

Abstract

PAMELA MECCA SEYMOUR. School Counselors in Public Montessori - A Qualitative Study of Three Elementary Schools. (Under the direction of Stanley Baker.)

This study uses qualitative research methods to examine the role of school counselors in three public Montessori elementary schools. Through the process of interviews and site visits, the data collected are compared against the American School Counseling Association's guidelines for a balanced and comprehensive guidance program. Data are also evaluated to see if philosophical and pedagogical elements of Montessori are integrated into each school's guidance program. The findings show that all three schools have programs that provide intervention services at a much higher rate than preventative services, and they have difficulty integrating Montessori pedagogy into their counseling programs. However, the opinions of the counselors at all three schools are favorable toward Montessori, and there seem to be possibilities for Montessori / counseling integration that could provide a very strong balanced and comprehensive guidance program.

**SCHOOL COUNSELORS IN PUBLIC MONTESSORI - A QUALITATIVE STUDY
OF THREE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

by

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science

COUNSELOR EDUCATION

Raleigh

2003

APPROVED BY:

Chair of Advisory Committee

BIOGRAPHY

Ms. Seymour was born in upstate New York in 1962. She lived with her parents, Drs. Thomas and Marilyn Mecca and only sister, Jennifer Lawler Mecca in that area throughout her childhood and adolescence. She met her future husband, David Seymour in her hometown in 1976.

Ms. Seymour attended Tompkins-Cortland Community College and Cornell University. She was awarded a Bachelor of Science Degree in Design and Environmental Analysis from the College of Human Ecology at Cornell in January of 1984.

Immediately after completing her degree Ms. Seymour moved to Massachusetts and married Mr. Seymour. She spent the next twelve years as a commercial interior designer with particular focus and expertise on public school design and construction.

In 1990 Ms. Seymour and her husband relocated to Raleigh, NC. She continued to work in the area of educational facilities design. Wilson Thomas Seymour, her first child, was born in 1992. Eleanor Ann Seymour followed in 1993.

In 1996 Ms. Seymour took a clerical position at Cary Montessori School, where her children were enrolled, and stayed with that school as it converted to Sterling Montessori Charter School in 1997. She was promoted to Assistant Director at Sterling and remained there until 2001 when she left to pursue a graduate degree in School Counseling.

Most recently, Ms. Seymour has been part of a three-year effort to start a new Montessori charter school in Raleigh. Casa Esperanza Montessori Dual Language Charter School opened in August of this year to 100 students. Ms. Seymour is Chairman of the Board of Directors.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee, Dr. Rhonda Sutton and Dr. Helen Lupton-Smith for their encouragement during my coursework as well as during the preparation of this thesis. I would also like to thank Dr. Stanley Baker for his encouragement and patience as my advisor during my entire tenure in Counselor Education. I take a lot with me.

I would also like to acknowledge my parents, Drs. Thomas and Marilyn Mecca for a love of learning and a passion for public education. They have been part of my work whether I have been selecting carpet for a new school building, chairing a board meeting, or working one-on-one with a child. I am taking the baton and running the next lap.

Thanks to my husband, Dave for financing this and a few other ventures. Maybe in our lifetime teachers will get multi-million dollar sneaker endorsements. In the meantime, I will try to make the best return on your investment. Please keep coaching me from the sidelines.

I would also like to express my appreciation to my friends Dr. Sandy Vavra and Janice Bonham West. Dr. Vavra was a wonderful editor and has always been very encouraging to me. Janice takes many opportunities to inform me concerning important matters such as why children's fantasy stories do not make appropriate Montessori materials. She has shown me what Montessori truly is. All three of us are running the same lap, and I am happy to share my water bottle.

Finally, thanks to my informal advisor Dr. Jack Huber. Your consistent practice of *gemeinshaftsefühl* helped me to figure out that my work and ideas are worth sharing even though I am imperfect. There is a bit of your encouragement in every therapeutic encounter I have with a child. I am watching for your footprints on the track.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades American public education has seen the accommodation of many alternative models. Magnet schools and charter schools have provided a wealth of different philosophies, cultures, and structures to meet the increasing demands on the Nation's school children. While alternative models have met with varying degrees of success, a particular model, the *Montessori Method*, that has seen continuing introduction and growth all across the country. (Chattin-McNichols, 1992).

Montessori is unique in its use of specialized didactic materials and specific multi-age grouping. Instruction in the classroom encompasses reading, writing, math and science as well as the arts, physical development, multicultural study, and emotional and social development. The teacher, referred to as a *Director* or *Directress*, is viewed as an educated generalist who provides guidance across all subject areas. The Montessori Director creates a classroom environment that provides order and beauty, guides the child through self-directed incremental exercises at an individual pace, and encourages independence. The *Montessori Method* encompasses children from birth through their 15th year, although programs for 3 to 12-year-olds are more common (Chattin-McNichols, 1992).

In its traditional form, a Montessori School is comprised of a professional faculty that do not specialize in any particular subject areas, but is certified according to a particular multiyear age grouping referred to as a *developmental plane*. Administrators and support personnel are present as required by the school structure (Kahn, Dubble, &

Pendleton, 1999) Most private Montessori Schools, especially private preschools, operate according to this model. However, when Montessori moved into the public sector, this model was not entirely feasible.

In particular, auxiliary faculty is often left with ambiguous roles and a lack of certified training in the *Montessori Method*. Additionally, many auxiliary faculty positions must be accommodated within the school structure because of the local district, state government, or federal law. New Montessori magnet programs, and public schools converting to a Montessori model often include Montessori trained classroom faculty, but ignore or minimize Montessori training for auxiliary faculty in the arts, physical education, special education, and guidance. The result sometimes becomes “Monte-something” rather than Montessori. In order for public Montessori schools to function at their best, i.e., in accordance with the theory behind the Montessori Method, they must address the issue of auxiliary faculty and develop a model that accommodates auxiliary programs while also remaining consistent with the Montessori Method.

This study proposes to examine the function of school counselors in Montessori public elementary schools. The data gathered will be analyzed to determine what these school counselors are focusing on in their particular schools. Is a comprehensive program being provided that incorporates academic success, social emotional growth, and career awareness? Are counseling activities balanced between those that intervene before issues arise and those that seek to remedy existing issues? Also of interest is how Montessori school counselors are delivering their program. Are they using Montessori theory as they plan and deliver activities? Does the counselor function in the roles of consultant, individual and group counselor, as well as teacher? Does a Montessori school

provide opportunities for guidance activities not found in other educational models?

Finally, the data will be examined to determine why a school counselor is needed in a Montessori elementary school. The Montessori Method provides a rich ground for guidance and counseling activities through portions of the curriculum that focus on social and emotional growth, peace education, multicultural understanding, and personal independence. On one hand, this affords an opportunity for school counselors to provide a more comprehensive and balanced program than might be possible in other educational models. However, it also might be interpreted as rendering the school counselor in a Montessori elementary school superfluous. Is individual and group counseling required outside of the classroom? Do Montessori Directors need consultation services from a school counselor?

Given that no prior research exists concerning the relationship between school counseling and Montessori education, this study will collect primary data. Since the data will be principally concerned with relationships among counselors, students, and school personnel, it will be collected in qualitative form. The common and distinct threads between the stories of the persons interviewed will provide a basis for hypotheses in future research studies.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Montessori Method and School Counseling Theory

When Dr. Maria Montessori opened her first school in the slums of Rome in 1917, it was a very small school that required minimal administration. The small-school model followed The Montessori Method to the United States in the late 1960's and early 1970's, where it was embraced by the private sector, but eschewed by public schools as being too radical. The private schools that opened during that time were small and populated by children from white, middle- to upper- socio-economic strata (Kahn et al., 1999). These children flourished in the Montessori schools even though they did not require specialized delivery of special education, medical, or counseling services. Therefore, administrators of these small private schools did not need the same skills as their public-school counterparts, and support staff that delivered auxiliary services was nearly non-existent.

The situation has changed as demands for Montessori school administrators and auxiliary faculty have grown in the last 20 years. The need for increasing competency has grown as the *Montessori Method* has become the pedagogical model for many public magnet and charter schools (Chattin-McNichols, 1992). Populations in these schools are often large and racially diverse. Many magnet schools have been started in inner-city environments in response to school improvement programs; therefore, a high percentage of students often require special education services and qualify for free and reduced lunch. The highly structured approach to curriculum delivery and organization of the environment that is required by the Montessori Method mandates that administrators and

auxiliary personnel be willing to take additional steps beyond what is required in a traditional school setting. For example, school scheduling must be structured to minimize interruption during the morning work cycle. To work successfully, this type of scheduling requires flexibility and a non-traditional way of thinking by all staff.

Like Montessori in the public school, elementary school counseling is also a relatively young specialty. Although the roots of school guidance developed shortly after the turn of the twentieth century and found its way into secondary schools in the 1920s and 30s, elementary school guidance counseling did not become common until the 1960s (Baker & Gerler, 2004).

The American School Counseling Association has developed guidelines for a balanced, comprehensive guidance program: 1) Elementary school guidance programs should provide elements that are preventative and intervening in nature; 2) They should also address the three elements of academic development, personal/social development, and career development; 3) Services may be delivered directly by the counselor to students or may be delivered indirectly through others; and 4) All activities should be developmental in nature (Campbell & Dahir, 1997).

Preventative aspects of a balanced guidance program identify possible issues unique to a particular school and address the issues through programming and curriculum delivery. Intervention addresses issues that are occurring, and intercedes with appropriate assistance. For a school guidance program to be effective, these two aspects should be balanced (Baker & Gerler, 2004).

Comprehensive programs focus on student growth in the areas of academics, career awareness, and personal/social development.

Counselors certainly provide services directly to students by counseling individuals or groups. They may also provide service indirectly either by consulting with other faculty, administrators, parents and staff members or developing programming to be delivered by classroom teachers, parent volunteers, or persons from outside agencies and groups. Many counselors also provide indirect service by coordinating auxiliary services such as psychological services, social work services, school-based health care, and community social service agencies.

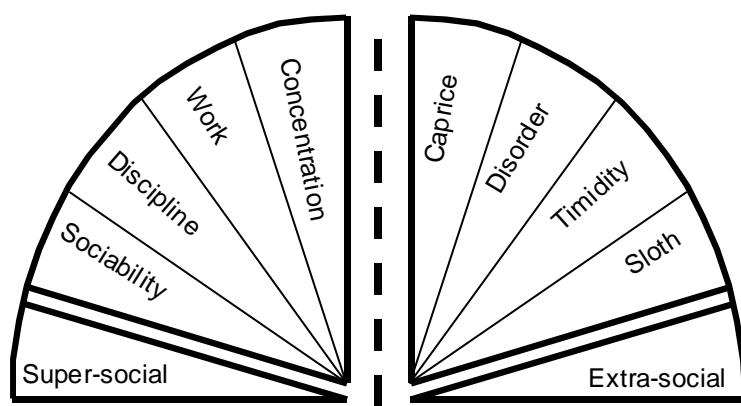
Thus, current elementary school counseling theory begins with the organization of services. A comprehensive, balanced school counseling program delivers a variety of services to as many students as possible and attempts to anticipate and prevent problems rather than merely reacting to crises (Baker & Gerler, 2004). Therapeutic counseling is a part, but not necessarily the largest part, of the program.

The *Montessori Method* begins with the individual child. After many years of careful observation, Dr. Montessori came to believe that children are capable of constructing their own intellect at their own unique pace through the use of hands-on, didactic materials and a carefully prepared environment (Montessori, 1972).

Montessori developed specially designed materials that take children through a natural progression from the simple to the more complex in a variety of academic areas including mathematics, language development, geography, social sciences and multicultural studies, biology, astronomy, music, and art. In addition to academics, she also created materials in the areas of *practical life* and *sensorial development*. *Practical life* materials include activities as diverse as window washing, sewing, flower arranging, lacing and buckling, carpentry, and pipe fitting. *Sensorial materials* assist children with

the exploration of the five senses. Materials for exploring color, sound, fragrance and tactile differences are included with materials that encourage children to practice pouring, using tweezers, and cutting with scissors. The materials are designed to be developmentally appropriate and change as the child masters each successive level.

Dr. Montessori firmly believed that children needed to prepare themselves to acquire academic knowledge, and she described that preparation as the development of character or *normalization* (Montessori, 1967). Character Education in schools today are often taken to include a set of traits or virtues such as respect, integrity, perseverance, self-discipline, honesty, etc.(Bennett, 1995). Dr. Montessori's view of character was quite different. For her, character meant the development of concentration, work, discipline, and sociability. The Figure below demonstrates this idea.



Normal and deviated character traits in children.

Children on the left-hand side of the dashed line are considered normalized according to Dr. Montessori (Montessori, 1967). Children must be in this place in order to self-construct the intellect they need to function successfully in life and society. This is the first task of the Montessori educator and, in fact “*It is the most important single result of our whole work*” [italics original] (Montessori, 1967).

Development of the normal traits illustrated above set the groundwork for the acquisition of academic knowledge and the ability to positively interact with others. Further lessons and activities in *Grace and Courtesy* provide children with the tools they need to behave respectfully toward one another and to peacefully resolve disputes. Aside from providing important lessons in their own right, the practice of *Grace and Courtesy* creates a classroom and school environment that is optimal for learning. As children move towards a normalized state, function effectively in their environment and become engaged and industrious, learning takes place in the context of *Grace and Courtesy* and normalization for the classroom and entire school in increased.

The scenario previously described has worked very well for small private schools who construct a community through selective admission; however, what about larger public schools which must work with all children who apply to the school and which have to function within a bureaucracy that does not fully understand Montessori methodology? Montessori training focuses on how the Montessori Method is used in the classroom. On the other hand, it does not produce administrators who can organize the delivery of supplemental services to the entire school (Chattin-McNichols, 1992).

Some of the current thinking about how to develop a comprehensive school guidance program run counter to Montessori Theory. School counselors may need to consider demographic groups within the school, rather than individuals, to implement a comprehensive plan that reaches as many students as possible and addresses issues and psychological theories that were not developed while Dr. Montessori was alive. For example, we know that some children who have difficulty developing the characteristics of control and concentration in the classroom may have unique brain chemistry that was

unknown in the early half of the century. Counselors work with these children directly and also assist teachers with specific techniques that supplement the traditional Montessori methods for developing concentration. Because there are often numerous children who deal with this issue, it is efficient for the counselor to use limited time to deal with this group of children as a whole rather than individually.

Therefore, school counselors in a Montessori setting have a unique role to play as a bridge between the microstructure of the classroom, and the macro-structure of the entire school (Lenhardt, 2001). Operating as this bridge, school counselors can serve to bolster the delivery of services to every student in the school in a manner consistent with Montessori theory.

Consultation with Faculty and Students

Montessori faculty members are referred to as directors. Dr. Montessori (1972) conceived of directors as educated generalists. As previously stated, the goal of the director is to educate the whole child. For that reason, Montessori schools eschew the school model that provides separate faculty for the instruction of art, music, or physical education (Chattin-McNichols, 1992). An alternate model used by many Montessori schools is to employ consultants to develop lessons and materials in subject areas where classroom directors do not have extensive expertise (Kahn et al., 1999). This model could also include school counselors. For example, directors would be trained to deliver guidance curriculum, and the school counselor would provide didactic, hands-on, self-correcting materials for use in the classroom. Research findings indicate that this model of guidance curriculum delivery has been shown to produce high outcome results for curriculum retention and application (Wasielewski, Scruggs, & Scott, 1997). A properly

trained Montessori director can use knowledge of individual students and teachable moments throughout the day to reinforce guidance lessons in a manner consistent with the needs and learning style of individual students. Using this model of consultation, guidance counselors are free to spend more time directly delivering individual and group counseling services.

A Montessori environment also allows the natural use of students as role models and peer mediators. Montessori children are accustomed to helping those in the classroom who are less developed in particular skills. They are also taught methods for peacefully arbitrating disputes and positively influencing behavior in others. Montessori theory holds that students who help others are learning as well as teaching. Although more research is needed on the effects of peer mediation in the Montessori setting, peer mediation has been studied as a component of comprehensive guidance programs in traditional schools and has shown good results (Lupton-Smith, Carruthers, Flythe, Goetee, & Modest, 1996; Whiston & L, 1998).

Current research and theory enumerate many methods by which school counselors can use naturally occurring behavior and situations and Montessori theory to deliver components of a comprehensive guidance program. Typical examples include the following: Redirecting a child to use polite language in everyday conversation; using conflict resolution techniques, including the “peace rose” ceremony when disagreements occur in the classroom; creating Montessori *works* (didactic materials) that teach concrete concepts related to career education and character education; integrating Montessori terminology into daily language; promoting student independence. Through interventions such as those listed above, the possibility exists for a strong partnership

between classroom directors, students, and counselors to meet very diverse student needs consistently on a large scale.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Design

A qualitative research design was selected for this study. Specifically, the researcher used grounded theory and the constant comparative method to identify common themes and issues as data collection was proceeding at each site. (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) (Miles & Huberman, 1994)

Participants

This study was conducted at three public Montessori elementary schools in the southeastern state. The theoretical sample of eleven public Montessori elementary schools in this state included two charter schools. The eleven schools were reduced by two, when it was determined that these schools did not have at least one staff member who was functioning as a school counselor and also held North Carolina state licensure in either school counseling, school psychology, or school social work. Two more sites were then eliminated because the researcher had previously spent time onsite as an employee, pre-practicum student, or student intern.

The remaining seven schools were contacted by phone through the counselor. The counselor was told that the study involved a several hour site visit for the purpose of interviewing the counselor, interviewing the counselor's supervisor, and touring the school. The counselor was then faxed disclosure and permission statements that are included in Appendix A. Disclosure involved informing the participants that the identity of the schools and the study participants would be kept confidential. In addition, the counselor was told the school would receive a copy of the completed study.

Three schools representing diverse demographics consented to participate. One additional counselor, who worked at two public Montessori schools, initially agreed to participate but dropped out of the study after initial contact due to scheduling conflicts. The remaining participating schools were diverse with regard to size, location, socioeconomic data, and racial diversity.

Site A is a school of approximately 300 students comprising pre-kindergarten through grade four. Over 80% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Sited in a historically African American rural community, the school population identifies itself as over 75% African American. The remaining children identify themselves predominantly as Caucasian. Fewer than five students identify themselves as part of any other racial group. Composite Reading and Math scores for the North Carolina End-of-Grade Test (EOG) in the spring of 2002 placed 52.4 % of the children tested at or above grade level in those two subject areas (NCDPI, 2002).

Site B is located in a suburban neighborhood outside a moderately sized city. It serves approximately 450 students from pre-kindergarten through grade five. In the 2002-2003 school year, grades four and five were still using a traditional curriculum and had not started to use Montessori pedagogy or Montessori materials. Over 85% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. The population is diverse, with approximately 60% identifying as African American, 30% as Caucasian, 7% as Native American, and 3% as Hispanic. The composite reading and math EOG test scores for spring 2002 show 59.2% of the students tested at or above grade level.

Site C serves 270 students in an urban neighborhood that is part of a large metropolitan area and is one of two Montessori magnet schools within the district.

Approximately 35% of the students participate in the free or reduced lunch program; over 60% are identified as Academically Gifted. Seventy-six percent of students identify as African American, 8% identify as Hispanic, 7% identify as white, and 7% identify as Asian. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction data lists that 81.3% of students tested in spring 2002 with EOG tests had composite reading and math scores at or above grade level (NCDPI, 2002).

Researcher / Interviewer

The researcher also interviewed all the study participants at all three school sites. The researcher has been involved in Montessori education since 1993. Initially involved as a parent with two children enrolled in a Montessori pre-school, the researcher began to work as an administrative assistant for a private Montessori school in 1996. That school converted to a public charter school in 1997, and the researcher continued to work there as an Assistant Director for Administration until 2000. While completing requirements for a masters degree in school counseling, the researcher completed a pre-practicum requirement in a local public Montessori school, and an internship in another public Montessori school. The researcher has also served on the Board of Directors for a public dual-language Montessori charter school that began operation in Fall 2003. Study participants were told that the researcher had several years of experience with Montessori education as a parent, employee, and graduate student, but were given no other details.

Instrument

The researcher developed a questionnaire for use during counselor interviews. Appendix B includes the specific questions. The order of questions is structured so that those that are most open-ended and have the greatest possibility for insight (Questions

5,6, and 7) are in the middle of the interview. As new themes or insights emerged, follow-up questions were added to elicit more information.

Data Collection

The primary method of data collection for this study was individual semi-structured interviews, beginning with the instrument described above. The researcher visited the school site beginning mid-morning, when children were engaged in their morning work cycle, and remained for a minimum of three to a maximum of five hours. The initial portion of the interview was conducted while touring the school building. During this phase, the researcher was collecting observations about the building environment, the interaction between the counselor and the staff, and the interaction between the counselor and the children. Data was collected as handwritten notes. A follow up interview was completed either in the counselor's office or during lunch. Additional notes and observations were hand recorded immediately after the conclusion of the site visit. In addition, reflections about the researcher's reaction to the visits were recorded as the data was reviewed and analyzed.

Data Analysis

All hand written notes were transcribed to a word processor immediately after collection. FileMaker Pro was configured to catalog the data according to interviews, observations, and reflections. The search feature of the software was used to look for patterns of language, key themes, and ideas. In addition, the researcher manually analyzed interview transcripts for ideas missed by the computer or particular richness of text. The data were examined to look for three specific theme areas:

1. Alignment with components of a comprehensive school guidance program (Baker & Gerler, 2004). Specifically, the data were examined for items that relate to intervention and prevention, social/emotional, career and academic development, direct and indirect delivery of services, and types of consultation.
2. Evidence of Montessori theory and pedagogy. Does the fact that the school employs a Montessori program impact the delivery of services or the types of services delivered?
3. Other themes that might not relate directly to items 1 and 2 above, but have a significant affect on the daily service delivery of the counselor.

Triangulation

In order to place the interview data in the proper context and strengthen its validity, additional data were collected. A brief interview was conducted with the principal at each site. (See Appendix C for the list of interview questions.) At Site B, the interview with the school principal was completed at the end of the visit. Because of scheduling constraints, the interviews with the principals at Site A and Site C were conducted at a later date via phone.

To further confirm credibility, an auditor was used to review consent forms, questionnaires, and data analysis for researcher bias. In addition, the researcher compiled reflections on personal attitudes and assumptions that might impact interpretation of the data.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Alignment with Comprehensive School Guidance Model

Prevention vs.intervention. All three of the counselors interviewed spent a great deal of time on intervention. The Counselors at Site A and Site B particularly spent a great deal of time making home visits and providing many services that are traditionally in the domain of a school social worker. Home visits were often required at these two sites because parents lack transportation to and from school. The researcher observed the counselor at Site A taking a child home who had been involved in a disciplinary incident. The child had been suspended and the parent did not have a car available to pick up the child. The counselor characterized this as fairly typical. “It gives me a chance to talk with the parents and see what conditions are like at home.” The counselor at Site B expressed similar sentiments: “I do most of the social work. You get such a picture of people – what is really going on.” Her Principal mentioned the home visits and social work services immediately at the beginning of her interview. “We have to have lots of home visits if we are going to make this work. Lots of people do not have phones, so you have to go out.” At Site C the big intervention issues were attendance and crisis counseling.

Prevention activities occurred at all three sites but were mentioned less frequently and with much less emphasis. All three sites used small groups for specific issues such as divorce and anger management. Only the counselor at Site A provided in-class guidance. At Site C the counselor observed, “Guidance doesn’t work in Montessori. They (meaning the teachers) don’t like to be interrupted.” Both the principal and the

counselor at Site B eschewed classroom guidance as a waste of time. “Classroom guidance is a dinosaur.”

Social/emotional, career, and academic development. There was very little direct reference to these three areas specifically by any of the counselors interviewed. In particular, career development was only referred to by the counselor at Site A in reference to a classroom guidance unit she was currently presenting to the children. Social/emotional development was programmed through the small groups mentioned above and was a large focus for all three counselors as it was the source of most of the interventions they needed to be involved in. Academic development was not specifically mentioned as an item that was programmed through the school counselor at any of the sites.

Direct and indirect service delivery. All three counselors tried to make the most of their opportunities to work directly with children. As previously discussed, intervention was demonstrated to be a large part of each counselor’s responsibilities, and all three schools either operated small groups or provided classroom guidance. All three sites also demonstrated how the counselors made the most of more creative opportunities to work directly with children. A child at Site A approached the counselor in the cafeteria to see if the counselor had any leftover food to share. The counselor took the opportunity to do some fact finding about recent meals at home, and if the child was particularly hungry. The counselor subsequently explained that the child approached her often in a similar manner, and thereby gave the counselor regular information about what was happening at the child’s home. This particular counselor repeated more than once that she was frustrated because she spent too much time doing paperwork rather than

working with children. At Site B the researcher observed children coming into the counselor's office in one case to show her some completed work and in another to ask for assistance with a pair of pants that did not fit properly. The counselor treated the children's presence as part of the normal flow of things, and told the researcher that she often has children who come to work individually in her office on their own because they need an environment other than their classroom for a period of time, or they just needed to be near an adult in an intimate setting. At Site C, the counselor made many opportunities to be with children while working at other duties. This counselor served as the school transportation coordinator. Bus duty was seen as a daily time to build rapport with the children. He also worked in the classroom providing informal academic support by tutoring children one-on-one, and sometimes volunteered to take classes out to the playground for recess. He viewed all of these activities as very beneficial, noting that, "By the time a child is referred for an IEP, I know them pretty well already."

Consultation. Consultation is a very important part of the guidance program at all three schools. All three counselors spend a great deal of time with parents either through home visits or as part of their school's IEP team. The researcher observed the counselor at Site B work with the Assistant Principal during a short IEP meeting. The counselor assumed the role of interpreter for the parent, explaining the evaluation process, and what different courses of action might be depending on the outcome. She provided reassurance to the parent as the Assistant Principal asked if the parent had noticed any frightening sounding symptoms of severe mental illness: "That's one of those things (hearing voices) that we never check. We are just required to ask." Both counselors at the other sites provided assumed similar roles, with the counselor at Site C

especially involved at the individual providing psychoeducational testing. At Sites A and C, both counselors expressed the desire to do more parent education activities.

Consultation with teachers in respect to student behavior issues was also indicated at all three schools. This was particularly important to the counselor at Site B: “It’s much more important to strengthen the relationship between the teacher and the child than to work directly with the child.” If she could work with the teacher to provide strategies to solve a particular issue with a student, she felt she had “killed two birds with one stone.” She had strengthened that relationship between the teacher and the child, and had made efficient use of her own limited time. The counselors at Sites B & C also worked personally with teachers who were troubled by frustration and burnout. Although not consultation in the strictest sense, sometimes the Site C counselor volunteered to take a class to the playground during recess to “give the teacher a break.” Finally, all three counselors consulted with teachers concerning the interpretation of test results. The counselors at Sites A & B were both testing coordinators and provided faculty with interpretation of the state standardized tests. The counselor at Site B took that one step further by creating individual EOG type tests for specific curriculum units at the teacher’s request, and assisting teachers with interpretation of those results so that student progress could be accurately tracked. The counselor at Site C, who is certified as a school psychologist performed psychoeducational testing for the preparation of Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Through this process he provided assistance interpreting test results.

The influence of Montessori

School context. It is important to place each individual school in their own Montessori context before elaborating specifically on how it is viewed by the counselor. All three sites demonstrated varying levels of Montessori implementation. Site A was only partially implementing Montessori while Site B and C which appeared to be making a concerted effort to incorporate Montessori as much as possible into the entire fabric of the school.

Site A has a beautiful new school building less than three years old. The building was clean and well maintained with a full complement of Montessori materials in every classroom. Soft lighting and a pleasant waiting area greeted visitors in the front office. The walls were decorated with many materials found in a traditional setting; animated characters, charts of progress on the number of books read in individual classrooms, etc. The traditional Montessori multi-age grouping of six-to-nine year olds and nine-to-twelve year olds was not being used for third and fourth graders at the school. Instead they were grouped according to individual grade level. The researcher observed that few of the third and fourth graders were working with Montessori materials. The vast majority of them were working in test preparation workbooks. The counselor noted that test preparation begins for these children in January, and work with the Montessori didactic materials drops off as the year progresses. The counselor also noted that although many of the teachers had been Montessori certified at the time the school converted to a Montessori curriculum, many had left and had been difficult to replace. She was unsure how many of the teachers were currently Montessori trained at the time of the site visit. Although the visit occurred mid-morning, several of the rooms were empty because

children were at music, physical education or art classes. Children moved in class groups quietly through the corridors. The principal did not have Montessori training, and the school has not participated in the Association of Public Montessori schools in their state.

Site B is housed in an older building with a new addition. Again, the building was clean and well maintained. Several fountains and several bird cages with parrots and cockatiels greeted the researcher in the entrance lobby. Children were observed feeding and caring for the birds during the site visit. All of the rooms, including the staff washroom, had been carefully decorated with wallpaper borders, curtains, and various works of art. All of the rooms from pre-K to third grade were equipped with a full complement of Montessori materials. Most of the rooms were free of extraneous clutter, and the furniture was carefully arranged to create different curriculum areas. The researcher visited several rooms including one where all of the children were independently and actively engaged in work. None of the children approached the counselor or the researcher during the brief visit. They did not seem to notice the adults. The teacher was seated on the floor at a rug and was delivering a traditional Montessori lesson to two children. One child who was having difficulty working independently was seated immediately to her right. The researcher observed a group of children gardening in the school courtyard. Some classrooms were empty because children were at art, music or P.E., but the majority were observing an uninterrupted morning work-cycle. Most of the faculty through grade three were Montessori trained or certified, and the fourth and fifth grade teachers were training in preparation for conversion from traditional curriculum delivery to a Montessori program. The principal and assistant

principal were not Montessori trained. The school participated in an annual meeting in 2003 for all of the public Montessori schools in the state.

As is true of Site A, Site C is a brand new building. Clean and well-maintained, it was cheerful and bright at the time the researcher visited. Very little material of any kind was present on the walls, and several rooms had material that had recently been moved into the building and looked as though it had not yet found a permanent home. The classrooms were designed to be adjacent to small observation rooms so that parents and other educators can observe activity in the classroom unobtrusively. Many of the rooms were carefully and beautifully arranged, and all had a full complement of Montessori materials. The researcher was able to speak to two veteran Montessori faculty members who had fourth and fifth grade combined classes. Their children were working independently while they spoke to me and there was a constant low-level hum of activity in the classrooms. The curriculum coordinator at this site is a veteran Montessori educator and researcher. The principal is not Montessori trained.

Perceived differences between Montessori and traditional curriculum delivery.

All three counselors acknowledged the differences Montessori pedagogy had with more traditional school settings. The Site B counselor commented, "It's like every child had their own IEP." The counselor at Site C echoed that, "It's not a cookie cutter thing. It helps develop the individual." At Site A the counselor felt there were some benefits for particular students. "It allows wiggly little boys to move more freely around the classroom. They do not have to sit still for a long time."

In contrast, none of the counselors felt there was any difference between the type of interaction with Montessori faculty and faculty who were operating in a traditional

environment. There were no differences noted in the amount of teacher consultation, for example.

At Site B and C the counselors felt Montessori did not lessen the amount of referrals, but reduced a particular type. “Grace and Courtesy lessons develop character,” noted the counselor at Site C. Site B counselor stated that the amount of referrals for academics was the same as before the school had converted to Montessori, but that referrals for behavior had dropped, attributing that to Grace and Courtesy in the classroom. The counselor at Site A felt that Montessori was particularly strong in the areas of multiculturalism and peace education. “The children are more tolerant of each other.”

None of the counselors were Montessori trained, but at Site A the counselor had received Montessori paraprofessional training. None of the counselors spoke of using Montessori pedagogy in working with students. There was no mention of creating or placing Montessori work in the classrooms that presented aspects of guidance curriculum. Grace and Courtesy were mentioned specifically by name at Sites B and C, but in the context of delivery by the classroom teacher rather than by the counselor. Indeed, the counselor at Site A was using traditional guidance materials to deliver in-class guidance lessons. None of the spaces used by the counselor in any of the schools were prepared in Montessori fashion with shelves of materials arranged for students to use during counseling sessions.

Other major themes

Testing. Student assessment was mentioned as a major component in the activities of all three counselors. At Site A, the counselor felt very overwhelmed by the task and the amount of her time that was consumed by test coordination. “I don’t do anything else for the last six weeks of school,” she commented. At Site C, the counselor did not participate in standardized test coordination, but tested students individually for psychoeducational issues. Still, he felt he “had to drop a lot of things at the end of the year, “ to do this testing. “Parents and teachers want test modifications in place before the EOGs, so there is a big last minute rush.” The same counselor also felt there was too much emphasis on testing state-wide. Site B had developed ways to cope with this issue. Although the principal seemed a bit apologetic that the counselor there had to be responsible for test coordination; “It’s not a counseling thing, but it’s important to know where the child is academically,” the counselor saw test expertise as an important service she had to deliver. By using specialized software to create individual unit tests for teachers on demand, teachers were able to have additional confirmation of individual student progress throughout the year. The counselor worked closely with teachers to interpret on-going results. She viewed test scores as an important portion of the overall picture of the individual student.

Flexibility. All three of these individuals were required to be highly flexible with the ability to multi-task and use a variety of skills. This was repeatedly expressed and observed by the researcher. This was succinctly expressed by the counselor at Site C who stated right at the beginning of the interview, “I’m Miscellaneous Man.” None of the counselors espoused a specific counseling philosophy, although the counselors at

Sites A and B mentioned Adlerian principals as something they particularly liked. All three stated they drew from a variety of philosophies depending on the situation and the particular individual they were working with. All three also noted the changing climate of the school: "We've been doing this for four years and we're learning as we go." (Site B) "Every year is different, and to me, that's what I love about working here." (Site C)

Sometimes this flexibility requires operating outside of the traditional school counselor boundaries whether it requires providing transportation home for children, creating test materials, or operating a recycled shoe closet. "We do what it takes to get these kids educated and successful." (Site B)

A positive attitude about Montessori. All three counselors expressed positive attitudes about Montessori philosophy and pedagogy. At Site A, Montessori had become the school program through efforts by members of the local community who were attempting to improve a failing school. In addition to the positive aspects of multiculturalism and peace education mentioned earlier, the counselor saw academic strengths as well: "The children have improved academically since the school became Montessori." Site B became a Montessori school as a result of the work of a School Improvement Team (SIT). The counselor was part of that team and noted that the SIT chose Montessori because "this is what we thought would help these particular children." The counselor also sees an increased awareness of child development in faculty since Montessori training, and sees Montessori as serving all different types of children: "It fits more than it doesn't." At Site C the school converted to Montessori to create a magnet program that would diversify the population of a low-performing school. The counselor appreciates the way Montessori assumes that all children can learn. He also perceives

Montessori as “having the reputation of being a fix-it for children who have failed other places.” However, he feels that, “Montessori helps the vast majority of those children, especially when they are young.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Across a deep but narrow canyon

The researcher is struck by the enthusiasm all of these counselors demonstrated for their jobs that require a great deal of them against long odds. There is no doubt that all three professionals were very important to their school communities. Sites A and B required the counselor to perform a great deal of intervention in the context of poverty and lack of social work support. At Site C the counselor also spent a great deal of time with intervention due to his dual role as school counselor and school psychologist. The additional duties of testing coordination, transportation coordination, and other miscellaneous duties took a great deal of remaining time. That being said, all three sites took the opportunity to provide preventative services where they could.

Montessori provides a natural starting point for a school counselor to become truly integrated with the classroom environment and strengthen social/emotional development, career development, and academic development. As stated in Chapter 2, Dr. Montessori felt that there was no greater task for the classroom teacher than to develop the character of each student. Dr. Montessori certainly saw Grace and Courtesy as part of this character development, but also viewed industry, independence, concentration and control as components to the overall psychological development of children. Moreover, she viewed the teacher as the single individual outside the family who must facilitate this specific psychological development before the child will master the ability to create the areas of knowledge that we measure on standardized tests. To some counselors this would seem to be an ideal situation; faculty who understand what

particular aspects of children school counseling is concerned with, and counselors who are available to strengthen work that is being done every day in the classroom.

We saw the seeds of this partnership in these schools. All three counselors were supportive of Montessori. All three seemed to have a basic grasp of how Montessori develops independence, individual development, multiculturalism and Grace and Courtesy. Yet there still seems to be a disconnect. There are several reasons why this is the case:

Differences in language. All technical specialties have unique terms and patterns of language, and Montessori is no exception. These specialized terms allow all parties engaged in a specialized activity to communicate effectively regarding specific concepts and also provide organizational cohesiveness. These shared patterns of language and terminology between disciplines in the school will be referred to here as language congruence.

The counselors in this study made very little use of Montessori terminology when speaking with the researcher about the school and activities in the classroom. This did not occur because the researcher was perceived as an outsider; the researcher told each participant that they had a long association with Montessori as a parent and educator. Even when the counselors were speaking with other faculty members, the faculty used Montessori terminology but the counselors did not engage in the same habit.

Particularly absent at each site was use of the term *normalization*. As the researcher commented to one counselor that the room they had just visited had been beautifully normalized, the counselor's facial and verbal reaction seemed to indicate that she was unfamiliar with the term. As normalization is a term to describe the behavior

and attitude of the child in the classroom which is considered to be optimal, its absence was noticeable.

It is possible that a lack of congruence in language illustrates a desire on the part of the counselor or of the staff to create a line of demarcation between *what you do* and *what I do*. It was not an indication of staff collegiality. Two of the counselors were very collegial with their colleagues and interacted with them cheerfully and frequently as we toured the school. At one school in particular inside jokes and personal information was often exchanged indicating that the friendliness was more than just a show for the visitor. At the remaining site the counselor hardly interacted with staff at all. Despite this difference, the level of language congruence was approximately the same for each site.

If people in a specialized setting, in this case a public Montessori school, are not using the same terminology and patterns of language, it is possible that they are not operating to achieve a common goal with the same ideas of how to do it. It may be that the counselors in this study are lacking a good working knowledge of the Montessori Method and Montessori pedagogy.

Lack of training. If the counselors in this study were lacking a good working knowledge of Montessori, it may be because of a lack of training. One counselor received Montessori paraprofessional training at a Montessori accredited training facility at the beginning of her tenure at the school. Another counselor had read Montessori theory and watched some videos. The remaining counselor had received no training at all. Despite the fact that school counselors in the state where these schools are located have a specific state mandated curriculum to deliver, the three counselors in this study were not prepared to deliver this curriculum according to Montessori pedagogy. Not

being able to deliver the curriculum personally also prohibited them from designing curriculum for staff members to deliver and for children to use. Therefore, an important opportunity for indirect preventative service is lost. Furthermore, as professionals who are trained with the Montessori theory of character development, faculty may step in to delivery guidance curriculum that is not aligned with state standards.

Contemporary societal issues. Maria Montessori began her work with the poorest most deprived children in Rome. Still, we face issues in schools today that she was unacquainted with. Her writings and theory provide specific procedures and structures for working with children, but they do no cover all eventualities. Montessori teachers may be perplexed about how to work with a child who has difficulty maintaining a normalized attitude and normalized behavior. In that case, they will require the assistance of a special education teacher or the school counselor, but may not approach the assistance as a consultation or collaboration but rather as an issue to be assumed by the other party. To of the counselors spoke of children who were “handed off” because they had disabilities that created ongoing issues in the classroom and the faculty member did not know how to cope. In this case again an opportunity for service delivery is lost because if the counselor and the faculty member are able to collaborate about a child, and find strategies that are consistent with Montessori, the faculty member may be able to develop some skills to assist another child in the classroom setting before turning to the counselor.

Public Montessori simply as a method to deliver curriculum. There are times when Montessori is implemented in a public school but is seen as a method to deliver curriculum rather than a philosophy that is integrated throughout the entire school.(Kahn

et al., 1999) This seemed to be the case at one particular school in this study. When the school is structured in that manner, the concepts of normalization and Grace and Courtesy easily fall by the wayside. Traditional methods of guidance programming are substituted for an aspect of Montessori and the opportunities it affords for both the school counselor and the faculty to create a learning environment that maximizes student potential. In this setting the school counselor may be very effective, but there is no reason to explore what benefits Montessori may have to offer to the guidance program.

The gap between the Montessori model and public Montessori. This study makes a distinction between Montessori education and *public* Montessori schools. Public Montessori brings with it a group of built-in issues that do not align with the ideal Montessori model school, but which must exist. All three schools in this study were dealing with these issues, the most salient for the school counselor being standardized testing and the Montessori philosophy of the Principal.

Standardized assessment flies in the face of the type of qualitative student assessment that Dr. Montessori and traditional Montessori educators espouse. Yet it is a necessary and growing focus on all public schools. Two different reactions at two different sites in this study illustrate differing ways to deal with assessment. At one location, test preparation began midway in the school year. Children began using standardized materials as opposed to working individually to prepare for state-wide testing. Although it is not congruent with Montessori philosophy, it is a method many schools choose to increase test scores and thereby demonstrate competencies that are important for funding and teacher pay. Another site in this study chose an entirely different approach. Children were assessed all year long in a method similar to those that

would be used on a school-wide basis at the end of the year. These tests were individualized and substituted for other methods of test preparation. In addition they allowed teachers to have an on-going idea of the progress individual students were making. While the assessment method itself is not congruent with Montessori philosophy, the individual approach is. At this site the researcher visited before the first third grade class were to take the first state-wide test as Montessori students, and the results were unavailable at the time this thesis was written. Because the counselor was involved in creating and interpreting these tests, an opportunity was taken to consult with teachers about the individual academic development of students.

Testing and assessment is an area of great concern to school principals as previously stated, test results can have a huge impact on the perception and function of an individual school. The school principal supervises and also works closely with the school counselor and is the professional in the school who is crucial to the success of a comprehensive school guidance program. (Ponec, 2000) Although there are a few training programs for Montessori administrators in the United States, there certainly are not many public Montessori school principals who have Montessori training or certification. The lack of this additional credential may have an impact on the level of Montessori integration in the school setting.

Implementing Montessori fully in a school setting takes a leap of faith on the part of many school administrators. Much of what is part of Montessori is unfamiliar to school Principals. Montessori does not make great use of text books, groups children in multi-age settings, and does not encourage punishment, reward and competition to encourage positive student behavior. No widespread models exist to reconcile special

education requirements with an inclusive classroom where children are not supposed to be interrupted during a morning work-cycle to leave the room and pick up another activity at another location. Particularly when the principal remains after a school has been converted to Montessori, it may be a struggle for the principal to make that leap of faith. As a result, the climate is not created where language becomes congruent, counselors are trained in Montessori, they are encouraged to collaborate with teachers to solve issues in the classroom setting, and the aspects of Montessori beyond delivery of academic curriculum are implemented and encouraged to grow.

Limitations of this study

Given the small sample size and specific locations of this study, it cannot be generalized to other elementary schools or other public Montessori schools. It is also important to note that the researcher has been associated with Montessori in the public sector for over ten years as a parent, educator, and school board member. Although that information was given to participants in the study, it was simply stated and not elaborated on so that a collegial environment for interviewing would occur, but so that bias would be minimized.

Suggestions for further research

A similar study on a larger scale over a greater period of time would serve to confirm or refute the findings here. It might also yield trends for a model of how to implement a balanced comprehensive guidance program in public Montessori schools.

Quantitative studies on the effectiveness using guidance materials prepared as Montessori works in elementary school settings would also begin to measure the

effectiveness of using an indirect method for providing preventative services to children on an ongoing basis.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

SCHOOL COUNSELING IN PUBLIC MONTESSORI ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Pamela Mecca Seymour, Principal Investigator

Dr. Stanley Baker, Faculty Sponsor

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to collect primary data on the role of elementary school counselors in a public Montessori setting.

INFORMATION

1. Study participation will require two days. The first day the principal investigator/researcher will shadow the school counselor and record the activities the counselor engages in and their duration. In order to preserve confidentiality, the researcher will not participate in any confidential meetings or sessions with students. These activities will be recorded generically (ie: "Individual Counseling Session - 9:45 - 10:15"). The second day will consist of a structured interview with the school counselor and an administrator to further determine the nature of the role the school counselor fills at each site.
2. The estimated participation time for the school counselor is 9 – 10 hours. Eight hours devoted to shadowing, and 1-2 hours for the structured interview. The estimated time for participation by a school administrator is 30 minutes to one hour for a structured interview.

RISKS

The foreseeable risks of participating in this study are minimal. Subjects may become nervous disclosing their routine tasks during a typical workday, and may become uncomfortable disclosing information and opinions about their job and their school. Because the public Montessori professional community is small, some people might be able to deduce the school and subjects being described in the study. To minimize this risk, subjects and schools will be given fictitious names, and factors that might identify a particular school will be kept generic and minimal.

BENEFITS

Benefits of this research are anticipated to be the beginning of a dialog of the role of school counselors in public Montessori elementary schools, with the ultimate benefit of a standard philosophy and method of practice that correlates with Montessori theory.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study.

COMPENSATION

There is no compensation provided for participation in this study.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Pamela Mecca Seymour, at North Carolina State University, Room 520, Poe Hall, Box 7801, or at 919 637 5778. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Matthew Zingraff, Chair of the NCSU IRB for the Use of Human Subjects in Research Committee,

**Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/513-1834) or Mr. Matthew Ronning, Assistant Vice Chancellor,
Research Administration, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/513-2148)**

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Subject's signature_____ Date _____

Investigator's signature_____ Date _____

APPENDIX B

COUNSELOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did you come to be the school counselor at this school?
2. Can you describe how you interact with children on a daily basis?
3. How do you interact with faculty and staff?
4. What about parents?
5. What are some of the basic beliefs and philosophies you hold about elementary school counseling?
6. How do you see your role in this school in relation to the role of a school counselor in a traditional public elementary school? In this case, think of traditional as a graded system where students stay with one teacher for a year, participate in the same activities during the day as other students in their particular large group (i.e.: we all do math at 10:30 am), work is not completed primarily through the use of manipulative materials, and the school year is nine months long.
7. What does the Montessori Method mean to you? What do you see as strengths or weaknesses of Montessori education?
8. Are there any other groups or individuals you interact with regularly? What type of contact do you have with them?

APPENDIX C

PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Could you describe the process the school uses to develop its guidance program?
2. How much input do the various contributors to this plan have in the development process
3. How do you see the school counselor's role in this school in relation to the role of a school counselor in a traditional public elementary school? In this case, think of traditional as a graded system where students stay with one teacher for a year, participate in the same activities during the day as other students in their particular large group (i.e.: we all do math at 10:30 am.), work is not completed primarily through the use of manipulative materials, and the school year is nine months long.
4. What does the Montessori Method mean to you? What do you see as strengths or weaknesses of Montessori education?