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An exploratory investigation of school counselors' experience in school reform: Interviews with ten counselors

Deborah Nackley Turner
William & Mary - School of Education

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**AN EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS'
EXPERIENCE IN SCHOOL REFORM:
INTERVIEWS WITH TEN COUNSELORS**

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

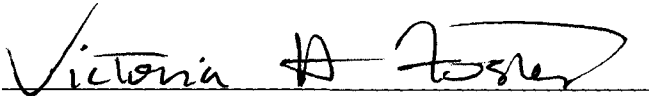
by
Deborah Nackley Turner
July, 2003

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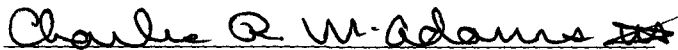
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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to the ten school counselors who so kindly granted interviews to me. Their time and interest in helping me with this project was much appreciated. This research is also dedicated to the many other caring school counselors in public schools. It is my wish that our professional roles become clear and stronger during this era of school reform.

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PREFACE

“Never believe that a few caring people can’t change the world. For, indeed, that’s all who ever have” - Margaret Meade (Gysbers & Henderson, p. 227, 2002).

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This project was possible because of the wonderful support available to me from others. I would like to acknowledge and thank my professors, family, friends, and colleagues for their lasting encouragement.

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To the memory of my mother, Grace, whose confidence remains with my spirit.

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To my close friends, especially Tracy Brady, who has stood by my side since we were seven years old. Now, I can stand by you all.

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**AN EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS'
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experience of school counselors during the time of school reform. This study was designed with an exploratory, case study approach that used elements of phenomenology to gather the counselors' perspectives.

Hunt's framework for assessing conceptual development levels was used as the theoretical perspective. Ten school counselors were recruited from three school districts in central Virginia. Data collection consisted of two face-to-face interviews and the written completion of the Paragraph Completion Method Test (PCM) to measure conceptual development.

The Grand Tour question was: What are the professional experiences of school counselors in an era of educational reform? Sub-questions were: (1) From the school counselors' perspectives, what is the nature of the counselor's professional role? (2) What influence, if any, has been experienced by school counselors related to school reform? (3) What information is available to school counselors about the current National Standards for School Counseling Programs? (4) What is the relationship of the counselors' perceptions of their role and the school administrators' expectations? (5) How/when did the counselors become aware of the changes resulting from school reform? (6) What is the relationship between the conceptual development level of school counselors and the way they view school reform measures? (7) How is this

relationship reflected? How consistent is the link between developmental levels and the way counselors conceptualize school reform?

Data analysis revealed five major themes common to the participants' experience: Commitment to Counselor Role, Balance of Tasks, Responding to Families, Shared Roles in Reform, and Accountability. Conceptual development assessment using the PCM identified bi-modal stages of 1.7 and 2.0. Post hoc analysis was used to expand the assessment of the counselor's cognitive developmental levels.

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**AN EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS'
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Impact of School Reform on School Counselors

The last 20 years have witnessed an unparalleled effort to improve the nation's schools and to raise student achievement in the elementary and secondary grades (Bemak, 2000). Increased requirements for high school graduation, reduced class sizes in the early grades, new end-of-course exams and other major revisions to statewide testing and assessment are some of the prominent national and state initiatives that have emerged in school reform during the last two decades (O'Day, 2002). Despite the activity and attention to promote success in schools across the United States, what originally began in 1983 as a nationwide quest toward improved school effectiveness has failed so far to produce the anticipated results (Tomlinson, 2002). Changes in basic practices and student achievement have been slow at best (Visher, 1999).

The reasons for slow progress are many and complex. One that has received growing attention in educational research is the need for stronger school counselor roles (Bemak, 2000; Gysbers, 2001; Olson, 1999; Johnson, 2000). Both the professional literature and the popular presses began to define the qualities of effective adults and to link essential attributes to successful schools as early as 1980 (Covey, 1990). Demands on schools have influenced school counselors and principals who direct and implement changes in the lives of children and adolescents. These demands have taken on added urgency in the current decade (Beale, 2001).

While concern about school counselors' roles may not be entirely new, the context of the counseling venue in schools has changed (Bemak, 2000; Paisley & Borders, 1995). What, then, has been done to deepen and develop a larger cadre of clear identity in the school counseling profession? As with many major problems in the nation's schools, there is yet no single answer.

Discussions about the future of school counseling have focused often on demographic, economic, and social trends that affect the profile of tomorrow's students, their families, and the structure of schools. Paisley and Borders (1995) speculated that school counseling would continue to evolve as a result of social, educational, political, and economic trends. In addition to the anticipated transitions associated with the process of growing up, the context for children and adolescents now includes divorce, poverty, violence, and neglect (Paisley & Borders, 1995).

Because school counselors too frequently find themselves in a reacting role, using much energy in response to daily challenges and external demands, little time and energy may remain to think creatively about the role of the counselor in tomorrow's schools (Bemak, 2000). The limited control of the school counselor over her/his role in the delivery of a comprehensive developmental guidance program seems to contribute to the ongoing confusion around the counselor's role in the current school reform movement (Paisley & Borders, 1995).

Theoretical Framework

Cognitive Developmental Theory: Higher is Better

For this study, the problem of developing effective roles for school counselors is framed within the theoretical concept that adult thought processes can change and

influence human behavior (Sprinthall, 1994). Research on cognitive developmental theory and its application in one domain with school counselors will serve as the framework for constructing this study.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that school counselors are familiar with the developmental changes that occur during childhood and adolescence (Paisley & Borders, 1995). The work of the Swiss psychologist, Piaget, (1927) accumulated much of the factual and theoretical findings on the development of cognitive process that are available today. According to Sprinthall (1994) and others, adult development is marked by its own sequence of change. This process involves a series of transformations of letting go of or moving through previous assumptions to integrate the old and the new (Brendel, Kolbert, & Foster, 2002).

Foundations for CDT

Piaget (1969) called the process by which cognitive structures (schemata) change from one state to another, “equilibration” (Phillips, 1969). The schema (singular) structural units in Piaget’s system change in shape to better assimilate incoming data. They form a framework onto which incoming sensory data can fit. It is a framework that is continually changing to incorporate something new from the environment. Piaget (1969) called this process “assimilation”. He explained that at the same time the input is being changed in the assimilation process, the process is changed by the input. This process is called “accommodation.” Discontinuities in structure continually arise out of the continuous action of invariant functions. The theory holds that the structures are transitory. If they were not, there would be no development (Phillips, 1969).

The theory presumes that an individual's cognitive structural development is orderly, sequential, and invariant, moving in the direction of greater complexity, differentiation, and higher order integration (Blocher, 1980). Although the process is continuous, its results are discontinuous. They are qualitatively different from time to time. Because of that, Piaget (1969) called the developmental units "stages." There appears to be a consistent relationship between stage and behavior. While stage does not determine behavior, it influences how choices are made (Piaget, 1969; Rest, 1994).

Research suggests that higher levels of cognitive development in adults allow for more effective functioning in areas related to counseling (Holloway & Wampold, 1986; Peace, 1995; Sprinthall & Thies-Sprinthall, 1983). Based upon Piagetian principles of cognitive maturation, cognitive developmental theory has been supported by numerous research studies as a basis for inservice training with counselors in residential treatment settings (Foster & McAdams, 1998); supervising teachers (Thies-Sprinthall, 1984); mentor teachers (Reiman, 1998); school counselor mentors (Peace, 1992) and school counselors (Paisley & Peace, 1995). Accordingly, cognitive developmental researchers speculate that individuals at higher levels will operate at a more comprehensive and empathic level (Borders, 1989).

"The fundamental premise of cognitive developmental theory is that reasoning and behavior are directly related to the level of complexity of psychological functioning. According to this theory, persons at lower levels of cognitive complexity tend to exhibit rigid, concrete, and less adaptive behavior in problem-solving situations. Those at more complex levels of cognitive development, however, exhibit more adaptive behaviors, and are capable of more complex reasoning in solving problems" (Foster & McAdams, 1998, p.3).

In addition, it is believed that growth is not automatic; it requires a series of events or conditions. For example, Mosher and Sprinthall (1970) developed a model

for use in counselor training programs. Called the Deliberate Psychological Education model (Mosher & Sprinthall, 1970), it was designed to encourage cognitive development in adults. The DPE model describes the conditions for the promotion of growth: a significant, new social role taking experience, a balance between support and challenge, guided reflection, and continuity of the experience that alternates periods of reflection with periods of role taking experiences (Mosher & Sprinthall, 1970).

In a consistent manner, research supports the assumptions of cognitive developmental theory (Sprinthall, 1994). Sprinthall (1994) found further support for the CDT assumptions of emergent cognitive development theorists and influenced the transition from theory to practice in his meta-analysis of role-taking studies. McAdams and Foster (1988) found similarities in their work. What the research suggests is that there is a human motivation towards competence and mastery, which is intrinsic. In addition, the CDT tenets hold that cognitive development occurs in stages, and each stage represents the individual's current style of organizing the thought processes. Stage growth is a qualitative rather than a quantitative change. Such growth occurs in a hierarchical and sequential manner. It is believed that the stage growth occurs in one direction and is irreversible. Furthermore, development depends on an interaction between the person and the environment. Behavior, such as a counselor's response to need, is related to an individual's level of cognitive complexity (Foster & McAdams, 1998).

Both physiological and psychological changes are involved in cognitive development. Tenets of the theory hold that development may occur in specific domains and not in other domains. In general, Sprinthall's (1994) analysis and the succeeding

studies conducted by others to examine cognitive development in different domains, confirmed an individual's function (Foster & McAdams, 1988). An individual may function at a level above or below their modal stage of functioning. Applications of cognitive development theory have been supported to occur across cultural settings as well (Snarey, 1985, Sprinthall, 1994).

In a published summary of school counseling research, Whiston and Sexton (1998) found the largest effect sizes were seen in programs that were based on developmental stage growth. Sprinthall (1981) and Baker (1984), both researchers who convey the CDT framework, designed those programs.

Whiston and Sexton (1998) also discovered a large number of studies in the responsive service areas of school counseling. They suggested that counselors expand their attention to include preventive activities that may, in the long run, decrease the need for remediation (Whiston & Sexton, 1998).

In three words, "higher is better" is suggested. In this era of accountability, school counselors face increasing demands to provide information to parents, administrators, and legislative policy makers about the effectiveness of school counseling programs. How can they meet this challenge?

Historically, since the 1960's, CDT research continued to emerge documenting the aspects of the developmental model in a variety of domains including cognitive, moral reasoning, ego development and conceptual development. Hunt's (1975) Conceptual Systems Theory using a level-matching construct has been cited as an applicable domain with counselors and counselor educators (McLennan, 1995). The

tenets of Hunt's (1975) construct will provide the foundation from which this investigation will take place.

The application of Hunt's conceptual systems theory was supported by a meta-analysis of studies conducted by Holloway and Wampold (1986). Several other researchers applied the conceptual level matching model to studies involving counselors (Sprinthall, 1994; Diambra, 1997; Halverson, 1999). Specifically, Peace and Sprinthall (1998) applied Hunt's (1975) matching model to school counselors as a way to support continued professional growth.

Conceptual Development Theory

Origins and applications

Conceptual systems theory (CST) has been applied to counseling since 1974 (Hunt, 1974). It was developed in 1961 as a theory of cognitive organization by Harvey, Hunt, and Schroder. The theory embraces a social interactionist view of behavior as first described in Lewin's (1935) field theory; $B = f(P,E)$. "Behavior is a function of person and environment" (Holloway & Wampold, 1986), p.310). What this means for this study purports that skill acquisition is not enough to meet current demands in the school counseling profession. The development of the counselor as a person is necessary as well (Holloway & Wampold, 1986, Sprinthall, 1994).

Conceptual level (CL) is the cognitive variable in conceptual systems theory. Hunt (1974) defines it as a personality characteristic that describes persons on a hierarchy of increasing conceptual complexity, self-responsibility, and independence (Diambra, 1997; Holloway & Wampold, 1986). Hunt's Conceptual Level Matching Model (1975) coordinates an individual's conceptual complexity with the degree of

structure in the environment. Evidence suggests more experienced counselors can take in more information and process it more objectively, reflecting higher conceptual levels (Harvey, 1964). Novice teacher and counselors may be able to replicate structures, with only minor revisions and without incorporating new learning (Diambra, 1997).

Hunt (1975) described persons with higher CL as more structurally complex, more able to use responsible actions, and more capable of adapting to a changing environment than persons at lower levels of CL. This theory holds that low CL individuals need high structure and high support because they are more externally dependent. It also postulates that high CL individuals require less structure and more autonomy (Hunt, 1974). Environmental structure refers to the degree of dependence or independence permitted in the learning environment. Environments in the counseling literature generally included the small-group learning seminar, individual interviews with supervisors, and the counseling interview.

Stages: How do we know?

A semi-projective instrument called the Paragraph Completion Method Test (Hunt, Butler, Noy, & Rosser, 1977) measures conceptual level. Conceptual development scores from the PCM are described in terms of a continuum from high CL to low CL. A detailed description of this instrument is provided in Chapter 3.

The four levels of the conceptual stage development in CST are: Stage 0-0- Unsocialized, concrete characteristics where ambiguity is not tolerated. Stage 1.0- Dualistic thinking and acceptable social behavior. Stage 2.0- Beginnings of questioning and challenging absolutes. More openness to the ideas of others and more tolerant of ambiguity. Stage 3.0- Greater understanding of the self and of the interdependence

between the self and the environment (Hunt, 1974)). For example, a person in the modal stage 2.0 might exhibit better listening skills than a person in stage 1.0.

Counselor behaviors in Stage 1 are reflected by a strong evidence of concrete thinking, compliance, and the need for detailed instructions. Other characteristics of Stage 1 include the need for immediate reinforcement and highly structured activities. In Stage 2, counselor behaviors begin to emerge as more flexible. This flexibility is evidenced by systematic “matching and mismatching”; varied structures, self-reflection, and the sensitivity to emotional needs of others. In Stage 3, counselor behaviors show evidence of adapting innovations to the needs of others and a higher tolerance for ambiguity. In stage 3 there is an appropriate balance of support and challenge (Brendel, Kolbert, & Foster, 2002; McLennan, 1995; Reiman & Parramore, 1993; Hunt, 1975).

Rationale for Study

Hunt’s (1974) model proposed that in order for an individual to move to the next level of development, certain environmental and experiential variables must be present. The blueprint for the current study is based upon Hunt’s (1974) stages of conceptual complexity. In Hunt’s (1975) Conceptual Level Matching Model, the individual’s level of conceptual complexity coordinates with the degree of environmental structure. Persons who function at more concrete levels of psychological development profit from high structure, such as a direct, systematic sequence of activities. Those functioning at more abstract levels benefit from less structured, independent approaches (Brendel, Kolbert, & Foster, 2002; McLennan, 1995).

A satisfaction match occurs when the person can cope with the environmental demands using currently available methods of problem solving and cognitive

complexity. To promote a developmental match, the establishment of an environment that slightly exceeds the person's current level of functioning compels the individual to adapt by acquiring new strategies and a broader perspective (Brendel, Kolbert, & Foster, 2002). Although the sample size was small in this study (N=30), the results were consistent with research trends in counselor education.

An individual's conceptual level guides the way the person interacts with the environment (Diambra, 1997). Further support for the application of Hunt's (1975) matching construct for counselors in non-school settings is provided in Holloway and Wampold's (1986) meta-analysis of studies. They found that high conceptual level counselors functioned better than low conceptual counselors in low structured environments and low conceptual counselors' performance improved with increases in the degree of structure (Holloway & Wampold, 1986).

What this means for school counselors involves support and challenge within the framework of their professional roles, both through skill acquisition and within a meaning making process (Peace, 1995; Sprinthall & Thies-Sprinthall, 1983). The daunting challenges in today's schools call for higher level helping skills. Linking counselor's educational experiences to an adult development framework offers a stronger alignment for a preventive approach to problems in schools (Sprinthall, 1994, Peace, 1995).

Harvey (1964) suggested that conceptual structure and conceptual level are learned characteristics. CL theory presumes that higher conceptual levels will provide a degree of hope for improving school counselor effectiveness during an era of change in public education (Peace, 1995). It provides a good reason for counselors to become

active participants in the restructuring of their own schools. It also offered a solid place from which to launch the current study.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this exploratory study is two-fold. First, it will explore some of the experiences of school counselors in selected school districts in central Virginia. The goal is to illuminate and clarify how counselors make meaning of their experiences during a time when public education is undergoing change. At this stage in the research proposal, the experiences of the school counselors will be defined generally as those having to do with the meaning of professional role/identity issues, their awareness of national standards for school counseling programs, and expectations of school administrators.

Secondly, this study purports to link school counselors' experiences to an adult developmental framework. The literature supports the directing constructs of CDT as a prevention tool, providing a rationale for continued exploration of this topic. This link will be a preliminary one, paving the way for future studies, interventions, and inservice training programs for school counselors. This study will explore how the domain of conceptual level development aligns with school counselor's perceptions. Given the intricacies of the changing context of public schools, what are the relationships of counselors with their principals, their comprehensive guidance programs, and their daily tasks really like?

Because there were few studies exploring the counselors' perspectives in the literature, an exploratory study devoted to understanding their experiences best lends itself to examining this question.

Grand Tour Question and Subquestions

Creswell (1998) recommends that the central question for an exploratory study address broad levels that foreshadow the steps in the data analysis process. For example, in the proposed study about school counselors, the central question would ask “What are the professional experiences of school counselors in an era of educational reform?” This question is open-ended to allow for multi-levels of structural meanings, underlying themes, and the context of the experience (Creswell, 1998). Creswell explains the universal structures that precipitate feelings about an experience and “invariant structural themes” that facilitate a description of the experience (Creswell, 1998, p.102). These structures construct an understanding of the experience through the lens of the participants.

To illustrate both issue and topical level questions in this study, the following subquestions to be addressed are:

- 1) From the school counselors’ perspectives, what is the nature of the counselor’s professional role?
- 2) What influence, if any, has been experienced by school counselors related to school reform?
- 3) What information is available to school counselors about the current National Standards for School Counseling Programs?
- 4) What is the relationship of the counselors’ perceptions of their role and the school administrators’ expectations?
- 5) How/when did the counselors become aware of the changes resulting from school reform?

- 6) What is the relationship between the conceptual development level of school counselors and the way they view school reform measures?
- 7) How is this relationship reflected? How consistent is the link between developmental levels and the way counselors conceptualize school reform?

Personal Statement

In my work with school-aged children and their families, I have served in several roles before and during the onset of school reform in the Commonwealth of Virginia. My work began as a teacher of young children who had multihandicapping conditions. My introduction in the 1970's to developmental theorists, John Dewey (1938) and Jean Piaget (1964), guided my early learning about how to interact with students. As a new teacher and young adult of 21 years, I was aware that the needs in public schools called for more than professional skill acquisition. My colleagues who were teachers, parents, and counselors themselves from a wide range of ages, ethnic backgrounds, and economic situations, were raising similar questions and concerns.

In my own struggle for professional identity, I continued to work as a special education lead teacher with young disabled children in a residential setting. I then served in a pediatric medical center as a clinic educational consultant, followed by a school counseling assignment with adolescent mothers and their infants. Several years after obtaining a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling (1978) with endorsements in school counseling, I began to wonder about two major themes. First, it seemed important for the adults on the teams where I worked to continue to experience growth and development. Secondly, in agreement with Mosher and Sprinthall (1971), I believe primary prevention is more effective than remediation or after-the-fact treatment.

Motivation and curiosity guided my aspirations toward higher level credentialing and to the counselor education program in The School of Education of the College of William and Mary. During my doctoral internship rotations and residency with the New Horizons Family Center, I experienced the challenges of new roles and found the support to continue my journey as a professional counselor and future counselor educator. Since then, developmental theory has informed my doctoral studies and influenced my current work as a school counselor in an alternative secondary school setting. I now find myself placing most of my day-to-day experiences within the contextual framework of developmental theory.

What seems convincing is the importance of listening, not only to students and administrators, but also to the voices of other public school counselors. My interest in the qualitative research methodology emerged during the process of learning about how higher order helping skills nurture humane behavior and cognitive development (Rest, 1994). According to Creswell (1998), the qualitative paradigm relies on words to describe the phenomena rather than using numbers; and a smaller number of cases can be studied intensively.

The distinct design of a qualitative study resonated with my own interests. In summary, qualitative research seemed to fit better as the more likely tool to examine the school counseling experience from the framework of the participants.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study was designed as a preliminary investigation of how school counselors experienced their roles in an era of school reform. Its scope was narrowed by findings not intended for generalization to other settings. Exploratory research does not attempt

to generalize beyond the particular experiences being studied (Creswell, 1994). Delimitations were placed on this study by the number of participants (N=10), the focus of the study, and the time available with each participant.

Every attempt was made to ensure the accuracy of transcriptions and the intent of the participants' comments. However, in this qualitative study, the findings could be subject to other interpretations. The values, assumptions, experiences, and judgements of the researcher could limit what is written from a full range of possible perspectives (Polkinghorne, 1989).

The limitations of this study relate to Polkinghorne's (1989) cautions inherent in a qualitative framework. 1) It is essential to verify the descriptions of the participants' experiences for accuracy and as much freedom from interviewer bias as possible. 2) Taped interview transcriptions need to be checked and rechecked for error in reporting. 3) Any alternative interpretations from the data that are not addressed by the researcher need to be identified. 4) The writing needs to be clear about how structural descriptions are formed and supported by the data.

The possibility of change occurring in both the researcher and the participants during the process of this study is likely (Krumpe, 2002). The researcher holds the responsibility to protect any relationship of trust and open dialogue that develops during the course of the study.

Definitions

In a qualitative design, Creswell (1994) explains that terms are defined tentatively because the meanings of words will emerge from the informants. The

following definitions are conceptual, with operational definitions to be found in Chapters 3 and 4.

Bracketing – a process in which the researcher sets aside preconceived ideas about an experience as much as possible in order to better understand and reflect the experiences of the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994)

Conceptual development – a cognitive developmental domain related to critical thinking and the concepts used to make meaning of an experience (Hunt, 1975)

Grand tour question – a central, overarching research question in the qualitative study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994)

Meaning making – a process in which life experiences are used to produce knowledge about or conceptualize self and others (Kegan, 1982)

Phenomenology – a research tradition in qualitative research in which the meaning of a phenomenon as experienced by individuals is described (Creswell, 1998)

Phenomenon – a central concept or topic being examined (Creswell, 1998)

Reciprocity – a field issue that addresses the need for the participants in a study to receive something in return for their willingness to be involved in the study (Creswell, 1998)

Reflexivity – an awareness of writer bias and values that casts the initial problem statement within an autobiographical context (Guba & Lincoln, 1994)

School Reform – a restructuring of the basic organization of the school which involves improving instruction, raising student achievement levels, and promoting school-level planning and problem solving (O'Day, 2002)

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The preceding chapter identified concerns about the daunting nature of the personal/social issues facing school-aged students today and some specific broader difficulties. These challenges could likely be grouped into at least three categories: 1) School Counselors' Professional Identity Struggle; 2) Programmatic Integration of National Standards for School Counseling Programs; and 3) School Administrators' Expectations vs. School Counselors' Realities. Consequently, this chapter will review representative literature selected around the contextual nature of school counseling experiences in an era of educational reform. It begins by examining some of the recent efforts to promote professional school counselor identity.

School Counselors' Professional Identity

Thomas Glass, author of *The Shrinking Applicant Pool*, (2000) reported that “fewer and fewer educators appeared to want posts that are laced with increasing pressures of administrative complexity, instructional confusion and social chaos” (p.2). The most frequently cited reasons for this declining interest were the imbalance between responsibility and salary, the stress of the job, and unreasonable time demands (Glass, 2000). What effect, if any, have these demands had upon school counselors?

Baker (2000) speculated that objections of this kind may hide a deeper and more pervasive problem: Schools are not at all clear about what it means for school

counselors to be effective. The literature consistently illustrated how the historical role of the school counselor has been seen as an ancillary one in the school system (Johnson, 2000; Herr, 2001). School counselors have been engaged for many years in a struggle to establish their credibility (Johnson, 2000). After decades of struggling with a role-identity crisis, the school reform movement facilitated the transition for school counselors to redefine their professional identity as highly trained practitioners. The context of the school counselor's work during this era has been seen by many as a way to promote a shift in operational identity (Gysbers & Henderson, 1999; Borders, 1988; Paisley & Peace, 1995).

Yillik-Downer and Sink (2001) conducted a study to measure school counselors' views toward their school districts' development and implementation of comprehensive guidance and counseling programs as part of the school reform process. This study extended previous research conducted in 1999 and in 1998 (Sink & MacDonald, 1999; MacDonald & Sink, 1998). One of the important points raised by this research, and one echoed periodically since the 1960's, is whether school counselors are seen as central to a school's mission or an "ancillary by-product" (Sink & MacDonald, 1999).

The Sink-Downer (2001) study investigated the extent of counselor attitudes toward their professional role in school reform innovations. The study included six specific research questions using the perceptions and concerns of school counselors about comprehensive guidance programs. The study was designed and conducted to address these research questions.

1. Do school counselors' needs for collaboration, concerns for tasks to be implemented, and demonstrating a link between program impact and student outcomes differ

depending on the developmental phase of their Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program (CGCP)?

2. Do counselors' needs for collaboration, concerns for tasks to be implemented, and demonstrating a link between program impact and student outcomes differ by various background variables?

3. To what extent are counselors' perceptions of their level of involvement with their CGCP predicted by their concern for collaboration, task, impact, and total perception ratings?

4. To what extent are counselors' perceptions of their level of involvement with their CGCP predicted by a range of demographic variables?

5. To what extent are counselors' perceptions of the level of importance of their CGCP predicted by their concern for collaboration, task, impact and total perception ratings?

6. To what extent are counselors' perceptions of the level of importance of their CGCP predicted by such background variables as gender, age, grade level, caseload, school district's location, geographical region, and total number of years as counselor? (Sink & Yillik-Downer, 2001, p.279).

The purpose of this study was to attempt to close a gap affecting large-scale educational reform. Yillik-Downer (2001) defined this gap as a substantial difficulty in how to "survey those who are most accountable for implementing change about their views regarding the innovations" (Yillik-Downer & Sink, 2001).

The participants in the study were practicing school counselors (N = 1033) from eight states within three regions in the United States. The sample was drawn purposely from urban, rural, and suburban school districts. Most of the respondents to the survey

were female (Midwest, 80%; South, 86%; West, 76%). In each region, more than 80% of counselors were over the age of 35. The frequency distributions by grade level were relatively similar over the three geographical regions. The respondents in each of the regions were primarily white, had caseloads over 300 students, and worked solely in a school counselor role (Sink & Yillik-Downer, 2001).

The instrument to survey the school counselors was the PCGCI, the Perceptions of Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Inventory (Sink & Yillik-Downer, 1997). This instrument identified school counselors' role perceptions at three phases: Planning and Designing, Implementing, and Evaluating. The authors suggested convincing evidence of the validity and reliability of this survey. The overall Cronback alpha showed the PCGCI to have strong internal consistency ($r = .92$) for an attitudinal survey (Sink & Yillik-Downer, 2001). An inherent limitation of the instrumentation was bias due to the nature of self-report measures (Borg & Gall, 1996). The researchers did not address this bias in their discussion of the PCGCI.

Results from the study suggested that counselors across the three geographic regions were relatively concerned with various aspects of their roles in school counseling programs. Their mean total PCGCI ratings were $M = 99.79$, $SD = 27.12$. High school counselors reported higher task concerns than did elementary school counselors. Although the statistical findings yielded significant F scores across the research queries, the practical significance of the results may have been diminished due to modest effect sizes (Creswell, 1994).

The investigation suggested that as counselors become more knowledgeable and gain confidence with the design and implementation of program change, they may

take increased ownership of their role (Sink & Yillik-Downer, 2001). No causal direction was determined from this study. An implication for future research in the area of increased leadership of school counselors was suggested. Because two others designed by Sink preceded this particular study, it was seen as representative of current quantitative research in the field (MacDonald & Sink, 1999; Sink & MacDonald, 1998). In addition, the relatively large sample sizes strengthened this series of studies.

Widespread anecdotal evidence has suggested that counselors largely appreciated a systemic and developmental approach to their work (Yillik-Downer & Sink, 2001; Peace & Sprinthall, 1998). Sink had identified in earlier research (1999) that almost half of the states in the US preferred a systemic, programmatic approach to school guidance and counseling over the conventional service delivery model. Results from this study indicated a shift in focus toward a professional identity with prevention as a goal and away from a crisis and reactionary orientation. The researchers did a thorough job of justifying the need for this study by discussing in their literature review section how counselor role alignment with the mission of schools has been an ongoing issue in the profession. Similarly, their synthesis of research literature around full-spectrum guidance and counseling programs concurred with national professional associations such as the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the United States Department of Education (Campbell & Dahir, 1997).

What seemed to be missing was the identification of salient developmental constructs. Because the Sink study investigated practicing school counselors (N = 1033) and not counselor trainees, the inconsistency of developmental evidence could

have been due to the loss of a theory base over time. Experienced school counselors may not retain their developmental theory base, or may have been trained using non-developmental approaches to counseling (Paisley & Peace, 1995). Many comprehensive guidance and counseling programs lack a solid theoretical foundation (MacDonald & Sink, 1999).

While the researchers obtained a large sample size, it was not a random sample. Therefore, statistical generalization was seen in this investigation as a research limitation. In addition, the response trends of the counselors were explored across the variables of gender, age, grade level, caseload, geographical region, and years of experience. This wide range of demographic background variables strengthened the study.

However, the sample was composed largely of European-American (80% or more in each region) respondents. With increased attention in contemporary education to cultural and ethnic issues, a sample omitting participants with diverse cultural backgrounds was seen as a limitation for the generalizability of the results. There was a similar, parallel finding of MacDonald and Sink in their 1999 study. Certain aspects, such as cultural identity, were needed to strengthen the developmental aspects and scope of the school guidance programs they investigated (Herr, 2001).

Brott and Myers (1999) conducted a qualitative research study about the professional identity formation of school counselors. They used a structured, open-ended interview approach and school observations to contribute to an understanding of school counselors' professional identity development. They contended that the development of a professional school counselor identity served as "a frame of reference

for carrying out work roles, making significant decisions, and developing as a professional.” In the review of the literature, the authors noted the theme of dissonance between school counselor expectations and the realities of the work environment (Brott & Myers, 1999). Self-conceptualization of the school counseling role was the consistent theme of the studies used to provide a justification for their study. Brott and Myers (1999) found the issue of conflict or, more specifically, conflict decisions, as one of the salient themes.

The research cited by the authors of the study supported a discussion about expanded roles for school counselors and the need for a meaning-making framework (Brott & Myers, 1999). While the language implied the need for a clear theoretical understanding of a developmental framework, there were no references to the major developmental constructs. This seemed to suggest a gap in the literature reviewed.

The participants in Brott and Myers’ (1999) qualitative research included a selective sampling of school counselors who represented diverse perspectives. School counselors from the United States ($n = 7$) and the Caribbean ($n = 3$) participated in the study. Nine females and one male identified their cultural/ethnic group as white ($n = 5$) or African-American/Afro-Caribbean/black ($n = 5$). Their years of experience as a school counselor ranged from one to twenty-nine (Brott & Myers, 1999).

The selection of participants was intentional. It seemed to provide sufficient variety in experience, credentials, and demographic variables to address the possibility of selection bias. The researcher-interviewer was a white female completing a doctorate degree in counseling and counselor education. The authors addressed the possible biases that could have resulted from the research process when the researcher

is the interviewer. They also noted that these biases could affect the generalizability of the findings. The open discussion about the sampling method, small sample size, and researcher bias was seen as an honest view of the limits of this study.

A strength of the Brott-Myers research was seen in the rigorous coding procedures. Their data analysis progressed through the stages of open, axial, and selective coding (Creswell, 1998). The analysis named and categorized the phenomena through a close examination of the data. Twelve categories were identified in this study. The researchers identified the basic problem found in the data was the counselors' need for personal guidelines in carrying out the professional role (Brott & Myers, 1999). They identified a "blending of influences" in four stages: Structuring, Interacting, Distinguishing, and Evolving.

What seemed to prevail in the research findings was the strong indication of a "professional maturation" as school counselors interacted with realities of their work (Brott & Myers, 1999). Missing was the critical link to adult development foundations and research.

A third study designed to gauge the impact of school reform and restructuring upon the functions of school counselors was reviewed. This qualitative study, conducted by Stickel (1999), used the Delphi research method to forecast future trends among school counselors. The purpose of this study was to begin the process of anticipating how school counselors would work as the new century began (Stickel, 1999). In addition, Stickel (1999) wanted to explore this impact upon school counselor training programs.

Stickel used the Delphi technique to collect data. The Delphi technique was developed in the 1950's by the Rand Corporation as a tool for forecasting future trends (Stickel, 1999). Stickel (1999) reported: "Today the technique is considered a reliable qualitative research technique for problem solving, decision making, and group consensus reaching" (p.4). Data was collected using multiple iterations of questionnaires (Stickel, 1999). LeCompte, Millroy, and Preissle (1992) also noted the "usefulness of the Delphi in studying schools and their potential for change" (p.109).

The sample in the Stickel study consisted of a panel of schools that were members of a school-university partnership at Brown University in 1995. This partnership, called The Coalition of Essential Schools, included more than 200 nationwide member schools on the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The schools formed a network supporting each other's efforts to reform. Stickel's initial questionnaire was sent to 243 school counselors belonging to the coalition. Forty respondents (N=40) were selected to comprise the panel for the second round of this Delphi study. The participants were experienced school counselors. They were chosen based on geographic region, membership in professional organizations, and reported reading of professional journals. Twenty-nine respondents were female. Thirty-three were white, with an average of 19.5 years of work experience in predominately high school and middle school settings (Stickel, 1999). While the sample size (N=40) may not have been large enough to suggest a representative population, this study provided a good basis for trend forecasts.

Results of the round one questionnaire were analyzed for the development of the round two questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were computed for each question and

the group mean response was used as part of the rating in round three. Thirty participants remained for round three of the study. The results were based on 24 of the 30 returned questionnaires (N=24).

Consensus was reported on eight items of the questionnaire. The counselors in this study seemed to agree that they were involved in more teamwork with administration, students, teachers, and parents. Strong agreement was also seen concerning more paperwork requirements, larger caseloads, more non-counseling duties, and evening obligations. Projections for five years into the future revealed strong agreement around a greater use of technology and working collaboratively as part of teams. Looking to the future, the counselors saw themselves “running more prevention programs” (Stickel, 1999, p.9). In addition to seeing themselves more involved as part of teams, counselors noted career preparation and professional development as important future trends (Stickel, 1999).

This study was one of the most closely aligned to an adult developmental link with its prevention trends seen in the counselors’ concerns in the schools. Stickel (1999) explored the need for prevention as a counseling tool and the counselor’s collaborative role on a school team.

In summary, Chapter 1 described the principal constructs of cognitive-developmental theory. A large body of studies supported the fundamental premises of this framework as sequential, irreversible, and hierarchical (Diambra, 1997; Holloway & Wampold, 1986; Foster & McAdams, 1998). Rest (1986) suggested a positive relationship between cognitive stage and altruistic behavior in adults. Holloway and Wampold (1986) found some evidence to suggest that counselor training programs

could effect cognitive stage. Thies-Sprinthall (1984, 1986) and Paisley (1990) extended this line of research to study teachers and teacher supervisors. Perhaps some of the best known research to tie the “higher is better” link to school counselors directly was seen in the work of Peace and Sprinthall (1998).

An inservice training program was designed by Peace and Sprinthall (1998) and based on the conception of the counselor as an adult learner (Rest, 1986; Thies-Sprinthall, 1984,1986). The purpose of this study was to develop supervisory skills in the counselors and to promote their cognitive developmental growth. The participants were 11 counselors from three school systems in North Carolina. The purposive sample consisted of ten females and one male, all experienced, tenured counselors who held masters degrees in school counseling. The participants (N=11) ranged in age from 31 to 52 years. The research method was of mixed design, a single experimental group with pre-and posttest measures and subjective journal entries (Peace & Sprinthall, 1998). Again, the sample size was too small to be representative. However, its findings were supportive of a consistent trend: linking skill acquisition with levels of cognition.

The assessment included multiple measures of outcome in three areas: 1) cognitive developmental measures, 2) Supervisor skill measures, and 3) Qualitative analysis of subjective journal entries. The developmental measures included the Hunt, Butler, Noy, and Rosser (1977) Paragraph completion Method (PCM) as an estimate of conceptual level (CL). The Rest (1986) Defining Issues Test (DIT), as a measure of moral reasoning level was included as well. The Flanders Interaction Analysis Scale (FIAS-S) was used to estimate supervisor skill development. The third measure was

derived from the subjective journal accounts of the participants (Peace & Sprinthall, 1998).

The researchers used a procedure composed of a two-semester course in counselor supervision. This course was the independent variable in the study. The results of the cognitive data suggested a modest, but not statistically significant trend in the level of conceptual development from 1.87 to 2.03 in the first semester. By the end of the second semester, the gain of +.35, from 1.87 to 2.2, was significant ($t=2.76$, $p<.025$). In stage terms, the researchers explained this gain as just over one third of a stage on a 3 point scale. It was considered an important increase in the level of conceptual complexity (Peace & Sprinthall, 1998). According to Hunt (1977), scores above the 2.0 level can be considered as “both an ability and preference for the abstract versus concrete cognitive process as well as an indicator of cognitive flexibility and tolerance for ambiguity” (Peace & Sprinthall, 1998 p. 5).

The researchers addressed the unavailability of a control group as a threat to the validity of this study. Nonetheless, the findings of this study supported the link between skill acquisition and a movement toward more complex levels of cognition in school counselors. The qualitative component of this study suggested a bridge to include the perceptions of school counselors in future research studies. This study was strengthened by its positive results in the measures of counselors' mastery of fundamental supervision skills. The gains reported on the Flanders in higher order skills and accurate empathy suggested leadership qualities that are called for by increased professional performance during an era of school reform.

In summary, the results of the four cited studies supported the ongoing issue of professional identity struggles for school counselors. It seemed likely that most school counselors may find themselves faced with such role ambiguity, in spite of emerging trends to establish credibility within the school system. All of the studies selected supported the need for further research to illuminate school counselor role/identity issues using the perspective of the school counselor. The fourth study (Peace & Sprinthall 1998), demonstrated the essential connection among cognitive developmental theory, research and practice.

Implementing the National Standards for School Counseling Programs

The national standards-based program (Dahir, 2000) has required a shift in the conceptualization of school counseling programs. These standards have connected school counseling to the current educational reform initiatives. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and the National Association of School Principals (NASSP) concur that counseling programs must now be seen as integral components in the central academic mission of schools (Dahir, 2000).

For the school counselor, this period of transition in public education compelled a collaborative leadership role in promoting schools that are safe and conducive to learning for all students (Bemak, 2000). For the researchers, the need to gather information about the process of such changes seemed to be imperative in the literature (Herr, 2001; Otwell & Mullis, 1997; Kohlberg & Wasserman, 1980).

In 1997, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) adopted the National Standards for School Counseling Programs. In this document, the emphasis is

placed on the use of the word *program* to describe the organization and purpose of counseling in the schools:

The purpose of a counseling program in a school setting is to promote and enhance the learning process. The goal of the program is to enable all students to achieve success in school and to develop into contributing members of our society. A school counseling program based on national standards provides all the necessary elements for students to achieve success in school. This programmatic approach helps school counselors to continuously assess their students' needs, identify the barriers and obstacles that may be hindering student success, and advocate programmatic efforts to eliminate these barriers (American School Counselor Association, 1997, Executive Summary).

In response to the educational reform agenda of GOALS 2000, the ASCA aligned itself with the academic disciplines and developed the National Standards for School Counseling Programs to better define the role of school counselors (Dahir, 2000). The research process included a national survey with a representative sample of more than 1,100 ASCA school counselor practitioners. ACT served as research consultant and coordinator for collecting information. The research personnel and resources were donated and ensured the survey design followed universally accepted research practices (Dahir, 2000).

The following studies represented the current implementation of the national standards. Burnham and Jackson, (2000) conducted a study to compare what school counselors were actually doing to what was suggested by the national initiatives. In their review of the literature section, the authors noted that most states in the US have adopted uniform counseling program guidelines. The majority of the programs were based on Gysbers' model (1998) which was implemented first in Missouri and on Myrick's model (1999) in Florida.

In the Burnham & Jackson study, a convenience sample of 80 certified school counselors drawn from two southeastern states completed a questionnaire. Participation was on a voluntary basis. Each counselor was required to be a certified, full-time counselor in a public school in one of the two states in which the study was conducted. Responding participants included school counselors at 25 elementary schools, 9 elementary-middle schools, 3 middle-high schools, 15 high schools, and 5 K-12 schools. The convenience sample was reported by the researchers as a limitation to the study because it was used instead of a random sample (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). Lack of a random sample may have weakened the generalizability of the results.

The instrument used to collect the data from the 80 school counselors was a revised edition of a school counselor questionnaire (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). It contained 19 items with sub-items and addressed counselor functions. The data was collected by approximately 50 graduate students in school counseling courses and one counselor educator. The results of the data were grouped into counselor function categories, such as individual counseling, group counseling, working with parents, testing and appraisal, consultation, and career planning (Burnham & Jackson, 2000).

The survey instrument was seen as a strength in this study by the researchers because it served as a necessary tool for the study to be replicated in other states. However, the demographic information section did not include gender, age, ethnicity, or years of experience. A limitation was found in the large number of interviewers (50) used to collect the information. Another difficulty was seen in the way the some of the items on the questionnaire asked for perceptions about how counselors spent their time.

When these responses were translated into statistical information, there was room for bias in interviewer translation as well as bias due to a self-report design.

The researchers used the statistical results from the data collected to compare with the recommendations from Myrick (1993) and Gysbers (1994). Burnham & Jackson (2000) suggested that counselors were performing the functions described in the program models, but with wide variations and discrepancies. One of the areas found to be the “most troublesome” by the authors was relationship of nonguidance and noncounseling duties to the counselor’s role (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). This specific finding was consistent with results seen from other studies the researchers included in their discussion of the literature.

Overall, this study supported a clear need for continued efforts among counseling professionals to continue to transform the role of the school counselor. The link between a developmental framework and role definition was again implied, but not addressed in the program models.

Movement toward a closer alignment with school counseling program trends was seen in additional research conducted by Gysbers, Lapan, and Jones (2000). The purpose of their study was to investigate whether or not local school board policies reflected the shift in school counseling from position to program (Gysbers, Lapan, & Jones, 2000). The researchers collected and analyzed policies from state school board associations from all 50 states, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico.

Two research questions were examined in the Gysbers, Lapan, & Jones study: What content do current school board policies for guidance and counseling contain? Do current school board policies reflect the shift from position to program? A total of 32

state school board associations responded to the researchers' request (Gysbers, Lapan, & Jones, 2000).

The researchers gathered 24 state policies to review. Seven of the thirty-two state associations reported they did not have policies for guidance and counseling. Their analysis was based on a "what, why and who" criteria developed by Watson (1999). The results indicated that 21 of the 24 policies focused on student outcomes similar to those stated in the National Standards for School Counseling Programs (Dahir, Sheldon, & Valiga, 1998). However, the researchers found many state board of education policies fragmented guidance and counseling in the schools because of their emphasis on a position rather than the guidance program (Gysbers, Lapan, & Jones, 2000).

The researchers suggested the need for school counselors to become knowledgeable and active in the policy formation for guidance and counseling in their school districts. They cited the Missouri Policy for Guidance and Counseling (1996) as a comprehensive program framework.

In summary, these studies suggested that if professional legitimacy within the school system is to be achieved, the school counseling program must align itself with the chief academic mission of the school. It is critical to recognize that strong program leadership is required for these efforts to be realistically undertaken. The studies selected supported a need for further research to address the developmental framework perspective in program models.

School Administrators' Expectations vs. School Counselors' Realities

Recent research studies examined the necessary partnership between school counselors and the school administrative team of principals and assistant principals (Beale, 2001). An analysis of the studies selected suggested how the expectations of the school administrators and the realities of the counselor's operational role might offer a bridge to reconfigure leadership posts (Towner-Larsen, 2000; Gysbers, Lapan, & Jones, 2000; Stickel, 1999).

In the previous four studies reviewed, current research called for the role of school counselors to be redefined so that it aligns more effectively with national and state educational objectives. Beale (1995) conducted a research survey designed to assist principals in understanding the changing role of school counselors and to update selection criteria necessary to hire them. In his literature review section, Beale noted the link between the selection of school counselors and the quality of school counseling programs. He reported that no relevant studies had been published since the onset of school reform dealing specifically with principal's selection of school counselors (Beale, 1992).

The participants in this study ($N = 709$) were school principals at the high school, middle school and elementary school levels from a single state located in the southeast region of the US. The principals in the study were asked to indicate the relative importance of 15 items typically used in making selection decisions about school counselors (Beale, 1995). The survey instrument, a questionnaire, was developed by Beale based upon extensive reviews of employment applications from seven school districts and earlier survey instruments, which were not listed in detail. The researcher suggested adequate validity for the questionnaire due to its review by

two counselor educators and 12 graduate students for precision and comprehensiveness prior to mailing it to the participants (Beale, 1995).

While the survey instrument seemed to target essential criteria considered by the school principals as critical components to selecting school counselors, little evidence regarding reliability measures, pilot studies, or validity was provided by the researcher. Such data would have strengthened the credibility of the instrument used in this study. Nonetheless, 709 of the 1000 questionnaires were completed and returned. Such a high return rate, 71%, was seen as a strength as well as a possibility for replication in future studies.

Results reflected the principals' ranking in importance of four critical selection components. These four areas were the personal interview, character references, former employer's recommendations, and internship supervisor's reports (Beale, 1995). Beale's results around the questionnaire item of prior teaching experience were consistent with widespread professional discussions in the school counseling literature published during the past decade. He found that teaching experience was viewed as "at least very important, but not essential" by less than 50% of the respondents (Beale, 1995).

Counseling experience was valued more highly than teaching experience in this study, suggesting concurrence with professional and popular trends. The research data presented 392 of the 709 responding principals (55%) as indicating they would be willing to consider applicants for counseling positions even with the absence of prior teaching experience (Beale, 1995).

However, work experience outside the field of education was rated as essential or very important by only 25% of the participants in this study. Beale noted this finding, especially at the secondary level, suggested confounding results in light of the counselor's role in assisting students in the transition from school to the work environment. He suggested that outside work experience would enhance guidance programs (Beale, 1995).

In the previous section of this chapter, the literature reviewed confirmed such a school-to-work tenet as one of the three national standards for school counseling programs (Dahir, Sheldon, & Valiga, 1998). A strength in Beale's 1995 research was seen in the trend forecasting points of discussion in his analysis of results and in the follow-up work conducted five years later (Beale & McCay, 2001). Limitations were seen in a single state (Virginia) sample selection, insufficient information to document validity and reliability measures in instrumentation, and omission of qualitative results in areas where qualitative information was implied.

A second study selected for review of the relationship between school counselors and school administrators was conducted by Roberts, Coursol, and Morotti (1997). Their research, also of quantitative design using a survey instrument, was located in the state of Minnesota. The purpose of this study was to accumulate baseline data on school administrator perceptions of the professional school counselors in Minnesota.

The participants were the superintendents of schools in each of the 392 school districts in Minnesota (N = 322). The initial return rate of the surveys was 62%. A second mailout was sent to those school district superintendents that did not respond to

the initial request to participate yielding a total respondent return rate of 82%. Sixteen of the survey responses were not included in the final analysis of results (N = 306) due to incomplete quality of response. The final response rate was calculated by the researchers as 78% (Roberts, Coursol, & Morotti, 1997).

Strict adherence to guidelines for sound survey research technique was found in the detailed description of the respondent return rate and the dual (by hand and by computer) analysis, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Only the quantitative data was published in the article reviewed. Even with the missing qualitative data analysis and discussion, the research methodology was seen as very strong in this study. Funding for the research was provided by the Minnesota School Counselors Association and the Mankato State University.

The results of this study were divided into two parts. The first part addressed the characteristics of the school district and the respondents to the survey. The second part examined the perceptual data of the school administrators as it related to the school counselors (Roberts, Coursol, & Morotti, 1997).

In this chapter, only the perceptual data of the school administrators as it related to the school counselors will be reviewed. Five major pieces of information were found in the researchers' analysis of the data collected from the surveys. First, the researchers found professional school counselors in their state were impeded by student-to-counselor ratios that were too high for optimal service levels (Roberts, Coursol, & Morotti, 1997). This information was important because Minnesota does not provide statutory mandates requiring the employment of school counselors within its public

schools. The researchers noted the ratios far extended the recommended standards of the American School Counselor Association established in 1993.

Next, the researchers found that where financial resources were not available for the employment of school counselors and were available for school social workers, the administrators hired the social workers. The researchers reported that this information validated a perception that the state-sponsored funding mechanism which favored school social workers placed professional school counselors at a disadvantage in the job market.

Next, the researchers found little indication of a lack of knowledge on the part of superintendents about the role of the school counselors. Given the funding restrictions for school counselors in the location where this study was conducted, 87% of the administrators still held the school counselors in high esteem and considered their employment valuable. In this study, the superintendents were involved in the clarification of roles for the school counselors. Next, superintendents preferred hiring professional school counselors to school social workers, even in a fiscally restrained budget. Finally, the researchers found that superintendents accepted alternative licensure mechanisms for hiring professional school counselors (Roberts, Coursol, & Morotti, 1997).

This study was selected because of its clear statements about the purpose of the research. In addition, it demonstrated a carefully planned collaborative effort including counselor educators from the local university, the school district's chief administrators, and the school counseling professional organization in Minnesota. The researchers reported the limitations of their study honestly in terms of participants (solely in

Minnesota), and misinterpretation of the survey directions that limited statistical depth (Roberts, Coursol, & Morotti, 1997).

The researchers also noted in their discussion of the findings that prevention was a first-order selected characteristic in the variation of respondent replies. Prevention was ranked as the number one function of school counselors in this study, over intervention and remediation (Roberts, Coursol, & Morotti, 1997). Missing, again, was the critical link to adult development foundations and research. Missing, as well, was the essential link to prevention work and the documentation of how counselors grow in leadership roles.

In summary, the two studies reviewed in this section looked at school counseling programs from the perspective of school administrators. Consistent themes were high caliber expectations for school counselor expertise, training, and professional program leadership in an era of school reform. These studies suggested that administrators see school counselors as developmental specialists who understand their role in prevention, academic success, and collaborating in the wider school community.

Future research is called for to examine the profound relationship of a school's guidance program with current and future school reform measures. The gap in the documentation of a theory-based adult development paradigm needs to be addressed.

This review was not intended to be exhaustive. It uncovered many, but far from all, of the school counseling trends related to educational reform published during the past five years. The increasing need to create a safe, nurturing school climate and a supportive link between students, families, teachers, and other school personnel merged in the research reviewed. In addition, the need to implement effective school

counseling practices that assist student achievement was suggested as an area calling for leadership among school counselors (Dahir, Sheldon, & Valiga, 1998).

Even though numerous researchers in school counseling have suggested that comprehensive programs be built upon developmental theory and research (Borders & Drury, 1992; Myrick, 1997; Paisley & Peace, 1995; Sprinthall, Peace, & Kennington, 2000), there seemed to be a disconcerting trend across the models. Very few studies were explicit about these critical issues. The state documents reviewed seem to have assumed a developmental approach to design and content without citing any in-depth supportive literature or research (Sink & MacDonald, 1998). Developmental assumptions and foundations in the discussions about the transformation of the role of school counselors were minimal at best (Burnham & Jackson, 2000).

The research seemed to tell an important story. These studies suggested a continued need for the collection of experiences in the school counselor's concurrent struggle with professional identity and successful functioning in multiple areas. Theirs is the challenge to face the duties of each day with a highly trained technical correctness. At the same time, to extend a reflection of higher levels of flexibility in their work calls for an understanding of a more complex analysis of the counselor's role in the school system. This means, as aptly explained by Holloway and Wampold (1986), to "increase the availability of multiple alternatives in evaluation and behavior, responding more relativistically and less dichotomously" (p. 310).

More research is needed to document and understand the school counselors' perspective. The omission of qualitative research studies from the counselor's perspective in the school reform movement has convinced policy makers, school

administrators, and counselor educators to ask for more of this little tapped potential (Smith, Crutchfield, & Culbreth, 2001). No studies, to this writer's knowledge, have been conducted yet around the issues of school counselors' professional and educational concerns with and without teaching experience following employment. Few studies have been conducted to examine what happens in an effective partnership between school administrators and school counselors in light of school reform (Bemak, 2000).

Summary of Studies

In summary, numerous quantitative studies have been published about the ongoing conundrum of school counselor role/function/identity issues (Johnson, 2000; Burnham & Jackson, 2000, Bemak, 2000). Rarely have these studies used a fresh, new approach to address the research problem. Qualitative research methods would best serve this current need, followed up by intervention studies in the area of on-site district staff development for school counselors. How can educational research in the social science area broaden the way school reform utilizes the professional leadership and skills of school counselors? Chapter 3 will provide a description of the proposed qualitative research methodology. Specifically, the significant body of previous research will be linked to an exploration of higher levels of cognitive complexity in school counselors' experiences.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The preceding chapter used selected published research to support current challenges in school counseling programs during an era of reform in public education. This chapter will present the research design to be used in this study. Most of the research conducted in the area of school reform has been with quantitative methodology. The choice to use a qualitative research design and its justification will be addressed. This chapter proposes a specific qualitative research approach for the current project. Its concept and process, site and sample selection, and procedures will be described.

Because the purpose of the current study is to illuminate school counselors' perceptions of the impact of school reform on their roles and relationships, a qualitative research approach was deemed the best fit. Faced with the dilemma of investigating new experiences from the framework of the participants, it seemed appropriate to propose a qualitative study to explore the topic. Qualitative studies can be particularly useful in the study of counselors because of its emphasis on meanings, interpretations, interactions, and subjective experiences of participants (Pyrzczak & Bruce, 2000).

General Characteristics of the Qualitative Research Paradigm

Qualitative researchers have gained greater attention with their contributions to the existing (mostly quantitative) educational research literature. Qualitative research

has emerged as a viable tool for examining an issue or experience without making judgements in advance as to what results one may find (Pyrzczak & Bruce, 2000).

“At the level of paradigm, qualitative research is distinguished from quantitative research in terms of their respective underlying *epistemologies*. That is, they differ in basic assumptions made about how one derives truth, the purpose of the inquiry, the role of the scientist/investigator, what constitutes evidence, how one evaluates the quality of a given study, and so on. Some scholars have even gone so far as to declare that a paradigm shift has occurred in education whereby *positivism* is no longer considered a defensible stance in conducting inquiry” (Lancy, 1993, p. 8).

Lancy (1993) summarized the classification of epistemological theories along a continuum from positivism (one attainable knowledge- reality), to postpositivism (probably one reality with imperfect understanding), to critical theory (knowledge/reality is shaped by social values), to constructivism (knowledge is constructed both individually and socially). The qualitative researcher tends to favor the view that reality is socially constructed, multiple in nature, and not fixed and knowable with only one truth. This view differs from the quantitative researchers who generally hold a positivist stance (Lancy, 1993). For this study, the perceptions of the school counselors will be explored.

According to Creswell (1994, 1998), qualitative research can be distinguished from quantitative research by the following unique characteristics that are inherent in the design:

1. Qualitative research occurs in natural settings, where human behavior and events occur.
2. Qualitative research is based on assumptions that are very different from quantitative designs. Theory or hypotheses are not established *a priori*.

3. The researcher is the primary instrument in data collection rather than some inanimate mechanism.
4. The data that emerge from a qualitative study are descriptive. That is, data are reported in words or pictures, rather than in numbers.
5. The focus of qualitative research is on the participants' perceptions, experiences, and the way they make sense of these.
6. Qualitative research focuses on the process that is occurring as well as the product or outcome. Researchers are particularly interested in understanding how things occur.
7. Idiographic interpretation is used. In other words, attention is paid to particulars. Data are interpreted about the particulars of a case rather than generalizations.
8. Qualitative research is an emergent design in its negotiated outcomes. Meanings and interpretations are negotiated with human data sources because it is the participants' realities that the researcher attempts to reconstruct.
9. This research tradition relies on the use of tacit knowledge and felt knowledge because often the nuances of multiple realities can be appreciated better in this way. Data are not quantifiable in the traditional sense of the word.
10. Objectivity and truthfulness are critical to both research traditions. However, the criteria for judging a qualitative study differ from quantitative research. Primarily, the researcher seeks believability, based on coherence,

insight and instrumental utility. Traditional validity and reliability measures are not used. A process of trustworthiness and verification are used (Creswell, 1994).

Creswell (1998) explained qualitative research as “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (p.15). Qualitative research may rely sometimes on a few cases and many variables as opposed to the many case/few variables employed in many quantitative studies. Other important differences of the qualitative and quantitative approaches are seen in the process of analysis, the reporting of results, data gathering instruments, the role of the researcher, and basic assumptions.

For example, qualitative research uses an inductive process, building themes from particulars. Quantitative research uses a deductive process, generalizing to particulars from hypotheses. Qualitative research is reported with a narrative, expressive style of writing. Quantitative research reports are more expository, consisting of a series of interlocking arguments. The investigator is the principal “instrument” for data collection in a qualitative study. The verification for accuracy procedures is rigorous. Intermediary instruments like surveys, tests, and structured observation schemes are used to gather data in a quantitative study where the investigator remains anonymous or neutral (Creswell, 1998; Lancy, 1993).

Given that qualitative and quantitative research studies clearly have different means, how can the researcher understand the relationship between the two approaches?

The following section will compare and contrast the philosophical assumptions needed to investigate complex social science phenomena and implications for practice. Reasons qualitatively designed methods are emerging in educational research studies become clearer where ideological perspectives guide studies like the current one proposed in this paper.

Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Design

Creswell (1998) described criteria that illustrated factors to consider in selecting a research paradigm. He believes most researchers bring to a study an outlook or worldview that favors either qualitative or quantitative ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological assumptions. With an ontological approach, a qualitative researcher holds the assumption that reality is subjective and multiple.

In contrast, a quantitative researcher holds the assumption that reality is objective and singular. The epistemological assumption around the relationship between the researcher and what is researched differs as well. The integral interaction of the researcher to the research is seen in the qualitative paradigm, whereas an independence of the researcher to that being researched is presumed in the quantitative paradigm. Similarly, there are contrasts in the axiological assumptions. The role of values in a qualitative paradigm is viewed as value-laden and biased. In a quantitative paradigm, the axiological assumption is value-free and unbiased (Creswell, 1998).

The rhetorical assumption, which guides the language of the research, is heard in a personal voice with evolving decisions in the qualitative paradigm. However, in the quantitative framework, the language is formal and based on set definitions. The resulting methodological assumption renders two different processes of research. A

deductive, cause and effect process for the quantitative paradigm and an inductive, emerging context-bound process for the qualitative paradigm is seen (Creswell, 1998).

In addition to the assumptions, a researcher brings training and experiences that seek a preference toward qualitative research design. Creswell reported the nature of the audience (receptive versus rejecting) is an important factor to consider in the selection of this method as well. He and other authors have noted that the nature of the research problem, the missing pieces, and the incomplete findings in the literature are essential in the determination of the qualitative research method (Creswell, 1988; Lancy, 1993; Fitch et al, 2001).

Based on this literature, the current proposed study meets the criteria and seems to be well suited to the qualitative research paradigm. The new vision called for in the school counseling profession seems to provide a natural link to the “higher levels of psychological maturity” described by Holloway and Wampold (1986). Missing, from the counselors’ perspective, is information about new roles, leadership in the implementation of national school counseling standards, and administrators’ corresponding, revised expectations. Missing, from the published studies available during the previous decade, are research methods to address the multiplicity of problems that have hindered counselors’ optimal function in our nation’s schools.

Exploratory Research Design

A cross-level exploratory study is proposed. The researcher will look at the experiences of twelve school counselors. Four counselors will be selected from the elementary level, four counselors from the middle school level, and four counselors from the secondary level. (N=12) In this study, the researcher seeks knowledge about

the school counselor's roles and experiences during a time of increasing demands in public education. Elements of phenomenological methodology in a case study approach seem to be the best way to explore these roles and experiences.

Moustakas (1994) believed that descriptions of individual experiences "keep a phenomenon alive, illuminate its presence, accentuate its underlying meanings, and retain its spirit, as near to its actual nature as possible" (p.59). Glesne and Peshkin (1992) used the term, "making words fly."

Stake (1995) described the case study research tradition in as having relevance in education because it provides a way for researchers to hear the stories of the persons involved. In a qualitative case study, the researcher seeks greater understanding of the complexity and uniqueness of the situation and the interaction within its contexts (Stake, 1995).

Twelve initial individual interviews will be conducted to explore the experiences of the participants and what impact these may have on their professional roles. Demographic data will be collected during the first interview. This will include information about the participants' age, race, gender, number of years of school counseling practice, number of years and types of work experience, credentials and endorsements, grade levels of students served, and membership in professional organizations.

Site and Sample Selections

Participants

In a qualitative study, the parameters for selecting participants are not intended to lead to statistical inferences as they would in a quantitative design. The participants

in a study that employs phenomenological methods are recruited usually because they have experience (either current or recent) with the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 1998). Creswell calls this a “criterion sample” (p. 111).

Based on the literature, the current study proposed a cross-level look at the meaning of school counselors’ roles and experiences during a time of school reform. The participants for this project were ten public school counselors currently employed in full-time positions. Three were working in elementary schools. Three counselors were in middle schools, and four in high school positions. Counselors with whom the researcher has been in a direct, sustained working relationship were excluded from this study. One elementary school counselor and one middle school counselor selected for this study withdrew before the interviews began. There were originally twelve participants selected.

A purposeful sample of school counselors was used in an effort to maximize variation among the grade levels. To include the differences of gender, age, and ethnic background, participants were recruited from more than one elementary, middle, and high school. Participants were recruited through the researcher’s professional associations in three school districts in Virginia. No counselor with whom the researcher had daily contact was selected for participation. The recruitment procedures consisted of obtaining names of counselors from professional contacts of the researcher in the school districts of Richmond City, Henrico County and Hanover County Public Schools.

Setting

The setting for this study were public schools in the City of Richmond and the surrounding districts of Henrico County and Hanover County. Because of an increased focus on test results in the larger school divisions in central Virginia during the past five years, this setting was selected. This setting also was selected for its easy accessibility and continuity of experience for the researcher. A criterion sample is permitted in qualitative studies provided verification measures are taken to protect credibility (Creswell, 1998). School counselors from the three districts were selected because of the variation in student population served by the counselors, ranging from urban to suburban to semi-rural. Table 3.1 summarizes the numbers of students in each school and whether or not the school met accreditation standards at the time of the interviews.

Table 3.1
School Population and Accreditation Status

Sheila's School	Lisa's School	David's School	Wendy's School	Joe's School	Barb's School	Denise's School	Eliz's School	Terry's School	Olivia's School
498	982	402	1015	1030	625	1009	1005	859	456
Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes

Numbers based on average daily attendance records as of September 30, 2002, Virginia Department of Education.

Sampling Procedure

The counselors selected for participation in this study met the criteria of school counseling experience during the time of school reform. Every effort was made to recruit school counselors who had been employed full-time by their school district for at least two years. Membership in the Virginia school counseling professional association (VSCA) was desirable, but not required for participation in the study.

Recruitment

As described above, caution was taken in the recruitment process to minimize researcher bias. Referrals of possible participants was taken through the professional contacts of the researcher.

The purposive sampling procedure was designed to optimize variation among 1) grade level certification credentials, 2) gender, 3) race, 4) number of years in school counseling practice, 5) membership in professional associations, and 6) involvement of school reform measures. One constant in the sampling procedure was that all of the school counselors had attained master's degrees. Some of the participants were licensed professional counselors in Virginia as well. Teaching experience prior to being hired as a school counselor was not a criteria required for participants, reflecting the current trend in school counseling literature (Beale, 2001; Smith, Crutchfield, & Culbreth, 2001). Referrals of names of counselors who were employed in school districts other than Richmond City, Henrico and Hanover Counties were not selected for this study.

The sampling procedures for this study differed from those for a quantitative study. An in-depth description of the characteristics of a small number of individuals (N=10), in contrast to a random sample selection of larger number, met acceptable standards for this research project (Stake, 1994).

Researcher's Role

Entry

Gaining access to informants employed by a publicly funded entity calls for caution and sensitivity to potentially sensitive issues (Pryczak & Bruce, 2000; Creswell, 1998). The recruitment procedure for this study varied by site contact. It was

determined in large part by the referrals from the researcher's professional associates and a longstanding rapport with school counselors in the locations selected for this project. Mutual concerns about participant confidentiality (anonymity), and building an atmosphere of professional credibility were part of the process in the overview of the proposed study. Efforts were put in place to protect the participants from attracting undesirable attention related to the challenges identified in Chapter 1.

The steps in gaining access and entry involved procedural details that complied with standards for qualitative research involving human subjects, and ethical responsibilities to "do no harm". Efforts were made to avoid confounding the data by including school districts in geographical areas within a close range of each other. The researcher's doctoral candidate colleagues who provided counseling services in the geographical region surrounding the College of William and Mary were not included in the recruitment procedures for the project for those reasons. According to Creswell (1998), because of the in-depth nature of the extensive interview process with participants, the researcher is permitted to request people who are easily accessible.

Reciprocity

The anticipated benefit to the participants of the study has been identified by Creswell (1998) as a field issue. He explains that the researcher has an obligation to provide something in return for the participants' willingness to provide information. For this dissertation study, participation was expected to be a positive experience for the school counselors. I provided participants with copies of their transcribed interviews for accuracy checking. At the conclusion of the study, I sent to each participant a summary of the findings.

In addition, it is believed that the counselors who participated in this study could benefit by affirming knowledge about their professional roles. It is hoped that they found enhancement of their identity through the interview process and the resulting written report. I will attempt to publish the results of this study in the hope that this research reflected the relevant school reform experiences of the counselors.

Data Collection Techniques

The Qualitative Interview

The research questions and the purpose of the study determine the design and which kind of data will be collected. Many researchers agree that the qualitative interview is the major procedure for gathering data in exploratory studies that use qualitative designs (Kvale, 1996). It is used to collect descriptions of experiences and to generate understanding (Kvale, 1996). The data collection for this study first involved individual interviews with each school counselor (N=10). Follow-up interviews were held with each participant and a written test, the Paragraph Completion Method, was administered.

A telephone call from the researcher and a written invitation to become involved in the study comprised the first contact with the participants following the recruitment of names of counselors through professional contacts. The researcher selected the participants based on the criteria listed under sampling procedure. Written consent was obtained. Demographic information was collected during the first interview. The details about the information collected and the interview questions may be found in Appendix C.

Creswell (1998) recommends the interviews begin by verifying that each participant meets the criteria for a study using exploratory/phenomenological methods. The initial interviews were conducted in the participants' school location in a quiet setting that was suitable for audiotaping, with no other people present. The researcher established a relationship to verify the participant's understanding of the purpose of the study, confirmed their availability for the study, and presented topical questions concerning the school counselors' experience.

Demographic data (counselor's age, gender, ethnic background, grade level of students served, and location of school) was obtained from a written form given to each participant. Every effort was made to include diversity in age, race, gender, number of years in school counseling practice, grade levels served, and membership in professional organizations. The initial interviews were audio recorded and hand-written on the interview protocol in case of audio recording technical difficulties. Transcriptions were given to the counselors to verify accuracy and further reflection, if needed.

The interview protocol was a researcher designed questionnaire similar to the one used in the qualitative research study published by Stickel (1999) to explore the experiences of school counselors. Because the purpose of this study was to illuminate the perspective of the school counselors, semi-structured and exploratory questions were asked.

Theory, the exploratory paradigm, and the research questions for the study must guide the composition of the interview questions for the dialogues. In general, the open-ended questions, asked about the highlights of the school counselors' training and

whether their expectations of the work have changed since they began. In addition, the questions explored the counselors' awareness of school reform measures and how they would envision their role in the future.

Because the proposed research also addressed the link to a cognitive-developmental inquiry, the follow-up interview collected responses from the participants (N=10) to assess the Conceptual Level of each school counselor. Hunt's Paragraph Completion Method Test (1978) was administered to each participant. (See Appendix E).

Polkinghorne (1989) recommends the investigator add self-reflection as a preparatory step to the interviewing or as the initial step in the analysis. He further recommends that the participants review and verify the findings as an ongoing step in the analysis (Polkinghorne, 1989).

It is important for a cross-level exploratory study to reflect the voices of each participant (Creswell, 1998). Three precautions were taken in this study to prevent or minimize potential problems of imbalance in this study. First, the initial interviews provided each participant with an opportunity to present her/his own views without bias from other participants' presence. Secondly, each participant reviewed the transcripts for distortions or omissions in meaning. Lastly, as Creswell (1998) suggested, the process called "horizontalization" was used in the analysis of the data. Each statement was regarded as having equal worth.

Paragraph Completion Method

The Paragraph Completion Method (PCM) is a semi-projective test requiring the participant to conceptualize within the areas of conflict/uncertainty and rule/authority

relations by responding to six sentence stems (Hunt, Butler, Noy, & Rosser, 1997). It has been widely used as a cognitive developmental measure to estimate conceptual complexity. Both the contents of the response and the structure underlying the response are given attention concerning rule structure, relations to authority, and handling of conflict and uncertainty.

Validity: The PCM has demonstrated a consistent predictive relationship to complex behavior in teaching and counseling (Holloway & Wampold, 1986). Concurrent validity was reported at the .20 to .30 range when correlated with tests of intelligence. When correlated with the Kohlberg Moral Maturity Scale (Hunt, 1970; Hunt, et al., 1978), validity was reported at .40.

Reliability: Median reliability correlations have been high, ranging from +.86 (Hunt, 1974) to +.96 (Peace & Sprinthall, 1998). Hunt (1978) reported one-year test-retest reliability as ranging from .45 to .56.

The test requires the participant to produce answers to stem questions, which are then coded and scored by raters trained by the test manual procedures. Hunt's corresponding stage scores ranging from zero to three are assigned to each item response. The total CL is found by averaging the three highest responses. It will be used in this study to assess conceptual development on a continuum of conceptual levels rather than at a discrete stage. The estimated length of time for the written completion of the PCM is twenty to thirty minutes. It will be given to each participant at the end of the second interview.

Field Notes

The nature of qualitative research is interpretative (Creswell, 1994). An aware, listening facilitator is essential with any interview (Kvale, 1996). A journal of the researcher's notes, reflections, thoughts, and feelings, and experiences was necessary to assist in the data collection process. A diary of such information could add depth to the intuitive knowledge and experience during the research process (Creswell, 1998). The researcher's notes were not included in the dissertation write-up. They served as a reflection tool and organizer for the researcher.

Procedures

The sequence of steps for the project followed in this way:

1. Submit, revise, and defend project proposal.
2. Complete and submit the required format to obtain approval from the Human Subjects Review Committee to conduct the study.
3. Pilot the interview questions for clarity, content, and ease of administration.
4. Make telephone and written contact with potential participants.
5. Begin initial interviews with participants at their site locations.
7. Conduct follow-up interviews two weeks apart during fall semester, 2002 at agreed upon site. Ask all participants to verify transcripts and findings.
8. Begin analytic inductive analysis of data collected.
9. Complete final analysis and interpretation of data.
10. Complete writing of report (dissertation).
11. Defend dissertation.

Managing and Recording Data

Ethical Considerations

Ethical dilemmas may be anticipated in qualitative research studies. (Lancy, 1993). If the key informants believe the researcher has misrepresented them, it is the obligation of the researcher to resolve the disagreements. Trends in the data that run counter to the researcher's interpretations should be discussed with the doctoral advisor before the text is finalized (Pryczak & Bruce, 2000). Opportunities for meaning making, reflection, and change can lead to sensitive issues. The researcher holds an important ethical responsibility to the participants. Their privacy needs to be protected.

The researcher ensured confidentiality among the participants in order to obtain truthful, free-flowing discussions. If the participants felt apprehensive or fearful of being exposed, they might not have fully disclosed their feelings and perceptions.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) recommended four general principles for researchers doing fieldwork:

1. Protect the identities of participants so that neither harm nor embarrassment comes to them while involved in the research process. Anonymity must apply to verbal reporting as well as writing.
2. Build trust, respect, and cooperation in the participants. Honesty in interviewing is essential.
3. Honor reciprocity agreements. If the researcher's proposed exchange for participation fails, discuss alternative plans and obtain permission for any changes.
4. Report truthfully in writing and in verbal reporting.

The following measures will be taken in this project to protect the participants' rights: (a) research questions will be submitted and approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee of the College of William and Mary, (b) the purpose and objectives

of the research will be clearly explained to the participants, in conversation and in writing, including a description of how the data will be collected and used, (c) written permission and an informed consent will be obtained from each participant, (d) transcripts from interviews will be checked and verified by the participants, and (e) steps will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Data Analysis Strategies and Procedures

The analysis in qualitative research is done with language and words. It can occur simultaneously with the data collection. In contrast, quantitative data analysis must be carried out only after the completion of data collection (Creswell, 1998). Creswell (1998) explains there is not a consensus for the analysis of the forms of qualitative data. He debates the critics who claim that qualitative analysis is “soft”, acknowledging the evolving nature of the analytic procedures, but conforming to a general contour. Creswell believes the contour is best represented in a spiral image called a “data analysis spiral” (p.142). In this strategy, the researcher enters the text data, manages the data in organized units, represents the account with notes and reflections, then describes the context while classifying, interpreting, and drawing comparisons and categories (Creswell, 1998).

In an exploratory approach, Creswell favors a modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method advanced by Moustakas (1994). The specific steps of this strategy are as follows:

- Begin with a full description of the researcher’s own experience of the phenomenon.

- The researcher conducts a “horizontalization” of the data obtained from statements in the interviews about how the participants are experiencing the topic. Each statement is treated as having equal worth.
- These statements are grouped into “meaning units” and the researcher writes a description of the “textures” of the experience. This is called a textural description.
- The researcher reflects upon her description and uses “imaginative variation or structural description,” seeking all possible meanings, varying the frames of reference about the phenomenon, and constructing a description of how the phenomenon was experienced.
- The researcher then constructs an overall description of the essence of the experience.
- This process is followed first for the researcher’s account of the experience and then for that of each participant. A large volume of data will likely accrue. Decisions about which data to disregard as non-essential to the study will be discussed with the faculty advisor.

In the proposed study the analysis of data will also include Hunt’s (1978) developmental measure. The interpretation of the responses collected during the initial individual interviews using Hunt’s (1978) Paragraph Completion Method will be scored by trained raters. Both the content of the responses and the structure underlying the responses with regard to rules, relations to authority, and handling of conflict and uncertainty will be assessed. Hunt’s corresponding stage scores ranging from zero to

three will be assigned to each item response. The total CL (conceptual level) score is found by averaging the three highest responses (Hunt, Butler, Noy, & Rosser, 1978).

Standards of Quality or Verification

To answer the question, “How do we know that the qualitative study is believable, accurate, and right?” Creswell (1998) distinguishes between the two terms, verification and standards. He defines “verification” as a process that occurs throughout the data collection, analysis, and report writing of a study. “Standards” are defined as the criteria imposed by the researcher and others after the study is completed. Creswell cautions researchers about finding “qualitative equivalents that parallel traditional quantitative approaches to validity” (p.197). He cited the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985) who adhere to more naturalistic concepts. For example, to establish the “trustworthiness” of a study, Lincoln and Guba use the terms “credibility,” “transferability,” “dependability,” and “confirmability.” Although multiple perspectives exist around how to operationalize issues of reliability and validity in the qualitative paradigm, this alternative language seems to clarify the semantic matters.

In his comparison of what verification is, Creswell (1998) explains how he reconceptualizes its framework from quantitative validity, using the following guidelines: 1. View verification as a distinct strength of qualitative research seen through the extensive time spent with participants and the detailed thick description. 2. Use the preferred term, verification, over validity when referring to qualitative studies. 3. Use the Lincoln and Guba (1985) language, trustworthiness and authenticity, as general concepts to establish the credibility of a study. 4. Use different frames of verification if

- The researcher reflects upon her description and uses “imaginative variation or structural description,” seeking all possible meanings, varying the frames of reference about the phenomenon, and constructing a description of how the phenomenon was experienced.
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using a post-modern perspective. 5. Recognize that the researcher can play a role in assessing the study and its procedural implications.

Eight procedures to satisfy verification questions are recommended for verification (Creswell, 1998). The specific procedures that will guide this project are also recommended in Creswell's discussion about verification. At least three of the following will be incorporated in the current study, depending on committee preferences:

- *Prolonged engagement and persistent observation* – This process involves building trust with participants, learning the culture, and checking for misinformation.
- *Triangulation* – The use of multiple and different sources is used to corroborate evidence
- *Peer review or debriefing* – This external check of the research process defines the role of a peer debriefer as one who plays a “devil’s advocate” to keep the researcher honest.
- *Negative case analysis* – The researcher uses this revision to exclude the outliers and exceptions.
- *Clarifying researcher bias* – In this clarification, the researcher openly comments on past experiences, biases, and frameworks that have shaped the approach to the study.
- *Member checks* – The informant feedback is considered by many to be the most critical technique of establishing the credibility of the study.
- *Deep, elaborative description* – This process allows the readers to transfer information to other settings.

- *External audits* - Allow an external consultant to examine both the process and the product of the account. If selected, the doctoral committee will guide the audit process.

Timeline

Data were collected from September through November, 2002.

June, 2002	Proposal defense Committee on Human Subjects Review Pilot Interview Questions
August, 2002	Telephone and invitations to school counselors
September –	Data collection, ongoing verification of findings,
November, 2002	ongoing data analysis
January, 2003	Data analysis, interpretation, and report writing

Committee on Human Subjects Criteria

The School of Education of The College of William and Mary's Human Subjects Review Committee evaluated this study because it involved human beings as participants. The elements of informed consent required by the committee were included on the consent form.

1. A statement that the participant is part of a research project and the title of the research.
2. An explanation of the purposes of the research.

3. The expected time frame for participation in the study.
4. A description of any reasonably anticipated risks or discomforts.
5. An explanation of compensation or treatments.
6. The name of the individual to contact for questions or concerns.
7. A statement that indicates participation is voluntary, that refusal to participate will not result in penalty, and that participation may be discontinued at any time without penalty.
8. A statement describing how confidentiality will be maintained between the researcher and the participants and among all parties of the research.
9. A disclosure of appropriate alternative procedures.
10. A description of benefits to be reasonably expected from the research.

Reporting: Distribution of Results and Implications

The results of this study will be published in dissertation format. In addition to that process, results will be presented at various professional meetings. Other conference proposals may follow, depending on interest in the study by counselor educators, school principals, and comprehensive school reform representatives.

Journal articles will be written for submission to the *Professional School Counseling Journal* and possibly other professional publications. It is hoped the data gathered for this study will be useful in designing further studies to address prevention and intervention paradigms for school counseling programs in public education. Lastly, although its scope is small, the researcher believes the findings in this research will contribute to the growing presence of adult development professional literature. A

profound responsibility calls for leadership in the school counseling profession as it prepares new counselors to touch the futures of public school students.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND WITHIN-CASE ANALYSIS

The preceding chapter described the specific qualitative research design for the current project. An exploratory investigation using elements of phenomenological methodology in a case study approach was deemed the best fit for the study. Its concept and process, site and sample selection, and procedures were identified in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 describes the findings of the study. Because the purpose was to illuminate school counselors' perceptions of the impact of school reform on their roles and relationships, a separate section in this chapter is devoted to each of the ten participants.

This within-case analysis will conclude with the participants' scores on the Paragraph Completion Method Test (PCM), along with a description of the assigned stages and examples of responses. Each analysis is followed by researcher summary using many of the authentic phrases spoken by the participants. The following chapter, Chapter 5, describes a cross-case analysis, including the comparison of the themes across all cases and the interpretation of the results.

Overview of Analytical Procedure

Names of the participants were changed to uphold confidentiality in the study. As outlined in Chapter 3, the analytic inductive method (Moustakas, 1994) was used as the basis for the analysis of the interviews. Each participant was

interviewed twice within a two-week period. The second interview concluded with the written exercise, the PCM Test, designed to measure conceptual levels and assess levels of cognitive complexity. All interviews were completed within three months. The researcher maintained written and electronic notes of asides and impressions during the project. This field notebook became another tool to assist in the analysis of each case.

Each interview was audiotaped, reviewed, transcribed, and read at least three times in order to gain an understanding of the experiences for each participant. Each statement was coded, and themes, prioritized on the frequency of occurrence and intensity, were developed for clusters of meanings. Participants seemed to return to important threads in the conversations. Even when moving from present to past experiences in response to the interview questions, meanings began to emerge. The researcher then was able to explore these experiences using the participants' own words.

The language of the participants seemed to demonstrate both a professional tone and an intensely personal concern for their own roles as school counselors. The following case analyses will demonstrate these counselors' perspectives presented through themes in order of their importance in the interviews. Not all sub-themes are discussed. The subthemes that were included were based on their relevance to the overarching research question or sub-questions. Table 4.1 summarizes the demographic information about the participants, including the accreditation status of their schools at the time of the interviews.

Table 4.1
Demographic Overview of Participants

Name	Age	Race	Gender	Years	Level	Teacher	Standards Met
Sheila	53	B	F	24	Elem	Yes	Yes
Lisa	33	B	F	5	HS	No	No
David	57	B	M	7	Elem	Yes	No
Wendy	56	W	F	19	MS	Yes	Yes
Joe	53	W	M	22	MS	Yes	No
Barbara	45	W	F	16	Elem	Yes	Yes
Denise	49	W	F	21	MS	No	Yes
Elizabeth	55	B	F	17	HS	Yes	No
Terry	33	W	F	7	HS	No	No
Olivia	44	W	F	10	HS	Yes	Yes

Descriptions of Participants and Individual Case Analyses

Analysis of Participant # 1 ("Sheila")

Introduction

Sheila was an African-American female counselor working in an urban elementary school. She was 53 years old at the time of the interviews and had served 14 years in her current school as the only counselor on staff. Sheila had 30 total years of work experience as a school counselor and a teacher that encompassed all three levels: elementary school, middle school, and high school. Sheila was a teacher of mathematics at the middle school level for 6 years before becoming a school counselor. In addition, she had obtained a doctoral degree and taught counselor education classes as part of the adjunct faculty at a nearby university. She was endorsed as a school counselor and a mathematics teacher by the Virginia Department of Education with the postgraduate professional teaching certificate.

Her school has met the current statewide school reform standards of learning assessment pass rates. Sheila had membership affiliations in four professional associations where she served as past president and secretary.

Themes

The following six themes (with related subthemes) emerged from Sheila's interviews: Preparation/Personal Growth (highlights, seeing results, feedback from students and parents), Role/identity Protection (National Standards for School Counseling Programs, Program Accountability), Seasoned School Administrators (exciting expectations, honest communication), Changes in School Counseling (societal changes, technology, child study/special needs students), Need to Collaborate (work closer, more time), and Non-counseling duties.

theme: preparation/personal growth

Sheila decided to obtain a masters degree in school counseling after she taught mathematics at the middle school level. Sheila "felt there was a need to help students on a different level other than in the regular classroom." She described her training as a "series of courses and a practicum experience, a comprehensive exam to exit the program, a written exam as well as an oral exam." For Sheila, the "most helpful part" was the "practicum experience where I worked with a counselor to receive the necessary supervision and on the job training." Sheila believed school counseling "was going to be an exciting profession" for her, "where people would work together and come to a mutual consensus about what to do." She told the researcher she thought she would "definitely have a better level of communication."

“I didn’t think it would have been a very difficult profession,” Sheila reported with a smile. Then she went on to say, “I later discovered that it didn’t happen that way.”

Sheila talked with the researcher about her early work in the “inner city school where the needs were there.” She expected to work longer hours “because of the type of population” to be served. Sheila expected to have “far more time to work with students and parents.” As she discussed her expectations and realities of the school counseling work, Sheila highlighted her experiences with parents and students. She returned to the concept of “seeing results in working with students.”

Sheila felt she was meeting her own professional goals:

“I feel that am accomplishing some things now in work with parents, students, as well as the administration. I feel that I have grown through my experiences and now I am at the level where I am seeing some results in working with students. Especially when I see my middle schoolers going from the fifth grade since I have worked with these students since pre-school. They come back to me and they say how well they are doing or talk about some of their frustrations. Then their parents are coming back. So I’ve learned a lot from talking with my parents and students. This has helped me a lot in fulfilling some of my professional goals. I started out helping, and I know I am helping at this point.”

theme: role/identity protection

Sheila was familiar with the current National Standards for School Counseling Programs. Most of her awareness of these standards came from “going to conferences and workshops” as well as from “information through the professional organizations.” Sheila saw uniform national standards as a protection for the school counseling profession. She emphasized, “We’ve always had an identity problem in terms of school counseling. Now, once we focus on the Standards, we will probably have services that are monitored.” Sheila stated, “I think those standards protect the profession. They protect us as professionals in the

field of counseling. I think we are (now) at the point where we are actually getting somewhere with the National Standards for School Counseling Programs.” Sheila told the researcher that she thought the standards would be helpful to counselors in terms of ethical/legal issues as well. School counselors will become “more accountable and have better methods of evaluating what we are doing.” Sheila linked the process of program monitoring to the provision of counseling services. She explained, “I think it is very important that we work on assessing programs. We need to know the population. We need to know the types of services that are needed in a particular location.”

Sheila viewed the assessment of guidance and counseling programs in the schools as essential. She described a multi-level accountability process in her job: “Counselors are evaluated by administrators, teachers, and parents. They look at us as maybe the key element to making things happen. When people don’t see results, they wonder why. So we need to become accountable for what we do.”

theme: seasoned school administrators

Sheila felt comfortable working with the principal and assistant principal at her school. She described the principal as “very seasoned” in terms of experience. She discussed how the principal liked to have the staff members see the school counselor carry out a positive image with parents and students. In her school, there was a male principal and a female assistant principal. Sheila felt that they worked well together “simply because we communicate, and they assist me in work with the teachers.” Sheila believed the administrators were supportive of the counseling

program in her school and those services were well utilized to assist the parents as well as the children.

Sheila also described how she communicated with the administrative team, “consulting with each other,” being “very honest in terms of what we are doing.” She liked to obtain any available opportunities to gather their attention on the school counseling program to make sure she was providing the services needed, “especially when working with the classroom teachers and the parents.”

theme: changes in school counseling

When asked about any changes she has seen in her work as a school counselor, Sheila discussed widespread demographic changes during the past two decades:

“We are talking about what has happened to society twenty-five years ago. We’ve had a couple of wars. We’ve had a higher suicide rate, higher divorce rate and people are seeking counseling services more than ever before. The profession has changed a lot. Clients have changed. The needs are different. When I first started counseling, we did not have computers. I had a telephone in my office, but we didn’t have a computer. We can communicate better with our parents as well as students because we have e-mail and we have computers now. We have professional meetings with counselors on a regular basis, which is what we had in the beginning; but now we have more training during our meetings. We have professionals coming in to offer programs. I think we are going to have less paperwork because we are already involved in computerized programs. We have all of the necessary tools to communicate with others, not only within the schools, but with our parents and agencies, supervisors, and so forth.”

Sheila talked about how frightening her first year was as a school counselor, largely due to the special education “child study component.” She believes she now has more assistance in her school with the process of identifying students who may have special or different needs. “We have better forms and I have an assistant

principal who was a former special education teacher. She is quite aware of the process.”

theme: need to collaborate

What emerged next was what Sheila called, “the need to work closer with parents and other administrators.” She explored collaborative roles for school counselors, emphasizing both “within school” connections and communicating with out-of-school agencies. Sheila was concise in her statement about collaboration as a key element in the profession. She believed “that’s where we’re going: communication, counseling, coordinating, and communicating.” Consulting with teachers, parents, and other agency workers seemed to be a major thread for Sheila’s work.

theme: non-counseling duties

Sheila spoke about only one non-counseling task, which was student record management. She found more assistance with cumulative folders now than in her earlier experiences as a school counselor. “I don’t feel as if I’m the only one responsible for records,” Sheila said. “The security of records and the monitoring process has improved tremendously since I started.”

conceptual development level

Sheila scored at the 1.5 level on the Paragraph Completion Method Test. A trained rater using the original scoring manual (Hunt et al. 1977) scored the PCM. For each response, the rater assigned a score from 0-3, corresponding to Hunt’s (1975) four stages of conceptual development. (See Appendix X)

Sheila was asked to write at least three sentences on each of six open-ended questions. For example, “When I am criticized...” was subsequently scored according to how Sheila conceptualized, ranging from concrete to abstract. The topics: rules, criticism, authority, conflict, and uncertainty revealed what Sheila thought about rule structure and authority relations.

Sheila’s score of 1.5 was half way between Hunt’s (1975) Stage 1, Learning the ground rules which apply to everyone, and Stage 2, Learning about oneself and how one is distinct from generalized standards. An individual at this level is interested in acting in a socially admissible manner with deference to authority, but is beginning to recognize and evaluate alternatives.

Sheila’s written responses indicated that “rules are necessary for understanding what is expected and provide structure and support for programs.” She viewed criticism as “feedback” which “may enlighten one’s perception, if handled appropriately.”

Hunt (1977) suggested that certain counselor behaviors could be matched with the different stages. In Sheila’s case, her responses fell between Stage A (strong evidence of concrete thinking) and Stage B (separates facts, opinions and theories about counseling). An individual at this stage would most likely follow a counseling model to a moderate degree, employing some different models in accordance with client differences.

Sheila’s Summary

Sheila was an experienced school counselor with 24 years of work in an urban school district in central Virginia. Sheila stated repeatedly an awareness, from

the beginning of her career into the present time, of a strong need “to help students on a different level.” She was also aware of the need for supervision for herself and for other school counselors “on the job.” It was important for Sheila to be a part of “mutual consensus about what to do” with school children.

While her expectations of the school counseling role did not always match the realities of her work in the elementary school, Sheila generally was positive in her views about the students, their parents, teachers, and administrators. She described her relationship with her principal, a male, as one of good communication and helpful to her role as a counselor. Sheila felt respected and valued by the other staff members in her school. She told the interviewer how “we communicate, we consult with each other, and we are very honest in terms of what we are doing.”

Sheila was comfortable and current with her information about school reform measures. She believed that the National Standards for School Counseling Programs offered protection for the identity issues school counselors have faced. She described an important link between program monitoring and the provision of school counseling services offered through school reform. Sheila emphasized the “need to know the population and what types of services are needed in a particular location.”

interpretation

Sheila was, by her description, “meeting her professional goals as a school counselor.” She referred to her progress over the years to where she was now “accomplishing some things in her work with parents and students, as well as with the administration.” Sheila said she was at “the level where I am seeing results...”

Sheila seemed to demonstrate emerging flexibility as she talked with the interviewer about her work as a school counselor. She spoke with ease about her role and her relationships in the school setting. Her PCM score of 1.5, half way between Hunt's (adapted from Oja, 1980) Unilateral Dependence Stage and Mutual Dependence Stage, was reflected in many of the experiences she described. Sheila exhibited a strong sense of caring and openness to the ideas of others. She also exhibited a strong deference to authority. Because Sheila valued her connections with students, parents, teachers and administrators, it was not surprising that she has kept up-to-date with the most recent changes in public education.

Analysis of Participant #2 ("Lisa")

Introduction

Lisa was an African-American female counselor who had worked in an urban setting both within public schools and public agencies. She was 33 years old at the time of the interviews and had served 5 years as a school counselor, all of which were in one secondary school. Her work experience prior to school counseling did not include teaching. Lisa had worked as a juvenile corrections counselor and as a family planning counselor. She was endorsed as a high school counselor with the Pupil Personnel Certificate issued by the Virginia Department of Education. The high school where Lisa worked had not yet met accreditation standards in Virginia at the time of the interviews. Lisa held professional memberships in the local and state associations for counselors.

Themes

The following 5 themes (with related subthemes) emerged from Lisa's interviews: Liking Children (child advocate, interacting with adolescents), Accountability (prioritizing tasks, different expectations), Transition of School Reform (implications, high stakes testing), Networking, and Non-Counseling Duties.

theme: liking children

Lisa based her decision to obtain graduate school training in school counseling because she liked working with children. She told the interviewer that she wanted to "work with children in the capacity outside of the classroom." She had worked at a school for emotionally disturbed children and found herself in the role of a "child advocate." Lisa believed that school counseling would afford her the opportunity to be more accessible to children, "being in one place at one time where the kids can always get to you."

Lisa's non-teaching work experience with the Planned Parenthood agency led her to select the secondary school level for counseling. She described an "overall positive effect of interacting with high school and middle school students." For example, Lisa discussed a "bonding" that occurred when she felt she was making a "positive impact on a child's life."

theme: accountability

Lisa was in her fifth year as a high school counselor during the time of the interview. She talked about how she now can "identify which things are high priority, which things can wait a couple of days, which things are immediate, and which things to buy time for." Lisa believed that accountability rested "ultimately with the administration." She described how most of her role as a school counselor

was defined from the principal to the guidance department head. She talked about how her administrators relied on her for the counseling issues, “the good stuff,” but that the final decisions about her students were made by the school principal.

Lisa noted a difference in the relationship she observed as a graduate intern at the same school where she is now employed. She told the interviewer that she did not feel she had obtained the “equal footing” that the previous counselors held before they retired from her school. She used a metaphor of a totem pole and placed herself “in the middle.” She felt that she had not reached the “expert status” in her school yet, and this led her to say: “Sometimes the principals rely heavily on us; but, most of the times, they don’t.”

Although her expectations were different from her experiences as a counselor in the high school, Lisa believed that keeping the administrative issues separate from the guidance issues was positive. It provided a chance for her to “do more guidance stuff than if her principal relied on her for other things.” She noted the example of responsibility for developing the master schedule as a task for her department chair. This task was a low priority for Lisa, and she seemed relieved to yield its accountability to someone else.

Lisa’s expectations were to “be more accessible and to reach out to the children.” She found that her “days had different plans” that were not the same as her own professional goals.

theme: transition of school reform

Lisa entered the school counseling profession with hopes that counselors would do “touchy, feely goodie type things.” She told the interviewer that she and

her co-counselor were surprised by the time required of students to meet the new school reform measures around obtaining a high school diploma. Lisa was familiar with school reform discussions during her graduate school training. She reported the topic was related to the role of school counselors in terms of the “high stakes testing” and the different “political implications” for school divisions. Lisa also said that she continued to learn about school reform “on all levels at work, through the Internet, from the state Department of Education, and the local guidance coordinator.”

Lisa’s awareness of the National Standards for School Counseling Programs was limited to the information and reading material distributed to counselors in her district. She felt that she had not found the time to really “catch up with and keep the new information in perspective” yet.

theme: networking

With careful thought, Lisa talked about the “networking piece” of her graduate training and her current work. She believed that it really helped her to “have a relationship with or to know at least one other person in building.” Lisa said that she also might call a counselor in another school district when something “came across her desk that she could not believe” to find out if others had similar information. She reported that her class members from graduate school have “remained in close proximity” and that she valued these connections.

theme: non-counseling duties

Lisa spoke about keeping an “open door policy” in her office even during times when she must do other tasks that are not related to guidance and counseling. She found that in the high school where she works, “it’s a hugely administrative task

to be a school counselor.” She also said that there was “very little time to interact with the children in the capacity that she thought she was going to.” Lisa felt that the students had many more obligations than they used to have which prevented them from spending time with the school counselor. She gave the example of limited access to classrooms for guidance activities because of the “fast pacing teachers required to prepare their students for the SOL” end of course tests.

conceptual development level

Lisa scored 1.7 on the PCM. Her score was slightly over half way between Hunt’s (1975) Stage 1, Learning the ground rules which apply to everyone, and Stage 2, Learning about oneself and how one is distinct from generalized standards. Lisa’s written responses on the PCM indicated emerging signs of conflicting deference to authority. For example, Lisa’s response to the PCM stem, “When I am told what to do,” included that she would usually follow instructions. Lisa wrote that she would “protest” if she questioned the authority figure, “but, for the most part, I try to accommodate people.”

Lisa’s Summary

Lisa had been working in the role of a high school counselor for 5 years. She indicated a level of frustration over the short amounts of time available for her to “actually interact with the children in the capacity she had expected.” Lisa acknowledged that her first year was “very chaotic.” Priorities seemed clearer to her now.

While Lisa’s expectations differed from the realities of her work, she believed she was valued as a school counselor. She talked about the students who

needed her services in the area of academic counseling during these transition years for the graduating classes of 2004, 2005, and 2006. It was in this area of new diploma requirements and standards that Lisa found a link to school reform.

interpretation

Lisa's description of "middle of the totem pole" status in her role as a counselor may be attributed partly to her new experiences. She referred to her relationships with administrators in a respectful manner. Lisa envisioned that her role would emerge to a more collaborative place where she could offer increased consultation to teachers and students.

Her PCM score of 1.7 was reflected by her challenges to find a comfortable amount of structure and supervision in the role of a new counselor. Lisa valued her connections with other counselors. She counted on a strong network to assist her in dealing with current changes in public education.

Analysis of Participant #3 ("David")

Introduction

David was an African-American male counselor who worked in an urban elementary school. His previous work experience included both teaching gifted students at the elementary school level and mental health agency work. David had been working in his current school for the past 4 years. The school met provisional accreditation standards, but was not fully accredited at the time of the interviews.

David was 57 years old during the time of the interviews and had a total of 26 years of experience in public education. He had been working as a school counselor for the past 7 years. David had the Virginia Postgraduate Professional Teaching

Certificate with endorsements as an elementary school teacher, gifted education teacher, and elementary school counselor. David was a member of the Virginia Education Association (VEA).

Themes

The following 5 themes (with related subthemes) emerged from David's interviews: Pride in Accomplishments (meeting goals, interpretation of programs), Open Person (liked to help people, found extra time for students), Work with Parents (groups, workshops), Child Study Team (IEPs, counseling for special needs), and Non-Counseling Duties.

theme: pride in accomplishments

David told the interviewer that he was "very proud of the things he had done." He described how it had "taken some time" for him to understand his role and what he needed to do to manage his work. David said, "It didn't start off that way. It took me a while to sort of organize myself and get to know the routine of how I can have certain things." He noted that elementary school counselors are "on their own." Usually only one counselor was assigned to an elementary school. David believed he "had to learn quickly and organize his program to make sure it functioned adequately."

However, once he completed his "cumbersome first year," David believed he was more knowledgeable and had more confidence in himself as a counselor. He gave the example of interacting better with teachers. "Because of my confidence in knowing what I know, I can assist them with certain information." David continued

to talk about how he no longer has to do a lot more research in order to answer a question from a teacher because he was now “familiar with what they’re asking.”

David also liked the “congenial positive experience” in his relationship with the school principal. He stated, “She gives me room for my interpretation of programs. If I want to bring in special people for any given topic, like conflict resolution, I can bring people in and we can introduce different techniques to our faculty.”

theme: open person

David described himself as an “open person who liked to talk to people and help people as much as he could.” His decision to become a school counselor after many years of teaching grew from his part-time work experience in a mental health facility. David conducted intake interviews and observations there. He liked this kind of work, listening, and observing people.

David described group work as one of the highlights of his graduate school training. During his practicum experience, David managed a small caseload in a school. He told the interviewer that he “liked it very much.” David found the time for a number of child-oriented activities in his current school because he “pushed himself to find time.” Because of his open-ended attitude, he reported that he responded well to the demands of the job. He also said that most of the programs were what “the principal wanted him to do anyway.”

theme: helping parents

David told the interviewer that some of his colleagues told him they did not have a chance to organize parent workshops. For him, the work with parent groups

was so important that he would “have a little workshop on the side with parents during PTA night.” He wanted to make sure the parents of the students in his school had a good understanding of the new testing requirements, “the SOL’s, the Stanford Nine Achievement Test, and the other different tests we take.” David also included in his testing workshops an explanation about what the test results meant for promotion to the next grade level.

In addition to helping parents become aware of the new school reform measures that involve testing, David talked with them about “things to do with their children as far as helping them academically and socially.”

theme: child study team

For David, the child study team was a link to school reform. He talked about “increased testing accountability for all of us that are in a school environment.” David believed the “No Child Left Behind” initiatives and their state mandates led to further involvement for his work with parents whose children had special needs. David served on evaluation teams and IEP (Individualized Education Plan) committees. He told the interviewer that he sometimes had to write counseling goals on the IEP, depending on the needs of the student. For example, David stated, “We will usually write on the IEP that the child will see me two or three times a week for fifteen or twenty minutes.”

David described how he kept a listing every year of how many students were referred to the child study team and how many were found eligible for services. He found computer technology “helps a lot” with documentation and revisions of the IEPs.

David would like to see more outside agency services available for his students, especially those in the special education program. He told the interviewer he would also like future school reform measures to offer increased training in parenting skills for both behavioral issues and academic help.

theme: non-counseling duties

David did not anticipate the amount of “paperwork” he has found in his role as a school counselor. He defined paperwork to include maintenance of the student cumulative record, transfer of students, filing report cards, and filing other information. His wish was for “a person to do that sort of mundane work, that would just handle those type of things and free the counselors up to do other things.”

David contended that he did not feel “overwhelmed or pressured” as he believed some other counselors felt about the non-counseling tasks. He attributed this to having learned from his previous errors over the years, and to having a positive relationship with the principal. David estimated “sixty or seventy percent” of his time was spent on non-counseling, non-guidance duties.

conceptual development level

David scored 1.7 on the PCM. His score was slightly over half way between Hunt’s (1975) Stage 1, Learning the ground rules which apply to everyone, and Stage 2, Learning about oneself and how one is distinct from generalized standards. David’s written responses on the PCM indicated a strong respect for the role of parents. He wrote, “I think parents are the foundation of one’s family. They provide love, stability, and guidance that continues into adulthood.” David’s sensitivity to

the emotional needs of the parents of his students suggested emerging counselor behaviors in Stage B of Hunt's Levels.

David's Summary

David was an experienced educator of elementary school-aged children. He served in the role of school counselor for the past seven years. David spoke throughout the interviews about how he had learned to assess the needs of his particular setting and organized his work accordingly. He acknowledged that his expectations going into the school counseling profession did not anticipate the amount of "paperwork" required in reality to do the job.

David was positive in his views about the students, school reform measures, and his relationship with the principal. He felt valued and respected in his role as a counselor by parents and teachers. David was not as familiar with the new National Standards for School Counseling Programs as he would like. He told the interviewer that he rarely has the chance to attend the counselor professional association workshops and meetings. David believed the counselors association was a good resource for updated information about counseling standards and models and would like to become more involved.

interpretation

David's description of himself as "an open person" was demonstrated in his flexible approach to the multiple duties of an elementary school counselor. He seemed to have an emerging understanding of the many ethical dilemmas involved in serving the students and their parents, the administration, and increasing accountability requirements.

His experience with special needs children and their parents seemed to be the beginnings of David's link to school reform. He wanted fair assessment for all children.

David's PCM score of 1.7 supported indications that professional experience alone has no apparent effect on higher conceptual level scores (Thies-Sprinthall, 1980; Sprinthall, 1994). However, it was evident to the interviewer that David brought much care and empathy to his work as a school counselor on a consistent basis.

Analysis of Participant #4 ("Wendy")

Introduction

Wendy was a Caucasian female counselor working in a suburban middle school. She was 56 years old at the time of the interview. Wendy had served 19 years in her current school as one of two middle school counselors. She was a former teacher of English. Wendy was endorsed by the Department of Education with the postgraduate professional teaching certificate as a middle school English teacher, a middle school counselor, and an administrator. She had obtained a doctoral degree in educational administration within the past three years. The school where Wendy worked met the current accreditation standards in Virginia.

Wendy was involved in professional affiliations at the national, state, and local level. She held offices at the state and local level and was a member of the writing team that developed the standards of learning assessments as part of the school reform movement in Virginia.

Themes

The following five themes (with related subthemes) emerged from Wendy's interviews: Step Outside the Box (multi-level needs of children, family needs), Embrace National Standards (simply counselors, work with families, professionally astute), Need for Structure (part of student life, teamwork), Administrative Support (counseling time, collaborative relationship), and Non-counseling duties.

theme: step outside the box

Wendy realized during in her experiences that "children have a lot of things going on in their lives that play an important role in how well they learn." She was interested in helping students, but discovered working with the children extended to their families. Wendy told the interviewer, " I don't guess I realized that in the beginning. I thought it would just be focused on the children solely, but I found out that it extends further."

Wendy believed that she needed to "step outside the box" on a daily basis in order to help her students. She stated that children could not be treated "all alike" and that it took a "lot of energy and time to do what was necessary to help them succeed."

theme: embrace national standards

Wendy believed that the link to school reform for her came through a strong affiliation with the national school counselors association. She saw the need for uniform standards to protect the profession and "hoped these standards would catch on." Wendy told the interviewer that her expectations for counselors in the schools were to "be counselors; simple as that." She hoped that the majority of the counselor's time would be spent "counseling individually and in groups." She saw

the national standards as a tool to guide the role of counselors, allowing time for classroom guidance and working closely with families “receiving their trust.”

When asked about the future of school counseling, Wendy responded, “I hope we are not test givers. I’m afraid that we may be if counselors do not become more professionally affiliated and become empowered about what they’ve been trained to do.” She added a positive tone and said, “I think counselors will become professionally astute and embrace these national standards.”

theme: need for structure

Wendy described how she was more structured in her approach to school counseling at the beginning of her career. She talked about how she would “write out hall passes at the beginning of the day for people to come and see her.” What evolved, according to Wendy, was “more enmeshment with her grade level” students who now “come and go, drift into her room, and leave notes on her door.” Wendy told the interviewer that she now seemed to be into the “pulp of the school, right in the center of things.” She said, “I have become more of a part of their life. I am able to work with the teachers and I just kind of know what’s going on all of the time as opposed to being separated from them.” She attributed these changes in her approach to several factors.

Wendy believed the “middle school philosophy” had a lot to do with her becoming more central in the lives of the students. She described a team effort and a deep concern for each child. In addition, she believed she had accomplished an important connection between her counseling role and her school administrators.

theme: administrative support

Wendy called her relationship with her principal and assistant principals “a good collaborative relationship.” She used the words, “respect and appreciate each other’s jobs in the school” and “we are all on the same sheet of music.” Wendy also talked about central office support from the district’s director of guidance programs. She found support from the guidance director in “protecting us from testing and purposeless jobs that would take us away from counseling.”

Wendy expressed the fear that if counselors do not become empowered about what they are trained to do; principals might hire people that are not appropriately trained to fill counseling positions. Her professional plans included helping administrators understand school counseling programs better, using the national standards as a “pivotal hook.”

theme: non-counseling duties

Wendy acknowledged other jobs that counselors must perform sometimes. She strongly believed, however, that counselors should not be administrators. She gave examples of monitoring student smoking in the bathrooms, creating master schedules, coordinating standardized testing programs, and handling issues around student discipline. Wendy told the interviewer, “I don’t believe all counselors think that.” She has found that not all administrators were as supportive as the ones who work in her school at this time.

conceptual development level

Wendy scored 1.8 on the Paragraph Completion Method Test. Her emerging flexibility in the role of counselor was reflected in her written responses to the open-ended questions of the PCM. For example, “When I think about rules” rendered the

following (in part): “As school officials we must examine rules consistently to be certain that they do not become outdated or obsolete.”

In Wendy’s case, her responses placed her score on the PCM very close to Hunt’s Stage B. An individual at this stage would most likely follow a counseling model to a moderate degree, employing some different models in accordance with client differences. Wendy’s consistent thread during her discussion about the need to extend student counseling services to their families is an example of how she might expand upon the current proposed national counseling model.

Wendy’s Summary

Wendy was an experienced middle school counselor. She had obtained advanced training at the doctoral level in school administration. Wendy seemed to clearly distinguish the roles of school counselor and school administrator and used her knowledge of both roles as a link to school reform. She was very aware of how the national standards for school counseling programs needed to be conveyed to other counselors and to the principal in her school.

Wendy felt valued and respected in her role as a school counselor. She described her work as satisfying and was happy to report that she “spent her days counseling students.”

interpretation

Wendy’s enthusiasm about her training and practice at the middle school level demonstrated a deep level of commitment to the students she served. Her understanding of how her role provided an opportunity for her to expand the work with students to include their families reflected an abstract conceptual level. In

addition, Wendy's understanding about uniform standards for school counseling programs enabled her to collaborate extremely well, by her own report, with parents, teachers, and school administrators.

Wendy's account of how her many years of experience had changed her approach, but not the tasks, supported her increasing flexibility in the role of school counselor. She described her need for more structure in the beginning, leading to a collaborative, central role now with the ability to bend and flex as the need arises. In addition, Wendy seemed to interact with ease during the interviews with concern for the future of school counseling programs.

Analysis of Participant #5 ("Joe")

Introduction

Joe was a Caucasian male counselor who worked in an urban middle school. He was 53 years old at the time of the interview. Joe had worked 17 years in his current school. He was a teacher of history almost 10 years and has served as an eighth grade counselor for almost 22 years. Joe was endorsed by the Department of Education with the postgraduate professional teaching certificate as a teacher, counselor, and school administrator. His school has not yet met accreditation standards in Virginia.

Joe was involved with the local, state, and national counseling associations. In addition, he was a member of the association for counselors in group work.

Themes

The following four themes (with related subthemes) emerged from Joe's interviews: Twenty-first Century (more visibility, added "hip-hop," world of work),

Learning the Ropes (coordinate with teachers, child study referrals), Team Oriented (good relationships, mutual support), and Non-counseling duties

theme: twenty-first century

Joe believed changes were necessary in order to “meet the needs of kids as we move well into the twenty-first century.” He said, “We still have a lot of them that have kind of fallen by the wayside that we really don’t serve as well.” Joe believed that counselors needed to be “more visible, not so much in an office area, but more involved with kids in groups.” He felt that school counselors needed to be more attuned to the problems students bring, and be more available for an individualized type of counseling.

Joe told the interviewer that he was “old school with a little hip hop added.” He had served as a softball coach and liked interacting with the middle school students with activities they seemed to enjoy. Joe also talked about how important it was to provide adequate career education and prepare students for the “world of work.”

Computer technology and the increased testing requirements were two of the changes Joe noted during this time of school reform. Part of his role was to prepare middle school students for high school. He believed he accomplished this goal, for the most part, but did not “get to as many kids” as he would have liked due to time restraints.

theme: learning the ropes

Joe told the interviewer that “learning the ropes of the system” was his biggest challenge when he began his work as a school counselor. He discussed how

he had to learn how to talk with middle school students appropriately, how to coordinate with their teachers, and how to handle child study referrals. He believes things have been different since the onset of the guidelines of school reform, especially with the SOL assessments. However, Joe felt that his experience, awareness of what to do, and collaborating with parents and agencies apart from the school strengthened his effectiveness.

Joe learned about new guidelines through “talking with peers, through the media, journals, reading about legislation, and attending counseling clinics and workshops.” He stated, “I think we need to do a lot of changing in the public schools and in the United States to meet the needs of kids.”

theme: team-oriented

Joe used the words, “outstanding relationship” and “very good relationship and reputation” when he described his principal and two assistant principals. He believed he was “very team-oriented” and did not seem to mind staying late into the evening at his school to help with additional duties. The administrators at his school were all men. Joe found support in his role as a counselor from the principal. He described a mutual support that contributed to “good mutual relationships.” Joe told the interviewer that he did not always agree with everything the principal did, but was respectful when a decision had to be made. He believed the team needed to “be on the same page” and that teachers and students would “pick up on that” if they were not.

Joe believed that his expectations might have been “a little bit different” from those of his co-counselors. He described himself as “an active counselor” using both

direct and indirect strategies with children, “depending on the type of child and the type of situation.” When Joe consulted with a teacher about a student who was having a problem, he liked to see the student immediately, observe the student in class and with his/her peers. He told the interviewer that one of his “best aspects” was “developing very good rapport with his counselees.”

theme: non-counseling duties

Joe discussed how he approached non-counseling tasks as an opportunity to “build relationships.” For example, he acknowledged his “monitorial” duties such as lunch duty provided a chance for him to get to know the students in a social venue with their peers. He found the “amount of paperwork” was much more than he had expected. The development of the master schedule for courses and record management tasks fell solely to Joe. He hoped that uniform national standards might relieve counselors from some of the non-counseling duties in the future.

Joe said it was too easy for counselors to “get bogged down in schools.” He had not expected the “number of other things one would have to become accustomed to and quite good at in order to pursue the job.” He believed that if a counselor “knew how to do the other things, paperwork and referring,” that it could be “handled without becoming a burden.” Joe told the interviewer that he was able to do a large amount of group guidance and individual counseling.

conceptual development level

Joe scored 2.0 on the Paragraph Completion Method Test. His flexibility in the use of counseling strategies, depending on the situation and the student, placed him in Hunt’s (1977) Stage B (separates facts, opinions, and theories about

counseling). Joe seemed able to employ different models in accordance with client differences. He also seemed to demonstrate emerging signs toward a collaborative approach. When asked to respond to the written stem, “When I am told what to do...” Joe wrote that he “did not respond politely” when he was told in a negative or condescending way. “If a job needs to be handled, a simple request is all I need. I am a self-starter and highly motivated. I do not need to be told what to do.”

Joe's Summary

Joe was an experienced middle school counselor who had additional training in school administration and supervision. He was also a coach for the girls' softball team. Joe seemed devoted to his work and did not complain about long hours that included two non-guidance tasks: sole responsibility for the master course schedule and record management.

Joe described his preparation in counselor training as very satisfying. He highlighted group work, both group counseling and group guidance, as his favorite interests. He seemed to enjoy his work, demonstrating much energy for relating well to his students during his years in the counseling role.

interpretation

Joe's approach to school counseling seemed to indicate a devotion to helping students become successful, both academically and as productive citizens. He was open in his discussion with the interviewer about multi-level problem solving strategies. Joe valued team work and felt mutual support among the teachers, parents, and administrators in his school. It seemed that Joe handled more administrative tasks than might be expected in the school counseling role. However,

his willingness to promote uniform counseling standards might evolve toward a lessening of non-counseling duties for Joe in the future.

Joe's PCM score of 2.0 reflected his flexibility to handle demanding situations and seek the balance of time directly spent with students. He felt he was meeting his professional goals as a school counselor. Joe told the interviewer he had declined offers for a position as an assistant principal. He enjoyed his job and planned to continue learning new ways to do it better.

Analysis of Participant #6 ("Barbara")

Introduction

Barbara was a Caucasian female counselor who worked in a suburban elementary school. At the time of the interview, Barbara was 45 years old and had served seven years in her current setting. She had previous teaching and non-teaching experiences, as an elementary school teacher and with a social service agency. For the past 16 years, Barbara had been a school counselor, both at the middle school and elementary school level. She was endorsed at both levels with the Postgraduate Professional Teaching Certificate. Barbara had post-masters degree training in counseling. She had obtained an Educational Specialist Degree. Her current school met accreditation standards in Virginia.

Barbara was not involved with the counselor's professional association at this time. Her awareness about school reform measures came through her local guidance director.

Themes

The following four themes (with related subthemes) emerged from Barbara's interviews: Change in Perspective (more than academics, role changes), Prevention (national level standards, technology), Work Closely with Principal (give and take, refer for treatment), and Non-counseling duties.

theme: change in perspective

Barbara believed her perspective as a school counselor changed as she worked a number of years in one school. She told the interviewer that over the years she "learned what worked and what has not worked." Barbara stated that she did not have that viewpoint during her early years as a school counselor. She was learning then "as she went" and now felt much more effective in what she does. Barbara attributed this change to her own professional learning and to the stability of remaining in one place. She said, "Now I feel like I have learned a lot and it makes it easier. The one thing that is really different is my perspective."

When Barbara worked as an elementary school teacher before she obtained her credentials as a school counselor, she found there were more issues with children than "just academic needs." She wanted to spend more time talking with the students about personal issues. Her belief that the academic issues "went hand-in-hand" with the personal issues in terms of student progress led her to become a school counselor.

Barbara highlighted the experiential part of her graduate school training as the most important. She discussed how she practiced counseling skills "with other people who were in training and being observed through a one-way window." Barbara liked getting feedback from both the professors and her fellow students. She

also told the interviewer about her involvement in the formation of a counseling group that worked through group process and experiences together.

Barbara anticipated that she would pass along the experiential part of her training with students in her work as a school counselor. She “thought she would be doing a whole lot of group work with children and a good bit of individual work.” She told the interviewer that it “would probably be more in-depth work than what I found people expect from school counselors.”

The professional goals changed for Barbara over time. However, she continued to believe that she was meeting her goals. Barbara described a shift in her thinking as she saw her role change. She said, “I have shifted from thinking in terms of providing more individual and group counseling to really doing a large part of my work in the classroom.” She focussed her current role as a school counselor as one in which she provided children with skills that would help them to become “resilient in life.” Barbara believed that the guidance programs implemented in her school were now more classroom based. She reported that her students were then returning to the counseling office following classroom guidance sessions for more conversations that addressed individual needs or the need for small group work.

Barbara observed another change in the school counseling profession. She believed there was now more variety among counselors about expectations of the roles they would each fill.

theme: prevention

Barbara believed that having national standards for school counseling programs would increase the implementation of preventive programs for children in

schools. Her school district provided staff training in support of school reform measures for elementary school children. Barbara was expected to teach problem solving skills to her students, to teach them to pay attention to their feelings, and to give the students outlets for their feelings in the school environment. She discussed how she helped students “keep those big feelings from escalating to the point that they interfere with the educational process.”

Barbara believed the emphasis on prevention programs in her school had a mental health perspective that mirrored what was happening on a national level. She said, “My school district has gone to great lengths to take what is happening on the national level and personalize it for our particular district to the point of having essential cards that go home for each child at each grade level. The cards outline exactly what is going to be done through the guidance and school counseling program by grade level. This includes what the goals are for children at that age, what the developmental stages are, and so forth.” This curriculum was in two parts: one for the younger children in kindergarten through grade two, and the other for grade levels three through five.

Barbara seemed comfortable with the local guidelines and noted that these were based on the national standards for school counseling programs. She talked about how she had been asked to do “a whole lot more with technology” as well. Teachers and counselors in her school were communicating with parents through informational web site links and increasing web-based instruction.

theme: work closely with principal

Barbara used the words, “really good rapport” to describe her relationship with the faculty, staff, administration, and parents. She had only one administrator in her school, a female principal. Barbara reported that she and the principal “talk a lot about individual students.” She communicated her awareness of a student’s special need or circumstance to the principal and said, “She does the same for me.” Barbara talked about a “give and take” interaction with her principal that allowed them to work closely together.

Some examples of the projects that Barbara coordinated with the principal were: identification of gifted students, the child study process, and some of the special education committee work. In addition, she implemented a special grant with her principal that involved consultation with the teachers of the younger students

Barbara told the interviewer that the principal expected her to refer students who had “in-depth issues” to an outside agency. Non-school settings, such as a private practice or mental health agencies, were the customary resources. Barbara seemed comfortable with making referrals for students who needed them. Her initial expectation upon entering the counseling profession was different from this on-the-job reality. Time constraints and emphasis upon school-wide academic achievement did not allow Barbara to conduct more than a few “in-depth” counseling sessions with her students.

theme: non-counseling duties

Barbara found “a lot of limitations on school counselors.” She mentioned the time period constraints, other parts of the job that need tending, and a short-term

counseling expectation from administrators. In spite of the limitations, Barbara planned to continue working in the school setting in her role as a counselor.

conceptual development level

Barbara scored 2.0 on the Paragraph Completion Method Test. The “give and take” relationship she described with her school principal suggested a mutual dependence that tends to emerge in Hunt’s (1977) Stage B of conceptual complexity. In addition, Barbara seemed to enjoy a level of autonomy in her work and demonstrated flexibility with the change in her perspectives about school counseling roles over time.

Barbara wrote in response to the PCM question, “When I am told what to do... after reflecting on the other person’s reasoning, I might see it is better to follow their lead.” This response suggested evidence of self-reflection associated with Stage B in Hunt’s Levels of counselor behaviors as well.

Barbara’s Summary

Barbara had worked in her current setting as an elementary school counselor for seven years. She saw not only changes in the profession, but changes in her own perspective about her role. Barbara continued to look beyond the academic aspects of student performance. She seemed to have found a way to link school success to the developmental and emotional needs of her students. Her district’s curriculum for classroom guidance offered her a way to establish collaborative roles with teachers and the administration. She would follow the group guidance sessions with individual or small group counseling work when indicated.

Barbara seemed able to employ different models of counseling in accordance with student needs. She demonstrated sensitivity to the emotional needs of her students and to the needs of the school in general.

interpretation

Barbara's counselor performance at Hunt's Conceptual Stage B seemed to be well matched to her setting. She had different experiences during the first part of her sixteen years as a school counselor. During the past seven years, Barbara felt she was meeting her professional goals. She worked well with the students, parents, teachers, and the principal in her school. She felt valued and found support in her work as a counselor.

Because Barbara was aware that her perspectives had changed with her experiences, she did not seem anxious about school reform measures. She had adjusted her expectations to meet the realities of working within a framework that limited the amount of in-depth counseling services available to children in her school. However, she had not compromised her skills in meeting their developmental needs. Instead, she moved the venue to the classroom where she enjoyed a positive relationship with children and, in tandem with the teachers, promoted their success in school.

Analysis of Participant # 7 ("Denise")

Introduction

Denise was a Caucasian female counselor who worked in a suburban middle school. She was 49 years old at the time of the interviews. Denise had 21 years of experience as a counselor. Thirteen years were spent at her current middle school

where she served as chair of the guidance department. Denise had no previous teaching experience and was endorsed by the Pupil Personnel Certificate in guidance and counseling. Her school met the accreditation standards in Virginia.

Denise was a member of two professional associations. She had served in leadership roles (past president in another state) in the past.

Themes

The following four themes (with related subthemes) emerged from Denise's interviews: Team Player (acceptance, partners with administration), Prevention (character education, family changes), Ties to Community (focus on students, parent involvement), and Non-counseling duties.

theme: team player

One of the first things Denise told the interviewer was "I knew it wasn't going to be like they told me it was going to be." Her mother had been an educator for twenty years. Denise had known in advance that she would be asked to do things that "maybe were not a counseling role, but that's what made the school work." She knew that working for a school system meant becoming a "team player." Denise also attributed growing up in a military household with "a lot of discipline and emphasis on working together" to her cooperative attitude.

Denise seemed to accept her role as a school counselor with a realization that there were things beyond her control in her work to help children. She said, "It is amazing how what just maturity will do to a counselor." She described her journey as an "idealistic" first year counselor to the point where she now concluded that she could not "take all the problems home" and she was not going to "save all the

children.” She found a way to “make some type of impression or gain” in her current setting by becoming a partner with her principal and teachers.

Denise told the interviewer, “I feel like this school is unique in that we are truly considered a family.” She described how the principal discussed goals with her. Some of their partnership involved problem solving strategies and “a lot of listening.” Denise felt a strong relationship with the administration in her school.

During her 13-year tenure at this middle school, Denise seemed pleased with the teamwork approach. She thought the teachers felt a mutual support with the two counselors there that reflected what was best for the students. Because Denise believed counselors who came from a non-teaching background, as she did, needed to “prove themselves” on a teaching staff, she had worked hard to build a strong link with the faculty. She valued her acceptance and believed the teachers were aware of her strong support of their work.

theme: prevention

From the beginning of her career, Denise insisted that prevention must be central in her work as a school counselor. She stated, “I guess coming from a different angle (non-teaching), it gave me a little more perspective.” She organized peer helpers, taught a peer helper class, wrote grants and served on a state level. She wanted “things to grow and change.”

In her school district, the link to school reform was seen in the development of a consistent character education program across grade levels. Denise was not fully aware of the details of the national standards for school counseling programs. However, she agreed with the need for uniform guidelines. Denise saw “such a

discrepancy from county to county in what counselors were responsible for and what they were doing.” She felt that the national standards would remove some of the discrepancies and allow counselors to spend more time counseling in schools.

Denise believed that in today’s society counselors are essential in the schools. She noted changes in family stability that she has seen among the students in her school. “I think the majority of our children are coming from divorced, separated, multi-guardianship homes. I think we have to be realistic and address these concerns as a society.” Denise also wanted to see students receive more information about careers that included non-college and college options for students.

theme: ties to community

At this time in her work Denise talked about expanding the teamwork approach to develop “ties to the community.” In addition to the focus on her students and teachers, she wanted things to grow and change. Denise told the interviewer, “There are a lot of things within the school that we haven’t grown into yet; and there is still that potential for growth.” She felt she had the support of the staff to accomplish those things and that she was valued in her role as a counselor. Some examples Denise mentioned included using community resources to “make things happen for children” and “working within the professional organizations.”

Family and parental involvement was another tie to the community for Denise. She felt that school counselors had a difficult time getting parents to become involved. She believed that if the guidance department held a more active presence in the community, parent involvement at the school would be stronger.

theme: non-counseling duties

While initially becoming “frustrated by the paperwork,” Denise now saw other non-counseling tasks taking up time in her day. These tasks included attendance issues, special education coordination tasks, and “other hats” that prevented her from having enough counseling time. She wanted to see more school involvement with clinical counseling services where needed for students with problems in the “clinical range.” Denise felt that, sometimes, school counselors were asked to “cross boundaries” and that they needed more training to do “clinical work.” She wanted a clearer role identity and more collaboration with the school psychologist and the school social worker.

conceptual development level

Denise scored 2.2 on the Paragraph Completion Method Test. She emphasized the role of prevention in her description of her work and in her written responses on the PCM. For example, Denise wrote in part of the response to the PCM question, “When I am not sure...I stop and think. The situation usually did not develop overnight and it can’t be solved overnight. Sometimes things take longer to solve than they took to develop.”

Denise showed emerging counselor behaviors between Hunt’s (1977) Stage B and Stage C of conceptual development. She seemed to benefit from a lower level of environmental structure in her role of school counselor. She also set some self-directed learning goals in her efforts to establish more community/parental involvement at her middle school.

Denise’s Summary

Denise had worked in her current setting as a middle school counselor for 13 years. She was aware of many demographic changes in the population she served. Denise seemed to have found a link to school reform in supporting the team work required for school improvement. She was aware of the increasing high school graduation requirements and how these would challenge her middle school students as they moved to the high school level. One of her goals was to involve parents more fully in career education decisions.

interpretation

Denise seemed to demonstrate an awareness of broader issues and challenges that her middle school students faced. She drew upon her personal and professional experiences to create a strong bond with her principal, co-counselor, teachers, and students. Denise also seemed open to innovations and making appropriate adaptations, in accordance with her PCM score of 2.2. She tended to consider and weigh alternative strategies, suggesting higher levels of conceptual complexity and flexibility.

Analysis of Participant # 8 ("Elizabeth")

Introduction

Elizabeth was an African-American female counselor who worked in an urban high school. She had worked for 17 years as a school counselor in this school. The past 5 years Elizabeth served as guidance department chair. Her 35 years of experience working in schools included teaching science and mathematics on the secondary level. At the time of the interviews, Elizabeth was 55 years old. She was a member of the local and state counselors associations.

Elizabeth held the Virginia Post Graduate Professional Teaching Certificate with endorsements in elementary education, secondary guidance and counseling, and middle school mathematics and science. Her school was not fully accredited yet.

Themes

The following 4 themes (with related subthemes) emerged from Elizabeth's interviews: Doing My Best (helping kids, counseling community), Teamwork (successful school, test taking skills), Future expectations (data information, parental involvement), and Non-counseling duties.

theme: doing my best

Elizabeth decided she wanted "to do more for students than she could do in the classroom" after teaching for about 5 years before becoming a school counselor. She found that her students experienced many "personal problems" that needed guidance. Elizabeth told the interviewer that students came to the teacher as "their mother, their doctor, their parent, their counselor, and everything all at once." She believed she would be able to address these needs better in the role of school counselor.

Elizabeth acknowledged that she was "not a perfectionist," but wanted her work to be "something she could be proud of and done right." She wanted to convey this idea of "personal growth to learn, not to just settle for just doing something, but doing your best at all times" to her students. She talked about situations where students had been homeless and abused. Elizabeth explained that she was hindered in the classroom from helping children with these issues. Her goal was to help people, and counseling offered a way for Elizabeth to be able to "meet the needs of

kids.” She believed the best way to reach her goal was to join the “counseling community.”

theme: teamwork

“Everyone in a school setting should work as a family, as a team,” Elizabeth said. She believed that working together as a team would “make things happen” in her school. It seemed important to her that the high school should be a “successful school.” There were two main approaches Elizabeth described as contributing to the necessary teamwork. The first was to have an excellent relationship with the principal and the administration. She believed she did. This was followed by her participation in the SOL Assessment Program to improve test-taking skills. In order for her high school to meet the current measures of school reform and for students to meet the requirements for graduation, a school-wide effort was required to prepare students to pass selected SOL End-of-Course tests.

Elizabeth told the interviewer that she felt she was meeting her goals as a school counselor right now. She worked as guidance department chair “very hard to make sure that the department ran smoothly.” Her main concerns were “not enough back-up from administration,” not enough “parental support,” and limited “resources to make the program work well.”

theme: future expectations

Elizabeth saw the future of her role as a school counselor as similar to now, with some changes. She talked to the interviewer about how “school counselors will have a greater part in going into the classroom and trying to encourage students to do

better with their test taking skills.” She believed that counselors will be using more data and need to keep up with more data-related information than in the past.

Elizabeth also believed there would be a need for more high school counselor involvement in the child study process. She told the interviewer that “some parents will try to get their students into special education (services) as a means of getting around the new diploma requirements.” She felt that increasing parental involvement with counselors at the high school level would be needed to prevent misunderstandings around school reform measures.

Elizabeth viewed the national standards for school counseling programs as a way to clarify counseling goals and expectations. She believed uniform standards would be helpful in areas of a student’s personal growth, preparation for the “world of working and life itself” as well as in the academic areas. Most of her awareness about school reform measures came from newsletters from her district guidance coordinator, professional organizations, the news media, and discussions with colleagues.

theme: non-counseling duties

Elizabeth did not anticipate the amount of “different administrative duties” that made up much of her workload. She found that excessive paperwork “takes away from the things I want to do.” She mentioned student record management, training computer operators, and fulfilling requests from outside agencies for student information as some of the demands on counseling time. She suspected that her frustrations around the non-counseling tasks might lead to her early retirement from school counseling.

conceptual development level

Elizabeth scored 2.0 on the PCM. Her score fell within Hunt's (1977) Stage 2, Learning about oneself and how one is distinct from generalized standards. Her written responses on the PCM suggested an emerging autonomy. When asked to respond to the statement, "When someone does not agree with me..." Elizabeth wrote (in part), "I try to find a solution where we can get a mutual understanding of the problem. I feel that there is no one way to resolve a disagreement." Elizabeth's struggle to balance the administrative/clerical parts of her role with the needs of her students seemed to lead to her expanded awareness of issues in her school. Her counselor behaviors seemed to emerge within Stage B (Hunt, 1977), with evidence of self-reflection and appropriate adaptations.

Elizabeth's Summary

Elizabeth had worked in her current setting for 33 years. She maintained a positive attitude as she talked about the excitement she still held for her work in a place that was the setting for her own high school graduation many years ago. She observed how the demands of her role increased with changes in the community. Elizabeth expressed some regret that she did not have the time to conduct more group sessions and more activities around study skills and career planning. She wanted to offer more available counseling times for her students and their parents.

interpretation

Elizabeth seemed keenly aware of the challenges that her high school students faced. In addition, she seemed sensitive to the demands of a large urban high school with safety issues, limited resources, and little parental involvement.

What emerged in listening to Elizabeth's frustrations was her strong sense of caring and unrelenting commitment. She presented a stable role model for her co-counselors, teachers, and students.

Analysis of Participant # 9 ("Terry")

Introduction

Terry was a 33 year-old Caucasian female counselor who worked in a suburban high school. She had 7 years of experience as a school counselor, both on the middle school and secondary school level. This was her first year in the current setting. Terry was not a teacher before entering the school counseling profession. She was endorsed with the Pupil Personnel License in Virginia. Terry was serving as department chair for the first time this year in her school. At this time, she was not a member of any professional associations. Her school had not met accreditation standards yet.

Themes

The following four themes emerged (with related subthemes) emerged from Terry's interviews: Talking with Kids (solve problems, communicate with parents), Before Testing (tracking credits, SOL's), Interacting with Administrators, and Non-counseling duties.

theme: talking with kids

Terry decided the role of school counselor would be a "better fit" for her in graduate school than teaching. She told the interviewer that her decision was based largely upon her experiences with a family member who needed special education

services. She had observed “things that should have been done that weren’t” and wanted to be trained to help students with special needs.

Terry liked the graduate course work that involved practical experiences, both with individual students and with groups. She expected that she would be “talking with kids all day long” in her work. She also anticipated that she would be able to help students, teachers, and administrators “solve problems or issues from day to day.” One of the “surprises” of the reality in the school counseling role for Terry was the need to communicate with parents. She explained that her appearance led parents to think she was much younger than she really was. She believed that she experienced occasional problems in communicating with the parents of her students because they did not “take her seriously.”

theme: before testing

Terry began her work as a school counselor just before the onset of the testing requirements associated with school reform measures. She currently served as the testing coordinator in her school. Terry told the interviewer, “It’s difficult to at the same time be involved with all the testing that goes on during the school year and also to be there for the students as much as I should.”

She described how during her first year as a counselor, she had time for more involvement in the daily activities of her students and met with them more often. She felt more relaxed a counseling role, stating that this year she was “feeling the stress of testing on students, parents, and herself.”

theme: interacting with administrators

Terry described her principal as “very willing to do just about anything to help us make sure our program is serving the needs of the students.” She had “a lot of interaction” with the female principal and the administrators. Terry believed the interactions were open and positive. She was able to consult with her principal about “issues that affect the guidance and school counseling department and how they may effect students.”

theme: non-counseling duties

Terry felt like the high school setting required “a lot more time spent doing paperwork type things.” She talked about “tracking credits” for each student, filing testing information, “especially with the SOL’s now,” and matching diploma types with student programs of study. Terry found herself in the dual role of counselor and director of programs. She believed the work was the most difficult because she “did not have a lot of help in helping the students and dividing the time.” At the time of the interviews, Terry felt her non-counseling tasks required more time than counseling students.

conceptual development level

Terry scored 1.7 on the PCM. This result fell slightly higher than half way between Hunt’s (1977) Stage 1 and Stage 2 conceptual levels. Terry wrote in response to the PCM question about rules, “When working in education, you begin to learn that things are not always black or white. Sometimes you have to work in that gray area, especially in the counseling profession.” Responses at this level suggest that an individual is interested in behaving in a socially admissible manner with deference to authority, but is beginning to recognize and evaluate alternatives.

Terry's Summary

Terry was in her seventh year as a school counselor. She had additional duties this year as department chair in her high school. Terry's expectation that she would spend most of her day counseling students was changing. She believed she was more involved with the daily activities of students before the onset of the statewide testing program. Terry's awareness of school reform began in her graduate training. She continued to receive information from her district's guidance coordinator on a regular basis. Terry was not familiar with the national standards for school counseling programs at the time of the interviews.

interpretation

Because Terry had worked as a counselor at both the middle school and the high school level, she discussed comparisons of her role in each setting. She believed there were more opportunities for direct involvement with the students at the middle school level. Terry felt she was able to do more of what she thought a counselor would do when she worked at the middle school. She seemed to demonstrate a level of autonomy and self-direction about her work at that level.

Terry believed she was meeting her professional goals, and was pleased to have been named department chair during her first year at the high school. As a young counselor, Terry felt challenged in her role with the parents of adolescents. She seemed to demonstrate a strong commitment to improving her work with the parents of the high school students. One of her strengths seemed to be her ability to relate her previous experiences from her family, where her sibling had special education needs.

Terry seemed to need more structure and support in the new setting, which was reflected in her PCM score of 1.7. She indicated that school counselors needed more training in working with families of special needs students.

Analysis of Participant # 10 ("Olivia")

Introduction

Olivia was a 44 year old, Caucasian, female counselor working in an urban high school. She had been a teacher of mathematics and science for ten years before she obtained a masters degree in school counseling. Olivia had been a high school counselor for ten years, serving in three different high schools. At the time of the interviews, she was beginning her third year in the current high school. Because it was a small school, Olivia was the only counselor there. The school met accreditation standards in Virginia.

Olivia had the Collegiate Professional Teaching Certificate. She was in the process of obtaining a doctoral degree in gifted education. She held offices in the local and state counselors associations and was involved with various committees.

Themes

The following four themes (with related subthemes) emerged from Olivia's interviews: Flexible Roles (collegial, still developing), Team Decision Making (systems approach, agency referrals), Technology (career inventories), and Non-Counseling duties.

theme: flexible roles

Olivia's work in the urban school setting was in the smaller schools throughout her career. She taught gifted adolescents and wanted to obtain a graduate

degree that would allow her to keep the teaching component and deal with emotions and problem solving. She liked to facilitate group counseling with adolescents in the smaller sized high schools. Olivia said during the interviews that she had “been in places where if you want something and it’s a part of your program, you can ask for it.” She had seen a lot of flexibility because of the kind of schools in which she worked .

One of the highlights of her training was the combination of theory and application. Olivia told the interviewer that she had a “small school perspective” that gave her a fairly “realistic picture of some of the issues students and their families would have.” She felt fortunate to have worked with principals who were also flexible. “I think some of the people that have been educators in larger school settings sometimes do not see the flexibility,” Olivia said. “I like wearing the teacher hat on occasion or staying involved with school based decision making. I have always been in schools where my role is a school counselor plus part of a team or decision making body.”

Olivia felt challenged this year to find time to do group work. She told the interviewer she was “still developing” in this, her third year at the current school.

theme: decision making

Olivia had experience with organizing a community based guidance advisory team. She felt good support from her principal and called their relationship, “collegial.” Olivia said her principal would be a “great school psychologist or school counselor.” She described her as “very effective” and “she believes in collaboration.” Olivia said that she had been fortunate by working with

administrators who were “student focused seemed to be more understanding of the needs of the guidance program.”

Olivia’s goals included providing better service as far as referrals and running a more effective program. She noted, “Their (student) world is changing so much. I like the systems kind of approach to things.” Olivia gave examples of helping kids move forward both personally and academically, addressing truancy issues, and meeting needs from a lot of different perspectives. She liked team work and team decision making and would like to see that role with agencies in her community.

theme: technology

Olivia had hopes for greater access to more technology programs, “particularly for career inventories or learning style assessments” with quick feedback and information. She wanted to expand options for her students to include choices other than two and four year college programs.

theme: non-counseling duties

Olivia saw the link to school reform through her test coordinator tasks. She talked about how “invisible” the guidance and counseling role seemed to be in the school reform literature she had read for high schools. She said, “Nothing, even in any of the accreditation information early on, and I kept up with everything...addressed guidance and counseling.” Olivia felt many of her non-counseling tasks related to the Standards of Learning Assessments. She felt her principal was “very understanding about her concerns about records and clerical things.” She was hopeful that soon some of the tasks would be “sent out to someone else to handle” so that counselors can do their jobs more effectively.

conceptual development level

Olivia scored 2.5 on the PCM. This score was half way between Hunt's Stage 2 and Stage 3. Olivia's responses suggested trends towards Stage 3, applying self-anchored dimensions to an empathetic understanding of other persons and differences between them (Hunt, 1977). Her counseling behaviors approached Stage C, as demonstrated by her flexibility. Olivia seemed articulate in analyzing her own counseling in both content and feeling.

Olivia wrote in response to the PCM question, "When I am criticized...I listen to the other perspective. I attempt to explain my position/perspective/decisions. I work towards solution-finding. I like to process what went wrong in order to make it better next time."

Olivia's Summary

Olivia was in her tenth year as a school counselor. She helped to develop guidance programs in two small high schools in an urban school district. Her expectations were being met as a school counselor at the time of the interviews. She attributed this to "coming from a family of educators" and knowing how important team work would be. Olivia had seen good administrative support for her counseling programs with adolescents. She sometimes felt the paperwork was intimidating and overwhelming, but, nonetheless, maintained an excellent relationship with students, parents and faculty.

interpretation

Olivia seemed to have integrated the relationship between theory and practice. She felt valued in her work, both as a part of the decision-making team in

her small high school and as a counselor. Her behavior suggested conceptual levels that were close to Stage C, the highest of Hunt's levels.

Olivia's concern about the future role of school counseling during school reform was noted. She did not want to see the counseling part become invisible due to excessive testing duties.

In conclusion, chapter 4 has described the findings of this study. The perceptions and experiences of each of the ten participants were addressed in this chapter. In addition, the within-case analysis included the participants' scores on the Paragraph Completion Method Test (PCM) along with a description of the assigned stages and examples of written responses.

Chapter 5 will describe a cross-case analysis, including the comparison of themes across all cases and the interpretation of the results.

CHAPTER FIVE

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

Chapter Four described the findings of the study, presenting an analysis of each participant. The within-case analysis included the participants' individual conceptual development levels and a brief researcher summary for each case. Chapter Five presents a cross-analysis of themes and the researcher's interpretation of the results. This chapter will also describe the cross-case analysis in which school counselors, at various stages of conceptual development, perceived their roles and relationships during the time of school reform. The themes emerging from the cross-case analysis will be referred to as interpretive themes.

Overview of Analytical Procedure

Cross-case analysis for this study consists of themes that occurred across participants. The procedure used to conduct the cross-case analysis began with an examination of all the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the within-case analysis of each of the ten participants. To qualify as an interpretive theme, the theme had to emerge in at least three within-case analyses. In the chapter four, the language of the participants' was used to present the themes. In this chapter, interpretive theme and sub-theme titles are those of the researcher.

In this study, themes and sub-themes were identified at three levels: elementary, middle, and high school. Because of the exploratory nature of the

investigation, analyzing the data across the levels called for some re-ordering at the level of sub-theme findings. There seemed to be no important differences among the grade levels in the interpretive themes.

The interpretive themes that emerged across the levels are Commitment, Balance of Tasks, Responding to Families, Shared Roles in Reform, and Accountability. Table 5.1 illustrates findings that were present in the interviews, which emerged to these five interpretive themes. A summary description of the cross-case demographic information follows Table 5.1 to add clarity to the participants' settings.

Table 5.1
Interpretive Themes

Participant	Commitment to Counselor Role	Balance of Tasks	Responding to Families	Shared Roles in Reform	Accountability
Sheila (E)	Helping Meeting Goals Expectations	Counseling/ Decision Making/NGA	Continuity Collaboration	Identity Protection/Ethics Collaborate with Teachers; Partnership with Principal	Multi-level Program Evaluation School Improvement
Lisa (H)	Liking Children Expectations	Prioritize Student Needs/NGA	Informing	Meeting Diploma Requirements	High Stakes Testing/Graduation
David (E)	Listening Meeting Goals Expectations	Academic/Social Needs/NGA	Parent Groups	Testing Workshops Collaborate with Teachers and Principals	Record Management Test Results
Wendy (M)	Learning Process Meeting Goals Expectations	Individual/Group Counseling/NGA	Multi-level Needs/ Involvement	Assisting Administrators Collaborate with Teachers; Partnership with Principal	Need for Program Standards Program Evaluation School Improvement
Joe (M)	Strong Presence Meeting Goals Expectations	Problem Solving/Groups/ NGA	Parental support	Uniform Standards Collaborate with Teachers and Principals	Academic and Career Program Plans
Barbara (E)	Prevention Meeting Goals Expectations	Role Changes/Goals/ NGA	Emotional Support	Collaborative Roles with Teachers Partnership with Principal	Classroom Guidance District Guidance Program Curriculum
Denise (M)	Prevention Meeting Goals Expectations	Teamwork/ Counseling/NGA	Changes in Family Structure Challenges	Transition to high school Collaborate with Teachers and Principals	School-wide Improvement Program Evaluation

Elizabeth (H)	<i>Caring Expectations</i>	Teamwork/Test Preparation/NGA	Needy	Tracking SOL's <i>Collaborate with Teachers and Principals</i>	End-of-Course Tests (SOL Assessments)
Terry (H)	<i>Problem Solving Meeting Goals Expectations</i>	Counseling/Assessment/NGA	<i>Challenges</i> Special needs	Testing coordinator <i>Collaborate with Teachers; Partnership with Principal</i>	Testing Requirements Special Education
Olivia (H)	<i>Flexibility Meeting Goals Expectations</i>	Counseling/Consulting/NGA	Sensitive to Family Changes	Invisibility of counselor <i>Collaborate with Teachers; Partnership with Principal</i>	Systems Approach <i>Program Evaluation School improvement</i>

Note: E represents elementary school counselor; M represents middle school, and H represents high school. NGA represents non-guidance activities. Subthemes are represented in italics.

Demographic Overview of Participants Across Cases

To assist with clarity in the table, findings themes and subthemes were selected where counselors at all three grade levels represented them. The subthemes are written in italics. In this study, four counselors worked in high schools, three in middle schools, and three in elementary schools. Three counselors had previous counseling experiences in schools with grade levels different from their current assignment. Only their current assignment was used in this study.

Two counselors who were selected for the sample withdrew from the study before the initial interviews were conducted. One elementary school counselor was on a leave of absence from her work due to family leave. One middle school counselor accepted another position in a school district that was not a part of the sampling site.

In the group of ten participants, two were male and eight were female. Their racial/ethnic backgrounds consisted of six Caucasians and four African-Americans. Five participants worked in an urban setting and five worked in suburban settings. Six participants worked in schools where the principals were the same gender as the counselors. The average age of the participants was 47.8 years. The average

number of years in practice as a school counselor was 14.8 years. Eight of the ten participants were affiliated with professional counseling organizations. Seven of the participants had worked as teachers before going into the counseling profession. Five of the counselors worked in schools that met the standards for accreditation at the time of the interviews.

Interpretive Themes

Theme: Commitment to Counselor Role

All ten participants talked about what drew them to the school counseling profession. In reviewing their comments, the theme of commitment to helping children emerged with intensity across the interviews. There seemed to be a strong presence of empathy and an understanding of multi-leveled needs that students bring to a school setting. All ten counselors expressed willingness to help students beyond classroom boundaries. Each of them talked about how important it was to help students become successful with academics, personal relationships, and with career development.

The researcher noted that two of the ten participants expressed a mild degree of dissatisfaction in their jobs. Lisa and Elizabeth, both high school counselors, talked about how difficult it was for them to find enough time to provide individual and group counseling services. Wendy, Sheila, and Elizabeth believed that uniform counseling program standards would assist school counselors with their commitment to improving student achievement. They talked about how school counselor identity would be protected by the standards. Only Lisa seemed less than

convinced that the adoption of uniform standards would facilitate a change in her school.

Terry and Denise had not been apprised of the 'new national model for counseling programs at the time of the interviews. However, they both noted how strong administrative support assisted them in implementing the counseling programs in their schools.

Academic achievement, personal/social development, and career development were noted in the literature as the three broad content areas in guidance and counseling program standards (Dahir, Sheldon, & Valiga 1998). Eight of the ten participants, as indicated, were fully informed about the National Standards for School Counseling Programs. Each counselor reflected multiple strands in her/his discussions about helping students. These reflections were included by Terry and Denise who had not yet received the national standards information.

Terry talked about implementing problem solving strategies with her students who came from diverse backgrounds in a suburban district. Denise, a middle school counselor, and Barbara, an elementary school counselor, both addressed prevention as a primary counseling tool. All ten counselors insisted that their commitment to helping school children took priority over the many other tasks required of them.

One of the counselors, Olivia, was concerned that national school reform strategies might ignore the role of the school counselors' commitment to balance student academic performance with life skills. Olivia's comments reflected the need

for counselor flexibility in a changing society. The increasing emphasis on student test results concerned Olivia. She did not want to see the important role of counseling become invisible due to excessive testing duties.

Meeting goals emerged as an interpretive subtheme in the overarching theme of commitment. Another subtheme that emerged was the reality of the school counseling role versus the expectations. It was in the context of commitment that these two subthemes emerged. The counselors did not imply or state dissatisfaction with their positions in the schools. Even when talking about struggles or challenges in helping children, all of the participants planned to remain in their current roles. In a similar way, all of the participants of this study remained committed to the school counseling profession even after they discovered how different the realities of the job were from their expectations during training.

Meeting Goals

Nine of the ten participants believed they were meeting their professional goals in the role of school counselor. Lisa, who had the least number of years in practice among the participants, expressed the most frustration with her current situation. In the high school where Lisa worked, reform measures around graduation requirements seemed to require more time than she had expected.

Sheila, who had the most number of years in practice among the participants, expressed the most satisfaction in her work. Sheila talked at length about how she has seen the results of her work over the years. David, the oldest participant (age 57), also talked about how proud he was of what he had done in his role of school counselor. Barbara reported that her perspective had changed from how she viewed

her role in the earlier years. She told the interviewer that she felt much more effective in her work at this time, meeting new goals as her viewpoint changed.

Reality vs. Expectations

All ten of the counselors expressed how the realities of their work were very different from their initial expectations. All of them talked about the complexities of their first year. For example, David called his first year, “cumbersome.” Lisa referred to a “very chaotic” first year. Wendy described how structured she needed to be in order to complete all the tasks she faced when she began her role as a middle school counselor.

While each counselor reported varying ways in which she/he adjusted to the multi-task role requirements, the subtheme of a difficult first year was constant in all of the interviews. The responses were similar for those counselors who had previous teaching experience and for those who did not.

In addition, all ten participants acknowledged that the reality of the work continued to change with the implementation of school-wide reform strategies. Shelia and Wendy’s comments supported the strongest need for uniform school counseling standards to protect the profession and uphold counselor identity. Sheila believed that expectations for school counselors to provide counseling should remain high. Wendy told the interviewer that her expectations were for counselors to “be counselors; simple as that.” Denise found the changes in the family structure of her students deemed the counseling role essential in meeting the students’ needs in today’s schools.

The ways in which the participants of this study balanced their many tasks in the schools led to the findings in the second interpretive theme. The nature of the relationships with school administrators, parents, teachers, students and other non-school agencies were found in this theme called, Balance of Tasks.

Summary Interpretation

In summary, six of the ten participants expressed concern that their time reserved for helping students might be challenged by the intense focus upon test results. All ten participants articulated the following attributes as part of their commitment to the profession: helping, liking children, listening, understanding the learning process, prevention, caring, problem solving, and flexibility. Their specific description of these attributes led to the intensity of the commitment theme. What seemed important to the counselors was not their own job satisfaction, but how they found ways to assist students.

Theme: Balance of Tasks

All ten participants talked about non-counseling duties or NGA's (non-guidance activities). In this study there were no principals who kept non-guidance activities away so those counselors could focus solely on guidance programs and direct services to students. Non-guidance tasks included administrative, clerical, or student supervision activities. Larger assignments, such as the responsibility for the implementation of schoolwide testing programs, were found in six of the ten cases in this study.

Gysbers and Henderson (2002) defined non-guidance tasks as those that do not fit into the comprehensive guidance program mission or those that do not

require a master's degree to carry out. The cross-case findings revealed that all ten counselors expected to participate in non-guidance activities somewhat. No differences were reported by the participants concerning the gender/race pairing of the counselor and the principal. The challenge seemed to emerge with how to balance the use of time to include the components for quality guidance system delivery. This issue was out of balance with the initial expectations of all ten participants. None of them anticipated the amount of time non-guidance activities would require.

Joe was the only participant who viewed the non-counseling monitoring tasks, such as lunch duty, as an opportunity to build relationships with students. At the middle school level, he talked about the importance of getting to know students in a social venue with their peers. The other nine participants had developed creative ways to manage time for direct services around non-guidance activities. Two participants, Elizabeth and Sheila, admitted to daily work schedules that stretched into the evening hours on a regular basis. Their commitment seemed unwavering.

Two subthemes were found in the Balance of Tasks theme: 1)Administrative Agreement with System Support and 2)Guidance/Counseling Program Components. This theme and its subthemes reflected the relationships of the participants with their principals and assistant principals. In addition, the nature of the school counseling programs across the grade levels of the participants' schools was reflected in this theme.

Administrative Agreement with System Support

In this study nine of the ten participants expressed they felt valued by their administrators. When the professional skills of school counselors are recognized and put to good use, the counselors are respected as having a special professional identity within the school (Gysbers & Henderson, 2002). However, when an imbalance exists between the way school counselors are used, such as quasi-administrators, clerks, or monitors, they are perceived as non-professionals. Coupled with the imbalance between their expectations and the reality of the work noted by all ten counselors, the relationships with the principals emerged as very important in the interviews. Only one participant, Lisa, talked about her need for administrative support for counseling time.

Olivia, Sheila, Wendy, and Barbara talked about partnerships with their principals that allowed for flexibility in roles and counselor involvement in program decision making. These counselors believed their principals shared a foundation similar to theirs about beliefs and commitment to students. Joe, David, Denise, Terry, and Elizabeth also described a positive working relationship with their principals that suggested satisfaction with the amount of time available for counseling.

The cross-case findings suggested that the five counselors who worked in non-urban settings felt slightly more support from their school district's central administration than the urban-based counselors did. These counselors (Wendy, Barbara, Denise, Elizabeth, and Terry) talked about how helpful their local guidance coordinator was in protecting their counseling roles in the schools. However, local district support for counselors seemed to be present and important to all ten

participants, particularly when facing the changes in school-wide organization brought about during school reform.

Guidance/Counseling Program Components

All ten participants talked about how they integrated the components of what they believed essential to the school counseling programs in their schools. Terry, Lisa, and Elizabeth used assessment results to provide academic counseling to high school students. Olivia emphasized her consulting role with teachers. Joe used group work to facilitate problem-solving skills with his middle school students. Barbara described group guidance sessions in the elementary classrooms of her school.

The school counselors in this study had diverse training backgrounds and were at different levels of counseling skills and program management techniques. Five basic roles were seen in the cross-case analysis. These were Guidance, Counseling, Consultation, Coordination, and Program management.

Summary Interpretation

In summary, a cross-case analysis of program components revealed that teamwork prevailed in the Balance of Tasks interpretive theme and subthemes. The teamwork consisted of participating in school decision making for Sheila, Olivia, Elizabeth, Denise, and Terry. For David, Joe, Lisa, Barbara, and Wendy, teamwork was reflected in their collaborative roles with teachers and parents. For all ten participants, nothing seemed missing in their efforts to provide a comprehensive school counseling program.

In spite of an imbalance between anticipated school counselor roles and actual function, nine of the ten participants seemed pleased with the way they managed the inclusion of effective, comprehensive guidance and counseling services in their schools. All ten believed teamwork with administrators and teachers was essential for their programs to work well.

Theme: Responding to Families

The interpretive theme, Responding to Families, emerged with intensity in seven of the ten participant interviews. In chapter four, using the participants' wording, the concept of involving families was listed as a major theme or subtheme in seven cases. With the remaining three participants, working with parents was embedded in other themes, described by Denise, for example, as "ties to the community." All of the participants agreed that parental involvement is essential for counseling programs to be successful. Two subthemes that emerged in this cross case theme are: Connections and Challenges. The subthemes are discussed below in those cross-cases where the intensity was the strongest. Nine of the ten participants reported ways of responding to the changing needs of families. It is within this context that the connections and challenges emerged.

Connections

Barbara believed that involving parents increased the chances that the skills she taught in the elementary school guidance curriculum would be reinforced at home. Sheila described the long-term relationships she developed with families whose children completed kindergarten through fifth grade in her school. David

expressed diligence in designing programs for parents to help with study skills and understanding test results.

Wendy expressed concern about how middle school parents seemed to be less involved with their children at school. A cross-case analysis revealed that the need for parental involvement was seen by the participants as important at all three levels. The challenge to involve parents when students reached the upper grades was reported as increasing by Terry, Elizabeth, and Denise.

Challenges

Terry talked about the challenges she faced as a younger counselor working with parents of older students. Her concern was that her recommendations to parents might not be taken seriously, due to her youthful appearance. Terry's experience with a sibling with special needs offered her a link to the families of her students. Many of the students in her school received special education services.

For Denise, the challenge in her school was obtaining parent involvement. She believed there was a potential for growth in this area for her work as a counselor in a middle school. Elizabeth talked about how increasing parental involvement at the high school level would be important in the explanation of school reform requirements. She wanted to offer more counseling time to parents around issues of special education and career planning.

Summary Interpretation

Parent involvement, including responding to parents who were critical of the guidance programs or who were involved with the school on a minimal level, was perceived as important by all ten participants. As members of the support staff in

the schools, much of what the counselors did to promote student achievement required parent involvement.

Some of the counselors reached out to parents on an individual basis, such as working directly with a parent to correct an identified student need. Some of them conducted parent workshops or parent groups for information and support around testing issues. While the strategies for involving parents varied among the participants, all of them seemed to share the goal for productive relationships with the families of their students. All of the participants valued the parents' insight in the area of problem solving on behalf of their children.

Theme: Shared Roles in Reform

In the context of the theme, Shared Roles in Reform, the participants reflected a critical opportunity for advocating comprehensive guidance programs in their schools. Sheila, Wendy, and Olivia's interviews emerged as the strongest in terms of seeking counselor identity protection during the time of school reform. These three counselors believed that the consequences of a lack of advocacy on behalf of their comprehensive guidance programs were profound. Agreement was found in all the participants about their need for strong relationships with the principals and teachers during the time of major changes in public education.

In this context two subthemes emerged in the Shared Roles Reform theme: Partnerships with Principals and Collaborative Work with Teachers. Barbara's comments reflected the most intensity around a working partnership with her principal.

Olivia's comments reflected the most concern around the counselor's role in school reform. She noted that in the school reform literature that she had read, there was very little mention, if any, of how the school counselor's role supported the reform measures. Olivia was concerned that if counselors were not involved with shared decision-making in the schools, the focus for comprehensive guidance programs might be minimized.

In a similar way, Wendy expressed concern for the need for consistent school counseling programs in her district as schools face changes in their political and administrative structure. She and Sheila believed that uniform school counseling standards would offer this kind of consistency and protection for the counselors' role.

Partnerships with Principals

Barbara talked about a "give and take" interaction with her principal that allowed them to work closely together. When there was a special circumstance with a student, Barbara communicated the student's needs to the principal. She told the interviewer how she and the principal talked often about individual students.

Wendy, Sheila, and Olivia also described partnerships with principals. Sheila told the interviewer how her principal liked to have the role of the school counselor seen in a positive way with parents and teachers. Olivia described how she was a part of the decision making team in her school, working very closely with the principal. Wendy believed she and her principal were both "on the same sheet of music."

This subtheme of good rapport with principals was seen in all of the participants as a link to implementing school reform measures. There seemed to be agreement in the findings that the counselors communicated their program operations to the school administrators based on the needs of the students. The cross-case findings suggested that the area of concern for most of the counselors was around the use of time: counseling vs. non-counseling activities.

Collaborative Work with Teachers

Sheila seemed to be the most concise participant in her remarks about collaboration as an important element in her work. She talked about how consulting with teachers helped her assist the students in their adjustment to personal issues and with academic achievement. Sheila described a “mutual consensus” about how to help the children in her school. Other participants who reflected this subtheme with intensity were Wendy, Barbara, and Denise. There was one case, Lisa’s, whose findings suggested that the collaboration work extended beyond her own school. Lisa reported that she communicated through “networking” with counselors in other schools and in other districts.

Summary Interpretation

As the schools revise and enhance the way children are educated, the school counselors interviewed wanted to be an integral part of the changes. At the same time, all ten of the participants wanted to protect their role and identity as counselors. The findings suggested that working together with principals, teachers, and other staff members was effective.

Theme: Accountability

All the counselors participated in required yearly evaluations of their job performance. Four of them addressed program accountability in their interviews in some way. They described their roles in school-wide improvement and in improving guidance program services. This final interpretive theme of accountability is composed of the findings themes of the two participants whose interviews reflected the most intensity around accountability issues: Wendy and Denise. Two subthemes were found in the cross-analysis content of this theme, School-wide Improvement and Program Evaluation.

A third cross-analysis finding, accountability around special education eligibility issues, is not included in this section because it did not emerge with enough intensity in more than one case-analysis. Only one counselor, Terry, suggested that school counselors need to take a graduate course in special education. The need for further exploration of the counselor's role in the special education process will be addressed in Chapter Six.

School-wide Improvement

School reform focuses on reorganizing and revitalizing the entire school rather than on isolated reforms or individual programs (Virginia Department of Education, 2001). Two participants in this study seemed to have a heightened awareness of recent school reform measures. Denise addressed the many demographic changes she observed in the middle school population. She noted the teamwork in her school that led to school improvement in the form of full accreditation by the state department of education.

One of Denise's goals for school improvement was to involve parents more fully in career education decisions and to link the new high school diploma requirements to her middle school guidance program. Denise believed that for her school to continue to improve, stronger alliances were needed with the school psychologist and school social worker. She felt that she needed more "clinical training" as a school counselor so that she could collaborate more effectively with community agencies. In addition to her focus on students and teachers, Denise wanted further growth and changes within her school.

Wendy and Denise (and other participants) believed that professional affiliations with organizations contributed to school improvement and to a clearer role identity for school counselors. Wendy described how she seemed to be "right in the center of things" in her school.

Wendy attributed the positive changes toward school improvement to several factors. Her remarks reflected her understanding of how the counseling role was central in the lives of the students and the smooth running of the school. Her goal was to help administrators understand school counseling programs better, using the national uniform standards as her link to reform measures.

Program Evaluation

Program implementation and program evaluation emerged as a subtheme in the accountability interpretive theme. Cross-case findings suggested that the kind and amount of data used to evaluate the guidance programs was left to the discretion of the individual school counselor. Wendy and Denise, for example, reported successful programs, based on their schools' accomplishments and feedback from

teachers, parents, and administrators. All four of the participants who discussed an assessment of their counseling programs suggested the need for flexibility and collaborative roles. Wendy and Denise reported district-wide support in the forms of positive recognition and resources for clerical assistance.

Summary Interpretation

A cross-case analysis suggested that the realities and pressures of working in schools make time a limiting factor. Arriving at a practical means of conducting program evaluation seems to remain a challenge for school counselors. The perceptions of the participants in this study suggested that it was difficult to isolate how school-wide results reflected counselors' contributions. Chapter Six will address how perhaps enlisting the support of university counselor education faculty might provide insight to the evaluation process for school counseling programs.

This section has covered the discussion of the five interpretive themes that resulted from the cross-case analysis. It described the school counselors' experiences viewed through their commitment, the way they searched for a balance of tasks, responded to families of their students, shared roles in school reform measures, and provided accountability for guidance and counseling programs. The next section will address the participants' conceptual development levels (measured by the PCM) and how they perceived their counseling roles.

Conceptual Development Analysis

This section explores the way the participants, at various stages of conceptual development, experienced their roles and relationships as school counselors. Hunt's conceptual level model uses a continuum from concrete to

abstract levels of conceptualization and thinking. The general definition of Conceptual Level is seen in terms of increasing conceptual complexity as indicated by discrimination, differentiation, and integration. In addition, increasing interpersonal maturity is indicated by self-definition and self-other relations (Hunt, Butler, Noy, & Rosser, 1977).

There are limitations inherent in the use of one written assessment and two interviews. In this study, there are also limitations of focus related to the post hoc analysis of counselor behavior to the PCM results. The behaviors of the counselors were matched to the stage groupings after the PCM scores were obtained. Nonetheless, a cross analysis of the results from the PCM suggested varying perceptions among the counselors. Qualitative differences in problem solving strategies to help students and interactions with parents, for example, were suggested by the remarks of the participants who scored at varying stages on the PCM.

The cross analysis was exploratory in nature. Some of the counselors reported behaviors that suggested higher levels than the PCM results indicated. This may be due to emerging skills that approach higher levels than those measured. In addition, conceptual systems theory (CST) suggests that higher level characteristics may be found at certain times and not at other times, depending upon the level of structure in the environment (Hunt, 1978; Holloway & Wampold, 1986). Because relatively little attention has been paid to CL measurement issues in previous studies (McLennan, 1995), an exploration of the topic using both a post hoc analysis and written PCM test results emerged as necessary in this study.

Further detail about the use of the PCM as a CL measurement tool may be found in Chapter 3. It should be noted here, however, that the frequently used approaches to CL measurement have been quantitative procedures. The design of this study permitted the inclusion of the participants own perceptions about their roles and experiences.

The results from the Paragraph Completion Method Test ranged from 1.5, Counselor Behavior Stage A, to 2.5, Counselor Behavior Stage B, approaching Stage C. The bi-modal levels were 1.7 and 2.0, indicating that most of the participants' written test results from the PCM fell near Stage B of Hunt's (1977) Counselor Behaviors. Counselors at Stage B are believed to need moderate structure and support in their roles.

In the context of the participants' responses to the interview questions as well as their written responses on the PCM, three stage groupings were found in this study. The listing of participants by stage and corresponding stage groupings is listed below:

<u>Participant Stage</u>	<u>Stage Groupings</u>
1.5 – Sheila	Stage A – Sheila, Lisa,
1.7 – Lisa, David, Terry	David, Terry, Wendy
1.8 – Wendy	
2.0 – Joe, Barbara, Elizabeth	Stage B – Joe, Barbara,
2.2 – Denise	Elizabeth, Denise
2.5 – Olivia	Stage C - Olivia

Description of Group Characteristics

Stage A: Strong Evidence of Concrete Thinking

An individual functioning at Stage A exhibits compliance to rules and expects the same of others. In this grouping, the orientation is toward learning the ground rules or cultural standards which apply to everyone. A concrete thinker needs detailed instructions and immediate reinforcement. Some of the characteristics of this group are polarized or dichotomous processing (right-wrong or good-bad) and deference to authority.

It is believed that the counselor behaviors at this level include the following: difficulty in tracking clients; uncomfortable with ambiguous assignments, prone to anxiety, reluctance to talk about own inadequacies. A counseling model might be followed as if it were “carved in stone” (Hunt, 1977; McLennan, 1995).

Stage B: Some Evidence of “Matching and Mismatching”

An individual scoring at this level begins to separate facts, opinions and theories about counseling. The orientation is toward learning about oneself and how one is distinct from generalized standards. The person would be open to others’ ideas, recognize and evaluate alternatives, but may not integrate them into a solution. There is increased tolerance and a striving for independence. Absolute thinking is questioned and challenged. Individuals are more accepting of others’ opinions, interested with others’ ideas, show concern with their own thoughts and feelings, and strive for autonomy. Tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty increases.

The counselor behaviors associated with this stage are: sensitivity to emotional needs, responses to a variety of client feelings, accurate listening, and congruent non-verbal responses (Hunt, 1977; McLennan, 1995).

Stage C: Abstract Conceptualization

Very few individuals reach the highest level of conceptual complexity. At this stage, the orientation is toward applying self-anchored dimensions to an empathetic understanding of other persons and differences between them. An individual at this stage would consider and weigh alternatives, then integrate them into a solution. The person would seek compromise when possible, accept responsibility and consequences for decisions, and show concern for both her/his own and others' ideas. This stage is marked by an interdependence between one's self and one's environment.

The counselor behaviors show an understanding of counseling as a process of successive approximations. There is ease with the application of multiple appropriate counseling models. The person would exhibit flexibility and an appropriate balance of support and challenge with clients (Hunt, 1977; McLennan, 1995).

Stage A: Highly Structured Activities Group

Commitment

Participants in all three groups demonstrated commitment to the school counseling profession. How were the responses different for each group? In the Stage A Grouping, Sheila, Lisa, David, Terry, and Wendy had results from the PCM

that ranged from 1.5 to 1.8. These scores were very close to Stage B, and all five of these counselors exhibited behaviors that approached Stage B.

What this means for the Stage A Group is that Sheila, Lisa, David, Terry, and Wendy were open to other people's ideas and evaluated alternatives. In most cases, however, they would tend to behave in ways expected by authority figures. Rules were viewed as necessary to maintain order and control, but the counselors in this group exhibited emerging questioning of rigid rules.

For example, Lisa questioned the amount of time required for record keeping around high school credits and test results. She sought support from other counselors who seemed to affirm her commitment to the work. In a similar way, Wendy described how much structure she needed during the first year in the role of school counselor. She told the interviewer that as she became more experienced in her role, less structure seemed to be necessary for her to be effective in her job. With the PCM score of 1.8, Wendy was approaching Stage B.

Balance of Tasks

The counselors in the Stage A Group struggled with imbalance. David talked about how many years it took before he felt he was organized enough to provide a comprehensive guidance program in his school. Sheila described feeling overwhelmed by the identification process for special needs students. Terry explained how clerical and management duties were taking away from time she used to spend listening and talking with students. The counselors at this level were not able to integrate their evaluation of the situation into a solution. They remained sensitive to authority figures and were concerned with behaving correctly. For

Sheila and David, this often meant working long hours into the evening at their schools.

Responding to Families

The counselors in the Stage A Group tended to evaluate parents in a polarized way (good-bad; involved-not involved). Terry felt challenged in her work with parents and had difficulty understanding the reasons for their behavior. Lisa did not say very much at all about working with parents, other than providing them with academic information about their children. Wendy, who scored 1.8 on the PCM, showed emerging empathy to the feelings, motives, and wishes of parents. She approached Stage B with her perspectives. David reached out, in spite of the inflexibility and lack of openness with the parents of his students, by offering educational workshops. With a PCM score of 1.7, he was also approaching Stage B.

Shared Roles in Reform

Sheila, Lisa, David, Terry, and Wendy exhibited an emergent need for independence around issues of school reform. Their collaborative work in this area with teachers and principals approached Stage B behaviors. For example, these counselors attempted to work through problems around testing programs and school-wide improvement while consulting their principals. They did not express feelings of insecurity about changes in public education, indicating levels beyond Stage A in this realm.

Accountability

David, Lisa, and Terry exhibited Stage A behaviors around accountability issues. They were concerned with the concrete tasks of testing requirements and

record management. Sheila and Wendy approached Stage B behaviors indicated by their discussions of the need for uniform counseling program standards and program evaluation. Wendy viewed her role as one in which she could assist administrators with a better understanding of how comprehensive guidance programs should be implemented. Sheila talked about multi-level program evaluation strategies, emerging to a higher level of conceptualization around accountability.

Stage B: Emerging Self-Reflection Group

Commitment

Joe, Barbara, Elizabeth, and Denise had PCM results in the 2.0 – 2.2 range. This suggested counselor behaviors at Stage B, an increased tolerance for ambiguity and a wider repertoire of counselor responses. In the area of commitment to the counseling role, these participants suggested emergent cognitive complexity to the tasks of helping as well as increasing self-responsibility.

The characteristics that emerged in the interviews for the counselors in Stage B were approaching openness to the ideas of others and evaluating the alternatives. For example, Joe and Elizabeth saw rules as necessary in their schools. However, they understood the flexibility needed in the counselor role so that they could assist students adapt to changes. Denise, whose 2.2 PCM score suggested emergent situational applicability, talked about “what maturity would do to a counselor.”

Balance of Tasks

The counselors in the Stage B Group seemed to experience more ease with the balance of tasks in their counseling role. Joe talked about counselors becoming “more visible” in the non-academic settings of school, such as during the students’

lunch time. He believed that he was aware of the complex problems that his students faced. Joe described how he became more available for counseling and more involved with students in groups. Both Joe and Elizabeth emphasized the infusion of adequate career education to prepare students for the world of work.

Barbara and Denise seemed to approach the multi-faceted tasks of their role with emerging flexibility. Less reliance upon concrete approaches to tasks was a characteristic that distinguished this stage grouping from the previous one.

Responding to Families

The counselors in Stage B seemed to understand that teachers and others could often misunderstand parents' relationships with their children. Barbara and Denise seemed to be sensitive to the parents' points of view and feelings, even when these views did not agree with the schools' perceptions. In a similar way, Joe and Elizabeth perceived differing points of view as potential sources for more information about the families of the students they served. These characteristics suggested emergent counselor behaviors toward Stage C. In contrast to the polarized perceptions that were seen in Stage A counselor behaviors, this group tended to be more flexible in finding ways to reach out to parents. This was seen in their involvement of community resources, workshops and parent groups.

Flexible responses of this group to family needs also included crisis counseling when needed, referrals for additional help, and promoting good relationships between parents and teachers. All four counselors in this group talked about awareness of their previous experiences in their own families, suggesting a higher level of self-reflection.

Shared Roles in Reform

Advocacy opportunities presented in many ways and at different times for the participants in the Stage B Group. One of the strongest factors in the guidance programs for Denise, Joe, Barbara, and Elizabeth involved their engagement of teachers. These counselors voiced concerns about teachers being reluctant to allocate class time for guidance activities during an era of high stakes testing.

Elizabeth explained the correlation of guidance standards and academic standards to teachers. Barbara coordinated classroom guidance sessions so that teachers could conduct them with ease. Denise and Joe used the transition time preceding high school as an opportunity to prepare middle school students and their teachers for changes in diploma requirements. As the structure of schools changed, these counselors seemed to seek ways to obtain support from their principals for their roles. This suggested emergent counselor behaviors toward Stage C, where using one's own knowledge to find information and arrive at a satisfactory conclusion is emphasized.

Accountability

The counselors in the Stage B Group participated in a variety of ways to assist students with awareness of the goals of school reform programs. They exhibited cooperation and collaboration with administrators and teachers to implement school-wide activities. While there seemed to be some uncertainty about working through changes, Elizabeth, Joe, and Denise showed an emergent need for independence. They evaluated alternatives with administrators, as did Barbara, before drawing conclusions.

This group seemed to approach Stage C in their search for a practical approach for evaluating guidance programs. The process of accounting for quality guidance services seemed as important to them as the results did.

Stage C: Adapting Innovations Group

Commitment

Only Olivia's results on the written PCM, 2.5, were the closest to Stage C. Scores at this level are believed to suggest that a person considers and weighs alternatives, then decides upon the best possible solution to a particular situation. Olivia's interviews suggested evidence of originality in adapting to the needs of her students. For example, she talked about how she reached a "realistic picture of some of the issues students and their families would have." Olivia addressed a systems approach to organizing guidance programs and wanted to include "a lot of different perspectives." She talked about expanding options for her students using technology for career development and assessments.

Balance of Tasks

Olivia's description of how to carry out her role as a counselor suggested a process of successive approximations. She told the interviewer she was "still developing" her group facilitation skills. Similarly, one of the training highlights Olivia talked about was her discovery about how to find a balance between theory and practice. Olivia told the interviewer that working in a small school setting assisted her with flexibility around task management. Her approach to find appropriate support and challenge suggested an accurate reflection of the PCM score near the Stage C range.

Responding to Families

Olivia seemed to show sensitivity to family changes in the student population she served. She also seemed to have a realistic understanding about adolescent developmental issues. Olivia's reports about her interactions with parents suggested patience and an effort for clear communication, reflective of Stage C counselor behavior.

Shared Roles in Reform

In her role of test coordinator, Olivia examined the duties in relation to her counseling role. She seemed comfortable coordinating and sharing roles with teachers around the Standards of Learning Assessments. Olivia also asked for relief from the clerical tasks related to school-wide test management. These behaviors suggested higher levels of adapting and tended to reflect Stage C counselor behaviors.

Accountability

Stage C counselor behaviors were suggested when Olivia talked about her experience with a community based advisory team. She also attributed the evaluation of her guidance program to the effective collaboration with her principal. Olivia expanded accountability measures to include team decision making with agencies in the community. She saw a need to coordinate services in the community around truancy issues.

Olivia was articulate in analyzing her own counseling strategies in both content and feeling. She also seemed comfortable in applying a number of appropriate models, further suggesting Stage C behaviors.

Summary

Cross-case analysis of findings themes yielded five interpretive themes: Commitment, Balance of Tasks, Responding to Families, Shared Roles in Reform, and Accountability. Only one of the findings themes (Special Education Needs, Participant #9, Terry) was not integrated into the interpretive themes. Table 5.1 (p. 124) displays the reduction of the findings themes. Examples of the paths from the participants' statements to the themes may be found in Appendix F.

This chapter has presented the cross-case analysis of themes and conceptual development levels. These findings addressed an inquiry about a possible link between the school counselors' perceptions of their roles and measured levels of conceptual complexity. The relationship of the school counseling practice of the participants and the influence of changes in public education was explored. Chapter Six will present the discussion of the Grand Tour Question and the Research Sub-questions, followed by implications for further research, counselor education and training, and school counseling practice.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Chapter Five presented the cross-case analysis of themes and conceptual development level. Chapter Six will present answers to the research questions (including a phenomenological profile), discussion of additional findings, implications for research, counselor education, and school counseling practice, and a personal statement of growth.

Research Questions

The grand tour question for this study was: What are the professional experiences of school counselors in an era of educational reform? The subquestions were:

- 1) From the school counselors' perspectives, what is the nature of the counselor's professional role?
- 2) What influence, if any, has been experienced by school counselors related to school reform?
- 3) What information is available to school counselors about the current National Standards for School Counseling Programs?
- 4) What is the relationship of the counselors' perceptions of their role and the school administrators' expectations?

- 5) How/when did the counselors become aware of the changes resulting from school reform?
- 6) What is the relationship between the conceptual development level of school counselors and the way they view school reform measures?
- 7) How is this relationship reflected? How consistent is the link between developmental levels and the way counselors conceptualize school reform?

Grand Tour Question

The case study approach to this research project included elements of phenomenological methodology. Elements of phenomenological methodology provided the means for profiling, for exploring what made up these school counselors' experiences representative of elementary, middle, and high school levels. The description that follows is not intended to represent the experiences of all school counselors.

Phenomenological Profile

Most of these counselors had ten or more years of professional experience as school counselors. More than half of them (seven of the ten) had worked as teachers before obtaining masters degrees in school counseling. They were motivated to seek further training because of their desire to help children. Most of the participants cited their counseling practicum as one of the major highlights of their training. Each participant found the realities of the job much more demanding than their initial expectations. All of the participants were concerned about the role/identity issues facing their profession, both from a historical perspective and during a time of many changes in public education.

Within the context of change in schools, the counselors believed there was a need for clear school counselor identity more than ever before. They were concerned about the new structure of schools and the changing social demographics for children. In addition to the expected transitions associated with growing up, the counselors now saw students who faced issues such as poverty, divorce, violence, and neglect. What began for these counselors as a traditional role of helper/student advocate was expanding to include collaborative relationships with teachers, parents, and community members.

Within the context of increasing daily challenges on the job and external demands, these counselors struggled with multiple ways to direct their energy. They wanted to move away from reacting roles to the delivery of quality comprehensive guidance and counseling programs. Many of them found support in the newly developed uniform counseling standards by the national professional school counseling organization. The counselors created strong professional associations with other counselors, community agencies, district guidance coordinators, and school administrators.

Most of the counselors in this study found strength in close partnerships with principals and assistant principals. They believed it was essential to become a part of the decision-making team and to present a coordinated effort to teachers, students, and parents. In addition to professional validation and sharing roles in school reform, the counselors gave and received help from principals with a variety of other issues. All of them were involved in statewide test program management, perhaps the most visible part of school reform measures to date.

Overall, the counselors found good communication with their principals. They believed regular discussions with principals and teachers about their plans and particular student circumstances were important to the counseling programs. Working well with school-wide student achievement was viewed as teamwork.

The most critical counselor behaviors emerged in the strong presence of empathy and an understanding of multi-leveled needs that students bring to the school setting. It was important to the counselors that their professional identities remain visible. In addition, flexibility was identified as important by most of the participants.

Comparison to Literature

The counselors' awareness that flexibility is important in their roles is consistent with conceptual systems theory and is reflected in that literature. Counseling researchers have investigated possible relationships between counselors' performance and their characteristic global ways of conceptualizing (McLennan, 1995). Harvey, Hunt, and Schroder (1961) defined an individual's conceptual system as "a schema that provides the basis by which the individual relates to the environmental events he (she) experiences (pp. 244-245).

Hunt (1971) proposed conceptual level (CL) as the major person variable in a person-environment interaction model. He defined CL as "a personality characteristic that describes persons on a developmental hierarchy of increasing conceptual complexity, self-responsibility and independence" (Hunt, 1978, p.78). During the last few years, this work has been expanded by Sprinthall (1994), and, specifically to school counselors, by Peace (1992), Paisley and Peace (1995). Specific to the school counseling literature as well, Borders (1989) suggested that individuals at higher

conceptual levels would operate at a more comprehensive and empathic level. It is believed that growth is not automatic and will not necessarily correlate with the number of years experience in a counseling position.

Even with the presence of adult development literature in school counseling applications, there may be limitations around the measurement of conceptual level. The most recent evolution of school counseling programs contends that their focus needs to be comprehensive, collaborative, and developmental (Paisley, 2001). Paisley, along with her colleagues, Sandra Peace (1995) and Dianne Borders (1995) followed the developmental research pattern begun by Sprinthall two decades ago. One of their goals was to refine a framework for assessing conceptual levels with counselors, especially school counselors. Such a framework would recognize that a single written test, such as the PCM, could not evaluate cognitive complexity adequately.

The link to “higher is better” in this study was designed to be exploratory and preliminary. Given both a written measure of CL (PCM) and post hoc matching qualitative data analysis for each participant, the findings seemed to be congruent with the most generally accepted implications of Hunt’s work. In agreement with the literature, these counselors demonstrated caring, empathy, and commitment to helping children at stages that suggested a more comprehensive understanding of multi-level problems.

A closer look at the findings, however, suggested that more work is needed around matching CL with the level of environmental structure. For example, the CL level of the school principals, whose relationship was very important to these counselors was unknown in this study. Given the complexities of CL differences in

interpersonal behaviors and environmental matching, the exploration of the experiences of the counselors in this study still suggested that good support from the principals contributed to a more positive perspective about their roles.

McLennan (1995) noted that relying solely upon written measures of counselor conceptual level could make it difficult to demonstrate a strong relationship between counselor CL and performance. Again, in agreement with the literature, the counselors in this study seemed to describe higher level counseling behaviors during the interviews than most of their PCM scores indicated. Perhaps it could be suggested that the PCM be modified to reflect school counselor behaviors and effectiveness. Conceptual systems theory draws upon parallel developments in the psychological and social sciences that challenge traditional notions of externally imposed order. In today's world of public education, where many players are adapting to each other, it can be very difficult to predict the emerging future.

The results from the PCM in this study suggested slight evidence of higher stage level counselor behaviors (Stage B) in half of the participants. In addition, eight of the ten participants used the word, "flexible" when describing themselves during the interviews. Six of the counselors talked about prevention as a part of their school counseling programs. Whiston and Sexton (1998) discovered a number of studies that suggested that preventive activities may, in the long run, decrease the need for remediation in the responsive service areas of school counseling.

The counselors' willingness and capacity to work with students, parents, teachers, other agencies, and other school personnel in this study suggested the importance of providing adult learning environments where they could benefit from

new learning experiences. Hunt's implications and their consistent support in the research of Sprinthall (1994), Thies-Sprinthall (1994), Paisley & Peace (1995), would encourage environments of discovery learning for the counselors in this study.

With emergent high-CL stage behaviors, it is believed that individuals are more likely to benefit from less structured learning environments (McLennan, 1995). Conversely, it is believed that low-CL individuals are more likely to benefit from learning environments that are relatively more structured and emphasize following the rules. In either case, the literature supports an appropriate balance between support and challenge and time for self-reflection alternating with periods of new social role taking experiences (Mosher & Sprinthall, 1970).

Three of the counselors in this study indicated they would like to have ongoing supervision in the area of individual and group counseling practice in their schools. Two of them would like to have more information about the process of family counseling, especially for students with special education needs. All of them were open to increasing their repertoire of interactions and responses in the counseling venue. These particular findings reflected a strong commitment of the participants to protect and enhance their counseling role. Paisley and Borders (1995) found that limited control of school counselors over their roles seemed to contribute to confusion around counselor identity in the current school reform movement (Paisley & Borders, 1995).

There are a number of quantitative studies available in the literature about conceptual level as an important individual difference variable related to counselor training and effectiveness (McLennan, 1995; Holloway & Wampold, 1986). Research from the perspective of practicing school counselors using qualitative methodology is

becoming more available in the published literature, particularly as it relates to the changes brought about due to recent school reform (Paisley & Borders, 1995; Bemak, 2000; Borders, 2002). This finding may address the school counselors' role/identity issues and it may enhance the collaborative team building element deemed crucial for school improvement (Paisley & McMahon, 2001).

Sub-question One

From the school counselors' perspectives, what is the nature of the counselor's professional role?

Discussion

The counselors in this study perceived their roles with personal concern and professional identity. They shared characteristics similar to others in the school helping professions: liking children, listening, problem solving. Their commitment to the counselor role was evidenced by a strong presence of caring and a respect for diversity in the populations they served. They were involved in many facets of the students' learning process, including academic achievement, personal issues and career exploration. The counselors also perceived their roles as changing. Most of them saw the need for more consultation and collaboration with teachers and parents around schoolwide testing and special education issues. All of them expressed concern about daunting social/demographic circumstances that have added complexities to normal childhood transitions. It was important to the counselors to be as available as possible for direct counseling services on an individual and group basis.

Most of the counselors felt they met their professional goals on the job by prioritizing tasks and using multiple organizational skills. Some of the counselors

received appropriate clerical support with non-guidance duties. All of them acknowledged that non-guidance duties far exceeded what they expected in the beginning of their counseling positions. They were drawn to this profession because they wanted to have more time available to help children than a teacher would have. They perceived the counseling role as offering a way to meet students' needs on a different level apart from the regular classroom setting.

These counselors discussed how to find a balance in their daily work to include multiple roles. The more experienced ones seemed to feel more comfortable and satisfied with managing many tasks. All of them described their roles in terms of teamwork and partnerships with administrators and teachers.

Comparison to Literature

Historically, the nature of the school counselor's role has been shown to have some dissonance in its conceptualization and a blending of influences (Whiston, 2002; Brott & Myers, 1999). The school counseling literature consistently cited the need for a clear frame of reference for carrying out work roles, making decisions, and defining the profession (Bemak, 2000). The literature supported the contention that most school counselors would face role ambiguity, in spite of emerging trends to stabilize their credibility within the school system (Peace & Sprinthall, 1998). Johnson (2000) stated, "It is time to reframe a professional identity wherein the school counselor's role is defined in relation to being part of an integrative, comprehensive program that has as its overarching mission the facilitation of student learning and development (p. 33).

Gysbers & Henderson (2002) explained the importance of recognizing the professional skills of school counselors. They believed that counselors would be

respected as having a special professional identity within the school when other duties, such as those that were clerical, monitorial, or quasi-administrative, were minimized.

In this study, the counselors' perspectives of their roles were consistent with the type of role/identity clarity advocated by school counseling researchers. The literature reflected the need for further research to illuminate this topic (Paisley & Hayes, 2003; Gysbers & Henderson, 2002; Peace & Sprinthall, 1998).

Summary

If there could be a magical solution to school counselor identity issues, might it be found in the Piagetian principles of cognitive maturation? Change theorists have suggested that phases of change appear to be sequential in nature and need to have an appropriate balance of challenge and support. This study attempted to connect previous research in this area (Paisley & Peace, 1995; Peace, 1992; Borders, 1989) to the way these school counselors viewed their roles. These contemporary school counselors seem to be concerned about their relevancy. They expressed the desire to maintain and enhance their skills. Most of them appeared to be proficient in the use of technology and saw the benefits of program evaluation and collaborations.

In this study, the participants' descriptions of their roles, their struggles with balancing many tasks, and serving multiple needs were consistent with the nature of experiences seen in previous studies. The complexities of the school counseling role should not be underestimated. These counselors indicated that changes in public education were likely to amplify those complexities. Research with school counselors during the time of school reform has been minimal. These counselors voiced concern

that their role might become invisible if more is not done to defend their adaptability and effectiveness.

Sub-question Two

What influence, if any, has been experienced by school counselors related to school reform?

Discussion

The counselors in this study discussed the emphasis on increased accountability, raising standards, and enhanced student learning that has become more relevant in their current work. Their counseling programs were aligned with the primary mission of the schools. With the emphasis on testing, achievement, and accountability, these counselors experienced a dual responsibility. All of them wanted to use their expertise to advocate for students whose emotional/social needs have become more complex. They also wanted to provide support to principals and teachers to facilitate student learning. The counselors believed their training prepared them to understand the social and economic conditions that affect children in schools.

These counselors experienced recent school reform measures as both positive and negative. The increased demands on the counselors' time required for implementing (or assisting with implementing) schoolwide testing programs was viewed as difficult. This difficulty was noted particularly at the high school level, where the record keeping around test scores and course credits emerged as an overwhelming task. Most of the counselors believed, at all three levels, that they would use more data than in the past to keep pace with academic standards for each student. They were concerned about the "excessive paperwork" related to test data management.

Many of the counselors in this study viewed the influence of school reform as an opportunity to involve more parents in choices for their children. Several of them offered parent workshops and test-taking seminars as part of their guidance programs. In addition, most of the counselors tended to view school reform proposals in their own schools as addressing their students' contextual needs. They were aware of the changes in the structure and content in schooling, in general. They did not see these changes as detrimental to their own student populations. Ambiguity around counselor role and function in reform issues and practice tended to remain consistent among the counselors in this study.

Comparison to Literature

Some of the current literature points to the historical perspective of the school counseling profession. "The reason for school counselors to be in the schools originally was a function of the major transitions schools were experiencing in the move from an agricultural to an industrial economy" (Herr, 2002, p.230). Today's school reform proposals are believed by some to be motivated by the educational implications of the "transition from an industrial, manufacturing economy to a highly technological, information-based service economy, in which knowledge and its application are central" (Herr, 2002, p.229). School counselors have moved from a peripheral role to a more central one. Lapan (2001) noted one of the problems of school counseling in school reform is that different schools require different models of school counseling. Research studies are beginning to emerge which ask questions about models of school counselor roles and function and their effectiveness under different conditions of student needs (Herr, 2002).

School counselors have important roles in the relationship between student behavior and motivation and the impact of school policies (American School Counselor Association, 1999). However, the literature consistently supported the finding that school counselors and what they do are topics missing from discussions of school reform (House & Hayes, 2002). House and Hayes (2002) cited this omission as “an enormous mistake, especially when school counselors hold the keys to many students’ dreams and aspirations” (p. 249). They believed leaving school counselors out of school reform efforts might be one of the most serious mistakes that reformers make.

Summary

The findings from this study, along with anecdotal and empirical evidence (Herr, 2002) suggest that school counselors are addressing the challenges facing today’s schools. There is reason to believe that school counselors are needed in key roles for the success of school reform. The existing reform initiatives seem to represent attempts to improve public education. It seems that school counselors will need to integrate themselves fully into an expanded vision of their roles to remain agents of change for students.

Sub-question Three

What information is available to school counselors about the current National Standards for School Counseling Programs?

Discussion

Eight of the ten counselors in this study had been informed about the National Standards for School Counseling Programs by their district’s guidance coordinators. At the time the interviews were conducted, the American School Counselor Association

had published the standards and was in the process of developing a national model. The eight counselors who were members of their professional organizations indicated they had received information about the national standards through mailings and at conferences. Most of these counselors felt they had not yet fully embraced the proposals recommended by the national standards.

Three of the counselors strongly believed the national standards would be beneficial to the profession in many ways. They specifically talked about the clarity for role/identity issues offered in the standards as well as protection for school counseling programs. These counselors believed the standards would lead to a reduction in time spent on non-guidance activities.

Comparison to Literature

Gysbers and Henderson (2001) outlined the content element of the National Standards and identified three domains of student competencies: Academic Development, Career Development, and Personal/Social Development. The strategies to structure activities around those competencies and the suggested distribution of total counselor time are summarized in the table below:

Table 6.1
Recommended Distribution of Total Counselor Time in Percentages

	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Guidance Curriculum	35-45	25-35	15-25
Individual Planning	5-10	15-25	25-35
Responsive Services	30-40	30-40	25-35
System Support	10-15	10-15	15-20
	100	100	100

Adapted from Gysbers & Henderson, 2001, p.250.

The literature consistently supported the adoption of the National Standards for School Counseling Programs (Paisley, 2001; House & Hayes, 2002). Emphasis was placed upon relating the work of school counselors to the mission of school's academic achievement (House & Hayes, 2002).

Summary

In summary, the counselors' information about the newly published National Standards for School Counseling Programs was in the initial phases at the time this study was conducted. Three counselors were very familiar with the standards due to their involvement in the professional counselor association. The percentages of time recommended in the standards for guidance and counseling services exceeded what these counselors described in their current functions. The literature was consistent in recognizing variation in the way school counselors perform their functions in existing models.

Sub-question Four

What is the relationship of the counselors' perceptions of their role and the school administrators' expectations?

Discussion

The counselors in this study described positive experiences with the principals and assistant principals. They perceived their role as supportive of the expectations of the administration. In a similar way, these counselors perceived their principals as supportive of the guidance and counseling programs.

All ten counselors noted the differences between the expectations of the role and its realities during their first year in practice. These differences in reality versus

expectations were related to time management, prioritizing tasks, and non-counseling duties. None of the counselors attributed these findings to principals' demands.

Most of these counselors described their relationships with school principals in terms of teamwork and partnerships. They felt valued by their principals and shared a foundation based upon helping students succeed. In addition, the counselors believed they shared roles in school reform measures with the principals. Most of the counselors perceived the principals as flexible people who included them in the process of making decisions.

Comparison to Literature

One of the most troublesome areas in previous studies was seen in the reassignment of non-guidance duties to appropriate staff (Burnham & Jackson, 2000, Gysbers & Henderson, 2002). For change to occur, school administrators need to determine who best could carry out those tasks. The literature supported movement toward counselor alignment with the central academic mission of the school and for the reassignment of non-counseling duties when possible (Johnson, 2000). Research findings encouraged partnerships between school counselors and administrators.

Whiston (2002) noted that "one of the strengths of school counselors—their dedication and willingness to pitch in and help—is also a weakness" (p.149). She further noted that many principals are not aware that uniform standards for counseling programs exist and what those standards suggest (Whiston, 2002).

Beale (2001) examined the relationship between school counselors and the school administrative team of principals and assistant principals. His findings suggested that leadership posts might be reconfigured when the school administrators'

expectations and the realities of the counselor's operational role were matched (Beale, 2001). In a previous study, Beale (1995) designed a survey to assist principals in understanding the changing role of school counselors. Those findings targeted what school principals considered essential criteria in the selection of school counselors. Specifically, the findings ranked internship experience and character references as very important to principals.

Summary

In summary, the literature supported the need for replication of studies about principals' understanding of school counselor roles and function. In this study, the counselors felt more comfortable advocating for their roles as they became more experienced.

Sub-question Five

How/when did the counselors become aware of the changes resulting from school reform?

Discussion

In this study, the counselors first became aware of relevant changes at the onset of the statewide testing program revisions in 1997. These counselors were given in-service training in their school districts about the standards of learning (SOL) assessments for their grade levels. Five of the counselors worked in schools where the newly revised accreditation standards had not been met. Their schools were involved in more intensive; comprehensive remediation programs designed to assist meeting the required benchmarks.

These counselors obtained information about school reform through the media, in professional journals, attendance at conferences and through staff development workshops. Two of the counselors had previous experience working in other states. They were familiar with school reform measures that began earlier in those states than in Virginia.

Comparison to Literature

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education published the report called *A Nation at Risk: The imperative for educational reform* (U.S. Department of Education, 1983). This provocative report sought a nationwide quest to strengthen public education (Johnson, 2000). Reform initiatives centered on increasing the rigor of curricula, raising achievement standards and graduation requirements, and increasing accountability. The counseling literature reflected this context by undertaking a strategic initiative toward promoting its professional identity. At the national level, the ASCA's National Standards for School Counseling Programs (Dahir, Sheldon, & Valiga, 1998) were developed in 1998 (Johnson, 2000).

Jennifer O'Day (2002) wrote in the *Harvard Educational Review* about defining and examining the standards-based reform movement as early as 1993. Her research compared school improvement issues and accountability in the Chicago Public Schools and the Baltimore City Schools (O'Day, 2002). This research was consistent with the widely accepted premise that school accountability measures seek increased student performance by improving the functioning of the school organization (O'Day, 2002).

The school counseling literature began to publish studies about changing school counselor roles around 1995 (Paisley & Peace, 1995). The focus became more prevalent

in the school counseling literature (Gysbers & Henderson, 1999; Baker, 2000). Four articles were published in April 2002 about school reform and school counselors in the *Professional School Counseling Journal*. These articles highlighted a proactive role for school counselors in reform efforts (Herr, 2002; Adelman & Taylor, 2002; House & Hayes, 2002; Lapan, Kardash, & Turner, 2002).

Summary

In summary, recent studies are beginning to be published about proposals for change and their effect upon the school counseling profession. The literature supported that school counselors need to become important players in school reform.

Sub-question Six

What is the relationship between the conceptual development level of school counselors and the way they view school reform measures?

Discussion

In their responses to interview questions and on the written PCM results, findings from these counselors suggested an exploratory link between conceptual development level and the counselors' perceptions of school reform. Most of the written test results fell near Stage B of Hunt's (1977) Counselor Behaviors. Three stage groupings were identified ranging from a strong tendency toward concrete thinking (Stage A) to more abstract conceptualization (Stage C).

The following discussion is intended to portray some of the trends about the CL findings of this study from the counselors' perspectives about school reform. Because of the post hoc findings gathered from the interview coding, and the similarity in PCM

scores across all the participants, these trends are only exploratory. They are not intended to suggest an absolute classification.

Stage A, Strong Evidence of Concrete Thinking

The relationships of the four counselors at Stage A seemed to share the characteristics of feeling somewhat overwhelmed by the new demands of school reform programs. While all of the counselors in this study were in the process of understanding new requirements for school improvement, Lisa, David, and Terry discussed the need for more detailed instructions and deference to their school principals. They were concerned with behaving correctly, but did not seem to feel insecure, suggesting emerging perspectives at Stage B.

Sheila and Wendy asked for more support from their administrators around accountability issues. Terry expressed concern that clerical duties were taking away from the time she used to spend with students. All five counselors at this stage seemed to benefit from a more structured approach to the new balance of tasks brought about by school reform.

Stage B, Some Evidence of Matching and Mismatching

The counselors at Stage B seemed to see alternatives appropriate to their perceptions of school reform measures. For Barbara and Elizabeth, this meant some give and take in their guidance curriculums, allowing time for counselor reflection and consultations with teachers. For Joe and Denise, this meant finding alternative ways to involve parents in the process. At this stage, the tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty increases (McLennan, 1995, Hunt, 1977).

The counselors at Stage B seemed to be expanding their repertoire of responses to school reform initiatives. Their behaviors suggested emergent cognitive complexity as well as increasing self-responsibility (Hunt, 1977).

Stage C, Abstract Conceptualization

Olivia, at Stage C, preferred to be a part of the decision making team in her school. She was able to recognize the need for increasing flexibility during a time of change in public education. Olivia continued to focus upon her students. However, as indicative of growing complexity, she appreciated the need for collaborative involvement of teachers and parents in the guidance program.

Summary

In summary, the counselors' conceptualizations of their experiences with school reform progressed in complexity from those of Lisa at the Concrete Thinking stage, through approximations of successive stages, to the approaching flexibility of Olivia at Stage C. The Comparison to Literature section covering Sub-questions Six and Seven can be found following the discussion of Sub-question Seven (p. 167).

Sub-question Seven

How is this relationship reflected? How consistent is the link between developmental levels and the way counselors conceptualize school reform?

Discussion

According to Hunt (1977), very few individuals reach the highest level of conceptual complexity. The findings of this exploratory study suggested the need for more research to determine how the correspondence between the counselors' experiences related to their emergent behaviors and PCM results. A consistent link is

believed to exist, based upon the counselors' willingness to help all students, to join the school improvement missions of their schools, and to reach out to families.

Stage A, Strong Evidence of Concrete Thinking

Appropriate to this level, counselor preferences for administrative support during school reform were strong. These counselors perceived the principals to be authority figures and they were striving to create real partnerships with them. Four of the five counselors in this grouping felt a sense of belonging for their roles as school counselors. They discussed some of their challenges around balancing multiple roles resulting from increased demands during the past five years. Sheila, Lisa, David, Terry, and Wendy attempted to work through problems around testing issues. Sheila and Wendy incorporated multi-level program evaluation strategies, suggesting a link to higher level conceptualization.

Stage B, Some Evidence of Matching and Mismatching

At Stage B, Joe and Elizabeth were approaching openness to the ideas of others and evaluating the options around preparing their students for graduation and careers. Denise discussed involving community agencies to assist students with serious adjustment issues. Barbara demonstrated sensitivity to the points of view from the parents of her students who were having problems. These examples of counselor responses correspond with Stage B behaviors, suggesting emerging self-awareness.

Stage C, Abstract Conceptualization

Olivia, with the PCM score of 2.5, reflected the closest to Stage C conceptualization in this study. She described regular consultations with teachers and parents and a collegial relationship with her principal. Olivia viewed school reform as a

shared role. She described her systems approach to reform measures, including a strong program evaluation component. It was important to Olivia that the omission of school counselor roles in the school reform literature be corrected. Her awareness of the missing link reflected a more abstract conceptualization than the other counselors.

Comparison with Literature

During the past 30 years, authors such as Norman Sprinthall (1978), Mosher and Sprinthall (1971), Myrick (1997), and Paisley and Borders (1995) have suggested cognitive developmental theory as a framework for counseling and counselor education. Paisley and Hubbard (1994) translated developmental theory into practice for school counseling. Paisley and Peace (1995) found applications from Hunt's (1975) conceptual systems theory to individual and group counseling and to working with adults in the lives of children (Paisley, 2001).

Halverson (1999) identified the modal conceptual level for the school counselors in her dissertation study as 1.85. The measures of conceptual level and counselor effectiveness were not found to have a significant correlation with the amount of support received by the school counselors sampled (Halverson, 1999).

The trends in the literature associated higher flexibility with counselors' ability to adapt to change. It could be speculated that the problem with identifying how consistent such a link might be is embedded in the limitations of non-comprehensive measurement. Few studies have combined qualitative interviews and written test results to assess counselor conceptual levels.

Hunt's framework suggested that persons at higher CL levels would be more capable of adapting to a changing environment. Much of the research on counseling

skills and conceptual levels confirmed accurate empathy levels at higher stages. Concrete tangible thinkers (identified by CL Levels as measured on the PCM) tended to use limited reasoning alternatives to consider behavior and to make sense of person/environment interactions (Hunt, 1977; McLennan, 1995). The relevant literature consistently associated abstract thinking with greater flexibility, greater threshold for stress, and creativity (Sprinthall, Peace, & Kennington in press).

There seemed to be a need to expand the work of Hunt (1977) to include updated issues around changes in schools. In earlier studies, counselor behaviors associated with higher conceptual levels were reflective of accurate empathy seen in sensitivity to emotional needs, responses to a variety of feelings, listening, and congruent non-verbal responses (McLennan, 1995; Hunt, 1977.). Those studies did not include school counselors during a time of restructuring. How can recent dilemmas be resolved?

The recent need for re-examination of school counselor practice and preparation in response to educational reform was reflected consistently in the literature (Keys, Bemak, & Lockhart, 1998; Paisley & Hubbard, 1994). It is believed that school counselors might be better prepared to meet the needs of all students, including the extensive needs of at-risk students, when developmental theory provides the foundation for their training (Paisley, 2001; Sprinthall, Peace, & Kennington in press).

What evidence might be gathered for school counselors in practice to document conceptual levels? The findings from this study suggested that in order for an exploratory link to exist between adult developmental levels and school counselors' adaptability during school reform, the ways we measure that relationship need to

expand. No one written test, such as the PCM, can capture the complexities involved. The PCM has not been found to have predictive validity. Its reliability ranges were found in some studies to be only moderate, .45 to .56 (Hunt, et al., 1978).

More research is needed to design and test new assessments of conceptual levels that build upon Hunt's work. School counselors who exhibit dedication that extends long after the final school bell has rung deserve to find their places in school reform with clear professional identity.

Discussion of Additional Findings

Because I have, over the years, been working in school settings where I was permitted to do family counseling, Terry's and Denise's experiences with parents of special needs children stood out for me. This topic was mentioned in Chapter Five around counselor roles in the special education process. I believe it is important enough to include further discussion.

A school counselor cannot provide the many types of services and programs necessary for comprehensive guidance and counseling in isolation. There is often more work than one person can do. (Paisley, 2001). A combined effort is needed with the school, the family, and the community. When there is no family therapist available to assist the school counselor, collaboration must occur between the school and the family.

To promote this kind of a relationship, the school counselor may need to involve the student's parent, particularly the mother, in advance of the formal child study process. The viewpoint of the school and its supportive-system professionals is reflected in the literature (Doerries & Foster, 2001). It has also been suggested that the

perspectives of the families be nurtured throughout the child study process (Krumpe, 2002).

Responding to Families emerged with intensity in seven of the ten participant interviews. Terry and Denise talked about the challenges they faced in dealing with parents, particularly the parents whose children were identified as having special learning needs. Terry felt that parents did not trust her because she was younger than most of them. Denise had trouble involving parents when their children needed them at school. Both counselors wanted to connect in a better way to these parents.

Both Terry and Denise were involved with coordinating assessments and programs for students with special needs. Their willingness and ability to work with the children seemed satisfactory to them. Terry believed school counselors should have at least one special education course in their graduate training program. In my experience, exposure to family counseling courses would benefit school counselors as well, especially when there is a child in the family with special needs.

Implications

This study has certain limitations. It was limited to a small number of counselors located in one region of one state. The implications of national school reform are more widespread and have been implemented at different times during the past two decades. In addition, there are likely to be variations in different regions across this state among school counseling programs. Therefore, this report is intended to reflect the experiences only of those counselors involved. As with all qualitative projects, no attempts to apply these findings to other school counselors were made.

Two of the counselors selected for this study dropped out before the initial interviews. Attempts were made to keep them in the study, but they declined due to personal reasons. This left an uneven number of participants at each grade level. Due to time restraints during the data gathering process, no other counselors were recruited to take their places. When this study is replicated, it would be better to interview at least twelve counselors, four at each level. More than two interviews might be needed, perhaps with the inclusion of a focus group about themes that seem to be important to all the counselors sampled.

The conceptual levels of the school principals were unknown in this study. A comparison of the similarities of their approximate match with the counselors' levels would have added another level of analysis to the findings.

It has been accepted generally for some time that self-report measures may not consistently relate to counselor effectiveness (McLennan, 1995). Responses on the PCM were rated for their level of conceptual abstractness in this study by an external rater. Higher ratings were given for the written expression of several alternatives and the ability to hold multiple viewpoints. In this study, the ratings seemed to fall slightly short of the sensitivity observed in the counselors by the researcher. Another additional measure of conceptual complexity, if available, would be recommended should this study be repeated.

There also appears to be the need for the development of a measure of counselor cognitive structure specific to the counseling domain. Within the boundaries of school structure, can counselors reach the higher stages of abstract conceptualization and flexible responses? For example, a companion test might need to be designed for use

with school principals and teachers. Those results could be correlated with school counselors to identify common concerns about problem solving strategies.

Implications for Future Research

The findings from this study encouraged the need for additional research in several areas. Studies about the counselor's level of involvement with school reform measures and the relationship with demographic variables, such as grade level, caseload, school district's location, region, position, total number of years of school counseling experience are scarce. Much work is needed in this area so that appropriate staff development activities could be designed for practicing school counselors.

The orientation of staff, parents, and the community to comprehensive guidance and counseling programs through the use of school presentations, newsletters, and local media would promote good public relations during a time of change in public education. The public relations component seems to be missing from the school counseling literature. As various school reform initiatives are tested and implemented, school counselors need to interact with their support bases, fellow mental health professionals in their communities, family and youth services, and other referral sources.

Computer technology has significant potential to assist school counselors with some administrative reporting tasks, scheduling appointments, contacting parents, and sharing information with teachers. The structure of school career development interventions, their relationships with conceptual matching models, and the implications of using technology in the process would be another area for future research.

Implications for School Counseling Practice

This study's implications for connecting school counselors with the current reality of what they need to know to strengthen their roles in school reform are important. It is time for school counselors to pay attention to the school reform literature. It is time for them to become involved in the decision making process in their districts about how to implement uniform counseling standards.

As we enter the 21st Century, there are substantial changes in industries, occupations, social conditions, and economics. These changes are reflected in the personal lives of school children and adolescents. School counselors, with the support of their district guidance supervisors, need to continue to expand prevention programs and strategies for meeting these challenges. It is an important responsibility.

For practicing school counselors, perhaps staff development sessions could be designed to explore the role of prevention in the guidance curriculum. Programs to encourage time for collaboration with teachers during their planning might be implemented.

Implications for Counselor Education and Training

When counselor educators look at the past, present, and future of school counseling, there are common themes (Whiston, 2002). These themes emerged in this study as well. They are focused on the belief that school counselors struggle with role definition, face increasingly diverse students, must engage in ongoing professional development, and need increasing collaboration skills with school administrators, teachers, and families.

Paisley and McMahon (2001) suggested that a "stable yet flexible" idea of school counseling does exist. They believe "school counseling programs are

increasingly anchored in proactive interventions associated with comprehensive, developmental, and collaborative approaches (p.110). Additionally they maintained the necessity of setting appropriate professional boundaries (Paisley & McMahon, 2001).

There are questions for counselor educators to consider. How can we assist school counselors to not settle for job descriptions that reflect monitorial or clerical, not counseling, duties? How do we provide training that would prevent school counselors from spending a significant portion of their professional lives performing noncounseling tasks? As the national agenda for school counseling changes its focus in response to national events and reform measures, how can counselor educators revise preparation programs to promote adult development?

Graduate programs in school counseling might need to introduce mentoring experiences with practicing school counselors during the first year of course work. All ten of the participants in this study described how different their expectations of the job were from its realities. It is speculated that early mentoring experiences might assist new counselors with realistic expectations during the novice years.

Borders (2002) has encouraged counselor educators to enhance the profession's ability to develop agents of change in a complex, contradictory world. One of the ways to do this would include the cognitive developmental training rationale in internship experiences for graduate students and in clinical supervision for practicing school counselors.

Personal Reflection

What this process has done for me created an intensive sense of respect for a profession that has been my work for many years. Now, at last, I feel ready to begin the

next phase of continuing this work in the position of a counselor educator. My hope is to be fortunate enough to find a university where I can belong. I found the right balance of challenge and support as a doctoral student in counselor education. I would like to believe that I have grown to understand what it really means to be flexible. That has not always been easy. I suspect it was never intended to be a fast process, nor an easy one.

Knowledge from this study has expanded my views about school counselors. The counselors in this study taught me so much. Their commitment to the role of helping students inspired me to complete this project. My commitment to them guides me forward to the next one.

Summary

The most surprising findings in this study were the similarities of the school counselors' values to each other and to mine. Their close PCM results as well as the similarities in their perceptions about counselor roles, relationships, and daily tasks seemed to confirm the need for strong solidarity in this profession. I learned how tightly woven their words were to their hearts. It seems that there might be a way to use these findings to minimize feelings of isolation about which school counselors often talk.

The intensity of commitment by the school counselors in this study to the helping role would not have been found without the qualitative methodology. I listened when one of the middle school counselors wanted to discuss a special project she had designed for their students. I heard how the high school counselors raced to keep parents informed about the new testing standards. I watched as one elementary school counselor stayed in her office during the evening hours to make sure her work was

completed. It seemed to be quite difficult to measure counselor effectiveness with paper and pen. The qualitative approach allowed me to look with a wider lens.

I learned that the work of these school counselors seemed to go beyond what the literature identified. Their perspectives mattered. Their relationships in the school setting were lasting; many of them spanned more than one generation of students. These counselors created a continuity of experience for their students who depended on them, and for principals and teachers who relied on their expertise. I doubt that they realize what an important presence they hold in the schools. I really did not either until now.

Because of this study, I have found guidance for the next step in my work. In future teaching positions with graduate students who are preparing for the role of school counselor, I will remember these insights. I will encourage the new counselors to take pride in this profession. I also hope there will be more opportunities to investigate the link between helping and growing. I believe it would be beneficial to use qualitative methodology for those investigations.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTRODUCTORY LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Date

Dear _____:

I am a doctoral candidate in Counselor Education at the College of William and Mary and a school counselor with Richmond Public Schools. As part of the requirements for my degree, I am conducting a research study to investigate how school counselors perceive the school reform process. Specifically, I am interested in knowing what experiences you have found helpful or not helpful in your role as a school counselor.

To gather information for this study, I would like to interview 12 school counselors who have been involved in school reform measures in Richmond, Hanover County, and Henrico County. If you decide to participate, I will need your commitment to meet with me twice at an agreed upon location. The first meeting will be for an initial interview. The second meeting will be for a follow-up interview and a written exercise. We will meet in a private room, and I will audiotape the interviews for later transcription. Your identity will remain anonymous; your name will never be used to identify your responses. Your participation will remain confidential, and I will give you copies of your interviews so that you can check them for accuracy and make corrections or additions, if you like. At the conclusion of the study, I will mail you a summary of what I have found. The estimated length of time for each meeting, scheduled at your convenience, will last from 60 to 90 minutes. I would like the first interview to take place near the middle of this summer, with the second interview to follow within the month of August.

Please consider that research in this area is limited, and your participation in this study may help other school counselors in Virginia to better serve students during this era of school reform. I also hope that participating in this study will be a positive experience for you. In any event, your participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you think you would be interested, or if you just have some further questions before deciding, please call me at 353-2184. I can be reached by email at debnackley@AOL.com.

Thank you for your assistance. I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Deborah Nackley Turner

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I understand that I am volunteering to participate in a research project for the purpose of investigating school counselor's experiences in school reform. The research project is being conducted by Deborah N. Turner as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Counselor Education at the College of William and Mary. The study will begin in the fall of 2002 with a 60-90 minute semi-structured interview that will be audiotaped for the purpose of transcribing the data for analysis. A second 60-90 minute session composed of a follow-up interview and a written exercise will be held approximately two weeks following the initial interview.

It is expected that participation in this research project will be a positive experience for the counselors involved and that the resulting report will provide valuable information and understanding about their experiences during an era of school reform, since research in this area is limited. There is no anticipation of any foreseeable risks or discomfort from participation in this study. Participation is completely voluntary, and refusal to participate will not result in any penalty. Participants may withdraw from the project at any time. The identities of participants will remain anonymous, and all information received by the researcher as a result of participation in this study will remain confidential.

If participants have questions at any time during the study, they may contact Dr. Victoria Foster at 757-221-2321 or Dr. Rip McAdams at 757-221-2338.

 Signature of Participant

Date

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONS FOR FIRST INTERVIEW

Begin with demographic data. A card will be provided for the participants to include their name, age, race, gender, number of years in school counseling practice, number of years in the particular school, status of school's accreditation in Virginia, previous work experience, endorsements or licensing credentials, membership in professional organizations, and grade level of students served.

The following questions have been adapted from the Stickel (1999) research study and will be used with permission from the author (Stickel, 1999).

1. How did you decide to become a school counselor?
2. What were some of the highlights of your training?
3. What did you think school counseling was going to be like before you started?
4. How were your expectations the same as or different from other counselors you met?
5. Are you meeting your own professional goals in your role as a school counselor?
Why or Why not?
6. Was your first year different from now? How is your work different now than when you started?
7. How did you learn about school reform?
8. What is your awareness and understanding about the National Standards for school counseling programs?
9. Please describe your relationship with your principal and other administrators?
10. What do you believe you will be doing as a school counselor in five years that you are not doing now?

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONS FOR SECOND INTERVIEW

1. Talk about your overall impression of your experiences regarding school reform.
2. How does it feel to be a counselor during this time?
3. What do you believe the future will look like for school counselors?
4. Has your view of your counseling role changed since you became aware of school reform measures?
5. Describe your current view about your role.
6. If you could have additional training at this time, what topics would you include?
7. What would you like to remain the same in the training you received?
8. What would you like to be different?
9. Do you believe uniform standards for school counseling programs will be helpful?
10. In closing, is there anything else you would like to add to what you have told me?

APPENDIX E

PARAGRAPH COMPLETION METHOD TEST

Date _____

On the following six pages you will be asked to give your ideas about several topics. Try to write at least three sentences about each topic.

There are no right or wrong answers. Indicate the way you really feel about each topic, not the way others feel or the way you think you should feel.

In general, spend about three minutes for each stem.

1. What I think about rules...
2. When I am criticized...
3. What I think about parents...
4. When someone does not agree with me...
5. When I am not sure...
6. When I am told what to do...

APPENDIX F

Source for Interview #1 Questions

1. How did you decide to become a counselor?	Conceptual systems theory
2. What were the highlights of your training?	School counseling practice Conceptual systems theory
3. What did you think school counseling was going to be like before you started?	School counseling practice
4. How were your expectations the same as or different from other counselors you met?	School counseling practice
5. Are you meeting your own professional goals in your role? Why or Why not?	School counseling practice Conceptual systems theory
6. Was your first year different from now?	Conceptual systems theory School counseling practice
7. How did you learn about school reform?	Public Education Reform Policies
8. What is your awareness about the National Standards for School Counseling Programs?	School counseling practice
9. Describe your relationship with your principal and other administrators.	Conceptual systems theory School counseling practice
10. What do you believe you will be doing as a school counselor in five years that you are not doing now?	Conceptual systems theory School counseling practice

APPENDIX G

Source for Interview #2 Questions

1. Talk about your overall impression of your experiences regarding school reform.	Conceptual systems theory Public Education Reform Policies
2. How does it feel to be a counselor during this time?	Conceptual systems theory Public Education Reform Policies School counseling practice
3. What do you believe the future will look like for school counselors?	Conceptual systems theory Public Education Reform Policies School counseling practice
4. Has your view of your counseling role changed since you became aware of school reform measures?	Conceptual systems theory Public Education Reform Policies
5. Describe your current view about your role.	Conceptual systems theory School counseling practice
6. If you could have additional training at this time, what topics would you include?	Conceptual systems theory School counseling practice
7. What would you like to remain the same in the training you received?	Conceptual systems theory School counseling practice
8. What would you like to be different?	Conceptual systems theory School counseling practice
9. Do you believe uniform standards for school counseling programs will be helpful?	Conceptual systems theory School counseling practice
10. Is there anything else you would like to add to what you have told me?	Conceptual systems theory

APPENDIX H.

Examples of Path from Participant Statement to Theme

Participant	Statement	Meaning	Sub-theme	CaseAnalysisTheme
Sheila, #1	“Seeing results”	Students are making progress	Feedback from students	Continuity/collaboration
Lisa, #2	“Overall positive effect”	Bonding with students	Liking children	Prioritize student needs
David, #3	“Pushed myself to find time to help”	Child-oriented activities were important	Responded to demands of job	Open person/good helper
Wendy, #4	“It takes a lot of time to do what is necessary to help them succeed.”	Perceived her role as central to quality of student life	Multi-level needs of children	Step outside the box
Joe, #5	“Meet the needs of kids in the 21 st century.”	Counselors need to be more visible	Observe and listen	Strong presence
Barbara, #6	“I learned what worked.”	Perspective changed over time	More than academic needs	Partnership with principal
Denise, #7	“Becoming a team player”	Cooperative attitude needed	Prevention	Changes in family structures
Elizabeth, #8	“Do not just settle for doing something.”	Doing her best	Meeting the needs of kids	Caring
Terry, #9	“Be there for students.”	Counselor availability	Talking with kids	Addressing special needs
Olivia, #10	“Realistic picture about student and family issues.”	Anticipate changes	Flexible roles	Sensitive to family changes

Note: The examples given were reflected in the researcher’s first interpretive theme, commitment, in chapter 5.

Vita

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 Ph.D. in Counselor Education
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 Education Specialist Degree (Ed.S.)
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 1976-1978 Virginia Commonwealth University
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 Master of Science
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 1971-1974 James Madison University (Madison College)
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 Bachelor of Science
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 Licenses: 1974-Present Virginia Postgraduate Professional Teaching
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 1997-Present Virginia Department of Health Professions
 Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC)
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 1986-Present Richmond Public Schools: School Counselor
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 Director, Deaf/Blind Program
 1975-76 Roanoke County Schools: Special Education
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