning the benefits of yoga for youth (Berger et al., 2009; Butzer et al., 2012; Ehud et al., 2010; Galantino et al., 2008; Harper, 2010; Noggle et al., 2012; Serwacki & Cook-Cottone, 2012; Williamson, 2012). The small number of empirical studies conducted on youth suggest that yoga improves behavior, body image, grades, focus, mental and physical health, self-esteem, cardiorespiratory effects, stress resilience, self-control, self-awareness, and self-regulation (Birdee et al., 2009; Busch, 2007; Noggle et al., 2012; Ramadoss & Bose, 2010; Slovacek, Tucker, & Pantoja, 2003; Tate, 2003). In addition, yoga has been used as a treatment modality in a variety of clinical settings to help children heal from sexual abuse (Lilly & Hedlund, 2010), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other forms of trauma (Longaker & Tornusciolo, 2003; Spinazzola, Rhodes, Emerson, Earle, & Monroe, 2011), and eating disorders (Carei, Fyfe-Johnson, Breuner, & Marshall, 2010). In
other clinical and rehabilitation settings, yoga interventions are employed to help youth with physical, developmental, and learning disabilities such as autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, executive function disorder, and non-verbal learning disorder (Bowen-Irish, 2007; Brandstaetter, 2014; Goldberg, 2004; Jensen & Kenny, 2004; Koenig et al., 2012). Children who have difficulties holding attention often need extra support or modalities in order to regulate emotions (Bowen-Irish, 2007). Yoga releases built-up energy and provides a comfortable atmosphere for children with special needs to feel successful in a non-competitive environment. Bowen-Irish (2007) teaches yoga to children with special needs and often notices vast improvements in self-control, self-regulation, and persistence in her students after a few sessions. Although the number of studies citing the benefits of yoga for youth remains small, emerging evidence support the anecdotal claims of physiological and psychological benefits (Hyde & Spence, 2013). Because of these claims, many researchers in this area have turned their attention to yoga in the school setting.

Yoga in Schools

There is a critical need for cost-effective, evidence-based wellness interventions to be delivered during the school day (Serwacki & Cook-Cottone, 2012). The lack of research specifically regarding yoga in schools has not been a deterrent for educators who have found yogic principles and tools to be helpful in the classroom (Douglass, 2010). There are numerous books, videos, activity groups, and curricula supporting yoga that specifically target children (Berger et al., 2009). In addition, school-based yoga curricula are implemented daily in schools across the United States.

The school setting is an ideal location to deliver yoga to youth due to the ability to access all students (Koenig et al., 2012; Mendelson et al., 2013; Serwacki & Cook-Cottone, 2012;
Steiner et al., 2012). Because students spend a large portion of their days engaged in school and school-related activities (Wisner, Jones, & Gwin, 2010), educators have an important role in recognizing and helping students who experience challenges that interfere with school. A carefully crafted yoga program has the potential to address and/or prevent a wide variety of challenges often seen in the classroom; for instance, fewer fights, improved decision-making skills, less overall disruptions, and more efficient use of class time (Williamson, 2012). When taught and implemented correctly, yoga is a powerful tool to support the overall well-being of students (Harper, 2010).

Yoga is designed for all bodies, ability levels, and fitness levels. While yoga can be regarded as a form of physical exercise, it also presents an integrative model of mind, body, and spirit (Flynn, 2013). To build a solid foundation for a positive mindset regarding physical activity, children need to enjoy what they are doing (Toscano & Clemente, 2013). Regardless of ability level, yoga provides students the opportunity to feel successful while participating in physical activity. Stanec, Forneris, and Theuerkauf (2010) assert that while the implementation of yoga in a school community could provide pronounced benefits, it should only complement physical education programs, not replace them. Yoga is one of many activities to increase the fitness level of youth, but the practice can provide substantial tools that enhance the physical and emotional well-being of students and educators. Hence, taking an academic break from the school day to practice yoga can help students remain calm, focused, and more able to learn.

Fundamentally, yoga teaches students about the notion of practice and self-improvement, rather than competition (Harper, 2010). In yoga, there are no opponents; there are no enemies. Yoga offers students the opportunity to feel a sense of group cohesion and fosters the development of community. In theory, yoga provides students with the opportunity to develop a
greater sense of self-efficacy and awareness of their personal potential. The discipline of yoga helps students to focus their attention and work more productively, regardless of distractions. Yoga in schools can create a safe and supportive learning environment that fosters growth and creativity. In addition, the practice of yoga offers students a quiet, calming space to better control test anxiety and/or fear of failure (Harper, 2010). When students are able to regulate their emotions, they have a richer opportunity to become more academically productive.

**Yoga and Academic Achievement**

Effective schools work collaboratively to ensure all students are academically successful (Frank et al., 2014). When yoga is effectively incorporated into the school curriculum, it has the potential to improve learning by lessening behavior disruptions, increasing focus, and improving students’ self-regulation (Anderson, 2014; Case-Smith et al., 2010; Mendelson et al., 2013; Williamson, 2012). Mendelson et al. (2013) found that delivering yoga during the school day has the potential to “enhance school climate by creating a culture of compassion and awareness among students and teachers” (p. 285). Flynn (2013) notes that yoga and mindfulness programs are being introduced in schools across the country to increase school connectedness, prepare students for learning, and alleviate the increasing amounts of stress and anxiety felt by students.

Today’s students face increasing amounts of stress and pressure to achieve (Kauts & Sharma, 2009). An excessive amount of stress is harmful and disruptive to academic performance. The inability to cope with stress can reduce grade point averages, and can lead to physical and psychological malfunctioning. Teaching students the foundation of yoga, breathing, and postures optimizes stress levels and has the potential to improve academic performance. Due to these increasing academic demands on students, Kauts and Sharma (2009) recommend yoga to be added to school curricula as an academic intervention.
Another area that greatly impacts the stress levels of students (and staff) is standardized testing (Flynn, 2013). Our nation’s increased focus on accountability and testing can contribute to high levels of stress, especially with underserved populations (Harper, 2010). In order to adequately prepare students for these tests, many school systems have removed, or decreased the time students spend engaging in physical activity (Tomporowski, Davis, Miller, & Naglieri (2008). Tomporowski et al. (2008) presented a summary of research findings to suggest that systematic physical exercise programs enhance the cognitive development and executive functioning of in youth. In addition to the reduction of physical education classes and recess, programs that target social/emotional learning are affected due to the rise of accountability standards (Harper, 2010).

Teaching students how to regulate emotions is critical to promote a healthy learning environment. Yoga programs often provide students with an escape from stressful home situations and academic struggles (Case-Smith et al., 2010). “Programs that use both active full-body movement and calming poses and postures can help students become more perceptive of their arousal and learn simple strategies for increasing or lowering their arousal” (Case-Smith et al., 2010, p. 236). Breath, movement, and focus can be used in stressful situations, both in and out of a school environment (Case-Smith, Shupe-Sines & Klatt, 2010). As Harper (2010) points out, “high expectations are irrelevant if children do not have the resources and support to achieve them” (p. 100). Many students from inner-city neighborhoods experience high levels of stress and poor coping skills which interfere with their willingness and ability to learn (Case-Smith et al., 2010; Harper, 2010). The practice of yoga helps youth develop key self-regulation skills that can be applied in any setting.
Many public schools are taking preventative measures to enhance the academic and social/emotional performance in students who are deemed at-risk for developing behavioral problems (Case-Smith et al., 2010). The practice of yoga offers an alternative method for students to enhance social/emotional and academic success, particularly with urban youth (Harper, 2010; Mendelson et al., 2013; Robold, 2002). For example, poor living conditions, community violence, and poverty all contribute to undue stress and anxiety in youth (Harper, 2010). These experiences are often complicated by grief, physical and emotional abuse, trauma, substance abuse, and familial instability (Robold, 2002).

Community and familial instability bleed into schools and create a stressful atmosphere. Harper (2010) states “Schools in urban centers are typically control-oriented, often with armed, uniformed police officers for security even at the lower grade levels. This reinforces the perception that the students are continuously in harm’s way” (p. 100). Moreover, youth in disadvantaged neighborhoods are more likely to experience significant poverty and trauma, resulting in increased hypervigilance at school. Robold (2002) states “…the decay and dysfunction of the family and shocking social problems in our communities have created a new level of deviancy and disturbance never before seen by educators and other adults who work with children and youth” (p. 82). As a result, some students are less likely to form trusting relationships with teachers and expect to have a negative experience at school (Harper, 2010).

Students in alternative school programs typically face long-term risk factors, complicated by a lack of community, family, and peer support (Robold, 2002). Furthermore, students in these programs have more cumulative exposure to stress and fewer positive coping strategies. Chronic stress affects physical and mental health, and influences students’ ability to emotionally regulate.
Yoga practices can mitigate the effects of chronic stress and produce a calming effect, helping students to focus and control their emotions to mitigate long-term consequences.

Studies have shown that yoga can reduce recidivism in adult populations (Landau & Gross, 2008), and a growing number of studies focus on how yoga can reduce the school-to-prison pipeline (Bose, 2013). This pipeline is overrepresented by students of color, many whom have suffered from abuse, neglect, and trauma. Furthermore, many of these students grew up in neighborhoods ridden with crime, violence, gangs, and drugs. Students who grow up in unstable and traumatic environments are more likely to drop out of school, abuse substances, experience homelessness, and commit crimes. And while yoga certainly is not the only form of recommended treatment, it provides youth with alternative, positive coping tools that help them feel a sense of control (Robold, 2002).

In addition to students, teachers may benefit from the practice themselves (Mendelson et al., 2013). Teachers who work in urban environments face greater levels of burnout and may benefit from stress management and positive classroom management techniques. Mendelson et al. (2013) suggest educators receive training to facilitate or co-facilitate a yoga program with students. When woven through the school day at various levels (i.e., breathing techniques to start the day or before a test, basic poses throughout the day, or posters/flash cards to remind students of mindful behavior), yoga and mindful behavior could prompt more comprehensive changes. “Embedding mindfulness training at multiple levels of the school ecology has great potential to transform school climate, improve the quality of teaching and learning, and promote resilience and positive growth in students” (Mendelson et al., 2013, p. 286). Furthermore, yoga could be a vital resource for students who live in disadvantage communities and face significant
stressors (Berger et al., 2009). After children had been exposed to the physical postures and relaxations tools of yoga, it requires little cost and/or ability to practice yoga independently.

**Feasibility of Yoga Implementation in Schools**

Although yoga has become more culturally mainstreamed in academic environments (Mardesich, 2007), it is still far from being a curricula staple (Harper, 2010). It is quite feasible to implement yoga programs into the school day to help students who face a myriad of academic and personal challenges (Case-Smith et al, 2010). From a social justice standpoint, yoga in schools can be a transformative experience for youth. Hyde (2012) explains:

Yoga is something shared by those who have experience with those who seek it. Yet it is ever afterward something that people can do for themselves and adapt to their own interests, needs, and beliefs. There are no tests and no competition. It is free to practice and even learn. You can do it alone or with others; there is no specific equipment required and you can practice anywhere with very little space. There is no prerequisite physical or level of ability, beyond the ability to breathe. Yoga is for *every* body (p. 118)

Flynn (2013) concurs that yoga can be practiced by individuals of all shapes, sizes, and ability levels; and yoga can be practiced in a small space. For example, Flynn’s (2013) *Yoga 4 Classrooms®* cards were designed specifically for students to practice yoga behind a desk and reduce the potential barrier of space. Steiner et al. (2010) found yoga to be feasible to implement in a school setting when staff buy-in was high and the school recognized the importance of holistic interventions with specific behavioral, social, and academic challenges. Additionally, Steiner et al. (2010) found that yoga in small groups proved to be an innovative and effective approach to reducing problematic behavior symptomology. Teachers in this study reported a
decrease in student disciplinary issues during and after yoga participation, therefore creating an environment more conducive to learning.

As previously noted, implementing yoga into the school day is also beneficial to staff. In a pilot study, Anderson (2014) focused on the perceptions of staff members during and after the implementation of a four-month yoga program taught by a certified instructor from a local, not-for-profit community agency. The yoga sessions were conducted in four classrooms: two half-day Pre-K classrooms, one full-day Pre-K classroom, and one Kindergarten-second grade special education classroom designated for students with severe and profound emotional and behavioral needs. Each session included a warm up, yoga pose of the week, breathing technique of the week, and relaxation. The overall results indicated positive benefits to students and teachers. Numerous teachers commented on how teaching the breathing techniques to students subsequently enhanced their ability to self-calm. Other teachers reported pride in the success of their students who had progressed significantly during the yoga program. Anderson (2014) concluded that “early childhood teachers are perfect candidates to take on the coordination and successful implementation of a classroom-based yoga program” (p. 115). While the implementation of yoga in a school is quite feasible in most academic settings, it can be met with resistance and numerous barriers that hinder instruction to students who may benefit the most (Williamson, 2012).

**Barriers to Yoga Implementation in Schools**

The main barrier of yoga implementation in a school setting is the misconception that yoga is a religion (Williamson, 2012). Originally introduced in India, yoga has historical roots in Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist practices, as well as other religious practices in both India and East Asia (Williamson, 2012). Yoga’s history extends back to thousands of years ago (Williamson,
and is currently culturally mainstreamed in all parts of the world and practiced by all religions (Flynn, 2013). However, while the roots of yoga are tied to religious traditions, yoga itself is not a religion (Brandstaetter, 2014; Catalfo, 2007; Flynn, 2013; Hyde & Spence, 2013; Steiner et al., 2010). Yoga is a discipline and practiced by religions all over the world (Flynn, 2013). The practice of yoga offers a secular space for students to enhance their physical and emotional well-being without infringing on individual beliefs or values.

Many misconceptions still exist about the practice of yoga (Williamson, 2012) and more empirical research is needed regarding the benefits of yoga in schools. Some school districts have banned the practice altogether, claiming it has no place in public schools. After observing the numerous positive effects of yoga in schools, The Encinitas Union School District (EUSD) partnered with the Jois Foundation and was awarded a $533,000 grant to implement yoga in every school (Careless, 2012; Luhar, 2013; Stewart; 2013). Researchers from the University of San Diego and the University of Virginia were hired to research and evaluate the effectiveness of the program. Despite an option to opt out, conservative advocacy groups filed a lawsuit, tying yoga to religious indoctrination and a violation of their First Amendment rights. The lawsuit was overturned, and EUSD continues to teach yoga in all district schools.

Douglass (2010) finds the current debates regarding this controversy to be “vastly oversimplified” (p. 163). She goes on to say “Yoga’s presence in the schools challenges the assumptions we make about ourselves and about others; its presence asks us to articulate strong beliefs about the body and religion that are often left implicit (rather than explicit) and unquestioned” (p. 163). The debates continue to unearth complex emotional reactions regarding the diversity of religions present at most schools. Although yoga has roots in Hinduism, to suggest the religion is merely about yogic postures, breathing, and sequences presents a
misunderstanding about the culture. In fact, Singleton (as cited in Hyde, 2012) asserts, “Yoga poses are more closely related to early 20th-century European gymnastics than to any religious practice of Hinduism or Buddhism” (p. 116). Catalfo (2007) argues the absence of formal rituals, creeds, or religious responsibilities secularize yoga, especially as practiced in Western culture.

To debunk this myth, it is important for educators to address yoga’s cultural history to acknowledge the connection with religion (Douglass, 2010). Open discussions provide public schools with a fortuitous opportunity to educate the community about the complexities of religion. Flynn (2013) suggests “… rather than enforcing a doctrine, yoga gives kids a tool for spiritual exploration. Indeed, yoga nurtures the hearts, minds, and bodies of children (and adults) without violating the individual belief of their families, and may even deepen children’s connections to their families’ beliefs” (p. 16). Hyde and Spence (2013) suggest that yoga taught in a public school should be “explicitly secular” (p. 54) but individuals may choose to use yoga to enhance spiritual beliefs. The authors assert:

The practice of yoga neither asks for nor requires an expression or practice of a transcendent belief, nor does it interfere with any expression or practice of religious belief. Therefore, including yoga and meditation in public school does not violate the Constitutional protections of the First Amendment (p. 54).

Catalfo (2007) suggests observing and simplifying the difference between religion and spirituality. Spirituality concerns the internal understanding and connection with ones’ self, whereas religion can be viewed as the external aspect of spirituality, “the organizational structure we give to our individual and collective spiritual processes: the rituals, doctrines, prayers, changes, and ceremonies, and the congregations that come together to share them” (Catalfo,
Hyde (2012) contends that yoga expressed as a spiritual practice by students should not be forbidden in public schools. Yoga can be explored through a multicultural lens to effectively teach students about cultural beliefs and practices, and/or spiritual and religious tenants.

School counselors are obliged to consider the spiritual needs of all students (Sink, 2004). In doing so, school counselors must remain open in order for students to explore their spiritual beliefs without fear of judgement. According to Allen and Coy (2004), allowing discourse and exploration of spiritually in schools enhances students’ “mutual respect for personal values and beliefs” (p. 355). School counselors can instill a safe space for students to explore their spiritually, and play an integral role in including aspects of spirituality in a comprehensive school counseling program (Sink, 2004). For example, character education programs can include components related to the development of personal morals, values, and meaning (Allen & Coy, 2004), that link to the ethical disciplines of yoga (Flynn, 2013). Combining these concepts allow for further spiritual exploration that could potentially help students overcome personal struggles, reduce conflict, and increase nonviolent problem solving skills (Allen & Coy, 2004). Sink (2004) suggests school counselors find creative strategies to incorporate spirituality into a comprehensive school counseling program to address the needs of the whole child.

In addition to religion, other barriers to implementing yoga in a school setting include time, staff buy-in, and logistics (Ancona & Mendelson, 2014; Anderson, 2014; Kaley-Isley et al., 2010; Mendelson et al., 2013). To effectively integrate all aspects of yoga, it is important to dedicate a fixed amount of time to practice. Kaley-Isley et al. (2010) suggest that school-age youth spend 30-45 minutes practicing yoga during each session. During that time, three to five minutes should be spent on focused awareness, 15-25 minutes on poses, three-five minutes on
breath work, and five minutes following a guided visualization during relaxation. Structured
time allows for youth to move through all aspects of yoga, including postures, breathing
techniques, and ethical disciplines.

Even when time is found during the school day to integrate yoga, it is often difficult to
find time for maintenance. For example, when a certified yoga teacher outside of the school
community implements an in-class intervention, Anderson (2014) noted it was important for
educators to actively participate in yoga sessions with their students. In this study, teachers were
asked to maintain teaching basic yoga postures and breathing techniques to students after the
sessions had ended with the community specialist. The educators who chose not to participate
with their students and the yoga instructor had difficulties remembering how to do the poses;
therefore, they relied on students to recall specific techniques.

Regardless of the reported academic and behavioral benefits of yoga in schools, they
cannot be reaped without the support of the community. Key educational stakeholders, such as
administration, educators, and parents, must support the program for it to achieve sustainability
(Mendelson et al., 2013). According to Mendelson et al. (2013), three key elements are critical
in order to successfully implement yoga into a school setting: administrative support, teacher
involvement, and student engagement. Administrative support refers to the commitment of the
principal, assistant principal, and other educational leaders in the school. For practical reasons,
administrative support is needed to ensure time and space is adequate for yoga instruction.
Furthermore, administrators can ensure teachers take the program seriously, reinforce yoga in
their curricula, and help students become more engaged. Like Anderson (2014), Mendelson et
al. (2013) found that teachers who engaged in the yoga intervention with their students were
more likely to support the program. Other teachers noted time constraints and increased stress
from the reduction of instructional time. In addition to teacher support, the time of day that students engage in yoga can have a tremendous impact on their level of engagement. For example, if yoga is offered at the same time as physical education, some students may have a negative reaction or be less likely to engage. Furthermore, yoga should not take time away from lunch or be held after school, as many students may not be able to participate.

Finally, it is critical for yoga instructors to dispel myths about yoga to increase student engagement. For example, Mendelson et al. (2013) discussed the popularization of yoga in Western culture and the perception of yoga being an activity for “white privileged females” (p. 281) as a barrier, particularly with urban youth. To dispel this myth, instructors discussed famous athletes who actively participated in yoga to increase strength and flexibility. They also helped students connect their yoga practice to their everyday lives by offering alternate, healthy coping techniques to heightened stress that often occurs outside of school. Another critical element for student engagement is fostering positive relationships with students. Mendelson et al. (2013) noted that several students in the study were constant victims of tragic neighborhood violence. Many students enter the school building each day hypervigilant, expecting danger, and fearful of negative interactions with teachers. By nature, yoga is designed to reduce this fear so students see positive, compassionate role models and view their teachers as individuals they can trust.

Lastly, it is important to have male instructors and teachers included in any yoga intervention, especially in urban environments. Many young men lack positive male role models; the inclusion of males can redefine masculinity in the context of non-violence and make an incredible difference in the lives of youth.

Anderson (2014) and Mendelson et al. (2013) highlight numerous barriers to successful implementation of yoga in an academic setting. These barriers largely pertain to logistics, cost,
and stakeholder buy-in. While these aspects are important, most of the current literature is conceptual and exploratory. Although these reports are helpful, sound empirical evidence is needed that demonstrates yoga is a “cost-effective, pragmatic, and beneficial tool in the academic setting and beyond” (Serwacki & Cook-Cottone, 2012, p. 106). Empirical studies need to address numerous aspects of yoga implementation and integration in schools in order to efficiently and effectively offer the practice to all students.

**Empirical Research Supporting Yoga in Schools**

The rise in popularity has helped yoga grow from a largely misunderstood discipline, to the focus of numerous research studies (Kaley-Isley et al., 2010; Steiner, Sidhu, Pop, Frenette, & Perrin, 2012). Hopkins and Hopkins (1979) conducted the first known study regarding yoga in a school setting. The purpose of this research was to compare the effects of yoga versus exercise on hyperactive students. Thirty-four participants, aged six through 11, were either assigned to yoga, or structured physical play. All participants attended an alternative school for students with severe educational problems. Researchers found that both groups exhibited less hyperactivity, were more relaxed, and had a greater ability to concentrate after the respected interventions. While the yoga group did not show differences from the control, the results suggest the advantages of using yoga as a modality with hyperactive students.

Since the publication of the Hopkins and Hopkins (1979) study, many schools have introduced yoga as a method to improve behavior. In one urban school in Milwaukee, WI, yoga was introduced as an addition to the schools’ positive behavioral support system (Williamson, 2012). In the year prior to the implementation of yoga, there were 225 classroom disruptions, 320 disorderly conduct referrals, and 150 fights. The year of the pilot program, classroom disruptions reduced to 110, disorderly conduct referrals reduced to 40, and there were only 52
fights in the school. Although a notable lack of large-scale evidence exists citing the potential benefits of yoga in schools, Williamson (2012) reports, “limited studies and anecdotal evidence continue to convince educators to give it a chance” (p. 28). Furthermore, implementing yoga is cost-effective, user friendly, and accessible to all students.

Several studies have examined the impact of yoga on behavior in alternative school settings. Steiner et al. (2010) studied the effects of yoga sessions within an urban school setting on youth with emotional and behaviors disorders. After the intervention, teachers reported significant improvement in students’ attention, adaptive skills, and behavioral, depressive, and internalizing symptoms. This research presented evidence of the positive impact of yoga in an alternative setting; however, the results indicated a need for long-term follow-up studies to evaluate overall effectiveness. In another study, Frank et al., (2014) evaluated the effectiveness of the Transformative Life Skills (TLS) program in an alternative school located in an urban, inner-city school district. TLS is a yoga program designed to reduce stress and enhance physical and mental health. Researchers reported a decrease in reports of anxiety, depression, revenge motivation, hostility, and psychological distress. In addition, students reported significant decreases on rumination, involuntary action, intrusive thoughts, and both physical and emotional arousal. The results of this study suggest programs like TLS can have a positive impact on the mental and physical well-being of urban youth, including the promotion of prosocial behavior and the reduction of emotional distress. Researchers noted generalizability and youth self-report as methodological limitations and suggest that future research gather supporting evidence from educators and/or parents.

Two more recent studies compared yoga to physical activity to determine outcome differences. Chaya et al., (2012) studied the effect of yoga as it compares to physical activity on
the cognitive performance in children aged seven to nine. The sample consisted of 200 students in a socioeconomic disadvantaged area in Bangalore, India, who attended school every day. Using a randomized-controlled design, students were either assigned to the yoga or physical activity group. Each intervention lasted for 45 minutes and was given daily (with the exception of school holidays and Sundays) for three months. Compared to the control group, data indicated that yoga was helpful in increasing attention and visuo-spatial abilities. Researchers noted the main limitation of the study was a lack of a true control group and suggest future research in this area; yoga is a cost-effective method to increase academic achievement in disadvantaged students, and that it should be part of the daily school curriculum.

Similarly, Conboy et al. (2013) examined the effects of Yoga in the Schools ®, a curriculum based on Kripalu Yoga, which is a classical style of hatha yoga. Ninth and tenth grade students who agreed to participate in the study were randomly assigned to either practice yoga or attend their regular physical education class for a period of 12 weeks. Both classes met either two or three times per week. A total of 47 students participated in the yoga intervention, and 25 students were interviewed. Students reported numerous individual benefits to practicing yoga, including: enhanced athletic performance, improved body awareness, mental health benefits, improved sleep quality, better ability to regulate emotions, a reduction in stress, less interest in substance abuse, and improved academic performance. Interestingly, based on students’ desire to continue practicing yoga, insights on designing a yoga program was an emerging theme. Researchers found that the desire to continue yoga was related to how students felt about participating in physical education. Students who enjoyed participating in physical education were more likely to dislike having that class replaced with yoga. Another emerging theme indicated that students desired to continue practicing yoga, but noted a financial barrier.
One student claimed that her friends from other schools were jealous that it was offered to her at no cost, whereas they had to pay. This points to the previously discussed benefit of yoga: providing access to all students.

Similarly, Daly, Haden, Hagins, Papouchis, and Ramirez (2015) evaluated the effect of a yoga intervention on the emotional regulation of high school students aged 15-17. Subjects were randomized to either a physical education class (n = 18) or yoga intervention (n = 19). Students in the treatment group met three times per week for 16 weeks. Each yoga session lasted approximately 40 minutes and included postures, relaxation, and a “closing ritual that emphasized carrying principles of the yoga practice into the rest of the day” (p. 2). Measurements included: the Emotion Regulation Index for Children and Adolescents (ERICA); the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale in Adolescents (MASSA); the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS); and the Multidimensional Assessment of Interceptive Awareness (MAIA). The analysis of pre/post data showed a significant increase in the emotional regulation and body awareness of the treatment group when compared to the control group ($F (1, 32) = 7.50, p = .01$, and $\eta^2 = .19$). Limitations of this study included sample size, potential mediating variables, and homogeneity of the sample.

Berger et al. (2009) conducted a pilot study to compare a treatment group of 126 inner-city fourth and fifth grade students to a control group of 109 demographically similar fourth and fifth grade students. The treatment group participated in yoga for one hour per week for 12 weeks and was taught by a certified yoga teacher from Bent on Learning, a nonprofit yoga education program in New York City. The yoga program is aligned with New York state and national physical education standards and is based on traditional yoga practice (physical postures, breathing, meditation, and relaxation). Other than yoga, the treatment group did not
have additional activities added during the period of the study. No student in the treatment or control group had received yoga instruction in the past. Researchers measured the intervention in both groups using baseline demographic data, the Emotional Well-being Assessment, the Physical Well-being Assessment, the Perceptions of Physical Health, and the Yoga Teaching scale. In addition, two subscales were distributed: positive/negative behaviors and focusing/relaxation, and two subscales from Harter’s Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC): the Physical Appearance subscale and the Global Self-Worth subscale. For the yoga group only, researchers used the Effects of Yoga on Well-being survey and also recorded attendance. Prior to the intervention, the yoga group reported remarkably better scores on the Yoga Teaching Scale, along with two of its subscales: Positive Behaviors and Focusing/Relaxation. After the intervention, the yoga group reported a significant reduction in Negative Behaviors, which included screaming and yelling, hitting, and throwing things when upset. Yoga encourages non-violence, which could have helped students find alternative coping strategies when emotionally overwhelmed. Overall, most subjects in the treatment group reported improvements in flexibility balance, attention, liking oneself, liking the way one’s body feels, classroom behavior, strength, the ability to self-regulate, and sleep, suggesting physical activity in general is helpful to students. Qualitative responses indicated students in the treatment group felt less angry, more able to manage stress, and noted improved behavior as a result of yoga. Students noted physical gains including an increase in strength, improved body image, and greater flexibility. Berger et al. (2009) noted several limitations of this study, including: small sample size, low attendance in the yoga group, and length of time the yoga intervention was offered. Overall, this study demonstrated that yoga could produce preventative and protective responses concerning the emotional and physical well-being of students.
Researchers suggest further studies continue to examine the role of yoga in positively impacting children’s emotional and physical health.

The Wellness Initiative (TWI), a Boulder Colorado based nonprofit agency, partnered with public schools across Colorado, including Denver Public Schools and Boulder Public Schools, to provide 45-minute yoga sessions to over 2000 students in predominantly low-income neighborhoods (Jones, 2010). TWI implemented the Yoga Ed ® curriculum, which includes yoga classes for students and staff, and yoga training for teachers. Preliminary findings show the effects of TWI’s yoga intervention to be positive. At least half of the students who participated in the yoga sessions reported improved strength, self-confidence, and optimism; and 60 to 70 percent reported incorporating breathing and visualization techniques outside of yoga. Moreover, students reported improvements in body image, concentration, self-esteem, frustration, healthy eating habits, and pressure. Although self-report data presents a limitation, it is important to show the perceived benefits of yoga by youth, especially in low-income neighborhoods.

Ehud et al., (2010) studied the effects of yoga on Israeli students affected by the Second Lebanon War. Many economically disadvantaged students resided in the area affected by the war; their homes were destroyed, and the students did not have access to financial resources or psychological treatment. A war survivor who wanted to provide students with access to stress and anxiety treatment developed the program “Here and Now: Yoga in School”. A total of 122 students aged eight to 12 received 13 yoga classes over a four-month period during the school day. Outcome measures included the WHO Well-Being Index, the Conners Abbreviated Symptom Questionnaire, and a satisfaction questionnaire. Results indicated a statistically significant improvement in attention span, restlessness, and inattentiveness. Furthermore, 90%
of the students indicated they wanted yoga to remain part of the school curriculum. Limitations included a lack of control group and inconsistencies between children’s’ self-report and observer ratings. Researchers believe this difference is due to the children’s young age. This study highlights the positive effects of yoga as it relates to stress and anxiety reductions in students suffering from post-stress reactions.

In the first study of its kind, Butzer et al. (2015) examined the salivary cortisol responses of 36 second and third grade students enrolled in a ten-week school-based yoga program. The students received the *Yoga 4 Classrooms*® curricula, which like other school-based studies, includes the four basic elements of classic yoga: breathing exercises, physical exercises and postures, meditation techniques, and relaxation (Butzer et al., 2015). In addition, the Y4C curriculum focuses on self-regulation, mindfulness, reflection, and integration. Outcome measures included the following: the Attention Network Test (ANT-C), salivary cortisol concentration, and perceived behavior change, a measure created by the researchers. Results revealed no significant findings regarding the effects of a single yoga session, but noted an acute reduction in cortisol concentrations from pre to post test. In addition, the behavioral observation scale showed significant perceived improvements in social interaction, self-control, anger management, attention span, concentration, ability to stay on task, creativity, academic performance, ability to deal with stress and anxiety, confidence, self-esteem, and overall mood. Similar to the aforementioned studies, Butzer et al. (2015) noted the main limitation of this study was the absence of a control group. A further limitation was the timing of the cortisol swabs. Numerous best practices exist that indicate the best time to collect saliva, but due to school scheduling constraints, the timing differed between students. These limitations are typical in a
pilot study, and researchers suggest future research include more rigorous research designs with larger sample sized and both objective and subjective methods of collecting data.

Buckenmeyer and Freitas (2007) explored the relationship between yoga in schools and the impact on academic achievement, health, personal attributes, and relationships. Participating schools were a combination of public and private schools in Canada, Florida, New York, and Wisconsin. Researchers created a survey instrument to record pre and post-test data from students in grades K-5, teachers, and parents. Reliability coefficients were high for both students ($\alpha = .92$) and teachers/parents ($\alpha = .83$). A total of 684 responses were gathered and showed a positive effect on academic achievement, general health, personal attributes, and relationships. In addition to statistical data, qualitative data were steadily positive, showing similar effects to quantitative data.

Overall, these studies reflect that empirical research regarding yoga and schools is still in its infancy stage. In the few empirical studies that have been conducted, there are numerous methodological limitations that make the findings difficult to generalize (Berger et al., 2009; Butzer et al., 2015; Kaley-Isley et al., 2010). For example, many studies do not sufficiently describe the specific aspects of yoga that were helpful in the intervention (Berger et al., 2009). Furthermore, with children, yoga is often a small part of a larger study, so it is impossible to link the benefits specifically to the yoga intervention. Other studies have targeted specific mental health and medical disorders, but have not studied the benefits of yoga on a healthy population, or lack a control group.

Serwacki and Cook-Cottone (2012) performed a systematic review of the literature to examine the evidence surrounding the delivery of yoga interventions in schools. Despite numerous benefits noted in school-based yoga studies, most lacked sound methodology. For
example, many studies lack randomization, effect size reporting, and detail regarding the yoga intervention. In addition, most sample sizes were small, which interfered with the researchers’ ability to declare a definitive conclusion or provide a recommendation for the implementation of yoga in schools. While most research supports the yoga in schools movement, the empirical evidence regarding the instruction and fidelity of the intervention is questionable. This does not negate the importance and value of qualitative research, however, buy-in from schools and school districts often require sound empirical evidence supporting program implementation.

As suggested, future research targeting yoga in schools should include randomized controlled trials that examine current and longitudinal effects of the intervention (Serwacki & Cook-Cottone, 2012). Furthermore, specific research design (standardization, adherence, attrition, fidelity) need to be explained, along with basic intervention detail such as: time, frequency, duration of study, type of yoga, and appropriateness of the intervention for students. Finally, in order to successfully implement yoga into schools, full support of educational stakeholders is necessary, including the students. In order to achieve support, more rigorous research demonstrating yoga to be a cost-effective, valuable tool to impact academic and social/emotional growth is needed. While numerous pilot studies have demonstrated how students, teachers, administrators, and even parents feel about yoga, to date there is no research that cites the experiences of school counselors using yoga as part of a comprehensive school counseling program.

School counselors help students cope with countless social and emotional concerns that interfere with learning; however, scant literature exists that connects school counselors with yoga. The 2014 July/August edition of the ASCA School Counselor Magazine is titled “The Whole Student” and focuses on holistic wellness interventions implemented by school
counselors. In this edition, Dye (2014) wrote a conceptual article titled: *Calm, Cool, and Confident*. This piece focuses on the school counselor’s role in the yoga in schools movement.

Dye (2014) states:

> We are not born knowing how to deal with stress, especially emotional stress. Rather, this is a skill most commonly learned by observing others. Yoga can prepare children for learning and teach self-regulation and self-understanding. The meaningful physical movement combined with breath control and mental relaxation activities fully engage a student’s mind and emotion (p. 22).

Dye (2014) asserts that yoga changed her school’s climate and improved the overall mood of student, faculty, and administration. It is implied that, regardless of circumstances, it is both feasible and beneficial to incorporate yoga into a school counseling core curriculum.

**Integrating Yoga into a Comprehensive School Counseling Program:**

**Overview of Theoretical Perspectives**

The foundation for understanding the role of the school counselor in implementing and/or facilitating a yoga program as it relates to student achievement is framed first by the ASCA Mindset & Behaviors for Student Success (2014a), which is rooted in Dweck’s (2006) Theory of Mindset. The second framework is Social Cognitive Theory of Self-Regulation (Bandura, 1991). Despite a lack of sound scientific research in the area of yoga for youth, the few studies citing statistical significance note improvements in self-regulation. Both theoretical perspectives complement one another and are used widely in educational settings.

**Theory of Mindset**

In response to the educational reform movement, the ASCA National Standards were originally developed to clarify the role of school counseling programs (ASCA, 2014a; Campbell
The National Standards address school counselor competencies in the areas of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that contribute to students’ academic, postsecondary, and social/emotional success. The ASCA National Standards have now evolved to the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success (2014a), which reflect a survey of research and best practices related to students’ academic growth and achievement as presented in the critical review of literature, “Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners,” conducted by the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (Farrington, et al., 2012).

How students perform in school is multifaceted and influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Farrington et al., 2012). However, the continued national spotlight on accountability standards has changed the way many teachers teach. It is not uncommon for K-12 educators to heavily focus their curriculum on teaching to improve standardized test scores. Despite numerous political battles regarding this excessive focus on standardized tests and accountability measures, educational policies aimed solely at academic achievement continue to soar. For example, states across the country continue to increase standard graduation requirements, enrollment requirements in honors and advanced placement courses, and rigor in core course curricula. These incremental changes continue to set the educational bar high as it relates to college and career readiness. When achievement expectations are continually raised, little room is left for creativity and personal growth. If the focus on achievement is shifted to reducing negative thought patterns related to academic growth, educators actually increase the likelihood of secondary and postsecondary achievement. This concept is often referred to as an academic mindset.
Consistent perseverance contributes to overall academic success (Farrington et al., 2012). “The best ways to improve students’ perseverance and strengthen their academic behaviors is through academic mindsets and learning strategies” (p. 73). Mindset refers to the way we think (Dweck, 2006). According to Dweck’s (2006) Theory of Mindset, individuals either have a fixed or growth mindset. Students with a fixed mindset believe their character, level of intelligence, and creativity are static and cannot be changed. They often avoid challenges that could lead to failure and assume they lack the intelligence to achieve. In contrast, students who possess a growth mindset embrace challenges and hold an innate belief that effort produces mastery. Failure is viewed as a growth opportunity and not evidence of unintelligence.

These mindsets greatly impact school achievement and behavior (Dweck, 2010). Students with a fixed mindset tend to sacrifice tremendous learning opportunities, particularly if those opportunities could potentially lead to poor performance or reveal academic deficiencies. They are more likely to become discouraged and/or defensive, may withdraw effort, blame others for their lack of success, cheat, or suffer from low self-esteem. On the other hand, students with a growth mindset view challenging work as an opportunity to learn and grow. They tend to enjoy challenges, value effort, and hold the belief that failure leads to success. These students are typically involved and present in school activities, use a variety of resources to facilitate learning, and remain positive when faced with setbacks. Students who exhibit poor behaviors in school are often labeled as lazy or unmotivated, when the majority of students want to succeed in school but have a variety of difficult obstacles in the way (Farrington et al., 2012). Like teachers and administrators, school counselors play a key role in helping all students develop a growth mindset to foster academic, postsecondary, and social/emotional success.
There is strong evidence to support helping students develop stronger mindsets and behaviors. Numerous school-based interventions have suggested that changing fixed mindsets in students results in an increase in academic performance (Farrington et al., 2012). Most human behaviors are viewed as malleable and possible to change, especially as they relate to academic perseverance. Moreover, targeted mindset interventions can assist in narrowing the achievement gap. With intentionality, all students can experience success.

The ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors (2014a) standards specifically identify and prioritize skills that students should acquire as a result of the school counseling program. These standards assist school counselors with assessing student growth, and help guide school counseling programs to help all students achieve success. The ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors standards were uniquely designed to align with district, state, and national initiatives in order to support the educational curriculum and are organized by domain: academic, career, and social/emotional development.

The mindset standards are related to psycho-social attitudes and/or beliefs that students have related to academic work (ASCA, 2014a). The student’s belief system is generally exhibited in behaviors. The behavior standards are composed of behaviors typically associated with academic success and organized into three categories: learning strategies, self-management skills, and social skills. By aligning school counseling programs and evidence-based interventions with the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors standards, school counselors position themselves to continually help students enhance their learning process by developing specific skills that promote college and career readiness.

Overall, a growth mindset aids in the development of self-regulation and important lifelong skills (Cope, 2010). Those who possess a growth mindset learn valuable tools to
overcome adversity, mitigate problematic situations, and develop innate skills to assist real and/or perceived barriers to learning. School counselors can help students develop a strong growth mindset by assisting with sound prevention and intervention strategies to improve self-regulation skills. Self-regulated learners are more academically successful than non-regulated learners (Lapan, Kardash, & Turner, 2002). Students can more effectively develop the capacity to self-regulate when an activity is modeled in a way that encourages emulation and self-practice (Cope, 2010).

Yoga is an example of a tool school counselors can use to teach students growth mindset and self-regulation strategies (Harper, 2010; Butzer, van Over, Noggle & Khalsa, 2015; Toscano & Clemente, 2013; Williamson, 2012). The practice of yoga has the potential to enhance students’ ability to engage in purposeful emotional regulation techniques that extend outside of the practice, and into their daily lives (Gard, Noggle, Park, Vago, & Wilson, 2014). School counselors consistently have the opportunity to engage students in activities that foster the ability to appropriately monitor thoughts, actions, feeling and behaviors to encourage academic growth. Furthermore, school counselors have a professional duty to empower and motivate students to realize their fullest potential. Yoga could be an effective strategy to help students achieve this.

**Social Cognitive Theory of Self-Regulation**

The second theoretical perspective used for this study is Social Cognitive Theory of Self-Regulation (Bandura, 1991), which posits that human behavior is both motivated and regulated by repetitive practices of self-influence. According to Zimmerman (2000), the most important quality that humans possess is the ability to self-regulate. The ability to self-regulate has proven to be an adaptive function that has enabled survival skills throughout centuries when extension was plausible. The social cognitive perspective of this theory views self-regulation as an
interactive combination of personal, behavioral, and environmental processes that influence one another (Bandura, 1986). Self-regulation can be defined as self-imposed thoughts, feelings, and actions that are adapted in order to achieve a personal goal (Zimmerman, 2000). Goals with tangible rewards explain why children may be able to adapt their behavior in one setting, but not another. Self-regulation can be described as cyclical because internal or external feedback from previous experiences typically motivates current efforts.

According to Bandura (1991), self-regulation is predominantly operated through three psychological subfunctions: 1) self-monitoring; 2) judgment of behavior; and 3) self-reaction influences. For the purposes of this study, I will focus primarily on these three areas as they directly correlate with the moral and ethical disciplines of yoga. These three self-regulative processes are involved in most functions of human behavior by mediating the effects of external influences and providing the foundation of purposeful action.

**Self-monitoring subfunction.** It is difficult for individuals to regulate their actions if they are not closely monitored (Bandura, 1991). Moreover, in order to have the capacity to influence personal action, one must pay attention to the conditions and the immediate consequences (positive, negative, or neutral) of their behavior. Existing structures in cognition and self-beliefs selectively guide which aspect of an individual’s functioning receives the most attention, how it is perceived, and how information about performance is organized in the brain for memory representation and replication. For instance, behavioral self-monitoring that relates to competence and self-esteem activates affective reactions. These reactions both influence and disrupt self-perceptions when a specific behavior occurs. In turn, the level of change resulting from self-monitoring widely depends on whether attention is focused on success or failure.
Judgmental subfunction. While casually observing one’s behavior is an important step in producing change, observation itself does not provide information for one to self-direct personal reactions (Bandura, 1991). Actions produce self-reactions through the function of judging and guiding behavior. Personal standards can be viewed as the barometer in which behavior is regarded positively or negatively. For example, if personal standards are formed partly by through other people’s reactions to their behavior, people are more likely to judge themselves by preconceived notions of acceptable social and societal standards. However, this is not a simple cognitive process. When societal standards are cognitively absorbed, individuals often filter them into their own standards through reflection and based on the degree of the influence. People often teach and prescribe standards for others through their own behavior. Moreover, they demonstrate personal standards in their reactions to their own behavior. The response to fulfilling a personal standard is often favorable, resulting in self-satisfaction and approval. Conversely, violating or failing to meet a personal standard is often laden with criticism and judgment. It is not uncommon to observe inconsistence between what people practice versus preach, as this is part of the human condition and based on personal and societal reactions to one’s behavior.

Self-reactive influences. Personal performance judgments are typically precursors for self-reactions (Bandura, 1991). Incentivizing actions and anticipating reactions to personal behavior contribute to the attainment of self-regulation. This concept is widely dependent on how behavior is measured against internal standards and judgements. Most people behave in a fashion that evokes positive self-reactions, and abstain from behaviors that produce harm or punishment. This type of self-incentive greatly depends on an individual’s level of personal motivation to complete a task. Those who make internal or external rewards conditional upon
task-completion or obtaining particular accomplishments are more likely to complete and accomplish goals and tasks.

As previously discussed, the Yamas and Niyamas are the ethical disciplines of yoga (Adele, 2009; Flynn, 2013; Iyengar, 2005). They are the first two of the eight-limbed path of yoga aimed to assist individuals in obtaining the highest level of self-regulation (Iyengar, 2005). The Yamas are the ethical disciplines toward others and include: non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, non-excess, and non-possessiveness; the Niyamas are the ethical disciplines toward self: cleanliness, contentment, self-discipline, self-reflection, and surrender (Adele, 2009; Iyengar, 2005). Bandura’s (1991) three psychological subfunctions of self-regulation (self-monitoring, judgment of behavior, self-reaction influences) offer a similar framework to the Yamas and Niyamas. The psychological subfunctions of self-regulation explain central areas of individual behavior and the importance of regulation; whereas the Yamas and Niyamas aim to regulate thoughts and behaviors toward self and others. All of these aspects can be linked together and tied to the role of the school counselor, which entails assisting all students with academic, career, and social/emotional development.

Self-Regulation and Comprehensive School Counseling Programs

School counselors are charged with empowering students to become motivated, lifelong learners (Lapan et al., 2002). This charge provides school counselors with a fortuitous opportunity to nurture the development of students’ self-regulation skills by working collaboratively with teachers to increase specific, evidence-based learning strategies, such as yoga. Zimmerman (as cited in Lapan et al., 2002) described the process of self-regulatory activities in the context of a three-phase cycle: 1) forethought; 2) performance control; and 3) self-regulation. Before acting on impulses, the self-regulated student will engage in forethought,
practice self-control during the performance phase, and lastly, engage in purposeful reflection. Self-judgements are made as they relate to behaviors and the inferences inferred about why the behavior occurred. A student who is able to self-regulate is less likely to blame a negative performance on lack of ability, and use concepts of growth mindset to move forward.

In addition to self-regulated learning, school counselors also significantly contribute to the social/emotional development of youth (Lapan et al., 2002). While most youth are able to show gratitude, humor, and love, many students struggle with forgiveness, spirituality, and self-regulation (Park & Peterson, 2008). Programs that encourage social emotional development and learning help youth with managing stress, regulating emotions, and develop empathy toward other people (Steinberg, 2014). A well-implemented comprehensive school counseling program has the ability to effectively help students develop more “planful, exploratory, and self-regulated behaviors” (p. 262). When a comprehensive school counseling program is effectively implemented, school counselors have a greater ability to collaborate and consult with educational stakeholders. During this process, they can assist teachers and administration with the adoption of best practices, such as yoga, that contribute to helping students learn self-improvement skills.

**Self-Regulation and Yoga**

As previously described, self-regulation is a critical part of the promotion of school readiness and continued academic success (Wukkus & Dubegart, 2013). School-based programs that promote the development of self-regulation, especially in early childhood, are desperately needed. For instance, meditation and yoga assist in the development of self-regulation by encouraging mindfulness and appropriate social/emotional behaviors. When these positive behaviors increase, teachers spend less time dealing with behavior interruptions, and increase the amount of time focused on academic content.
The psychological subfunctions of self-regulation, self-monitoring, judgment, and self-reaction (Bandura, 1991) can be linked to the moral and ethical disciplines of yoga, the Yamas and Niyamas. Cope (as cited in Gard, Noggle, Park, Vago, & Wilson, 2014) explain that the Yamas (moral observances) and Niyamas (self-disciplines) can be conceptualized as concrete methods to help students regulate emotions, thought, and/or behaviors. Furthermore, the diversity of a yoga practice can be modified to accommodate the specific needs of students.

Gard et al. (2014) illustrated how, as a whole, “yoga can be broken down into a skillset of four tools for self-regulation: 1) ethical precepts, 2) sustained postures, 3) breath regulation, and 4) meditation techniques” (p. 5). In addition to the promotion of physical and psychological well-being, yoga helps promote bidirectional (top-down) feedback, improve integration and efficiency of both high and low-level brain networks, and increases peripheral sensory functions. In addition, yoga can help replace maladaptive coping skills that affect the nervous system (e.g. stress responses) with more efficient tools to reduce negative consequences associated with unregulated behavior. When students are able to model the moral and ethical disciplines, they receive direct internal and external rewards from the practice. The motivation resulting from bidirectional feedback “provides realistic goals and positive intentions to fuel approach behavior and provides the scaffolding to support the ethical framework build into the practice” (p. 5).

Steinberg (2014) simplifies this concept by describing the brain as a seesaw as between self-regulation and the reward center of the brain. Prior to puberty, self-control is highly immature and unbalanced. Specific self-regulatory skills need to be taught, practiced, and rewarded. After adolescence begins, the brain becomes powerful enough to keep impulses under control and encourages one to think before acting. When the pressure to seek stimulating rewards declines, self-regulation becomes stronger; hence the seesaw balances. Yoga is a tool that instills the
practice of self-regulation in people of all ages, which, in turn, can help students focus, relax, delay fight, flight, or freeze responses, filter and control overstimulation, and ultimately contribute to academic success.

**Conclusion**

Over the last century, the school counseling profession has evolved alongside of the educational reform movement. School counselors have multiple roles within a complex educational system and are often held to rigorous accountability standards. Through comprehensive school counseling programs, school counselors are able to offer preventive and developmental services that meet the social/emotional, career, and academic needs of all students (ASCA, 2003). While local, state, and national educational reforms call for increased academic and accountability standards, school counselors are charged with meeting the multiple social/emotional needs of students that interfere with learning. Many students struggle with a variety of challenges that impact their ability to achieve academic success (Auger, 2013) and need a significant amount of additional support.

Yoga is an ancient practice of holistic health aimed at developing the mind, body, and spirit (Balasubramaniam et al., 2013; Douglass, 2007; Ehud, An, & Avshalom, 2010; Flynn, 2013; Williamson, 2012). Over the past decade, the practice of yoga has made its way into Western culture, and recently, into public school settings. Yoga has countless benefits and has demonstrated effectiveness for a variety of mental health concerns and can mitigate some of the impact of violence and poverty. Furthermore, yoga in schools has helped students improve grades, body image, focus, self-esteem, behavior, and self-regulation.

There is a need for more evidence-based programs in schools that impact the whole child. Holistic approaches to educational best practices are becoming popular as awareness to the
academic benefits is gaining traction. Empirical research regarding yoga in schools shows statistical benefits in the areas of self-regulation, focus, stress reduction, and improved behavior. Studies have been conducted in K-12 settings and in rural, suburban, urban, and alternative settings. Furthermore, while barriers to implementation exist, most educators have found it feasible and beneficial to incorporate yoga into their school setting. Taking small mental breaks during the school day has proven benefits that extend far beyond the walls of the school.

Despite the potential benefits of yoga and the school counselors’ involvement in social/emotional learning, no literature exists concerning the school counselor’s role in integrating yoga into a comprehensive school counseling program. More information is needed from school counselors who use yoga in their schools in order to understand the process. Gathering data from these individuals will lead to greater understanding of the roles and functions of the school counselors who have successfully integrated yoga into their school counseling programs. In addition, it is important for school counselors to be considered an integral part of the yoga in schools movement.

This study sought to clarify the experiences of school counselors who integrate yoga into a comprehensive school counseling program. Readers will gain knowledge about the process of participants with experience in this area, as well as potential barriers and successes. Finally, this study will fill a hole in the literature regarding the school counselor’s role in the integration of yoga.
Chapter III

Chapter II provided a review of school counseling and yoga literature most pertinent to this study. Given the paucity of research in this area, more studies concerning the integration of yoga in schools are needed in order to gain a better understanding of the phenomena. Despite the emergent research regarding yoga in schools, no literature exists citing the school counselors’ role in this movement. This chapter includes a presentation of the research methodology designed to explore the experiences of school counselors who integrate yoga into a comprehensive school counseling program.

Methodology

Research Design

This study followed a qualitative design in an effort to understand the lived experiences of school counselors who integrate yoga into their comprehensive school counseling program. According to McMillian (2012), the research question determines the methodological design. Merriam (2009) describes qualitative research as being derived from constructivism and phenomenology. Researchers interested in qualitative methods want to know “1) how people interpret their experiences, 2) how they construct their worlds and, 3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 23). Qualitative studies begin with an assumption and are designed through the lens of a theoretical framework that addresses the specific problem or issue (Creswell, 2013). Next, the researcher chooses a specific approach of
inquiry and data collection that is pertinent to both the people and places under investigation.

Data is analyzed through inductive and deductive approaches in order to establish patterns and/or themes. Finally, a report is written that includes the voices and experiences of participants, researcher reflexivity, a thick, narrative description and interpretation of the problem, and a call to action based on an analysis of data.

Specifically, a phenomenological approach was used in order to gain a thorough, in-depth understanding of the participants’ experiences integrating yoga into their school counseling programs. In phenomenology, the researcher aims to discover and describe the essence of individuals’ lived experiences (Creswell, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2011; McMillian, 2012; Merriam, 2009). Researchers focus on the essence of an experience and place emphasis on the intentionality as it relates to a collective, universal meaning. Using this design, participants are often referred to as co-researchers due to their in-depth knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon (Hays & Singh, 2011). This study was best examined using a phenomenological design because I sought to understand lived experiences of the participants. Due to the paucity of research in this area, it appears that school counselors who integrate yoga into a comprehensive school counseling program are a phenomenon. It was important to understand their lived experiences in order to have a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

**Role of the Researcher**

Consistent with qualitative research, I was the primary source for both data collection and analysis (Lichtman, 2014; Merriam, 2009). The aim of a phenomenological design is to construct and make meaning out of individuals’ lived experiences of the topic being studied. Therefore, I was the key instrument due to the ability to be “immediately responsive and
adaptive” (Merriam, 2009, p. 15) to participants’ responses. Hence, I was involved in every step of the research process.

Since I was involved in all aspects of the research, it was critical to remain reflective throughout the process. All research was filtered through me, meaning my experiences, knowledge, and skills could have potentially influenced the study. In qualitative research, bias could impact the validity and reliability of findings (Creswell, 2013). However, qualitative researchers do not attempt to eliminate biases and subjectivity (Lichtman, 2014). Instead, personal experiences are bracketed, or put aside, throughout the phenomenological investigation. Therefore, the first strategy to control for personal biases was to recognize they exist. For instance, I was a practicing school counselor for a decade and currently provide ASCA National Model training to school counseling practitioners. In addition, I practice yoga on a regular basis. My interest in this area was piqued many years ago as a school counselor when my students participated in yoga as part of an after-school fitness club which yielded positive results. My personal and professional experiences were disclosed to participants if asked. According to Creswell (2013), “Qualitative researchers today are much more self-disclosing about their qualitative writing than they were a few years ago” (p. 214).

Although my personal and professional experiences shaped my initial interpretation of the phenomenon, I employed numerous methods to control for my biases. In addition to bracketing and limited self-disclosure, I used a reflexivity journal to take field notes and memos directly after each interview. My journal contains personal thoughts and reactions to each interview and any additional thoughts and insights that materialized during this process. In addition, I utilized two peer debriefers to control for and uncover biases, emotions, and any other inquiries that emerged during the data collection process. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that
peer debriefing “is a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical sessions and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind” (p. 308). Due to the two different topics (yoga and school counseling), I had a debriefer from the school counseling profession, and another with an extensive background in the practice, philosophy, and teaching of yoga. Prior to data collection, I met with each debriefer separately and explained my role as a researcher, their role as a debriefer, and a general idea of how long the process should take. During this process, I was open to difficult questions regarding data collection, analysis, and interpretation to avoid potential bias as I finalized my interviews and analyzed the data. The anonymity of the participants was protected throughout the process.

**Participants**

After approval from the Virginia Commonwealth University Institutional Review Board (IRB), participants for this study were recruited using purposive and criterion sampling. These sampling procedures were necessary for this study, as it was essential to locate specific individuals who integrate yoga into their school counseling programs (Creswell, 2013). The number of participants recommended for a phenomenological research design varies. Dukes, as cited in Creswell (2013) recommends a sample size of three to 10; however, general consensus is to interview participants until data saturation is met (Hays & Singh, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Saturation refers to the point in data analysis when further sampling will not lead to additional information pertaining to the research question.

The aim of qualitative research is to “gain a depth of understanding about a topic area” (Hays & Singh, 2011, pp. 172-173), not to generalize my findings. Therefore, it was necessary to recruit participants who met specific criteria for this study in order to best understand the
targeted phenomena. To be eligible for this study, each participant had to be a full-time, licensed/certified school counselor who currently integrates yoga into a comprehensive school counseling program. Integration of yoga was operationalized by yoga being directly tied to a comprehensive school counseling program goal, either as a direct or indirect intervention. In addition, participants were not required to teach yoga to students as long as they are involved with the integration of it. For example, a participant may have a certified yoga instructor teach yoga to identified students.

Next, purposive sampling was conducted to recruit known school counselors who integrated yoga into their school counseling program. Additional participants were recruited through school counseling groups on Facebook, or responded to an invitation to participate in this study through a Childlight Yoga ® listserv. As a result of these recruitment methods, a total of 33 participants were interested in participating in this study.

After all potential participants were identified, each individual was emailed an invitation to participate that outlined the purpose, importance, and potential benefits of the study (see Appendix A). In addition, each potential participant received a link to a short online demographic questionnaire that included gender, ethnicity, school level, number of years as a school counselor, number of years at current school, yoga instructor credentials (if applicable), number of years of involvement with yoga and/or yoga at their school, and were required to list their comprehensive school counseling goal connected to yoga (see Appendix B). Afterward, only 10 individuals met eligibility criteria for participation in this study.

After the 10 study participants were identified, each individual was contacted to set up an interview (in-person or via phone). The interview format was dependent on each participant’s geographical location and personal preference. Two days prior to each interview, I sent an email
reminder. After each interview was complete, participants were sent an email thanking them for their time, and an opportunity to follow-up with additional questions as they pertained to the interview.

**Data Collection**

Data was collected during 10 semi-structured interviews conducted either in-person or over the phone. The materials used for this study included a digital recording device for in-person interviews, and a secure conference call service with a recording feature for phone interviews. Individual interviews were most appropriate for this study due to the focus on participants’ specific experiences integrating yoga in their school counseling program (Merriam, 2009). The interview questions (see Appendix C) were designed to be open-ended so each participant had the opportunity to elaborate and include additional information not outlined in the original interview questions.

While interviews were the primary method for data collection for this study, participants were asked to provide additional artifacts pertaining to their yoga program. I received numerous documents that were examined for triangulation purposes. For instance, participants provided outcome data related to their yoga goal, evaluation surveys for students, parents, and teachers, and permission slips for student participation in yoga. Phone interview data was recorded on a secure conference call site, and in-person interviews were recorded on a personal recording device. All interview data was downloaded, stored, and backed up on my personal computer and hard drive. To further protect the identity of the participants, I assigned each individual a pseudonym that was used during the interview, transcription, coding, and data analysis process.
**Instrumentation**

In qualitative design, the researcher is the key instrument (Creswell, 2013). Prior to interviewing study participants, I conducted a pilot test to detect potential flaws or weaknesses in my interview questions. According to Turner (2010), qualitative researchers should pilot interview questions with participants who have similar interests as those participating in the study, and refine the interview design as necessary. I piloted the interview questions with two local school counselors who currently integrate mindfulness, opposed to yoga, in their school counseling program. I selected these two participants due to their knowledge of contemplative practices, school counseling experience, and geographical location. As a result of the pilot interviews with these school counselors, minor sequencing adjustments were made to the interview questions.

For this research study, I conducted all interviews myself either in-person or via phone. Before I began the interview process with study participants, I asked open-ended interview questions that were design based on the relationship between yoga, school counseling, and school counseling program goals/outcomes. Interview prompts/questions included:

1. How would you describe yoga?
2. Talk about your personal experiences with yoga.
3. Talk about your professional experiences with yoga.
4. What specific factors led you to bring yoga to your school?
5. Tell me how you integrate yoga in your school.
   a. Provide an example.
6. How do you define a comprehensive school counseling program?
   a. How does yoga fit into your comprehensive school counseling program?
b. What was your reasoning/justification for adding yoga to your comprehensive school counseling program/plan/SMART goal?

7. There are a lot of myths about yoga. Are you aware of any of them?
   a. If yes, which ones?
   b. How have those myths impacted your yoga program?

8. Have you experienced barriers to implementing yoga into your comprehensive school counseling program?

9. What are the supports for the integration of yoga into your comprehensive school counseling program?

10. What is your perception of the impact of yoga on your school community?
    a. Students
    b. Administration
    c. Staff
    d. Parents

11. Tell me a specific story or example of the impact yoga has had on your school.

12. How has this experience personally affected you?

13. Summarize your overall experience integrating yoga into your school counseling program.

14. What do you want other school counselors to know about yoga as it relates to school counselors/counseling?

15. Is there anything else you’d like to share with me?

Some of the questions were revised slightly during the interview based on the flow and dynamics between the participant and researcher. For example, some participants’ thoughts
answered numerous predetermined questions. In that case, I either skipped a question already discussed, or asked for clarification. In addition, I provided prompts for collecting artifacts, and engaged in observation techniques when conducting in-person interviews.

**Data Analysis**

In phenomenological studies, data analysis procedures are less structured and open to alternative analyzing methods (Creswell, 2013). Data for this study was analyzed using a linear, hierarchical analysis approach, designed to build data from the “bottom to the top” (p. 256), a strategy developed by Creswell (2013a) to allow for flexibility during the coding process. These six steps include: 1) organize and prepare all data for analysis (transcription, memos, etc.); 2) thoroughly read and analyze all texts; 3) begin coding the data; 4) generate a description of the categories or themes for analysis; 5) advance the description and themes using a narrative passage to convey findings, including subthemes and interconnecting themes; and 6) interpret the meaning of the themes/descriptions.

Using the aforementioned steps developed by Creswell (2013a), after the interviews were complete, each session was transcribed verbatim. This allowed me to organize and prepare my data for the analysis process. I uploaded each transcript into ATLAS.ti, a software system designed to help qualitative researchers store, protect, manage, and analyze data (ATLAS.ti, n.d.). Next, I read each transcript and reflected upon the overall meaning. In addition, I listed to each interview again in order to reflect upon the tone, depth, and meaning of the participant’s statements. During this process, I also added memos to each transcript to organize my thoughts and overall impressions of each interview. After these two steps were complete and I felt saturated in my data, I began the coding process.
According to Creswell (2013a), there are numerous acceptable ways for a researcher to code qualitative data. One way is to develop predetermined codes based on the constructs being examined. Creswell (2013a) noted that “The intent of a codebook is to provide definitions for codes and to maximize coherence among codes” (p. 248). For this study, I examined the integration of yoga into a comprehensive school counseling program. Based on my interpretation of the data, creating a qualitative codebook was the most appropriate way to illustrate the correlation between school counseling, yoga, and a comprehensive school counseling program. To create this codebook, I consulted with a coding partner, a counselor educator from a local university with experience coding qualitative data. We independently examined each transcript to determine appropriate codes, and then met to finalize a master list of codes. Codes created for this study, along with the frequency counts from the 10 interviews are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Predetermined Codes and Frequency Counts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASCA_Advocacy (37)</th>
<th>ASCA_Accountability (46)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASCA_Collaboration (74)</td>
<td>POY_PhilosophyofYoga (103)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASCA_Leadership (26)</td>
<td>POY_Niyamas (59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASCA_SystemicChange (18)</td>
<td>POY_Yamas (31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASCA_Foundation (87)</td>
<td>SchoolCounseling_General (46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASCA_Management (49)</td>
<td>Yoga/SchoolCounseling_Overlap (65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASCA_Delivery (110)</td>
<td>Yoga_General (94)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the master list of codes was determined, my coding partner and I independently reviewed each transcript and met again in an effort to enhance reliability. When the coding
process was complete, I met with my coding partner to operationalize themes and subthemes based on data that emerged from each code. We first deduced data into broad, general themes, and then further deduced data into final themes and subthemes. This process involved careful analysis of each code in order to accurately interpret multiple perspectives of a general topic. After determining each theme, I closely investigated each participant’s quotes as they related to the code to further deduce the data into subthemes. This process helped determine how the data would be represented in the narrative of findings. Finally, all data were interpreted in order to make meaning out of the results and compare to previous literature. Questions raised during this process allowed me to form interpretations and implications for school counselors, counselor educators, and future research.

**Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research is largely based on assumptions rather than empirical data; therefore, it is open to interpretation (Merriam, 2009). It was imperative to follow numerous strategies to establish trustworthiness of the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) present four specific criteria for the researcher to consider while judging the overall validity of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

**Credibility**

Credibility refers to the degree in which the results of my qualitative research are credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To establish credibility, I used prolonged engagement with each participant in order to build trust and rapport, orient myself to the specific situation, and clarify any preconceptions or misconceptions I may have (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, I connected with each participant via email prior to the study interview. I offered the opportunity to ask questions about myself, my research, my role as a researcher, and any other clarifying
questions of concern or inquiry. During participant interviews, I described my research prior to asking questions and reiterated procedures to protect anonymity. Each participant was thanked over the phone or in-person, and a follow-up email was sent to provide the opportunity to ask further questions.

To further establish credibility, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest researchers triangulate all data. Triangulation refers to process of establishing validity to qualitative research by cross verifying data sources. In order to triangulate my findings, I collected a variety of artifacts from my participants. In addition to interview data, I received both anecdotal and outcome data from parents, students, and teachers, evidence of go-fund-me or other grant proposals, links to the school counselor’s website as it related to this study, thank you cards to the school counselor from students, and permission slips for students to participate in yoga. These artifacts offered further insight into the participants’ role in yoga integration, and allowed for a thicker, richer narrative during data analysis.

Another method I engaged in was member checking throughout the interview and data analysis process. Member checking is a strategy in which the researcher consistently checks the validity of their findings (Lincoln& Guba, 1985). During the interview, I used numerous probes as suggested by Hays and Singh (2011) to ensure clarity. For example, “A few minutes ago you mentioned yoga philosophies, would you elaborating on what that meant?” or “Let me be certain I understand what you’re saying…” Additionally, during the data analysis process I contacted participants if I had a question or needed clarification based on the findings. Finally, after each transcription was complete, it was sent back to each interviewee to check for accuracy (Hays & Singh, 2011). A few participants deleted vocal fillers (um, hmm, just, like, etc.), but otherwise
agreed that the interview was an accurate reflection of their thoughts, feelings, and experiences as they related to the research study.

**Transferability**

Transferability is another way for the qualitative researcher to obtain external validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The findings of qualitative research are generally specific to a small population; therefore it is difficult to ensure that conclusions drawn are applicable to other situations (Merriam, 2009). However, steps can be taken to increase the validity of qualitative research. For example, I thoroughly described the context of the research and provided exact demographic data (including school counseling program goal linked to yoga) of each participant.

**Dependability**

Dependability refers to the stability of the research process over time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Consistency during the research process increases dependability of results. During this study, dependability was enhanced by maintaining an audit trail, developing memos, and continually tracking all emerging themes and subthemes.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the degree in which the research can remain neutral during the data collection process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability was achieved through consultation with a coding partner, maintain an audit trail, analytic memos, and bracketing to protect against researcher bias.

**Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the methodology used to answer the research question of this study. The research design, role of the researcher, participants, data collection, instrumentation, and
data analysis for this study were provided. Chapter IV will discuss the results from this phenomenological study.
Chapter IV

Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of school counselors who integrate yoga into a comprehensive school counseling program. A phenomenological qualitative research design was used to gain a rich understanding of participants’ experiences integrating yoga into their school counseling programs. During in-depth interviews, participants described various personal and professional experiences with yoga that contributed to their interest in this area. In addition, they described program supports, barriers, and the perceived impact of yoga in their schools. This chapter presents research findings based on the data analysis of 10 structured interviews.

Description of Participants

The participants of this study included 10 licensed school counselors from nine different eastern and mid-eastern states. At the time of the study, eight participants were employed in a public school, and two participants were employed in a private school. Seven participants worked at an elementary school, two worked at a middle school, and one worked in a K-12 school. Of those, five participants reported that their school received Title I funding. Six participants worked in a suburban setting, and four worked in an urban setting. All participants identified as White females. The years of school counseling experience varied among
participants, ranging from one to over 20 years. Similarly, participants varied in the number of years at their current school, with a range from eight months to 16 years.

All but one participant reported maintaining a personal yoga practice. The range of years participants have maintained a personal practice was from four to 20 plus years, with an average of eight to 11 years. Over half of the participants reported having yoga teacher training or specialty training in children’s yoga. Specifically, one participant reported being credentialed as a 500-hour Registered Yoga Teacher® (RYT®-500), three participants reported being credentialed as a 200-hour Registered Yoga Teacher® (RYT®-200), and one participant reported being in the process of the RYT-200® credentialing process. One participant had an additional endorsement as a Registered Children’s Yoga Teacher® (RCYT®), and one participant received additional specialty training at Childlight Yoga® to obtain a Certified Childlight Yoga Instructor® (CCLYI®) endorsement. In addition, one participant reported being trained in yoga therapy for autism. Four participants reported not having additional professional yoga credentials or certifications. Finally, participants reported integrating yoga in their school setting for eight months to four years, which is consistent with the rise of popularity of this phenomenon.

**Analysis of Research Findings**

This chapter presents an analysis of the 10 participant interviews regarding their experiences integrating yoga into a comprehensive school counseling program. The process of analyzing phenomenological research involves careful steps to increase the validity of findings (Creswell, 2013a). Each interview was transcribed verbatim and uploaded into ATLAS.ti (ATLAS.ti, n.d.) for coding. After each transcript was read and analyzed, I coded the data using
a set of predetermined codes to best illustrate the constructs being examined. After this process, the data were deduced into five major themes and subthemes (see Table 2).

Table 2. Major Themes and Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Intentionality</td>
<td>a) Personal experiences with yoga impacts professional intentions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Offering yoga in school gives students a lifelong skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Yoga intentionally tied with comprehensive school counseling goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Yoga Integration</td>
<td>a) Organic commonalities between school counseling and yoga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Methods of yoga delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Overlap of yoga philosophies and ASCA Mindsets &amp; Behaviors standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Logistics of Yoga Integration</td>
<td>a) Accessibility of yoga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Managing yoga myths and stereotypes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Program supports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Perception of the Impact of Yoga</td>
<td>a) Overall impact on school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Impact on students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Examples of students taking yoga “off the mat”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Impact of Yoga Integration on School Counselor</td>
<td>a) Yoga as a continual self-care strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Yoga is a meaningful aspect of school counselor role</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Themes and emerging subthemes will be presented in this chapter, along with interview data and narratives describing the participants’ experiences integrating yoga into their comprehensive school counseling programs.

**Intentionality**

The first major theme described by participants was the intentional integration of yoga within the context of their comprehensive school counseling programs. Three subthemes emerged within this category: a) personal experiences with yoga impacts professional intentions,
b) offering yoga in school gives students a lifelong skill, and c) yoga intentionally tied with comprehensive school counseling goal.

**Personal experiences with yoga impacts professional intentions.** When asked to describe their personal experiences with yoga, participants described experiences regarding both the physical and mental aspects of the practice. For example, in addition to being a physical practice, words like “union”, “calmness”, “awareness”, “balance”, “focus”, “stillness”, “equilibrium”, and “mind-body connection” were used to describe yoga. Christine described the feeling of connectedness she felt through yoga, “With yoga, I found my tribe; I found my home.” Anna offered a similar sentiment, “Yoga is a connection of mind and body with the universe and with the world that you live in.” The personal stories described by participants were deeply meaningful and led them to connect the practice to their professional lives. Elizabeth reflected upon the connection between her personal and professional interest in yoga:

> When I think about my personal practice …I can't help but make the connection of how similar the concepts taught by my teacher are to the needs of my students at school or how it's so closely aligned. And if this is benefitting me in so many ways and benefitting other adults in my yoga community in so many ways, then it would definitely benefit my students.

Participants noted the busyness of our society and conceptualized yoga as an “off-the-mat” learning experience they wanted to share with students. For example, Anna said, “Yoga is finding stillness with all of the crazy things that are going on around us.” Elizabeth added, “You learn about yourself when you practice yoga, so the movement and the breath work together an ultimately it helps you identify with who you are inside.” Dottie had a similar experience:
At first I would go to yoga class and that was my calm, peaceful place, and then I would get up and get on my phone and speed off to the next thing and I would kind of leave that there. Then I started incorporating that in my life and knowing that yoga’s a way of living; it's not just a class that's an hour and a half long. When I saw my own benefits I just had to share that with kids.

Similarly, within the context of intention, Missy found yoga to be a therapeutic coping mechanism and described a feeling of empathy towards struggling students:

If I'm feeling anxious or overwhelmed about a situation, I go to my own toolbox, because I know what I need to do to get myself together. And see, I think that's why I get it. I've been there. So, you're that much more effective when you understand and you've walked in their shoes. And I've been in their shoes personally so I definitely know. Yoga helped me, so I'm just paying it forward...

**Offering yoga in school gives students a lifelong skill.** The notion of taking “yoga off the mat” was a reoccurring theme described within numerous contexts throughout this study. This action is described as taking skills acquired in yoga (philosophies of yoga) and applying them throughout everyday life. Anna describes telling her students “You don’t need to be on a yoga mat to focus in your breath, you know, you can be in a classroom.” Joy asserts, “If you teach yoga to kids, they leave school that day with something tangible they can use.” Joy is employed in an urban, Title I school with elevated rates of families who struggle with poverty and incarceration. She became frustrated when her students were able to utilize coping skills and strategies when she was present, but failed to apply them in day-to-day situations.

After my first year I realized that kids could calm down with me standing right there but they didn't have their own strategies for when I wasn't in the room or in the hallway or on
the playground so I wanted to give them something they could remember and internalize and use on their own.

Other participants had similar thoughts. Blair explained:

So what I find is there are a lot of parents disciplining children in inappropriate ways and handling stress in inappropriate ways. This carries over to the child. The child then brings their experiences and stresses to school and act out because they’re unable to express themselves in the ways that they need to. So my thought is that if my children at school can develop and use some of these self-regulation skills to better themselves now and in their futures, their lives will change.

Anna describes her school as “overcrowded” and “chaotic.” The school is typically loud and students are unable to move around freely due to crammed spaces. “It’s crazy...they get yelled at when they’re out of their seat...so, being able to find quiet is huge...they’re overstimulated by all of these different things so yoga is a way to help them take a break from that.” Anna described teaching yoga to students as way to provide them with tools they can use anywhere to calm down and find stillness. Self-regulation strategies were discussed by numerous participants as the specific tool for students to utilize in any setting. Molly points out:

If you think about yoga being a tool that doesn't require any extra equipment, that kids have the tools they need to use anyway - their breath and their body - it's really a cost-effective ideal tool to teach all kids to regulate themselves, which is something that everyone needs and I think, you know, I tell the kids when I'm teaching them that I hope they'll just find at least one or two things that they can walk away with and incorporate into their lives.
Missy works in a high-achieving suburban middle school and mentioned that her setting was ridden with anxious students, parents, and teachers. She talked about the extraordinary number of drills (tornado, earthquake, lockdown, active shooter, etc.) and the chaos that ensues from everybody living in “survival mode.” She exclaimed “and you wonder why, I mean, this society is crazy with the anxiety piece and it’s the world we live in.” She continued to say “everybody just needs to calm the mind.” Missy wants her students to have the ability to stay calm during chaotic times they will inevitably face in life. Elizabeth regarded yoga as a memorable skill and gift that students can utilize in all aspects of their lives:

It's a great gift and it's something that, I always tell the kids, you never forget what 2+2 is, once you know it, you know it, and no one can take that away from you. It's sort of the same thing with yoga; once you learn to have a part of this practice in your life it's a gift that nobody can take away from you.

**Yoga intentionally tied with comprehensive school counseling goal.** Finally, each participant was intentional about the integration of yoga into their school counseling program. Table 3 lists each participant’s pseudonym, comprehensive school counseling goal related to yoga, school level, school setting, and Title I funding status. This information was provided on the demographic questionnaire prior to each interview, and further discussed during each interview. Many used yoga as part of a Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) program or tied yoga to a Response to Intervention (RTI) Tier I, II, or III goal. In addition, some participants discussed the intentionality behind using yoga in their goals through needs assessments and linking their goals to local, state, or national school counseling standards.
Table 3. Comprehensive School Counseling Goal Related to Yoga

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Comprehensive School Counseling Goal Related to Yoga</th>
<th>School Information</th>
<th>School Setting</th>
<th>Title I Funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Missy</td>
<td>By June 2016, 80% of students will be able to identify and utilize three or more positive and appropriate coping strategies to use when experiencing stress or anxiety.</td>
<td>Public Middle School (6-8)</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristin</td>
<td>By the end of the 2016 school year, discipline referral rates will decrease by 10%.</td>
<td>Public Elementary School (K-5)</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Students will learn and implement three new calming strategies as part of a new way to manage confrontations with others and be more focused learners. This can be evidenced by eliminating physical aggression at school by implementing and planning weekly Second Step ® lessons integrated with Yoga 4 Classrooms ®, collaboration with community educational services, and viewing Second Step ® webinars.</td>
<td>Public Elementary School (K-5)</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>By the end of the 2015-2016 academic year, I will provide all teachers with the opportunity to receive YogaEd Tools for Teachers ® professional development and manuals. I will begin with professional development for the Program for Young (PYC) teachers and move up through the divisions from there. I will provide a more in-depth training opportunity for the PE faculty to learn to teach yoga. In addition, I will engage the students and faculty in yoga opportunities throughout the year including yoga clubs, before and after school classes, etc.</td>
<td>Private K-12 Girls’ School</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dottie</td>
<td>To implement yoga as a Tier 2 RTI intervention to enhance students social/emotional well-being. Yoga will be used to help decrease anxiety, empower students, and increase self-esteem.</td>
<td>Public Middle School (6-8)</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>By June, 2016, 100% of our educational staff will contribute to a Supportive School Environment by engaging in the Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS)</td>
<td>Public Elementary School (K-5)</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prior to obtaining her current school counseling position, Missy was aware of the increased academic demands and concurrent stress/anxiety in the school. At her previous school, she ran a successful yoga club she planned on replicating to help students develop healthy, effective coping skills. She recalled part of her job interview: “I remember sitting in the conference room and I told them, I was like, listen, my office is a yoga studio/anxiety
clinic/knitting club…you know I have yoga studio in my office. It was a joke, but they knew what they were getting themselves into.”

Kristin began to incorporate yoga in her school due to student requests: “I would do needs assessments with my third, fourth, and fifth graders, they would always say they wanted to do yoga.” She found some of the traditional “paper and pencil” curricula to be ineffective and wanted to offer the students a more creative way to deliver parts of her school counseling program. Elizabeth noticed an academic and social/emotional need with a group of second grade boys:

I looked at these boy’s report card grades, and many of them had lots of two’s on their report card in these different areas and also with self-control. So, I said I’m going to target the group of eight boys and I’m going to work on self-control and integrate a yoga group.

Due to an increase in anxiety and other mental health concerns, Dottie specifically uses yoga as an RTI goal.

I’m using yoga as a Tier II intervention…I’ve actually geared it toward girls with anxiety, that seems to be a big thing lately with our 6th grade girls. We had so, so, so many girls down in my office crying on a daily basis…a lot of attachment issues where they didn't want to be away from their parents, a lot of high anxiety from the weather, to OCD [obsessive compulsive disorder] - extreme OCD behaviors. So I just saw tons of anxiety and said this is what they need.

Furthermore, the yoga curriculum she uses is completely aligned with her state standards. Christine notes, “Our yoga curriculum certainly meets our school counseling goals and it helps promote emotional well-being.”
In general, this theme suggests that school counselors were intentional about integrating yoga into their school counseling programs. Participants disclosed personal experiences with yoga which led them to share the “gift” with students. These experiences influenced the notion that yoga is a skill that could be taken out of the context of school and carried with students throughout their lives. Participants described yoga as a cost-effective tool that can be utilized anywhere. Finally, each participant was intentional about aligning yoga to a comprehensive school counseling goal. Participants either directly or indirectly used yoga as an intervention to improve student success.

**Yoga Integration**

The second major theme described by participants was the actual integration of yoga in their school counseling programs. Three subthemes emerged within this category: a) organic commonalities between school counseling and yoga, b) yoga delivery, and c) similarities of yoga philosophies and the ASCA Mindsets & Behavior standards.

**Organic commonalities between school counseling and yoga.** Each participant provided numerous examples and descriptions of the natural fit between yoga and the desired outcomes of school counseling services. Kristin connected her beliefs about yoga and school counseling: “We have to teach kids how to cope with difficult emotions and yoga is a really natural way to do that.” Anna has always been interested in providing yoga to her students due to the benefits of the practice and goals of school counseling: “There is an overlap between counseling interventions and things you do in yoga…it helps with the different topics that we focus on as school counselors.” Blair views yoga as “creative” and “different way of looking at dealing with and handling emotions, helping kids de-stress, and having our kids work together in groups and teams as they accomplish tasks in all of the different areas that we already work
with.” Dottie had similar sentiments “Yoga entails everything you would want…you’re having fun…you’re learning without even necessarily knowing that you’re learning. It’s not like I’m standing here teaching something because they’re doing it, they’re experiencing it. I feel like sometimes we regurgitate information…and I feel like once you experience it you can have a deeper understanding than if you’re just listening to someone talk.”

Christine adds:

When we practice yoga, when we take the time to connect breath with our movement, we're turning our attention inward and we are increasing our awareness of our own emotional state, and our ability to regulate our emotions. So yoga is a tangible piece of the counseling process and a way that we can physically be present and move and be aware of our bodies, our mind, our thoughts, and our feelings.

Elizabeth described the non-physical aspects of yoga as a predominate reason for choosing to integrate the practice into her school counseling program. She stated,

The asanas, the postures, are only 12% of what yoga is about…it's more a way of living. I think of community and giving back, being compassionate to yourself and being compassionate to others and I think of finding that inner peace. Yoga can also be described of as the union of body and mind. This is exactly why I chose to use yoga to support my students who struggle with self-control.

She believes that school counselors are ideal to deliver yoga to students. She further stated,

I feel like school counselors are the perfect avenue to share this practice because we get to work with the whole school. We work with every single classroom, particularly in an elementary school, where you can teach these strategies early on and then they could know these strategies when they get to middle and high school. Integrating yoga into
your counseling program benefits everyone rather than, just being a classroom teacher and teaching only your class. I mean yeah that's great if you do that, but I think school counselors can cast a wider net and support more students. And it aligns with our national standards so it’s perfect.

According to Joy, “Yoga is a nice kind of marriage between the two systems [yoga and school counseling] that make things operate smoother.” Anna added, “Any type of counseling goal that I’m working toward with my students, like yoga is also helpful to that goal.”

For Missy, yoga is connected to similar counseling techniques and is a welcomed addition to her intervention “toolbox.” She sees a lot of students with chronic anxiety at her school, and intuitively understands the battle her students face.

Just knowing the adrenaline piece and how with anxiety there is too much adrenaline. You’re in fight or flight, and the perceived worry…so, how do you calm those fears? How do you focus your mind and how do you stop the irrational thoughts? Yoga is all a part of that – the mind, the breathing…

Dottie summarized this concept:

There is so much opportunity, not only to build rapport, but if you as a counselor are giving out this non-judging, accepting, loving energy to your kids and you're constantly teaching them about it and they’re experiencing it, you just naturally have this amazing relationship and rapport with them and their parents. It’s almost like this deeper relationship than you get when it's your typical group or a curriculum or something like that. And I think the more they know you're non-judging and accepting, they accept themselves and they feel like they can be themselves in their own bodies. So I think that's key, too.
Methods of yoga delivery. The participants delivered yoga to their students in a variety of creative ways. Some have uniquely designed ways to deliver yoga to the entire school, while others utilize individual, group, and classroom time to teach specific skills and techniques. In addition, a few participants have collaborated with community members to bring yoga to their school. For example, when Elizabeth was developing her boys’ group, she noted:

Five out of the eight boys come from homes without a dad, or at least divorced families, and so one of my thoughts was well, you know, this is a group of boys, all boys, and it would be awesome to have a male role model in the group.

She knew a male who worked in the before and after school program practiced yoga and was in the process of completing his yoga teacher training, so she asked him to lead the group with her to provide her students with additional support. At her previous school, Missy collaborated with yoga instructors from a local studio to teach yoga to her entire school. This started as a “special event” during National School Counseling Week and turned into complete integration throughout all physical education classes. “We filled the gym at the middle school and for 45 minutes, the whole student body did yoga.” At her current school, Missy is deliberate about using yoga as a counseling technique with individual students and also continues to bring in local yoga instructors to lead the yoga club she sponsors.

It’s twice a month on Thursdays for about 45 minutes. The instructor does a basic beginning class and what I’ve noticed is a lot of people who are signing up are not athletic, they’re not staying after for sports, and they wouldn’t make a team here.

Missy added that many students in the yoga club have befriended one another and feels that the sense of community yoga offers has helped with this bonding experience.
Mallory often takes her students outside and infuses her lessons by connecting with nature. Furthermore, her students have become accustomed to the postures and sequences that she allows them to take the lead: “We're out and we're talking about being a tree, look at the tree, we sway in the wind, we really connect to the environment, and then I let the kids lead the pose, not me.” Blair also mentioned connecting her students to nature:

In the coming weeks also are going to plant a Peace Garden outside of the school...and we are going to do yoga outside to be in the fresh air and environment and nature, so that the children appreciate the natural world around them.

To encourage leadership and the development of social skills, Blair invites her students to help plan and teach weekly yoga lessons:

The children have gotten so good at the different poses and different components that they are each teaching a class...they decide who will teach the class each week, then I work with that child individually and we develop a lesson plan for the week. They actually, with my assistance, instruct the class.

Joy teaches the Second Step ® curriculum weekly to all of her students (13 classes, K-5). She commented on the level of incarceration and poverty in her area and that her students “have so much thrown at them” before they get to school. To help create a more conducive learning environment, she integrates Yoga 4 Classrooms ® for 10-15 minutes before each lesson. She said, “As a new person who has more counseling training than teacher training, yoga really helps with the management because the kids are a little bit more focused and centered – and it just clicks for them and for me.”

Some participants discussed tying yoga to educational curricula or a schoolwide theme such as character education. For example, Elizabeth leads a lot of classroom guidance and
integrates yoga into the student’s academic curricula: “I try to weave in children's books and themes...re-telling stories through yoga, so there's the language arts component, too.” Blair also incorporates stories with yoga, “we read a story having to do with a topic or theme that we are working on for that class session...then we do our planned yoga class.” Christine added:

I might read a story out loud to them and we might do yoga poses throughout the story...there's so many really amazing children's literature that lend itself to yoga classes that it would be kind of a shame not to use it in some manner.

On the other hand, Joy pointed out that yoga is not a catch-all for all students:

There are always kids that are kind of the extreme and the outliers that it doesn't work for. They may do yoga really well in front of me and then go punch someone 20 minutes later. So, part of my learning is how do I make this deeper for them? I have one really tough boy; do I just give him 15-30 minutes a week where we just do guided meditation?

While most of the students in her school receive 10-15 minutes of yoga from her each week, some students receive additional time due to extenuating circumstances, teacher referral, and individual requests. Missy can relate:

I had several students that would come to me...they would be so destructive in the classroom and the teachers did not know what to do with them. They just wanted to send them out of the room, so they'd come to me and I'm like you know what, we're going to breathe.

Overlap of yoga philosophies and ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors standards. As previously discussed, the Yamas and Niyamas are the first two of Patanjali’s eight-limbed yoga system and are considered to be the ethical foundation of yoga (Iyengar, 2005). The Yamas and Niyamas outline how one should treat self and others and are learned through both practice and
observance. Likewise, the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors standards (2014a) outline the knowledge, skills, and attitudes students need to achieve success in three core areas: academic, college/career, and social/emotional. There is considerable overlap between these concepts (See Figure 1). Conscious or not of the yoga philosophies (namely the Yamas and Niyamas) and/or ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors, participants gave clear examples of how these two concepts overlap.

Figure 1. Overlap of ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors standards and the Yamas and Niyamas.

For example, Molly experienced a turning point in her personal yoga practice when she realized she cared less about the physicality and more about the emotional components. She described the concept of self-regulation and the importance of students being able to identify feelings in order to use the tools they develop through yoga:

I think that awareness is the first piece of our body and our mind, and what is my body telling me, and my breath, and the sensations in my body? What can I learn about how I’m being and then how can I shift myself to a more regulated state?

While Molly’s situation is not directly concerning students, it is an important example of how her mindset shifted from concern about the physical practice yoga gave her, to how she was
treats herself and others. Dottie teaches her students how their thoughts (mindsets) lead to actions (behaviors) and how they can change after practicing yoga (Yamas and Niyamas):

We talk about yoga kind of being a meditation, like a moving meditation… we talk a lot about separating out thoughts and using our breath to bring us back to the current, the present moment and not getting so attached to our thoughts. Our thoughts can be like a magnet and suck us in - and we believe them and then we think that that's who we are and they weigh heavily on us sometimes, and so we practice a lot of mindfulness and being present and then we use yoga, moving with the breath, as a meditation.

Elizabeth described her process of incorporating ASCA’s Mindsets and Behaviors standards to her yoga program:

So what I ended up looking at was how the ASCA Behaviors standards aligned to yoga…the overall mindset I decided was development of whole self, including balance of mental, social, emotional and physical well-being because we are actually doing that physical component with the movements. So that was my overall mindset, but then there's an ASCA Behavior that ties in with each one of these report card topics. So I made a crosswalk [of standards and yoga philosophies] because they're all so closely related to each other, the ASCA Standards, social emotional learning core components, the research based benefits of mindfulness and five of the eight-limbs of classical yoga.

She provided a concrete example of the overlap between the philosophies of yoga and the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors standards:

The first class we talked about building character and respect, and we came up with warriors for self-control…and so we had all these different examples of warriors, positive warriors…so each boy got a card and then they talked about what that meant to them, and
each card had a character trait on the back. We talked about what character meant to them, but we did it while they were trying to balance in Eagle pose…we’ve talked about how yoga is all about balance, we have to balance everything out...So that's just an example of how I wove the character traits and being respectful in school, an ASCA standard, to a physical yoga practice – like standing in eagle pose and balancing and breathing and staying in control of yourself.

In small group counseling, Kristin uses the Yamas and Niyamas as “group norms.” In addition, she further discusses the notion that yoga is about more than the physical postures, “it’s breathing, it’s mindfulness, it’s visualization, it’s relaxation, it’s all these other thing within it and not just the poses.” Anna weaves the yoga philosophies and standards into leadership opportunities, “If a group is having trouble working together, I break them up into groups and assign partner yoga poses, then they come up and show the rest of the class. So they're practicing leadership skills, social skills, teamwork, etc.”

This theme describes the numerous ways participants integrate yoga into their school counseling programs. Participants highlighted the organic commonalities between yoga and school counseling and provided examples of why school counselors are ideal individuals to deliver yoga in schools. Examples of individual, group, classroom, and whole school yoga integration were detailed, along with how the ethical disciplines of yoga (Yamas and Niyamas) overlap with the ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors.

**Logistics of Yoga Integration**

The third major theme described by participants was the logistics of yoga integration. Three subthemes emerged within this category: a) accessibility b) challenging yoga myths and stereotypes, and c) program supports.
**Accessibility of yoga.** Accessibility of yoga took many forms to the participants of this study. Space and time were barriers to accessibility, yet all participants found ways to work around such challenges through collaboration, advocacy, and leadership. Moreover, yoga, in its truest form, can be done with little to no cost, doesn’t require an excessive amount of space, and anyone – any “body” can practice yoga.

Dottie finds space and time to be an issue at her school, but rotates her groups each week so they are only missing one class over an eight-week time frame. She mentioned, “We just got creative and we used classrooms that were empty that period.” Anna relates, “I work in a New York City public school, so yeah, we don’t have a lot of space…my space is very, very, very tiny.” However, Anna collaborated with the physical education teacher and uses the gymnasium to teach yoga classes when the teacher has his planning period. Kristin takes her students outside on the playground and assigns them a yoga space in the concrete lines. During inclement weather, she has not had an issue finding temporary space in the school.

Most of the participants discussed, in detail, the fact that yoga can be done by anyone. Molly believes yoga is an accessible and affordable intervention for school counselors. She notes that yoga is a “tool” that doesn’t require “extra equipment,” meaning that school counselors can easily deliver these skills to students:

I feel like sometimes we just overcomplicate things and counselors are always looking for good programs or ways to teach kids these things that yoga teaches, and it's very simple and cost-effective. Like I said, all you need is your body and your breath and you have all the tools you need within you, all ready to regulate yourself. If we could keep it that simple and teach kids how to use their internal resources - that's what yoga is.
Missy concurs, “Yoga is free, it's easy, it's for all fitness levels, all shapes and sizes, and it works.” She added that “most of the time people are running around in orange - that's the new normal. And it's awful.” Hence, yoga is a viable intervention to help reduce chronic stress and anxiety that students experience.

Christine wants other school counselors to understand:

Any breath linked with movement is yoga. If you take a breath in and you’re your hand up, and take a breath out and move your hand back down, that is yoga and anyone can do it…anyone can teach it, and anyone can receive it. The main requirement is that you are comfortable with it and that you enjoy it. And comfortable with being uncomfortable. It's OK. I can't do every single pose…and it doesn't take some Lululemon wearing, hot yoga every weekend, kind of a person to do it. It can be done. By anyone.

In addition to her school counseling position, Christine also volunteers with a non-profit organization that delivers yoga to communities that might not otherwise engage in the practice. She teaches yoga at a local alternative high school and finds the students “need the kind of soothing practice yoga brings.” She is referring to the calmness and stillness yoga offers and goes on to reiterate that anyone can deliver and receive the benefits of yoga; it can be accessible to anyone open to the idea and concept.

**Managing yoga myths and stereotypes.** When asked about myths associated with yoga, every participant mentioned the myth that yoga is a religion. Christine explains, “There are myths that yoga is a religion, or it is only for bendy people, or it can only be done in a yoga studio by someone named Rainbow Sparkles.” Dottie said, “I was kind of nervous thinking people like my principal wouldn’t allow it or people think meditation is religious, but everyone
was OK with it. All parents were on board with it.” Joy had similar concerns, “I did worry starting out in the area that there was going to be a lot of “that's religion, that’s hippy stuff”, but it hasn't happened and fingers crossed it stays the same.” Elizabeth elaborated:

I think when it comes down to it, it’s just people that are unaware or don’t know and so the fear of the unknown, not being educated on what it truly is, and how it can benefit anyone…it’s a way of living, and a really nice peaceful, community oriented way of helping others.

While the myth of yoga being a religion was on participants’ radar, it has not impacted any of their programs. Despite the lack of controversy, they made proactive attempts to reduce any misunderstanding associated with the secular term. For example, Kristen recalls,

I remember the first year when I did my small group consent; I don't know if I used the word yoga, I think I just focused on developing coping skills. And I figured I would hear if it was a problem and ask for forgiveness, and my principal was OK with that.

Molly said, “I don't use Sanskrit, I don't do chanting, I don't call the mindful practices meditations, so I obviously mindfully choose to stay away from any confusion when possible.”

Blair discussed her process of writing a consent letter to parents:

I struggled a lot when I wrote a letter to send home to the parents to get them to agree to the children participating in the program…do I say it's a yoga program? Do I not say it's a yoga program? Do I call it a relaxation program? I went back and forth with it a lot. I ended up calling it a relaxation/stress reduction program created by Yoga 4 Classrooms® so I did mention yoga and I didn't have one parent come back to me upset…there haven't been any problems at school with me using the word yoga and the kids talk to the other kids about it and also to teachers.
Missy echoed:

I'm not calling it yoga when they're coming in here; I'm saying let's breathe together, let's go for a walk. I mean yoga club, yes, is yoga club. But my techniques, on a regular basis, I'm not telling them let's do some yoga. Mindfulness yes, because that's a school wide thing. So I mean if they want to complain, give me a call.

**Program supports.** In schools, collaboration and support from administration are often vital to the success of a program. Likewise, it is important for teachers and other educational stakeholders to support school counseling efforts. This was apparent throughout the interviews as participants discussed administrative, teacher, and parent backing of their yoga programs.

Elizabeth talked about the process of building rapport with her community prior to introducing yoga into her school counseling program:

I think if had I walked in the first day and no one knew me and I said "I'm going to implement a yoga program and we're going to all do yoga" people might have been like ‘whoa, what is she talking about and who is this person!’ But I think I haven't really, knock on wood, come across any major obstacles at this point, but I do feel like I established that rapport early on, you know? And I have good connections with the parents and so when I say these things now they know me and trust me so they're more open to it. I think that has helped.

Dottie said her administrators are “luckily, very supportive.” Her principal has been on board from the beginning. When she asked to purchase eye pillows for meditation, his response was, "Ohhh yeah!" In fact, her principal is advocating for yoga in the whole school. Dottie explained, “I'm not the 6th grade counselor this year, and he came to me like ‘we've got to do a 6th grade group this year’ so yeah, I was pushing it, and now he's pushing it, so it's good.”
Anna’s principal understands how meaningful yoga is to her and her students and has been “very on-board” with her program. She added, “If he knew I actually had time in my schedule to make this bigger, he'd want me to do that. Blair further stated, “I have an administrative team that's amazing. I ask them can I do this or can I do that and they say do whatever I would like to as long as it benefits the children.”

Participants also described their administrators supporting yoga after they realized the positive impact it was having in their schools. For example, Joy said, “I have an administrator that observed me once and said ‘the kids were oddly into that.’ And I thought ‘what? Of course they’re into it. I wouldn’t do it if they weren’t’.” After an administrator observed Dottie teaching yoga to students, she was asked to lead a professional development to more fully integrate it into the school community. Dottie described her assistant principals’ reaction to her yoga program:

The assistant principal is my supervisor so she has to observe me during the school year, so I had her observe my yoga group. After she observed me she was like ‘WOW! That—I didn't know that's what you did!’ After she observed me she was like ‘can you give a workshop to our staff so that they know what this is?’ So last year during one of our school improvement days, I did that… I got a lot of positive feedback from that, and I think a lot of eyes opened that ‘Oh yeah, this is more than stretching or working out.’

Molly concurred: “I have some really supportive administrators who want to see wellness as an important part of our school community. Having an administrator support your work is huge; it doesn't happen without that.”

Also vital to program success is teacher buy-in. Participants described mixed reactions about yoga from teachers, but overall found them to be supportive, especially after they realized
what yoga was about. As Anna bluntly said, “Teacher buy in is important, because if there's no teachers willing to bring their classes, then I'm not doing it.” She elaborated:

The teachers that I work with, I won't say all, but some of them think yoga is this hippy thing, so at first I thought it would be difficult for them to be interested in it. And they still feel that way, like, ‘Oh yoga - let's just sit with our fingers touched or let's levitate.’ They still think that, but they’re bringing yoga to their classes, so they're not closed-minded to it.

Part of their willingness and openness to yoga was a result of a workshop that Anna delivered to teachers. Due to the busyness of her school setting, she wanted teachers to help with the integration of yoga.

Last year I held a couple of professional development workshops for the teachers in my building, showing them how they can incorporate yoga and mindfulness into their classrooms. I felt was like a good way for me to reach the whole school, indirectly, through someone else who obviously has more direct contact with them [students] because like I'm only one person. I can't go into every classroom every day, you know?

Anna found her teachers to be supportive of this process by integrating yoga during the school day. She noted that some teachers adapted specific yoga techniques into their classrooms, and others use GoNoodle, an interactive online tool that offers movement activities to students. Mallory found her teachers to open up after seeing the impact yoga can have on students.

Sometimes there are teachers with different views about things you’re doing with children, which I think happens as a school counselor all the way around – that maybe it doesn’t seem academic so why are you doing it? But overall, the majority of teachers are
pretty accepting. When they see kids…how it brings them back to where they need to be and helps them so much, they buy into it, because they see the results.

Similarly, when school counselors delivered yoga in classroom settings, participants noted that teachers also began to make yoga a part of their day. After delivering yoga during classroom sessions, Joy said teachers asked, “Can you print that yoga poster and blow it up so I can hang it in my room? You know in my calm down corner?” She described many classrooms in her school to be “responsive” and that yoga helps to calm the students so they are better equipped to learn. Joy also mentioned that teachers often participate when she teaches yoga. She said, “I have a few teachers that sit right on that carpet and do it with them. That makes me feel nervous because they’re watching, but so happy.”

This theme detailed the logistics participants faced with the integration of yoga. Without hesitation, all participants noted that yoga can be done by anyone, anywhere. They described the connection of mind, body, and breath and gave examples of yoga’s accessibility. Also noted was the challenge of having adequate space for students to practice yoga. However, each participant who mentioned this as a challenge collaborated with others in order to find a viable space for students. The practice of yoga is riddled with countless myths, misperceptions, and stereotypes. Every participant mentioned the myth of yoga being a religion, along with other stereotypes of yoga. Myths and stereotypes regarding yoga have not impacted participants to a large degree. Those participants who have dealt with minor challenges demonstrated advocacy in order to debunk such myths so students could benefit from the practice. Finally, each participant joyfully described administrative and teacher support regarding yoga implementation. Due to the controversy surrounding yoga, many participants explained how fortunate they feel to have supportive administrators and teachers to assist them with delivery.
Perception of Yoga Impact

The fourth major theme participants described was their perception of how yoga has impacted their school and school community. Three subthemes emerged within this category: a) overall impact on school b) impact on students, and c) examples of students taking yoga “off the mat.”

**Overall impact on school.** Participants believe that their integration of yoga in the school has yielded an overwhelmingly positive response from students, parents, teachers, and administrators.

Dottie explained:

The parents love it, the kids want to get into the yoga group; they're constantly down here asking ‘How can I get into the yoga group, how can I get into the yoga group?’ I feel like a lot of time counseling groups are ‘oh you don't want to be one who is in a counseling group’ you know it's kind of looked down upon, but kids are begging me to be in our yoga group. Parents are calling asking how their kid can get in the group. And now that the staff has been trained they're supportive. They're much more supportive.

Missy had a similar reflection: “The rising 6th grade parents know about yoga here and they say ‘I want my child to do this.’ I’m like, sure, come on over, we’ll be here.” Christine added, “The teachers, my administrators, my fellow counselors – I mean, everyone is really excited about this program and really enjoys it.” She further stated:

A parent, who is also a teacher at the school, posted a video on Facebook of her son playing and mucking about and poking his head out the closet and singing one of our yoga songs. She posted, ‘Does anyone know this song?’ I was like ‘yeah - I know that song!’
Joy found that teachers in her building were also benefiting from her integrating yoga in the classrooms:

The teachers also love yoga...It's just been a really wonderful thing and the teachers also will say to the kids ‘I use this stuff all the time.’ So helping adults, you know adults who work in a really low-income area who don't get paid much who have a lot of stress.

They're getting some strategies too.

Elizabeth offered a similar sentiment, “The parents have all said good things, and that they're happy. The teachers joke and say ‘I think we all need a morning yoga class.’” The teachers at Christine’s school like teaching after she has practiced yoga with her students. They tell her, “The children are just in a place where they can receive information in another way. They’re calmer, they’re more focused, and they’re ready to learn. They’re just more student-ish.”

Moreover, the parents of Christine’s students have positive things to say about yoga:

Our parents really enjoy it as well. They report to me, ‘I wanted to meet you, I want to say hello, because Johnny comes home and he’s teaching us the yoga you did today and he’s singing, is there a song? What was that song?’ Because there is ALWAYS a song (Christine sang me her call and response yoga song).

Like other participants, Christine noted that she has enjoyed seeing the positive effects of yoga carry over from her students to the community.

**Impact on students.** In addition to the positive sentiments from the school community, the participants also provided numerous examples of the impact of yoga on their students.

Christine shared a conversation she had with the physical education teacher about a student:

I’m working through a PE class and the teacher said to me, ‘You know this student doesn't participate in anything.’ I was like WHAT? He said, ‘No, this student never
participates in a thing. The only thing I have ever seen him do is your yoga class.’ And he asks questions, does the poses, and practices them and he's right there with me.

She was surprised that this student never participated in his PE class due to his engagement in yoga. Christine has noticed other benefits with her elementary students:

As a result of this yoga program, our students are definitely more aware of their thoughts and feelings. They are exploring their relationship to each other. When we do partner poses we're leaning on our friend, or we're pulling on our friend, or when we all sit in a circle and make a sun with our feet - if one set of feet are slightly off, it doesn't look like a sun anymore. The children are like, ‘OH’ realizing well, this one set of feet are important. And look what difference, how it impacts our whole sun. So I think that they're aware of, they're aware of their own relationship to the group.

Participants added that the students ask for yoga. Elizabeth said, “The boys are always asking, ‘When are you going to come get us?’ I mean they love it; they just can’t get enough.” Missy stated “I’ve got a lot of kids that will come and ask for yoga now, and that to me is success.”

Kristin administered a perception assessment to her students and reported:

The kids all loved it; they wanted to do more of it. I asked ‘how do you feel when you do yoga?’ and there was a lot of happy, relaxed, etc. They really loved that it was something new and different, rather than being told to take deep breaths and count to ten and all the typical things that we teach them…I mean they hear it and they hear it again and they don't really remember it or use it properly because that's all they've heard for so long.

Similarly, Dottie asked her students, "What did you get out of this?" She shared a few of her student’s responses:
My favorite of all time is: ‘I learned to love myself.’ I'll never forget that…they also said feeling a sense of belonging, feeling safe, building rapport, building relationships and a lot of friendships came out from girls that would never be friends - you know what I mean? We had girls in popular groups and not so popular groups, and all of them were a family when we were together, which is really cool.

Molly also offers her students the ability to reflect the meaning of their practice:

So, we've done lots of reflections and journals about ‘what does yoga mean for me’ and ‘what does yoga do for me,’ and that's when you can start to see what they are internalizing and taking away which is really meaningful. I'm thinking of one quote off the top of my head - the question was something about ‘what are the benefits of this yoga class’ and one of the girls said ‘the ability to mess up and not get judged.’

Elizabeth provided an example of student perseverance:

When it comes to the physical practice, one of the boys in my group, in general, he's just all over the place and then when he comes to yoga he tries so hard to balance in warrior 3 and he says, ‘Look at me!’ He feels so proud of himself for being able to do certain physical poses; it's just so exciting to see his excitement…‘Look I can do it, I'm balancing, I'm trying really hard’ and it's great to see that.

Blair has noticed a shift in how her students were expressing themselves since beginning the yoga program:

Before the students would kind of close up and they didn't want to talk to anybody and they would just hide their head and not want to do anything and disengage. Now I'm seeing that they're explaining how they're feeling and why they're feeling that way and,
explaining what they can do from the things we've worked on so far to help themselves
get out of it and deal better with the stress that they are experiencing.

**Students taking yoga “off the mat”**. The goal of a yoga practice is to be able to carry a
certain state of being both “off” your yoga mat. If one is to truly benefit from yoga, it has to
expand into everyday life. Participants provided numerous examples of students utilizing the
tools and skills they learned in yoga into a variety of settings. Kristin said, “When this student
sees me he stops, points at me, and goes into warrior. I can see him taking the breath as he
moves. I think that's my favorite, just seeing him retain that and then use it.” Kristin has another
student who she sees using yoga to calm down:

I have one of my students who, whenever he is upset, he goes through warrior. All three.
And it helps him breathe. Because he knows how to breathe in, and you know, a third
grader that can do that I think is pretty impressive.

Elizabeth stated, “When I think about pranayama, or breathing, I’ve had many students come to
me and say, ‘I was really upset and I practiced my belly breathing.’” Joy reflected on the difficult
aspects of school counseling and how yoga helps students when she’s not around:

School counseling in general is hard because the kids answer everything perfectly for the
half hour that I have them and then they're on the playground and they do the exact
opposite, but I often have kids say, ‘But I try to bunny breathe’ or ‘I did a balloon breath’
so I know that they are internalizing it to some level.

In addition, students have reported their ability to use the tools they learned in yoga to the school
counselor. Dottie had a student tell her: "I almost got in a fight, but you know what, we just had
our group and I was in my Zen and I just ignored her and walked away.” She also had a student
report, “My mom and I got in a fight, we were fighting and we were arguing and I just told her,
“You know what, let’s do yoga.” Dottie said “I just see it all the time, they talk about it; they talk about how they are using it at home and they talk about how they're using it in school.”

Elizabeth sees her students utilizing coping skills learned in yoga in the classroom:

Students definitely use the strategies I’ve taught them…the second grade classrooms have a class graph with coping strategies like belly breathing, counting, using positive self-talk, and showing compassion. When they see somebody else doing one of those things, they color in a box on the graph. So I think that they're just more aware of these coping strategies and I think the compassion piece is very prevalent, and ties in with yoga.

Anna had a similar reflection:

The students that I work with, one-on-one or in a small group…I have noticed that they take the techniques that we use, like the breathing exercises, and they use them by themselves. Their teachers will see them using it by themselves, like when they start to get really upset or worked up.

Overall, participants perceived yoga to have an overwhelmingly positive impact of yoga on their school community. Participants noted the parents were enthusiastic about yoga being offered during the school day and wanted their children to participate. In addition, participants described the teachers benefited from yoga being offered as well. They noted calmer classrooms and also enjoyed the opportunity to manage their stress, which they perceived as helpful.

Participants further described anecdotal data emphasizing the positive impact yoga has had on students. They provided examples of student engagement, motivation, and excitement about practicing yoga at school. Lastly, participants highlighted examples of students using skills they learned in yoga in stressful situations. For participants, the examples of students taking yoga
“off the mat” illustrated the students feeling a deep connection to the practice. The participants described feelings of gratitude regarding the ability to provide students with coping skills and techniques they can apply in a variety of settings.

**Impact of Yoga Integration on School Counselor**

The final theme described by participants was the personal and professional impact of integrating yoga into their school counseling programs. Two subthemes emerged within this category: a) yoga as a self-care strategy, and b) yoga is a meaningful aspect of school counselor role.

**Yoga as a self-care strategy.** As previously described, yoga is more than a physical practice. The second limb of Patanjali’s eight-limbed yoga system contains the five Niyamas, which reflect observance of self (Adele, 2009). The practice of Niyamas provides a positive environment for self-reflection and the development of inner strength. Participants of this study provided thoughtful insights regarding yoga as strategy for self-care, in both the personal and professional realm. Molly reflected:

> When I first started and was first learning about yoga it was more important for me to have a physical practice because that's all I knew. But as I became more integrated into yoga as a lifestyle and mindfulness practice it's become just a part of everything I do so it's less important, I mean it's still important for me to get on my mat as much as possible, but if I'm not able to I can still integrate yoga into everything I do.

Kristin stated, “For me, yoga reinforces the need for self-care…I mean, I'm doing it with my kids so I need to practice what I preach, you know, and use it as part of my coping toolkit too.” School counselors are constantly faced with countless tough issues. With high caseloads and the aspect of unpredictability in our profession, participants further discussed the importance of self-
care. As Joy simply stated, “Yoga is a movement break for kids and it calms me down, because, you know, it's a crazy job.” Elizabeth added, “My personal yoga practice is so therapeutic for me when it comes to self-care, taking care of myself, and not getting burnt out by situations that happen in school.” She went on to recommend, “I know as school counselors often times things can seem overwhelming and we deal with some difficult situations…so I think, it’s important for them to have an outlet for self-care.” Anna notes:

I think something that’s very important is self-care, especially for people who take care of other people. It's one thing to put on a yoga video or a relaxation video and have the kids do it, but it's another thing to actually practice it yourself and then be able to model that in your class…if you are not taking care of yourself, you're not going to be as effective taking care of other people.

Christine discussed the importance of role-modeling self-care to students:

I think it's helpful that we enjoy something and that we get to model that and get to live it, breathe it, and show them this is one way we take care of ourselves as adults. Because as adults we don't have access to the school counselor any more, you know? How do we as adults take care of our mental health? What are we doing?...And if it's important for us to take time out of our academic day to teach children, then it should be something that's still valued as an adult.

**Yoga is a meaningful aspect of school counselor role.** Finally, all participants emphasized how integrating yoga into their school counseling program has added meaning and value to their position. Mallory reflected:

It's really, it's rejuvenated me, because I mean to tell you the truth when I'm doing it with them, I'm enjoying myself as well. It helps me. So I'm not just there to watch them, I'm
really participating. Which I think is a big piece of it; I'm never just telling them about it, we do it together.

For Blair, teaching yoga to her students has inspired her to deepen her knowledge of yoga and participate in a teacher training over the summer.

It's made me so excited about the practice, and it makes the week happier and better and the kids look forward to Fridays. The kids see me every day and say ‘when's it Friday, when's it Friday’ and I feel the same way. I look forward to that time because I know it's going to be a de-stressing time. So much so I decided that I wanted to become a yoga teacher. I signed up for a 200-hour yoga teacher training this summer and I'll be going to Bali to do it.

Regarding the unpredictability and sometimes-chaotic aspect of the school counselor’s role, Joy remarked:

I think it's helped me. You know it's a stressful job…last Wednesday I was 20 minutes late to a class because I was doing a safety risk assessment for suicide, so I'm super escalated inside; I'm not showing it, but I'm out of breath and I'm 20 minutes late. Yoga gives me a chance to start my lesson with a quiet voice and be really calm and really centered myself, and then my lesson runs smoother because I'm not just like ‘Alright, let's get to the objective. Let's assess what you learned.’ …We're going more down into a baseline instead of being off the charts escalated.

Participants further explained the importance of being passionate about their work. Elizabeth discussed how she feels about the connecting yoga and school counseling:

I feel really connected to what I'm supposed to be doing. I actually read a quote this morning and it was: When you want what life wants, magic and synchronicity start to
happen. And I feel like things are connecting and I’m able to live my passion which I am, I am, I feel very lucky to have found a place where I can do that.

Christine echoed Elizabeth’s sentiments, “I feel like, just in general, as human beings and as adults, if we're not having a good time with whatever curriculum we're using then I'm not sure that our children are enjoying it either.”

In addition to students, participants reflected on how yoga has impacted them both personally and professionally. First, participants discussed the importance of self-care in the school counseling profession. For them, using yoga as a self-care strategy has helped ease anxiety, decrease burnout, and provided an opportunity to role-model the importance of self-care to students. Finally, being able to teach yoga to students has added meaning and connection to their school counseling role. The participants enjoy this part of their job, and gave concrete examples of the increased connection they feel to their school communities and profession.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the results of the data analysis of this study. Findings were presented in five major themes and subsequent subthemes: 1) intentionality (personal experiences with yoga impacts professional intentions, yoga intentionally tied with comprehensive school counseling goal); 2) yoga integration (organic commonalities between school counseling and yoga, methods of yoga delivery, overlap of yoga philosophies and ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors standards); 3) logistics of yoga integration (accessibility of yoga, managing yoga myths and stereotypes, program supports); 4) perception of yoga impact, (overall impact on school, impact on student, examples of students taking yoga “off the mat”); and 5) impact of yoga integration on school counselor (yoga as a self-care strategy, yoga is a
meaningful aspect of school counselor role). Participants’ responses yielded insight and information regarding their unique experiences using yoga in their school counseling programs. Supporting quotes were provided to illustrate and support the findings. Overall, the shared belief from all participants was that yoga is a viable tool and intervention can add value to any school counseling program. A discussion of themes and subthemes, along with implications for school counselors, counselor educators, and future research is presented in Chapter V.
Chapter V

Discussion

This chapter includes a summary of the results, limitations of the study, and a discussion of themes. Implications for school counselors are explored and presented, along with recommendations for future research.

Overview

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of school counselors who integrate yoga into comprehensive school counseling programs. The practice of yoga is regarded as a continual self-study, with the aim of developing the mind, body, and spirit (Douglass, 2007; Ehud, An, & Avshalom, 2010; Williamson, 2012). Likewise, school counselors are charged with developing a comprehensive school counseling program that meets the social/emotional, career, and academic needs of all students (ASCA, 2003). At the inception of this study, no empirical literature existed regarding the school counselor’s role in yoga integration. This study builds upon existing literature in both fields, while adding a new construct linking commonalities between the goals of yoga and school counseling.

To understand the phenomenon, in-depth interviews were conducted with a total of 10 participants who currently integrate yoga into their school counseling programs. A qualitative analysis of the data implied a considerable amount of connectedness between the ASCA National Model (2012) quadrants (foundation, management, delivery, and accountability), the
ASCA National Model themes (advocacy, collaboration, leadership, and systemic change), and yoga (see Figure 2). During the interviews, participants described multiple accounts of advocacy, collaboration, and leadership while integrating yoga in their school counseling program, resulting in overall perceived systemic change. Moreover, the descriptions of yoga integration organically aligned with the framework of the ASCA National Model. For example, teaching yoga to students could be considered a delivery service, and aligning yoga to a school counseling goal is a component of the foundation of the ASCA National Model.

*Figure 2.* Connectedness between ASCA National Model, ASCA National Model Themes, and Yoga.

Five significant themes and subsequent subthemes emerged from the data. While each of the five themes emerged discreetly, there appears to be a substantial overlap between the content. The themes and subthemes include: 1) intentionality (personal experiences with yoga impacts
professional intentions, yoga intentionally tied with comprehensive school counseling goal); 2) yoga integration (organic commonalities between school counseling and yoga, methods of yoga delivery, overlap of yoga philosophies and ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors standards); 3) logistics of yoga integration (accessibility of yoga, managing yoga myths and stereotypes, program supports); 4) perception of yoga impact, (overall impact on school, impact on student, examples of students taking yoga “off the mat”); and 5) impact of yoga integration on school counselor (yoga as a self-care strategy, yoga is a meaningful aspect of school counselor role). Participants’ responses yielded insight and information regarding their unique experiences using yoga in their school counseling programs.

**Discussion of Themes**

The research question of this study aimed to gather a rich understanding of the experiences of school counselors who integrate yoga into a comprehensive school counseling program. This section will include a discussion of the five major themes and subthemes that emerged during data analysis. The findings will be synthesized with preceding research to further illustrate how yoga can be integrated into a comprehensive school counseling program.

**Intentionality**

Participants in this study vocalized clear intentions regarding the integration of yoga in their comprehensive school counseling programs that resulted in the emergence of three subthemes: 1) personal experiences with yoga impacts professional intentions, 2) offering yoga in school gives students a lifelong skill, and 3) yoga intentionally tied with comprehensive school counseling goal.

**Personal experiences with yoga impacts professional intentions.** According to Hyde (2012), “Those who take up the mission of bringing yoga into public schools will typically have
a personal transformational back story” (pg. 121). This sentiment seamlessly encapsulates this subtheme, as participants revealed deeply transformative personal experiences with yoga that influenced their decisions to share the practice with students. Participant’s experiences mirrored Hyde’s (2012) conviction that educators who have a transformational experience with yoga feel a sense of gratitude toward the practice and feel “compelled” (p. 121) to share it with others.

For participants, offering yoga to their students was a result of self-reflection they intentionally turned into action. This reflection further supports Hyde’s (2012) claim that yoga is a mindful approach to increased student engagement and connection. For instance, because yoga offered participants a reprise from chaos and stress, they felt strongly the practice would benefit students. Participants described chaotic situations their students endure at home and school and desired to offer them a reprise from the outside world. Some participants described ongoing personal struggles similar to their students. What I heard these particular participants describe is yoga as a feasible way to foster healing in students and themselves. Participants felt that yoga fostered a sense of purpose to their school counseling role, and expressed the intent of continued integration. Overall, this finding suggests that a positive personal experience with yoga is a strong motivational factor for integrating the practice into a comprehensive school counseling program.

**Offering yoga in school gives students a lifelong skill.** Research supports the delivery of yoga in school settings in order to mitigate common stressors by teaching students fundamental self-regulation skills needed for lifelong success (Harper, 2010; Butzer, van Over, Noggle & Khalsa, 2015; Toscano & Clemente, 2013; Williamson, 2012). Findings from this study support this concept; participant’s highlighted self-regulation as a desired outcome of
teaching yoga to students. Participants further shared their desire to teach yoga to students who may otherwise not have access to it.

Participants reflected upon stories concerning student anxiety, grief, trauma, poverty, and behavior concerns that impede academic performance. Because of their counseling role, participants were aware of additional concerns that impact students outside of the school setting. This level of awareness is why school counselors are in an ideal position to offer yoga to students. They know the pulse of the school, their students, and are ultimately situated to provide students with coping skills that can help them in a variety of settings. Participants wanted their students to have a proverbial toolbox they can use anywhere, regardless of the situation. This finding supports the claim that offering yoga school can benefit students beyond the school day by providing skills to help them cope with stressful home situations (Case-Smith et al., 2010).

Yoga intentionally tied with comprehensive school counseling goal. When asked to describe the process of linking yoga to their school counseling program, participants noted intentionality in the form of using yoga as program goal. For example, yoga was written as a direct service to students in the form of individual counseling, group counseling, classroom guidance, or a schoolwide intervention. In addition, participants’ goals reflected numerous options for yoga delivery to students. For instance, yoga was intentionally delivered to students as a Tier I, II, or III intervention, implemented to reduce overall discipline referrals, or offered to reduce anxiety in students. The yoga-related school counseling goals provided by participants are congruent with research by Brown and Trusty (2005), who clarify that not all components of a comprehensive school counseling program need to be entirely devoted to improving academic achievement. I noticed that participants were able to clearly articulate their multifaceted reasons
for combining yoga with a school counseling goal. They seemed to have a keen understanding of their overall student population, subgroups, and individuals they felt would directly benefit from learning and practicing yoga. They further stated that other components, such as social/emotional development can serve as an intervention or complement an academic goal.

Consistent with the framework of the ASCA National Model, participants also used data from students’ needs assessments to determine the type of activities/interventions to be delivered. Based on the results, participants felt yoga would be a creative, innovative strategy to meet student needs and connect the practice to their school counseling program goals. To take it a step further, many participants aligned their yoga-related goal with district and state standards. This action was another clear example of intentionality. The ASCA National Model provides school counselors with a framework to connect program goals and objectives to state accountability standards, and participants seemed eager to show others where and how yoga fit. Coinciding with best practices, aligning yoga with district and state standards further substantiated yoga as a direct or indirect intervention with students. This finding connected with research by Gysbers and Henderson (2012), who expressed that school counselors should choose desired skills and learning outcomes for students and use them as a platform to connect preventative school counseling curricula with academic curricula.

**Yoga Integration**

In this study, yoga integration is defined as merging yoga into specific aspects of a comprehensive school counseling program. The participants’ descriptions of yoga integration yielded three subthemes; 1) organic commonalities between school counseling and yoga, 2) methods of yoga delivery to students, and 3) overlap of yoga philosophies and ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors standards.
Organic commonalities between school counseling and yoga. The aims of yoga and school counseling share numerous commonalities. For instance, the practice of yoga involves discipline, focus, concentration, and compassion toward self and others (Flynn, 2013). School counselors are positioned to help students with skills to achieve personal and academic success (ASCA, 2012). Participants articulated these similarities and found yoga to be a creative way to teach students to cope with and manage a variety of social, emotional, and academic pressures.

Case-Smith et al., (2010) pointed out that more schools are utilizing preventative measures like yoga in order to increase the social/emotional and academic success of students. To connect this construct with school counseling literature, it aligns with the main role and function of a school counselor, which is to remove potential barriers to student success (ASCA, 2012). The accounts from participants also lend support for the similarities between yoga and school counseling. Participants described yoga as a natural way to teach students skills they are already expected to teach. For example, it would not be unusual for a school counselor to teach a classroom guidance lesson to students on stress management prior to taking a standardized test. Yoga is merely an alternative way to teach students how to manage stress. Participants noted they often have better outcomes with yoga, as they felt students were more engaged with activities involving movement. Ultimately, it is the job of school counselors to provide evidence-based interventions based on student need. Participants took this role seriously and felt that yoga can complement or add benefits to any school counseling program.

Methods of yoga delivery to students. School counselors are expected to deliver their program to all students (ASCA, 2012). Due to the fact that school counselors work with the whole school, participants felt they were ideally situated to deliver yoga. In this subtheme, participants further described a thorough understanding of student needs and current situations,
information a teacher may or may not be privy to. Because of this knowledge, participants were able to target particular students based on their individual needs and concerns.

Each participant detailed a variety of creative tactics employed to deliver yoga to students in their school setting. A comprehensive school counseling program includes both direct (direct contact with students) and indirect (collaboration with educational stakeholders) service delivery to students, parents, and school employees (ASCA, 2012). Participants provided examples of yoga delivery to students via individual and group counseling, classroom guidance lessons, whole school counseling, and as a responsive service to students. These examples suggested a clear understanding of the delivery quadrant of the ASCA National Model, as participants discussed their reasoning for teaching yoga in a variety of settings and situations with depth and nuance. For example, many participants offered yoga in small groups and found this delivery method to be an effective way to work toward a Tier II or overall school counseling program goal (i.e., reduce suspensions and/or problematic class behavior, reduce anxiety, etc.) This finding builds upon research from Steiner et al. (2010), who found that yoga delivered in small group settings was an innovative and effective approach to reducing problematic behavior symptomology.

In addition to direct delivery of school counseling services, the collaboration theme of the ASCA National Model involves coordination and consultation with community stakeholders in an effort to advocate for student needs (ASCA, 2012). In this study, delivery of yoga also included participants deliberately collaborating with community providers in order to bring yoga to their school. The concept of collaborative efforts manifested in two ways: 1) collaboration with other educators to enhance yoga delivery, and 2) collaboration with yoga teachers in the community. The idea of outsourcing a licensed yoga teacher to deliver yoga to students was
important to this study, as it coincides with the aforementioned thought of school counselors being in an ideal position to connect students to yoga. What I also heard from participants who brought in an outside yoga teacher was a passion for yoga and deep belief that the practice could benefit their students. This finding illustrates that regardless of comfort level teaching yoga, delivery can still be coordinated by utilizing community resources.

**Overlap of yoga philosophies and ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors standards.** The overlap of ASCA’s Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success standards (2014a) and the philosophies of yoga were thematically deduced from the data of this study. The ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors standards are reflective of students’ psycho-social attitudes and behaviors. The Yamas and Niyamas share similar principals and support character education, self-control, self-respect, kindness toward self and others, and encompass strategies to support overall student success (Flynn, 2013).

While most participants provided an example of how these two concepts connect, the participants who previously described a deep personal connection with yoga were better able to clearly articulate the overlap. Furthermore, these participants were also credentialed as an RYT ®. While reading the transcripts, I noticed the participants who had an extensive amount of yoga teacher training specifically named the Yamas and Niyamas and wove them into lesson plans, used them as guidelines for group norms, or tied them into a school wide initiative or theme (i.e., character education, Second Step ®, etc.).

Regardless of yoga experience, all participants described a situation, action, or concept that implied a connection between the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors and Yamas and/or Niyamas. For instance, many participants stated they teach yoga to help students with emotional regulation. Emotional regulation is regarded as Niyama and a Behavior standard. Similarly,
when participants discussed teaching students partner yoga poses to help develop social skills, I interpreted that as both a Behavior standard and Yama. Regardless of intent, participant responses reflected a clear overlap of these four concepts (Yamas, Niyamas, Mindset standard, Behavior standard). It remains unclear how these parallels impacted the intentionality of integrating yoga into school counseling since I did not specifically bring up the Yamas or Niyamas during the interview process. This inconsistency could be a mere oversight, or lack of knowledge regarding the association of concepts.

**Logistics of Yoga Integration**

For this study, logistics refers to the specific aspects and considerations of yoga integration. Subthemes explicated from this theme included: 1) accessibility of yoga, 2) managing yoga myths and stereotypes, and 3) program supports.

**Accessibility of yoga.** In order for yoga to impact students’ academic and personal success, it has to be accessible. The notion of yoga accessibility took many forms in this study, including time, space, affordability, and the concept that yoga is accessible to all body types. Participants mentioned sufficient time and adequate space to be a barrier to yoga integration. Researchers (Ancona & Mendelson, 2014; Anderson, 2014; Kaley-Isley et al., 2010; Mendelson et al., 2013) concur, citing time and space as a barrier to yoga integration in schools. In contrast, data from this study indicate that time and space was not a barrier. This contradiction was noted when participants explained they found practical spaces and adequate time for students to access yoga. Consistent with ASCA National Model themes, participants provided examples of leadership, advocacy, and collaboration in order to have the space and time they found necessary to integrate yoga. Furthermore, many participants reported using Flynn’s (2013) *Yoga* 4
Classrooms cards, which remove the barrier of space in school by offering a series of postures, poses, and meditation sequences for students to practice at their desks.

Data from this study support the literature that indicates yoga is accessible to all persons (Case-Smith, 2010). Participants provided detailed examples of teaching yoga to students with specific physical, behavioral, social, and emotional challenges. This coincides with research conducted by Steiner et al. (2010), who recognized the value of providing alternative interventions for students who struggle with additional challenges. Participants agreed that yoga techniques could be quickly implemented to thwart escalations in disruptive behavior. Furthermore, yoga is free, which makes integrating specific tools and techniques in school more feasible. Generally speaking, yoga is a cost-prohibitive activity. Participants of this study expressed gratitude for being able to offer yoga to students who may not otherwise have access to the practice. These results extend the thoughts of numerous researchers (Flynn, 2013; Koenig et al., 2012; Mendelson et al., 2013; Serwacki & Cook-Cottone, 2012; Steiner et al., 2012) who agree that school is an ideal place to integrate yoga.

Managing yoga myths and stereotypes. When asked about awareness of myths regarding yoga, every participant discussed religion. Yoga is not a religion (Brandstaetter, 2014; Catalfo, 2007; Douglass, 2010; Flynn, 2013; Steiner et al., 2010), but can be practiced by all religions (Flynn, 2013). This misconception has evoked numerous lawsuits (Careless, 2012; Luhar, 2013; Stewart; 2013), and resulted in parents denying permission for their children to participate in yoga-related activities/practices during the school day. The results of this study were in contrast to existing literature, as the myth of yoga as a religion was not found to be a problem by participants. Although the myth of yoga as a religion was discussed, participants challenged this assumption and engaged in proactive attempts to absolve any potential conflict or
misconception. For example, participants either proactively avoided using the term yoga in permission slips and consent forms to parents, or mindfully avoided speaking in traditional Sanskrit in an effort to avoid a potential misunderstanding. I was surprised by this incongruence. On one hand, the myth of religion has not impacted their yoga program, but on the other hand, some were not using the term yoga, instead calling it “breathing”, “stress-management”, or “mindfulness.” I wonder if this subtheme would have generated different results had participants used the term “yoga” or advocated for it in a straightforward manner.

Mendelson et al. (2013) addressed the importance of dispelling myths and stereotypes about yoga in order to increase student engagement. Interestingly, participants did not vocalize this as a concern among students, but revealed that stereotypes regarding yoga impacted teacher buy-in. While overall participants reported teacher buy-in and support for yoga integration, they also shared frustrations with particular teachers who did not understand the point or purpose of teaching yoga to students. Participants reported educating naysayers about the purpose of yoga, along with the potential benefits to students. They felt these efforts yielded some improvement in attitude and engagement. Although not directly discussed, the participant’s actions were another clear demonstration of collaboration, advocacy, and leadership as highlighted in the ASCA National Model (2012).

**Program supports.** All participants indicated that the success of their yoga programs was due, in part, to administrator support. This finding mirrors research by Steiner et al. (2010) who found yoga implementation to be far more successful when supported by key educational stakeholders. Mendelson et al., (2013) added that program sustainability occurs with the support of administration, educators, and parents. Participants believed they would not be able to offer
yoga to students without the support of their administration, perhaps further evidencing the importance of principal buy-in.

In addition to administrators, participants provided examples of direct participation by teachers, which they felt increased participation from students and buy-in from parents. In fact, participants gave examples of teachers replicating the school counselor’s activities by offering yoga to students during class time. This construct build upon research by Anderson (2014) and Mendelson et al. (2013), who found that teachers who engaged in yoga with their students were more likely to support overall implementation.

Finally, some participants were asked by their administration to offer professional development to staff in order to increase overall yoga integration. These participants noted that after an administrator observed them teaching yoga, they had a deeper understanding of the program and realized the potential positive bearing on students and staff. This example supports research by Hyde (2012) who identified the concept of “professional empowerment” opposed to “professional development” (p. 120). Hyde (2012) asserts when the discourse of development is revolved to reflect empowerment, teachers feel more in control of their classrooms, ultimately impacting students.

Likewise, other participants saw a need for teachers to be trained to deliver yoga as a support to the school counseling program. In this case, participants described aspects of collaboration, advocacy, and leadership to offer professional development to staff. Interestingly, Hyde’s (2012) use of the term empowerment is what I heard participants describe when they discussed the process of training teachers. For instance, participants did not have the time to deliver yoga to the entire school as often as they wished. Therefore, they sought out
opportunities to teach the staff how to replicate and reinforce specific yoga tools to students during class time.

**Perception of Yoga Impact**

All participants reported that yoga has had a positive impact on students and the school community. In addition to their interviews, some participants provided analyzed outcome data from their yoga programs. However, these data were used solely for triangulation purposes. In this theme, data were reduced into three subthemes, 1) overall impact on school, 2) impact on students, and 3) examples of students taking yoga “off the mat”.

**Overall impact on school.** A successful yoga program has the ability to improve the overall mood and climate of an entire school community (Dye, 2014). Participants offered similar sentiments when discussing their perceptions regarding the overall impact yoga has had in their school. First, participants perceived that teachers look forward to practicing yoga with their students and feel the program adds value to the academic setting. In fact, per teacher request, some participants offered a yoga class for teachers to prevent burnout and help them manage stress. This is concurrent with Anderson’s (2014) finding that implementing yoga into the school day is also beneficial to staff. Furthermore, participants added that as a result of teacher involvement, some began to weave yoga into relevant classroom lessons and/or provide “yoga breaks” to students throughout the school day.

Contradictory to warnings about parental upheaval regarding yoga in school (Careless, 2012; Luhar, 2013; Stewart; 2013; Williamson, 2012), participants cited numerous examples of parental satisfaction and support. This could be related to the advocacy and collaboration efforts from participants. While this concept did not emerge as a specific theme or subtheme, participants discussed building rapport with parents prior to implementing yoga. It sounded like
their advocacy efforts helped prevent potential backlash from parents. This may help explain why once the word got out about various yoga offerings (group, class, club, etc.), parents requested their child participate. Additionally, participants who worked in a middle school noted parents of elementary-aged children inquiring about the program during periods of school transition.

It is unclear from previous literature what specific steps were taken prior to the implementation of yoga to increase community support. However, the examples provided by participants of this study are congruent with the expectation that school counselors collaborate with educational and community stakeholders (ASCA, 2012). This finding suggests that advocacy and collaboration efforts prior to implementing yoga may increase the overall impact in a school setting.

**Impact on students.** In addition to the school community, participants unanimously believed that using yoga in their school counseling program has had a positive impact on students. Participants believed that yoga helped students with emotional regulation, healthy coping skills, focus/engagement, and positive self-esteem. Moreover, participants said students enjoyed the opportunity to practice yoga. This finding is consistent with Toscano and Clemente’s (2013) claim that children need to enjoy what they are doing in order to construct a positive mindset. These findings are also congruent with Dahir and Stone’s (2012) assertion that school counselors should develop comprehensive school counseling programs that emphasize student growth and achievement. Participants cited numerous examples of how they believed that yoga integration fostered student growth, particularly in the areas of self-expression, asking for help, belief in abilities, and a reduction of disruptive behavior. While no literature currently
exists to connect these findings with the role of the school counselor, they mirror the overall
goals of yoga (Flynn, 2013) and school counseling (ASCA, 2012).

Many participants integrated yoga as part of a Tier II intervention in small groups and
classroom guidance. Participants felt that utilizing yoga in these arenas increased students’
connection to other students, helped with social skills, and decreased classroom interruptions. In
turn, participants believed classrooms, especially at the elementary level, were more cohesive.
These findings are aligned with Wukkus and Dubegart (2013), who posit that self-regulation is a
critical aspect of school readiness and continued academic success. Walton (2013) further
suggests that the brain must be trained to self-regulate and cope with a continuum of minor and
significant stressors. Hence, school counselors must teach students how to regulate emotions.
Participants believed that after participating in yoga, students were better able to cope with
stressors and regulate emotions, particularly around other students. This was particularly evident
when participants gave examples of challenging situations individual students had faced where
prior interventions had not been successful, but yoga seemed to help; even if temporarily.

Unlike teachers, school counselors see a substantial amount of students individually to
offer academic, career, and social/emotional support (ASCA, 2012). Participants provided
examples of students who they felt benefited from yoga, where other interventions were not
successful. Additionally, they noted these students were able to articulate their needs and
directly ask for yoga, mindfulness, and breathing exercises when upset or anxious. Participants
seemed proud of these students for asking directly for help, and regarded this behavior as a huge
success. This example encapsulates Auger’s (2013) claim that some students struggle with a
variety of challenges that interfere with academic success, often resulting in the need for a
substantial amount of additional support. Furthermore, participants felt yoga helped students to settle quicker than other interventions, enabling them to return to class more prepared to learn.

Examples of students taking yoga “off the mat”. The practice of yoga teaches physical and psychological balance in order to cultivate a mindful, intentional way of being (Butzer et al., 2015; Frank, Bose, & Schrobenhauser-Clonan, 2014; Khalsa, Hickey-Schultz, Cohen, Steiner, & Cope, 2012; Noggle, Steiner, Minami, & Khalsa, 2012; Toscano & Clemente, 2013). Hence, yoga is intended to be carried “off the mat” and into everyday life. Findings from this study indicate that students were perceived by the participants to be able to implement skills and techniques learned in yoga throughout a variety of settings.

Berger et al. (2009) acknowledged that yoga could be a vital resource for students who face significant home stressors. While it was unclear exactly how often students engaged in yoga skills and techniques outside of school, participants reported that students often shared stories about how yoga helped diffuse a difficult situation. The students’ stories led participants to believe yoga had helped them control outbursts, increase focus, and improve interpersonal relationships. For example, breathing through a stressful situation instead of fleeing. Or, suggesting to a parent they do yoga together instead of fighting. In addition to delaying outbursts, participants described students being able to ask for yoga when feeling anxious or upset about a situation. Furthermore, participants felt students who frequented their office were able to remain in the classroom longer after applying yogic breathing and techniques. These behaviors illustrate Bandura’s (1991) assertion that anticipating reactions to personal behavior can contribute to the attainment of self-regulation.

At school, participants noticed students using yoga in numerous settings without direct instruction. Case-Smith et al. (2010) asserts that poor coping skills can interfere with students’
willingness and ability to learn, but yoga can mitigate these effects. Participants noticed students taking breaks to practice a yoga pose, then going back to whatever task they were working on, or taking deep breaths during a test. Some participants said students practiced yoga on the playground with each other. Participants concurred that once students learn basic yoga techniques, they can be practiced independently, by anyone, anywhere.

According to Steinberg (2014), programs that encourage emotional development and growth can help students manage stress, regulate emotions, and develop empathy toward others. This concept appeared to be consistent with thoughts from participants, who continually noted the importance of teaching yoga to students to improve self-regulation. Moreover, participants shared the belief that yoga has helped students be more compassionate to themselves and others. This concept reflects the ethical principles of yoga, the Yamas and Niyamas (Adele, 2009). Cope (as cited in Gard, Noggle, Park, Vago, & Wilson, 2014) purports the Yamas and Niyamas are concrete methods to help students regulate emotions, thought, and/or behaviors.

**Impact of Yoga Integration on School Counselor**

Participants were able to clearly elaborate upon the impact yoga integration has had on their professional role and noted an increase in connection to work and overall job satisfaction. In this theme, data were reduced into two subthemes, 1) yoga as a continual self-care strategy, and 2) yoga is a meaningful aspect of school counselor role.

**Yoga as a continual self-care strategy.** The current role of the school counselor requires professionals to maintain high standards and expectations, focus on success for all students, and proactively respond to the emerging needs of 21st century learners (ASCA, 2012). School counselors typically have high student caseloads, difficult student cases, demanding schedules, and are often responsible for non-counseling responsibilities such as test coordination,
substitute teaching, and coordinating special education services. Participants explained these demands are often overwhelming and can easily lead to burnout. Similarly, Moss, Gibson, and Dollarhide (2014) found that counselors who continually confront work-related challenges reported elevated levels of frustration and “were in need of rejuvenation” (p. 7). To manage job-related stress, participants from this study reflected upon the importance of self-care, particularly given their role as a helping professional with an unpredictable workday. For participants, their yoga practice seemed to be an antidote to burnout. They noted that yoga has provided a space for them to self-reflect and be present, both in and out of their school setting.

As a result of a yoga training program, Hyde (2012) found that “teachers learned that making time to take care of themselves has a direct benefit to their student and they teaching practice” (p. 121). Although school counselors were not directly cited in that literature, participants from this study voiced similar sentiments. This concept manifested in participant’s beliefs that individuals in helping professions need to properly care for oneself in order to properly take care of others. They felt strongly about using yoga as a therapeutic outlet and found comfort and support in using yoga as a continual self-care strategy.

Yoga is a meaningful aspect of school counselor role. The sentiments participants shared regarding the process of implementing yoga in their comprehensive school counseling programs was expressed in terms of meaningful, connection, engagement, and reflection. Hyde (2012) asserts, “Teachers deserve to be happy and fulfilled on the job and off” (p. 122) and suggests that yoga is a means to achieve this status. Participants felt that engaging in yoga with students offered a unique opportunity to see them in a different light, fostering further connection and adding meaning to their school counseling role. This finding coincides with literature from
Gunduz (2012), who found that school counselors with a positive perception of their job report higher self-efficacy and feelings of personal accomplishment.

Each participant’s passion for delivering yoga to students was evident in their interviews. I felt each participant’s excitement as they explained how yoga has added meaning and value to their professional role. Delivering yoga in their schools provided each participant with a meaningful strategy to connect with students, parents, educators, and perhaps most importantly, their role as a school counselor. Participant’s responses were consistent with literature by Moss et al. (2014), who found that counselors who reach a level of congruency between their personal and professional lives feel more connected to their work. The term “rejuvenation” was mentioned by many participants as they reflected on the personal impact of integrating yoga into their professional realm. Connecting their personal and professional experiences with yoga has been an opportunity to “pay it forward,” if you will. Participants further reflected that untimely, offering yoga to students was their method of taking yoga “off the mat.”

Limitations of the Study

All research designs present methodological limitations. In phenomenological research, the researcher’s perspective guides the interpretation of knowledge (Dukes, 1984), meaning researcher bias is unavoidable. Cognizant or not, the researcher always brings values, beliefs, and philosophical assumptions to their research (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, it was necessary for me to acknowledge my biases throughout data collection and analysis. My experiences as a school counselor and participant of yoga were influential in my choice to explore this research. To account for potential biases, I bracketed my personal experiences through the use of reflective journaling and peer debriefing.
Phenomenological research designs require participants who have experienced the phenomena being studied (Merriam, 2009). I used purposive sampling to recruit school counselors who integrated yoga in their schools, and then relied on snowball sampling to recruit the remainder of participants. Although the sample size (n = 10) was appropriate for the research design, it is possible the participants of this study may not reflect the experiences of other school counselors who integrate yoga into their school counseling programs. For example, participants of this study were required to have yoga integration tied to a comprehensive school counseling goal. It is probable that other school counselors integrate yoga into their school counseling programs without the practice being tied to a specific school or departmental goal. In addition, my sample lacked racial, gender, geographical, and ethnic diversity. All participants were White women who worked in either urban or suburban environments, in elementary or middle schools. However, the socioeconomic status of the students my participants worked with was diverse, with 50% employed in a Title I school.

The interview protocol was the same for all participants. However, the context of the interviews posed a limitation to data analysis and interpretation. Three interviews were conducted in person, and seven were conducted over the phone. The in-person interviews afforded me the opportunity to meet the participant, see the school environment, and view additional sources of data. For example, one participant I interviewed in-person had a variety of yoga props in her office, along with a large amount of yoga books and mindfulness tools. She is in the process of applying for Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) certification (ASCA, 2012), and was able to validate her interview answers with examples and student data. This contextual information was not offered to me with the remaining seven participants. Therefore,
it is possible that different conclusions may have been drawn had I interviewed each participant in person.

The process of data reduction involved the interpretation of participant interviews and the deduction of data into general codes using ATLAS.ti (ATLAS.ti, n.d.). The codes were then further deduced into themes and subthemes. Despite best efforts, it is possible that participants’ responses were misinterpreted and/or wrongly coded. While all transcripts were sent to participants to member check, participants were not privy to the creation of coding data. Participants may have had a different perspective regarding the deduction of codes. In addition, using Atlas.ti for data analysis may have posed a limitation due to the reduction of the sheer nature of phenomenological inquiry: the naturalistic process (Hays & Singh, 2011). To control for this limitation, I read each transcript verbatim, listened to each interview numerous times, and utilized a coding team during data analysis.

Finally, with the exception of a few, most participants in this study were unable to provide definition of a comprehensive school counseling program consistent with the ASCA National Model (2012). This fact, in and of itself, has numerous implications for school counselors that are detailed later in this chapter. As a limitation, it is difficult to conclude that all participants truly integrate yoga into a comprehensive school counseling program.

**Implications for School Counselors**

The findings of this study have several implications for school counselors. Current literature concerning the yoga in schools movement suggest a dire need for evidence-based, cost-effective wellness programs implemented during the school day (Serwacki & Cook-Cottone, 2012). Coincidently, a comprehensive school counseling program is designed to deliver such programs to promote overall student success (Dahir & Stone, 2012). The themes explicated from
the data reveal that when delivered with intent, yoga is a viable intervention that can be integrated within a comprehensive school counseling program.

First, as indicated in this study, the goals of yoga and school counseling share many commonalities. During the interview, I asked each participant, “What do you want other school counselors to know about yoga as it relates to school counselors/counseling?” Participants conveyed that yoga can be taught to students by anyone. While I agree with this sentiment, to an extent, I found that participants who were either credentialed as a RYT® or children’s yoga instructor better articulated the principals and philosophies of yoga. These concepts are what help students take yoga “off the mat”, and are critical to yogic teaching. To facilitate student learning in this area, it is recommended that school counselors who teach or wish to teach yoga to students, receive specific professional development from a credentialed provider. Results of this study indicate that a thorough understanding of the basic principles of yoga helps school counselors convey this message to students to better deliver the lifelong skills yoga is designed to teach.

Second, this study offers suggestive evidence that program buy-in from educational stakeholders, namely parents, teachers, administrators, and students, is integral to the success of yoga integration. Due to the possible confusion and controversy regarding the myth of yoga as a religion, it is suggested that school counselors first take proactive measures to build rapport with students, parents, teachers, and administrators prior to implementing yoga. Rapport with the community will help school counselors decide what, if any, additional steps need to be taken to increase support and prevent potential backlash. In addition, it is suggested that school counselors have literature to support the fact that while yoga is not a religion, the practice can enhance religious and spiritual beliefs. Yoga can be expressed as a spiritual practice and school
counselors are obliged to consider students’ spiritual needs (Hyde, 2012; Sink, 2004). It is further suggested that school counselors avoid renaming yoga and advocate for the numerous benefits of the practice should an issue arise. Finally, school counselors in the developmental steps of yoga integration should appropriately convey the goals and purposes of the program to educational stakeholders in order to garner additional support.

Third, it is important for school counselors to align yoga with a comprehensive school counseling goal and have a clear evaluative plan to determine the overall impact and effectiveness of yoga integration. It is evident from both the literature and results of this study that students are more likely to benefit from school counseling interventions when they are part of a fully implemented school counseling program (Gysbers, 2012). It is further recommended that school counselors who tie yoga to a specific school counseling goal do so with intent and provide a clear rationale for yoga integration as it relates to the overall goal. This entire process should encompass each quadrant of the ASCA National Model in order to strengthen the purpose, quality, and fidelity of program delivery.

Fourth, while this study did not examine specific outcome data, it was implied by participants by the linking of yoga to a school counseling goal that data would be collected and analyzed. According to ASCA (2012), school counselors should regularly evaluate their program to determine the impact on students. Such evaluation includes the analysis of a variety of data sources (i.e., outcome, perception, and process) to determine program effectiveness. It is recommended that school counselors employ appropriate pre/post surveys that address the goals and objectives of their yoga program, use multidimensional interventions, collect data from teachers and/or parents to increase validity of perception data, and ultimately examine all sources of outcome data to determine “how students are different as a result of the school counseling
program” (ASCA, 2012, p. 99). It is further recommended that school counselors share result reports with appropriate educational stakeholders to increase the likelihood of continued program support.

Finally, two subthemes emerged from this study (personal experiences with yoga impacts professional intentions, yoga is a meaningful aspect of school counselor role) that suggest school counselors who are passionate about a particular topic may be more invested in their professional role. Participants provided sentiments regarding how yoga integration at their school has rejuvenated their job and/or significantly reduced burnout. It is recommended that school counselors engage in regular self-care activities to avoid burnout, and also find a topic or activity they are passionate about to teach students. Participants believed their passion for teaching yoga was clear to students, which increased student engagement and connection. This passion may not be teaching yoga at their school, but school counselors could find an area related to school counseling they are interested in sharing with students.

**Implications for Counselor Educators**

In addition to school counselors, the results of this study yielded several implications for counselor educators. First, a major aspect of this study was examining the incorporation of yoga into a comprehensive school counseling program. When asked to define a comprehensive school counseling program, each participant’s definition varied significantly. In fact, most participants were not able to provide an accurate description of this concept as outlined in the ASCA National Model (2012). The framework of the ASCA National Model (2012) outlines the roles, functions, and expectations of school counseling professionals, along with best practices for school counselors. Furthermore, CACREP (2016) standards require school counselors-in-training to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to develop, implement, and evaluate a
compressive school counseling program. As detailed in chapter two, accountability standards in education continue to rise, and it is imperative school counselors understand how to evaluate program goals and objectives. It is recommended that counselor educators teach according to school counseling standards set forth by ASCA (2012) and CACREP (2016) in order to continually move the school counseling profession toward standardization.

Second, as the school counseling profession continues to move toward role clarification and standardization, it is imperative that school counselors are able to willfully develop, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive school counseling program (Gysbers, 2012). It has been implied that the paucity of evidence supporting school counseling programs is the impetus behind the absence of the profession in educational reform agendas (Schellenberg, 2008). School counselors continually cite a lack of preparedness, interest, and comfort level as reasons for not conducting practitioner research and program evaluations. In this study, participants’ definitions of a comprehensive school counseling program varied, but everyone provided detailed accounts of yoga integration that aligned with the quadrants and themes of the ASCA National Model. The incongruence between findings could be a lack of ability to connect theory with practice. Hence, counselor educators need to continually be intentional in connecting theory with practice. For instance, school counselors-in-training should be expected to develop classroom, group, and individual plans that align with local, state, and/or national standards. In addition, school counselors-in-training should go into the field with a thorough understanding of how to use data to inform decision making and advocate for students.

Third, counselor educators can support the yoga in schools movement by teaching school counselors-in-training the facets of implementing such programs within a comprehensive school counseling program. To begin, it is important to point out that not all components of a
comprehensive school counseling program should be entirely devoted to improving academic achievement (Brown & Trusty, 2005). As highlighted in this study, the practice of yoga can yield numerous social/emotional benefits that may improve academic achievement. Similarly, school counselors-in-training should understand local, state, and national education policy in order to effectively advocate for the implementation of a yoga program. For instance, understanding how a yoga program supports educational efforts and using research to support such claims. Lastly, programs like Yoga 4 Classrooms ® assists school employees in writing grants to pay for school wide yoga implementation (Hyde, 2012). It is important for counselor educators to teach school counselors-in-training where and how to find such resources.

Finally, although this topic did not emerge as a theme or subtheme, five of 10 participants were employed at a Title I school. These participants noted the impact of poverty on their students and felt grateful to be able to provide them with the “gift” of yoga. What did emerge during data analysis was the concept of yoga accessibility, and the belief that yoga could be done anywhere, by anyone. Yoga outside of a school setting is often expensive and not highly accessible, further justifying the need for implementation in schools. Both CACREP (2016) and ASCA (2012) suggest that school counselors use interventions and strategies that promote equity and equality. It is recommended that counselor educators teach school counselors-in-training about alternative interventions to holistically support all students both in and out of the academic setting. It is further recommended that counselor educators continually teach the importance of social justice advocacy by providing school counselors-in-training with the tools necessary to build an accessible, equitable, comprehensive school counseling program.
Implications for Future Research

This study sought to investigate the school counselor’s role in yoga integration, an area not addressed in previous literature. Due to the paucity of research in this area, the specific findings of this study evoked several recommendations for future research. First, while a phenomenological design was most appropriate for this study, it is recommended that future research explore this content area using a variety of study designs and analytic approaches. Additional qualitative studies may explore the experiences of school counselors who deliver yoga to students who struggle with specific concerns that interfere with academic success (i.e., anxiety, trauma, grief, self-control, etc.). As mentioned previously in this chapter, school counselors are generally aware of the issues facing struggling students and are ideal to deliver specific interventions to meet their academic, career, and social/emotional needs. These types of studies could provide further specificity regarding the school counselor’s role in yoga implementation.

Similarly, quantitative research is needed to examine the overall impact of targeted yoga interventions in schools, with attention to the school counselors’ role. Based on the outcomes of this study, it would be prudent to compare the outcomes of a yoga intervention delivered to students by a school counselor with specific yoga credentials (i.e., RYT®), to a yoga intervention delivered to students by a school counselor without additional yoga credentials. The findings of this study suggest that school counselors who have additional yoga credentials had a better understanding of the philosophies of yoga. Such a comparison may reveal the value, as it relates to school counseling, of additional yoga licensure.

Another area worthy of further investigation is the notion of students taking yoga “off the mat.” This concept emerged as a theme in this study, and appears to be another area lacking
research as it relates to students. Research by Berger (2009) and Case-Smith et al. (2010) acknowledge that yoga can mitigate the negative effects of significant life stressors often faced by students. A longitudinal study would provide researchers with the opportunity to examine the same variables over an extended period of time in order to better understand the true impact of providing yoga in a school setting.

It is important to note that although studies continue to emerge regarding the yoga in schools movement, methodological limitations and inconsistencies leave many questions to be answered making replication difficult, if not impossible. For example, small sample sizes, fidelity of treatment, homogeneity of samples, and lack of randomization leave questions regarding the accuracy of empirical data. Research replication is vital to improve reliability and provide empirical support of the original study. It is recommended that future research add detail and rigor to quantitative designs so studies can be replicated in order to increase reliability and generalizability. Future research can use both the results of this study and research recommendations to serve as a foundation for building a solid base of research regarding the school counselor’s role in yoga integration. Furthermore, while this study focused specifically on school counselors who integrate yoga into a comprehensive school counseling program, it would be beneficial to expand this study to include school counselors who use yoga with their students, expanding beyond linking yoga to a specific school counseling goal.

Finally, this area of study offers many fortuitous opportunities for collaboration between counselor educators and school counseling practitioners. Such partnerships are beneficial to counselor educators in order remain connected to the reality of the ever-changing roles and functions of school counselors, and to school counselors to strengthen practitioner-based research. Furthermore, the intersection between yoga and school counseling offers many rich
avenues of study that would benefit from the collaborative efforts of academics and practitioners. It is suggested that future research include collaborative partnerships in order to advance research in both realms of study.

**Conclusion**

This study examined the experiences of school counselors who integrate yoga into a comprehensive school counseling program. A comprehensive review of the literature explored the evolution of the school counseling profession, along with the current roles and functions of a modern day school counselor. The practice of yoga, ethical disciplines of yoga, and the yoga in schools movement was discussed in detail. In addition, current empirical research was highlighted to examine the potential impact of yoga integration in school settings. The context of this study was linked to two theoretical perspectives, Theory of Mindset (Dweck, 2006) and Social Cognitive Theory of Self-Regulation (Bandura, 1991). An overview of both theories was provided along with a rationale for connecting each perspective to this study.

Results of this study revealed that five themes and subsequent subthemes were important for the integration of yoga into a comprehensive school counseling program: 1) intentionality (personal experiences with yoga impacts professional intentions, yoga intentionally tied with comprehensive school counseling goal); 2) yoga integration (organic commonalities between school counseling and yoga, methods of yoga delivery, overlap of yoga philosophies and ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors standards); 3) logistics of yoga integration (accessibility of yoga, managing yoga myths and stereotypes, program supports); 4) perception of yoga impact, (overall impact on school, impact on student, students taking yoga “off the mat”); and 5) impact of yoga integration on school counselor (yoga as a self-care strategy, yoga is a meaningful aspect of school counselor role). Each theme and subtheme was discussed and connected with current
literature regarding the professional role of the school counselor and the yoga in schools movement. In addition, themes that were directly correlated to the theoretical perspectives guiding this study were highlighted and discussed. Limitations of the study were noted with suggestions for methodological improvement in future research. Finally, implications for school counselors, along with suggestions for future research were addressed.

This study provided new insight into the experiences of school counselors who integrate yoga into a comprehensive school counseling program, an area not formally addressed in past literature. Data suggests that yoga is a viable and valuable tool to include in a comprehensive school counseling program. Moreover, as the yoga in schools movement continues to grow, school counselors should be regarded as essential stakeholders in the process. Results from this study provide a solid foundation for future research involving school counselors and yoga.
References


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March 4th, 2016

Dear Participant:

My name is Julia V. Taylor and I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Counselor Education at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, VA. I am conducting a research study about the experiences of school counselors who integrate yoga into their comprehensive school counseling program. Completion of this study will fulfill part of my requirements for a Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Supervision.

Eligibility criteria for this study include:
  a) Integration/implementation of yoga in your current school setting;
  b) Yoga or perceived outcome of yoga as a comprehensive school counseling program goal (either SMART goal, ASCA National Model goal, Tier 1, 2, or 3 RTI goal, and/or school counseling department goal);
  c) Current school counseling license.

Should you meet the criteria listed above and are willing to participate, I will conduct either an in-person or phone interview with you regarding your experiences integrating yoga into your comprehensive school counseling program. Participation will take approximately one hour. This study has been approved by the Virginia Commonwealth University Office of Research (IRB Protocol #20006185; phone: 804-828-0868). All interviews will be recorded and transcribed, but your information will be kept strictly confidential. Participation in this study is voluntary and you may stop participating at any time or choose not to answer any questions I may ask you.

To date, there is no research regarding school counselors and yoga. Therefore, your participation in this study had the potential to benefit school counselors and students as we work towards a deeper understanding of this topic.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you are willing to participate, please respond to this email and I will send a link to fill out a short demographic survey and set up an interview time. Please keep this letter in your files for your reference.
If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. You may also contact my dissertation chair, Donna Gibson at dgibson7@vcu.edu.

Sincerely,

Julia V. Taylor

Julia V. Taylor
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Counselor Education
Virginia Commonwealth University
1015 W. Main Street
Richmond, VA 23284
Appendix B

Demographic Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions listed below by checking the most appropriate box or writing a short response.

1. Last Name: ____________________
2. First Name: ____________________
3. Email Address: ____________________
4. Telephone Number: ____________________
5. Ethnicity
   □ African American
   □ American Indian
   □ Asian or Pacific Islander
   □ Caucasian
   □ Hispanic
   □ Other ____________________
6. Gender
   □ Female
   □ Male
   □ Other ____________________
7. Name of school, school district, and state: ____________________
8. Number of years as a licensed school counselor
   □ 0-3
   □ 4-7
   □ 8-11
   □ 12-15
   □ 16-20
   □ 20+
9. Number of Years at Current School: ____________________
10. School Level
    □ Elementary (K-5)
    □ Elementary (K-6)
    □ Middle (6-8)
    □ Middle (7-8)
□ High
□ K-12
□ K-8
□ 6-12
□ Other_____________________

11. Type of School
□ Public
□ Private
□ Charter
□ Magnet (public)
□ Other_____________________

12. School Setting
□ Rural
□ Suburban
□ Urban
□ Other_____________________

13. Does your school receive Title 1 funding?
□ Yes
□ No

14. Do you currently maintain a personal yoga practice?
□ Yes
□ No
□ Other_____________________

15. If yes, how many years have you been practicing yoga?
□ 0-3
□ 4-7
□ 8-11
□ 12-15
□ 16-20
□ 20+

16. What, if any, professional credentials do you hold to teach yoga? Check all that apply.
□ RYT ® 200
□ RYT ® 500
□ E-RYT ® 200
□ E-RYT ® 500
□ E-RYT ®200, RYT ® 500
□ None
□ Other_____________________

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17. If other, please describe the credentialing process (credentialing agency i.e., Yoga 4 Classrooms®, number of hours to receive credentials, credential maintenance procedures, etc.)

18. How long have you been involved with the integration of yoga at your current school?

19. Please write your comprehensive school counseling goal that is related to yoga.

20. Are you available for follow-up questions?

☐ Yes
☐ No
Appendix C

Interview Prompts/Questions

1. How would you describe yoga?
2. Talk about your personal experiences with yoga.
3. Talk about your professional experiences with yoga.
4. What specific factors led you to bring yoga to your school?
5. Tell me how you integrate yoga in your school.
   a. Provide an example.
6. How do you define a comprehensive school counseling program?
   a. How does yoga fit into your comprehensive school counseling program?
   b. What was your reasoning/justification for adding yoga to your comprehensive school counseling program/plan/SMART goal?
7. There are a lot of myths about yoga. Are you aware of any of them?
   a. If yes, which ones?
   b. How have those myths impacted your yoga program?
8. Have you experienced barriers to implementing yoga into your comprehensive school counseling program?
9. What are the supports for the integration of yoga into your comprehensive school counseling program?
10. What is your perception of the impact of yoga on your school community?
    a. Students
    b. Administration
    c. Staff
d. Parents

11. Tell me a specific story or example of the impact yoga has had on your school.

12. How has this experience personally affected you?

13. Summarize your overall experience integrating yoga into your school counseling program.

14. What do you want other school counselors to know about yoga as it relates to school counselors/counseling?

15. Is there anything else you’d like to share with me?