Group-Oriented Practices of Middle School Counselors

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

COUNSELOR EDUCATION

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August 12, 1999
Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: Middle School Counseling, Groups, Advisory, Peer Mediation
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(ABSTRACT)

This study is an investigation into the middle school counseling programs that facilitate the early adolescent need to belong to a group. Particular focus is on the effectiveness of teacher-advisory programs, peer mediation programs, and group counseling programs, and how all three programs work together as components of a comprehensive middle school guidance program. Factors associated with successful implementation of these programs and the role of the middle school counselor in the implementation these three programs were also examined. Five middle schools were studied, using qualitative interviews of principals, counselors, and teachers. A focus group of seven to ten students was conducted at each middle school. Results provide a look at several different ways to combine the three programs in a middle school, along with factors for successful implementation.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Jerry and Marie Folmar, who taught me that I could accomplish anything I set out to do; to V. Elizabeth “Wookie” Esposito, without whose encouragement and support the Ph.D. would not have been possible; to my brothers, Jerry and Steve, for their belief in their little sister; and to my husband, Chad, who is my best friend, cheerleader, and partner in every sense of the word. Thank you all for believing in me and pushing me to succeed.
Acknowledgements

Many people should be thanked and acknowledged for their part in the completion of this dissertation. In particular, I would like to recognize and thank the following people: my research professor and dissertation committee member, Dr. Jimmie Fortune, for opening my eyes and mind to the world of qualitative research, and for offering a kind word of encouragement and praise when I doubted myself; my committee members, Dr. Hildy Getz, Dr. Sherry Lynch, and Dr. Tom Agnew, for encouraging me to stick with it and not give in to irrational, self-defeating thoughts; my assistant moderators, Jeremy Tittle and Matthew Kelly, for their much needed assistance and valuable insight; Dr. Ginger Kirk, Dr. Laurie Williamson, and the counselor education students of Appalachian State University, for their help in reviewing this dissertation; Vicki Meadows, for her support and humor; Paula Hoover, my friend and caretaker, for showing me the way and believing in me; and finally, my dissertation committee chair and advisor, Dr. Claire Vaught, who has been and continues to be a wonderful mentor, editor, coach, and friend.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Problem

Very dramatic physical, intellectual, emotional, and social changes take place in children during the middle school years (National Middle School Association, 1995). Early adolescents are faced with these difficult changes, yet are often unequipped to handle them effectively on their own. Educators in middle schools have recognized the importance of helping adolescents meet the developmental needs related to social and emotional growth. The middle-level school, therefore, has historically been regarded as a “guidance school” (Beane, 1986, p.190).

Calling the middle school a “guidance school” does not make the establishment of an effective middle school guidance program an easy task. School counselors in general have struggled with role clarification and establishing themselves as professionals whose training and skills directly benefit the schools’ population. Their roles and expectations of others have ranged from record keepers and clerical assistants to miracle workers who are solely responsible for the guidance program in the school (ERIC CAPS, 1985). In a study of perceptions of the role of the middle school counselor, Huffman et al (1993) found that parents and students still associate the middle school counselor with an administrative role. Due to the confusion about what a middle school is and what its students’ needs are, middle school counselors have had an especially difficult time defining themselves. They have found themselves caught in the transition from junior high schools to middle schools where the focus was shifting from strictly academic needs to a total child approach, which added the social, emotional, and career developmental needs of
students to the middle school’s purpose. This transition carried with it a lot of confusion about the roles of middle school counselors and what practices they should employ in their programs.

To provide some clarification for school counselors and educators, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) (1981) defined the role of a school counselor as developmental, a concept based on the social, emotional, physical, academic and career developmental needs of the students served by a guidance program. This approach emphasizes planned interventions in which the school counselor plays a proactive, facilitative role in fostering the learning and maturation of all students, as opposed to crisis management (ERIC CAPS, 1985). However, some studies of school counselors still show that many of them are using a reactive, rather than proactive, focus in their programs (Mauk & Taylor, 1993). Schmidt (1991) emphasizes how easily counselors can become overwhelmed by the simultaneous challenges that face them in the school.

Because the developmental needs of middle school students are so unique from those of elementary and high school students, it is of extreme importance that middle school guidance programs pay special attention to the most appropriate ways of meeting these needs. Havighurst (1952) suggested that a useful way to understand the developmental needs of adolescents is to think of the developmental tasks they must accomplish. The writings of Thornburg (1970a, 1970b, 1979, 1980, 1986) focus specifically on eight developmental tasks of middle grade students. These tasks are organized into three domains of development: physical, intellectual, and social. Five out of these eight tasks are related to social development, presenting some strong implications for school counselors as they develop their middle school counseling and guidance programs. The specific social developmental tasks are:

1. Learning new social and sex roles.
2. Identifying with stereotypical role models.
3. Developing friendships.
4. Gaining a sense of independence.
5. Developing a sense of responsibility (Thornburg, 1986).

Based on these developmental tasks, the challenge for middle school counselors is to develop middle school counseling programs that help to facilitate fulfillment of these social needs (Gerler, Hogan, & O’Rourke, 1990). Thus, middle school counselors should try to coordinate programs that teach and encourage social skills and interactions with peers.

The school counselor is no stranger to the adolescent need to belong to a group. In fact, it has been argued that most of the serious problems counselors deal with at the middle and junior high school level are directly related to students’ failure to adapt themselves in ways that permit them to enjoy valid group membership (George, 1986). The focus of this study is on the middle school guidance practices and program components that facilitate meeting the early adolescent need to belong to a group. In particular, the programs under examination are: teacher advisory programs, peer helper programs and group counseling programs.

Gumaer (1986) suggested that middle school students place a strong emphasis on learning with peers. George (1986) recommended facilitating group involvement for middle school students through teacher advisory programs and counseling groups. Bowman (1986) also pointed out that the increase in peer influence during the adolescent years is not always a negative thing. He emphasized the importance of a peer helper program based on this increase in peer influence. Godbold (1994) conducted a study of middle school counselors to determine their recommended practices for meeting the needs of middle school students. Although a team approach was emphasized as one of the factors associated with success of guidance programs in
this study, a teacher-advisory program was not among the programs included in each guidance
department studied. In addition, she reported that they did not include peer helping programs as a
part of their guidance programs.

Peer helping is becoming more accepted as an integral part of the delivery of guidance
programs (Levi & Zeigler, 1991). Recognized as having an important influence on adolescent
social development, different forms of peer helping have been supported in educational theory
since the early 1950’s. Levi and Zeigler (1991) support the use of peer helper programs in the
middle school:

There is a natural tendency during the transition years for adolescents to go to their peers
for help rather than to adults. Teenage students place a high value on peer relationships,
often feeling that adults are unable to understand an adolescent perspective. Their stage
of ego growth makes it difficult for them to appreciate or accept adult ideas or
suggestions. Research demonstrates positive results for peer-helping programs. In one
study, the peer counseling model was found to be ‘highly effective’ in promoting social
leadership and group discussion. Peer counselors were successful in reducing
absenteeism, dropping out, and vandalism; in increasing favorable attitudes to school
work; in helping students deal with problems such as loneliness; and concerns about
sexuality, dating, family, friendships, and work (p.15-16).

Despite the importance of peer-facilitated groups cited in the literature, Levi and Zeigler (1991)
found through a survey of actual practices of school counseling programs that peer helper
programs were reported in fewer than ten percent of schools surveyed.

In addition, Levi and Zeigler (1991) cited as a necessary requirement for an effective
total-school guidance program that “the guidance program is perceived as a shared responsibility
among guidance counselors, administrators, and teachers…” (p. 11) They also highlighted the
main functions of the middle school guidance programs as including “small group advisories,
teacher mentors, and peer facilitators” (p. 12). Yet, in a 1991 survey of school counselors of
adolescents, fewer than half of the schools surveyed employed a teacher-advisory program
Statement of the Problem

The problem of how to best meet the developmental needs of middle school students continues to trouble counselors and other school professionals. The adolescent need to belong to a group has been emphasized as one of the strongest and most important needs of middle school-aged students. Programs such as teacher-advisory programs, student-led counseling programs and group counseling programs have been designed with the facilitation of this developmental need in mind. These programs have been supported by many researchers as effective in meeting the needs of middle school students (George, 1986, Gumaer, 1986, Henderson & LaForge, 1989, MacIver, 1990). However, integration of all three of these programs into a middle school guidance program is yet to be documented. The question that remains, then, is whether or not these three programs can be effectively combined and implemented as parts of a middle school’s guidance program. Furthermore, if the group-oriented programs are combined in a comprehensive middle school guidance program to help facilitate the early adolescent need for groupness, how are they coordinated?

Models for middle school guidance programs have been designed based on the developmental needs of young adolescents, which provide general guidelines for counselors to use in the development and management of their school counseling programs (Cole, 1977; Gysbers & Henderson, 1988; Gysbers, 1990). These general guidelines highlight the major functions of middle school counselors under large umbrella categories such as counseling, consulting, and coordinating. However, this organization of services into a model does not tell the middle school counselor exactly how to manage a guidance program. These models are very broad and offer a framework within which a counselor can fit certain practices, but they do not tell the counselor which practices are appropriate for meeting the needs of middle school
students. Many techniques and programs have also been prevalent in the literature, giving the middle school counselors many options from which to choose in designing their guidance programs to meet the developmental needs of middle school students. In particular, the early adolescent need to belong to a peer group has been emphasized as important to consider in designing middle school guidance programs (Thornburg, 1986; George, 1986; Bigner, 1994).

The most commonly recommended practices of middle school counselors in the literature which address the early adolescent need to belong to a group are teacher advisory programs, group counseling, and student-led adjuncts to the counseling programs (George, 1986; Gumaer, 1986; Henderson & LaForge; 1989). The coordination of these programs and practices are usually in addition to many other responsibilities of school counselors, and thus are often met with apprehension from school counselors and other school personnel. The middle school guidance models, although they are helpful in general development of school counseling programs, do not show the school counselors how to implement the recommended practices and programs within the recommended framework. Therefore, school counselors are left with the notion that they are supposed to implement certain practices and programs to meet students’ developmental needs, yet they are not provided instruction on how to put it all together in a comprehensive program.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate middle school guidance and counseling programs that integrate all of the most commonly recommended practices for facilitating the adolescent need to belong to a group. Specifically, these practices are: Teacher-advisory programs, peer helper or peer mediation programs, and group counseling. Moreover, the purpose is to discover if and how these schools are integrating these group-oriented practices into a
comprehensive middle school guidance program, and how successful these programs are perceived to be by the members of the school community. The results of this study provide middle school counselors and other middle school personnel the opportunity to see evidence of successful implementation and integration, as well as several models from which to choose for their own middle school guidance programs. Furthermore, this study provides examples of how these middle school counselors divide their time and what programs are given the highest priority. This study provides a bridge from general models to specific practices for middle school counselors and aid in the development and delivery of group-oriented middle school counseling and guidance services. As background for the study, a background of the middle school concept, an overview of developmental theories pertaining to middle school-aged youth, the prominent middle school counseling and guidance models, and information about the theoretically recommended practices for meeting the developmental needs of middle school youth are provided.

**The Middle School Concept**

Middle schools encompass the grades in between the elementary school and those of the high school. The junior high school emerged in 1909-1910 and grew rapidly over the next few decades. By 1960, the majority of high school graduates had gone through an elementary-junior-senior-high school organization, usually grades 1-6, 7-9, and 10-12 (Alexander & McEwin, 1989). Dissatisfaction with this organization eventually came from a recognition of the unique developmental needs of this age group and the realization that these students were a not a “junior” anything, but rather had a designation all their own.

Students in the middle school are unique and should be considered separate from students in grades preceding or following them. These students are characterized as the in-between agers
The advent of the middle school in the 1960’s and 1970’s was intended to address the unique needs of this age group. The restructuring of the school grades to form the middle school was based on three points (Alexander et al, 1968):

1. Individual differences present in the in-between-ager. Because of the wide variation among young people during this time, the middle school places emphasis on the individual with two considerations in mind: first, the in-between quality of these young people and how they differ from elementary or senior high students; second, the tremendous variability among young people, which adds to the complexity of teaching young people during this time. One way to address these issues is through a flexible curriculum.

2. Providing continuity across the K-12 educational experience. Clearly, the middle school is a transition between the elementary and high school. Since junior high school has been regarded as being too similar to high school, the middle school becomes a developmentally appropriate buffer, smoothing the transition from elementary to high school. The issue of continuity is difficult when one considers how variable young people are at this time, and then factor in the orientation toward a nongraded curriculum. The education of children and adolescents has been regarded as a ladder approach, wherein students move the rungs as they move through the grades. Continuity, then, becomes a K-12 issue, not just a problem of the middle school. There needs to be close planning at all levels with consideration for what precedes and follows in the educational schema.

3. Introducing innovations in instruction and curriculum to accommodate the new organizational structure. …Innovation is more easily accomplished when restructuring takes place. Unfortunately, at times, restructuring occurs for reasons other than
educational innovation to meet the needs of young people. It may be a factor in matching enrollments with facilities, arranging levels to establish acceptable class size, or some other reason that may or may not impact the delivery of quality education (p. 12).

These recommendations, made in 1968, still represent the latest view of the middle school. It is obvious from the literature that the middle school concept is largely based on theories of adolescent development. Therefore, a discussion of relevant adolescent development theories is necessary in order to understand what needs middle school students have.

**Adolescent Development**

The middle school was organized based on the unique developmental characteristics of early adolescents. Early adolescence is a time in which young people are simultaneously facing changes physically, intellectually, socially and emotionally, and at the same time pondering the question “Who am I?” (Gerler, Hogan, & O’Rourke, 1990). These changes bring about excitement, delight, anxiety, and a lot of misunderstanding. “The child, who in elementary school was obedient and academically motivated may seem disrespectful and lazy in middle school” (Gerler, 1991, p.1). Early adolescence marks the beginning of a transition from adult direction to challenging authority and moving toward self-direction. It is also a time of experimentation and of heavier reliance on peer groups for approval and direction (Gerler, 1991). “Counselors implement various practical strategies to help middle school students move toward self understanding. These strategies include such activities as maintaining daily journals, group counseling, and developmental classroom programs that offer young people opportunities for self exploration” (Gerler, 1991, p.1).
Middle School Counseling Program Models

The need for a school counseling program to have a plan behind its implementation has been supported heavily in the literature. For example, Carlson (1991) noted that many counselors inadvertently sabotage their programs by appearing not to be busy at the beginning of the school year. This can lead to the assignment of non-guidance duties, which the counselor may accept but cannot possibly perform as the year progresses. The existence of a clearly articulated school counseling program and plan can help school counselors avoid this kind of sabotage.

Schmidt (1991) maintains that a school counseling program should consist of practices and components that are based on goals and objectives reflecting the needs of the particular school populations. These practices and components are chosen as a part of a planned program of services. A summary of essential school counseling services can be categorized into four major components of a school counseling program: planning, organizing, implementing and evaluating.

Cole (1977) designed a model for a middle school guidance program based on the developmental tasks of middle school students. It outlined four major areas of concentration for middle school counselors: counseling, coordinating, consulting, and curriculum specialist. These areas encompassed the practices of middle school counselors, leaving some latitude for what those practices are.

Gysbers and Henderson (1988) developed a model for school counselors based on four major components: guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and system support. This model also provided a recommendation for percentages of time spent in each component. The American School Counselor Association released a role statement for middle school counselors in 1990 outlining the major responsibilities of school counselors. These responsibilities clarify the role of the school counselor in meeting the developmental needs of the
middle school students and suggest general ways to meet those needs, but do not explain to the
counselor how all of the responsibilities can be met together in a guidance program.

**Recommended Middle School Group-Oriented Program Components**

In the vast literature of school counseling programs and practices, a few programs found
to be developmentally appropriate and recommended for middle schools emerge. Again, the
young adolescent need to belong to a group is emphasized in much of this literature. To meet this
need, the major theorists have suggested the following programs. Alexander and George (1981),
George (1986), Myrick and Myrick (1990), and many more of the leading theorists in the field
support teacher-advisory programs. Peer helper programs are recommended by Bowman and
Myrick (1980), Cole (1977), and Bowman (1986) as ideal ways to meet the adolescent need to
belong to a peer group. Group counseling is recommended by Gumaer (1986), Cole (1977), and
many others as an ideal way to meet the needs of many adolescents.

Specific practices are easy to find in the middle school counseling literature. For instance,
one can easily find an article explaining exactly how to implement a middle school teacher-
advisory program. Alexander and George (1981) give a very detailed explanation of how a
teacher-advisory program should work in a middle school. They also suggest very strongly how
important this program is in the meeting of middle school students’ needs. However, these
studies do not tell the counselor how to coordinate the teacher-advisory program while
maintaining a peer helper program, several counseling groups, a classroom guidance curriculum,
and individual counseling sessions with students in need. This does not even begin to cover the
other duties of the school counselor, such as testing and career development. It is obvious that a
large gap exists in the literature on middle school counseling. This gap is the implementation of
all of the recommended group-oriented guidance practices together in a comprehensive middle school guidance and counseling program.

Research Questions

This qualitative investigation of middle school counseling and guidance programs focused specifically on the following research questions:

1. Are the middle schools in this study benefited by having all three group-oriented programs (teacher-advisory, peer-led counseling adjunct, and group counseling) operating together?

2. Based on the data from the middle schools in this study, how can the three group-oriented programs be implemented together in a middle school?

3. What are the key factors necessary for the implementation of the three group-oriented programs together in the middle schools of this study?

4. What is the counselor’s role in the implementation of each program at the middle schools of this study?

Significance of the Study

Middle school youth are more troubled today than ever before. They face risks and decisions that were almost unknown to their parents or grandparents. Many youth first experiment with sex, alcohol and illicit drugs during early adolescence (Carnegie, 1989).

“These young people enter a world in which they will likely be tempted, if not pressured, to experiment with drugs and alcohol. They may live in neighborhoods so dangerous that they fear walking to school. They date earlier in life than their parents did. They are at once admonished to control their sexual urges and bombarded through the media with the allure of sex.” (Carnegie, 1989, p.21-22) By the age of fifteen, millions of American youth are at risk of
reaching adulthood lacking the capacity to meet job requirements, to maintain healthy relationships with family and peers, and to meet the demands of living in a multicultural and democratic society (Carnegie, 1989).

Despite the attempts of school personnel to implement programs and maintain an organized guidance program aimed at the developmental needs of middle school students, many counselors in the middle schools are still delivering services on a reactionary basis. There are too many students and not enough middle school counselors (Godbold, 1994). In a study by Mauk, Mortensen, & Taylor (1991) an average student-counselor ratio of 563:1 was reported for 73.5 percent of the middle school counselors surveyed. This is in marked contrast to the recommended maximum ratio of 300:1 (ASCA, 1990). Counselors in the middle schools are extremely important members of the staff, but relying on one or two counselors in a large middle school results in a failed attempt to meet the critical needs of early adolescents. Students are not getting the guidance they need, and middle school counselors are spreading their talents and skills incredibly thin (Carnegie, 1989).

Crisis in the middle school is a daily phenomenon, and as such school counselors cannot afford to take the time to try new things to meet their students’ needs. They read what the literature recommends and respond with a list of what they already do in what little time they have. Without an example of how it all can work together, middle school counselors continue to believe that it cannot all be done. This study intends to determine if the recommended group-oriented guidance practices can work together effectively in a comprehensive middle school counseling and guidance program, and, if effective, how they are best integrated into the overall middle school counseling program. These issues were explored while explaining and defining the role of the middle school counselor in the implementation of such a program.
Definitions

*Middle School:* A school serving students between the elementary and high school levels, usually containing grades six through eight, focused on the educational needs of students in these in-between years and designed to promote continuous educational progress for all concerned (Alexander & George, 1981).

*Group-oriented guidance practices:* Any guidance practices or program components that are conducted in a group setting and aimed at facilitating the adolescent need to belong to a group. Specific examples are: Group counseling, teacher-advisory programs, and peer helper programs.

*Teacher-advisory program:* “…an organizational structure in which one small group of students identifies with and belongs to one educator, who nurtures, advocates for, and shepherds through school the individuals in that group” (Cole, 1992, p.5).

*Group counseling:* “A unique educational experience in which students can work together to explore their ideas, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors, especially as related to personal development and progress in school. A counselor facilitates this interaction among participants in a special learning experience where helping relationships are formed.” (Myrick, 1993, p.183)

*Peer Helper program:* A program that involves the training of students in basic listening and helping skills along with basic problem-solving and decision-making. The trained helpers, also
referred to as peer facilitators, serve as tutors, “special friends” to younger or new students, co-leaders of small discussion groups, or assistants to the counselors.

Peer Mediation program: A program that employs a form of conflict resolution that uses the services of another person, an impartial mediator, to settle a dispute. In schools the mediator is another student. Often working in teams of two as co-mediators, the students work to encourage problem-solving between disputants (Sweeney & Caruthers, 1996; Araki, 1990; Lane & McWhirter, 1992).
Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Introduction

The majority of research on middle school counseling program implementation is either highly theoretical, opinionated, or focused entirely on individual program components. For example, there are studies about the successful implementation of teacher advisory programs, peer helper or peer mediation programs, and counseling groups for a specific need. The literature is lacking, however, in successful implementation of a comprehensive, developmental guidance program including all these components. The middle school counseling theories share numerous examples of how to run a guidance program; and the theorists agree that a middle school guidance program can benefit greatly from including group-oriented program components. However, a school counseling program which integrates all three of the recommended group-oriented practices together in a comprehensive school counseling program has not been examined in the literature. This study intends to highlight middle schools that integrate such practices and examine the factors associated with successful integration of services.

The Middle School Concept

Middle school is the level of education that encompasses early adolescence, the stage of life between age ten and fifteen (NMSA, 1995). The theory that supports middle grades education is based on the belief that early adolescents’ social, emotional, and academic needs are best served by an educational experience that is different from both the elementary and the high school formats (McKay, 1995). Middle school theory, based on developmental psychology and effective schools research, holds that “with the appropriate experiences, students will become
more effective persons, more effective participants with other students and adults, and stronger academically” (p.13).

In order to be developmentally responsive, these schools should be based on the diverse characteristics and needs of this age group (NMSA, 1995). The National Middle School Association has sought to reconceptualize middle schools as being developmentally responsive, recognizing that: “…the experiences youth undergo during these formative years have lifelong influence…” (p.10). As a result, it is the position of NMSA that middle schools should “promote the growth of young adolescents as scholars, democratic citizens, and increasingly competent, self-sufficient young people who are optimistic about their future” (p.10).

Alexander and George (1981) referred to the middle school as “a bridge from elementary to secondary education, from the childhood level served by the elementary school to the adolescent level served by the high school” (p.1-2). The middle school movement gathered strength in the 1960’s as more educators saw the need to provide a school for students with unique developmental needs. Although there are several different methods of organization, the typical middle school houses grades six through eight (Myrick, 1993).

A complete understanding of the unique needs of young adolescents makes it clear that an educational program for ten to fifteen year-olds should reflect these needs. Guidelines for selecting educational goals, curricula, and teaching methods should grow out of an awareness of this distinct age group (NMSA, 1995). The National Middle School Association (1995) developed six main characteristics that must be shared by all developmentally responsive middle schools. Once these characteristics are in place, middle schools are in the best position to provide an educational program that truly reflects student and societal needs. These developmentally responsive middle schools are characterized by: educators committed to young adolescents, a
shared vision, high expectations for all, an adult advocate for every student, family and community partnerships, and a positive school climate. Therefore, these schools are said to provide the following to their students: a curriculum that is challenging, integrative, and exploratory; varied teaching and learning approaches; assessment and evaluation that promote learning; flexible organizational structures; programs and policies that foster health, wellness, and safety; and comprehensive guidance and support services (NMSA, 1995).

Myrick (1993) distinguished middle schools from junior high schools, emphasizing that middle schools make teachers an integral part of guidance. Junior high schools typically have the school counselor take the sole responsibility of providing guidance to students. Middle schools also incorporate organized guidance periods into the regular school schedule, another characteristic different from that of junior high schools.

The attention devoted to the guidance needs of early adolescents has been a concern of educators since the beginning of the middle school movement. Unlike the high school and elementary school, where the responsibility for guidance services is placed primarily on the school counselor, the middle school is based on the belief that guidance services are the responsibility of the entire faculty and administration (McKay, 1995). The guidance responsibilities of teachers and administrators in a middle school are suggested below:

1. establish a caring relationship with individual students
2. be available to students to discuss concerns and interests
3. confer with students and parents (communication link between home, school, and community)
4. assist students in obtaining information about school activities;
5. serve as a first-line source of referral (e.g. to counselors, nurses, other specialists);
(6) serve as an academic expert and student advocate;
(7) provide social and emotional education to students;
(8) provide a “sounding board” by assisting students in working out problems; and
(9) conduct group guidance activities (McKay, 1995, p.18).

Adolescent Development and the Need for “Groupness”

“Each age or developmental level has particular characteristics which might seem to warrant the label of unique, but no other age level has so clear and legitimate a claim to the designation of unique as does this period of transition between childhood and full-blown adolescence, roughly ages ten to fourteen” (Lounsbury, 1982, p.3). Not only do these individuals experience marked physical changes that are quite obvious, but they are also faced with intense intellectual, emotional, and social changes. These changes are made even more intense to the adolescents when one considers the wide variation with which the changes occur between individuals. There is no other time in the lifespan at which differences between individuals of the same age are so great (Lounsbury, 1982).

The ten to fourteen year-old age group has also struggled with an identity, partly due to the fact that it has lacked one for several years. Nonspecific terms such as adolescent, pre-adolescent, early adolescent, late childhood, or emerging adolescent have been used to describe the same group of in-betweener (Lounsbury, 1982). This made the young adolescent indistinguishable from the high school student. The English language did not include a word to describe this period of transition between childhood and adolescence until Eichorn (1966) coined the term “transescent”. He defined the term as such:

“The stage of development which begins prior to the onset of puberty and extends through the early stages of adolescence. Since puberty does not occur for all precisely at the
same chronological age in human development, the transescent designation is based upon the many physical, social, emotional, and intellectual changes that appear prior to the puberty cycle to the time in which the body gains a practical degree of stabilization over these complex pubescent changes.” (p. 4).

The early adolescent is in a transition between dependence and interdependence with parents, as well as friends, relatives and other adults. Although this renegotiation of relationships is often stormy, the early adolescent is actually seeking to maintain strong bonds with exactly those people from whom he or she is withdrawing (Carnegie, 1989).

Developmental issues of middle school students have been a major concern of educators since the middle school movement began. Many theorists believe that the middle school is indeed an ideal place to meet the unique needs of young adolescents. Thornburg (1979) emphasized the heavy reliance middle school students place on their school environment to facilitate the development of meaningful relationships with peers.

Cole (1992) presented the “herd instinct” as a dominant developmental characteristic of early adolescents. This characteristic refers to the desire to be a part of a pair, a trio, or a larger group of age-mates. “Rarely does one see an early adolescent alone by choice. Some of the saddest early adolescents are those who don’t know how to be friends and become part of a group” (p.5). The early adolescent moves from being dependent on parents and other adults to an intense need for groupness, often overwhelming significant adults with their devotion to peers. “As the group goes, so does the individual, with every group member sporting protective camouflage to become indistinguishable from other members of the group” (p.5).

Thornburg (1979) emphasized the need for groupness among middle school students. Referring to them as “preadolescents” he made the following observations:
“Preadolescents form teams, clubs, and groups…. [and] are influenced by friends and often have inner conflicts when one of their group’s activities is out-of-step with what their parents have taught. [They] begin challenging parental authority, and throughout this period emphasis will shift more from parents to peers” (p.14).

In his book on preadolescent development, Thornburg (1974) also described group behavior as being “contributory in the pursuit of social maturation” (p. 331). Group identification also helps youth in the process of attaining independence from their parents.

Glasser (1986) included among the basic needs of adolescents the need to belong to a group. Cole (1992) related this need to belong, along with the other basic needs of power, freedom, and fun, to the establishment of a teacher-advisory program to facilitate the fulfillment of these needs.

Studies indicate that peer activity has a dominating effect on the behavior of adolescents (Thornburg, 1974). Based on this evidence, it makes sense that many of the guidance needs of middle school students would be best met through the use of group-oriented guidance practices.

School Counseling Program Models

Levi and Ziegler (1991) described an effective school guidance program as a total-school program, based on goals and objectives held in common by administrators, teachers and guidance counselors. This type of program becomes integral to the school, a “nerve center for the system” (p.12).

Gysbers (1990) traced the history of school counseling models from those which focused on vocational guidance, to a clinically-oriented approach, and finally to a developmental approach. The vocational approach to guidance was based on occupational selection and placement. In the early 1920’s a more clinically-focused approach emerged, stressing counseling for personal adjustment rather than strictly vocational planning. Two guidance models emerged
during this period: The services model and the process model. The services model focused on organizing the activities of the counselor around six major services: orientation, assessment, information, counseling, placement, and follow-up. A limitation of this model is that it is primarily oriented toward secondary schools. The process model emphasized the clinical and therapeutic aspects of school counseling, focusing on the process of counseling, consulting, and coordinating. This model is appealing to many because it can be applied to all school levels. However, it does not specify allocations of counselors’ time. The 1960’s and 1970’s brought with them a call to reorient guidance from an ancillary, crisis-based set of services to a comprehensive, developmental program. In the 1990’s, comprehensive guidance services are becoming the major way to organize and manage guidance services in the schools (Gysbers, 1990).

Cole (1977) developed a middle school counseling model based on the developmental tasks of middle school students. This model was organized around three faces of a cube. The components of the cube were (a) Roles of the guidance counselor; (b) Target of guidance activity; and (c) Purpose of the guidance program. The four roles of the counselor were defined as counselor, consultant, coordinator, and curriculum specialist. The targets of guidance, or primary recipients of guidance services, were listed as individual, group, school, and community. Remediation, prevention, and development were the three purposes of the guidance program under this model. Ten middle schools were studied in order to validate the model and examine the degree to which these middle school counselors were focusing on its specific components. Schools with programs most like the model had an emphasis on prevention, development, and group work; strong administrative support and a division guidance supervisor; written guidance
programs; counselors active in professional organizations; and evidence of community support. Schools with programs that least resembled the model had the opposite of these characteristics.

Stamm and Nissman (1979) devised a model for a middle school guidance program, viewing guidance services as a “Human Development Center” (p.52). The Human Development Center is designed to include nine clusters, each operating independently, as well as being a part of a unit aimed at meeting the needs of the entire school community. The clusters are: communication services, curriculum services, assessment services, counseling services, community contact, professional growth, crisis center, and career resources. Specific activities are included in each cluster, along with the assignment of roles to school personnel and community members.

Another way of describing school guidance services is the duties model (Gysbers, 1990). In this model the counselor simply lists duties, with the last duty on the list often being “and other duties as assigned” (p.4). While this model is simple and applicable to all developmental levels, it is difficult to identify student outcomes and nearly impossible to determine allocation of counselor’s time spent in each duty.

In response to the criticisms of other models, Gysbers and Henderson (1988) developed and refined the elements of a school counseling program into a comprehensive, developmental model. The model contained four major components: guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and system support. A description of the counselor’s time allocation was provided, with the middle school counselor’s percentages as follows: guidance curriculum 25-35%, individual planning 15-25%, responsive services 30-40%, and system support 10-15%.

Costar (1988) supported a middle school counseling model in which the middle school staff is “assisted by one or more counselors working with other members of the pupil personnel
team, especially when helping teachers with more difficult or time-consuming cases and the principal with administration and evaluation of the program” (p.14). With this model, the teachers often become less and less responsible for the guidance needs of their students and the counselors may eventually become the entire guidance program. To prevent this from happening, as well as to promote efficiency, the teacher-advisor approach to middle school guidance is recommended (Costar, 1988).

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) (1990) endorses and supports the implementation of a comprehensive, developmental guidance and counseling program. This refers to systematically planned programs that provide direct services to students, staff, and the community that facilitate self- and other-understanding. Furthermore, ASCA supports the integration of developmental guidance into the role of the school counselor.

According to Schmidt (1991), the characteristics of a comprehensive school counseling program which distinguish it from traditional guidance and counseling programs are the following:

1. Balanced program of services
2. Preventive/developmental/remedial in nature
3. Proactive in planning and goal-setting
4. Direct service orientation
5. High level of teacher involvement
6. Extensive use of group services.

Schmidt (1991) summarized the services and activities of school counselors under four major components: Planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating. Planning refers to the process of assessing the needs of the school and its students and establishing goals. Organizing
refers to the selection of program objectives and strategies, and determines who will deliver which services. This part of the program assigns roles and responsibilities to counselors, teachers and administrators. Implementing refers to the actual delivery of services such as counseling, consulting, coordinating, testing, and other program components. Finally, evaluation is cited by Schmidt as the most important part of the program. This part allows the counselor to assess strengths and weakness of the program and make recommendations for future changes.

The concept of a comprehensive school guidance and counseling program has changed the role of the school counselor. Rather than emphasizing individual counseling, the school counselor’s role has moved toward one of facilitating change through prevention and intervention of all students in the school. This means more concentration on groups and more emphasis on change in the learning environment (Perry, 1995).

Bonebrake and Borgers (1984) found in a computer survey of counselors and principals, that middle school counselors and principals agreed on the following necessary components of a middle school guidance program: individual and group counseling, classroom guidance, consultation with teachers and parents, and coordination of programs. Although there is some disagreement about which of the four components are most valuable to a school counseling program, all four are cited as necessary components of a comprehensive school counseling program and are necessary for effectiveness (Borders & Drury, 1992).

Although it is clearly emphasized in the school counseling literature as necessary, many middle schools are still operating guidance programs without a systematic plan aimed at meeting the developmental needs of students. In a 1991 survey of middle school counselors in Utah, Mauk, Mortensen, and Taylor (1991) found that some schools did not have any guidance personnel at all, and others had clerical or administrative workers performing guidance duties.
This study focused on survey responses of 147 middle school counselors. The survey addressed the following issues: guidance position titles, levels of education and amount of experience, student-counselor ratio, direct and indirect service provision to students and staff, existence and perceived utility of teacher-advisory programs, primary counseling technique or approach, and several other categories including system-level impediments and demographic information. Results showed student-counselor ratios of forty-one percent higher than the recommended student caseload, numerous administrative duties assigned to counselors, and a lack of funds and facilities for interventions. Among the system-level impediments were: an unclear or undefined role, lack of facilities, inadequate training, and no comprehensive guidance curriculum.

Group-Oriented Practices of Middle School Counselors

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) (1981) identified the first major function for school counselors as structured developmental guidance through the use of group activities. These group activities may be made available to middle school students through four recommended methods: classroom guidance, discussion groups, growth-centered groups, and problem-centered groups. Revised in 1988, the ASCA position statement supports group approaches as “the preferred medium of delivery for developmental guidance activities, with efficiency as well as effectiveness” (p.17). George (1986) also supported group interventions, maintaining that two of the most important developmental needs of middle school students are the need for individuality and the need to belong to a group.

Godbold (1994) conducted qualitative interviews with six middle school counselors in Virginia. Using a cross-case analysis, she found that the most commonly reported benefit to a counseling program is the concept of a team atmosphere. Much of the success found in the counseling programs examined was attributed to the cooperation between counselors,
administrators, and parents. The majority of counselors interviewed also agreed that group
counseling sessions were more helpful than individual counseling in reaching the largest number
of students. All counselors agreed that they had too many duties and not enough time to give the
students the individual attention they deserved. Teacher advisory programs and peer helper
programs were not mentioned in this study.

Schmidt (1999) holds that “counseling middle graders requires expanded approaches that
include individual helping relationships, group experiences, and peer support systems” (p.61).
Many advocates of the middle school have emphasized the importance of the teacher-student
relationship at the middle school level. Alexander and George (1981) have suggested that this
relationship is the very basis of the middle school counseling program. Further, they emphasize
that every student should have at least one adult with whom he or she can have a close advisee
relationship.

The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) emphasized the importance of
small groups for adolescent learning in middle schools “where stable, close, mutually respectful
relationships with adults and peers are considered fundamental for intellectual and personal
growth”(p.9). Teacher-advisories are among the many ways to establish such a “community of
learners” (p.9).

Teacher-Advisory Programs in the Middle School

According to Schockley, Shumacher, and Smith (1984), a need exists for middle schools
to address the following issues of their students: (1)understanding themselves and others, (2)self-
concept and respect for others, (3)understanding behavior and values, (4)decision making, and
(5)developing interpersonal skills. These issues need to be addressed in a planned and systematic
manner. Although many educators would say that this is the school counselor’s responsibility,
most school counselors would respond that they do not have the time to give each student the individual attention he or she needs. Therefore, it seems obvious that, in order for middle schools to successfully address to affective needs of their students, educators must recognize that these issues are the responsibility of everyone in the school.

“One of the most important programs in the long history of the junior high school-middle school movement has been the teacher-based guidance effort often called the advisor-advisee program. It is both the most popular component of the curriculum of middle-level schools and the most disliked.” (George, 1986, 1990, p.320) Because proponents of the middle school philosophy support the notion that teachers are major providers of guidance as well as instruction to students; the teacher-advisor program has become recognized as an important way of meeting the guidance needs of students in the middle school (Gibson, Mitchell, & Higgins, 1983; Henderson & La Forge, 1989).

Bergmann and Baxter (1983) held that early adolescents have a need to develop significant relationships with adults. A well-developed advisory program can provide the opportunity for middle graders to do just that. In an advisory program, the adviser is the student’s best adult friend. “He or she is available to help students through difficult times and to share successes. The adviser helps to personalize the learning experience for the student” (p.50).

Ayres (1994) emphasized the importance of advisory programs in meeting the early adolescent need to belong to a group. “The advisory time helps students establish positive peer group support, so that they will not have to go outside the school to negative arenas for a sense of belonging” (p.9).

Alexander and George (1981) strongly support the implementation of a teacher-advisory program in meeting the early adolescent need for groupness. “The need for acceptance and
approval by their peers is matched in its strength only by the frequent inadequacy of their efforts to secure this peer support. Consumed by the unquenchable need to belong, they are seemingly less able to satisfy this need than almost any other” (p.90). The advisory program provides an opportunity for meeting this need without adding more pressure to the early adolescents to establish their own peer support.

Beane (1986) supported the use of an advisory program in his “human school”, focused on the developmental needs of early adolescents. Emphasizing the importance of making affective learning a part of the curriculum, he asserted: “Commitment to personal/social growth needs to be at least as high as that given to academic achievement of any other item on the school agenda” (p.16).

Digby, Totten, and Snider (1995) support teacher-advisory programs, placing emphasis on the learning community. “Within the advisor-advisee learning community, students participate in collaborative activities and group projects that foster collegiality, mutual responsibility and concern, and active participation” (p. 279). In addition, they assert that advisor-advisee programs provide students with the opportunity to belong to a group. Middle school students need to belong to a group that meets their social needs. Often, middle school students feel left out of the school community, turning to their own, sometimes undesirable, social groups for a sense of belonging. Teacher-advisory programs can provide a sense of belonging for students through activities that encourage positive, appropriate behavior. These authors provide strategies for successful implementation of a teacher-advisory program, complete with a description of the counselor’s role as the affective expert of the school. However, there is no mention of how the program is integrated into a guidance program along with other guidance services.
Gibson, Mitchell and Higgins (1983) contend that such advisor-advisee programs will be enhanced if they are viewed as a part of the school’s total counseling and guidance effort. “Clearly teachers and counselors working together as ‘team’ members, serving each other as consultants, and coordinating their respective efforts will result in increased ‘payoff’ for their mutual concerns” (p. 218).

In Turning Points, the well-known report on middle schools by the Carnegie Corporation (1989), the teacher advisory program is advocated strongly through the recommendation that “every student…be well-known by at least one adult…Small group advisories, homerooms, or other arrangements enable teachers or other staff to provide guidance and actively monitor the academic and social development of students” (p.40).

Henderson and LaForge (1989) discussed three middle school counselor roles in an advisory program: (1) assessing and reporting the schools’ readiness for a teacher-advisory program, (2) establishing a teacher advisory committee, and (3) training teachers for their role as teacher-advisors (Henderson & La Forge, 1989).

Teacher advisory programs, although highly recommended and supported by many, can also be met with much frustration and conflict in a middle school. Many teachers are uncomfortable with the idea of guidance or advising, often responding to such an idea with “I’m not a trained counselor; my job is to teach” (Bergmann & Baxter, 1983). This response to an advisory program is not uncommon. For example, in a study of teacher attitudes prior to implementing a teacher advisory program, Cole (1994) found, in a survey of 224 middle school teachers and counselors, that many teachers felt the need for an advisory program, but were reluctant to serve as advisors themselves. Reasons cited for this reluctance included time constraints, fear of being ineffective as advisors, lack of commitment from fellow teachers, and
parental objections. Suggestions that resulted from this study included extensive planning before beginning an advisory program, keeping the numbers of students small in the advisory groups, and involving the school counselors in the program to promote program support.

Ayres (1994) noted that inadequate preparation was a strong underlying factor for teacher resistance to advisory programs. “Fear, inexperience, lack of appropriate skills, and, above all, ignorance of underlying philosophy, contribute to teacher discomfort and rejection of advisories” (p.10). When teachers do not know what is expected of them or why they are being asked to serve as advisors, they may fill the void with horror stories and rumors. Not surprisingly, advisory programs that began without any staff development were generally rejected by teachers. Extensive staff development and frequent supply of guidance materials are suggested as ways to prevent this kind of reaction to advisories.

Johnston (1997) found that many advisory programs were not meeting their goals of providing guidance to adolescents. In a survey of teachers, parent, and students in five large northwestern and western states, advisory programs received substantial criticism. The majority of those surveyed supported advisory programs as “…promising ways of helping students develop strong self-concepts and decision-making skills.” (p.11) However, only thirty-two percent of teachers and sixty-eight percent of parents indicated that the advisory programs were meeting those goals.

Vars (1997) emphasized the importance of having small groups for the advisory time to enable the “…students and teachers to become better acquainted.” (p.17) He also recognized the problems with scheduling advisory time: “The morning time is apt to be disrupted by late arrivals and in the afternoon students are tired and looking forward to after-school activities.”
Schools can expect to have similar problems if they schedule their advisory times during lunch or as a part of some other activity.

Zeigler and Mulhall (1994) defined elements of a successful advisory program as:

1. A planning period of at least six months preceding implementation.
2. An in-service program supported by staff with skills in team building, and including training in adolescent development.
3. Advisory group meetings scheduled on a daily basis.
4. Group size not exceeding fifteen.
5. Students remaining with same advisor until graduation.
6. A handbook including resource units to draw upon (p.46).

Despite the mixed reviews teacher-advisory programs have received, they continue to be an important characteristic of middle schools. In fact, a 1993 nationwide survey of middle schools by McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins (1996) found that 52% of all schools with grades six through eight had teacher-based guidance programs in place.

**Group Counseling in the Middle School**

Group counseling is especially effective at the middle school level because it provides a comfortable environment for students, as well as the opportunity to learn and practice new behaviors, communication skills, and receive valuable feedback from their peers (ERIC CAPS, 1985). The American School Counselor Association (1990) includes small group counseling as one of the main functions of school counselors.

Students use the peer group as a reference group for comparing academic achievements, personal and social accomplishments, and leisure successes as well as failures (Gumaer, 1986). “No better or more natural environment exists for middle-grade children to learn in than their
Gumaer (1986) listed four approaches to working with middle school students in groups: classroom guidance, discussion groups, growth-centered group counseling, and problem-centered group counseling. Classroom guidance was emphasized as most beneficial when the group size is small. Larger classes may necessitate breaking into smaller groups.

Myrick (1987) supported small-group counseling as time-efficient, cost-effective, and developmentally appropriate with its emphasis on peer interactions. “Students who share a common concern can provide support and verification for each other, share coping strategies, give and receive feedback, and challenge each other to make changes” (Borders & Drury, 1992, p.491).

Mauk, Mortensen, and Taylor (1991) found in a survey of 113 middle school counselors in Utah that many had no facilities for group intervention, and therefore had a serious impediment to their delivery of services. Despite this finding, the school counselors reported spending fifty-five percent of their time providing direct service to their students, which included group interventions.

Peer Helpers and Peer Mediators in the Middle School

The increase in peer influence on the early adolescent is an easily observable change. Although this influence often overpowers the influence and authority of adults, it should not be viewed as always negative or harmful to these young people (Bowman, 1986). During the past few years, peer facilitator programs have increased and are continuing to thrive. In 1985 a review
of the state peer helper association members indicated that peer helper programs had increased most significantly at the middle school level (Bowman, 1986).

The emphasis on the peer group at this developmental level provides the middle school counselor with the perfect opportunity to develop and implement effective peer helper and peer mediation programs. Students trained in both academic and non-academic one-on-one and group skills can substantially benefit their peers as well as themselves. (ERIC CAPS, 1985).

Peer helpers are increasingly becoming a part of a comprehensive, developmental school counseling program (Myrick, 1993). They serve the school and complement the school counseling and guidance program through a variety of functions. Among these functions are tutors, peer group co-facilitators, “special friends” to younger or new students, and guidance assistants (Myrick, 1993; Borders & Drury, 1992).

Several guidelines and suggestions for coordinating a peer helper program can be found in the literature. Bowman (1986) provided different ways for counselors to develop, sell, and evaluate a peer helper program. In addition, he provided step-by-step instructions for the selection, curricula, and training of peer helpers for specific roles. The roles of peer helpers include tutors, student assistants, special friends to new students, and group leaders for peer counseling groups (Bowman, 1986). The integration of a peer helper program into the comprehensive middle school counseling and guidance program, however, was not discussed.

Peer mediation programs have also become popular in schools across the nation in the last several years (Lane & McWhirter, 1992). Many programs are based on community mediation program models, such as San Francisco’s Community Mediation Program, which had five years of experience settling disputes between neighbors and businesses prior to beginning its school program. Students in this program receive sixteen hours of training on how to mediate
conflicts in the schools, apply effective communication skills, and facilitate the communication
of others. Although the focus of peer mediation programs is often on the benefits received by
those needing the mediation, the peer mediators have been reported to receive benefits from their
participation in the program as well. Lane and McWhirter (1992) compiled a list of peer
mediation program benefits. Among these are the increased social status and self-esteem for the
mediators, development of the mediators’ leadership skills, and academic improvement of the
mediators.

Several different models have been used for the development of a peer mediation
program. These models involved teachers, counselors, and other staff members in the school
having responsibility for the coordination of the peer mediation program. For example, a 1996
study of three schools and their peer mediation programs had three different types of peer
mediation coordinators leading the programs (Lupton-Smith, Carruthers, Flythe, Goettee, &
Modest). The study looked at an elementary school, a middle school, and a high school for its
focus. The middle school peer mediation program was coordinated by the In-School Suspension
Coordinator, which served to develop the peer mediation program as a discipline alternative
(Lupton-Smith et. al, 1996).

The Role of the Middle School Counselor

Much confusion has surrounded the role of the middle school counselor. This role
confusion has resulted in a range of counselor duties from clerical work to social work
(Huffman, 1993). Cole (1977), in the development of a model for a middle school guidance
program, listed the following roles for the school counselor: counselor, consultant, coordinator,
and curriculum specialist.
McGee and Fauble-Erickson (1995) described the role of the middle school counselor as follows: “…to work with teachers and administrators to build a program based on the characteristics of the middle level student, the interrelationship of home and school life, and the importance of peer and adult relationships to the early adolescent.” (p.17) This role, according to their recommendations, included facilitating counseling groups and supporting the advisory program.

In a 1991 study of middle school counselors in Utah, Mauk, Mortensen, and Taylor found that many counselors listed an unclear or ill-defined role as a system-level impediment to their guidance programs. It was also reported that over two-thirds (67%) of the counselors spent much of their time in administrative duties rather than guidance activities.

In a series of qualitative interviews, Remley and Albright (1988) found that middle school administrators did not agree on what the role of the school counselor was. In addition, most students interviewed either did not know what the counselor’s role was, or had negative perceptions of the counselors. The perceptions of the counselor’s purpose in the school included discipline, preventing students from taking the courses in which they are interested, and revealing confidential information to the students’ parents. The teachers’ perceptions indicated that they believed there was a definite need for middle school counselors to serve the children, but that most middle school counselors were not performing the functions necessary for meeting this need. The primary reason cited was that middle school counselors spend much of their time performing administrative tasks rather than assisting teachers and counseling students. The impressions from the parents interviewed in this study presented conflicting views of the middle school counselor. Some believed that the counselors should be more involved in assisting students with personal issues, while others saw this activity as inappropriate.
In contrast, a 1984 study by Bonebrake and Borgers found considerable similarities between rankings of counselor tasks between counselors and principals. Although the rankings were not identical, this study showed that the discrepancies between counselors’ and administrators’ perceptions of the role of the counselor were smaller than in previous studies. The agreement was that counselors should primarily be involved in the following five functions: individual counseling, teacher consultation, student assessment, parent consultation, and evaluation of guidance.

In a 1988 study of counselor functions in schools, Miller examined the rankings middle school counselors placed on guidance functions. Survey responses from 419 participants across the United States were analyzed. Results indicated that middle school counselor functions in excellent schools were as follows:

1. Counseling and consultation
2. Coordination
3. Career assistance
4. Professional development
5. Organization
6. Educational planning
7. Assessment
8. Discipline

Costar (1988) listed the following functions, noting the variations in their emphasis from school to school, as essential to the role of the middle school counselor:

(1) Collecting data about pupils
(2) Consulting with teachers, administrators, and other specialists
(3) Collaborating with parents

(4) Counseling with pupils

(5) Conducting research studies related to the guidance program

(6) Coordinating all guidance services available to pupils in the school (p.13-14).

These functions are Costar’s recommendations, however, and not based on an empirical study.

In a study of perceptions of the role of the middle school counselor, Huffman (1993) found that teachers and administrators in Northeastern Kentucky viewed the school counselor more favorably than did the students and parents. This study focused on the results of a survey on the role of school counselors which was completed by students, parents, teachers, and administrators from eight middle schools. In spite of the favorable perception of counselors by teachers, many teachers reported viewing counselors as an alternative to administrators. This finding may be linked to the fact that counselors are often seen performing administrative duties. This supports the previously mentioned Remley and Albright (1988) study which found that teachers thought counselors were too often performing administrative duties and not spending enough time counseling students and assisting teachers.

These studies suggest that there is still a need for clarification of the role of the middle school counselor. In addition to this role clarification, there exists a need for middle school counselors to make their qualifications and services known to their student and parent populations. Group-oriented guidance practices may be a way to begin this task.

A thorough review of the last five years of journals regarding middle school education and middle school counseling provided no additional empirically-based studies on group-oriented practices in middle schools.
Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

Because a majority of the literature surrounding the implementation of such practices as teacher-advisory programs have focused on barriers to success, it seemed appropriate to focus this study on factors facilitating successful implementations instead. The first step in focusing on successful implementation of practices is to identify schools that are doing so. This was accomplished through soliciting nominations from recognized leaders in the fields of middle school counseling and middle school education (see Appendix A). Once the schools were identified, the researcher contacted each school by phone and requested preliminary permission from each school’s principal. A follow-up letter was sent, explaining further the reasons for the research and the nature of the data collection (see Appendix B). Once the schools had granted permission to conduct the study at their sites, qualitative interviews were conducted in order to investigate the utilization of, relative reaction to, and effectiveness of the three group-oriented guidance practices: teacher-advisory programs, regular group counseling sessions, and peer helper or peer mediation programs. The results of this study of middle school counseling programs paint a picture for the novice as well as the seasoned counselor of how successful group-oriented programs can be implemented in a comprehensive middle school guidance program.

Methodological Approaches

Qualitative research is concerned with understanding behavior from the subject’s own frame of reference. This kind of data is usually collected through sustained contact with people in settings where subjects normally spend their time. (Bogden & Biklen, 1992). One common
form of qualitative research is the long interview (McCracken, 1988). The open-ended nature of
the long interview allows the subjects to answer from their own frame of reference rather than
from one structured by predetermined and prearranged questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In
addition, the long interview will allow the subject to share what experiences and factors are
meaningful to him or her (McCracken, 1988).

The interview questions were based on the research questions of this study. The
researcher asked teachers, counselors, principals and students specific questions. The nature of
the questions, however, was very general, in that the teachers and principals were asked to give
their general reactions to each of the three programs examined in this study (see Appendix C).
The counselors were asked the same questions as the teachers and administrators, however they
were also asked to describe their primary duties and list the most and least important components
of their jobs (See Appendix D).

Another type of qualitative research is the focus group. Focus groups are typically
composed of seven to ten participants who are selected because of certain shared characteristics
related to the topic of the study (Krueger, 1994). The purpose of the focus group design is to
obtain perceptions of a particular area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment.
Attitudes and perceptions pertaining to services, programs, ideas, and products are largely the
result of interaction with other people (Krueger, 1994). An advantage to using a focus group for
research is that it is a socially oriented procedure, perfectly designed for facilitating the products
of social interaction. Because this study is examined the methods used by middle schools and
school counselors in facilitating the adolescent need for groupness, it made good sense to obtain
early adolescent perceptions of the middle school guidance components within a group setting.
Participants

A purposeful sample of five middle schools which met the criteria of having the following group-oriented guidance practices: teacher-advisory programs, regular group counseling sessions, and peer helper programs integrated into their school guidance and counseling programs was selected. These schools were selected based on recommendations from recognized leaders in the field of middle school counseling and middle school education (Appendix A). These leaders nominated middle schools that, in their opinion, successfully and effectively implemented the three group-oriented guidance practices into their guidance programs. Middle schools located in North Carolina, Virginia, and the surrounding areas were given preference due to convenience. At each of the five schools, participants included the principal, counselor or counselors, a minimum of five teachers, and a focus group of at least seven students (see Appendix B). The subjects for the interview were chosen, based on which teachers were available at the time of the study, in cooperation with a counselor at each school. The members of the focus groups were selected by the counselors at each school, based on the following criteria: the group must include at least seven students; there should be representation from each grade level present; at least two of the group members must be peer mediators; and one to two of the group members must have had some experience in a counseling group at school.

Data Collection Procedures

Each of the five schools selected were visited and investigated by the researcher. Upon visiting each of the schools, data collection was conducted using the following procedures: qualitative long interviews, focused interviews, and focus groups. The specific procedures and the nature of the investigation as related to each are described below.
Qualitative Structured Interviews

At each of the five schools, the principal, the counselor or counselors, and a minimum of five teachers were interviewed about the three group-oriented guidance programs being implemented in their schools. Particular focus of the interviews with adults was based on an interview guide incorporating issues from the literature and the research questions of this study (see Appendix C).

The Long Interview

In addition to the focused interviews described above, the Long Interview (McCracken, 1988) format was utilized with the school counselors at each of the five schools. The interviews focused on each counselor’s perceived primary components of the job, whether or not they found their jobs rewarding, and their roles in the implementation of the three group-oriented guidance programs.

Focus Groups

Seven to ten students were recruited at each school to participate in a focus group. The topic for the focus group to examine was the utilization and effectiveness of the three group-oriented guidance practices at their school. The researcher served as the moderator at each of the focus group hearings. All focus groups were both audio- and videotaped with the permission of the school officials and of the students’ parents. An assistant moderator, trained in advance by the researcher, helped with the audiovisual equipment and took notes during most of the focus group sessions. The moderator and assistant moderator instructed the students in the focus group that they were not to share personal information during the process of the focus group. When such personal information was shared by accident, for instance, if a student started to share specifically how a teacher or peer mediator helped him or her with a personal issue, the
moderator instructed the student to discontinue the discussion of that topic and save it until after
the focus group had ended. At the end of the focus group discussion, the moderator referred the
student to the guidance counselor for any necessary interventions. A pilot study with several
early adolescents and one middle school counselor was conducted to assess the developmental
appropriateness of the focus group questions. Specific focus group questions were based on the
literature and recommendations from the pilot study (see Appendix E).

**Method of Analysis**

Data from interviews and observations were analyzed using Miles and Huberman’s
(1994) procedure for analysis of emergent themes. Each question and response were written on
an index card. The teachers’, principals’ and counselors’ perceptions of the group-oriented
programs were then coded positively and negatively and formatted into tables for further
analysis. Particular attention was directed toward the degree to which teachers, counselors,
administrators, and students appeared to support the implementation of the group-oriented
guidance programs. If these groups showed strong support and approval of these programs, then
they were perceived as successful and effective. If the problems of three programs appeared to
outweigh the benefits, the opposite was concluded. A cross-case analysis matrix was developed,
using data from the interviews at each school (see Table 5.1). Data from the investigation were
then compiled and developed into recommendations for a middle school guidance and
counseling program emphasizing group-oriented activities.

The data from focus groups were analyzed using Krueger’s (1994) method. This
procedure involved listing each focus group question, writing general, objective statements about
the students’ responses to each focus group question, listing quotes of typical responses to each
question, and then drawing conclusions based on the general observations and typical quotes. Summary charts were developed to provide an overview of the students’ perceptions of the programs at each school.

After each of the focus groups was conducted, the researcher and the assistant moderator met for a debriefing session in which prominent themes and findings were discussed. These meetings were helpful in identifying major themes among the students’ responses. The results of these discussions were then taken into consideration as the reports for each focus group were written.

In addition to the researcher’s reports of the data, a secondary analysis was conducted for each school’s report. These secondary analyses were conducted by soliciting the help of available counselor educators, school counselors and counselor education students with experience in the public schools. These helpers read the school reports and responded with questions and comments about major themes, from which the researcher compiled into a report at the end of each school section. This secondary analysis was helpful in allowing for further analysis of the data.
School #1 -- Mountain Valley Middle School

Mountain Valley Middle School is a school located in a small rural community of the Appalachian Mountain region. Its small enrollment of 303 is a combination of three feeder elementary schools. There is very little ethnic diversity at this school, with less than one percent of any ethnicity other than Caucasian. However, there is a large amount of socioeconomic diversity among the people in the various mountain communities. The school has one secretary, who handles all of the students’ schedules and any other clerical responsibilities as they arise. The school has one counselor, whose small office is located across the hall from the main office. The main corridor is decorated with student artwork and advertisements for upcoming events. Upon my arrival, the counselor greeted me with a schedule for my interviews. I noted that her small office did not have a computer, and she replied by saying that she uses the school secretary’s computer whenever she wants.

Programs

Mountain Valley Middle School has an advisory program called TAG (teacher advisory groups). Twenty-five certified staff members serve as advisors for the students, with the student population divided into groups of 15 or less. Students are randomly assigned to the TAG teachers according to their grade level. The principal has the sole responsibility for making the TAG assignments. The teachers on each grade level are also divided into teams, with enrichment teachers such as music and art being included in the teams as much as possible. These enrichment teachers do have their own advisory groups, but their time in teacher teams are cut by their teaching time, due to the fact that enrichment classes and academic classes meet at opposite
times. This schedule puts the teacher team meetings going on while the enrichment teachers have
the students. In spite of this scheduling problem, the teachers I spoke to said that one team
member is responsible for making sure the enrichment teachers are up to date on what happens in
the team meetings.

TAG meets first thing every morning for thirty minutes. According to the principal,
counselor, and teachers, the teacher teams are responsible for their own TAG activities. Teachers
at this school have two planning periods: one for individual planning and one for team planning.
The teams are required to meet every day. The team meetings are used to share ideas for TAG
activities and to discuss any students who may be struggling academically, socially, or otherwise.
The counselor and the principal are expected to meet with the teams on a weekly basis.

Mountain Valley Middle School also has a student assistance team, referred to as CORE
team. This team is chaired by the principal and is comprised of one person from each teacher
team, the school counselor, school social worker, and the assistant principal. This team meets
regularly for staffing of students and referrals to outside resources.

The types of activities that take place during TAG are determined by the teacher teams.
These activities are chosen based on the current student concerns. For example, the sixth grade
activities often focus on issues such as friendship and conflict resolution. One sixth grade teacher
told me that they spend the first two or three days of the school year totally in their teams. “We
don’t let them go to their regular classes at first. We want them to get to know us and each other
so they can feel comfortable finding their way around the middle school.” The seventh grade
often spends time discussing family issues and transitions. The eighth grade focuses on career
and life planning issues. The ways in which they deal with the issues vary. Sometimes they show
movies or listen to music and then discuss themes of each. Sometimes they have round table
discussions about current issues. Several of the teachers mentioned games they played in their TAG’s that presented opportunities for processing group experiences. TAG teams often take trips together and have other events that promote cohesion among the teams. The teacher teams, TAG teams, and CORE team within the school have clearly defined roles, yet their boundaries are loosely defined. This allows for the team members to feel and become a part of a larger team, and includes every member. A quote from the principal illustrates this further: “We start from the bottom up here, instead of from the top down. Everything starts with the TAG team, then it moves to teacher teams, then it moves to CORE team, and from there we make outside referrals.”

The peer mediation program is coordinated by the counselor. She arranges for the training and sets up the mediations for the students. Only eighth grade students are chosen to be peer mediators. The selection process takes place through a survey of the students. This survey instructs the students to list the person in the school with whom they would feel comfortable sharing their problems. The teachers and the counselor then work together to narrow the list of students to include only those who can afford to miss occasional classes. Once the peer mediators have been chosen, they attend a training session at the high school. This training is a day-long workshop during which the students learn and practice mediation and conflict resolution skills. After the training has been completed, the students are called on an as-needed basis for mediation. Many of the mediations take place during TAG time. There was no reported time limit on the mediations, and it was apparent from the counselor’s comments that the program had not been active during this school year. The counselor told me in our interview that the peer mediation program was “waffling” and that something needed to change. The interview
with the other staff members, reported later in this chapter, will shed more light on the nature of this program.

According to the school counselor and the principal, the only group counseling currently taking place in this school is in a program called CHAMPS (Changing Habits And Making Positive Steps). This is a program for at-risk students that requires its students to perform two hours of community service per week, while maintaining their school work. The students are identified by the Core team, based on teacher or parent referrals. The criteria for determining if a student is at-risk can be anything from having a single-parent home to struggling academically. As a reward for the work the students complete, they get to participate in weekly outings to restaurants and recreation areas. A yearly beach trip is the big reward for these students, and anyone who does not meet the program requirements is not permitted to participate in the outings. The counselor is in charge of the girls’ group and the school social worker heads up the boys’ group. There is a maximum number of eight girls and eight boys in each group. Both leaders monitor their students’ work and meet regularly with the teachers to keep up with student progress. No formal group counseling takes place during this program. However, the counselor said that a lot of group interaction takes place during the activities they participate in together.

Teachers at Mountain Valley Middle School are required to receive training called Phase One and Phase Two. These training sessions are held in a group setting and are aimed at helping the teachers learn how to discuss feelings, to become more tolerant, and to get at some of their own personal learning styles. They are required for all teachers and are designed to help the teachers become better team members. The principal described these training sessions as being similar to the Myers-Briggs personality styles workshops. There is a Phase Three training session, which takes the participants into a more intense personal search. The teachers explore
deeper personal issues during these workshops and are taught how to lead such group discussions as they are experiencing them. These training sessions can be very powerful and are often emotionally exhausting for the teachers involved. After completing Phase Three training, some teachers lead support groups in the middle school. These support groups are traditional counseling groups such as groups for grief and loss, relationship issues, getting along with others, new student groups, and anger management groups. The teachers volunteer to lead the support groups, and the principal and the counselor decide whether or not a teacher is ready for such group leadership. The interviews at this school will provide staff and student reaction to the CHAMPS program, as well as to regular support groups formerly conducted in this middle school.

**Interview data**

The interviews took place over the course of two days. Table 4.1 provides a matrix display of the responses to the questions. Teachers are listed by number, and the programs are labeled. Teachers were asked to give their perceptions of each program, their perceived role in the implementation of each program, and the key factors to successful implementation of the programs together at this school. The table shows columns for teachers’ program perceptions, roles, and key factors. Counselor and principal responses are listed at the bottom of the table with the same column headings. Responses were coded by the researcher with positive and negative signs, indicating the positive or negative nature of the perception, and inserted into the appropriate blocks of the table.

Looking at the Advisory column, the emergent pattern is an extremely positive one. The staff at Mountain Valley is very supportive of the advisory program. The staff investment in this program is overwhelmingly clear. Comments describing the program as the “backbone” or
“heart” of the school emerge as the norm. The team concept of the middle school is cited as the basis for the program’s design. Teacher #1 elaborated, saying: “…it helps the kids with a sense of belonging through the team concept”. The majority opinion seems to be that focusing on the relationship between the teacher and the child takes care of problems that may arise. Although the teachers do concur that having and maintaining a successful advisory program is a difficult thing, they also agree that it is worth the time and effort. Teacher #2 explained, “There are lots of other ways I could be spending my time with the kids, but this is the best way to spend my time.” Teacher #5 began her description of the program as “…one of the better parts of my day.” Both the principal and the counselor support the comments of the other interviews by emphasizing the importance of the relationship between the teacher and the student. In describing the organization of the student assistance team, the counselor described the advisory program as “…the first resource for linking kids with adults in the school.”

One teacher shared a negative perception of the advisory program, noting that it is difficult to find effective advisory activities for the seventh grade students. “I love the sixth grade advisory! But nothing works for the seventh grade.” This teacher elaborated by saying that the seventh grade students are going through such a difficult time at that age, and having such a variety of problems, that she thinks no program activity works consistently with them.

The perceptions of the Peer Mediation program were quite different from those of the advisory program. The distribution of responses is more diverse, representing a wide range of positive and negative responses. The Peer Mediation column of Table 4.1 shows three different teachers stating that they had not seen much of the program during this school year. Teacher #2 has a daughter who is a peer mediator and still had no knowledge of what the program is doing this year. Two of those teachers made reference to the program having been strong in the past.
One teacher in particular hypothesized why the program may have decreased its involvement in
the school: “Students used to use peer mediation to get out of class. They would manipulate it
through pretending to mediate a problem and get out of class at the same time.”

Two of the teachers interviewed spoke very highly of the peer mediation program. Both
of these teachers commented on the benefits students receive by being allowed to work through
their own problems and reach a solution without the intervention of an adult. Teacher #3 noted
that the program serves needs for both the students receiving mediation and the peer mediators
themselves. “It empowers them. It gives them responsibility.”

The principal offered that she did not know a lot about the program since the
responsibility for maintaining the program is solely the counselor’s. However, she did say that
she had seen positive results of the program. “Fights in our school have steadily decreased over
the past few years.” When asked about how the program helps the peer mediators, she said she
believes that the peer mediators are seen as leaders in the school. After the interview with the
principal, we walked across the hall to the counselor’s office and the principal asked the
counselor how other students viewed the peer mediators. When the counselor responded that the
program was weak and that the other students probably had no idea which students were the peer
mediators, the principal appeared very surprised and commented that they needed to work on
that situation.

The counselor’s perception of the peer mediation program focused on the positive
benefits of the training. “The training is excellent, but the mediations are not always productive.”
She elaborated about the conflict resolution skills they receive during the training and how
valuable that could be for all students. However, she pointed out that this school district had been
providing conflict resolution skills training since elementary school. Therefore a lot of these
students were already equipped with these skills. “There is less of a need for it [peer mediation] now.” The counselor went on to describe how she believes that the advisory program takes care of the problems peer mediators may face, by dealing with potential conflicts in the TAG teams before they become a larger problem. She did offer, however, that the peer mediators should be used more in some capacity.

The responses to the group counseling questions varied depending on the teachers’ ideas of what group counseling is. Some referred to the CHAMPS program and others referred to support groups that had taken place previously in this school. For the purpose of this study, I accepted both types of responses. The Group Counseling column of Table 4.1 shows positive perceptions of the Champs program. All of the staff members who made mention of the Champs program support it as a good program for the at-risk students. One teacher explained: “It gives the kids the chance to turn themselves around.” Others described the Champs program as “wonderful,” “very important,” and “a good program.” The principal commented on how the Champs program really helps the school and helps the at-risk students to “gel as a group.”

When asked about regular counseling groups, or as these staff members call “support groups,” the respondents agreed that those kinds of groups were not taking place. These terms refer to the kinds of groups that are comprised of five to ten students who meet regularly to discuss similar needs or concerns. These groups are usually facilitated by a counselor; however, at this school it was apparent through teacher comments that some of the teachers had been leading such groups in the past. Two of the teachers interviewed referred to a type of training (Phase One, Two, and Three) they had received that qualified them to lead support groups in the school. This year, however, no such groups had been held. Three of the respondents asserted the need for such groups. Teacher #3 referred to support groups in the past as having been
“powerful.” Teacher #4 expressed disappointment in the lack of such groups. Yet another teacher (#5), who said she usually volunteers to facilitate a support group, pointed out that scheduling and lack of desire on the teachers’ parts have prevented the support groups from taking place this year. The principal spoke negatively of some of the support groups, stating that many of them had been “too closed”, and that it was difficult to add other students to the groups as the need arose. Therefore, when the respondents gave their perceptions of group counseling programs at this school, the majority of their responses were in reference to the CHAMPS program. Responses related to regular group counseling referred to the support groups of the past and are labeled as such in Table 4.1. The responses to the CHAMPS program were very positive. Teachers 1, 2, and 3 agreed that it is a good program. Teachers 1 and 2 elaborated that it is important for the students involved to be given the chance to turn themselves around academically and socially, as well as the chance to receive positive role modeling. The principal asserted that the students in the CHAMPS program really “gel as a group.”

The counselor, who had referred to the CHAMPS program as a group counseling program in our initial telephone interview, spoke at length about the logistics of the CHAMPS program, including the requirements for eligibility, students’ weekly requirements and rewards, and the positive results she has seen from the program. When asked about the group dynamics, she stated that not much formal group counseling takes place in this program. She explained that a lot of informal group interaction takes place, through eating out together, working together in the community, and taking trips. However, the only time she does any formal group counseling with these students is when two or more of them are in a conflict.

The Role column of Table 4.1 displays the respondents’ replies to how they perceived their roles in each of the three group-oriented programs. Most of the respondents gave one-word
responses to this question. Common words describing their perceived roles in each of the programs were: “Facilitator,” “Monitor,” “Advisor,” “Referral source,” and even “Mom”. The responses were based on the program to which they were referring. The principal’s and the counselor’s responses were somewhat different from the other responses, in that their roles reflected some coordination and/or leadership. The principal said her role in the advisory program was to assign the students and teachers to advisory teams and then to serve as a resource person for each of the programs. For example, if the teachers requested more information for conflict resolution in the TAG’s, the principal would make it her responsibility to find a workshop for these teachers. The counselor reminded me that her role is to be a teacher-advisor, since she has a team of her own. Her role in the peer mediation program is total responsibility for coordinating it.

The last column in Table 4.1 refers to the main research question of this study. The respondents listed the key factors they thought were necessary for the successful implementation of the three group-oriented programs in this middle school. Here again, many of the respondents listed one-word responses. Among such responses were: “Commitment,” “Relationship,” “Communication,” and “Teams.” Three staff members listed the former principal, who had been an innovator in the middle school movement, as a strong factor in the success of these programs. Several others referred to the relationship between the teachers and the students as being the most important part of being successful. Having a team approach to managing the school, along with teacher investment and belief in the program, was yet another strong point supported by several of the staff members.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Advisory</th>
<th>Peer Mediation</th>
<th>Group Counseling</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Key Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>+Great invitational program. Helps kids with sense of belonging.</td>
<td>-Was strong, but then it dropped; used to be manipulated to get out of class.</td>
<td>+(CHAMPS) Wonderful! Very important due to poor parenting; great coordination.</td>
<td>TAG: Facilitator Motivator, Participant P.M. and groups: Referral source.</td>
<td>Team focus, teacher investment, facilitating instead of leading, Whole school input.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>+Backbone of the school. Relationship focus, team-centered, child-centered, “…the best way to spend my time.”</td>
<td>-Haven’t seen much of it this year. My daughter is a P.M. Needed more at the end of the year.</td>
<td>+(CHAMPS) Gives the kids a chance to turn themselves around.-Haven’t had support groups since last year.</td>
<td>TAG: Facilitator, listener P.M.: Referral source G. C.: Referral source</td>
<td>Team approach, commitment, relationship focus, former principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>+The heart of the middle school. Relationship focus.</td>
<td>+Serves both the P. M.’s and the kids needing the mediation. Empowers them and gives them responsibility.</td>
<td>+(CHAMPS) “Good program. I’m not involved in it.” –Did have support groups which were powerful, but none this year.</td>
<td>TAG: Advisor Contact person P. M.: none G. C.: none</td>
<td>Relationship, staff investment, evaluation, respect the kids.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>+Love it for 6th grade. -Nothing works for 7th grade.</td>
<td>+”Wonderful program. Wonderful way to for kids to solve their own conflicts.”</td>
<td>-”I’m real disappointed in the lack of [support] groups..</td>
<td>TAG: Mother P. M.: Trainer Monitor G. C.: none</td>
<td>Relationship with the kids. Time-efficient, kids are cared for.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>+”One of the better parts of my day.” Team-building, teacher is child’s advocate.</td>
<td>-”In the past it was strong. This year I’m not aware of it.”</td>
<td>+/-”I usually take a group, but not this year. There are often scheduling problems and teachers don’t always want to do it.”</td>
<td>TAG: Facilitator, Mom, supporter, liaison P.M.: referral G. C.: referral and identification</td>
<td>Commitment, communication, former principal, teacher investment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Advisory</th>
<th>Peer Mediation</th>
<th>Group Counseling</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Key Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>+Relationship focus. Teachers are advocates. Family atmosphere.</td>
<td>+Have seen positive results. Fights have steadily decreased. P. M.’s are leaders in the school.</td>
<td>+(CHAMPS) Helps the school. Students gel as a group. –Support groups have been too “closed”.</td>
<td>TAG: Assigns TAGS Overall: resource person</td>
<td>Teacher dedication, Teams, All are involved, re-evaluation (yearly).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>+Relationship with the kids. 1st resource for linking kids with adults.</td>
<td>+/-Training is excellent, but mediations are not always productive. There is less of a need for peer mediation now.</td>
<td>+(CHAMPS) is a wonderful program. Not much formal counseling but a lot of informal group interaction.</td>
<td>TAG: teacher P. M.: runs the program</td>
<td>G. C.: none CHAMPS: girls’ counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Former principal, teams, administration, strong belief in the kids.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The interviews with the principal and with the counselor are summarized in Table 4.2. The interview questions for the principal followed the same format as those for the teachers. The interview with the counselor was conducted using the Long Interview format, in order to minimize the limitations of her responses (McCracken, 1988). As shown in Table 4.2, the counselor did address the same questions as the other staff members. However, I also requested that she answer additional questions, allowing for more focus on her role in the implementation of the three group-oriented school counseling programs under examination.

When asked to describe her daily duties and activities, the counselor laughed and said, “…no two days are the same.” However, she listed a wide variety of activities for which she is responsible. These include: enrolling new students, identifying at-risk students, responding to referrals for counseling through individual appointments with students, consulting with teachers and parents about developmental issues, conducting parent conferences, intervening in crises, monitoring attendance for the sixth graders, and developing intervention plans for students in academic or social trouble. She also mentioned that she has cafeteria duty every morning. “I want to be there for the students first thing in the morning, so they can come up to me and tell me about their new puppy, something that happened the night before, or whatever.”

The counselor said that her top priority is to make sure that things are fair for all students in the school. She elaborated that she does this through conferences with teachers and parents and meeting weekly with the teacher teams. When I used the word negotiator as a possible way to describe her role, she corrected me by saying, “advocate.” Rethinking this question, she asserted that no one task was more important than another: “All are equally important.”

When asked about her least important duty, the counselor shook her head and replied that she doesn’t approach things that way. “There’s nothing that I’m asked to be involved in that I
don’t consider important.” I prompted her about the amount of paperwork that many counselors complain about, and she told me that she had come from a high school counseling background, so she considers the paperwork she has to do here as minor, and doesn’t mind it at all. She added that having the secretary do all the scheduling really helps matters. It was obvious in this interview that this counselor loves her job. She told me that she was eligible for retirement two years ago, but “I’m still here because I love it.”

Focus Group Data

There were seven group members present at this focus group interview, and the counselor opted to sit in and observe this group discussion. Apparently there was a miscommunication between the counselor and the researcher, because the counselor readily involved herself in the discussion, sometimes prompting responses from the students to questions posed by the researcher. To ascertain authenticity of student responses, a follow-up visit was conducted in which the researcher had individual meetings with three different members of the student discussion group. All three of the students said that they had not felt at all uncomfortable with the counselor having been in the room for the focus group discussion, and that they would not change their responses if the counselor had not been present.

The following questions were asked during the focus group session.

1. What does a counselor do?

Students listed helping activities such as listening, talking to students about their problems, and helping them resolve conflicts. They also mentioned coordination activities such as running the peer mediation program and conducting the girls’ groups for the CHAMPS program. Typical responses to this question included:

“She helps you with your problems.”
“She listens to you when you need someone.”

“She helps you with conflicts with friends.”

“She also heads up the peer mediators.”

“She’s the girls’ counselor for CHAMPS”

The students seemed to have no trouble listing counselor duties, even though the counselor was in the room. They seemed to have a good rapport with the counselor and she beamed as they described her job.

2. **Do your teachers ever act like a counselor with you?**

The students agreed that their teachers frequently are trusted with personal information about students’ problems. There was an emphasis on how trustworthy their teachers are and the comfort they had with their TAG teachers in sharing personal information. The students elaborated on the TAG program, remarking that it occurs everyday and that they get to do a variety of activities as a part of the program. A couple of students expressed their appreciation of what TAG had taught them about values and other things a person needs to know. All students agreed that it is an enjoyable program. Typical comments of this group included:

*In TAG we share problems and tell everybody what’s going on with us.*

*Like, when you have a teacher you can trust a lot, you can usually tell them anything.*

*You get to do games.*

*It’s really fun.*

*It teaches you values that you really need to learn.*

3. **What does the teacher advisory program do for you and other students?**

The students expressed very positive reactions to the advisory program. Most of them liked the opportunity the program provided for them to interact with other students, although it
was discovered during the discussion that not all teachers allow their students to visit with others during the advisory time. Other benefits of the advisory program included the opportunity to build trust with the advisory teacher, a time to rest before the start of the school day, and the freedom of having an unstructured time to do what you want to do. Typical responses to this question included:

*It helps us build trust with our teachers.*

*We get to go to other people’s TAG’s.*

*It gives you more freedom.*

*It gives us a reason to come to school, to be with and talk with our friends.*

*It’s a time to rest, really, before the school day begins and we have to do work.*

*It gives you someone to talk to, like your TAG teacher.*

*We play games, like “Pass the Feather”. Whoever holds the feather gets to talk about whatever they want and the group listens.*

The students were easily able to articulate the benefits they receive as a result of the TAG program. They really like the opportunity to talk freely with their friends and not get into trouble for it. They also seemed to enjoy the activities their teachers facilitate as a part of the program. There was quite a bit of variety among the teams and grade levels, and some students were envious of the free time or trips that other students were granted, but overall the students supported the program.

4. **What do you like the most about the advisory program?**

The students agreed that there were many things they liked about the program. Some of the TAG’s went on trips and the students involved really liked that. Others emphasized the opportunity to talk with their friends without getting in trouble for it. Another student (an 8th grader) pointed out that having a relationship with his teacher was a real benefit for him. All
agreed that having the advisory time at the beginning of every day was very helpful in getting their day started off on a positive note. Typical responses to this question included:

- *Probably having thirty minutes each morning…*
- *…it’s like a free period.*
- *Being able to just talk to your friends.*
- *Games.*
- *It’s just fun.*
- *We get to go on trips and stuff.*
- *Having a relationship with the teacher.*

The group had already given several positive aspects of the advisory program before I asked this question, so I think there was an attempt to come up with new answers. Overall the students were pleased with the program and especially appreciated the opportunity to talk freely with their peers or their teachers.

5. **What do you like the least about the advisory program?**

A couple of students had difficulty thinking of any negative aspects of the program, while two of the older students immediately responded that the Channel One program should be eliminated. Another program, the Drop Everything And Read (DEAR) program, was mentioned as a negative, although a couple of students acknowledged the valuable opportunity it provided for completing the previous day’s homework. Typical responses to this question included:

- *There ain’t nothing I don’t like about it.*
- *Channel One!*
- *DEAR! We just sit there and read.*
- *I guess it’s okay, though sometimes you can finish your homework if you didn’t get the chance to do it before.*
Other than the two programs, Channel One and DEAR, the students really couldn’t think of any negative aspects of the advisory program. There was strong support in the room, and it was clear that they wanted me to know they were happy with the program.

6. **What is your school counselor’s role in the TAG program?**

   The students had difficulty understanding this question. None of the students in this group were in the counselor’s advisory team, so many of them did not know that she had an advisory group. One eighth grade student came up with organizational responsibilities that the counselor might have, but he was not sure about it. Typical responses to this question included:

   - *Explain that question again.*
   - *She’s a TAG teacher, I think.*
   - *She’s never here during that time.*
   - *I guess she might help organize some of the programs we do or something to do during TAG.*

   This question may have been difficult for the students because they were not accustomed to thinking of roles within the school pertaining to the advisory program. I changed this question for the subsequent focus groups as a result of this difficulty. The one eighth grade student was really insightful about what the counselor might do, but he was not sure. The other students had no idea what the counselor might do during the advisory times, or what association she may have with the program.

7. **If could change something about the advisory program, what would it be?**

   The students all contributed to this question. Most of the students felt that there was not enough time to interact with their friends during the advisory period. They all agreed that instructional time is too long and advisory time is too short. Some suggested specific ways to design the school day so that they could have more time to interact with their friends and still not
impede the learning process too much. Others mentioned having one day a week when they were allowed to visit with their friends. At this suggestion it became apparent through comments that the sixth grade teams were already doing this. This prompted some complaints from the seventh and eighth graders in the group. Another suggestion was to have two advisory periods each day: one in the morning and one midday or last period. Typical responses to this question included:

- Have a visitation day.
- We do that already.
- What? The eighth grade really got gypped on TAG!
- We need more time in TAG. Even like fifteen more minutes in TAG and cut fifteen minutes of class time.
- Yeah, class is too long.
- We should have 2 TAGS! One in the morning and then one around lunch or at the end of the day. That would be great because you’re going through the day with work, and then you get a break to talk it over with your friends.

This group definitely liked the advisory program and wanted to extend its time to allow for more peer interaction. They really seemed to recognize how being able to talk to their friends during the day really helps them to feel better. The boys were more vocal about this point than the girls were, but the girls nodded their agreement with the suggestions that the boys were making.

8. **Tell me about the Peer Mediation Program.**

There were three peer mediators in this group and one boy immediately smirked at this question and looked at his counselor, implying they had had this discussion before. He talked about how the program used to be strong and that it had really started to fall in the past two years. He had watched the program all three of his years at the middle school, and it had gradually decreased in its visibility and usage. There was reference from the majority of the
group to the sixth grade class of two years ago, stating that they were a wild group and needed a lot of mediation. The Peer Mediation Program, therefore, was very busy and widely recognized as a useful alternative to discipline referrals. Now, however, the program seemed to be hardly used at all, except for a few times during the year. This eighth grade boy was especially passionate about how the peer mediators should be used more, if not as mediators, then as peer counselors, or helpers throughout the school year. Typical responses to this question included:

The first year was good, with lots and lots of peer mediations because the sixth grade was a wild, rambunctious group of kids.

Yeah, and there are lots of different schools coming together so that makes more problems.

The program itself gives the students the opportunity to talk their problems out and settle things without getting into trouble.

I’m a peer mediator. You get to go to the high school for training. That’s pretty fun because you get a good lunch (laughter).

When I was in seventh grade, you didn’t see it that much. I had like two mediations all year last year.

People just forgot about it.

You feel more comfortable talking to a peer than to a teacher.

I think it’s just more at the beginning of the year.

99.9% of the time, things just get settled. It’s that .1% that needs mediation.

These students seemed to support the program; even those who had not had any experience with it supported the idea of it. There was agreement that the mediation was not needed as much as it had been in the past; however, the students, especially the one passionate eighth grade boy, believed that the program should be used more for other purposes.

9. What does the Peer Mediation Program do for students? For the Peer Mediators?
Students in this group talked about how having the opportunity to talk to their peers instead of having to settle a conflict in front of a teacher makes them more comfortable. They all agreed that there are times when a peer can be more helpful than a teacher can in understanding the problems teenagers have. The issue of confidentiality was brought up and it was agreed that the peer mediators have to be trustworthy or the programs will not work. The students asserted that they must be able to feel comfortable sharing private information with their peers or they will not participate at all. The peer mediators agreed that they had to be good at keeping secrets or the program would go nowhere. Typical responses to this question included:

*I think it makes them more comfortable talking to peers.*

*(Agreeing)* Some students are afraid to tell their teachers.

As a peer mediator you have to be a good secret keeper.

We need to use the program more. Like for helpers or student counselors.

This group again expressed their support for the opportunities the program provides. However, confidentiality was a very important issue in the success of the program. The students discussed how quickly information can spread around such a small school, so confidentiality has to be respected. The passionate eighth grade peer mediator again expressed his wishes that the program be used more, and he suggested that the program move in the direction of a multi-purpose peer helper program instead of strictly peer mediation. When I probed for what benefits the peer mediators gained from being a member of the organization, the main responses were leadership and listening skills.

10. **What do you like the most about the Peer Mediation Program?**

The students’ responses reflected their enjoyment of helping other people work through their conflicts and providing a safe listening environment of other students to share their
concerns. Others mentioned the satisfaction that they gained from being trusted by other students with personal information. One peer mediator said he liked the training the best and thought everyone should get the chance to do it. Another peer mediator remarked that being a peer mediator is kind of like being an investigator, because you have to dig deep sometimes to get to the root of the problem. All of the students nodded their agreement that the program is a good thing. Typical responses to this question included:

- *I like helping people solve their problems.*
- *It's a good experience, the training. Everybody should try it.*
- *Trust.*
- *It’s kind of fun to listen to people.*
- *I think its good.*
- *You’re kind of like an investigator because you have to dig down to get the root of the problem in order to help others solve their problem.*

This group really enjoyed the training and the process of being peer mediators. Even one student who was not involved in the program said it was a good thing. These students also could articulate how interesting and challenging mediation can be. Overall, they seemed to really enjoy participating in the program.

11. **What do you like the least about the Peer Mediation Program?**

The students agreed that the program needs to be utilized more, and that the training should take place each year so that the students could have some follow-up and the new students could receive training at the same time. Other than those two things the students could not come up with negatives about the program. Some typical responses to this question included:

- *Not really anything.*
- *We should have the training every year.*
The students’ responses to this question were repeats of what they had already mentioned: that the program needs to be used more and that the training is a lot of fun and they should have more of it. This question may need revision to get at more of the group interaction or lack thereof.

12. What is your counselor’s role in the Peer Mediation Program?

The students were clear in their understanding of this question. They immediately said that the counselor was the one person who ran the program and arranged for the peer mediations to take place. Some typical responses to this question included:

- She’s the head of it.
- She sets up the mediations.
- Trainer.
- She’s the boss, really.

The students who were not mediators did not respond to this question, so it may be that they did not have any idea of what the counselor’s role is in this program. The other reason for their silence could be that the peer mediators had already taken the floor and so they just sat back and watched. The peer mediators were definitely clear in their understanding of the counselor’s role, and the counselor nodded her agreement.

13. Do you have any opportunities to see the counselor in groups?

The students remarked that most of their contact with the counselor is individual rather than in groups. They referred to some conflict resolution situations that may involve the counselor, and another student mentioned the TAG program, but then quickly remembered that the counselor was not involved in that. The counselor then mentioned the At-risk group program called CHAMPS, and the students immediately nodded their agreement and started to describe the things they do in the program. Some typical responses to this question included:
Not really.

More individually than in groups.

TAG---but that’s not with the counselor.

What about the CHAMPS program? (counselor)

Oh yeah, in CHAMPS we do group stuff.

It’s mostly community service, we have to scrape gum off of chairs or shovel snow or something like that, so we can go on trips.

Yeah, if you don’t do your community service, you don’t get to go on the trip.

I realized after posing this question that there was not a good transition between talking about the Peer Mediation program and the group counseling questions. After the group understood what I was asking, and after the counselor mentioned the CHAMPS program, they started to talk about group involvement. However, it did not sound like there was much group counseling that went on. It sounded more like the students did community work together in order to go on trips and get rewards.

**14. What does the group counseling (or CHAMPS) do for students?**

The students’ comments centered around the motivation and encouragement they receive from participating in the CHAMPS program. They talked about how the trips and other incentives really give them something to work for and to look forward to, so they try harder to get their work done. They referred to both schoolwork and community service work as incentives for going on trips and doing other fun activities. Some typical responses to this question included:

*It helps me get my work done.*

*It gives you something to look forward to.*
I’ve seen improvement since I’ve been in the program.

These students were clearly focused on the rewards of the program as incentives for completing their work. There was not mention of group involvement or interaction with peers. All of the comments referred to individual experiences.

15. What do you like best about group counseling (or CHAMPS)?

The students’ responses focused on the rewards that they receive for their participation in the program. One student was very excited about the free food he gets for being in the program. A girl in the program talked about the community involvement she has enjoyed as a result of the program. The other two students in the CHAMPS program talked about the trips and being with their friends as the most fun part of being involved with the program. Most of the other students in the group did not respond to this question because they were apparently not members of the program. Some typical responses to this question included:

Trips!

Free Food!

Treats!

More community involvement.

We have fun.

My best friend is in the group.

These students were very excited about the rewards they receive as a part of this program. Only one student mentioned the interaction with her friend as an enjoyable part of being in the program. With the exception of the community involvement comment, all of the other responses were generally referring to the enjoyable activities they get to participate in as a reward for their hard work. Group interaction was not mentioned.
16. What do you like the least about the group counseling (CHAMPS) program?

The only responses to this question were in reference to some of the community service jobs they have to do as a part of the program. The typical responses to this question were:

- *Scraping gum off chairs.*
- *Shoveling snow.*
- *There’s nothing I don’t like about it.*

Again, the focus of this line of questioning remained around the types of community service the students have to do, and other aspects of the at-risk program. No mention was made of group activities or group interaction. I think this may be the nature of this program, that its focus is on activities and not counseling. The group interaction appears to be secondary to the work and rewards the students receive and not group counseling as it is defined in this study.

17. If you could change something about the program, what would it be?

The students immediately talked about the community service jobs and rearranging the schedule so that they could get more rewards for the work they do. Some typical responses to this question included:

- *We should have two hours of community service each week so we can get more rewards.*
- *Yeah!*

The students in this program are clearly focused on what they can do to get rewards and not on the group involvement that comes from being a part of this program. They are all invested and supportive of the program, but group interaction is not seen as a benefit they receive.

18. What is your counselor’s role in the group counseling (CHAMPS) program?
The students involved in the CHAMPS program talked about the counselor’s role in leading the girls’ group in the program and referred to the school social worker who led the boys’ group. The typical response to this question was:

*She’s the head of the girls’ program.*

The counselor’s role in this program was not a complicated one according to the group members’ perceptions. They did not mention any type of group facilitation or discussion group leadership. They just knew that the counselor was in charge of the girls’ portion of the program.

19. **What suggestions do you have for other counseling groups that may be helpful in your school?**

The group focused on TAG again and peer mediation type activities rather than counseling groups. One female student mentioned that she did not think groups were appropriate for personal stuff because of the danger of confidentiality being violated. However, another student quickly responded that everyone really sticks together in this school and that the trust is really strong. The counselor spoke up at this point and commented that the TAG program really takes care of most of the school’s needs. Some of the students agreed and others remained silent. No new ideas for groups were presented. Some typical responses to this question included:

*Let’s have TAG twice a day instead of just once.*

*More peer mediation training.*

*It would be a lot better without Channel One.*

*I think groups would help as long as you can trust that what you say won’t get spread all over school.*

*I don’t think groups are good for that kind of stuff because it’s too risky to share personal stuff.*
Our school is really good though about that kind of stuff. Everybody here really sticks together.

This group seemed to be in agreement that group counseling was not a necessity at this school and they chose to focus their comments on the other two programs. There was a real concern about confidentiality, although the support for and loyalty to the school really came through in this discussion. The counselor seemed satisfied that the TAG program really takes care of the needs that may call for group counseling. She also seemed relieved that there was not an identified need for other types of groups. The students did not appear to understand the evaluation that she was looking for and stayed quiet for the most part during her comments.

After this focus group discussion, I met with the assistant moderator to look at common themes and nonverbal behavior of the students. For the advisory program, it was clear that the students clearly valued the time and a lot of the activities involved. However, they did not like the DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) component. Confidentiality and trust were common issues. If the students were comfortable with their teachers, then they would share information, and seemed to enjoy their TAG’s more. They all agreed that more time to socialize with their friends would be beneficial.

The older students seemed to value the peer mediation program more so than the younger ones did. We attributed this to the fact that the peer mediation is an eighth grade program, so the other students are probably not as aware of it as the older ones. This also may be due to the lack of activity this program has seen this year. The peer mediators agreed that the program needs to be used more, moving toward a peer helper program instead of purely mediation. The male students were definitely dominant in this discussion. The only time the girls were very interactive was when the discussion moved to the CHAMPS program.
The girls seemed invested in the CHAMPS program and showed their pride as they talked about the community service component. The one boy who was involved in the program really became involved in the discussion at this point. There was also a sixth grade boy (the only sixth grader in the group) who responded to questions about each program, whether or not he was involved in that particular program. His responses were thoughtful and seemingly sincere. Overall, it seemed that the students valued all three programs. Confidentiality is a big issue for them, so the thought of counseling groups in their school did not receive much support. This issue also came into play when discussing their TAG teachers. If they don’t like their teachers, or feel comfortable with them, then it follows that their TAG experiences are negative ones. They clearly want more social interaction, more involvement for the peer mediators, and more opportunities to build trust within the school.

Table 4.3 presents a summary of the students’ responses at Mountain Valley Middle School.

Table 4.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ Perceptions of Group-oriented Programs at Mountain Valley</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advisory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive. Build trust, gives the students someone to talk to, fun and games.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perceptions of secondary reader

A professor of counselor education and former school counselor reviewed this report and responded with questions to generate more information from the data. The following are her questions and comments in response to the data.

1. For the CHAMPS program, why call it group counseling if no group counseling occurs?
2. Why isn’t there a therapeutic counseling component to CHAMPS?
3. How do you address the dual role that TAG puts the teacher into as a “counselor” for his or her students?
4. If the peer mediation training is so valuable, why isn’t it included in the TAG program so it can benefit all students?
5. How does the school ensure the quality of TAG teaching that occurs? In other words, how do the staff members address the practices of less inspired teachers who may just have their kids watch Channel One and do “busy work”?
6. There are several programs at this school serving to address the same issue of improving communication and support.
7. TAG is the foundation for all student concerns and referrals.
8. They call CHAMPS activities “community service” when it really is not community service at all.
9. The CHAMPS program receives a lot of glory without much substance.

School #2 - Murray Middle School

Murray Middle School is a large school with an enrollment of approximately 1,000 students. It is located in a suburban area outside a large metropolitan capital city in the southeast. A large state university is located nearby, providing many resources to the students at this school that are not found in many areas. The school is a large, multi-building complex, containing seventh and eighth grade only this year. Upon my arrival, one of the counselors informed me that the sixth grade had been moved to a nearby building just this past school year, due to lack of...
space. According to the counselor there were mixed feelings about this change. There are eighty-three certified staff members; forty-three supervise advisory groups. At the time of this study, the principal of Murray Middle School was a woman rapidly approaching retirement. In fact, the week of the study, a large retirement party for the principal was scheduled.

Murray Middle School has two counselors and one full-time guidance secretary. On the day of my visit the guidance secretary was distributing awards to the students of the month. She proudly read a speech for the recipients and was very complimentary to them for their achievements. One of the counselors holds the position of guidance director and works a 215-day contract. The other counselor works a nine-month contract. The guidance director acts as the counselor for the eighth grade students, while the other counselor serves as the seventh grade counselor. Although they each have an assigned grade level, they share a lot of the coordination responsibilities. Each grade level also has a building administrator, or assistant principal. There is also a registrar on staff, who handles the master schedule, students’ schedules, and all of the student assistance team referrals.

**Programs**

Murray Middle School has an advisory program called “Team Time” during which teachers meet with teams of approximately twenty students for advisement activities. Students are assigned to grade-level teams comprised of two language arts teachers, two math teachers, one science teacher, and one social studies teacher. The administrators and the registrar handle all of the student assignments. All of the teachers and students combined on one team create a team of about 135 students. Because there are two language arts and math teachers, they are able have all of the students in their Team Times for their regular classes as well. Since the science and social studies teachers teach all of the students in the grade, they each have only half of their
Team Time students for their regular classes. This arrangement allows the social studies and science teachers to get to know students outside of their regular classes, and enables the language arts and math teachers to facilitate a stronger bond with their Team Time students. Team Time takes place during the lunchtime block, and each grade level team decides what their weekly schedules will be. The principal allows the teams to have two days of recess per week, in which the students are allowed to go outside or participate in indoor recreation activities. One day per week is devoted to guidance activities, and the other two days are generally used for a study hall. The guidance activities are provided for the teachers in a manual from the guidance department. The guidance counselors meet with the teacher teams weekly to discuss activities for the Team Time and to discuss any student referrals for individual or group counseling.

The Peer Mediation program began just this year at Murray Middle School and the training was completed in February. The counselors share the coordination of this program, focusing on the students of their own assigned grade levels. No formal mediations have been held yet (May 1999), although the students are anxious to begin. The Peer Mediators were selected from teacher recommendations and student nominations. These nominations were narrowed down to two students per team. The students attended weekly training sessions after school for eight weeks. The counselors supervised the students in practice mediations at first, and then slowly allowed the students to conduct the practice mediations on their own. Still, the students seemed disappointed that they had not conducted any real mediations on their own yet.

The two counselors conduct several groups during the school year. Both counselors shared that they do not advertise for groups. Instead, they make the groups a choice for students who are referred for them. They base the types of groups they run on referrals they receive from the teacher teams. Counselor #1 said she prefers to pull the groups from Team Time if at all
possible, but the schedules often prevent it and students do not always want to leave their Team Time. She gives them the choice of missing Team Time or missing an Exploratory class such as music or art. Both of the counselors said they did more group guidance than group counseling, distinguishing the two by the depth of issues explored. They both agreed that having a student explore very deep emotional issues and then return to class is not a fair expectation. Therefore, surface issues such as how to get along with friends are more often explored in groups. Both of the counselors also noted the difficulty in scheduling groups due to the increased accountability among the teachers, since “Academic time is very protected.” The principal echoed this point in her interview, saying, “It’s not that the teachers don’t believe in what the counselors are doing. It’s just that they have to have that instructional time in order to meet the new standards of learning.”

Interview Data

Table 4.4 provides a matrix summary of the questions and the teachers’ responses. The perceptions of the Advisory program, or Team Time, do not seem to be overwhelmingly positive or negative. Teachers #3 and #4 are the only ones who seemed to feel the program is “important” and “pretty effective.” Teacher #2 said she speaks for the majority of the teachers when she says “…it is not worthwhile compared to the time we put in,” and “we don’t see the immediate benefits from it.” She went on to explain that teachers rarely see immediate benefits in education, but the lack of evidence for the Team Time hurts the teacher investment into it. Several of the teachers noted that the materials need to be continually updated to remain relevant to the students.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher #</th>
<th>Advisory</th>
<th>Peer Mediation</th>
<th>Group Counseling</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Key Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>+It’s good but needs to be revised. The student population has changed and our curriculum needs to reflect those changes.</td>
<td>I’m not that familiar with that. The students don’t talk about it. They never tell us what’s going on.</td>
<td>+There are different groups available. The students seem to really benefit from it.</td>
<td>T. T.: Facilitator&lt;br&gt;P. M.: Referral&lt;br&gt;G. C.: Referral</td>
<td>The counselors are the ones. I don’t know how they get it all done. Teachers too—work very hard to identify students that need help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>-The majority of us feel like it is not worthwhile compared to the time that we put in. We don’t see the immediate benefits from it. We need newer video series.</td>
<td>Don’t know much about it. Just started it this year. +Have seen some conflict resolution as a result of the training they received.</td>
<td>+All done through guidance. We have a super guidance counselor.</td>
<td>T. T.: Facilitator&lt;br&gt;P. M.: none&lt;br&gt;G. C. none or facilitator</td>
<td>Kids know they have several sources to pull from and feel comfortable here because of that. Administration really pushes it and believes in it. Counselor keeps it going.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>+Kids don’t realize they like it but they get a lot out of it. They know it’s important. Topics need to be current.</td>
<td>Pretty new program here. Don’t know how it works yet. A lot of volunteers-girls and boys-though. They take it better from their peers.</td>
<td>Not much experience with it this year. +Saw benefits from a grief group last year. Need to have follow-up. Has the most direct impact on an individual student.</td>
<td>T.T.: get the discussion started and wrap it up.&lt;br&gt;G.C. recommendations and referrals.</td>
<td>Having the administration behind you and it has to be a priority for them. Counselors genuinely care about the students. Follow-up is important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>+Pretty effective. We plan guidance activities every for Wed. Students come inside for individual conferences during Recess.</td>
<td>+Helps a lot to talk to your own age. It’s necessary.</td>
<td>Don’t know much about it. Wasn’t aware it was in this school. Definitely need more groups.</td>
<td>Overall: To relate to the students.</td>
<td>Very strong administrators who backup the teachers. Strong team structure. You have to care about the programs. All 3 are necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Guidance lesson every Monday. Students have folders with worksheets. Need more drug, gang, and security-related themes.</td>
<td>+Kids need an outlet other than a counselor or a teacher. It’s good.</td>
<td>Have no knowledge of it. I see a need for it. New kids especially need a group.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Communication with the kids about what’s available in the school. Have kids involved as much as possible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Peer Mediation Program was clearly new to all of the teachers interviewed.

Three of the teachers said they knew very little about the program yet. The majority of them were able to see prospective benefits of the program, however, such as “conflict resolution” in
the rest of the school as a result of the training, “taking [solutions] better from their peers,” and “…it helps to talk to someone your own age.”

The value of group counseling in Murray Middle School received a variety of responses. Several of the teachers (#1, #2, and #3) saw the group counseling as a real “benefit” for their students and thought the counselors were doing a “super” job with the groups they run. One teacher (#3) distinguished group counseling as having “the most direct impact on an individual student,” from other guidance services. She described a grief group that had some noticeable benefits for a couple of her students and remarked that she had seen some new friendships develop between participants in a counseling group. Teachers #4 and #5 were not aware that such groups existed in their school.

The teachers saw their roles in both overall and specific terms. For the overall roles, Teacher #4 saw hers as being able to “relate to the students.” Teachers #1, #2, and #3 all gave specific roles for each program. The Team Time program received “facilitator” roles from all three teachers, while the Peer Mediation and group counseling roles were largely that of “referral” and “recommendation”.

The Key Factors for successful implementation of the three programs largely referred to the administration and the counselors. The majority of the teachers interviewed seemed to feel that the administrator “really pushes…and believes in” the programs and therefore sees that the programs get carried out as directed. The counselors were also seen as ones who “keep it going” and “genuinely care about the kids.” Other key factors referred to the “strong team structure” at Murray Middle or the teachers who “work very hard to identify students who need help.” This teacher (Teacher #1) went on to say that once the teachers refer a student who needs help, they know the student is “in good hands.”
The two counselors appeared to work closely together and to have a mutual respect for each other. The counselors were interviewed individually, with the guidance director going first.

Table 4.5 illustrates a summary of the principal’s and the counselors’ responses.

### Table 4.5

**Principal’s and Counselor’s Perceptions of Group-oriented Programs at Murray**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advisor</th>
<th>Peer Mediation</th>
<th>Group Counseling</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Key Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Had to develop curriculum for parental approval. +It gives them a place to feel at home and someone to watch out for them.</td>
<td>Just started and still getting comfortable. Part of our strategic plan. Gives the PM’s more skills to work with.</td>
<td>+Counselors are very good with that. A lot more guidance than counseling. Testing makes it hard to do groups.</td>
<td>Overall: Chief Cheerleader, Supporter to convince parents and teachers that it’s worth the time. All 3 are necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor #1</td>
<td>Began in 1991 using regular guidance activities. Revamping program this summer.</td>
<td>Took a lot of faculty buy-in. 7th graders are excited about it. More work to do with the faculty.</td>
<td>Try to pull groups from T.T. or Exploratory classes. Very difficult to do. Groups are a choice, not forced. More group guidance than counseling due to transitioning back to class.</td>
<td>T.T. Coordinates activities with teachers. P. M.: training G. C.: run several groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor #2</td>
<td>Provided training for the teachers and offer to come in their classes.</td>
<td>Just started. No mediations yet. Kids seem anxious to get started. Kids have too much going on to be able to deal with this.</td>
<td>No advertising for groups. Mostly in the fall. Friendship issues for girls is the biggest topic. More effective in the elementary school.</td>
<td>T.T.: encouraging teachers to use the materials. Keeping the teachers invested. P. M.: training G. C.: run several groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Counselor #1 talked about how the guidance portion of the advisory program began and how she has plans to “revamp” the curriculum this summer. When I asked how much time she spent with the advisory program, she replied that “it is not a daily duty,” but one that takes time at different points in the year. Counselor #2 gave general information about how the counselors were responsible for the guidance training for Team Time and that there is a standing offer for the teachers to have the counselors assist them in their Team Time discussions. She said the teachers rarely ask for them to assist. Counselor #1 seemed to be primarily responsible for the curriculum, judging by her mentioning teachers coming to her with suggestions for new Team Time activities and wanting her approval. Counselor #1 also shared that, although she is available to come into the classes and assist with Team Time, she refuses to do the lessons for them. They both seemed to support the Team Time program and saw their roles as coordinating the activities and encouraging the teachers to use the materials they provided for them. The principal clearly supported the program and felt that “…it gives [the students] a place to feel at home and someone to watch over them.”

The two counselors share the coordination of the Peer Mediation program, and both of them talked about how the program was just beginning. Counselor #1 offered that it “took a lot of faculty buy-in” to get the program off the ground. She added that she still had “more work to do with the faculty,” referring to the lack of faculty investment that remained. Counselor #2 noted that the “kids seem anxious to get started,” but added that she is “not a big fan of peer mediation.” She explained that she thought the kids in middle school “…have too much going on to be able to deal with this.”
The principal informed me that the Peer Mediation had become a part of the school’s strategic plan and is therefore required. She also said she thought that the training “gives the Peer Mediators more skills to work with.”

Counselor #1 said she preferred to make counseling groups a choice for the students involved. She noted that it is “very difficult” to maintain groups’ schedules due to the other duties she has. She added that if she sees students for three to four sessions then she feels like that is an accomplishment. Both of the counselors agreed that they did more group guidance than group counseling. The principal praised the counselors’ group work and also distinguished it as “more guidance than counseling.” Counselor #1 said she believed it would not be fair to send a student back to class after delving into deep emotional issues. Therefore, they both try to stick to issues like friendship, getting along, and study skills.

Counselor #2 said the majority of her groups are in the fall semester and are mostly with girls, who “don’t know how to broaden their friendship circles, or to narrow them, without having conflicts.” Counselor #2 also said she believed group counseling to be more effective at the elementary level than at the middle school level.

The principal’s overall role was “Chief cheerleader” and supporter to convince the parents and teachers that it is worth the time. Counselor #1 spoke about her dual role as the guidance director and the eighth grade counselor. She talked about her regular meetings with the grade level teams and how her dual role as a counselor and as a department head gives her role in the school an unusual tone. As a department head, she also meets with all of the team leaders to discuss “house” issues. She also acts as a department head in meetings for district standards and issues. She remarked that these administrative type duties often interfered with the counseling aspects of her job.
In addition to the questions listed in the Table 4.5, the counselors were asked to describe their typical duties and their priorities among those duties. When not acting as guidance director, Counselor #1 spends a lot of her time in conferences with parents, counseling individual students, and interviewing potential group members. She also coordinates the testing in her school and as a result her counseling services almost “shut down in March” of each school year.

Counselor #2 spoke about a lot of the crisis intervention in her school and shared some confidential information about the current crises in which she was intervening. She shared that she thought crisis intervention was the most important part of the time she spent at the school. She also described how she coordinates the student awards ceremony each year and that it takes a lot of her time towards the end of the year.

I asked Counselor #1 to give her advice to new or seasoned counselors for keeping their priorities straight in a middle school counseling office and she replied that a counselor should always “protect your time with direct services to students.” At the same time, she said, the time she spends helping one teacher is often more effective in helping students than her individual or group counseling: “You must have that working relationship with the teachers.”

The principal pointed out that in order to make programs like these three work, it cannot be just the counselors who do the counseling. “Every teacher is a front line counselor” in this school. When I asked each counselor how they got everything done and what the key factors were, they had two very different responses. Counselor #1 said she though it was helpful to have an understanding of “how a school functions, and knowing what teachers face on a daily basis.” She also noted that something will inevitably get dropped while juggling all of the duties she has, so her advice was to “be prepared when the ball drops!”
Counselor #2 expressed her belief that “you can’t juggle everything.” She went on to explain that “you can pretend to, but I’m past pretending.” I took that to mean it is important to know one’s limits, especially since she had begun our interview by telling me that she had no interest in taking on the extra duties of the guidance director position when the position was created.

Focus Group Data

The counselors at this school appeared to be very suspicious and guarded in their approach to my study. I was asked to sign a confidentiality statement, assuring no names and information would be released other than for the purposes for my dissertation. In addition to this, the guidance director instructed me on the day of the focus group discussion that my assistant moderator could not sit in for the discussion due to parental objections. No objections had been made prior to this, so we were not made aware of this until after my assistant moderator had driven several hours to be there for the focus group. The guidance director was apologetic, but said that the school had been “burned” before by researchers who had not respected their confidentiality, and therefore many parents were distrustful of researchers. She did not know about this prior to the day of the focus group because she had not received word from all of the participants’ parents until just prior to the focus group discussion.

There were exactly seven students present for the focus group discussion. Five of the students were Caucasian, and two were African Americans. The students were fairly interactive, and seemed willing to share information with me. They were cheerful and friendly. In fact, a few of them tried to extend the discussion after I had ended my line of questioning, so they could miss some more of their classes.

The focus group discussion began with the following questions:
1. **What does a counselor do?**

The students immediately responded with descriptions of different ways of helping, such as listening, talking about problems, and helping to solve conflicts or intervene with friends.

Typical responses to this question included:

"*She helps you with problems.*"

"*She just talks to you about stuff and she’ll keep it secret if you want.*"

"*She just listens to you when you need it.*"

"*You can talk about a problem with a friend or sometimes if you know someone who has a problem you can tell her and she’ll let you stay in there while she calls them in and then they’re not alone.*"

The answers seemed to paint a positive picture of the students’ counselors. They seemed to have a lot of trust in their counselor and seemed confident that they could approach them with the issues they discussed.

2. **Do your teachers ever act like a counselor with you? If so, when and how?**

The students immediately said “yes” in unison. They began to talk about specific teachers who shared a lot with their students and who also took some interest in the students’ personal lives. Team Time was given as the time when most of this kind of interaction occurs. Some elaboration of what Team Time entails followed this response. Typical responses to this question included:

"*Yes!*” (several together)

"*Mrs. _____, she talks to us about everything.*"

"*Mrs. _____ helps us out with our problems.*"

"*Team Time is mostly when that happens. It’s a lunch period, like a recess really. It’s a time we can talk to our friends.*"

"*It’s also a study hall.*"
“On Monday, we have guidance, we have these packets with different questions in them and we discuss them.”

The response to this question seemed very emphatic in its support of teachers behaving like counselors and Team Time being the perfect opportunity for this sort of interaction. The students clearly recognized the teachers’ helping skills as being counselor-type behaviors and seemed to have an appreciation for these behaviors. One boy gave a description of Team Time, and no one else disputed his description.

3. **What does Team Time do for students?**

There were only a couple of responses here about fostering self-esteem and confidence among the students. These responses were from the same male student who gave the description of the program. The responses to this question included:

“*Helps them with their self-esteem*”

“*Builds their confidence.***”

Although no one added anything to the boy’s comments, there seemed to be no disagreement with his statements. I asked if there were any additional comments and no one responded.

4. **What do you like the most about Team Time?**

The students listed activities they get to participate in, such as recess activities, watching movies, working on projects, finishing homework, and working on the computer. More of the students responded to this question than the previous one. Typical responses to this question included:

“*You can work on projects with groups.*”

“I like recess and I like movies, cause we get to watch movies.”

“*Mrs. ______ lets us go into her room and work on projects.*”
“I go to the computer room.”

“Sleep.”

The students’ favorite points about Team Time seemed to revolve around having freedom to do an unstructured activity for a period of time. I was surprised that no one mentioned social time with his or her friends, but the group interaction involved in working on projects together may have taken the place of this.

5. **What do you like the least about Team Time?**

The students listed things like their teachers forcing them to study when they had nothing to study, forcing them to be quiet, and specific qualities about specific groups or teachers. One student thought the period was too short and another resented having to stay in his room when he wanted to visit a friend in another classroom. One student said she did not have any problems with her Team Time and therefore offered no response this question. Typical responses to this question included:

“*The teacher makes us study and be quiet.*”

“I don’t like my group.”

“We have work on stuff. It gets boring if you don’t have anything to do.”

“You can’t go to other classes to see your friends.”

“It’s too short.”

It is interesting that the students seemed to object to the structure of the Team Time, when they were just praising the unstructured quality of it prior to this question. It seems that the students want more of what they are already receiving a small amount of: freedom to do what they want to do.
6. **What are the counselors’ roles in Team Time? In working with the students? In working with the teachers?**

Many of the students had no idea what the counselors had to do with Team Time. Some knew they ate lunch around that time. They said the counselors never came to their classes during that time. One student said she thought the counselors probably met with the teachers and helped them plan what they were going to do during Team Time. Typical responses to this question included:

“I don’t know.”

“They eat in the cafeteria and come back to their offices.”

“They never come to our classes during that time.”

“They probably meet with the teachers about Team Time and plan what to do and hand out the packets then.”

Only one girl who thought the counselors had something to do with the planning of activities in Team Time. The others seemed surprised at the idea that the counselors may be involved in it at all.

7. **If you could change something about Team Time, what would it be?**

The majority of the students talked about having more freedom to talk with their friends and more opportunities for group interaction. They made the point that Team Time is supposed to be a part of lunch, and since they are allowed to talk at lunch, they should be allowed to socialize during Team Time. Some of the students wanted Team Time to be longer. Some wanted it to be shorter and wanted to extend the lunch period. Typical responses to this question included:

“Let us have more freedom to talk to our friends.”

“Team Time is just like lunch, and you can talk at lunch.”

“Make it longer.”
“No. Make it shorter and make lunch longer.”

“We have thirty minutes for Team Time and only twenty-five for lunch. It should really be the reverse.”

“We need to do more group stuff.”

This was an interesting comparison to the social quality of lunch and the lack of interaction during the students’ Team Time. The students had a valid point that lunch should last longer than their Team Time if interaction was to be the goal of the activities. It was also interesting that the students spoke about the need for more group activities in their Team Time. They seemed to understand the group interaction basis for Team Time and believed that their teachers were not carrying out the intentions of the program.

8. **Tell me about the Peer Mediation program.**

One male student explained how the Peer Mediators were chosen and the kind of training they received. He told us that after the training was over, nothing else had happened. Another peer mediator agreed that they had done no real mediations on their own yet. He also explained how mediation can be a choice for students instead of receiving detention. Several students said they had no idea what we were talking about. The students said there had been very little publicity about the program, and therefore many students were not aware of it as an option.

Typical responses to this question included:

“We got elected and then we had training for nine weeks. Then we had advanced training and that was it.”

“It helps you solve your problems with other people.”

“It’s a choice, like, instead of D-Hall, unless the conflict keeps going afterwards. Then you still have to go to D-Hall.”

“People should know about it, but they don’t. So they don’t know it’s an option.”

“We’ve only done practice mediations and then we just stopped.”
The peer mediators were clearly disappointed in the lack of action the program had seen. They were also disappointed in the small number of people who knew about the program. It was unclear if the program had received little attention due to people not knowing about it, or if the counselors had not encouraged referrals due to the other responsibilities they had at that time of the year (testing, etc). Regardless of the reason, the peer mediators, and the students who had just found out about the program during the discussion, seemed ready to move on with the program.

9. What does/could peer mediation do for students?

The students talked about peer mediation as an option to keep kids out of trouble with the school and with their parents. Problem-solving skills were another benefit they listed for being involved with the peer mediation program. They also talked about how many students would feel more comfortable talking to another kid than to an adult. The peer mediators said the training was fun and they enjoyed getting to know the other members of the organization. Typical responses to this question included:

“*It might save them from D-Hall.*”

“*Keep them out of trouble with their parents.*”

“*They learn how to solve their problems and have to talk it out.*”

“*Some might feel more comfortable talking with another kid there instead of an adult.*”

“*The training was fun.*”

Since many of the students had not yet learned of the peer mediation program, I thought it would be best to ask this question in a hypothetical manner instead of asking about the present benefits. However, the peer mediators were able to tell about some current benefits of taking part in the peer mediation training. Even the students who had just learned about the program were able to articulate some strong reasons and benefits associated with having a peer mediation
program. They seemed to like the idea of it, but they really deplored the lack of publicity about the program.

10. **If you could change something about the program, what would it be?**

The majority response was to use the program more and to publicize it more. One peer mediator, a girl, spoke about how late in the year the training had taken place and believed that had sabotaged the program for the rest of the year. She recommended starting it earlier and having the whole spring semester to hold mediations. The non-peer mediators did not contribute responses to this question. Typical responses to this question included:

“We should have had it earlier in the school year.”

“We just finished the training in February and now here we are three months later and nothing has happened.”

“We need more advertising.”

The peer mediators were clearly anxious to get started with their peer mediations and seemed to need some explanations for why the program had stalled. They had valid points about when the training began and how it had faltered since then. There were no explanations offered for why the program’s activities had ended.

11. **What is your counselor’s role in the program?**

The students talked about the how both of the counselors trained them and gave some specific examples of the types of training they had. They distinguished the counselors by the grade-level assignments they had, but said both of the counselors were involved together in the training. Typical responses to this question included:

“They supervise us in the beginning to help us get the hang of it.”

“We watched a video and Mrs. ____ would stop it and talk to us about it.”

“They both did the training.”
“Mrs.____ has the eighth grade, and Dr. _____has the seventh grade.”

Again, the peer mediators were the only ones who had been exposed to the program here and therefore were the only ones talking. The other students appeared to be losing interest at this point, so I quickly moved on to the next topic.

12. **Do you have any opportunities to see the counselor in groups?**

Several students immediately said “yes” and gave examples of situations in which they had seen the counselor in groups. One student told about a conflict she had with others in the room and how she settled it with the group in the counselor’s office. It became clear that the students were talking primarily about conflict resolution situations, so I asked about counseling and support groups, giving examples of such groups. They did not know of such groups, so I then asked if they thought those kinds of groups would be helpful to students. They immediately came up with several reasons why such groups might be beneficial. They also listed several potential risks for being involved in a group. Typical responses to this question included:

“*Yes.*”

“*Last year me and you and you (pointing) had a problem and saw the counselor and worked it out.*”

“*It helps them solve things and helps you get more friends.*”

“*I don’t know of any groups like that.*”

“*It might help you understand each other.*”

“*It’s good because you can turn to each other about the same kind of problem.*”

“*I don’t know about telling someone else my problems.*”

“*If it’s too personal to say, you might not want anyone else to know.*”

The students clearly had no experience with group counseling in the school. They understood group problem-solving and thought it was great that they could work out problems in the
counselor’s office. The group counseling/support group idea received mixed reviews. I used the phrase “support group” because I had heard the principal use that phrase earlier and thought it would be recognized more quickly than group counseling. Some students seemed to like the idea of group sharing, while others objected to the confidentiality risks.

13. **What suggestions do you have for groups that might be helpful in your school?**

More of the students contributed to the conversation at this point. One girl talked about people who may be suffering from depression or suicidal thoughts and how a group would help people like that to feel that they are not alone. Another student said the groups needed to be optional and not something the students were forced to do. The discussion turned to talking about the need for the counselors to check on everyone individually in the school and make sure they were okay. A group for new students and a group for students with substance abuse problems were also suggested. Typical responses to this question included:

“**We need groups for people who are depressed or maybe thinking about killing themselves so they will have people that know how they feel, and they can realize they are not alone.**”

“**People need to be called to guidance more often because a lot of people are scared to go to guidance and they may be having problems at home.**”

“**Groups should be optional, though, and not forced to do it.**”

“**The counselors should bring people in and check on everyone to make sure they are okay.**”

The students were very sensitive to group membership being confidential and referrals for groups being subtle in order to respect students’ privacy. They seemed genuinely concerned about others in their student body, and wanted to make sure every student had someone to talk to, but wanted to make sure the students wouldn’t be embarrassed about their problems. One student summarized counseling in the schools, saying that “…just listening can help.”
Table 4.6 provides a summary of the students’ perceptions of the group-oriented programs at Murray.

Table 4.6

**Students’ Perceptions of Group-Oriented Programs at Murray**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advisory</th>
<th>Peer Mediation</th>
<th>Group Counseling</th>
<th>Suggestions for Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helps with self-esteem, builds confidence, variety of activities, quiet study time.</td>
<td>Just received training and anxious to begin, but no real mediations yet. Disappointed with lack of involvement and publicity.</td>
<td>Conflict resolution groups only, unaware of any other types of groups.</td>
<td>Provide more freedom for students to talk to their friends. Have voluntary groups for depressed and suicidal students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perceptions of secondary reader

A counselor education student reviewed this report and developed questions and comments for further analysis of the data from this school. The questions and comments are as follows:

1. The principal described the teachers as “frontline counselors” in the school. Do the teachers understand their roles as such?

2. The counselors’ key factors for the successful implementation of these three programs had no mention of the teachers being perceived as “frontline counselors”.

3. One of the teachers said she did not see the benefits of the advisory program. Yet, the students seemed easily able to articulate the benefits of it. This causes one to wonder what sort of benefits that teacher wanted to see.

4. It seems to be that the students’ only objections to the advisory program were when they are forced to engage in activities that were non-guidance based.

5. How much teacher sabotage of the advisory program is possibly going on?

6. The peer mediation training had ended in February and then the program had stalled. This timing coincided with the counselors being consumed by testing responsibilities that carry into the end of the school year. This explains their lack of involvement with the peer mediation program at this time.
School #3 - New Heights Middle School

New Heights Middle School is a new school in a southeastern suburban community. The enrollment at New Heights is about 600 students. The building is brand new, built in 1995, and has all the conveniences of a new school, such as conference rooms, a large auditorium, computer terminals in every office and classroom, and windows everywhere. The student population is largely middle class, with less than ten percent of the students on free or reduced lunch. The majority of the student population is Caucasian, with five percent of the students representing minority ethnic backgrounds.

New Heights had two full-time counselors and a full-time guidance secretary, who helps with the students’ records and with the entering of grades each grading period. One counselor has twenty-three years of experience, primarily at the elementary level. The other counselor has four years of experience, solely at the middle school level. The older, more experienced counselor is on an eleven-month contract, while the younger counselor is on a ten-month contract. The two seem to complement each other well, and the other staff members spoke very highly of them both. Their responsibilities are divided by grade levels, with each counselor following her students until they finish middle school. They each are assigned one and one-half grade, with the half grade divided alphabetically (i.e. A-J, and K-Z). They each supervise peer mediations for their own students, and keep up with any other activities for students in their caseload. Both counselors seemed to like this arrangement.

In addition to the two school counselors, a third counselor is employed at this school. She is the counselor for the Student Assistance Program (SAP), which is funded by a grant and focuses on students with substance abuse problems. The SAP counselor is at the school two days
per week and conducts several groups and individual sessions within the school for students on her caseload.

**Programs**

New Heights Middle School has a Teacher Advisory program referred to as T. A. or homebase. The two terms seem to fit the program equally as it appears to be a combination of the two: school morning business and advisement activities. Each T. A. is comprised of about 20-30 students, much like a homeroom class. The school day begins at 8:30 and the T. A. time takes place between 8:30 and 9:20. The order of events during T. A. is as follows: Channel One, Homeroom business (i.e. attendance, announcements), organization for the day (the teachers make sure the students have their agendas and all of their homework), and free time or social time. Students are encouraged to complete their homework during T. A. time if they have not already completed it. The students remain in their T. A. teams for their first period classes. This enables the T. A. teams to extend their T. A. activities if necessary. For example, one teacher said she took advantage of this opportunity for extra discussion after the Columbine shootings. Although the T. A. program at Study Heights does not have required guidance activities as a part of the program, several of the teachers said they felt very close to their T. A.’s.

The Peer Mediation Program at New Heights Middle School is shared by the two counselors. They conduct the training together each year and then supervise the mediators in their assigned grade levels. The mediations are arranged by the counselors, based on referrals received from teachers and students, and then the counselors call their mediators to conduct the mediations. No particular time of day is reserved for mediations. They are conducted on an as-needed basis. The counselors are usually not in the room with the mediators, but nearby in their offices in case the students need their help.
Both counselors hold several groups throughout the year. They also co-lead some groups. They schedule the groups so that the students are coming from different classes each time. This prevents too much intrusion on instructional time. Counselor #1 said she kept one to two groups going all the time. Counselor #2 spoke about her group counseling in more general terms. They both seemed to have great rapport with their teachers and most of the teachers saw counseling, both individual and group, as very valuable for their students.

**Interview Data**

Tables 4.7 and 4.8 summarize the responses to the interview questions. The response headings are identical to those in previous school reports, with the responses coded similarly. A plus sign indicates a positive perception, while a minus sign indicates a negative perception. Responses that have neither sign are neutral responses or responses that cannot be coded positively or negatively.

The responses in the Advisory column were largely positive or neutral. Teachers #1 and #4 supported the program’s structure and intentions: “The T. A. program provides structure similar to the elementary school design.” “It gives the students opening and closure to their day.” Teacher #2 noted “Its success depends on the teachers in each T. A. and how committed they are.” Teacher #5 and the principal both commented on how the program has changed over the years. “We used to have required guidance activities. Now it’s more of a homebase business time.” The principal noted that, although the program is not a textbook T. A. program, the T. A. teacher is still “the one to look to for information on a student.” Only one person had an entirely negative perception of the program. Teacher #3 offered, “Our program is not what you read about that T. A.’s should be. We have too many students in our T. A.’s for any real advisement activities to take place.”
The Peer Mediation Program had a fairly even representation of positive and negative perceptions. The positive responses focused on aspects of the program such as:

(a) public relations: “They do a good job with P.R. It keeps the Peer Mediators in check because of the expectations for the role they’re in.” (Teacher #4)

(b) self-sufficiency: “It gives the opportunity for peers to handle problems without adults.” (Teacher #5)

(c) discipline: “We have very few discipline problems and I think Peer Mediation is an important part of that.” (Principal)

Negative perceptions largely questioned the necessity and effectiveness of the program. “I don’t know much about it. I have a peer mediator in my room and she is a very sensitive child. I don’t know if it’s necessary or not.” “Unfortunately, it primarily benefits the peer mediators. It’s probably more successful at the high school level, because they have the maturity necessary to manage conflicts.” Teacher #3’s response was more of a neutral response due to her lack of familiarity with the program. She did note, however, that “I don’t think it’s used as much as it should be.”

The perceptions of the Group Counseling programs that take place in this school were extremely positive. Only one teacher (#4) was not aware that counseling groups were facilitated by the school counselors. Her impression was that all of the groups were conducted by the SAP counselor, and her comments reflected this impression. “The SAP programs runs groups and those are great!” The other teachers expressed wishes for more groups and more ways to work with the students within these groups. “We just don’t have enough of them. I have seen some real results” (Teacher #3). “Excellent program. Both counselors are excellent. The students benefit from it” (Teacher #2). “I have a number of students who are in groups. I wish I knew
more about how to help them, but confidentiality prevents that. I wish the counselors could share
more” (Teacher #1). The principal echoed these positive responses by referring to the counseling
groups as “an important resource to pull upon.”

Under the Key Factors heading, a lot of the responses refer to a strong commitment on
the part of the administration and staff to making these programs succeed. Examples of such
factors include:

“A lot of people who work really hard. Dedication.”
(Teacher #1)
“Leadership that has those expectations and supports the staff in getting it done.”
(Teacher #2)
“Commitment on everyone’s part. Don’t give up, but keep working until it is successful.”
(Teacher #3)
“Administrative support and strong guidance department.” (Teacher #5)

The principal’s response was congruent with the others: “I lean on the guidance
department a lot. Commitment. We all like kids and want to share knowledge with them.” When
I asked the principal how she would deal with a staff member whose priorities were not focused
on the kids but on scholarly activity, she replied that she would not hire such a person. “They
have to like kids and they have to want to do what’s best for them, or they don’t belong here.”

Teacher #4 remarked on the unique position in which the staff of a brand-new school
finds themselves. “We have a one-up on other schools because we’re new. We started with the
current trends and the best practices and there was no resistance because there was no status quo.
No one knew any differently.”

The individual roles in the implementation of these programs did not always receive
responses at this school. Sometimes the respondents talked about other aspects of their jobs and
the roles were implied instead of directly referenced. At other times, the conversation took a
completely different turn and that question was simply omitted due to time constraints. None of
the respondents gave roles for the implementation of each program. For Teacher #1 the roles in the T. A. program are “mother,” “trainer,” and “teacher.” Her role in group counseling is strictly that of referral. Teacher #2 spoke strictly in reference to the T. A. program and described his role as “allowing for social time,” and “mentor.” Teacher #3 gave overall roles such as “Commitment,” “Involvement,” “Support.” The principal described her overall roles as “Support,” “Problem-Solver,” and to “Believe in them.” (I assumed that last role referred to both the programs and the staff members in charge of implementing them).
Table 4.7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher #</th>
<th>Advisory</th>
<th>Peer Mediation</th>
<th>Group Counseling</th>
<th>Key Factors</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>+I’m very excited about T. A. The T. A. unit provides structure similar to the elementary school design.</td>
<td>-I don’t know much about it. I have a P.M. in my room and she is very sensitive. I don’t know if it’s necessary.</td>
<td>+I have a number of students who are in groups. I wish I knew more about how to help them but confidentiality prevents that.</td>
<td>A lot of people who work really hard. Dedication. Administrator is terrific.</td>
<td>T.A. –mother -trainer -teacher G. C. – referral in team meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>+/- It has good intentions and opportunities for its goals to be met. Its success depends on the teachers in each T.A.</td>
<td>+/- A very good idea, unfortunately it primarily benefits the P.M.’s. Probably more successful at the high school level.</td>
<td>+Excellent program. Both counselors are excellent. The students benefit from it.</td>
<td>Leadership that has those expectations and supports the staff in getting it done. Good personnel.</td>
<td>T. A. –allow for social time -mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>-Our program is not what you read about that T.A.’s should be. We have too many students</td>
<td>-I’ve not been exposed to that a lot. I don’t think it’s used as much as it should be.</td>
<td>+We just don’t have enough of them. I have seen some real results. The counselors have too many other duties. We need more counselors!</td>
<td>Commitment on everyone’s part. Don’t give up, but keep working until it is successful.</td>
<td>Overall: Commitment Involvement Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>+It gives students opening and closure to their day.</td>
<td>+They do a good job with P.R. It keeps the P.M.’s in check because of expectations for the role their in.</td>
<td>Not familiar with groups run by the school counselors. The SAP program runs groups and those are great!</td>
<td>We have a one-up on other schools because we’re new. We started with the current trends and best practices and there was no resistance because there was no status quo.</td>
<td>Administrative support and strong guidance department.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 5         | Has changed a lot. Used to be required guidance activities, now it’s more of a homeroom business time. | +A really good idea. It gives the opportunity for peers to handle problems without adults. | +I think the counselors are really trying. They’re doing a great job because the kids don’t mind going to group. | Administrative support and strong guidance department. | Administr
The counselors’ interview responses are summarized in Table 4.8. Both counselors offered that they do not have much of a role in the T. A. program. Counselor #1 expressed a desire to work more closely with the T. A.’s in some guidance activities, however. She also noted that the Channel One time takes up the space needed for such guidance activities. Counselor #2 said that lack of time prevented the school from having a real “textbook” type of T. A. program.

Counselor #1 is a “strong supporter of the Peer Mediation Program.” Her experience at the elementary level had made her familiar with the program and its benefits. She remarked that “the skills are important, even if no mediations take place.” She noted, however, that the Peer Mediators are also “ambassadors” in the sense that they are called upon to serve as tour guides for new students and parents, and asked to hand out programs for Parents’ Night. Counselor #2 felt that the Peer Mediation Program continued to get stronger each year. “The amount of mediations tripled this year. It reduces discipline and counseling referrals.”

Under the Group Counseling heading, it is apparent that both counselors spent a lot of time facilitating groups. Counselor #1 has one to two groups going at all times during the school year. Counselor #1 said she spends about fifty percent of her time doing either individual or group counseling. When I asked about how she keeps up with the groups on top of all of her other duties, she said she had no trouble with the groups’ notices or reminders because that’s the part of her job that she enjoys so much. The two counselors have also co-led a grief group, which Counselor #1 described as the best group she had ever facilitated.

Counselor #1 described the Key Factors for successful implementation as “doing a lot of things right at our school.” She went on to discuss what a good climate they have there and how so many people make the comment upon walking into the school that it “has a good feel about
it.” I remembered making a similar comment when I walked into the school. She also noted that the attendance rate is an impressive ninety-seven percent, and remarked, “We must be doing something right.” Counselor #2 noted the unique challenges a new school faces and how they are improving at what they do each year. She also listed public relations as an important factor so the students will know what services are available to them. “Flexibility is also important,” she added.

The Role section of the table is scant due the extensive information the counselors provided in other parts of the interview. Counselor #2 did state her role in the Peer Mediation program as the one who “…takes referrals and sets up mediations. I monitor the mediations if necessary and I am easily accessible if there is a problem.”

In addition to the regular questions asked of the other staff members, each counselor was asked questions pertaining to her particular duties in the school. Counselor #1 stated that she is the school test coordinator, which takes a large amount of her time. She also said she spends a lot of time doing individual counseling, consulting with teachers and parents, and having weekly team conferences. She coordinates the peer mediations of her assigned grades, coordinates the mediation training with the other counselor, and attends special education committee meetings. When asked how she gets to all the students she intends to see in a given week, she said she had to let go of weekly meetings with students and tries to see them every ten days instead. “If I can get to them every ten days, then I’m doing okay.” There are referral forms, but teachers and students often make verbal referrals instead. She asks the students to rate the urgency of their concerns so she can decide whether she can wait a day or two to see them and then works from her priority list. When I asked how she got everything done, she said she often is still at the school at five or six at night.
Counselor #2 responded to this question by saying, “We’re supposed to spend sixty percent of our time counseling, but we’re barely there. Never do we exceed that percentage. I’d say it’s closer to fifty percent.” She went on to talk about other school responsibilities such as weekly team meetings, Section 504 meetings which the counselors chair, report cards which have to be done every six weeks, and scheduling which takes up the first few days at the beginning and the end of each year. I asked what time she usually leaves work and she said “Unless I have a meeting, I try to leave on time, which is around 3:30. But there is almost always a meeting, so it’s usually around 4:30.”

The most important duties listed by Counselor #1 were counseling, both individual and group. Counselor #2 listed counseling or “being there for the kids” as the top priority. Building rapport with the teachers through team meetings was her second priority. The least important components of their jobs were entering grades into the computer and dealing with testing responsibilities.
**Table 4.8**

Principal’s and Counselors’ Perceptions of Group-oriented Programs at New Heights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Advisory</th>
<th>Peer Mediation</th>
<th>Group Counseling</th>
<th>Key Factors</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>With the new standards for Middle Schools we have had to cut back on T.A. time. + The T.A. teacher is the one to look to for information on a student.</td>
<td>+I feel like we have very few discipline problems and I think P.M. is an important part of that.</td>
<td>+Often used as part of a 504 plan. A real important resource to pull upon.</td>
<td>The needs are there and we’ve got a good staff. I lean a lot on the guidance department. Commitment. We all like kids and want to share knowledge with them.</td>
<td>Overall: Support Problem-Solver Believe in them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Counselor #1 | Don’t have much of a role in T.A. Channel 1 prevents a lot of guidance lessons. Would like to do more guidance activities with T.A. | +I’m a strong supporter of P.M. Wonderful program. Skills are valuable even if no mediations take place. | 1-2 groups going at a time. Does screening, schedules 6-8 sessions and always sends out notices to students about their times. | -Doing a lot of things right at our school. It’s a good climate. Good students. 97% attendance rate. We must be doing something right. |

| Counselor #2 | We don’t have anything to do with that at all. It’s a time to talk to teachers, make up tests or do homework. | +Each year getting stronger. Amount of mediations tripled this year. It reduces discipline and counseling referrals. | About 50% of time is spent with individual and group counseling. | Each year we get better. Being a new school we have different challenges. Good P.R. is important, so the kids are aware of what’s available to them. Flexibility is also important. | P.M. - Takes referrals and sets up mediations. Monitors if needed. |
Focus Group Data

The New Heights focus group was held in the guidance conference room. Ten students were present, all of whom were Caucasian students. This room was by far the most conducive to group discussions, with the sofas and soft chairs facing each other. This observation was validated by the increased amount of interaction among students at this school as compared to that of the other schools. There also seemed to be more balance in the interaction, as opposed to the discussion being dominated by a few students in the group. The interaction was also equal from a gender standpoint as well. This is a marked contrast from the previous schools, which had a noticeable inequity with males dominating the discussion.

The focus group discussion questions are as follows:

1. **What does a counselor do?**

   The students listed functions such as keeping student records, taking care of new students, helping to keep students organized, and helping with problems in the school. One student said his mom was a counselor and therefore he knew that counselors did “all the behind the scenes stuff.” Some typical responses to this question included:

   “She does all the records for new students and stuff. You know all the behind the scenes stuff.”

   “Keeps you organized.”

   “Helps you with problems in school.”

   It was interesting that record-keeping was mentioned before any counseling activities. The boy whose mother was a counselor dominated this part of the discussion and only a couple of other students added to the discussion. This seemed to be just part of the warming-up process of the group dynamic.
2. Do your teachers ever act like a counselor with you? If so, when and how?

The immediate response to this question was a resounding “yes!” with the majority of the students joining in the discussion at this point. Their comments were referring to general helping situations, such as when a student needed extra help on some work. The times that a teacher acts like a counselor varied from student to student. Some mentioned lunchtime as the time when their teachers helped them the most, while others said after class or after school were the most common times. Typical responses to this question included:

Yes!!! After school.

Like if you’re not doing your work, they will sometimes ask what’s up at home.

In the morning, during T. A.

After school they sometimes want to see you individually.

The students were very receptive to this question and had no trouble recognizing counseling-type behaviors among their teachers. When I pressed them further to tell me what kinds of things their teachers did that reminded them of counselors, they immediately responded with situations of their teachers talking and listening to them, and showing general concern for what was happening in their lives.

3. What is the Teacher Advisory Program?

The students’ comments focused on T. A. as a time to watch Channel One, complete their homework, or make up tests they may have missed. They also described T. A. as a time to get extra help from their teachers, or to go to the library. No one mentioned group activities or counseling-type activities. One student did talk about a particular teacher who “really listens and acts like a T. A.” Typical responses to this question included:

It’s good for homework.
Channel One.

Time to ask teacher for extra help.

Make up tests, go to the library.

Mrs. ______ really listens and acts like a T. A.

It was interesting to note that the students had recognized their teachers as acting like counselors from time to time, but they did not mention any formal counseling activities taking place during the T. A. time. I also thought it was interesting when the boy described his teacher as acting “like a T. A.” I wondered if he meant “counselor” when he said “T. A.,” or if he was simply making a comparison to the other teachers who were focusing more on schoolwork instead of listening to their students.

4. What does the Teacher Advisory Program do for students?

The students again mentioned Channel One and one student remarked that T. A. time was a time to catch up on current events. Another student pointed out the social time T. A. provided for students to spend with their friends. Still, the students seemed to agree that T. A. was really just a time for announcements, Channel One, and the Pledge of Allegiance. Typical responses to this question included:

It gives you a chance to catch up on current events.

Watch Channel One.

A time to talk to your friends before school starts.

We first have Channel One for about ten to fifteen minutes and then we have the announcements and the Pledge. By then its time for class to start. That’s really all its for is those three things.

It’s sort of a wake up time.
The social time was apparently not equal among the T. A. teams because several students said their teachers would not let them talk to each other. Instead, they would often be quizzed on the Channel One news. It seemed that there was a big difference between grade levels or classes as to what they did during T. A. time. Some were allowed to have social time and some were not.

5. **What do you like the most about T. A. time?**

These responses had to do with the positive experiences students had with their teachers, whether they were allowed to talk to their friends, doing homework, or receiving help on some school work. The students seemed to appreciate the time for these activities. There was a bit of discussion about the differences in T. A.’s regarding social time. Some students seemed disturbed that the other classes were allowed to talk to each other while they were not. A discussion of whether this was a grade-level difference or a team difference followed. Typical responses to this question included:

*Getting help with work, doing your homework.*

*Finding your friends and talk.*

*Some do get to talk, but we don’t.*

*Seventh grade has the most freedom really.*

The students seemed surprised when I pointed out that there seemed to be a big difference in the amount of freedom to socialize among the T. A. teams. At first they said there was no difference and then they said that seventh grade probably had the most freedom, because eighth grade had too much career stuff and high school planning to do.
6. **What do you like the least about the Teacher Advisory Program?**

   The students listed the T. A. activities just as they had for the morning routine in response to this question: Channel One, long announcements, and the Pledge. Everyone laughed but their answers remained the same after the laughter stopped. The typical response to this question included:

   *Channel One, long announcements, and the Pledge.*

   It was clear that they wanted the morning time to be used for something else. The next question allowed them to clarify their response.

7. **If you could change something about the Teacher Advisory Program, what would it be?**

   The students said, almost in unison, that they wanted more social time. They explained how they could have that time if they would extend the T. A. period for a few minutes or cut out some of what they have to do now during that time. Typical responses to this question included:

   *More social time!*

   *If we could just have fifteen more minutes, that would make a difference.*

   The announcements, Channel One, and the Pledge, take up all of the morning advisory time and leave room for little else. They want to have some time just to be with their friends and not have any structured activities.

8. **What is the counselor’s role in the Teacher Advisory Program?**

   The students talked about how the counselors assign students to T. A. teams depending on their schedules and then explained how the T. A. times work. Sixth grade is in the middle of the day instead of first thing in the morning like the others. The sixth grade students have their exploratory classes (art, music, etc.) first and then they report back to T. A. afterwards. After the
students talked about this arrangement and their apparent disapproval, they took a tangential turn to talk about how discussions such as after the Columbine shootings often don’t take place in T. A. at all. This sparked further discussion about how school personnel are reacting to idle threats or comments about violence in the schools. Typical responses to this question included:

They assign us to our T. A. ‘s and do the scheduling.

The seventh and eighth grades have their T. A. during first period, but the sixth grade has it after exploratory.

We don’t talk about anything in our T. A., like when the Columbine shootings happened, we didn’t talk about it at all.

What’s bad is when you just say, “I’m mad because you got a better grade than I did, I’m gonna shoot you” and then you have to go to the principal’s office and the counselor’s office and it’s such a big deal over nothing.

9. If you could change something about the T. A. program, what would it be?

The responses generally referred to wanting more social time, and extending the T. A. period so that would be possible. Some students suggested getting rid of Channel One, but others responded with positive aspects of Channel One and insisted that it should be kept. Another objection was the “busy work” the students are often required to do in response to Channel One, such as discussion questions or taking a quiz on current events. Silent T. A. is also used as a discipline measure for the classes and the students discussed the unfairness of this practice. The consensus was that they should have more freedom during this time to watch Channel One and learn from it what they wanted, instead of being required to treat it like a regular class. Typical responses to this question included:

Have an extra fifteen minutes for social time.

Channel One.

They make us do this stupid busy work. Like, we have to take quizzes and stuff about Channel One.
Yeah, and sometimes we have silent T. A. and I don’t think that’s fair.

School is just a big day care. (Laughter)

I like Channel One because I learn about what’s going on in the world.

The girl who made the “day care” statement continued on another tangent about how nothing valuable is learned in school and therefore it is just used as a babysitting service. The other kids laughed but did not reply in agreement. A few sideways glances followed, and it appeared that this girl was alone in her comments. The other students seemed to agree that T. A. should be a time of freedom to interact with their friends, to watch Channel One if they chose, and to relax and not have to do any work.

10. **Tell me about the Peer Mediation Program.**

    Several students said they liked the program, while others talked of people not feeling open to the peer mediation process. There were some doubts expressed about the ability of students to respect the confidentiality of those who receive mediation. Others expressed their suspicions of the selection criteria for the Peer Mediators and called it a “big popularity contest”. Some of the Peer Mediators said they thought it had been very effective for the sixth and seventh grade, but the eighth grade students did not use it much and seemed not to take it very seriously. There was a discussion about some former Peer Mediators who violated confidentiality and the program has suffered since then due a lack of trust in the Peer Mediators. Typical responses to this program included:

    *I like it.*

    *I don’t think people feel open to it. At least not the eighth graders.*

    *Some of the peer mediators told people’s problems to their friends and then by the end of the day it was all over the school.*
It got to a big joke in the eighth grade. Ooh, you’re going to peer mediation.

The sixth and seventh graders are open to it.

I think it’s pretty good for the seventh grade.

Some problems should be handled by an adult, though.

One of the Peer Mediators tried very hard to tell the others about their training and how they are taught to refer to adults when necessary, but it seemed she gave up after not getting her message across. She also talked about how often she had done mediations this year, so it seemed that several students were open to the process even though some students in the group said this was not the case. The comment about the selection criteria being based on popularity seemed to get under the Peer Mediators’ skin as well, but there were comments disputing this statement. I got the feeling that the Peer Mediators probably agreed that the selection was based on popularity, and there was nothing they could do about being popular. I suspected they also did not want to appear vain if they agreed with this assessment of the selection criteria.

11. What does the Peer Mediation program do for the Peer Mediators?

The consensus among the Peer Mediators was that it feels good to help people and they have all enjoyed seeing positive results from the mediations they facilitated. Typical responses to this question included:

I think it feels good to help people.

People have come up to me afterwards and said it was helpful to them.

I think this was a new idea for the other group members, that there was another side to being a Peer Mediator other than keeping secrets. None of the other group members commented when the Peer Mediators talked of their enjoyment in helping others.
12. **What do you like the best about the Peer Mediation Program?**

The only response here was that the students liked to get out of class. The lack of comments may have been because positive aspects of the peer mediation program had already been shared and therefore there was no reason to repeat the answers to the previous question.

13. **What do you like the least about the Peer Mediation Program?**

The discussion about the selection criteria of the Peer Mediators resumed, referring to it as a “popularity contest” again. The conversation then turned to the lack of trust in the Peer Mediators. I noticed that the Peer Mediators in the room appeared uncomfortable. One of them even said, “Gosh, you make it sound like I’m a terrible person or something.” At this point I asked the boy who was leading the discussion on lack of trust if he wanted to make a distinction between peer mediators in the room and other peer mediators who had violated confidentiality. He then said he was sure the ones in the room were trustworthy, but others before them had ruined the reputation. The remaining comments referred to the benefits of having a peer help with a problem instead of an adult. Typical responses to this question included:

*Popularity Contest.*

*They can’t be trusted. (my question about clarification followed.)*

*Some can be trusted like her and her (pointing around the room), most can be trusted, but people here before ruined it for these guys.*

*A lot people either like it or not.*

*It helps to have a peer to understand you because some things adults don’t understand. (Others said “yeah” and nodded agreement.)*

*A couple of people spoiled it for us.*

*Plus, it’s not always an option. Sometimes we get referrals from people who don’t know why they’re there.*
As soon as I said something, I wished I had not intervened in the discussion about the Peer Mediators. I fear I may have influenced the discussion too much. I don’t think the boy was describing the Peer Mediators in the room when he talked about distrust, but I ruined the chance for him to clarify it on his own. Still, the discussion revealed that some students value Peer Mediation, while others do not.

14. **What are the counselors’ roles in the Peer Mediation Program?**

The majority of the students seemed to have a good grasp of how the counselors set up the mediations. The Peer Mediators also talked about how the counselors were available when they held mediations and often helped them through the mediation process when they needed it. They described the counselors as advisors to the Peer Mediators. Typical responses to this question included:

*Sort of an advisor to the Peer Mediators.*

*They help you to get feelings out, like when you’re doing a mediation, you can go get them.*

*They set this whole thing up.*

These responses were very matter of fact and without passion. I think the students were growing weary of the Peer Mediation discussion at this point. However, they did not hesitate to volunteer the answers.

15. **Do you ever have the opportunity to see the counselor in groups?**

Many of the students responded negatively, appearing sure that no opportunities like that existed in their school. One student then talked about her experience in group counseling and what it does for her. Another student talked about his ADHD group and how helpful it had been for him to have some structure and accountability. As these students were talking about their group experiences, a few of the other students expressed their surprise and said they had no idea
anything like that went on at this school. Then the girl involved in group counseling talked about how she did not trust her counselor. This prompted more discussion about who could be trusted in the school and who could not. Typical responses to this question included:

*Not really.*

*Yeah. (surprise from the others)*

*We’ll have a certain counselor take care of a certain group. It sort of helps to get to know other people with the same problems as you. It makes you feel a lot better, but it didn’t really help with anything the sharing.*

*I didn’t know we had that!*

*I was in a group and now every morning Ms. ______ checks my homework and it helps to keep me organized.*

*I don’t really trust Ms. ______ because she told my parents about something one time.*

*She was probably just trying to help you, because I trust her a lot (referring to the counselor). I don’t trust the teachers.*

The apparent surprise response to the group counseling that occurs in this school speaks well for the counselors’ ability to maintain confidentiality. However, it also showed that many students were not aware of the opportunities to see the counselor in a group. This could be due to groups being limited to those students who have a DSM-IV diagnosis such as ADHD or limited to students who have some sort of trauma in their lives. However, my interviews with the counselors did not indicate that this was the case. The conversation about confidentiality appeared to spark some passionate responses. The girl who did not trust her counselor seemed again to be alone in her opinions, while another student quickly came to the counselor’s defense. I asked the students if they understood the limitations of confidentiality and they expressed a thorough understanding of when the counselor has to break it.
16. **What kinds of groups would you suggest that might be helpful here in this school?**

Groups such as those for children of divorce and those who have trouble making friends were most often suggested. A male student (the one whose mother is a counselor) talked about how the group for making friends could really help a person’s self-esteem. Another boy suggested having a group for students with all types of disabilities such as ADHD and physical disabilities. Typical responses to this question included:

*Divorce.*

*I think a self-esteem group would be good, because those are the ones who always sit by themselves and don’t know how to make friends. You know they want friends but they just don’t try.*

*I think a group for disabilities would be good. Like for ADHD and….well there are so many of them, (I said, “both physical and learning disabilities?”) “Yeah.”*

These students, upon learning about the kinds of groups that go on at their school, seemed to support having them. I was impressed by the compassion that the students showed when they talked about self-esteem groups and groups for students with disabilities. The girl who lacked trust in her counselor did not say anything at this point, however.

Table 4.9 provides a summary of the student perceptions of the group-oriented programs at New Heights.

**Table 4.9**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ Perceptions of Group-oriented Programs at New Heights</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advisory</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A time to finish homework, watch Channel One, and talk to friends.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Perceptions of secondary reader

A former school counselor reviewed this report and developed questions and comments for further analysis. The following are her questions and comments:

1. The students here are primarily from upper middle class families. How much does that affect the quality of programs here? Studies have shown that people in upper middle class families experience less stress than people in impoverished families. How much does having less stress influence the success of programs such as T. A.?

2. Several of the teachers mentioned the structure that the T. A. program brings to the students’ day as a positive factor. How is this structure helpful to these students?

3. This school is brand new and a couple of the respondents talked about the unique challenges a new school faces. How does being new affect this school’s success? How much influence does a new, positive atmosphere have on the morale of the staff and the students?

4. It was clear from the lack of knowledge of the teachers and students about certain programs that the counseling department clearly needs to do a better job with public relations.

5. Strong leadership and commitment of the staff are recurrent themes in the success of this school’s programs.

6. The counselors seem to have a good handle on perceiving the students’ needs and adapting their services to meet those needs.

7. The students’ description of the advisory program parallels the principal’s description of the program.

8. Confidentiality is clearly a theme with the students as they discuss the peer mediation program. This brings the question to mind of the maturity of middle school students and whether or not they are able to handle the confidentiality necessary for peer mediation.

9. The theme of peer mediation being a “popularity contest” is a strong one. This takes away the objectivity of the program and deflates its strength in many ways.

School #4 Castle Middle School

Castle Rock Middle School is a large school in a southeastern suburban town, located about twenty miles outside of a large metropolitan area. The enrollment is around 1,100 students,
with a variety of ethnic groups represented. In addition to the ethnic diversity at Castle Rock, there is also a wide range of socio-economic classes represented. One of the assistant principals described the population as ranging from solid middle class to lower class; and from the very rural farm-life to the very streetwise. The school contains sixth, seventh, and eighth grades on the same campus, with buildings connected by breezeways. The buildings are old and undergoing renovation. Student artwork decorated the hallways when I arrived for my visit. A large suit of armor guarded the entrance to the school with a sign that read “Welcome to the Castle.” The principal greeted me and quickly escorted me to the conference room, saying the teachers were waiting for her to make the morning announcements. From the intercom in the conference room I heard the principal talk about the school’s upcoming events and meetings. These announcements were followed by a short quote read about making wise choices. The principal then ended the announcement saying, “This is Ms. ______. Make it a great day, or not. As always the choice is yours.”

Castle Rock Middle School has three assistant principals who serve as the administrators for each grade level. These assistant principals handle all of the statewide testing, along with the help of the three counselors, and all of the scheduling, including the assignment of students to teams. The advisory period, called Homebase/Knight-time, takes place every morning from 8:40 to 9:00 a.m. The student homebase/Knight-time teams are comprised of approximately twenty students per teacher. According to one of the assistant principals, efforts are made to make the assignments as diverse and as equitable as possible. Each grade level has about five teams with three teachers on each team. The teams are generally made up of one language arts teacher, one math teacher, and one social studies and science teacher. These teachers, called Core teachers, have their planning periods at the end of the day. Half of their planning periods are used for team
planning, while the other half is for individual planning. They meet formally once a week to discuss their students and prepare team notes for the administrator and the counselor. The counselor and the administrator are supposed to meet with the teams on a weekly basis; however, one teacher noted, “We need to see them more.” The three school counselors are also divided by grade level. They each follow the grade until the students leave the school, and then they each rotate back to sixth grade. The assistant principals follow the same grade for three years as well. All three counselors indicated that this arrangement really helps them build strong relationships with the students.

The guidance department has a twelve-month secretary and a full-time attendance secretary. The attendance secretary has a cubicle in the corner of the office. The sixth and eighth grade counselors’ offices are located behind the reception desk, down a short hallway. The seventh grade counselor’s is located in the main office, next to the principal’s office. The third office in the guidance department is occupied by one of the assistant principals. When I asked about why the counselors’ offices were not housed together, I was told that one of the assistant principals needed a larger office, so the seventh grade counselor took his office in the main office and he took hers. I was also told that the counselors and administrators rotate offices every year as they follow their appropriate grade levels. However, I wondered if this was the only reason for the division of counselor offices. Two of the counselors and two teachers had referred to a division among the counselors. Apparently, two of the counselors are “more invested in the kids” and “work well together”, while the third counselor works more independently. No one specified any counselor names, but I wondered if the physical office division represented a professional division among the three counselors.
Castle Rock Middle School employs a full-time Recovery Room teacher. Recovery Room is a day-long class that took the place of In-School Suspension last year. In addition to normal in-school suspension procedures, teachers send students who are disrupting the class to Recovery Room to cool off and come back to class when the Recovery Room teacher gives her approval.

Another service that makes this school unique is that it has a full-time clinical social worker on its staff. Her position is funded by the state mental health agency. She holds individual, family, and group counseling. All of the students on her caseload have DSM-IV diagnoses, and the cost for the services she provides are based on a sliding scale through the local mental health agency. She explained that she holds groups in the school and at the mental health agency, depending on the students’ schedules. She also is available at the school throughout the day to see her students individually.

Programs

The Homebase/Knight-time period gets started each morning with an announcement from the principal. The announcement usually contains a quote, prepared by the sixth grade counselor, involving a character lesson. This counselor serves on a county-wide committee responsible for developing themes for the schools to use during their advisory periods. These lessons are also given to the teachers ahead of time so they can prepare a relevant activity for their students. The principal then ends the announcements with her daily, “…make it a great day or not. As always, the choice is yours.” The teachers know that this is their cue to have whatever activities or discussions they have planned for their Knight-time teams. The students remain in their classes after Knight-time is over, which allows for a longer transition time into their regular classes. This
can be especially helpful when the discussions are covering difficult topics, such as the Columbine shootings.

The Peer Mediation Program is coordinated by all three counselors together, with each counselor supervising the Peer Mediators in her assigned grade level. The training takes place at the beginning of the year with all of the Peer Mediators together, and then the grade level Peer Mediators meet with their grade level counselors throughout the year. The Peer Mediators are chosen from nominations from students and teacher recommendations. There are about twelve Peer Mediators per grade level. The counselors arrange the mediations for their assigned grade levels by taking referrals and leaving notices in the Peer Mediation box. The Peer Mediators are assigned to teams, and the teams are responsible for a particular day of the week. The Peer Mediators check the Peer Mediation box in the guidance office on their assigned mornings and often find their notices in the box, which will tell them who they are mediating, where and when they are to meet, and who will be supervising the mediation. Teachers also receive the Peer Mediation training and serve as supervisors of the mediations. The teachers said their roles were to be on hand in case the students needed them, and not to take over the mediations. The students in the focus group, however, said that the teachers often “help too much” in the mediations. Two of the counselors had very specific things to say about working with their Peer Mediators, while one counselor said very little. Therefore, it was difficult to determine how equitably the Peer Mediation duties were divided.

Each counselor is required to do at least two groups per year. The counselors meet with the principal at the beginning of the year to let her know their intentions for the kinds of groups and how many different groups they intend to run. The counselors consult with the teachers to determine the kinds of groups they need to conduct and take referrals from teachers for
prospective group members. The groups did not seem to be scheduled at any particular time of the day, but the counselors agreed that they tried to stagger the meeting times so they would not be taking the students out of the same classes each week. They send weekly notices to the teachers to let them know when the students are to report for the groups. In addition to the school counselors, the clinical social worker runs groups for those children who have DSM-IV diagnoses. The social worker said she made sure she told the teachers to let her know if she was treading on their instruction time too much, because, she said, “I’m sure, I’ll do it eventually. So I just tell them to let me know, and they do!”

**Interview data**

Table 4.10 shows a matrix display of all the teacher interviews. The teachers are listed by number, and their responses are listed under the appropriate headings. Teacher #4 is the Recovery Room teacher. Under “Program Perceptions” the subheadings are “Advisory” for perceptions of the teacher advisory program, “Peer Mediation” for perceptions of the Peer Mediation program, and “Group Counseling” for perceptions of the group counseling that takes place in that school. The fourth subheading is labeled “Role” for that respondent’s perceived role in any of the programs. The perceived roles are distinguished by the program’s initials. The word “Overall” is listed beside general role perceptions within the school, rather than referring to a specific program. The researcher coded the program perceptions with positive and negative signs to indicate the nature of the perceptions. For purposes of this study, the Teacher Advisory program will be referred to as T. A. P., or T. A.
### Table 4.10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher #</th>
<th>Advisory</th>
<th>Peer Mediation</th>
<th>Group Counseling</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Key Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>-More effective with younger students. Too late to teach values to 8th grade students.</td>
<td>+Works real well. Seems very effective. Makes the kids feel good about themselves.</td>
<td>+I think most groups are conducted by the mental health counselor. I think it’s really needed.</td>
<td>TA-respond to thought for the day. PM-supervise G.C.-referral</td>
<td>We’re interested in the kids and we think the programs are needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>+Good organized way to start the day. Can see the difference it’s made.</td>
<td>I have referred some students to P.M. The P.M.’s are very positive about their jobs.</td>
<td>+I like that the counselor asks for our opinions about what groups are needed. The 6th grade counselor is fantastic.</td>
<td>TA-Facilitator Overall: To give enough info so the students can form their own opinions.</td>
<td>Having staff members who believe in the programs. A well-organized counselor (6th). Easy to follow activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>+/-Has changed over the years. Used to have intramurals as a team-building activity. The short lessons are important.</td>
<td>+/-I wanted to be trained but I had to let others on my team do it instead. I like the idea of the kids working out their own problems. Some kids don’t take it seriously though.</td>
<td>-I haven’t been involved with much of that. One counselor does a lot more groups than the others do. Some kids do take advantage of the services. It’s needed.</td>
<td>Overall: Referrals Motivator</td>
<td>Sharing ideas with each other. Strong vision and belief in our school by the admin. The kids come first.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 RR</td>
<td>+Real valuable. It’s important no matter when you have it.</td>
<td>+I don’t work with the P.M.’s but I use mediation as an option for students in my class. Sometimes it’s a goal for them to work towards.</td>
<td>+The Brothers for Success group is really good. I’ve seen a positive difference in the boys who were in that group.</td>
<td>Recovery Room Teacher</td>
<td>Faculty and staff. We’re a family here. Dedicated to making the school rise above negative factors. Teamwork.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>+Used to have it once a week. Everyday is more effective. Rapport is casual. It’s needed.</td>
<td>+Must be working because they haven’t canned it yet. Someone must be benefiting.</td>
<td>I know very little about the groups here.</td>
<td>TA-Teacher &amp; to carry out what the principal wants. No roles in other 2 programs</td>
<td>Teachers have input and we evaluate programs yearly. Dedicated teachers; principal insists it be done.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown in Table 4.10, the perceptions of the T. A. program were generally positive. Teachers #2, #4, and #5 agreed that the program is “valuable,” “effective,” and an “organized way to start the day.” Two of the teachers offered that the program had changed quite a bit over the years. Several of them referred to the Quest program sponsored by the Lions Club which had been used for advisory for a few years. Teacher #3 explained, “At first it was great, but then after about two years, it got old.” She added that the students began to recognize lessons from the previous year, and they became bored with them. The subject matter also became outdated after about two years. Teacher #3 spoke of past intramural competitions between the T. A. teams, which had helped make the T. A. teams bond together more closely. She wanted to bring those activities back as a part of T. A. The frequency of T. A. meetings and time of day were both subjects for debate. Teacher #5 preferred having everyday meetings to the weekly meetings of the past. Teacher #4 felt that the T. A. P. time is important no matter when it takes place.

Teacher #1 believed that the T. A. program was effective, but said she thought it was “more effective with younger students.” This teacher went on to explain that she thought it was too late to teach morals and values to eighth grade students, that their values were already largely formed. She explained further that the students’ if parents were setting poor examples for the kids, then it is difficult to try to tell them they should choose to act differently. She gave an example she had used in her class of a person receiving too much change and not returning to the cashier. She explained that many of her students saw nothing wrong with that because their parents would have done the same thing. Therefore, she thought it was difficult to teach these kids right and wrong if their parents were already showing them poor examples.

Teacher #2 said she was “unsure of the program” last year, but that the quotes for the day made everything much simpler this year. “The quotes are a good, organized way to start the
day.” She went on to discuss the activities she facilitates in her advisory group. “I’m a big believer in letter-writing, because I think it’s becoming a lost art. So, I have my kids write letters in response to the quotes for the day or any current events.”

Under the Peer Mediation heading, the perceptions were again quite positive. Teachers #1, #2, and #3 spoke positively about both the Peer Mediators and the concept of the program itself. They thought the program “works real well,” and that “the Peer Mediators are positive about their jobs.” Teacher #3 said she wanted to receive the mediation training but a younger, less trained teacher within her team wanted to do it as well, so she backed down. She added, however, that “…some kids don’t take it seriously.” Teachers #4 and #5 had much less to say about the program, but their perceptions were positive.

The majority of the teachers felt that the group counseling was necessary and a positive experience for the students receiving services. Teacher #1, however, was under the impression that the mental health counselor conducted all of the counseling groups in the school. Two of the teachers had particularly positive things to say about the sixth grade counselor and the groups she runs. Teacher #3 suggested that one of the counselors did a whole lot more group counseling than the other two, but she did not specify to which counselor she was referring. Teacher #3 liked the fact that the counselor consulted them about the types of groups that were needed before she planned them. Teacher #5 had very little to say about group counseling at all.

The perceived roles in the implementation of each of these programs were quite general. Some of the teachers responded with words like “facilitator,” and “motivator.” Other teachers made specific responses referring to the individual programs. Examples for the T. A. roles were: “facilitator,” “respond to the thought for the day,” and “carry out what the principal wants.” Teacher #1 was the only teacher who gave a perceived role for the Peer Mediation program and
that was the role of “supervisor.” Teacher #4’s role was the Recovery Room teacher, regardless of the program, since her responsibilities are different from that of the other teachers. Teacher #1 was also the only one to list a specific role for the group counseling. Her role was strictly that of a referral source. No other perceived roles were listed.

The Key Factors for successful implementation of the three programs are listed in the last column. The comments focus on having a staff with an interest in the kids and an administrator whose vision and dedication influence the rest of the staff. Other factors include the staff having a “family” quality and having a well-organized counselor (referring to the sixth grade counselor). Shared belief in the programs and a common vision among the administration and staff members are also listed.

**Principal and Counselor interviews**

The principal’s interview and the clinical social worker’s interview followed the same format as the teacher interviews. Table 4.11 illustrates a summary of the responses, which follow the same format as the teachers’ responses. In addition to the questions listed in the table, the counselors were asked additional questions pertaining to their typical duties and the job components upon which they placed the highest priority. The first additional question was: “Tell about your primary duties and how you spend a typical day in the middle school.”
Table 4.11

Principal and Counselor Perceptions of Group-oriented Programs at Castle Rock

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Advisory</th>
<th>Peer Mediation</th>
<th>Group Counseling</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Key Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>+Has transformed into a less formal advisee/homebase. Thought for the day sets up the advising.</td>
<td>+/-This year we are going to survey to see if it’s effective or not. I’m not sure how aware the kids are of the program. It’s preventive. P.M.’s are viewed positively.</td>
<td>+Requires counselors to do 2-3 groups per year as a part of their evaluations. Teachers are good about letting the kids go because the groups meet on alternate days so the same classes are not missed repeatedly.</td>
<td>Overall: Not to run programs but to evaluate and support the counselors.</td>
<td>District support; efforts of counselors; cooperation of teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor #1</td>
<td>It’s changed a lot over the years.</td>
<td>+6th graders are eager to try it. Not used as much by administrators. This year we made a commitment to do a better job with it.</td>
<td>+I usually do a lot of groups. This year I’ve only done 2 or 3. I think it’s important.</td>
<td>TA: I give the topic for the month to the principal and the teachers. I give the quote for the day to the principal. Help other counselors develop themes</td>
<td>Having an administrator who believes in the program and allows time for you to do the programs. A good working relationship is necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor #2</td>
<td>I don’t work with TA except sometimes to help them with a guidance lesson.</td>
<td>+/- The program has its place, but I think kids still look to adults to help mediate their conflicts. The maturity is often not there for the PM’s.</td>
<td>I do some group counseling but I prefer individual. That’s my niche.</td>
<td>TA: Sometimes to come in the classroom and help with a lesson. PM: helper.</td>
<td>You just do it. It becomes a part of you and the hat that you wear. You have to love it. Commitment of faculty and staff plays a big part.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor #3</td>
<td>-We don’t really have a TA program per se. Teachers teach character education. It’s not really much work for the teachers because they have a folder of materials to use.</td>
<td>-I don’t know if the kids are mature enough to handle the confidentiality. Need to re-evaluate.</td>
<td>+Probably the most effective use of my time. Teachers do get upset about the loss of instruction time. I prefer whole-day group experiences to ongoing ones.</td>
<td>TA: None</td>
<td>It’s just plain required!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical Social Worker</td>
<td>+/-Not involved in TA—not sure what it is. I do meet with the teacher teams.</td>
<td>+I’ve used it before with my kids. Often it’s a goal for them to work toward.</td>
<td>+One of the more effective things I do. I try to pull kids from different classes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The sixth grade counselor was the first to be interviewed. She began by saying that school counselors at this school are expected to do a certain number of groups each year, along with classroom guidance, career development activities and individual counseling. The administrators do a lot of the scheduling and testing, so that allows her to focus on the counseling aspects for her job. She showed me a daily log of her activities, which included students to be seen, scheduled counseling groups, and other duties. Her records were very organized. She said she plans each evening for the next day, and usually does not get to everything she has planned. The students she does not get to see are then moved to the next day, and she tries again. She talked about the school’s arrangement for the counselors to follow the same grade of students until they leave the middle school. She said she liked this arrangement very much, because it allowed her to develop and maintain close relationships with her students. She serves on the county-wide committee of counselors who developed the curriculum for the Teacher Advisory Program. As a part of her local duties, she distributes the curriculum to the teachers on a monthly basis, and delivers to the principal the quote for the day to be read during announcements.

Counselor #1 said that the Peer Mediation program had received new commitment from the counselors this year. They re-trained the seventh and eighth grade Peer Mediators and she felt they were off to a strong start this year. She talked about how the students seem to lose interest in Peer Mediation as they get older. “Sixth graders are eager to try it,” she said, as she showed me several Peer Mediation reports for sixth grade mediations. However, the numbers for mediations in the older grades are slim compared to the sixth grade.

Counselor #1’s favorite group experience is a boys’ group called “Brothers for Success” which targets boys who have recurrent behavior problems. She said this group has been successful in helping the boys reach their goals for positive behavior. She also talked about a
Fireman’s group that she ran previously, which involved bringing some firefighters in from the community to serve as role models for wayward children in the school.

Counselor #2 was the seventh grade counselor. She said a typical day was always filled with the unexpected. No clearly defined duties were listed as a part of her day, but she said she wears several different hats. She said that she does not do any scheduling, but she does some advising. Her preference is individual counseling, but she does a little bit of group work. She added that group counseling and classroom guidance were important and many counselors are gifted at doing those kinds of counseling. For her, however, her most effective work was at the individual level. She said she just felt that she made more of a difference with the students when she worked with them individually. Her answers were very general, and though I tried to get her to tell me some specific information about the group work she did, her reply was that groups were not her forte and that she preferred individual counseling. When I asked her about the Teacher Advisory Program, she said she had nothing to do with the coordination of it. She did not know, however, if the other counselors had anything to do with it or not.

Counselor #2 talked about the Peer Mediation program and how they had recently started to involve more teachers as supervisors for the mediations. When I asked how she felt about the program, she replied, “It has its place, but kids still look for those adults to solve their problems.” She went on to say that it was indeed a part of their program, but that “a lot of times, especially with the sixth graders, the maturity is not there.”

Counselor #3 also spoke in support of the counselors following the grades as they progressed. When asked about her typical duties, she also said that there was no such thing as a typical day. She keeps a to-do list, but most of her time is spent attending to crisis situations. She
explained that it was not unusual for her to come back to the school on nights and weekends to complete paperwork or projects that were not finished during the regular day.

Counselor #3 said she had nothing to do with the advisory program, and that she didn’t think they had an advisory program “per se.” “The teachers get a folder of materials to use, so it’s not much work for them.” As for the Peer Mediation program, Counselor #3 showed me manual she had created for the use of her Peer Mediators. However, she said, “I don’t know if the kids are mature enough to handle the confidentiality.” She talked about having to dismiss a student from the Peer Mediators because he violated confidentiality. Although she said this year there had been more mediation requests than previous years, she still thought they needed to re-evaluate the program. “Often the eighth grade students don’t resolve their conflicts after peer mediation anyway. It can be a real waste of time.”

The counselors were also asked to list the job component they held most important among their duties. Counselor #1 said her most important job component was to be an advocate for the students and a liaison between the teachers, principal, students, and parents. She said she spends a lot of time talking to students individually. She wished that she spent more time in the classroom, but said that the scheduling makes that part difficult. She explained further that each time she does a classroom guidance presentation, that means she has to visit fifteen classrooms. Usually she does about four to five classroom guidance lessons per year, and that already takes up a lot of her time. She added that career development activities are important, but because the school already has a required career class, she does not do a whole lot of those activities.

Counselor #3 said that group counseling was the most effective use of her time. She talked of a specific group on grief and loss, which she held in conjunction with the local Hospice organization. This was a one-day intensive group experience, and she said it was wonderful.
Since that experience she has believed that the one-day group experiences are more effective and more practical than the on-going counseling groups. Then this counselor said that she was a different kind of counselor than the other two. She started to describe the other two, saying that the sixth grade counselor was “huggy-feely” and then she moved on to show me what she was trying to say. She pointed to a large poster of a Yorkshire Terrier and said she trains therapy dogs to work with the kids. She brings her dog in to sit in the office, and if she has a student come in who needs work with anger management, she will leave the student in her office with the dog and let the dog “make her way over to them and calm them down.”

**Focus Group Data**

This focus group meeting involved 13 participants. The discussion was held in the school’s conference room, which was also the designated spot for yearbook distribution. This group included a couple of African American students, one Asian student, and the rest Caucasian. We were seated around a large table, with myself on one side, and my assistant moderator on the other side, and the students filling in the space between. No school employees were present during the discussion. The room was crowded with boxes of yearbooks, filing cabinets, and extra chairs and tables. The students had just received their yearbooks that day, and they appeared very excited. Later that day, the students were scheduled to go outside for a yearbook signing party. Despite the large number of students in the group, I thought it would be best not to ask any students to leave, for fear of establishing a negative climate for the remaining students. This large group did result in several tangential discussions and difficulty keeping the discussion on track.

The focus group questions were as follows:

1. **What does a counselor do?**
A male student started the discussion, with a general statement about how the counselor helps students. Others quickly joined in with other activities in which a school counselor might participate. The general comments dealt with what a counselor talks to students about. However, one student mentioned the counselor’s involvement in coordinating a particular program. Typical responses to this question included:

“She helps you out.”

“Helps students with problems, like if they get in trouble.”

“Helps with home problems, like if you’re having a problem at home.”

“Talks to you about choices, like why you did something that got you in trouble.”

“Plans special activities, like the Honor Card.”

The students’ responses seemed to center around the counselor’s role in dealing with problem students. In particular, the perception seemed to be that the counselor talks to students who are either having a problem at home, or having behavioral problems at school. Interestingly, no one mentioned relationship issues that involve people in the school, such as friendship issues, or problems with teachers. One student mentioned the counselor’s coordination of the Honor Card system. He explained further that the Honor Card is a merit system, in which a student can earn privileges based on good behavior. I deduced that he had personal experience with this program, because no one else spoke during his explanation of the Honor Card.

2. **Do your teachers ever act like a counselor with you? If so, when and how?**

Most of the students nodded as they listened to this question. The individual responses referred to the students’ respective teachers and they types of discussions they had with them that resembled what a counselor might say. Most of the comments referred to teachers talking to their students after class to discuss their grades or missed homework, and to find out if there is
something wrong with that particular student. One student talked about his teacher’s use of novels, such as Steinbeck’s *The Pearl*, to discuss life issues. No one referred to their advisee periods as a time that his or her teachers acted like a counselor.

After I mentioned their advisee period (also known as Knight Time) and asked for clarification of what the program involved, the students listed different activities that take place during their Knight Time. They talked about homebase activities, such as attendance and announcements, and went on to describe the types of discussions and activities that take place after announcements are over. Typical responses to this question included:

“*Our teacher, Miss _____, she wants to be a counselor.*”

“*Sometimes if you miss your work, they’ll try to talk to you, like after class or something.*”

“*Lunchtime. They talk to you at lunchtime.*”

“*They read stories. Like, we’re reading this book, The Pearl, and our teacher talks to us about it and relates it to true life.*”

“*At Knight Time, we learn character skills like respect. They taught us table manners and stuff like that.*”

“*It’s like a homebase, really.*”

“*For every month, there’s a different word, like respect, and we take that word and do different things with it.*”

“*It’s a social time, too.*”

The students did not seem to make the connection between Knight Time and teachers acting like counselors. I’m not sure if that was because many of the teachers do not resemble counselors when they conduct their Knight Time activities, or if it is just a lack of recognition on the part of the students that what they are doing is similar to what a counselor does. They did not mention anything about group activities, either; however, most of the activities they talked about
took place within the classroom setting. This could be due to a lack of recognition of the activities as being group ones; or it could be due to the activities being largely individual. The students did mention class discussions occurring during Knight Time, however.

3. **What does Knight Time do for students?**

The students’ responses referred largely to how the Knight Time is a way to begin the school day and get off to a positive start. Several students talked about how they appreciated the time to finish homework they had not completed the night before. There was some disagreement on how the time should be spent. Some students said their teachers let them play cards and talk to their friends during that time, while others spoke of organized classroom activities that had a central theme. One student appeared upset that some classes were getting to play while others had to finish homework or participate in organized activities and discussions. He explained further that he did not think that was how the principal had intended the time to be spent. The other students’ responses showed Knight Time to be a time to get adjusted to the school day before classes begin. Typical responses to this question included:

“It sort of gets them started off right. You can catch up on your homework.”

“After announcements our teacher brings in a newspaper article and we discuss current events.”

“We have free time on Fridays, when we can play cards and stuff.”

“It gets you calmed down and ready to go.”

“Maybe their teachers are letting them play cards, but I don’t think that’s what Ms. ____ (the principal) wanted it to be.”

“I think it’s kind of like a free time before classes start. It’s just kind of like a time to get here and get adjusted.”

The students seemed to value the Knight Time as an important way to begin their day, through adjusting to the school, completing their work, or talking as a group about a particular
topic. The student who spoke up about what the time is intended for seemed to stand alone with his comments. The other students remained silent and seemed to be pleased with how they spend their Knight Time. It seemed that the quality and consistency of Knight Time depended on who the Knight Time teacher was and how he or she thought the time should be spent.

4. **What do you like most about Knight Time?**

All of the students’ responses referred to their appreciation of having time to do what they needed to do, whether that was talking to their friends, catching up on homework, or resting sleeping without getting into trouble for it. Typical responses to this question included:

- “You can catch up on your homework so you won’t have a bad grade.”
- “Catch up on your homework.”
- “I get to sleep.”
- “You get to talk.”
- “It’s time to relax.”

All of the students’ comments here seemed to reflect their appreciation of the freedom they have during Knight Time. They all used phrases like “we get to…” and “we can…” implying that they are allowed to do things during this time that they are not allowed to do at other times. It seems that the students really value this time of day as a time to do what they want to do, without strict limitations or consequences.

5. **What do you like the least about Knight Time?**

These responses reflected individual Knight Time experiences rather than a consensus. A few students said they did not like their Knight Time teachers. These responses were followed by muffled laughter from the others. One student referred to the announcements that the principal makes and all several students chimed in with the phrase that ends every announcement: “This is
Ms. ____. Make it a great day or not. As always, the choice is yours.” This same student remarked that the principal’s comments were often “cheesy” and not relevant to students’ lives. Another student nodded agreement and said Knight Time was boring at times. Typical responses to this question included:

“*The teacher.*” *(followed by laughter)*

“We never get to have free time.”

“Sometimes it’s kind of boring.”

“It’s too short. By the time announcements are over, we don’t have much time to do anything.”

“Some of the stuff Ms._____ (the principal) says is so cheesy.”

“Our teachers are so moody. You never know when it’s okay to talk or not.”

These responses started to take off on a tangent about the moodiness of their teachers. This seemed to be the point in the interview when the students realized they could say what they wanted to about their teachers and it would be okay. However, this discussion was at the cost of constructive, evaluative comments about the Knight Time activities.

6. **If you could change something about Knight Time what would it be?**

The responses to this question focused largely on the individual students’ teachers. One student mentioned a male physical education teacher and everyone agreed that he would make a great Knight Time teacher because he allows the students to talk when they please. Another female student talked at length about how she thinks many teachers should not be in the profession based on how they behave toward the students. Another reference was made to the principal’s announcements as well. Typical responses to this question included:

“*Change the teachers.*”
“I don’t think some teachers should be teachers. You can tell they don’t enjoy what they do, and I don’t think they should even be here.”

“I want to change to Coach ______, because he lets you do what you want to.”
(agreement from other students.)

“My teacher is always boring.”

“The announcements are stupid. Ms. ____ (principal) will talk about professors from 1400 B. C. and we don’t know what she’s talking about.”

“I wouldn’t change nothin’ about homebase.”

The tangent continued here, where the students seemed to feel that this was the time to bash their teachers without repercussion. This also appeared to be the time when the discussion became disorganized, with students calling out their responses instead of waiting for others to finish their comments. There was one student who spoke out about how she liked Knight Time (or homebase, as she referred to it), and that she wouldn’t change anything about it. I wonder if she sensed my frustration at the turn the discussion had taken, or if she was simply annoyed by the others’ comments.

7. What is the counselor’s role in Knight Time?

Many of the students shrugged at this question and one of the students responded that the counselors had nothing to do with Knight Time. Another student said he thought the counselor might have something to do with suggesting the activities they do during KnightTime, but he was not sure about that. Others talked about how the counselors often call students to their offices during Knight Time and how peer mediations will sometimes take place during that time as well.

Typical responses to this question included:

“Nothing.”

“Once in a while we’ll do a special activity. I think the counselor might suggest it.”
“She’ll call us up to talk.”

“She’ll call the Peer Mediators during that time.”

It seems that the counselors have no significantly perceived role in the Knight Time program. They recognized that the counselor may use that time to set up mediations or to talk to students in need. However, they did not seem to see a relationship between the counselor and Knight Time. This is probably due to the fact that only one counselor is involved with the coordination and distribution of the Knight Time activities. The other two apparently do not participate unless called upon to help with an activity. The student who recognized that the counselor might suggest the activities was also a Peer Mediator; therefore, he may have more direct knowledge about what his counselor does than the average student would.

8. What is the Peer Mediation program?

Several of the students responded by telling about their experiences with peer mediation. One student pointed to a few members of the group, indicating that she had had a conflict with them and resolved it through peer mediation. Other students joined in at this point and talked simultaneously about the conflicts they had experienced and resolved through peer mediation. At this point a female student announced that she was a peer mediator and explained in detail what the peer mediators do.

Typical responses to this question included:

“It helps you out with problems. Like I had a problem with him (pointing), and him, and I think him, too, and we went to peer mediation to work it out.”

“I’ve been in peer mediation many times.”
“I’m a seventh grade peer mediator, and we just help others with their problems because a lot of the time, students will feel more comfortable talking to us than to an adult, because they’re afraid they’ll call their parents or something.”

The responses to this question seemed to convey a positive perception of the peer mediation program. However, the discussion had taken such a chaotic turn, with students interrupting each other, and with me having to raise my voice to be heard, that it was difficult to determine the exact nature of the perceptions.

9. **What does the Peer Mediation program do for students?**

These responses began with an explanation of how the peer mediation allows students to resolve their conflicts without the intervention of an adult. One student quickly interjected that there are adults supervising the peer mediations, but they are not supposed to talk during the mediations. Then, however, the discussion took a turn in which the students talked about how the supervising adults often talk more than they should. Some of the peer mediators disagreed with this statement, but at least one of the students complaining about the supervising adults was a peer mediator. The conversation shifted to the peer mediators and their perceived lack of trust from the other students, and how students have violated the confidentiality of the mediations. I asked if it was the peer mediators who had violated the confidentiality or the ones being mediated, and one of the female mediators replied that it had been both. Apparently, some former peer mediators had violated confidentiality and had created a climate of distrust for the remaining ones. Another comment indicated that the students often do not take the mediation seriously and therefore create false conflicts in order to get out of class.

Typical responses to this question included:
“Sometimes the counselor does more talking than we do.”

“Sometimes they really help you because we may not know what to say. Our teacher helps us figure out how to say something.”

“They help us, but then they help too much.” (referring to the teacher-supervisors)

“A lot of mediations were not voluntary. Sometimes teachers will see a conflict and just make a referral and not tell the students. Then the peer mediators call for the two students and by that time the conflict is already resolved. It’s a real waste of time.”

“A lot of kids don’t take it seriously. They use it to get out of class.”

“Students use it to get other people in trouble.”

“Sometimes the mediators make it worse.”

“You can’t trust them not to tell.”

There was clearly a division among the students here. Some thought that the peer mediation with adult supervision was effective, and others thought it was unreliable and that mediators were untrustworthy. One female mediator seemed upset by the lack of faith in the peer mediators and appeared very protective of the program and of the adult supervisors. They all agreed that many students manipulate the peer mediation program to get out of class. There was no apparent consensus on how things should be handled. Some thought peer mediation was effective and others did not. It seems that peer mediation is not right for everyone at this school, but for many it is effective and appreciated.

10. What is the counselor’s role in the Peer Mediation program?

A couple of the students said that the counselor set up the mediations and often supervised them. Then one student posed a question about how the peer mediators were selected.
Many students in the group seemed to think that the selection process was really just a popularity contest. This prompted a long discussion about the selection procedures. A male peer mediator referred back to the false, insignificant conflicts that had been previously discussed and suggested that a screening procedure be set up to prevent wasting peer mediators’ and teachers’ time.

Typical responses to this question included:

“She sets it up.”

“She sets it up and then has to be there to watch over you.”

“How do they get picked? That’s what I want to know.”

“Yeah, it’s just a popularity contest, really.”

“They need to have a basic criteria for mediations, because some of the conflicts are just silly, and I don’t have time for that.”

It seems as though the role of the counselor in the peer mediation program is pretty clear. However, the peer mediators did not mention the counselors’ involvement in the training they had received. I attributed this to their focus on the mediations themselves, rather than the focus being on the training. There was apparent resentment and distrust of the selection process. This appeared to make the peer mediators in the room squirm a little.

11. Do you ever have the opportunity to see the counselor in groups?

This question was apparently misunderstood. The students immediately responded in reference to peer mediations. Upon rephrasing the question, the students seemed to have a better understanding. One student talked about how often her group met and general things they did in the group. Another student remembered a sign-up sheet circulated at the beginning of the year.
for anyone interested in participating in a group. Still another student seemed to be talking about peer mediation when she referred to groups. Typical responses to this question included:

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“The group that I’m in, she usually calls us once a week and we get in there with our friends and we just talk about what’s happened at play games and stuff.”

“At the beginning of the year, I think they had a sheet to sign up for different groups.”

“The problem is usually more serious than the peer mediators can handle.”

“They used to do a loss group in elementary school and I liked that then because my sister was killed in a car accident, but I don’t need it now.”

These responses seemed to depend on the level of familiarity the students had with group counseling. The students involved in group counseling seemed to value their experiences in groups, and those who had not experienced group counseling had very little to say.

12. What does group counseling do for students?

This question received one positive response before the group launched into why group counseling is not a good idea. A few of the students talked about the dangers of their confidentiality being violated and why many students do not trust other group members to keep their information private. Individual counseling was supported as a favorable alternative to group counseling when trust of other students is an issue. Typical responses to this question included:

“It lets them know they’re not alone.”

“A lot of people don’t sign up for group counseling because they don’t want others to know their problems. They do more one on one counseling.”

No one disputed the comments about the lack of trust in group counseling. Even the students who had been involved in group counseling did not respond when the students questioned the confidentiality of such groups. This may be due to a lack of confidence in their own groups’
ability to keep confidentiality; or possibly due to a hesitation to share too much about their own group experiences.

13. **What suggestions do you have for other groups that may be helpful in this school?**

   A popular suggestion was to have groups for people just to process what’s happening each week. The student who suggested this called it a “gripe group” in which everyone would be allowed to air their concerns about whatever they chose. Another idea presented was a study skills group. A third group mentioned was called a fire fighters group. This referred to a group of boys who met regularly with local firefighters for mentoring. Typical responses to this question included:

   “*Have groups that talk about what’s happening each week. Sort of a gripe group.*”

   “*A firefighters group.*”

   “*A study skills group.*”

   These responses were only from the males in the group. I wondered if the girls did not enjoy the idea of groups, or if they were just intimidated by the boys dominating the discussion.

14. **Do you think all three programs: the Knight Time, the Peer Mediation, and the group counseling are necessary in this school?**

   The students said “yes” in unison to this question. One student said that the Knight Time was not really a program, it was more like a class. Some thought that a lot of improvements needed to be made to the programs; others were happy with the way things were. One student made a summary statement that prompted agreement from several others about how the programs are necessary but they’re not for everyone. Typical responses to this question included:

   “*Yes!*” *(whole group)*
"I think they're necessary; I guess just sometimes the Knight Time is not really needed, but we should keep it."

"I say keep it, but just make it longer. It should last until at least nine o’clock." (Knight Time).

"I think they're necessary, they just do different things for different people. They’re not for everyone."

This final comment was made by a girl in the group who seemed to be speaking for everyone.

The boys, who had been dominant in the discussion, did not disagree with her and no one else disputed her assessment of the programs at this school.

Table 4.12 provides a summary of the students’ perceptions of the group-oriented programs at Castle Rock.

Table 4.12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advisory</th>
<th>Peer Mediation</th>
<th>Group Counseling</th>
<th>Suggestions for Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive start to the day. Adjustment time, play of catch up on work, free time.</td>
<td>Helps with problems, solving conflicts, counselors help too much, should be a voluntary process, confidentiality is a concern.</td>
<td>Some support for groups in the school. Concerns about confidentiality.</td>
<td>Make Peer Mediation voluntary, counselors need to let the students do more on their own; have a study skills group.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perceptions of secondary reader

A counselor education student reviewed this report and responded by developing questions and comments for further analysis of the data. The following are his questions and comments:

1. This school is well-staffed, having four administrators, three counselors, and a mental health counselor.
2. Castle Rock is much more structured in its programs than some of the other schools are. The duties and roles seem to be more clearly defined.

3. The name of their advisory program seems to signify pride as their coat of arms does with the welcome sign.

4. The consistency of the principal’s announcements and the way she signs off is very appealing.

5. There seems to be good structure for the peer mediators with their responsibilities, including checking the box for referrals and planning for their assigned days.

6. There is good, honest communication between clinical social worker and teachers.

7. The students at this school had very positive comments about a variety of learning-centered activities that take place during their advisory periods.

School #5 - Westview Middle School

Westview Middle School is a school of 610 students, located in a small rural town in the Southeastern Appalachian area. The current principal worked at this school as the assistant principal for eight years before she became the principal at the end of last year. There are forty-five certified faculty members, thirty-three of whom have Advisory teams. The main building is old and surrounded by small trailers serving as classrooms. The school is undergoing some badly need renovations, but still manages to have some modern facilities for the students’ use, including a multi-media classroom for desk-top publishing and a computer lab.

Westview Middle School has one counselor, a female with about fifteen years of school counseling experience. She was the counselor at this school for eight years before she left to work at the nearby elementary school. Five years later she returned to the middle school and has been at Westview for the past two years. There is also a part-time guidance secretary who works one day per week to do all the filing and assist with the record-keeping.
The Advisory program is called simply “Advisory” and consists of teachers meeting with fifteen to twenty students two mornings per week for thirty minutes. The advisory period begins at 10:20 a.m. after the core classes, and runs until 10:50 a.m. The teachers are provided with advisory materials from the county office, with grade-level appropriate activities. There is a strong emphasis on school-to-work advisory activities at the eighth grade level. Each eighth grade student is given a career portfolio, in which information on career interests, work and community service, talents and hobbies, and academic accomplishments are compiled. The advisory curriculum was undergoing some changes at the time of the interviews; however, the curriculum was described as focusing on “a lot of peer group things, school to work, and self-esteem” (Teacher 2). The other three mornings each week are consumed by “Exploratory” classes in which students pursue special interests such as chess, juggling, or musical instruments. These classes rotate every nine weeks, to allow for a wide variety of student interests. This was the first year the school had held its advisory meetings in the mid-morning and the general consensus of the teachers and the students was that the afternoon advisory periods worked better.

The advisory period is treated just like a regular class, with an A through F grading scale. The principal said that they had tried it as a graded activity and as a non-graded activity, and each time there were both positives and negatives. The graded advisories were to help the students feel more of an investment in the time they were spending, and the non-graded advisories were to help the students feel less pressure during their activities.

Peer Mediation is now mandated by the state in which Westview Middle School is located. The Peer Mediation program is coordinated by the Student Assistance Program (SAP) Coordinator. This is a classroom teacher who receives a small stipend for the coordination all of
the drug and alcohol education activities and referrals. She also conducts classroom guidance sessions on other psycho-educational areas such as anger management, in addition to her Peer Mediation duties. The Peer Mediators are chosen entirely through student nominations. Each student nominates three students and then the results are tallied. Teachers are not involved in the selection process unless there is a serious problem with a nominee’s grades or behavior. During the first nine weeks of the fall semester, the SAP coordinator holds training for the Peer Mediators in their advisory periods. After the initial training is complete, mediations are held on a regular basis. The mediations are held during the SAP coordinator’s planning time so she can supervise the mediations.

Interview data

The counselor arranged all of the interviews, by sending notes to each teacher on the day of the interview. When I expressed concern about the lack of advanced notice for the teachers, she told me all the teachers were very agreeable and would be happy to help. She was right. No one appeared to be the least bit ruffled by the unexpected intrusion on his or her planning time.

Table 4.13 shows a description of each respondent’s answers and perceptions of the three programs in question. The columns are labeled as follows: “Teacher #,” for each teacher interviewed; “Advisory,” for perceptions of the teacher advisory program; “Peer Mediation”, for perceptions of the peer mediation program, “Group Counseling”, for perceptions of the group counseling program, “Necessary/Role”, for whether or not the respondents thought the programs were necessary, and their respective roles in the implementation of the programs; and “Key Factors” for the key factors for successful implementation of each program. The respective roles in the implementation of each program refer either to specific roles, such as “T. A. teacher”, or to overall roles like “supporter” or “to be flexible”.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher #</th>
<th>Advisory</th>
<th>Peer Mediation</th>
<th>Group Counseling</th>
<th>Necessary /Role</th>
<th>Key Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>-It’s changed so much. We used to have the same students for 3 years, and I liked that better than different ones each year.</td>
<td>Don’t know enough about it. More talk in the past about it than now. +The P. M.’s are enjoying what they are doing and feel they’re providing a good service.</td>
<td>I don’t know enough about it. I do know the counselor is available at any time the students want to see her as much as is humanly possible.</td>
<td>All 3 programs are necessary. We just need more training and more time. Role: T. A. teacher</td>
<td>A very caring faculty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>+We’re re-doing the program—A lot of peer group things, school to work, and self-esteem. Small number of students works better.</td>
<td>+It’s really good. Kids listen to their peers now more than ever. It’s something you have to have.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers all like each other. The principal listens. Everyone works together for success. It’s a team effort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I don’t have an advisory class right now. +I prefer having the same kids for 3 years. You get to know the students really well and create a bond with them.</td>
<td>A lot of people think the counselor should handle the Peer Mediation program instead of me. I’m supposed to be lessening the counselor’s load.</td>
<td>I’m not aware of any groups here. We were going to have some anger mgmt groups but I’m not sure they ever came about.</td>
<td>Very necessary because kids are so up and down. Role: Trains Peer Mediators</td>
<td>We work to improve them all the time. The administration insists on them being done and teachers are willing to do extra things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>+It’s been in place since the school began in 1979. The program is necessary but needs some strength and updating. I prefer grade-level T. A.’s because you know all the relevant grade information instead of re-learning each year. We need more training.</td>
<td>I don’t know a whole lot about it. I know it takes a special kind of student with a special maturity.</td>
<td>It’s very confidential so I don’t know much at all. I have referred students for it.</td>
<td>All 3 have their place, yes. But not needed daily. You can overdo.</td>
<td>A very influential faculty that is willing to go above what’s required. Very student-oriented. Not afraid to try something new. Flexible and Adaptive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>+I don’t have an advisory group right now. I miss it. I like the closeness that it develops—the relationship with the kids.</td>
<td>I didn’t realize there was much of an active Peer Mediation program at this level. +I think with training it is appropriate for this age group.</td>
<td>+I like it. It seems it helps kids to become a part of the school. When you become a part of a small group it helps you become part of a larger group.</td>
<td>Necessary: Yes! Groups are for serious problems; Peer Mediation handles minor crises; and T. A. fills the gap so teachers are not left out.</td>
<td>A counselor with that kind of vision and not consumed with paperwork. Full support of the administration.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The “Advisory” column of Table 4.13 shows a majority of positive perceptions of the teacher advisory program. The only negative perception refers to how the program has changed over the years: “We used to have the same students for three years and I liked that better than different ones each year,” (Teacher #1). This particular teacher liked the way having the same students for three years facilitated a close bond between the teacher and his or her students. She also spoke of the shift in the advisory curriculum from a peer relationship/self-esteem focus to a career-oriented school-to-work focus. “We also used to do study skills and I really liked that.” This teacher believed that the teachers were “not using the time wisely” during the advisory period and described the curriculum as “hit and miss.” She preferred to have the advisory period at the end of the day instead of its present time in the morning. “It lets them leave school with a good feeling, no matter what kind of day they’ve had.” She also talked about how the program “needs constant updating and the teachers need more training.”

The positive perceptions referred to aspects of the program such as having a small number of students, developing close relationships with the children, and believing the program is a good one. The majority of the positive responses also referred to a large need for the program to be updated, however. Teacher #4 stressed the need for more training because “teachers are not counselors. We’re asked to do things we’re not trained for.” In reference to the aftermath of the Columbine shootings, she said, “We need more than just being told to discuss these difficult issues.” She also debated the usefulness of having the same students in an advisory group for all three years or having new students in the same grade level each year. After talking a while about it, she decided that she preferred having new students each year because then the teachers only needed to be trained for one grade level, instead of new training each year. She went on to describe how difficult it had been to try to help seventh grade students with seventh
grade business when she was used to teaching sixth graders. “We couldn’t help them like they needed because we were always having to ask someone else what was going on the seventh grade. I like having the same grade each year better, because then you only have to be trained once instead of every year.” This was an interesting response in comparison to Teachers #1 and #3, who both preferred following the same students for three years because: “You get to know the students really well and create a bond with them” (Teacher #3).

Three of the teachers in the “Peer Mediation” column expressed their lack of knowledge about this particular program. It was unclear if this was due to their lack of involvement with the program, or if the program was just not very highly publicized. Teacher #1 did say that the Peer Mediators she knows seem to be “…enjoying what they are doing and feel they’re providing a good service.” She also said there was “…more talk in the past about it than now,” referring to the program as a whole. Both teachers #4 and #5 thought the program would be very appropriate for this age group, even though they were fairly unaware of the specific program characteristics at this school. Teacher #2 described the program as “very good,” and thought the program was necessary for middle school students due to their strong peer orientation.

Teacher #3, the Student Assistance Program coordinator and coordinator of the Peer Mediation program, provided some insight into the logistics of the program. She has the sole responsibility for the Peer Mediation program training and supervision of the Peer Mediators. She talked about how many of the teachers thought the mediations should be handled by the counselor instead of by her. Since she is the coordinator as well as a classroom teacher, she has to arrange all of the mediations during her planning time, and that makes it difficult and inconvenient for other teachers and students. She described her role as “…supposed to be lessening the counselor’s load,” but also expressed doubts about whether or not her role was best
serving the school’s needs. She described that the counselor tended to be “territorial” and how that made things less than efficient.

The “Group Counseling” column showed a majority of the respondents being “…unaware of any groups here,” or not knowing “enough about it.” Teacher #1 immediately said, however, that they knew the counselor was “…available at any time the students want to see her as much as is humanly possible.” Teacher #2 also supported the counselor’s work in her statements about how the students “feel comfortable talking to her,” and “have to have it in order to function in our classes.” Teacher #4 cited confidentiality as her reason for not knowing much about the groups that go on at this school. Teacher #3, however, talked of groups that were to have taken place this school year, but was “not sure they ever came about.” Both Teacher #5 and the principal supported the group counseling program and the counselor’s coordination of it. Teacher #5 noted: “When you become part of a small group, it helps you become part of a larger group.”

For the Necessary/Role column the responses unanimously supported necessity of all three programs. Some of the responses were more emphatic than others were, however. Teacher #4 noted that the programs were necessary but not a daily necessity. “You can overdo.” Teacher #1 pointed out that more training is necessary for the programs. Teacher #5 gave specific reasons why the three programs are necessary: “Groups are for serious problems; peer mediation handles minor crises; and T. A. fills the gap so teachers are not left out.” This was the first time anyone had described advisory programs in terms of helping teachers stay involved in the school happenings. Usually the advisory programs are described from the perspective of helping the child stay involved. This teacher saw advisory as an effective way to keep the teachers informed about what is happening school-wide, as well as with their own students.
Several of the respondents did not describe specific roles for themselves in the implementation of the three programs. In many of the interviews this question was not asked due to repetition of previous answers. Therefore, unless it seemed that a particular respondent’s role was unique, this question was often omitted. Teachers #1, #2, and #3 described their roles specifically referring to a particular program. For example, Teacher #1 described her role in the T. A. program as a “teacher.” Teacher #2 considered herself a “second mom” in the T. A. program. Teacher #3 described her role in the Peer Mediation program as the one who “trains the Peer Mediators.” The remaining two teachers did not describe their roles in these programs.

The “Key Factors” for successful implementation of the three programs were characteristics of the staff, such as the following: “a very caring faculty;” “Teachers all like each other...Everyone works together for success;” “The administration insists on them being done and teachers are willing to do extra things;” “Very student-oriented. Not afraid to try something new;” and “…staff who are willing to do more than just the basic classroom requirements.” The other comments described the principal as being “supportive,” one who “listens,” and the counselor as having “vision and not consumed with paperwork.” The staff members here seemed to believe in the team concept and many of them described specific occasions when a staff member willingly took on extra responsibility to help another staff member.

Counselor and Principal Interviews

The school counselor appeared to be constantly pulled in different directions. During my visit, she was involved with the elementary school students’ tour of the middle school, dealing with a discipline issue, and conducting testing, so she was difficult to find. She said that paperwork was not her strong point, and the piles on her desk supported that statement. Nevertheless, her office was constantly filled with students needing to talk to her. One student,
the same girl who gave me a guided tour of the school, was sitting outside the counselor’s office, crying. I asked her if I could help her and she told me she was in trouble because a male friend gave her a “sympathy hug.” I wondered if the counselor had a disciplinarian’s role in speaking to this girl or if her purpose was something else. I did not get the chance to talk to the counselor about this again.

Our interview began with the counselor talking about each of the three group-oriented programs in question and her involvement in each of them. Table 4.14 provides an overview of her responses, with the same headings as those of Table 4.13.
Table 4.14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal’s and Counselor’s Perceptions of Programs at Westview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advisory</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The counselor talked about how the advisory program is currently undergoing badly needed revisions. She described how the advisory classes meet everyday for the first nine weeks of the school year, and then only two days per week after that. She talked about the school having tried scheduling advisory at several different times of the day, and the majority of the staff members seemed to prefer the end of the day. Currently, the advisory classes are being held in the middle of the day, just before lunch. The counselor discussed the new advisory curriculum, which she is helping to design, that will contain a community service project component. Her main role in the advisory program is to assign the students to their advisory teams and to serve as an advisory person for the teachers if they need help with an activity or a lesson for a particular topic. The advisory materials are chosen by the grade level teams, so she just helps them when they request it. She seemed to be very supportive of the advisory program and invested in the plans for future advisory activities.

The principal agreed that the advisory program is a “good” one, and also that it “…needs updating but that takes time.” She added, “The program should always be changing,” rather than staying with a prescribed design. She elaborated that the programs designed to meet the changing developmental needs of adolescents reflect these changes by being adaptable in its design.

The counselor’s comments about the Peer Mediation program were brief, but she did say that the program had “slacked off” somewhat this year. When I pressed on about the Peer Mediation program, she told me that the Student Assistance Program Coordinator handled that program. The only other information she shared about the Peer Mediation program was that more mediations should be done, but it was hard to schedule them when they were needed. The
principal’s response seemed to support the Peer Mediation Coordinator’s statements: “I don’t think we’ve gotten as much done as [the Peer Mediation Coordinator] had hoped.”

The counselor talked a lot about groups that she had held. Her job description for the next school year will require her to do a certain number of groups per year. This year she and the rest of the school counselors and school psychologists in the district are scheduled for training for conducting groups in the schools. This counselor, however, has been conducting groups for quite some time. She listed the types groups she had had this year: ADHD/ADD, study skills, divorce, and sibling rivalry. The group members are based on teacher referral and the types of groups are chosen from the primary concerns she has in her individual counseling sessions, along with suggestions from the students. Her groups generally meet during the Advisory/Exploratory time so scheduling is not a problem for her. “The problem is that I never know when I [will] have to cancel a group or not,” she said, referring to the unpredictability of her day. The principal praised the counselor in her efforts to “work with the teachers” in scheduling the groups.

The “Key Factors” for successful implementation column generated some interesting responses from the Westview counselor. Using the analogy of three balls being juggled in the air, she replied that she thought “the balls bounced a few times.” However, she did describe the staff at her school as being “really involved” and the principal as one who deals with those staff members who do not buy into the programs. She recommended the Peer Mediation Program receive more commitment from the school, including the assistant principal who needs to make referrals for mediation as a part of the discipline procedures. She also said it needed to be scheduled daily in order to work.

The principal described an overall role in the implementation of all three programs in the school. Her role was that of “facilitator, being flexible with new ideas, a cheerleader.”
In addition to the questions listed in Table 4.14, the counselor was asked to discuss the typical duties she is expected to perform, other than those related to the three programs in question. Westview’s counselor said that she is responsible for keeping all of the records, registering new students, handling academic awards, and scheduling for all of the new students. When I asked if she had any help with the scheduling, she said there was no registrar or any other clerical person to help with this. “Most of the scheduling is done after hours; I can’t do it during the school day,” she said. She also assigns the students to their advisory teams. This is done randomly, and there are two teams per grade. I asked her about statewide testing and she said that the principal helps a lot with that, but she is expected to coordinate it. The part-time guidance secretary helps with all of the filing and the students’ awards. “I also meet with a lot of parents.” When she talked about individual counseling, she said, “I do very little planned, but a lot of unplanned, individual counseling. I would estimate that I spend about fifty percent of my time with students.” She said that she is required by the county to see every student in her school for ten minutes twice a year. “That’s just not possible,” she said, and explained how many hours she would have to work to get that accomplished. “I have seen every student either through classroom guidance or in groups.”

Her priorities seemed easy for the Westview counselor to pinpoint. Her first priority was “just being here for the students,” and her second priority was “groups”. When asked about the least important duty, she laughed and said, “The paperwork! Can’t you tell from what’s piled on my desk?!” Indeed, her desk was covered with stacks of papers. She went on to explain that the reason she left this school before was due to the enormous amount of paperwork she was expected to do.
Overall, the Westview counselor seemed to enjoy her job and, with the exception of the paperwork piled on her desk, and appeared unruffled by all of the duties she was expected to perform. She seemed truly committed to the students and spoke of her fellow staff members having the same commitment.

Focus Group Data

On my first day there, I gave the school counselor the consent forms for the students in the focus group to take home and get signed. She was to give them to the students at the end of the day to take home with them and return the following morning. When I spoke to her at the end of the day, she suddenly realized that she had forgotten to give the forms to the students and they were already gone. She immediately got on the phone and started calling parents asking for their verbal permission and if they would sign the forms the next morning. Despite the frantic nature with which she gathered students and their parents’ permission, I had the number of students I needed for the focus group on the next day. When I asked her how she accomplished that feat, she said she knew most of the students’ parents personally and knew they would not object to their children’s participation. I wondered what kind of group I would end up with, and my suspicions were largely justified, as this was the least interactive and least productive of all the focus groups I facilitated.

The focus group was held in a large classroom undergoing renovations. The lack of decorations on the wall caused some cavernous echoes and made it very difficult to understand some of the comments the students made. Not surprisingly, the video- and audio-tapes of the focus group discussions were very difficult to understand. Most of the information from the focus group discussion was retrieved from notes taken during the focus group and a de-briefing session with the assistant moderator.
This group was the least interactive of all the schools I visited. One female student remained silent throughout the entire discussion and only shrugged her shoulders when I asked her questions directly. A male student appeared completely alienated from the other students and even became hostile as the group discussion continued. He rudely interrupted others’ comments, including mine, and stood up and started to walk out of the room before the discussion was over. He also shared inappropriate personal information in the group, which I have chosen to omit from this report in order to protect his confidentiality. This student was apparently the only student in the group who had been involved in a counseling group. He talked about specific issues with which he had dealt in group counseling, and when I interrupted, he persisted, looking around the room at the other students. None of the other students volunteered any information about group counseling. Therefore, this part of the discussion was not a productive one. Four out of the ten students did most of the talking about the other programs.

The focus group discussion questions and responses were as follows:

1. **What does a counselor do?**

   A few of the students responded with help-oriented activities such as problem-solving and helping with decision-making. One student referred to a time the counselor “got me into trouble,” and appeared to have little regard for the Westview counselor. The other students appeared to ignore him and went on to describe other ways a counselor helps them. Typical responses to this question included:

   - *Helps you through problems.*
   - *Helps the principal decide what to do with students in trouble.*
   - *Gets you into trouble. At least this counselor does. (Went on to tell about the counselor telling his parents about his behavior in school).*
   - *Talks to you.*
Brings in other kids to talk about a problem (medication).

The students, with the exception of the one who got into trouble, seemed to understand the counselor’s purpose and function in the school. No one else appeared to agree with the student who clearly disliked the school counselor. This seemed to set the tone for future discussions in which the male student stood alone in his opinions.

2. Do your teachers ever act like a counselor with you? If so, when and how?

The students immediately responded “No” to this question, except for one male student who mentioned the Student Assistance Program coordinator as an example of one who acted like a counselor. He talked about how she had helped him and another student said that she talked to his class about the dangers of using tobacco. No one else mentioned their teachers or advisory activities resembling counseling qualities. Typical responses to this question included:

“No.”

“Mrs. ______. She helps me all the time.”

“She talked to us about tobacco and how it’s bad for you.”

No one mentioned their advisory time as a time for teachers to act like counselors. A couple of the students did seem to agree that the Student Assistance Program Coordinator acted like a counselor, however.

3. Tell me about the advisory program and what it does for students.

Students gave a variety of responses about this program, such as the fact that it gives them time to do their homework or catch up on sleep, or to participate in activities for fostering self-esteem and team-building. The eighth grade students talked about how they focused on career exploration and worked on their school-to-work portfolios. Others described it as a time just to relax and enjoy one’s friends. Typical responses to this question included:
“Do your homework.”

“Sleep”

“We play basketball.”

“Sometimes we do worksheets.”

“The eighth grade has these portfolios and we do have to do a lot of career stuff.”

“It’s like a class really, except we do stuff for self-esteem.”

“Sometimes, we color.”

Overall, the students seemed to have positive perceptions of the advisory program. No one said anything negative about it and most seemed to value the time for one reason or another. Although a couple of the students realized that they were working on self-esteem activities during their advisory periods, no one seemed to recognize the teacher as having an important role in fostering that self-esteem. Furthermore, no one said anything about strengthening the relationship between teacher and student during the advisory time.

4. **What do you like the most about advisory?**

The most popular responses regarded sitting with one’s friends and having social time, and relaxing or sleeping. The students really seemed to appreciate the opportunity to sit with their friends and not be penalized for enjoying a conversation with them. Typical responses to this question included:

“Talk time.”

“Sitting by my friends.”

“Time to sleep.”

“Time to relax.”
The students here seemed to value the advisory time, not for the advisory activities provided, but for the freedom to either sleep, talk to their friends, or just to relax.

5. **What do you like the least about it?**

The students talked about the things the teachers required them to do during these times, such as checking their planners, checking their lockers, or doing worksheets that seemed like “busy work” to them. Other comments had to do with specific teachers and videos they were required to watch during advisory time. One student said he found the advisory time to be boring in general. Typical responses to this question included:

“I hate the worksheets we have to do. It’s just busy work.”

“They check our planners and check our lockers to see if they’re neat.”

“My teacher.”

“It’s just boring.”

“The videos are stupid.”

The responses seemed to revolve around a common theme of lack of freedom. The students objected to being required to show their planners, their lockers, and complete worksheets during a time when they could be socializing with their friends or just relaxing. It appeared that they did not object to the advisory time itself, but to the activities in which the teachers required them to participate.

6. **What is your counselor’s role in the Advisory Program? In working with the students? In working with the teachers?**

There was some hesitation and the boy who had made it clear that he did not care for the counselor said she did nothing during that time. A couple of other students joined in and talked about how the counselor schedules the Advisory time, works on testing procedures, and monitors the Advisory period. Typical responses to this question included:
“Nothing. She just sits there and does nothing.”

“I think she schedules the Advisories.”

“She does the testing stuff.”

“She just sort of monitors it.”

With the exception of the male student who disliked the counselor and continued to mutter comments under his breath, the students seemed to have a fairly clear understanding of the counselor’s duties related to the Advisory time. They knew that she did not just sit there, and they made the connection between her doing the majority of the scheduling, and how Advisory fits into their schedules. They also recognized that a lot of the testing takes place during Advisory time and saw the counselor as having a major role in that. They did not, however, mention any involvement between the counselor and the teachers regarding Advisory. This could be due to the collaboration between counselor and teachers being rare, or due to the collaboration being behind the scenes rather than something the students had witnessed.

7. **If you could change something about the Advisory program, what would it be?**

The majority responses were to have the period extended for social time and to move it back to the end of the day. One student wanted to have the period last all day, and the other kids laughed at this idea. Typical responses to this question included:

“Expand it to last longer for more time to talk.”

“Have it at the end of the day.”

“I think we should have it all day.”

Here again, the major theme was that the students want more time to relax and talk with their friends during the Advisory time. They also preferred having it at the end of the day instead of at
the middle or beginning. This was an interesting agreement with what the majority of the teachers preferred.

8. **What is the Peer Mediation program?**

   This topic of discussion was lead by a reluctant eighth grade student, after a few of the sixth graders announced that there was no Peer Mediation at the sixth grade level. The eighth grader went on to give a very limited description of the program. Typical responses to this question included:

   "*Sixth grade doesn’t have one.*"

   "*They teach us how to help solve problems and stuff with our peers. Mrs. _____ leads it and trains us.*"

   This was a very limited discussion. It seemed that the students really did not want to talk about this. It was unclear if it was because they were tired of the discussion in general or if it had something to do with this particular subject.

9. **What does the Peer Mediation Program do for students?**

   The students talked a little about how sometimes peers understand each other more than adults. They also noted that it was better to try to work things out in Peer Mediation than in the principal’s office. Typical responses to this question included:

   "*We understand them more sometimes than adults do.*"

   "*It’s better, like, if you work things out with us, than having to go to the principal’s office.*"

   The discussion continued to be very limited. The Peer Mediators in the group did not appear excited about what they were doing and seemed even a little uncomfortable talking about this. When I tried to get at what the problem was, the students offered nothing.
10. **What do you like the most about the Peer Mediation Program?**

   The students repeated some answers here such as the preference of working things out through Peer Mediation than in the principal’s office. They also talked about how it was just better to try to work things out than to let conflicts build up and go on. One Peer Mediator talked in general about the skills she had learned as a Peer Mediator. Typical responses to this question included:

   “It’s better to work it out than to get into trouble.”

   “It keeps things from getting out of hand.”

   “You learn skills that help you solve conflicts.”

The students seemed to become slightly more involved towards the end of this discussion than they were in the beginning. Perhaps the Peer Mediators were not sure how they would be perceived in the discussion. It was very difficult to tell why the students were being so reserved during this portion of the discussion.

11. **What do you like the least about the Peer Mediation Program?**

   Lack of confidentiality was the main objection to the program. Students talked about not being able to trust the Peer Mediators to keep secrets and the Peer Mediators remained quiet during this portion of the discussion. Typical responses to this question included:

   “I wouldn’t want to tell a Peer Mediator my problems. Some people can’t keep their mouths shut.”

   “I’d rather keep it to myself and things will work out.”

   “Yeah, you can’t really trust anybody.”

The Peer Mediators did not talk about the training they receive about confidentiality, or whether they do receive such training. It was interesting to note that no one came to the defense of the Peer Mediators. On the other hand, the people complaining about the lack of trust in the Peer
Mediators did not mention specific instances when a Peer Mediator had violated confidentiality. It is possible that no one really knew whether the Peer Mediators could be trusted or not, including the Peer Mediators themselves.

12. If you could change something about the Peer Mediation program, what would it be?

Only the Peer Mediators responded at this point, talking about how the program needs to be used more and publicized more. One student suggested that the Peer Mediators be enrolled in a class during Exploratory time, so they could learn new ways to mediate and help each other through difficult cases. Typical responses to this question included:

“We don’t use it enough.”

“People don’t know enough about it.”

“We need to have a class, so the Peer Mediators could talk about how to handle conflicts and stuff. Like during Exploratory.”

It was interesting to see that the discussion about confidentiality and lack of trust in the Peer Mediators did not ruffle the Peer Mediators’ ability to talk about improving the program. Confidentiality was not addressed at this point. Instead, the focus was on finding ways to help people learn and understand more about the Peer Mediators and what they do, in addition to helping the Peer Mediators become better at their jobs.

13. What is your counselor’s role in the Peer Mediation Program?

The students did not seem to know of any role the counselor played in this program. No one offered any responses except to say that it was the Student Assistance Program Coordinator who headed the Peer Mediation Program. Typical responses to this question included:

“Nothing.”

“Mrs. _____ does all the Peer Mediation stuff.”
The students did not know where to go with this question, especially since the counselor appeared to have no functional involvement with the Peer Mediation program. I quickly abandoned this question and moved on to the next one.

14. **Do you have any opportunities to see the counselor in groups?**

    The students seemed to assume immediately that I was talking about conflicts with other peers, and responded that they had the option to see the counselor as a group if they chose. I clarified what I was asking about and the only one who knew anything about group counseling was the boy who had made unflattering remarks about the counselor earlier in the discussion. He talked a little about his own group experience and then started to share some very personal information about himself. At this point I interrupted and told him we needed to respect his confidentiality. No one else said anything after this, but the boy continued to utter comments under his breath. Typical responses to this question included:

    “*Yes, you can get your friends together and go see her if you have a problem you need to work out.*”

    “*Or sometimes she’ll call people in for you to talk to if you’re having a problem with someone else.*”

This discussion was cut short by the boy’s inappropriate personal comments. Because I had said something several times during our discussion about limiting one’s comments to general ones and not personal ones, I suspected his personal comments were purposeful and not accidental. He seemed to be waiting for everyone else’s reactions and the other students seemed to be irritated and shocked by his comments. At this point the discussion was not going very well at all.
15. **What does group counseling do for students?**

There were no responses to this question. The boy seemed to be waiting for everyone else to respond, and the other students seemed to be waiting for me to do something about the boy. Because of this I moved on quickly.

16. **What do you like best about counseling groups?**

I tried to focus this question on the boy for two reasons: I wanted him to feel less alienated and a valuable contributor to the discussion, and I also wanted the others to learn something from his experiences. He did not respond, so I asked the others to give possible reasons for why group counseling might be beneficial. They listed a couple of reasons like being around people you know, and knowing that you are not the only one with a given problem. Typical responses to this question included:

“You’re with people you know.”

“I guess it’s good to know that you’re not the only one with that kind of problem.”

My efforts to bring some solidarity into the group had clearly failed and I was not getting many answers to my questions in the process. I’m not sure how accurate the students’ answers were, either, because I suspect they were trying to defuse the potentially hostile situation with the boy as well.

17. **What do you like the least about counseling groups?**

The boy spoke up at this point, saying that he did not like to confide to anyone in the groups because they could not be trusted. The other students did not say anything. It was uncomfortable to continue the discussion after this because none of the other students knew much about the groups and the only boy who did, seemed to make the others uncomfortable with his comments.
18. **If you could change something about the counseling groups here, what would it be?**

   The only response to this question was from the boy, who suggested that the groups should be smaller than they currently are, such as with five people or less. This seemed to calm the atmosphere a little, as both I, and seemingly the other students, were expecting the boy to say something much more abrasive.

19. **What is your counselor’s role in the counseling groups?**

   There was no response to this question at all.

20. **Do you have any suggestions for other counseling group activities that might work at your school?**

   The bell rang at this point, and as I continued reading this question, the boy stood up and said “Okay, Bye!” and started to walk out. One of the other students told him to sit down, and he stuck his chest out, saying, “Make me!” I intervened and asked him to give me one more minute of his time. He sat down and after I read my question again, he responded that the Advisory period was way too long. The other students looked at each other, rolled their eyes, and started to shift in their seats. I took this as my cue to end the discussion, thanked them all for their time and dismissed them. As he was leaving, one boy who had sat next to me whispered an apology, saying, “Some people are so rude.” I smiled and told him it was all right.

   Table 4.15 provides a summary of the students’ perceptions of the group-oriented programs at Westview.
Table 4.15

Students’ Perceptions of Group-oriented Programs at Westview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advisory</th>
<th>Peer Mediation</th>
<th>Group Counseling</th>
<th>Suggestions for Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time to do homework, worksheets, or career stuff, relaxation time. Prefer to have it at the end of the day.</td>
<td>Peers understand each other better than adults. Concerns about confidentiality.</td>
<td>Some positive perceptions but also unaware of programs at their school.</td>
<td>Expand the advisory time. Use the Peer Mediators more. Have a Peer Mediation class.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perceptions of secondary reader

A counselor education student reviewed this report and responded by developing questions and comments for further analysis of the data. The following are his questions and comments:

1. Is there consistency between the students’ responses about the advisory program and what the program’s objectives are?

2. The advisory time seems to be largely supervision of free time and the only structured activities are viewed negatively.

3. It seems that the students in this group had little or no respect for the counselor at this school.

4. The students’ responses to the peer mediation program seemed to parallel the teachers’ perceptions of the program.

5. Were the peer mediators quiet because they knew the reputation they had developed, that they had been labeled?

6. Perhaps a helpful component to the peer mediation program would be something similar to consultations or group supervision, in which the peer mediators share concerns about specific mediations and share ideas about how to handle their concerns.

7. It was interesting that the boy who became hostile during the focus group wanted less advisory time and therefore less social time in school.
Chapter 5

**Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations for Future Study**

This final chapter summarizes the purposes and procedures of this study, as well as the findings about the five schools and their group-oriented programs. Conclusions based on the data are also included and discussed, along with recommendations for further research.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to provide examples of how three group-oriented programs can be implemented together in a middle school as a part of a comprehensive middle school counseling program. The perceptions of teachers, principals, counselors, and students were examined in order to assess the perceived effectiveness of each of the group-oriented programs. Special attention was given to the school counselor’s role in the implementation of the three programs, while maintaining and balancing the rest of the school counseling duties. The three group-oriented programs were chosen, based on the developmental need of middle school students to belong to a group. A review of literature in the areas of adolescent development, middle school counseling and guidance program models, the adolescent need to belong to a group, and the middle school programs supported as facilitating this need was conducted to provide background information for the choice of programs to study.

**Procedure**

For the data collection portion of the study, five schools were visited, during which interviews were conducted by the researcher with a minimum of five teachers per school, all of the school counselors, and the principals at each middle school. A focus group of seven to ten students was also held at each middle school, during which students were asked their perceptions of the three programs in question at their schools. Interviews and focus groups were recorded and
then coded by the researcher for positive and negative perceptions and elements of successfully implemented programs. A matrix display provided further analysis of the interviews at each school (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A cross-case analysis meta-matrix was then designed to allow for further analysis of all the schools and their respective programs (Miles & Huberman, 1994). An assistant moderator was present at the majority of the focus group discussions and for a debriefing session with the researcher after each focus group, to aid in identifying major themes within the discussions. Focus group discussions were then transcribed by the researcher and analyzed according to practices described by Krueger (1988). The methods were used to answer the following research questions:

5. Are the five middle schools in this study benefited by having all three group-oriented programs (teacher-advisory, peer-led counseling adjunct, and group counseling) operating together on a regular basis?

6. Based on the data from the five schools studied, how can the three group-oriented programs be implemented together in a middle school?

7. What are the key factors necessary for the implementation of the three group-oriented programs together in the five middle schools?

8. What is the counselor’s role in the implementation of each program at the five middle schools?

Results

Table 5.1 illustrates a summary of the program perceptions and the counselors’ level of involvement in each of the programs. The majority of the perceptions at each school was positive and therefore supported the implementation of each of the group-oriented programs. Some respondents thought the programs needed updating, and others were unfamiliar with some of the
programs in their schools. The overall perceptions, however, seemed to support the programs remaining at the middle schools.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Advisory</th>
<th>Peer Med.</th>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Counselor (s)</th>
<th>Program Leader</th>
<th>Major Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mtn. Valley</td>
<td>Totally Positive-“Backbone” and “Heart” of the Middle School. Every day.</td>
<td>+/- Good program, but not as strong as it used to be. Students want it to be used more for other purposes than mediation.</td>
<td>No formal group counseling but great at-risk group interaction.</td>
<td>(1 Counselor) Advisory: group teacher P.M.: Coordinator Groups: none at the moment except for leading girls at-risk group.</td>
<td>Advisory: Teacher Teams P.M.: Counselor Groups: Counselor and Principal</td>
<td>Team Focus, Teacher investment, dedication to the kids.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murray</td>
<td>Mostly Positive but program needs to be updated. 1 day per week. One negative perception—not sure if it’s effective.</td>
<td>Still very unfamiliar with program. Some think it might be a good program but don’t know how it works yet. Students are concerned about confidentiality.</td>
<td>+Largely positive. Only two teachers did not know much about it. Most saw benefits from it and see the need for it. Students question confidentiality.</td>
<td>(2 Counselors) Advisory: Coordinate curriculum P.M.: Coordinate Groups: Coordinate and Facilitate</td>
<td>Advisory: Guidance Director P.M.: Counselors Groups: Counselors</td>
<td>Strong Counselor and Administrative support of the programs. Dedicated staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hts.</td>
<td>+/- Changed to more of a homeroom time with some social interaction, but some like the structure it brings to each day.</td>
<td>Some don’t know about it; others think it’s a great idea, one said it only benefits the P.M.’s themselves. Students are concerned about confidentiality.</td>
<td>Positive overall. One teacher was unaware and one teacher wanted to know more about the groups’ work. Students question confidentiality.</td>
<td>(2 Counselors) Advisory: None P.M.: Coordinate Groups: Coordinate, Facilitate</td>
<td>Advisory: None P.M.: Counselors Groups: Counselors</td>
<td>Leadership. Commitment. Strong Guidance department. The needs are there and each year we get better. Being a new school helps.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castle Rock</td>
<td>Mostly positive. Every morning. Some want to add more activities. Thought for the day sets it up. One teacher thought it was not as effective with 8th graders.</td>
<td>Very positive except for one comment about some kids not taking it seriously. Students are concerned about confidentiality and don’t always take it seriously as an option.</td>
<td>Positive overall. Teachers found it to be necessary. One counselor seems to do more than the others. Students question confidentiality.</td>
<td>(3 Counselors) Advisory: 1 counselor coordinates; other 2 have none except occasional consulting with classes. P.M.: each coordinates 1 grade Groups: each coordinates and facilitates 2 groups per year.</td>
<td>Advisory: Counselor #1 P.M.: Counselors Groups: Counselors</td>
<td>Dedicated staff, easy to follow manuals, sharing of ideas, Teacher input, interest in the kids. Family atmosphere. Principal insists it gets done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westview</td>
<td>Largely positive. Graded class 2 days a week. Needs updating. Prefer last period.</td>
<td>Little knowledge of it. SAP teacher coordinates it. Staff support it. Students question confidentiality.</td>
<td>Majority did not know they existed. Principal supports them. Counselor’s priority.</td>
<td>(1 Counselor) Advisory: revising curriculum with committee. P.M.: none Groups: coordinate and facilitate</td>
<td>Advisory: None P.M.: SAP teacher Groups: counselor</td>
<td>Faculty like each other, principal insistent on things getting done. Team effort. Most people think the programs are important.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Varying definitions of teacher advisory programs were found among the schools studied. Many of the schools had begun advisory programs based on the Alexander & George (1981) definition. However, they had changed their programs over the years to fit their schools’ unique demands in an effort to compromise between time constraints and students’ needs. All but one of the schools had permitted their advisory groups to exceed the recommended number of fifteen students per teacher. Although many respondents objected to the large number of students in their advisory groups, no one offered a logistical alternative to this arrangement during the interviews. This large number of students was cited as having a direct relationship with the lack of guidance-based advisory activities during advisory time and the change from daily advisory time to fewer advisory classes per week or just homeroom time. In other words, many staff members said it was too difficult to plan guidance activities for and interact with twenty or more students each day. Therefore, New Heights, Murray, and Westview Middle Schools had changed their advisory periods from daily to one to three days per week, and from a daily guidance focus to other activities such as homeroom business, recess, or Channel One each day.

The schools in this study reported regular advisory meetings, but the meetings were not always daily. Often the schools had scheduled advisory time slots, but then used the time for other purposes. Three of the schools had scheduled daily advisory meetings; however, the advisory periods often included watching Channel One and homeroom business such as attendance and announcements. In addition to these other activities taking up advisory time, the schools with daily meetings often had no formal guidance agenda for their advisory periods. In fact, one of the schools reported having advisory time for completing homework, having a study hall, or social free time for the students. This arrangement was appealing to the students, as long as they were not required to study or complete an assignment. The schools who had advisory
periods scheduled three times or less per week, had formal guidance agendas for each advisory meeting and had recess, exploratory classes, or study hall on the other days of the week.

In addition to the staff perceptions of the advisory programs, students expressed their feelings about the advisory programs in their schools. The major objection to the advisory periods was being required to participate in structured work activities, which the students considered to be "busy work". The students wanted more time to interact with their peers and have the freedom to choose to do work, participate in an activity, or just relax.

Another major student objection was to the requirement of watching Channel One. Students at two of the five schools reported having to watch the Channel One broadcast and then sometimes being tested on the information they had seen. They said they thought this was unfair, especially if the advisory time was intended to be for their social interaction and growth.

Three of the schools were either mandated to have a peer mediation program or had such a program written and required as a part of the school’s strategic plan for improvement. Therefore, peer mediation was often required at some level for those middle schools to implement. Two of the schools reported having strong peer mediation programs in the past, while the present state of the programs was rather weak. One school had just begun its peer mediation program this year, a fact not reported until the interviews began. Many of the respondents were not familiar with the peer mediation programs at their schools. The perceptions of peer mediation programs were generally positive; however, there was some doubt expressed, by both teachers and students, at the ability of middle school students to handle confidentiality and take the mediations seriously. The peer mediators at each school expressed an interest in doing more as a part of their organization. New Heights Middle School uses its peer mediators as “ambassadors” for the school, giving them duties such as giving campus tours, handing out
information at Parents’ Night, and welcoming new students. The peer mediators at the other schools seemed to want this kind of involvement and recognition at their own schools.

The counselors at each school provided very little specific information about how they coordinate their groups each year. Instead, they spoke in general terms of scheduling to protect instructional time and to promote positive teacher rapport. All of the counselors tried to schedule their groups so that the students would miss a different class each time the group met, to make sure the students were not missing each class more than once. Most of the counselors based the types of groups they held on teacher referrals and recurrent concerns of adolescents in the counseling office. Some of the counselors had a few groups going on all year, and some had several groups that lasted for only three or four sessions. Two of the schools required the counselors to conduct counseling groups each year and one school had no counseling groups going on at the time of this study.

One of the schools (Mountain Valley) had a vague definition of what constitutes group counseling. A program for at-risk students doing community service was listed as the school counselor’s on-going counseling group at the identification stage of this study. However, when the interviews began, it became clear that group counseling, according to the definition in this study, was not currently present in this school. Instead, the counselor spoke of the valuable group interaction that often took place while the at-risk students worked on community service projects and took trips together. The only time she counseled the students as a group was when a conflict arose between two or more students. Support groups, described by the school personnel as similar to the definition of counseling groups in this study, had been conducted in past years by the counselor as well as by teachers who had received group training. They were not, however,
going on at the time of this study, although they had been positively viewed by many of the teachers.

The other four schools also had varying definitions of group counseling. One school reported doing “more group guidance than group counseling”. The others held groups that focused on a particular activity, such as partnering boys with adult male mentors, rather than on group counseling. All of the schools in this study reported strong support among their staff for the use of counseling groups in the middle school. Many of the students were unaware that group counseling was an option in their schools. Students at four of the five schools expressed concerns about confidentiality related to group counseling. Many of them doubted fellow students’ ability to keep information shared in groups confidential. However, their lack of knowledge about groups as an alternative in their own schools seemed to speak well for the confidentiality of the groups that had taken place.

The Counselor Role and the Program Leader columns of Table 5.1 (p. 189) provide some interesting information about the counselors’ level of involvement in the programs at each school. Often the counselors had almost no role in the implementation of the advisory program, except as a consultant or curriculum committee member. Mountain Valley is the only school that has the counselor assigned to lead an advisory group. Castle Rock is the only school in which the counselor was responsible for coordinating and distributing the advisory materials to the staff. Four of the five schools have the counselor(s) coordinating the peer mediation program, while Westview had the SAP coordinator serving as the peer mediation program coordinator.

At the two schools with only one counselor on staff, Mountain Valley and Westview, there was another staff member who served as program leader for one of the group-oriented programs. This arrangement allowed the counselors to have more time to devote to the other
programs and the other requirements of their jobs. The other three schools had counselors who either shared the coordination of the three group-oriented programs or had one counselor designated for leadership while the others helped in other areas. Castle Rock also had teachers trained to supervise the peer mediations, again leaving the counselors with more time to handle their other duties.

The Key Factors column of Table 5.1 lists (p. 189) the respondents’ comments about what makes their schools unique in their ability to implement the three group-oriented programs together. Based on the findings from each school, the following were key factors of group-oriented programs, perceived by the faculty and staff in at least one of the five schools, to be successfully implemented:

1. Strong administrative support of counselors.
2. Programs required by the principal, or school system, or state.
3. Strong team concept in which all personnel are involved and invested.
4. Yearly evaluations of each program.
5. A strong “student-oriented” staff.
6. More than one school counselor, or another person, other than the school counselor designated to lead one of the group-oriented programs. For example, the student assistance team coordinator leading the Peer Mediators, or a teacher trained to lead support groups.
7. Regularly scheduled times and curriculum activities for the advisory program.
8. Thorough training for teachers, counselors, and students in the programs on several levels and at several points during the year.
In addition to the key factors identified, the following observations were made:

1. Schools in this study with advisory programs perceived to be successful have a strong sense of the “team” concept and handle school business through a series of teams. Gibson, Mitchell and Higgins (1983) found in their study of advisory programs that schools with successful advisory programs viewed the advisory program as an important part of the team concept of the middle school. In the current study, the schools whose advisory programs were considered a team responsibility reported strong teacher and student investment in the programs. They planned their advisory activities in the teams and discussed any concerns about students in their teams. They also had clearly defined chains of referral set up within the different teams, which allowed for easy referral from team to team.

2. The counselors were not always directly involved with the advisory program. Two of the schools had the counselors coordinating the program; while two had the counselors either serving as an occasional consultant and resource person for advisory activities or having no involvement at all. One school had the counselor leading an advisory group. This is in contrast to the findings of Henderson and LaForge (1989); Gibson, Mitchell, and Higgins (1983); and Digby, Totten, and Snyder (1995) which describe the counselor as having an important role in the development, planning, and training aspects of an advisory program.

3. Schools in this study with advisory programs perceived to be successful have advisory meetings scheduled on a daily basis and planned guidance curriculum activities. This supports the literature on advisory programs. For example, Schockley, Shumacker, and Smith (1984) emphasized the importance of addressing middle school students’ developmental issues with a systematically planned curriculum.
4. The optimum time of day for the advisory meetings depends on each individual school and its population. The two schools with the perceived strongest advisory programs had their advisory meetings first thing in the morning. However, two other schools were holding their advisory periods in the middle of the day. One school, after having tried advisory in the middle of the day, clearly preferred the end of the school day for their advisory time. The schools that preferred the morning time wanted to give their students a positive start to their day and extinguish any possible conflicts before the students began their core classes. The schools that preferred the middle of the day recognized that their students had more behavioral and conflict problems as the school day wore on, rather than first thing in the morning. The one school whose staff and students preferred the end of the day was focused on “sending the kids home with a good feeling, no matter what kind of day they have had.” All of the schools had tried different times of day to find the best advisory time for their schools. The variation in advisory times supports the recommendations by Vars (1997), which discussed the scheduling difficulties educators face regardless of the time they to choose to schedule their advisory periods.

5. Students want more time to talk with their friends and have group interaction as a part of their advisory time. All five schools had student groups who voiced their desire for more social interaction during the advisory times. Many of them had specific plans in mind, such as an extra fifteen minutes at the end of the period after the other advisory or homeroom activities were concluded. This supports the literature that emphasizes positive peer group support as a major goal of teacher advisory programs (Ayers, 1994; Alexander & George, 1981; Digby, Totten, & Snyder, 1995). Many of the students objected to the “busy work” their teachers required them to do during the advisory periods. They recognized the purpose
of the advisory period as facilitating group interaction and viewed their teachers as unfair for denying them this interaction with their peers. Many of them saw the advisory time as just another class.

6. Schools in this study with active advisory programs have a common purpose and materials for teachers to use. The schools that had common materials, such as a manual, or regular meetings to plan common activities, showed more teacher investment in the advisory programs. However, the materials needed to be easy to use and require minimum preparation time. “The last thing teachers need is one more lesson plan,” one of the teachers explained. So having a book that the teachers can open and use with minimum preparation is ideal. One school began its advisory time with a character education announcement. The teachers were then ready to continue activities relevant to the announcement each day. The activities were provided for the teachers ahead of time, so the teachers knew exactly what to do with their classes once the announcements were over. This announcement served as a catalyst for teachers to start their group discussions and kept the teachers from having to do a lot of preparation for each lesson. Still, the announcement provided a common theme for the whole school to discuss and integrate into their activities for the remainder of the day.

7. It is yet to be determined whether advisory programs work better with teachers following the same students for three years, or having different students each year. The schools with active advisory programs vary in their preferences of having one advisor for students until graduation, or different advisors each year for the students. Teachers interviewed expressed varying opinions on this matter. They liked the relationships that resulted from having the same students as advisees for three years. They really knew these students well. The problems arose when they needed to know relevant grade level information for their advisees
and they were not well-informed because it was not the grade they were accustomed to
teaching. An example would be when a sixth grade teacher follows an advisory group for
three years and then needs to disseminate important information for them as they plan to go
from eighth grade to the high school. Since this is a sixth grade teacher, he or she is not well-
versed in the requirements for eighth grade students, and therefore must be trained all over
again for a different grade level. Having a different advisor each year allows for the students
and teachers to have the same access to grade level information and prevents the necessity
for yearly training of advisors in grade-level information. However, some teachers also said
the relationship between a student and an advisor that can evolve over the course of three
years is rarely formed when the students have different advisors each year. Two of the
schools had tried each arrangement and had settled with having new advisors each year,
although they had not decided which arrangement was the better of the two. Zeigler and
Mulhall (1994) recommended students having one advisor until they left the school. Other
studies did not list the preferred arrangement. At any rate, this emphasis on the importance of
strong teacher-student relationships certainly supports the goals of advisory programs cited

8. Schools in this study with active and perceived successful advisory programs have advisory
classes with twenty students or fewer. The most active and successful advisory program had
fifteen students or less in each advisory group, and made sure the advisory assignments were
spread out among the faculty to ensure smaller numbers for advisory groups. This supports
the literature (Ayers, 1994; Cole, 1992, 1994; Vars, 1994; Zeigler & Mulhall, 1994) that
emphasizes the importance of keeping student advisory groups small.
9. Schools with effective advisory programs had regular in-service training for the teachers and continued training for new teachers within the teacher teams. A major complaint among the teachers in the weaker programs was that there was not enough training provided. One teacher strongly objected to being asked to discuss difficult issues with her students while having no training about how to do so. This supports the research of Cole (1994) and Ayres (1994) that discussed teachers’ reluctance to take on the responsibilities of facilitating advisory groups without proper training.

10. Schools with regular counseling groups generally had students with concerns about the confidentiality limits in a group. There was a strong lack of trust among the students in a group’s ability to keep a secret. These same concerns were voiced about the peer mediation programs and the peer mediators’ ability to keep the proceedings private. The studies that supported group counseling as an effective approach with middle school students did not list lack of confidentiality as a concern for the students involved (Gumaer, 1986; Mauk, Mortensen, & Taylor, 1991; Myrick, 1987).

11. Peer mediation programs often benefit the peer mediators more than the rest of the school population. This benefit comes from the group interaction, self-confidence, and social status peer mediators gain through their involvement in the program. The conflict resolution benefits for the whole school appear to be secondary to the personal gain of each of the peer mediators. This supports research on the early adolescent need to belong to a group and the positive changes that can result from this peer involvement (Bowman, 1986; Glasser, 1986; Gumaer, 1986).

12. None of the schools had peer helping programs in place. Although their peer mediation programs often had the peer mediators involved with other responsibilities such as school
tours and special events, none of the schools had students involved in the therapeutic counseling of other students.

13. Most of the school counselors reported no formal guidance model from which programs were derived. However, several of them had specific job descriptions or plans that served as the basis for their programs. These are similar results to what Cole (1977) found in her development of a model for middle school counselors.

14. Schools with all three group-oriented programs had female principals and counselors, who were strong supporters of all three programs. This resulted in requiring the staff members to carry out such programs regardless of the amount of staff support. The fact that the principals and counselors were female may or may not have been significant.

15. Although there were varying opinions on the implementation of the three group-oriented programs, the majority of the staff interviewed at each school felt all three group-oriented programs should remain in their middle schools.

Conclusions

Based on the data from middle school students, counselors, and other middle school personnel, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. None of the schools in this study organized their services so that the teacher advisory, peer mediation, and group counseling programs were bound by commonality of material. It seems that the programs and the curriculum designed for each program would be more effective school-wide if they were bound by a common theme. For example, the teacher advisory programs could focus on conflict resolution in their advisory periods, while the peer mediators could serve as models for effective conflict resolution. Counseling groups could also be designed around this theme, encouraging students to discuss different types of
conflicts in their lives and how to best deal with them. The issue of trust could also be explored in a similar way, having trust-building activities in the advisory groups and ongoing training in confidentiality for the peer mediators. Trust could also be easily explored in the counseling groups. The schools in this study had no such connection between the three programs in their schools. Therefore, it seems that a potentially valuable component and unifying factor in their school programs was being neglected. This could be a factor in the failure of all five schools to have three equally strong group-oriented programs.

2. All three of the programs in the schools were more strongly endorsed by the students than by the staff. This supports what many of the students were saying about the staff members not listening to them and therefore not meeting their developmental needs.

3. There was no clear or common definition of group counseling among the five schools. All five of the schools professed to holding regular counseling groups, but none of them had the same definition of what group counseling is.

Recommendations for Future Study

Clearly, there is a lot of variation from school to school in how programs are implemented. The roles of the counselor vary as well from school to school as well. In light of the findings of this study, the following points represent potential issues of focus for future study:

Schools with all three group-oriented programs generally had one or two really strong and active programs and then one or two programs that received less attention. For example, Mountain Valley Middle School had a very strong advisory program, while its peer mediation and group counseling programs were operating at a minimum. Murray Middle School did an excellent job of having regular group counseling and had a moderately strong advisory program,
but its peer mediation program had not passed the training stage. Although the majority of respondents supported the three group-oriented programs remaining in their schools, the effectiveness of the programs was often questioned. Perhaps having a common theme among the three programs would allow for more effective implementation and commitment among the students and staff.

As stated earlier, some of the schools in this study had an extra staff member hired to coordinate one of the group-oriented programs. Although it was not overtly stated, it was implied in one of the schools that there were territorial issues and conflicts between the extra staff member and the counselor. This may lead one to wonder how having this extra staff member affects the counselor’s ability to compartmentalize his or her duties and manage his or her time in the most efficient manner possible. In other words, what are the advantages and disadvantages to having another staff member coordinate one or more of the programs typically thought of as a school counselor responsibility?

Westview’s principal talked about the abundance of parents signing their children out of school during the advisory time at the end of the day. In changing the time of day for the advisory period, they found that parents were signing their children out anyway. However, this does prompt some thinking about the parents’ perceptions of advisory time. Do parents think it is a worthwhile activity for their children? This also prompted thinking about how advisory affects the relationship between teachers and their students’ parents. Does having an advisory group with regular guidance-based activities result in better rapport with parents and more knowledge about the child’s home life? It may be worthwhile to look at advisory programs from the parents’ perspective to determine whether or not they have seen benefits of their child’s involvement in such a program.
As stated before, all of the counselors and principals in this study were female. This was not a pre-requisite of this study, but rather a surprise realization during the data collection. This led to considerations of how the gender of the principal and counselors might be related to having a group-oriented focus to meeting the needs of middle school students. It may be prudent to examine the possibility of such a relationship and how that relationship could affect the hiring practices and resulting school counseling programs in middle schools. The goal of such an examination would be to determine the whether the gender of the principals and counselors would affect the attitude toward and requirement of group-oriented programs in the middle school.

The schools in this study were largely rural or suburban. This brings to mind how the programs may be implemented in an urban setting, and whether or not such programs would even be appropriate or beneficial in such a setting. It may be interesting to look at the differences in group practices among urban and rural middle schools. The goal of such a study would be to determine the appropriateness of such programs for middle schools in a variety of cultural environments. In particular, are teacher-advisory programs, peer-led counseling adjuncts, and counseling groups just as beneficial for inner city middle schools as they are for rural and suburban middle schools?

The size of the schools in this study varied from as little as 300 students to well over 1,000. It may prove beneficial to look at the effect of school size on the implementation of the group-oriented programs.

Typically, counselor education programs and school counselor organizations have cautioned school counselors about the dangers of getting pulled into a disciplinary role in one’s school.
How can this issue be addressed as more and more teachers are asked to be “counselors” to their students?

Students at all of the schools expressed serious concerns about the ability of their peers to maintain confidentiality. Many adults in the study expressed similar concerns. Is it possible that confidentiality is a developmental issue, and therefore it is unrealistic to expect early adolescents to keep confidential information to themselves? A further understanding of early adolescents and confidentiality from a developmental perspective would prove helpful in the future development of middle school guidance and counseling services and programs.

There was a distinction between group counseling and group guidance at one of the schools. It seems possible that this varied definition of group counseling could have an effect on the quality of the services provided to the students. Perhaps a study on the perceptions and definitions of group counseling among school counselors and principals would prove helpful in examining this issue more closely.

This study revealed that the majority of the teachers, counselors, and principals of the five schools supported the retention of the three group-oriented programs in their schools. The students clearly want more opportunities for group interaction and are not always getting them. The schools had a variety of methods in implementing the three programs, as well as a variety of benefits and problems associated with their individual methods.
March 17, 1999

Dear Colleague:

I am interested in studying middle schools that are implementing and integrating all of the following guidance services into their school counseling programs: Teacher-advisory programs, group counseling, and peer helping programs. To do this, I need the help of experts in the field of middle school counseling and middle school education in identifying such schools. Please nominate two middle schools, with which you have had personal contact, that are implementing these programs successfully, and that you would recommend for study of successful practice. I will base the selection of the schools for study on your recommendations. Please respond with name and location of the middle school, and the name of the school counselor, by March 29, 1999.

Thank you for your help and expertise.

Sincerely,

Judy Esposito
Ph.D. Candidate
Virginia Tech
March 17, 1999

Dear Principal, Counselor, etc:

Your school was nominated by a recognized leader in the field of middle school education as doing an excellent job in meeting the needs of adolescents through the implementation of particular programs. I am interested in examining how the following programs are successfully implemented in your school: Teacher-advisory program, peer helper program, and group counseling programs. These programs have been supported in educational literature as helpful in assisting early adolescents’ developmental needs. However, many schools and school counselors are struggling with the implementation of such programs. Study of your school would help many middle school counselors and other personnel understand how to coordinate such programs that help facilitate the developmental needs of middle school students. To do this study, the following information and processes will be necessary: a roster of students from which to select random focus group participants, interviews counselors, teachers and administrators about the above-mentioned programs, and a focus group of seven to ten students. The interviews and focus groups will be limited to information pertaining to the implementation of the three programs. No personal or sensitive information will be solicited or encouraged in the process.

The results of this study should prove helpful to counselors, teachers, administrators, students, parents, and anyone else involved in middle school education. I have attached my vita and more information about the study. Please let me know if you need any additional information. I am excited about the opportunity to study a successful model of an innovative and developmentally responsive middle school.

Sincerely,

Judy Esposito
Ph.D. Candidate, Virginia Tech
Interview Guide-Administrators and Teachers

(1) What do you think about the Teacher Advisory program?

(2) What do you think about the Peer Mediation program?

(3) What do you think about the group counseling program?

(4) Your role in the implementation of each program.

(5) Factors associated with the successful implementation of the three group-oriented programs.
Interview Guide-Counselors

1. Typical daily duties performed as a middle school counselor.
2. Most important job components and amount of time spent in each.
3. Least important job components and amount of time spent in each.
4. Reactions to the three group-oriented guidance program components.
5. Counselor role in each program.
6. Key Factors for successful implementation of all three programs.
Focus Group Questions

(1) What does a counselor do?

(2) Does your teacher ever act like a counselor? If so, when and how?

(3) Tell me about the advisory program.

(4) What do you like best about the advisory program?

(5) What do you like least about the advisory program?

(6) If you could change something about the program, what would it be?

(7) Tell me about the peer mediation program.

(8) What do you like best about it?

(9) What do you like least about it?

(10) If you could change something about the program what would it be?

(11) Do you have any opportunities to see the counselor in groups? If so, when and how?

(12) What do you like most about group counseling?

(13) What do you like the least about group counseling?

(14) What suggestions do you have for counseling groups that may be helpful in your school?

(15) What kinds of peer group opportunities are available at your school?
References


ERIC Counseling and Personnel Services Clearinghouse. (1985). The role of the school counselor: Middle/junior high level. Information Digest. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan, School of Education.


EDUCATION


M.A., School Counseling, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC, 1997.

Additional graduate work in counseling and psychology, UNC-Pembroke, Pembroke, NC, 1993-1995.


PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

September 1999 – Present
Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Counseling, Rehabilitation Counseling, and Counseling Psychology, West Virginia University. Responsibilities include teaching courses in school counseling and general counseling, supervising practicum and internship students, and professional committee involvement.

August 1997- May 1999
Graduate Teaching Assistant, Counselor Education, Virginia Tech. Responsibilities included supervision of school counseling interns, designing program recruitment publications, participation in preparation for CACREP accreditation, administrative support, and teaching graduate courses.

Graduate courses taught or co-taught:

* Theories of counseling and consultation
* Doctoral seminar in clinical supervision
* Career and information services (taught via the Internet).

Summer 1998
Adjunct Instructor, Lees-McRae College, taught theories of personality undergraduate course.

Spring 1998
Practicum Student Counselor, University Counseling Center, Virginia Tech. Responsibilities included individual and group counseling, campus outreach programs,
participation in individual and group supervision, and referrals for medical or psychiatric screening.

1996-1997
Middle School Counselor, Hudson Middle School, Hudson, NC. Responsibilities included individual and group counseling, classroom guidance, providing counseling services and activities for Communities in Schools program, coordination of peer helpers and peer mediators programs, participation in student assistance team, Jr. Beta Club advisor, and coordination of educational testing.

1995-1996
Elementary School Counselor, Maiden Elementary School, Maiden, NC. Responsibilities included individual and group counseling, classroom guidance, coordination of school-based committee, participation in Department of Human Resources intervention team, participation in student assistance team, coordination of school volunteer program, planning and coordination of career planning events, and coordination of educational testing.

1994-1995
Admissions Counselor, UNC-Pembroke, Pembroke, NC. Responsibilities included review of undergraduate applications, recruitment travel, coordinating on-campus recruiting events, supervision of student ambassadors, and designing recruitment publications.

1992-1994
Assistant Director of Admissions, St. Andrews Presbyterian College, 1992-1994. Responsibilities included territory management, recruitment travel, coordination of on-campus recruitment events, supervision of telemarketing volunteers, and coordination of the alumni-admissions network.

INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

1991-1992
Literature Teacher, Notre Dame High School, Talofofo, Guam. Responsibilities included teaching American and English literature to eleventh and twelfth grade students, coordination of academic enrichment activities, Mock Trial advisor/coach, and writing for the accreditation handbook.

Spring 1988
Student, Semester in Beijing, China. Beijing Foreign Languages Normal College. Participation in study abroad program through St. Andrews College. Studied Chinese language (Mandarin), history and culture.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS


“On Being a Middle School Counselor” guest speaker, counseling techniques graduate class, Virginia Tech, October 1997.

TECHNOLOGICAL COMPETENCIES


Seminar in Clinical Supervision, course co-taught through distance education via V-TEL with R. Paritzky, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA. Fall 1998.

Research Participation


PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIALS, ACTIVITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

Licensure and Certification

National Certified Counselor
Licensed School Counselor, State of North Carolina
Memberships

American Counseling Association
Virginia Counselors Association
Virginia School Counselor Association
American School Counselor Association
Virginia Association for Counselor Educators and Supervisors
Chi Sigma Iota (secretary 1998-1999)

HONORS

Graduate Student of the Year Award, Human Development and Psychological Counseling, Appalachian State University, 1997

Chi Sigma Iota, member, Virginia Tech, 1998-present

PERSONAL

Spouse: Albert C. “Chad” Esposito, II, Head Women’s Volleyball Coach, Wheeling Jesuit University, Wheeling, WV.

Enthusiast of pedigreed cats, music, aerobics, jogging, hiking, and camping.

REFERENCES

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