

The Counseling Challenge: Balancing Student Interests with Societal Pressures

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Abstract

High school counselors, as determined by the literature and this study, are not successfully encouraging their students to follow their aspirations and take important post high school risks. Teachers and staff alike are responsible for educating students about all the possibilities for their varying futures. In discussing with students their opportunities after high school, counselors may focus on standard recommendations with the goal of having students qualify for a four-year university. Student interests may not be consistent with standard options that counselors may suggest.

Students who do not get proper guidance based on their interests and talents are left feeling stuck in someone else's educational or vocational path. The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of counselor objective guidance regarding students' post high school lives. The literature review reveals that high school counseling practices need to be upgraded to better fit the needs and interests of today's students.

A qualitative approach to gathering data was used in this research, using a case study of the counseling opportunities available in a local high school in a suburban Northern California community. Results indicated that students need more effective counseling that better meets their needs in regards to both their interests and talents in planning their post high school education and career options.

Chapter One Introduction

A Personal Story

When I was in high school, I had a counselor who I did not love, but I did not hate her either. I appreciated the minor amount of guidance that she gave to me, while still assuring that I completed the classes that I needed to finish in order to graduate and get a high school diploma.

When I started my senior year, after several injuries and a change of heart about going to college to play softball, I went to my counselor to discuss my future. I had always been interested in art and pursuing a career in it, but the softball injuries had led me to reconsider my options for college. I had decided, after much consideration and discussion with my mother and my advanced placement art teacher, that instead of going to a traditional four-year college, I wanted to go to an art school. When I told my counselor that I wanted to go to art school, she said, "I do not think that is such a good idea." I was shocked. I went into the meeting expecting her to be supportive by recommending art schools and then I would be on my way with decisions to make about where to apply. Instead I was left feeling deflated and upset, thinking that my dreams were unrealistic.

The fact that I did not have the support of my counselor was upsetting to me, but I moved on and completed applications without any help from her. I was accepted everywhere I applied and received scholarships at each of those schools.

After I graduated from high school, I went to art school near Los Angeles and found out that I was more interested in pursuing a relationship back home than I was in pursuing art school. I also missed sports; I was an athlete and had always been connected to sports, so I missed being exposed to athletics. A year after I began college, I transferred to the University of Oregon. I

had made it my goal prior to college to graduate in three years because I knew I wanted to save a year's worth of tuition and put it towards a master's degree.

One year had gone by since I had graduated from high school and I had completed courses at art school and the local community college. When I got to Oregon I wanted to make it clear to my advisors that I wanted to graduate in three years total, two more years at Oregon, and that I needed their help and guidance in order to do it successfully. I went through six advisors before I found someone who said, "Let's make it happen!" She helped me and with a workload of an average of 24 credits per quarter, I graduated with a bachelor's degree in a total of three years.

Then, after two years of time off from school I was still without a job; I decided to finally pursue a teaching credential and master's degree. Even here, I was not able to get the support that I felt I deserved in order to do it at the fast pace that I felt I could handle. I pushed through, stood my ground, and eventually got the advisor to agree with me that this was something I could do; but it still was not without some convincing.

These experiences left me in a place where I have little faith in the guidance that high school students in this community, and other communities, are getting, especially when they want to pursue a path that is less traditional than going to a four-year university. Why not encourage students to go to art school or vocational school if it is something they are truly passionate about? Why not encourage a student to graduate from college in three years if it is something they want to give a shot? What happened to encouraging kids to "reach for the sky"? After my student teaching assignment, I found that high school students have little motivation because they think that their student path is already set in stone. This preconceived notion deprives students of both their creativity and the potential for high aspirations.

Student Teaching Experience

During my student teaching at a local high school, I was surprised by the expectation that students will go to a standard academic four-year university. While I certainly think it is important to encourage students to go to college, I also think it is important to listen to what they really want to do and take this into account when guiding students into their futures.

For example, at the school where I completed my case study, there was a student who wanted to go into theater directing at NYU's prestigious theater arts program, Tisch School of the Arts. When the time came to decide what he was going to take his first semester senior year to better equip him for his goal, he met with his counselor. His counselor, knowing where this student wanted to go and what he was interested in doing with his future, suggested that he take another advance placement (AP) class, such as AP Physics or AP Statistics, instead of theater directing, which was also available. So, is his counselor not listening or does she think that AP Statistics is going to increase his chances of getting into theater school? Does she have a negative interpretation of art school, which is driving her to recommend something different? Or perhaps does she want him to take another AP course so that the school would look more academically advanced? Whose agenda is this counselor acting on behalf of? Why has she not listened to this student about his interests and talents?

Statement of Problem

The problem is that often counselor personal bias gets in the way of effective counseling truly based on what the student wants to pursue. After my student teaching assignment, I found that high school students have little motivation because they think student paths are already set in

stone. This is a disservice because it deprives students of both their creativity and the potential for high aspirations.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to obtain an understanding of whether counselors are letting their personal bias influence the opportunity for effective and personalized guidance, making students feel lost and disregarded. Are counselors giving students the encouragement to take risks based on their interests and talents; or are students being pushed to take a standard path to a four-year college or university with a traditional academic focus? Primarily, I want to know if students who have other post high school plans are being encouraged to go to a four-year academic university instead of obtaining information about all the options related to their ideas for their futures.

Research Questions

What are the factors that influence counselors' approach to providing high school students with information about post high school options? How does counselor personal bias have an effect on the guidance they give to their students? Are high school counselors encouraging students by educating them in regards to all the possibilities for their futures? Are counselors pushing high school students to move along the path that they the counselors think is acceptable?

Theoretical Rationale

The theoretical rationale from the work of Johnson, Rochkind, and Ott (2010), suggests that counselors need to engage their students so that they can work together to establish great possibilities for students with all different interests, including vocational and art schools.

The researchers state the following:

Among young adults who have graduated from high school and at least started some form of postsecondary education, a surprising 6 in 10 give their high school guidance counselors ratings of fair or poor for helping them think about different careers they might want to pursue. Sixty-seven percent give their counselors fair or poor ratings for helping them decide which school to attend, with 35 percent giving the lowest possible rating of poor (p. 75).

In Johnson and Ott's 2010 study the authors discuss students' disappointment with high school guidance counseling. The focus of the article is to demonstrate how students feel about their experiences with their counselors, while my research is directed towards answering the question, what can counselors do to improve the relationships they have with their students to better suit the student's interests and talents?

The Johnson and Ott research states that only 3% of students who graduated from high school said they never met with a guidance counselor to discuss their postsecondary plans; this means that 97% of students met with a guidance counselor to discuss what their plans after high school. Of these 97% of students, 60% of them described their experience with their counselors as "fair" or "poor".

In the Public Agenda study, nearly one-half of young people (48 percent) say they usually felt like just another face in the crowd in dealing with their high school guidance counselor -- slightly more than the 47 percent who say that their counselors really made an effort to get to know them and work with them (p. 75).

Johnson and Ott report that students should not feel as if they are another face in the crowd. The researchers indicate that student voices should be heard and their interests taken into consideration when it comes to planning their futures.

The following categories are areas in which students felt like they did not get effective guidance:

- Counselors helping students decide what school was right for them
- Counselors helping students find ways to pay for college, such as financial aid or scholarship programs
- Counselors helping students think about different kinds of careers they might want to pursue
- Counselors explaining and helping students with the college application process

Students do not feel as though they are being given the support and guidance they need in regards to their futures. Based on my personal background, these are the only experiences that I had with a guidance counselor; this is why “guidance counseling needs to change”. It needs to change into a service which kids find both supportive and productive.

Assumptions

When students are sent to their counselors to talk about the possibilities for their futures, the counselor’s personal bias interferes with giving these students effective and supportive guidance. In other words, I assume that students in this community who want to veer off the path of going to a four-year college or who are average students, are not getting proper or appropriate guidance

to make informed decisions about their futures. The reason this is happening is because counselor's personal bias interferes with student interest.

More specifically, I assume that students who want to go to art or vocational school, for example, are not being encouraged to take that risk. I also assume that students who are achieving at an average level are not encouraged by their counselors to reach for a higher level of success. My assumption is that the reason these students are not being pushed to follow their dreams, originated from counselor personal bias which interferes with their encouraging students to apply to schools that counselors believe are out of reach.

Background and Need

Militello (2009) explores and researches exemplary counseling practices that have proven successful in the guidance of students. The exemplary counselors in these schools demonstrate the knowledge and consideration for their students that encourages success and risk taking as demonstrated by the following quote: "One school counselor indicated that while she knows that not all students will attend college, she wanted the students' choices to be based on their interests and aspirations, not on inaccurate beliefs about their ability to do college work" (p. 13). This particular counselor emphasized the importance of letting go of any preconceived notions when it came to guiding her students into the future.

These exemplary counselors demonstrated the importance of not only setting high expectations, but also being the support that kids need in order to reach those high expectations. Additionally, these counselors established and maintained partnerships for social capital, developed a systemic thought process, reached out to parents to get them involved with their students' success, established their own leadership within the school, and demonstrated effective program management practices based on their fair counseling beliefs.

Ensor (2009) discusses the use of a program called AVID, Advancement Via Individual Determination. The article discusses the implementation of the AVID program within the Baltimore County Public School System and the success of the program.

AVID is a nationally recognized program that was created in San Diego, CA in 1980, and is designed to give high school students who ordinarily would not participate in rigorous, academic, college preparatory classes the opportunity and support necessary to succeed in these higher level classes. AVID promotes student success in rigorous college prep curriculum, and can be a valuable asset to a college counseling program. (p. 17)

Ensor suggests that one of the most important roles that counselors play in the AVID program is helping their freshmen students set up a four year plan in order for them to achieve success both during and after high school. The four-year plan helps keep students on track in regards to graduation requirements. The article suggests that the four-year plan is important because

...meeting with students early in their high school career not only helps to identify their strengths and weaknesses, but allows an opportunity to find out what their interests are and to discuss the importance of how they relate to course selection and ultimately, choice of college major and occupation. (p. 18)

Additionally, the AVID program recommends that sophomores in high school should be exposed to “college and career awareness programs” (p. 19). The counselors are responsible for this exposure. During the execution of AVID in the Baltimore County Public School System, sophomore and junior students were taken to Washington D.C. and Virginia on college visits. At these college visits students were given the opportunity to attend informational college sessions at the many universities in those areas. This early exposure to college and life as a college

student gave these high school kids a taste of what it might be like when they graduated; in most cases, it gave students something to look forward to in regards to their post high school lives.

The focus of my review of this article is based on the following quote:

Counselors become and integral member of the AVID team and need to take the lead role in preparing students for the college admission process... By helping the students and parents become aware of the competitive nature of college admission, counselors can increase the awareness of the process and help reduce some of the anxiety and tension that inevitably results throughout the four years of college preparatory work (p. 18).

In other words, it is the responsibility of the counselor to take the lead with their students at the beginning of high school, and set these students up for success who are students that “ordinarily would not participate in rigorous, college preparatory classes” (p. 17).

Chapter Two Review of the Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the literature written about and related to the topic of the effectiveness of counseling. The following sections include the historical context of counseling, then a review of the literature broken into literature that discusses both *The Experience of a High School Counselor* and *The Importance of a High School Counselor*. Additionally it includes a special collection, statistical information, administrative records, and an interview with an expert including a description of the sample and site of my own research.

Historical Context

According to Lautz, Hawkins, and Perez (2009) "...in 1937, high school counselors and college admission officers, seeking to establish standard, ethical practices for their respective professions and for the students' transitions from high school to college, founded the National Association for College Admission Counseling." (p. 7)

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009) school counselors are responsible for several aspects of student success. Here is a specific description of what high school counselors are responsible for:

High school counselors advise students regarding college majors, admission requirements, entrance exams, financial aid, trade or technical schools, and apprenticeship programs. They help students develop job search skills, such as resume writing and interviewing techniques. College career planning and placement counselors assist alumni or students with career development and job-hunting techniques.

Additionally, school counselors at all age levels are responsible for helping students manage emotional and personal problems. Throughout each year, counselors are to develop a relationship not only with their students, but with parents, teachers, and administrators too. It is also their responsibility to communicate regularly with “school psychologists, medical professionals, and social workers to develop and implement strategies to help students succeed” (para. 6).

As demonstrated by the description of a school counselor provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, it is very important that counselors stay current with their students’ lives, academic requirements both for high schools and colleges, and the ever changing strategies used in order to manage high school students who are struggling in various aspects of their academic and personal lives.

Review of the Previous Literature

The Experience of a High School Counselor

Fowler as cited in Griggs (1983) explores the work of director of counseling at George Washington High School, Jane Fowler. The author discusses Fowler’s experience as a high school counselor and her frustration when it came to connecting with her students. Fowler had one incident in particular with a student who was disinterested; Fowler began to consider the fact that each student needs to be approached in a different way because all people learn a little differently. The article states that, “Consistently, she encountered strong resistance from some students who had difficulty verbalizing and other students whom teachers labeled as ‘learning disabled’ and ‘non-achievers.’ Nothing in her counselor education program had really prepared her to work with these students” (p. 293).

Most importantly the Griggs article states that,

...the school counselor works with the school administrators to develop counseling programs that are responsive to student needs. This approach assumes that individual learning styles will be assessed and that instructional and counseling interventions will be design that are compatible with the various learning styles (p. 296).

The article demonstrates and explains the importance of individualizing counselor guidance based on students' learning needs.

The Importance of a High School Counselor

According to Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, and Holcomb-McCoy (2011), "School counselors play a vital role in college counseling. Student access to school counselors is a critical link in the college counseling process that includes information, choice, application, and enrollment" (p. 190). This article discusses the important role that counselors play in their students' lives when it comes to applying to colleges. Most importantly, it emphasizes the fact that when students have a consistent and positive relationship with their counselors, the students are more likely to apply to college. The findings of this research suggest that student connection to counselors is very important; and that having more counselors within a school is necessary for developing the relationships that encourage more students to apply to school. "...In general, student-counselor contact for college information is a significant positive predictor of applying to college, and these effects appear stronger for earlier student-counselor contact as opposed to later" (p. 195).

The fact that many counselors are overwhelmed with their responsibilities in working with large numbers of students is well documented. This study identifies the importance of having a reasonable number of counselors to manage and connect with the student body. Also,

the student-counselor relationship is particularly important in regards to assisting students in planning for the future.

According to Lautz, Hawkins, and Perez (2005), “In public schools, there is a well-documented need for college counseling staff and resources, particularly in lower-income settings” (p. 7). Additionally, this article discusses the need for more connection between high schools and colleges, vocational schools, and other postsecondary institutions. The authors of the article focus on the importance of the counselor in these schools within lower income neighborhoods in regards to postsecondary options, but disregard the importance of counselors within wealthier public schools and private schools.

In a study conducted on the evaluation methods applied to high school counseling, Murray, Levitov, Castenell, and Joubert (1987) agree that the success of a counseling program is often “embedded in the organizational ‘culture of the school’” (p. 259). In other words, instead of using a standard evaluation method to determine the effectiveness of a counseling program, they based their study on the culture of the school. For example, counseling programs are more successful when teachers and administration encourage the use of counseling services to their students. When the culture of the school is more collaborative, they found that the counseling programs proved to be more successful.

Special Collection

In another article, Martha Miller (American School Counselor Association, 2010) describes her experiences as a high school counselor at Taylor High School in Texas. For six years, Miller had 900 students for which she was responsible as a high school counselor. She mentioned that she quickly developed skills that were essential to succeeding as a counselor: organization, time management, and flexibility. Miller mentions that there is a large amount of paperwork that

counselors are responsible for completing. At the school where I conduct my research, each counselor is responsible for about 300 students, nearly a third of what Miller is responsible for. Even with 900 students, Miller was able to develop a relationship with her students and set up a club for senior students that met in the morning with the counselors as a forum to discuss and ask questions about the college application process, scholarship options, essay writing, and college selection based on personal interests.

Statistical Information

In 2002 The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) completed a survey in public high schools in the United States to get an idea of both the demographics of high school counselors and counselor goals in their guidance of high school students. Wirt, Choy, Rooney, Provasnik, Sen, and Tobin (2004) of NCES, found that there was an average of 284 students for every guidance counselor. Within the research they asked what counselors focused on most out of four different categories: “helping students plan and prepare for their work roles after high school, helping students with personal growth and development, helping students plan and prepare for postsecondary schooling, and helping students with their academic achievement in high school” (p. 76). Results of this study varied based on location, size, and focus of school district. Overall the results reported that 48 percent of the schools surveyed had counselors that most importantly emphasized helping students with academic achievement. This compared to the 27 percent of schools whose counseling programs emphasized planning and preparing for postsecondary schooling, 17 percent who emphasized personal growth and development, and 8 percent who emphasized planning and preparing for their work roles after high school. Data showed that especially those schools with a higher number of students and higher percentages of minority students emphasized most importantly academic achievement.

Administrative Records

At the focus school of my research, Butler High School (pseudonym), they have a College and Career Center (CCC). Teachers can set up times for their classes to come visit the CCC, but it is not required that students use the CCC in their time at Butler.

There is access to various resources within the College and Career Center. Students can get information about colleges, universities, and vocational schools as well as careers and scholarships. Additionally in the CCC, students can access and check out books and pamphlets about SATs, ACTs, and various college majors and universities around the world.

Along with this, the head of the College and Career Center is knowledgeable about the job and college application processes. She can help students out with finding a college that will be right for them or set students up with work permits. Additionally she can give students information about summer programs, international programs, and various community service opportunities. This is a facility and faculty that Butler High School has on site for its students, but again, it is not required that students take advantage of what this facility provides.

Interview with an Expert

I interviewed the head of the art department, James (pseudonym), at Butler High School, who has been a drama teacher at the school for 13 years. I chose to interview this particular individual because he has a great sense of how helpful counselors are to students who are interested in art or theater school. After asking him several introductory questions, I was able to ask him about his opinions regarding the counseling services at Butler. Having dealt with years of graduating drama students who were interested in going to art school, James is well versed in regards to the needs of those students.

While James believes that counselors are doing the best they can with the information they have, he also believes that they are not well enough versed on the numerous options for students pursuing a career in art. He also mentioned that he feels as though there are some counselors who are eager to accommodate non-traditional postsecondary plans and work with students to find options that both interest and work for them. Then he also believes there are counselors who do not take the time to work with students effectively. He mentioned that he thought counseling would be more effective at Butler High School if the counselors had fewer students to manage, which is a common belief among teaching staff across the country (personal communication, 2011).

Sample and Site

The sample for the study includes members of the counseling and teaching staff at a local suburban high school. This is a purposive sample. The counseling staff consists of four women and one man. The teaching staff has various levels of experience in teaching, but all teachers interviewed have no fewer than seven years teaching experience.

The reason I chose this sample is because it is not news that schools struggle to support and house a large counseling staff. We hear all the time about schools having two counselors for the entire student body, and each of those two counselors are responsible for hundreds of students. However, even in schools with enough counselors to successfully manage what the job requires for a reasonable amount of students, students are not feeling as though they are getting the attention they deserve.

Chapter Three Method

Introduction

The research method is primarily qualitative. By interviewing experts, both students and teachers who deal with a high majority of students with interests other than traditional four-year colleges, I am able to document the reasons for the disconnect between students and their counselors. This qualitative study is a smaller sample size, but will hopefully be demonstrative of the counseling challenge as a whole.

Sample and Site

The sample is a group of experts and students at a local suburban high school. I interviewed several members of the teaching staff, particularly art and vocational teachers. These professionals developed close relationships with students who preferred to go on a non-traditional path. Additionally, I asked several senior students about their experiences with their counselors.

Ethical Standards

This study adheres to the guidelines protecting human subjects for research purposes as described in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (2009). Additionally, this proposal was presented to the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, approved, and assigned number, 8287. To

ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms are used in summarizing subject responses. Also, the school and district all have fictitious names.

Access and Permissions

I received signed informed consent forms from everyone who participated in the study. They indicated that they understood that all identities would be kept confidential. Additionally, I conducted interviews as scheduled with each individual subject based on their availability.

Data Gathering Strategies

The data gathering strategies I use are simple interview strategies. Interview questions for teaching staff include the following:

1. How long have you been working as a teacher? How long have you been working here at Butler High School?
2. Overall, do you think that students who are interested in futures that don't include a four-year university are being given the attention they deserve from their counselors?
3. From your experience, do you think that counselors are educated enough about the future possibilities for students who are interested in art?
4. Do you think that students ever take the traditional college path because they feel like it is their only option? If so, do you have any examples?
5. Has there ever been a time where students who want to go to art school or a vocational school approach you for your advice because they haven't received any help from their counselors?
6. Do you think that in most cases, student guidance is swayed by counselor personal bias?

7. Do you think that high school guidance counseling needs to change? If so, what suggestions might you have to improve it?

Interview questions for senior students include the following:

1. What grade are you in high school? How old are you?
2. What is your primary goal for after high school? What do you want to do? Where do you want to go?
3. Have you met with your counselor this year about college and jobs? How many times? What did they help you with?
4. Was your counselor the primary person who helped you plan for what you're going to do post high school?
5. Overall, were you happy with your experience with your counselor? Why or why not?
6. What was the best advice your counselor gave you?
7. What do you think your counselor needs to work on in regards to helping students plan for life after high school?

I conducted each interview verbally and was able to be more focused on listening instead of manually recording answers because I used a tape recorder.

Data Analysis Approach

After each interview I review responses and identify differences and commonalities among teaching staff and students. This data provides a sense of what is responsible for the disconnect between counselors and students and whether each group of experts feel as though bias interferes with the guidance being given to high school students.

Chapter Four Findings

Description of Site, Individuals, Data

The school focused on in this study is located in an affluent county in what is considered a high performing district, according to Public School Review (2001). The graduation rate at each of the three schools within the district is 99%. The grounds are clean, the building is nicely maintained and there is enough parking for hundreds of students. The pseudonym that I use for the high school is Butler High School.

There are five counselors at Butler High School and there are about 1500 students. This means that each counselor is responsible for counseling about 300 students. My intent was to interview the entire counseling staff. However, I was unable to obtain official administrative permission to contact these professionals. I spoke to both teachers at the high school and several senior students. In order to assure confidentiality, I reported general findings, and used pseudonyms for all my contacts.

To reiterate, this sample is a purposive sample and all data is qualitative. All names were kept confidential and findings were summarized to demonstrate the results of the study.

Themes

After speaking with several teachers from Butler High School, it was clear that there was agreement on common themes. There were a few academic teachers who thought that counselors were doing the best they could with the large number of students they had. These teachers thought that it would increase counselor effectiveness if the counseling staff was larger and each counselor had fewer students. Almost all the teachers agreed overall that students need

to be encouraged more to access the College and Career Center (CCC) throughout their time at Butler High School. They believe that the CCC is a valuable resource for students looking to get information about any kind of future. They also believe that older students do not utilize the CCC as much as they should in order to support planning for their various futures.

All art teachers that were interviewed had similar responses to the questions. They agreed that although they thought counselors were doing the best they could with students interested in pursuing a future in art, they were not adequately prepared to give these students helpful guidance in regards to their interests and capabilities relating to art. All the art teachers, and interviewed art students, mentioned that art teachers were often “counselors” for students who wanted to go to art school or pursue a career in art. In other words, students who were hoping to pursue a career in art or who were hoping to go to art school, were dissatisfied with the advice they received from their counselors and therefore approached their art teachers in order to receive more helpful guidance.

After speaking with several members of the senior class who are interested in pursuing various post secondary options, I found that many were not connected with their counselors. All students had had meetings with their counselors, but their primary support and help during their planning and application processes was not their counselors. The response about counselors was fairly negative, and one student even said, “My overall counselor experience was not good because I didn’t feel like she helped me at all.” Most students mentioned that their primary support in figuring out the application process was their parents and other teachers.

Additionally, a majority of students felt as though their counselor did not know them or did not believe in them. For example, there was one student who dreamed about going to UCLA for cross-country and track and field. She was both academically and physically capable of

accomplishing this goal, and let her counselor know that she was in close contact with the track and field coach at UCLA, who was clear with the student that he wanted her to come run for him in Los Angeles. Her counselor recommended that instead of applying to UCLA and other UC schools she should set her sights lower and apply to California State schools instead. She did not listen to her counselor and instead decided to follow her dream by applying to UCLA. She got in and has a scholarship to run for their cross-country and track and field teams. This is just one example of students who felt as though they weren't being supported in reaching their goals. Nearly eighty percent of students interviewed felt similarly.

Chapter Five Discussion /Analysis

Summary of Major Findings

The major findings throughout this research demonstrate that in fact students are unhappy with their experiences with their counselors. Additionally, they support the popular opinion that schools need more counselors to more effectively serve the students. Art teachers agree that they have served as the primary help to students considering art school and that counselors could learn more about artistic alternative post secondary options; teachers also agree that counselors do the best they can with the information they have available.

Comparison of Findings to Previous Research

Compared to previous research, the data from this study has fallen in line with previous studies. Students feel disconnected from their counselors, making them feel like Johnson, Rockkind, and Ott's (2010), "just another face in the crowd" (p. 75), when the purpose of the high school guidance counselor is to develop a supportive and informative relationship. The consensus of the previous research is that guidance counseling needs to change, and this study has proven to agree with the consensus.

Limitations/Gaps in the Research

The gaps in the research are clear. This is a small sample size used in order to be demonstrative of a larger population; obviously there are going to be exceptions. Additionally, I did not have complete participation; there were members of the anticipated sample that did not want to take part in this research.

Implications for Future Research

Generally, I would like to see more literature dedicated to the effectiveness of high school guidance counseling. I would also like to see a budget made public that identifies costs and personnel needed in order to serve the high school population as they transition to post high school education and career planning. More money should be spent on establishing a larger counseling program, so that students do not feel as if they are another face in the crowd; instead they feel as if they have a caring and supportive relationship with the one person in their high school whose job is to help guide them into their futures smoothly and effectively.

Ideally, given the funds and time, I would like to be able to conduct this study with a larger sample size across districts nationwide. This would perhaps shine more light on the problems that guidance counseling faces within high schools, and the negative effects that poor counseling has on its students.

Overall Significance of the Research

Overall, the importance of the interviews and the literature suggests that perhaps the problem with the disconnectedness between counselors and their students is the fact that counselors have too many students to manage effectively. Either way, something needs to be done in order to more effectively encourage students to pursue their interests and capabilities.

Based on the interviews, my recommendation for Butler High School, without affecting the budget, by adding more counselors or requiring more inner-district education for counselors, is that students be required to use the College and Career Center as a support at the beginning of their search for post secondary options. Counselors and students could meet in the College and Career Center for their first college meeting. For students who have interests that the counselors

are familiar with, the CCC could be used simply as a support to the counselor's prior knowledge. For students who have interests that counselors are less familiar with, like art, the CCC can be used as the basis for exploration of possible future options for the student; this will not only help the student plan for his or her future, but will also encourage the counselor to become more educated about options for other art students.

High school guidance counseling needs a shift. Based on the literature and this study, students are struggling to get the support they need in planning for their futures. Students should not feel like "just another face in the crowd" (Johnson, Rochkind, and Ott, 2010, p. 75); they should feel connected and supported by their high school counselors. As the Militello (2009) article suggests, students' choices about their futures should be "...based on their interests and aspirations, not on inaccurate beliefs about their ability to do college work" (p. 13). Students need to feel heard and be told about the incredible options that are available to them after they graduate. Students are often surprised by college applications, the incredible possibility of numerous scholarships, and the fact that they could potentially get into a school that at first seemed out of their reach. Given effective and supportive guidance counseling, along with appropriate resources, students may have the opportunity to be more confident in pursuing their dreams and accomplishing their goals.

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