

School Counselors' Experiences of the Single Diploma: Should All Students Prepare for
College?

by

STACY J. DEHNKE

Under the Direction of Pamela O. Paisley

ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the experiences of eight high school counselors during the change to the single, college preparatory diploma in the State of Georgia. While this study addressed a change in policy at a state level, the debate over how to prepare students for college and career is of national significance. Through semi-structured interviews and constant-comparative data analysis, four broad themes were identified: The high school counselor as academic advisor, "College" is a difficult term to define, Difficulty with the math curriculum: Some students just can't do it, and Frustration with the policy and policy-makers. Findings point to the complexity of how policy is perceived, interpreted, and implemented and the poignant intersection of policies and the core beliefs of those who are required to implement them. Implications for school counselors, school counselor educators, and recommendations for future research are presented.

INDEX WORDS: Tracking, School counselor beliefs, High school counseling, Social cognitive theory, Qualitative research.

School Counselors' Experiences of the Single Diploma: Should All Students Prepare for
College?

by

STACY J. DEHNKE

B.S., The University of Georgia, 1999

M.Ed., The University of Georgia, 2003

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2011

© 2011

Stacy J. Dehnke

All Rights Reserved

School Counselors' Experiences of the Single Diploma: Should All Students Prepare for
College?

by

STACY J. DEHNKE

Major Professor: Pamela O. Paisley

Committee: Diane L. Cooper
Anneliese A. Singh

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2011

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the exceptional educators who have framed my understanding of what public education should be as well as what it means to dedicate your life to the service of others, in order to better individuals, communities, and society at large. Also, to my husband Ben and our three spirited boys, Carter, Grant, and Isaac. While you may not fully understand what Mommy was out doing all of this time, I hope that in the future this achievement will ignite in you a passion for education and for social justice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The accomplishment of this dissertation and Ph.D. would never have been possible without the unwavering support of my family. First, to my amazing husband Ben, whose loving support allowed me to make it through this three-year process. Your encouragement and calm spirit provided a balance to my frantic nature and I will never forget the support you provided and continue to provide as I find my way professionally. Also, to my boys for keeping things light, and for loving Mommy unconditionally (even when she received the occasional B-)! Equally as important in this process were my parents, Joe Carter and Elaine Carter, who provided a lifelong education on social justice (although we didn't call it that), teaching me that all human beings have value and the most rewarding professions allow us to help others find their value. Also, to my Aunt Pat who over the years has been a model of strength and kindness that is truly admirable. To my Uncle Mike whose perfectionism is often the subject of family jokes, but is something that we all strive to achieve in our work and personal lives. I appreciate both of you tremendously!

My committee, led by "The" Dr. Pam Paisley and including the phenomenal Drs. Diane Cooper and Anneliese Singh, was truly a dream team. These women provided enormous support and the highest quality of instruction throughout the program. I learned a great deal about what it means to be an educator from you. Dr. Paisley, you have been a tremendous addition to my life both professionally and personally. We now think of you as family (Ben does love his Pam shirt) and I am honored to have your name signed on this dissertation. Dr. Cooper, you are the rock star of instructors and I can speak for many in our cohort when I say that we owe you an

infinite amount of gratitude for all that you offered us in terms of knowledge, support, and nurturing! You are the BEST. Dr. Singh, you have made a tremendous impact in my life, both professionally and personally. My understanding of the world has shifted because of your guidance throughout this program, specifically in our social justice course. You have given me a vocabulary that has allowed me to bring a voice to those around me. I appreciate your tireless dedication to our program and to our profession. Thank you!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
CHAPTER	
1 Introduction.....	1
The Intersection of Policy, Practice, and the Beliefs of Educators.....	1
Rationale	3
Significance of the Study	6
Purpose of the Study	7
Summary	8
2 Selective Review of the Literature.....	9
Historical Overview of Tracking	11
The State of Georgia’s Change in Graduation Requirements.....	17
The Impact on the School Counseling Profession	18
Social Cognitive Theory as a Framework.....	19
Summary	22
3 Methodology.....	24
Researcher as Instrument	25
Rationale for Use of Phenomenology	28
Study Design.....	29
Summary	36

4	Findings.....	37
	The High School Counselor’s Primary Role as Academic Advisor	37
	The Difficulty in Defining “College”	41
	Difficulty with the Math Curriculum: Some Students Just Can’t.....	44
	Frustration with the Policy and Policy-makers.....	47
	Summary.....	50
5	Discussion.....	52
	Re-visiting Social Cognitive Theory as a Framework.....	53
	Implications for School Counseling.....	55
	Limitations	59
	Implications for Future Research.....	60
	Summary.....	61
	REFERENCES	64
	APPENDICES	
	A Consent Form.....	70
	B Interview Protocol.....	72

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

When Roger Bannister began training for the 4-minute mile, few believed he could conquer it. Bannister himself was not all that convinced, but he is quoted as having said many times, "I knew my trainer believed in me and I couldn't let him down." On May 6, 1954, he became the first person in the world to break the 4-minute barrier with a 3:59.4 mile. Without having read a word of academic research, many people would agree that the expectations placed upon them can positively or negatively affect their performance. When asked about favorite teachers or coaches in school, some might respond with a narrative about a math teacher or basketball coach who believed in them and as a result, they believed in themselves and performed accordingly. Research supports this idea. People with high self-efficacy expect success, which often leads to success itself (Bandura, 1997). Therefore, if expectations affect student achievement (Rist, 2000; Usher & Pajares, 2006), it is imperative that educators continuously evaluate their own beliefs about student capabilities and how those expectations impact the students they are called to serve (Grimmett, 2003). Of equal importance, and an issue not represented in the educational literature thus far, are how beliefs and expectations are conveyed through educational policies and the translation of policies to practice (Grimmett, 2003).

The Intersection of Policy, Practice, and the Beliefs of Educators

The implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation in 2001 highlighted glaring disparities in how students are educated and positioned for success in schools across the

country (NCLB, 2001). What research had been declaring for years (Braddock & Slavin, 1992; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Oakes, 1985, 2005; Pigford, 1990), the Federal Government began formally acknowledging, that not all students were given access to a quality education (NCLB, 2001). Prior to NCLB, research pointed to the practice of tracking as a significant contributor to educational disparities and the gap in achievement between students of color, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and white students and those from more affluent backgrounds (Oakes, 1985, 2005). Tracking meant placing students in tiered courses and diploma types where the quality and delivery of content varied greatly (Oakes, 1985, 2005), providing some students with a higher quality education than those in lower level tracks, who received less in both quality and quantity of instruction (Braddock & Slavin, 1992; Rist, 2000). Recently, fueled by federal regulations through NCLB and research highlighting the detrimental effects of tracking, schools were urged to implement policies that moved away from tracking and toward more streamlined curricula that provided all students with access to the knowledge and skills necessary to prepare for college and career (The College Board, 2010; Georgia Department of Education, 2008; NCLB, 2001).

Since the implementation of NCLB, states, school districts, and local schools have translated the legislation into more specific policies in order to best meet the needs of students, preparing them for success in their academic and professional endeavors (NCLB, 2001). The State of Georgia, for example, recently introduced the Georgia Performance Standards, requiring schools to provide a more rigorous curriculum to all students. At the system and local school level, phrases like “meeting the needs of ALL students” and “providing a world class education for ALL students” began surfacing in mission statements and philosophies nationwide. Raising expectations for all students was the hallmark of NCLB and is the continued mission of President

Obama, as outlined in his blueprint for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (US Department of Education, 2010). While few educators would argue with this mission being laudable, how it should actually be reflected in practice remains debatable (Steinberg, 2010). Educational policy is complex and dynamic. How professionals interpret and implement policy is even more complex. Individuals who serve students bring to the educational system their own personal history as well as a set of beliefs about how students learn and the extent to which they can achieve (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). These beliefs can be conveyed through both verbal and non-verbal messages to students, fostering either a sense of inclusion and respect, or a sense of alienation and disaffirmation (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004). The encouragement students receive from teachers and others they trust can boost their confidence in their academic capabilities (Usher & Pajares, 2006) and positively impact the choices they make about their future (Bandura, 2001). Therefore, schools serve as an ideal platform from which to boost students' perceptions of what they can achieve. School counselors, as advocates and guides, are in an ideal place to increase the self-efficacy of their student clientele, expanding their academic and professional horizons (ASCA, 2010; The Education Trust, 2010; Hamacheck, 1995). Exploring the beliefs of school counselors and how those beliefs intersect with educational policy is of vital importance, given that counselors hold great potential for impact within the educational system (Grimmett & Paisley, 2008; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

Rationale

A recent New York Times article (Steinberg, 2010) addressed the current dilemma facing educators, policy makers, students, and school counselors with regard to postsecondary options for students. The article, titled "Plan B: Skip College," highlighted a small group of economists and educators who were advocating for *alternatives* to college for students unlikely to be

successful pursuing a traditional bachelor's degree. Naming the current economic and budget crises as reasons to refocus attention on the topic of preparing students for higher education, a group including professors from Ohio University, Northwestern University, and American University believed that short-term vocational and career training through high school programs and corporate apprenticeships would better serve some students than traditional college settings. Professor Robert I. Lerman of American University advocated for federal investment in such training programs. The problem, as he saw it, is that due to budget cuts and attempts to increase rigor in standards-based instruction, vocational and technical programs are being cut around the country, leaving students with fewer options. The debate over how to best prepare students for life after high school has been around for decades (Braddock & Slavin, 1992; Oakes, 1985, 2008a). Should vocational and technical training be supported or should schools focus on college preparatory curricula that prepare all students for college?

The article, "Plan B: Skip College" cited the Bureau of Labor statistics stating that, of the thirty jobs projected to grow at the fastest rate over the next decade in the United States, only seven typically require a bachelor's degree (Steinberg, 2010). Contradictory to that claim, the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Overview of 2008-2018 Job Projections (2010) reports occupations that require post-secondary education are projected to grow at a faster rate (19%) than those requiring on-the-job training (8%). More specifically, jobs requiring a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degrees are expected to grow by 17% - 18%, respectively. The Georgia Department of Education (2008) also pointed out that roughly two thirds of all jobs in the state of Georgia require some form of postsecondary education. To add to the importance of these statistics, college graduates generally earn significantly more and face lower risk of unemployment than those without college degrees, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Baum & Ma, 2007;

National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). More precisely, full-time, salaried workers between the ages of 25-34 with less than a high school diploma earn a median income of \$23,500 annually. Those with a high school diploma earn a median income of \$30,000 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). Few would argue that a high school diploma is necessary to survive financially in today's society. But note those with a bachelor's degree or higher report a median income of over \$46,000 annually (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010); that is almost double the income of those with less than a high school diploma. The level of educational attainment matters, not just in dollars and cents but in the unemployment, crime, prison, and death row rates as well (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). Interestingly, college graduates are more likely to engage in behaviors that improve their own health as well as the health of their community (Baum & Ma, 2007). Societal contributions such as volunteering, voting, and an increased tolerance for others have been shown to correspond to higher levels of educational attainment (Baum & Ma, 2007).

Should all students prepare for college? This question has a renewed vigor due to current educational reform as well as current programmatic cuts due to budget shortages (Steinberg, 2010). The economic and budget crises occurring in school systems and institutions of higher education around the country require a critical focus on what is best for students and how schools can best prepare them to become successful contributors to society. The State of Georgia took a stance on the topic by eliminating the technical diploma from the high school curriculum (Georgia Department of Education, 2008). Currently, students are no longer given the option of pursuing a technical diploma that required fewer core courses (math and science, specifically) and more vocational/technical courses. Now, all students are required to pass the curriculum necessary to obtain a college preparatory diploma. The college prep diploma provides all of the

necessary coursework to attend most four-year universities in the State of Georgia and around the country. In essence, Georgia declared that all students should consider college as an option through a more rigorous, college preparatory curriculum. The change to the single diploma has caused heated debate among educators, specifically school counselors who are responsible for advocacy, advisement, and guidance in academics and postsecondary planning (ASCA Executive Summary, 2010). How school counselors perceive the change to the single diploma and how they perceive postsecondary options in general is a relevant and important topic to explore given the significant role they play in student planning.

Significance of the Study

In addition to the complexity of integrating educational policy and best practices, there also exists a set of beliefs that can impact how school counselors interact with students and the expectations they convey (Grimmett, 2003; Ridley, Mendoza, Kanitz, Angermeier, and Zenk, 1994). School counselors need to be aware that their personal beliefs can impact their effectiveness when working with students (The Education Trust, 2007). “The professional school counselor who believes that not all students should consider college as an option has already placed limits on certain students’ potential, thereby limiting their effectiveness in working with those students” (Grimmett & Paisley, 2008). There is a need to better understand how school counselors support reform initiatives (House & Martin, 1998) and what they believe about initiatives aimed at increasing expectations for all students (Grimmett, 2003). How school counselors perceive the change to the single diploma speaks to their expectations of students. Do they believe that all students should consider college as an option? Should all students be prepared for college? Social Cognitive Theory postulates that expectations affect self-efficacy and self-efficacy affects achievement and career aspirations (Bandura, et al., 2001); therefore,

school counselors are in an incredibly powerful position to either positively or negatively impact the futures of their students (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Exploring the experiences of school counselors regarding the change to the single, college preparatory diploma and whether all students should consider college is thus of utmost importance. School counselors are critical to the successful navigation of the high school curriculum and postsecondary planning process (ASCA Executive Summary, 2010; The Education Trust, 2010). As a result, how school counselors perceive the importance of college preparedness for all students is important to how they serve their students.

Purpose of the Study

School counselors play a critical role in the planning and development of students' educational plans, including course placement and the design of long-term educational goals (The Education Trust, 2010). These professionals need to be integral in closing the achievement gap by encouraging rigorous curricula for all students, particularly those not currently being served (House & Hayes, 2004). The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of high school counselors surrounding the change to the single, college preparatory diploma with the goal of better understanding their beliefs about whether all students should prepare for college. Using a phenomenological design allowed for the focus to remain on the voices of the participants and what meaning they attributed to this phenomenon. By examining the following research questions, this study gave insight into how school counseling practitioners experienced a significant change in policy, and highlighted the complex intersection of policy and beliefs. This study intended to further inform the practice of school counseling aimed at equity and excellence for all students.

Guided by the tenets of phenomenological design (Creswell, 2006; Moustakas, 1994), the following research question was central to the design of this study: What are the experiences of school counselors as they relate to the change to the single-track diploma? The interviews were further informed by the following issue sub question (Creswell, 2007): What do participants believe about preparing all students for college?

Summary

Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1997) addresses the influence that others' expectations can have on an individual's self-efficacy; that is, their perception of their ability to perform in ways that give them control over events that affect their lives. One principal source of information that affects self-efficacy is the notion of "social persuasion" (Bandura, 1994). This concept suggests that people can be persuaded that they are capable of success, and they therefore exert more effort and are more perseverant in their undertakings (Rist, 2000). Likewise, if they are persuaded that they are not capable, they focus on personal deficiencies and develop self-doubt (Bandura, 1997). While this is only a piece of Social Cognitive Theory, it is the component that speaks directly to the powerful influence school counselors have on the self-efficacy and ultimately the achievement of their students. That is to say, school counselors' beliefs about student abilities, whether they are "college material," can be conveyed through expectations (Hamacheck, 1995) that can persuade students to set higher educational and career goals (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Vittorio, & Pastorelli, 2001). This study aspired to better understand this chain of events by exploring school counselors' experiences of an educational policy designed to prepare all students for college.

CHAPTER 2

Selected Review of the Literature

Today's global market, technological advances, and the economy are changing the face of the job market (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). Consequently, what is expected of young professionals entering the workplace is also changing. Roughly two-thirds of all new jobs in Georgia require some form of postsecondary education (Georgia Department of Education, 2009). In 1950, sixty percent of jobs were classified as unskilled, attainable by people with a high school diploma or less. In 2005, only fourteen percent of jobs were unskilled, while eighty-six percent were skilled, professional jobs requiring higher levels of education. As a result of the increased expectations of those entering the workplace, schools are raising expectations for all students. In Georgia, using one state as an example of a national trend, students are now required to complete a more rigorous college preparatory curriculum in order to graduate. By eliminating the "tiered" diploma system (which provided the option of a technical track diploma) and requiring a college preparatory curriculum for ALL, the State Board of Education and local school systems are requiring that students must meet a higher standard in order to graduate, with hopes of better preparing them for life after high school. Under the previous "tiered diploma," the students in the technical track were more limited in their postsecondary options and high school students in general were underprepared for even entry-level college courses (The American Diploma Project, 2006). With the new graduation requirements and a more rigorous curriculum, it is the goal that all students will leave high school with the curricular requirements to enter most four-year universities and be better equipped to enter today's workforce.

The change to the single diploma has caused discussions among educators, parents, students, and policy makers that reveal core beliefs about students and learning. Should all students consider college as an option? Should all students have access to a college preparatory curriculum? These questions are relevant now more than ever, as state and federal educational policy attempts to increase expectations for all students. The heavy emphasis on student learning outcomes necessitates that all school personnel work effectively to ensure that students meet the criteria to graduate and obtain the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in today's job market. Included in the team of educators charged with those duties are school counselors who play a key role in the support of student learning (The Education Trust, 2010). School counselors have an important role in ensuring students' success and are in an ideal position to serve as advocates for all students (Paisley & Hayes, 2002). As a result, how they perceive the current policy aimed at raising expectations for all students through a college preparatory curriculum and whether they believe all students should consider college as an option is important to explore.

The change to the single diploma has sparked heated debate among educators, particularly school counselors whose role is to advise and counsel students on high school curriculum choices as well as post-secondary planning (ASCA Executive Summary, 2010). In light of the current change to the single, college preparatory diploma and informed by a quantitative study on school counselors' beliefs surrounding effective practices (Grimmett, 2003), this study delved into whether school counselors believe all students should be prepared for college and whether all students should consider college as an option.

A study by Grimmett (2003) yielded some interesting data; namely, that eighty-one percent of school counselors surveyed agreed with the statement, "All students should have access to college preparatory classes" but only twenty-one percent agreed with the statement,

“All students should consider college as an option.” (p. 104). The aforementioned study and the data it provided is relevant, given the recent change to the single, college prep diploma in the state of Georgia. Understanding school counselors’ perceptions of this change, as well as their beliefs about preparing ALL students for college can inform school counselor preparation programs and staff development in order to encourage on-going educational reform and effective practices in the profession. This chapter reviews the history of tracking and its impact on student achievement in order to better understand why the Georgia State Board of Education moved toward “de-tracking” and the implementation of a single diploma. Additionally, this chapter explores the role of the school counselor and how school counselors’ beliefs surrounding post-secondary preparation can impact their expectations of students. The final piece of this chapter examines how the tenets of Social Cognitive Theory framed this study; namely, how school counselors and the single diploma can impact the self-efficacy of students and ultimately their academic and career aspirations.

Historical Overview of Tracking

“We must ensure that EVERY American child gets the education he or she needs to contribute to and benefit from the mainstream of our civic, cultural, and economic life. It’s up to all of us to live up to the promise – for our children and our great nation” (The Education Trust, 2009). How we group students for instruction says a great deal about our beliefs surrounding the goals of education, student abilities and expectations (Braddock & Slavin, 1992; Oakes, 1985). Some argue that this practice is a significant contributor to the lingering achievement gap and research points to its ill effects on students of color and low-income students (Oakes, 1985, 2008). While much of the literature on tracking is dated, taking place in the 1980’s to 2000, its relevance is rejuvenated as current educational reform addresses the inequities in teaching and

learning and how grouping students for instruction impacts students achievement and future academic aspirations.

The effects of tracking students for instruction has been studied for decades and most agree that students in the lower level tracks (i.e. technical/career tracks) receive less in quantity and quality (Ansalone & Biafora, 2004; Aydin & Tugal, 2005; Braddock & Slavin, 1992; Hallinan, 2000; Oakes, 2008) which affects student achievement and educational aspirations (Eder, 1981). Additionally, there exists an overrepresentation of students of color and low-income students in lower level courses (Oakes, 2008), making this a social justice issue and a possible contributing factor to the lingering achievement gap between white students and students of color as well as low-income students.

Tracking and ability grouping began during the early 20th century due to an influx of immigrant children into schools within the United States. Between 1880 and 1918, student enrollment across the country increased by over 700 percent and by 1920 more than 60 percent of America's fourteen to seventeen year olds were enrolled in schools (Oakes, 2008). With hopes of a more prosperous life, immigrants and families from rural America moved to bigger cities, resulting in a very different urban population. In order to educate a new group of diverse students, schools believed it necessary to place students in tracks based on ability and past performance (Hallinan, 2004). "Gone was the 19th century notion of the need for common learning to build a cohesive nation. In its place was curriculum differentiation – tracking and ability grouping – with markedly different learning for what were seen as markedly different groups of students" (Oakes, p. 21). Here began the application of society's belief that some groups were more deserving or fit to receive a higher quality education (Oakes, 2008).

Later, grouping students became more “apparently scientific” with the inception of IQ tests and standardized test scores. Additionally, testing affirmed what many already believed, that IQ scores were a reliable prediction of future occupational attainment (Oakes, 2008). As a result, tracking meant dividing students into structured tracks, preparing them for life after high school. These tracks were typically academic, general, or vocational (Hallinan, 2004) and schools were responsible for providing the appropriate training in each track. How effective these practices were would be scrutinized over the next several decades.

Court cases affect tracking practice. During the late 1980’s, the glaring disadvantages suffered by students in the lower tracks became cause for concern for teachers, civil rights activists, parents and policy-makers, who referred to tracking as second generation segregation (Oakes, 2008). This form of tracking made room for segregation and discrimination (Oakes 1985, 2008; Braddock & Slavin, 1992), even after *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954 determined racial segregation to be a violation of the 14th amendment. Courts mandated reform that included “de-tracking” (referring to more heterogeneous grouping for instruction) in order to continue the desegregation of schools (Grossen 1996; Oakes, 2008). In her article, *How should we group to achieve excellence with equity*, Grossen reviewed two landmark cases where tracking was determined to result in a disproportionate number of minority children being placed in lower track courses. In the 1967 case of *Hobson vs. Hansen*, the courts ruled against tracking because students were assigned to the same permanent track for all academic instruction. In this case, the courts found there to be unequal resources across groups and the district brought no evidence to show that tracking was having a positive effect on student achievement. In the second case, *Marshall vs Georgia*, the courts ruled in favor of tracking because the group assignments were flexible and the district was able to prove that this type of grouping for

instruction had positive outcomes on the Georgia Criterion Referenced Test, particularly for lower performing black and white students, due to the individualization of instruction and additional resources provided to the lower performing students. In these two cases, the courts were able to distinguish between inequitable and equitable ability tracking practices. Equitable tracking involved tailored instruction and provided more resources for children in the lower tracks (Grossen, 1996). Inequitable tracking, as determined in the first case, involved sorting students based on perceived ability or past performance, but included an unequal allocation of resources (Grossen, 1996).

Tracking's impact on teaching and learning. What is the relationship between tracking and instructional practice? Gamoran and Berends (1987) discovered more frequent and positive interactions between teachers and high ability students than between teachers and low ability students. Additionally, Hallinan (2000) examined ability grouping and student achievement by exploring whether a student would attain higher achievement if placed in a high ability group rather than the group actually assigned to the student. In this study, achievement was measured based on scores in statewide, standardized achievement tests in English and Mathematics. Hallinan (2000) discussed three determinants of student learning: quantity and quality of instruction, social psychological processes affecting student motivation and a strong academic climate, all of which contribute to a student's overall success and achievement. Specifically, when discussing academic climate and student learning, Hallinan (2000) denotes that teacher's perceptions of student ability are often based on standardized test scores. Accordingly, those perceptions determine the rigor of work teachers provide students as well as level of expectation. Likewise, in a study examining elementary school teachers' attitudes toward tracking, Ansalone and Biafora (2004) discovered seven out of ten survey respondents reporting

that they adjust class presentation according to track. Additionally, 62% of the teachers in the study revealed being able to provide more material to upper-track classes. According to Hallinan, students typically respond to higher teacher expectations by improved academic performance.

Tracking's impact on the achievement gap and educational inequities. The extent to which students' achievements are impacted by the environment where learning occurs is an important issue to explore. Because of the discrimination and marginalization that took place under the guise of tracking historically (Oakes, 1985), it is important to look at the social justice and P-16 implications for current practice. While proponents of tracking argue that it is necessary in order to individualize instruction, Braddock and Slavin (1992) point to the lack of evidence supporting the effectiveness of this practice. Opponents of tracking share the concern that the practice negatively affects low achievers, denying them access to high-quality instruction, undermining the goals of fairness and equity in our society. In addition, research points to the ineffectiveness of homogeneous grouping in addition to ill effects on interracial relations and equity in education (Braddock & Slavin, 1992).

In addition to the social justice implications of homogeneous grouping, it is important to look at the lasting effects of this practice, including P-16 implications for students. When tracking occurs, some students will have access to considerably different kinds of knowledge, resulting in different educational and employment opportunities (Ansalone & Biafora, 2004). Teachers of more advanced courses provide more quantity of instruction and enriched material. On the other hand, teachers of lower groups perceive those classes as needing more structure and greater discipline (Ansalone & Biafora). Tracking also impacts students' academic self-concept (Ireson & Hallam, 2009). In a study including over 1600 students, these scholars discovered that students in schools with rigid academic tracking had a more negative academic self-concept

which correlates with students having negative intentions towards learning more in the future (Ireson & Hallam, 2009). Academic self-concept was defined as an individual's perception of their academic competence. Their study contributes to the questions surrounding ability grouping and student performance as well as a new consideration: future educational attainment. In discussing this potential side effect of ability grouping, Ansalone and Biafora (2004) found that 60% of the elementary teachers in their study either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "Tracking may have negative consequences for future educational and employment opportunities for some students" (p. 254).

One study found that children in higher-ranked first grade reading groups were perceived by their parents and teachers as more competent than their classmates in lower reading groups, regardless of their actual performance in reading (Pallas, Entwisle, Alexander & Stluka, 1994). "These perceptions may structure the educational opportunities that parents and teachers subsequently make available to children, as well as the social-psychological resources they extend to such children" (p. 43). Pallas et al. (1994) believe the effects of tracking "is not that the students actually learn more... but, rather, that they are treated as having learned more by parents, teachers, peers and society at large" (p.31). How educators perceive student ability seems equally as significant as students' academic achievement (Weinstein, Gregory & Strambler, 2004), according to the aforementioned scholars. It seems logical then, if educators aim to close the achievement gap, they must first understand how students are perceived and how those perceptions affect expectations. Ireson and Hallam (2009) supported such a theory, stating that educators "need to be aware that the messages, verbal and non-verbal, that they convey to pupils about the extent to which they and their efforts are valued determine whether pupils perceive the school as having a positive inclusive ethos" (p. 355). Research pointing to the

detriments of tracking is significant and many studies point to a link between these practices and the lingering achievement gap. Social justice advocates are keenly aware of how educational policy can affect marginalized groups of students. In order to promote equity and excellence in education, local, state and national movements calling for higher expectations for all students are gaining momentum.

Federal and State Policy Aimed at Eliminating Tracking. Data pointing to the ill effects of tracking paired with the scrutiny with which schools are examined through No Child Left Behind has influenced changes in state and local educational policy. As a result, schools are required to provide a more rigorous curriculum to all students. Currently, under the guidance of No Child Left Behind, states are working to close the achievement gap and make sure all students achieve academic proficiency (No Child Left Behind Overview, 2010). Due to this legislation, schools and school systems are required to disaggregate data in order to better identify groups of students being underserved. While NCLB is not without its flaws, it has forced policy makers to closely examine data surrounding educational standards and best practices in instruction.

The State of Georgia's Change in Graduation Requirements

With increasing emphasis on data and closing the achievement gap, many states are now looking toward a single curriculum for all students and organizations such as the National Governors Association and the National Education Association are in favor of continuous de-tracking reform. The state of Georgia, with the implementation of the Georgia Performance Standards, now requires all high school students to complete a rigorous curriculum necessary to obtain a college preparatory diploma (<http://www.doe.k12.ga.us>). This means that, while ability-grouping practices still exist within content areas, there is no longer a distinction between

technical diploma students and college preparatory students and students are no longer tracked according to their diploma type. All students are required to pass the following core curriculum: four years of language arts, four years of math, four years of science, and three years of social studies and upon completion of high school will meet the minimum requirements to attend a four-year university. While this change in policy means higher expectations for all students, schools, educators, and families were forced to grapple with how to support students in their pursuit of a more rigorous diploma. How school counselors, in particular, perceived this change was important to explore because their perceptions of the students they work with and the school system in which they operate can influence their effectiveness as practitioners (Grimmett, 2003).

The Impact on the School Counseling Profession

School counselors, as social and educational advocates (Bailey, Getch & Chen-Hayes, 2003), are in a unique position to bring all of the necessary elements together to increase student achievement for all students. An expectation set forth by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), school counselors should support the academic achievement of all students. Additionally, ASCA stated that students will “complete high school with the academic preparation essential to choose from a wide range of substantial post-secondary options, including college” (ASCA Executive Summary, 2010). These expectations of school counselors point to the significance of the school counselor-student relationship. How school counselors perceive the necessity of college preparedness for all students is important, given their influence on student choices surrounding post-secondary options.

School counselor beliefs. A 2003 nationwide, quantitative study explored how school counselors’ beliefs aligned with the professional standards set forth by school counseling’s accrediting body and professional organizations (Grimmett, 2003). Using The Professional

School Counselor Self Efficacy Survey (PSCSES), the study explored many facets of counseling standards and the congruence between those and school counselors' beliefs in four sections. The section most relevant to this study examines counselor beliefs as they correspond to effective school counseling practice. Section three of the PSCSES lists beliefs related to effective practice and respondents were to mark "agree" or "disagree" for each statement. A piece of section three that is particularly interesting found that 81.5% of school counselors surveyed agreed that all students should have access to college prep classes. However, only 21% agreed with the statement, "All students should consider college as an option." In light of Georgia's change to the single diploma, requiring that all students meet the requirements of a college prep diploma, and the apparent dichotomy in the aforementioned statistics, this study aspires to qualitatively explore school counselors' experiences of the change to the single diploma, hoping to highlight participants' beliefs about whether all students should consider college as an option. First, this chapter will examine the link between expectations, student achievement, and career aspirations through a Social Cognitive lens. Research suggests a link between expectations and student achievement (McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Rist, 2000). Social Cognitive Theory points specifically to a link between expectations, self-efficacy, and achievement in the school setting (Bandura et al., 2001).

Social Cognitive Theory as a Framework

The capacity to exercise control over one's own life is at the core of humanness (Bandura, 2001). What social cognitive theorists refer to as "personal agency" is the concept that individuals seek influence and intentionality over what happens in their lives. A shift in paradigm from the behaviorists' view that human behavior is simply an input-output reaction to environmental stimuli, social cognitive theory takes into account social influences and a complex

“throughput” that includes a functional consciousness (Bandura, 2001). In other words, how individuals respond to their environment is intentional and is affected by past experiences, beliefs about one’s capabilities, and how they see themselves within various social systems (Bandura, 2001). According to social cognitive theory, it is the interaction of environmental influences and consciousness, or cognitions, which affect an individual’s self-efficacy (Bandura, et al., 2001). A central component of Social Cognitive Theory, self-efficacy is defined as one’s perception of their ability to produce desired effects by their actions (Bandura, 2002). Perception is the key to this concept, as it is the *perception* of one’s abilities to successfully achieve goals that impact academic and career aspirations (Bandura et al., 2001). Perceived self-efficacy impacts aspirations, the commitment to achieving goals, motivation, and strategic thinking (Bandura et al., 2001), all of which have the potential to influence a student’s choice in academic planning and postsecondary options. Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) addresses the relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievement as well as career aspirations. In essence, self-efficacy points to a sense of control over one’s destiny. Without a sense of control, one has little incentive to act or persevere in the face of difficulties (Bandura, 2002). The SCT literature reflected research on self-efficacy within the educational setting. The higher students’ perceived efficacy to successfully meet educational requirements and occupational roles, the wider the career options they seriously considered pursuing, and the better they prepared themselves educationally for those pursuits, even when studies controlled for past academic achievement (Bandura et al., 2001). So, what impacts an individual’s self-efficacy? First, Social Cognitive Theory supports the idea that school counselors’ expectations affect students’ self-efficacy (Hamacheck, 1995; Oakes, 1985) and that students’ self-efficacy affects achievement and career exploration (Bandura et al., 2001). It is within this theoretical framework that this

study was built. By exploring how school counselors experienced the change to the single diploma, what unfolded was a set of beliefs and expectations around whether all students should consider college as an option and at what level students can achieve.

How expectations impact student achievement. How school counselors perceive the change to the single diploma and post-secondary options for students in general, can influence their expectations of students (Ridley, Mendoza, Angermeier, & Zenk, 1994). Likewise, expectations of students and the learning environments in which they must function can influence student achievement and academic self-efficacy (Ireson & Hallam, 2009; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Vittorio Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001; Hamacheck, 1995). A 2000 longitudinal study (Rist) illustrates this point. The study investigates the effects of teacher expectations in an elementary school setting, revealing how the self-fulfilling prophecy proved accurate in the achievement of students. Rist's (2000) study found that by the eighth day of kindergarten, the teacher had assigned students into three instructional groups and separated them into three tables, accordingly. The children whom the teacher expected to succeed were placed at table one and so forth. Shockingly, after two and a half years of classroom observation, Rist (2000) found that the three groups were basically intact and that there was no upward mobility for any students. One can postulate that students who are tracked throughout high school would have an even more engrained self-concept regarding expectations and learning. In a recent study on students' academic self-concept, Ireson and Hallam (2009) found that students with low academic self-concept had negative intentions towards learning more in the future. The question is then, while policy changes such as the current move to the single diploma dictates what schools must offer in the ways of a curriculum, do expectations and beliefs of the school personnel supersede policy? How school counselors perceive educational policy and the related expectations placed upon

students is important to explore, as the result of lowered expectations for some students has proven to be detrimental not only to performance in K-12 settings, but also in future educational aspirations. The following quote from a meta-analysis of research related to expectations eloquently supports the need to explore school counselor beliefs and expectations.

Although literature points primarily to the effect of teachers' expectations on students' performance, there is no reason to believe that the expectation phenomenon works any less powerfully in counselor-student relationships. It can be argued that, because counselor-student relationships are more one-to-one, more direct, and presumably more intense, positive or negative expectations are felt even more deeply. Thus a strong case could be made for the need for counselors to keep a watchful eye on the feelings and attitudes that they develop toward their students (Hamacheck, 1995, p. 68).

This quote is quite convincing and challenges school counselors and researchers to further explore the beliefs that school counselors hold on students' capabilities and postsecondary aspirations.

Summary

The American School Counseling Association's Ethical Standards require school counselors to expand and develop awareness of his/her own attitudes and beliefs affecting cultural values and biases and strive to attain cultural competence (ASCA, 2004). Oakes (2005) also addressed why the perceptions and attitudes of school counselors are important. According to her study, most districts report that teacher and counselor recommendations are used to supplement or replace test scores in order to determine course placement. School counselors

play a critical role in the planning and development of students' educational plans, including course placement and the design of long-term educational goals (The Education Trust, 2010). School counselors need to be integral in closing the achievement gap by encouraging rigorous curricula for all students, particularly those not currently being served (Bemak & Chung, 2008; House & Hayes, 2004). For that reason, it would help to better understand how school counselors perceive the current changes in policy, moving away from tracking and toward a single, college preparatory diploma

The history of the educational system in the United States is filled with policy that underserved certain groups, namely students of color and those from low-income families. In the 2nd edition of *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality*, Oakes (2005) addresses specifically the detriment of tracking practices. She acknowledges the social justice piece by stating, "tracking is something more than a flawed schooling practice – an anomaly that might be rooted out or reformed out of a schooling's structural repertoire. Indeed, it is the social consequences of tracking – sorting students according to preconceptions based on race and social class and providing them with different and unequal access... Thus to understand tracking, one must pay attention to a complex set of beliefs and values, while noting carefully the politics of power and privilege" (p. xii). As education reform attempts to steer away from tracking and toward a more rigorous curriculum for all students, it is important to examine how school counselors perceive such change as well as what they believe about students' learning and their postsecondary option. By examining this phenomenon, this study provides insight into the experiences and beliefs of school counselors surrounding current policy college access, further informing and promoting educational reform aimed at equity and excellence for all students.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Research on the effects of tracking reveals that students in lower level courses receive less in quantity and quality of instruction (Aydin & Tugal, 2005; Braddock & Slavin, 1992; Ireson & Hallam, 2009; Oakes, 1985, 2008a). As a result, educational reform (No Child Left Behind, 2010) calls for schools to raise expectations for all students and to close the achievement gap between white students and students of color. At the local level, the State of Georgia instituted policy reform that deleted the technical diploma and required all students to complete a college preparatory diploma in order to graduate from high school (Georgia Department of Education, 2010). This change affected not only the students who were then required to achieve in higher-level courses, but also the educators who supported them. School counselors, as educational advocates and academic advisors (Bailey, Getch, Chen-Hayes, 2003), were in the position to influence students and how they perceived this call to higher expectations. How school counselors perceived the change to the single diploma indicated what their beliefs were about the necessity for all students to prepare for college. Little research has been done on school counselor beliefs (Grimmett & Paisley, 2008) and there is no research on how school counselors are experiencing current reform focused on increasing expectations through a single, college preparatory diploma. In order to develop an understanding of school counselors' experiences of the change to the single diploma, this study used qualitative methods of inquiry, particularly those of phenomenology.

Because phenomenology relies on interpretations, this chapter begins with a description of the philosophical assumptions and biases of the primary researcher. An important step in phenomenological design, bracketing allows the researcher to identify philosophical assumptions as well as their own experiences with the phenomenon that might influence the research process (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Following an exploration of the researcher as instrument, this chapter proceeds with a description of the theoretical rationale used to guide the study. Next, tenets of phenomenological research are described in order to frame the study and to understand why this tradition is appropriate for exploring the research questions. Finally, the chapter concludes with the design of the study, including the methods used for sampling, data collection, and data analysis.

Researcher as Instrument

Before conducting phenomenological research, it is important to bracket philosophical assumptions and personal experience with the phenomenon in order to better understand the phenomenon through the participants (Heppner & Heppner, 2004).

Philosophical assumptions. Our beliefs about the nature of reality (ontology), how we obtain knowledge (epistemology), and our values (axiology) affect how we conduct research (Ponterotto, 2005). Whether we believe that there is one truth, multiple truths, or no truths will play a role in what questions we ask about our environment and how we go about answering those questions (Creswell, 2007). The qualitative research process began by examining philosophical assumptions and lived experiences as a way of exploring how those assumptions and experiences might impact research questions, design, and data analysis. The researcher adopted a constructivist-interpretivist (Ponterotto, 2005) perspective in that there are multiple realities and multiple ways of knowing the world. This perspective stemmed from a

hermeneutical approach, which maintained that meaning can be brought to the surface through the researcher-participant dialogue (Ponterotto, 2005). Because individuals may experience the same phenomenon differently, they co-construct meaning throughout the research process. As a result, the qualitative researcher used rich, thick descriptions through quotes and themes, often in the words of the participants, in order to provide evidence of different perspectives (Creswell, 2007).

Axiological assumptions refer to the values and biases researchers bring to the study as well as the value-laden nature of the study topic itself. It is here that I spent a significant amount of time in an effort to acknowledge my values and biases and, bracketing them in an effort to understand the experiences of the participants. While bracketing is an important step in order to better understand the experiences of the participants, the researcher can never fully be separated from the research process. Therefore, the use of a reflexive journal and research team (explained further in the data analysis section of this chapter) was helpful in keeping in check the potential effects of researcher bias. The epistemological approach in constructivism asserted that knowledge is co-constructed between researcher and participant (Ponterotto, 2005). Therefore, one cannot assume that biases were eliminated. The process of acknowledging my assumptions and biases throughout the study will be described in the data analysis section of this chapter. To begin though, it is important that I disclose my personal experience with the change to the single diploma and how my experience impacted the creation of this study.

Personal experience with the phenomenon. I have worked as a classroom teacher at the elementary school level for four years and as a school counselor at the elementary and high school level for five years. My work experiences both in the classroom and as a counselor have led me to this research topic. My teaching and counseling experience at the elementary school

level took place in a lower-income school with a large Latino population. It was during that time that I realized the importance of education in preparing students to overcome barriers; both poverty and the oppressive forces that they faced because of their race and residency status impacted their daily lives. I realized that a high school diploma, at the very least, would improve the lives of my students and the generations that would follow them. Without a high school diploma, students face lower earning potential and the difficulties that accompany poverty (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010).

As a high school counselor, I worked with students as they made the difficult decisions on their postsecondary goals, whether they would attend a four-year college, a technical or two-year college, or enter directly in to the workforce. The academic choices they made, in addition to the advisement of their school counselors, played a significant role in what they considered available to them after high school. The classes they took had a direct impact on the options they had after graduation. When the technical diploma was deleted and all students were required to complete a college preparatory diploma, students and school counselors were concerned that some students would not be able to complete such a rigorous curriculum. School counselors in my department began having discussions on whether all students should consider college as an option. Those discussions and the lack of research surrounding counselor beliefs on students' postsecondary options led me to this topic. How school counselors are grappling with the high expectations placed upon all students to complete a college preparatory diploma and their beliefs about whether all students can and should consider college can be explored using Social Cognitive Theory, which explains how self-efficacy and academic aspirations can be affected by the expectations and influence of others.

Social Cognitive Theory provided a rationale for this study as it pointed to the significance of self-efficacy in students' achievement and career aspirations. Because school counselors are in a position to heighten or dampen students' self-efficacy, it is important to understand the experiences of school counselors and how those experiences might be influenced by their beliefs about students' capacity for a college-preparatory curriculum. Through a phenomenological design, the essence of their shared experiences of the change to the single, college preparatory diploma was explored.

Rationale for Use of Phenomenology

Phenomenological studies aim to understand the meaning of a lived experience or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenologists focus on how participants describe their experience and what they have in common as they experience the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The type of research question best suited for phenomenology is one in which the goal is to understand several individuals' shared experiences of a phenomenon in order to develop practice or policies, or to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The phenomenon being explored in this study is the change to the single, college preparatory diploma and how school counselors' beliefs might frame their experience of the phenomenon. This tradition was appropriate for this study, as school counselors were experiencing a significant change in what students were required to accomplish in high school. The beliefs of school counselors regarding the capacity of their students to achieve at high levels was important to explore, because those beliefs had the potential to impact the counselor's effectiveness in helping students (Grimmett, 2003; Paisley & Hayes, 2002). By gaining a deeper understanding of their experiences of this change as well as their beliefs on postsecondary options for students, this

study can inform school counselor training and development and support the reflective process necessary to be effective in this profession.

While quantitative research methods provide educators with important data on the issues facing education (for example, disparities in test scores), qualitative methods are used to answer other types of questions (for example, what is it like to be an English language learner in a predominantly English-speaking school?). Both methods add to the literature with rich information and ways to improve how we serve students. While quantitative methods can tell us if the single-track diploma increases or decreases the dropout rate of certain subgroups, the purpose of this study was to understand how school counselors are experiencing the change to the single, college preparatory diploma and how their beliefs surrounding students' postsecondary options might color those experiences. This study employed the techniques of qualitative methods of inquiry, particularly phenomenology, to better understand the essence of the participants' experiences surrounding the change to the single diploma.

Study Design

In phenomenology, the researcher identifies purposefully selected sites or participants, determines the type of data to be collected, collects data, and then analyzes the data for meaning (Creswell, 2009). In the following sections of this chapter, detailed descriptions of sampling, data collection, and data analysis are provided, all of which are guided by the tenets of phenomenology.

Sampling method. The primary focus of sampling in phenomenological studies is to find participants who have experienced the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007). Sampling, therefore, was purposeful and required that the researcher consider the criteria necessary to find participants who can best inform research questions. The criteria used for

purposeful sampling in this study were: (a) the participants must have been practicing high school counselors during the change to the single diploma (2008-2009 school year to present day); (b) they were able to articulate their experiences of the change in diploma; (c) they were able to articulate their beliefs about whether all students should prepare for college; (d) they consented to participate. Participants were contacted by phone and email with information about the study and to determine if they were interested. Participants were given informed consent forms to sign at the beginning of their interview.

Participants. The sample for this study was comprised of eight practicing high school counselors in the State of Georgia. Seven of the participants were female, six of whom identified themselves as white and one identified as African-American. One participant was male and identified himself as white. Three of the counselors stated that they had over twenty years of counseling experience. Three stated that they had over ten years of counseling experience and two had over five years of counseling experience. While all of the participants were employed by school systems in the State of Georgia, the school settings in which they worked were diverse. Four of the counselors worked in large, public high schools in a suburban setting with diverse student bodies. Two of the participants worked in an upper socio-economic school setting, where over 90% of the student body enrolled in a four year university upon graduation. Two of the participants worked in a school system that served both privately funded students, from outside of the school system and publicly funded students who live within the system's district and includes a wide range of socio-economic statuses. All of the participants were practicing school counselors before, during, and after the initiation of the change to the single diploma.

Data collection methods. The following sections detail methods for access and contact, development of the interview protocol and the interview process, maintenance of field notes, and data management.

Access and contact. Initial contact was made by either phone or email. Each counselor received a consent form including the following information (Creswell, 2007):

1. The right of participants to withdraw at any time.
2. The central purpose of the study and procedures used in data collection.
3. Statement of confidentiality of the participants.
4. Statement of any known risks.
5. The signature of both the participant and the researcher.

Interview process. In phenomenological studies, the process of collecting data is primarily through in-depth individual interviews with as many as ten people (Creswell, 2007; Seidman, 2006). The purpose of the interviews was to understand how school counselors were experiencing the change to the single diploma. Each participant was interviewed using an interview protocol developed by the researcher (See Appendix B). Interviews were semi-structured and took place in a window of 40-60 minutes each. Following the tenets of phenomenology, one central question was asked at each interview (Creswell, 2007): What have you experienced in terms of the change to the single diploma? Following the central question, there were other questions designed to encourage more detailed descriptions of the participants' experiences. Those are reflected in the interview protocol (See Appendix B). Because the researcher maintained constructivist-interpretivist philosophical assumptions, interviews were open to co-construction and participants added their own areas of emphasis to the interview as well. At the completion of each interview, initial thoughts and reactions to the interview were

recorded on a form that included the date, participant pseudonym, and a space for initial thoughts. Participants received, within 2 weeks after the interview, a complete transcription of their interview. This process, called member checking, will be discussed in the section on credibility later in this chapter. Transcriptions were analyzed only after each participant gave approval, through email or by phone, that the transcriptions were acceptable.

Data management. Interview tapes, transcriptions from the interviews, field notes, and a reflexive journal (as described in the following section) were stored in paper and digitally on the researcher's personal computer. Copies of all digital files were also stored on a removable drive. Participants were given pseudonyms and the researcher was the only research team member with knowledge of participants' identities.

Data analysis methods. Data analysis involved co-construction with participants as well as interpretation by the researcher (Creswell, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005) and can best be described as recursive (Creswell, 2007), as opposed to a linear process. In other words, data analysis involved moving back and forth between steps as all of the procedures were constantly informing each other. The following section provides a description of the steps used for data analysis in this study.

Procedures. Data analysis entailed a four-step process. Step one began with the primary investigator describing and recording her experiences with the phenomenon. Step two occurred when the primary investigator read and transcribed interviews to achieve a holistic understanding of the data (Moustakas, 1994). In step three, the research team developed a list of statements from the interviews about how individuals experienced the phenomenon and created a list of non-repetitive statements, treating each with equal worth (horizontalization of the data). These were placed in a code book to assist in grouping significant statements into meaningful units of

information (themes). The research team analyzed raw data independently and then met face-to-face in order to review coded transcripts, examine themes, and identify significant statements to support each theme. In step four, the primary investigator wrote a composite narrative of the themes, relating the essence of the experiences of the participants. This final piece is reflected in chapters four and five.

One measure of qualitative research is the trustworthiness of the study's design. A key component of trustworthiness is credibility, which is described in the following section.

Credibility. "Validation" in qualitative research is an attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants (Creswell, 2007). The following strategies were used to strengthen this study and added to the trustworthiness of its results.

Reflexivity. Reflexivity means that the writer was aware of the biases and experiences that she brought to the study (Creswell, 2007). The process of bringing these influences into awareness began with a statement about philosophical assumptions and personal experiences with the phenomenon. This allowed the researcher to bring to the forefront any ideals that might impact her study design and data analysis. After bracketing those said assumptions and experiences, the researcher continued the process of reflexivity throughout data collection through use of a reflective journal. This journal was shared with the research team to strengthen its poignancy, as team members illuminated any possible biases that might affect the credibility of the study. For example, ample time was spent at the onset of data analysis discussing the personal experiences of the primary researcher with the phenomenon. While those experiences sparked interest in the study, it was determined that it would not adversely affect the results as the primary researcher had only one year of experience counseling at the high school level.

Triangulation of the data. To make use of triangulation, data collection included the use of multiple sources. This included participants from varied school settings and a wide range of work experience in high school counseling, from 7 years to over 20 years. In addition, a reflexive journal and peer debriefing sessions were used to build coherent justification for themes.

Research team and peer debriefing. Use of a research team was important in this qualitative study. Peer debriefing provided an external check of the analysis process (Creswell, 2007). Because the constructivist-interpretivist approach upholds that researcher biases can influence the research process (Moustakas, 1994; Ponterotto, 2005), bringing in others to help the primary researcher maintain balance was helpful. The team provided varied perspectives and asked questions about interpretations in order to strengthen the trustworthiness of the results.

The research team consisted of the primary investigator and three additional doctoral students in the primary researcher's program of Counseling and Student Personnel Services at a southeastern university. All three additional team members were professional school counselors. In addition to the primary researcher, there were two white females and one African American female on the research team. The first team member practiced as a school counselor at the elementary school level for six years and was currently working at the high school level in a large school system in a suburban setting. The second team member was a white female who was a practicing middle school counselor in a large, suburban school system. The second member also had experience as a high school graduation coach and high school counselor. Both of these team members, in addition to the primary researcher, had experience in classroom teaching. The third team member was an African American female, who worked as an elementary school counselor in a large, urban school system with over 6 years of work experience. Each team member had over seven years of experience as school counselors and, due to their diverse school

settings, added different perspectives to the research process. The team member who had experience at the high school level shared her experiences and biases surrounding the change to the single diploma at the onset of data analysis, as did the primary investigator. The two members who had little to no experience in the high school setting added a much-needed “outside” perspective and were helpful in transcript analysis. The entire research team was used to assist in the analysis of transcripts and the development of themes through constant comparison. Constant comparison involved the ongoing comparison of themes among team members and across transcripts. The research team also helped in researcher reflexivity; the primary researcher kept a reflexive journal throughout data collection and analysis and shared any poignant entries or concerns with the research team. This provided aid in keeping biases at the forefront of data analysis.

Member Checking. This step in the data collection and analysis process is one of the most critical for establishing credibility. The primary researcher took data analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they could assess the credibility and accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2007). Member checking provided the opportunity for participants to judge the accuracy of the transcriptions as well as the credibility of the interpretations (Moustakas, 1994). Raw transcripts were sent to each participant within two weeks of the interview date. Participants reviewed the transcripts and were asked to make any changes they felt were needed. All participants gave the primary researcher their approval to use the transcripts in their initial form and no changes were made. Additionally, the primary researcher sent, via email, a copy of the final code book that included the major themes and sub themes. Participants were also given the opportunity to read chapters four and five of the dissertation in

order to share results and implications so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the accounts.

Description. When qualitative researchers use rich, thick descriptions of participants' experiences, transferability to similar settings and participants becomes possible. These detailed descriptions enable future researchers and practitioners to transfer the information to other settings (Creswell, 2007), widening the impact of the study.

Summary

Using a phenomenological approach, this study aspired to understand the experiences of high school counselors who were experiencing the change to the single, college preparatory diploma. Using a credible, qualitative design, this study can inform the body of literature on tracking and school counselor beliefs, both of which have the potential to impact students' self-efficacy, achievement, and future aspirations (Bandura, et al., 2001).

CHAPTER 4

Findings

The goal of phenomenology is to reach the “essence” of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007) through the experiences of the participants. This is conveyed in the findings through textural descriptions (*what* the participants experienced) and structural descriptions (*how* it was experienced) using verbatim examples from the participants (Creswell, 2007). Finally, a composite narrative, presented in the summary of this chapter, incorporates both the textural and structural descriptions and reflects the essence of the phenomenon.

Findings from the data revealed four major themes: High School Counselor as Academic Advisor, “College” is a Complicated Term to Define, The Effects of the Math Curriculum: Some Students Just Can’t, and Frustration with Policy. Additionally, eight sub themes were identified related to participants’ experiences of the change to the single diploma. This chapter will examine the themes and subthemes, using quotes from participants to support the findings.

The High School Counselor’s Primary Role as Academic Advisor

All of the participants listed academic advisement and planning as the area in which they spend the majority of their time with students. This included individual, small group, and large group sessions aimed at increasing awareness of course options, credit checks for graduation, and post-secondary planning. While all participants listed personal and social counseling as part of their role as well, all eight participants stated that getting students to graduation was one of their main objectives. Two subthemes were identified under the topic of high school counselor as academic advisor: First, that the participants’ main goal (of getting students to graduation) has

not been affected by the single diploma but, reflected in the second sub theme, the change has made helping students graduate on time more complicated. Clarifying this seemingly contradictory finding, Gloria stated, “We still do almost the exact same thing, but we have to approach it at a different angle. We want the same end, we want them to graduate and go on, but how we get them to do that, well, we have to use different tactics and different routes.”

Getting students to graduate. While the participants were eager to talk about the change to the single diploma and its impact on their profession, schools, and students, they unanimously agreed that it did not affect their main focus, which was getting the students to graduation. Lindsey shared, “It doesn’t really change what I do because they still have to meet the requirements and they still have to graduate.” Brian similarly stated, “I don’t think my overall objective is going to change which is getting the student graduated, that’s really my main objective.” Pat agreed, “It’s just that now instead of having two different diploma types and keeping track of who’s getting what, there’s just one.” The participants answered the question, “How do you think the change to the single diploma has affected you and the way you do your job?” towards the beginning of the interview. All participants agreed that their main goal of getting students to graduate would not change. The complexity of the phenomenon however unfolded as the interviews progressed. Brian iterated,

As much as I enjoy personal counseling and stuff like that, you know on-going therapy is not really what I’m hired to do. I’m hired to help my students graduate. No, I don’t think my overall purpose for being here is going to change. It is my job to help a student under the old system collect twenty-two credits, pass everything and get out of here. That’s the same for the new system too. They’ve got to collect twenty-three credits but I don’t think that my overall job, now the

information I'll be giving out might be different. But my overall purpose for being here won't change and that is, trying to get students to complete graduation requirements to graduate and go on to college.

While participants do not see the change as affecting their main objective, all went on to explain how it made their role more complicated. This dynamic is reflected throughout the remaining themes.

The struggle to keep students on track. While one set of graduation requirements seemed simpler to the participants as far as record-keeping, the more rigorous curriculum made their jobs of keeping students on track to graduate more difficult. Lindsey described it as a “giant puzzle” where “we have to do a lot of schedule changing each semester now and figure out how to catch all of these kids up.” Brian stated,

Well, I think that it puts really more work on us as counselors because we have to be dealing with more failures. Making stuff up, scrambling around and trying to get an alternative way to pass the classes or make them up within the time frame. Um, which interpret that to mean more meetings with students, parent-teacher conferences, those types of things, transcribing grades from outside of the county. They still want to do their band and their art and those other things. So, I have to help them reach outside of here to grab those things.

Likewise, Gloria felt the transition to the single diploma complicated her job in making sure that the students, teachers, and parents were given the correct information. “We have to be really, really careful in making sure that when we check a students’ graduation requirements, making sure that it’s based on the year that they entered high school. We find that families might

have one student on one diploma type and another student on a different diploma because they entered high school in different school years and they're confused.”

An additional source of complication was in the foreign language requirements introduced with the new diploma. Students were no longer required to complete two years of a foreign language in order to graduate. However, most of the four year institutions in the state of Georgia still held the foreign language requirement for admission. The participants felt frustration surrounding this change and difficulty in communicating it to their students. Trisha shared, “Another hard part of the new diploma is getting the word out to students that two foreign languages are still required for college. Getting the correct information out there is important.”

Participants all reported experiencing some sense of anxiety over getting the correct information to the students, parents, and teachers surrounding the change to the single diploma. Macy agreed, stating

Making sure that the graduation requirements are based on the year they entered high school and keeping those status checks separate so that if you entered on the old diploma or if you entered the class of 2012 and beyond making sure that it's different and making sure that we clearly communicate that and publicize that as well to parents, students, and the community, to the rest of the staff...and the administrators so that everyone is on the same page. What's really confusing is that the foreign language changed and so you always have to say, well it's no longer [required] for the state however if you still want to go to a competitive four year school, you're going to need those two years of foreign language. And that confuses some people.

Of course, moving to a single diploma meant the deletion of the technical diploma. Participants shared great frustration, and in some cases anger, over this aspect and the majority of that content will be shared in the following sections.

The Difficulty in Defining “College”

While participants’ main goal was getting their students to graduate, the change to the single, *college preparatory* diploma implied that all students should be prepared for college. Questions surrounding college preparation for all students contained not only mixed responses across participants, but within each interview participants seemed personally divided as to what exactly students should be prepared for in high school. The two sub themes reveal the complexity of this debate and how, according to participants, theory sometimes felt separate from practice.

Should all students prepare for college? Participants showed general support for the idea that all students should be prepared for college, but with some caveats. Gina stated,

I think all students should be prepared but I think we define that to a certain extent and that the student will define that as well. I come from a college that did not require you to have trig or statistics to get in...and they still don’t! I struggled in school and may not have taken the hardest math in the world.

Pat shared,

You know, philosophically I think that students should have as many options as possible after high school. They graduate prepared for college, they’re also prepared for, theoretically, to go to a technical school, into the military or directly to work.

Trisha stated, “I believe the higher the expectations the school has for students the higher the student will achieve. And when you say college, you know there are different levels of

college out there.” Trisha’s point led to a rich sub theme that adds to the complexity of the overall theme of college preparation and that was, what does “college” mean to the participants?

Preparing all students for college. When asked should we “prepare all students for college”, there remained some ambiguity about what that statement meant. Participants unanimously agreed that college should not be limited to four-year institutions. Lindsey stated that the expectation for all students to attend a four year institution is,

...ridiculous and I think you’re having kids who the skill set that they need is not at a four year school, it’s at a tech school. So why go to a four year school if you’re going to have to find an additional way to get your skill set. So, if you have a plan and it’s not at a four year school necessarily, what if it’s the military?

Trisha shared a similar distinction, stating, “Do I believe that all students go to college? No. But I do believe that they all should be prepared to go into that arena. But I think there are different levels of that and I’m not sure the State recognizes those different levels.”

Adding,

I’m not gung ho on the expectation that all students should prepare for a four year university. I don’t think all students should do that. You know, when I was in high school I mean it was taught to me early on that I would go to college. But I had several friends of mine who attended a technical college and have done wonderful and their careers and financially, probably even more so than me with a six year degree. So, I don’t believe in that philosophy.

On a similar note, Brian mentioned the high salaries of career and technically prepared individuals, iterating, “So what they’re saying is everybody’s college prep material and that is

not reality. Plumbers make more money than I make, electricians make more money than I make, welders make more money than I make.”

Laura continues the college caveat by saying that the push to set a four-year university as the standard is a mistake.

Because I think that’s kind of acting like the two year college is a poor stepchild and the two year college is there for a reason. You know, it’s developmental but it’s also for those kids who just don’t have the confidence to go forward and if they can go some place and be successful then by the time they hit the upper classes they can move on to a four year institution.

In response to the question, “should all students prepare for college,” Macy explained, When you actually take a look at the educational system, there are students who operate at different levels and that’s okay. Because you know what? Some students are going to go to a college but they might go to a technical college first or they might go to a Georgia Perimeter first and that’s okay. They might go into the workforce and then two years later discover that they want to go to a two year school. And it’s just a different path for each student and we can’t keep imposing what we feel like is the most important on those students. Some students are not ready for a four year school right out of high school based on their maturity, educational levels, based on their comprehension of the material. So I think ultimately what we’re doing is taking the students who really needed a couple more years of baby stepping through the tech schools, two year schools, and we’re going to find that we’re actually pushing them into dropping out.

Concern over the dropout rate was iterated throughout all interviews by all participants.

In addition to the higher expectations set forth by a college preparatory curriculum, there also

existed an enormous change in the math curriculum, introduced simultaneously with the single diploma. The following section explores the theme of difficulty with the math curriculum and the unanimous agreement that some students just can't do it.

Difficulty with the Math Curriculum: Some Students Just Can't

While the math curriculum seems separate from the single diploma, all eight participants shared frustration over the expectations placed on students. Macy explains the relationship between the single diploma and the math curriculum, stating,

There are two pieces to it because now not only do they need four years of math, but it's four years of more difficult math rolled out with the new diploma. So you're not only asking for a year more of math, you're asking for a year more of a more complicated math. So it really is trying to piece together and there is no lower level, they all start at integrated algebra. They all have to meet the same standards now.

Participants voiced concern for students struggling to meet the requirements of the new math curriculum. All participants stated in some way that there are some students who just cannot do the math, no matter what supportive measures are offered. Macy shared,

I've just seen students who, despite all of the tutoring, all of the effort, you know simply cannot make it happen. We're not talking about students who aren't trying or who aren't completing the work, not the families who aren't engaged. We're talking about people who are doing everything right and simply cannot make it happen. And those are the ones who need another option because otherwise they're left behind.

Brian shared the same concerns over the new math curriculum and added a personal note, stating,

I'm not a math person... I got C's in algebra and geometry because the teacher liked my family. I failed algebra II with a progression of failures and ended up having to take business math to graduate. Now I have a PhD. That's not bad. So I personally understand math problems with kids. I was one of those. If someone would've told me I had to pass trig to get out of high school, I may have quit and my opinion is we could damage our graduation rates because there are some kids I've sat and talked with who can't do this stuff. And the proof is what's happening with the failures. We need a track to allow kids, like myself, to be successful. Everybody doesn't have to do calculus. I think it's ridiculous.

Participants shared that, with the single diploma, students who could not pass the more rigorous math curriculum had no safety net in the technical diploma and no lower level math courses for weaker math students. Lindsey stated,

I mean the new math is ridiculous. There would be students who would benefit from the technical (lower level) math because that's the math they would be more likely to use. It also gives them more time to get into their technical areas and other activities. But instead they're coming in every day after school for help and we're saying that all kids have to go through some portion of calculus... which I just don't think necessarily has to be the case. I think it's too hard and when there are kids taking the same math three and four times, the same semester over and over, something's not right.

While discussing the frustrations over the new math requirements and the students struggling to pass the required courses, participants also noted the financial burden failing courses places on families.

Financial burden. Macy shared information regarding the cost of course make-ups which families pay out of pocket, if they can.

I can tell you just with the math alone since that has rolled out I've had more students going, we've been keeping tallies in house, we've had more students having to go to summer school, take it online, for that specific math versus what students were having to do with the old math. Students pay out of pocket if they fail. It is either \$250 or \$350 for a semester long class. And when you're talking about the economy we're in, some families don't have it. When you're talking about over four years, and you can't double up on math because you have to take the first year to understand the second and so on. And now students can't make up the classes because of cost. We're having more students coming to us already talking about potentially dropping out or potentially going to our alternative school.

Gloria shared the same concern over the cost of summer school specifically, stating, "Making up failed courses can be difficult, especially in the economy we're in. There were far fewer students in summer school last year and we know that more students needed the course credits, especially in math."

It became apparent, shortly after beginning each interview that the participants shared frustration over the new math curriculum and the lack of a safety net that they previously had in the technical diploma. So, what or who is the target of their frustration? Participants continuously referred to "they" as the policy-makers who introduced the new diploma and the new curriculum, indicating a feeling of disconnect from the people who make decisions that impact participants' and their students. The following theme reflects the feelings and experiences of the participants as they relate to policy and "they" who made the decisions.

Frustration with the Policy and Policy-makers

Lindsey addresses how “they,” meaning the policy makers in the state of Georgia, made a mistake in introducing the math curriculum in ninth grade to students who did not have the base of knowledge necessary to complete the courses.

I think they’re jumping in too deep too fast. I think instead of starting with the group of ninth graders, starting in kindergarten and that particular group after twelve years graduates with that, I think that’s more reasonable. Instead of these last kids, where things changed in I think seventh grade. I think it was both feet at the same time and they really weren’t thinking about what’s best for kids.

Throughout all eight interviews, two sub themes emerged when discussing the policy and policy-makers involved in the change to the single diploma: General Frustration and Frustration over the loss of the technical diploma.

General frustration. Macy iterated the frustration, adding, “You know, preparing students for college is a great idea in concept, however what you have is a policy that’s made by policy makers instead of people who have been in the education system.”

Brian shared feelings of anger, stating

To me this is about politics, nothing but politics. Nothing but somebody sitting in their office that has to justify their salary and create more programs to justify their job. The thing is, we could offer the most outstanding, highest level courses for those who want to be challenged. But why take little Johnny who can’t even do algebra I and tell him he’s got to do trig?

Gloria emphasized the “they” concept, stating,

I think they're doing a disservice to a large group of our students and I've said ever since I've started doing classroom guidance, not everybody needs to be a doctor, not everybody needs to be a lawyer. You know, if we've got a bad cold and our plumbing stops, who are we going to call first? The plumber! And we have a real need for those skills and what I want to see is our students be successful with the skills to go into work.

Embedded in the sense of general frustration over the policy was a more specific source of anxiety over the loss of the technical diploma.

Deletion of the technical diploma. All eight participants referred to the technical diploma as a safety net, specifically. With the change to the single diploma, there was a unanimous feeling that there existed a void, or lack of options for students. Gina, a head counselor in her building, supported the idea of a safety net, stating,

At the last head counselors' meeting they were talking about how there are some people in the State Department of Education who are now re-thinking the one diploma type and considering trying to have at least two different diplomas. Not necessarily a technical, but a general diploma because they're realizing that with one, there is no safety net. You know, when we had two, when we had a college prep and technical, if you caught it in time the technical could become a safety net for those who could not pass the math.

Lindsey felt that the technical diploma could still result in a college education, stating,

You can graduate on a technical diploma and still go to a four year school. It's a different avenue but you can still go. Instead, now we have kids who are so frustrated that they're dropping out. So, it's the complete turnaround because you have parents who are frustrated because their kids can't pass high school.

Laura discussed the policy as it relates to her understanding of the general population in Georgia, stating, “It’s not realistic because if you look at the state of Georgia and the percentage of the population that actually goes to college and then the percent that actually finish college, it’s not the majority of the people. So it doesn’t seem like that’s a good fit for the general population.” Adding later that,

If you have a kid who ends up having some major crisis in their life and everything falls apart mid- high school, sometimes the tech diploma was a safety net that at least there’s still, they can stay on track to graduate. It may not be the same rigor that they were planning on taking but they’re going to be able to graduate.

Macy voiced the same desire to have options for students, sharing,

I personally think that it’s a good idea to have options for students. That the four year track isn’t necessarily for everyone. So to have an option for those students to have, some people just cannot cognitively do it whether it’s because of a learning disability or because of language, or because of something else, to give them an option so that they can get through high school and move on to the next stage of their lives.

Macy was not the only one who mentioned special education and English language learners, specifically, as beneficiaries of a lower level diploma type. Lindsey shared concern for those groups, stating,

I mean, when you talk about mastering a college prep curriculum, it’s what they come in with. Is that also all of the special ed kids with severe cognitive disabilities? Is that all of the ESOL (English as a Second or Other Language) kids who transfer in their junior year not speaking English? I think they’re grouping all the kids together and that’s what we’re trying to steer away from because you want to look at kids individually. So, just like you

can group all kids as being unsuccessful, you also can't group all kids as living up to some perfect standard.

Brian shared frustration with the deletion of the technical diploma, stating,

I've dealt with the kids who've failed math 2, 3, 4 times and good God, we're asking them to do algebra II and trig, it's insane. They're not going to do it. And I see them dropping out. You know, they go to their high class offices and have power lunches and they do their stuff and they don't work in the trenches every day. I've worked with kids and I think a lot of these people who do these changes, they're not with kids. Nobody asked us anything. Certainly I never recall taking a poll sent out to counselors.

Adding later,

There was nothing wrong with the technical diploma. It served the population equally, there was something for everybody. I think the new program is forcing kids into a mold and a pattern that some of them do not need to be in and I use myself as an example.

Nobody forced me to into something with my weaknesses. There are kids who are struggling with this. There is no safety net. There is no safety net, meaning that if I have a senior who fails second semester math four, that student does not graduate. Period. Does not graduate. With a technical diploma, you only had to have three years of math so you can take a shot at the fourth year, but as long as we took care of the technical electives, you can shoot for the college prep diploma, but if they struggled and failed they could still go on to graduate, go to a technical college, move on.

Summary

The participants in this study shared a number of common frustrations surrounding the change to the single diploma; namely, that there were some students who were not capable of

passing such a rigorous curriculum, particularly in math. Some participants cited specific groups of which they felt distinct concern like special education and English language learners, while others noted anxiety for a more general group of students, “those with different learning styles.” Participants felt certain that all students should be prepared for life after high school, but not necessarily college, especially when “college” was defined as four-year institutions only. All eight participants mentioned the value of two-year and technical colleges for some students, who were either developmentally or academically unprepared for four-year institutions. Participants also agreed that having options for high school students was important and that a single diploma did not serve all students. What remained unclear, however, was how school counselors determined who exactly would benefit from a technical diploma. How is it determined who is truly unable, despite all available resources and support, to complete the college preparatory diploma? The fact that all participants mentioned students, in general, who were unable to meet such rigorous expectations emphasized the importance of further examining Social Cognitive Theory and how expectations impact self-efficacy and the academic and career aspirations of students. Further, understanding the context in which school counselors must work is of significance, as they do not operate in isolation from the policies or politics that influence the educational system.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

There exists a dilemma in the current educational system as to how to best prepare students for a productive and fulfilling life after high school (Steinberg, 2010). In order to see an increase in achievement and post-secondary options for students, educators need to raise expectations (Braddock & Slavin, 1992; The College Board, 2007; The Education Trust, 2010; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Oakes, 1985, 2005). But, does raising expectations mean that there needs to be a single bar set for all students to meet? The shared experiences of the school-counseling professionals who participated in this study reflected this dilemma. All participants shared their desire to see students prepared for as many post-secondary options as possible. However, there was consensus that holding all students to the standard of a college preparatory curriculum placed some students, perceived to be unable to complete such requirements, at risk for dropping out. This dilemma illustrates the complexity of the relationship between educational policies and the beliefs and experiences of those required to implement them.

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of eight high school counselors surrounding the change to the single diploma, with the hope of better understanding their beliefs about whether all students should prepare for college. While data reflected participants' beliefs about post-secondary options for students, there also existed a poignant theme surrounding policy and a perceived disconnect between policy-makers and practitioners. In this chapter, participants' beliefs and expectations will be revisited through a Social Cognitive Theory lens. Next, the theme of participants' frustration over policy will be examined through the framework

of ACA's Advocacy Competencies. Finally, limitations of the study will be identified and implications for future research will be discussed.

Re-visiting Social Cognitive Theory as a Framework

The relevance of SCT to this study's results is multi-layered. School counselors have the ability to affect the self-efficacy of their students through expectations (Hamacheck, 1995; Oakes, 1985) and through access to expertise and resources (Bandura, 2002). If school counselors believe that some students cannot complete a college preparatory diploma or attend a four-year institution, is that being conveyed through counseling sessions as lower expectations? Conversely, SCT describes the importance of proximal goal setting; emphasizing positive self-efficacy can only be achieved when students feel the goals are actually within reach (Bandura, Barbareanelli, Vittorio Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996). This component of SCT would seem to support multiple diplomas, as there were students, according to the participants, who entered high school with a variety of educational histories, some prepared for the college preparatory curriculum, and some needing a more tailored academic plan that allowed for less rigorous courses. The question remains then, does proximal goal setting mean lower goals for some students? Or should students who have been underserved be held to the same rigorous standards, but given the necessary support to ensure academic success? Also, should the goal for students be graduating "on time" or should the goal be rigorous preparation? Perhaps there are circumstances when those two goals cannot exist simultaneously. The multicultural competencies, set forth by the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development, encourage counselors to understand and have knowledge surrounding sociopolitical influences that impact the lives of racial and ethnic minorities, further stating that issues surrounding poverty, racism, stereotyping, and powerlessness may impact the self esteem and self concept of

their students (Arredondo, Toporek, Brown, Jones, Locke, Sanches, & Stradler, 1996). While the participants in this study shared concern for students who were unprepared for the rigors of the new college preparatory diploma, the safety net of the technical diploma might be doing some a greater disservice, placing them at a further disadvantage for postsecondary considerations.

SCT addresses the multicultural component of educational achievement, pointing out that, although people can influence their environment, there are circumstances in which that is more difficult; there are some instances in which people do not have control over the social and institutional conditions that affect them (Bandura, 2002). In such situations, they must proxy themselves close to those who *do* have access to resources and expertise; individuals they feel would act in their best interest (Bandura, 2002). No clearer an example could there be of marginalized groups of students, who feel they are not in control of their environment and need to rely on the help of those with access to expertise and resources in order to successfully navigate the educational system (The Education Trust, 2010). School counselors can be the support system in such cases and have the power to position themselves as advocates for those who have been negatively impacted by oppressive systems, including the educational system (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). The question that then surfaces is, should students without a quality educational background be held to different standards, or should they be provided greater access to the necessary resources and expertise? Social justice advocacy recommends the latter approach, suggesting that there are students who require more resources in order to achieve high educational goals (The Education Trust, 2010). Some students face greater barriers to academic achievement due to inequitable systems they have faced over their lifetime (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007) and it is the responsibility of the educational system, including school counselors, to

remove those barriers (The Education Trust, 2010) so that students are able to reach their fullest potential.

Implications for School Counseling

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of high school counselors surrounding the change to the single, college preparatory diploma with the goal of better understanding their beliefs about whether all students should prepare for college. Review of the literature on tracking pointed to the practice's detrimental affects on students in lower level courses, leaving them with less in both quality and in quantity of instruction (Braddock & Slavin, Oakes, 1985, 2005; Rist, 2000). In order to raise expectations for all students in the state of Georgia, a single, college preparatory diploma was implemented requiring all students to meet the requirements of a more rigorous curriculum in order to graduate (Georgia Department of Education, 2008). Results of this study showed that the high school counselor participants have indeed been affected by the change to the single diploma as they attempted to help their students navigate a more difficult curriculum without the safety net of the technical diploma. While participants agreed that students need to be prepared for college theoretically, they shared concern that not all students are capable of completing a college preparatory diploma and that not all students can or should consider a four-year institution upon graduation. Participants unanimously supported the role of technical and two-year institutions, the military, or direct entrance into the workforce for some students. When participants shared their collective support for a technical diploma, they suggested that students who attended a two year or technical college could ultimately graduate from a four year university. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2010), however, only half of students attending a two year or community college, who declare an ultimate goal of obtaining a bachelor's degree, actually

enroll in a four year university. Further, only a quarter of students who declare an associate's degree enroll in a four year university and students whose parents had a bachelor's or higher were more likely to enroll in a four year university after a two year college (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). These statistics suggest that, while it seems harmless to suggest to students that attending a two-year or a four-year institution can result in the same degree, the transition is not entirely seamless.

Utilizing the advocacy competencies. The four themes identified through data analysis (High School Counselor as Academic Advisor, "College", Difficulty with Math: Some Students Just Can't, and Frustration with the Policy and Policy-makers) indicated that counselors empathized with students who were struggling to complete the college preparatory diploma and felt challenged to piece together the academic and scheduling puzzle that was necessary to meet what they considered the major goal, high school graduation. Additionally, participants shared a general frustration for the policy that deleted the technical diploma and with the policy makers, who seemed distant and out of touch with the participants' role high as school counselors. This final component pointed to the importance of the Advocacy Competencies, adopted by the American Counseling Association in 2003 (Lewis, et al.). While participants seemed to have a solid grasp on advocacy at the student and school/community levels, the source of their frustration seemed to rest in the social and political domains. In order to advocate for their students when they felt policies were not supporting academic success, the social and political domains call on counselors to act on behalf of students through use of data and the utilization of allies and professional organizations. Advocacy is an important component of the school counselors' mission (Bailey, et al., 2003; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Lewis, et al., 2003). Results of this study highlighted the potential for further training for school counselors in ACA's Advocacy

Competencies (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2003), particularly in the public arena domain. Participants experienced frustration with how policies are made and how they impact those that work “in the trenches” as Brian noted. ACA’s Advocacy Competencies outline the possibility for social and political advocacy on behalf of students.

Participants shared that the majority of their time with students is spent in academic advisement, including course selection and registration during high school as well as post-secondary planning and goal-setting. The change to the single diploma affected school counselors directly, yet, as one participant noted, school counselors were perceived as not being included in the decision-making process. Instead, all of the participants noted feelings of frustration with how policies are made and how “they,” meaning the policy-makers, are not a part of the system in which the policies must be instituted. The results of this study brought to light an important aspect of the school counseling profession, and that is moving outside of the school building in order to advocate for students. In line with the American Counseling Association’s Advocacy Competencies (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2003), school counselors can operate in a social and political advocacy framework in order to bring their voices to the policy-makers on behalf of their profession and their students. The competencies state that school counselors, when aware of external factors that act as barriers to student development, should respond through advocacy at multiple levels. School counseling preparation programs and school systems can respond by providing a better understanding and emphasis on the Advocacy Competencies, encouraging school counselors to move across domains in order to remove barriers to student success.

Utilizing professional development to examine core beliefs. A 2008 article (Grimmett & Paisley) pointed to the importance of examining school counselor beliefs as there is the

potential for those beliefs to influence how school counselors interact with their students. The tenets of social justice advocacy (Bailey et al., 2003; Holcomb-McCoy, 2004, 2007) and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura et al., 1996) support this line of inquiry in that the beliefs held regarding students' academic capabilities can be conveyed through expectations, impacting their self-efficacy and, ultimately, their academic and career aspirations (Bandura, et al., 2001).

Further supported by the results of this study, school counselors must continuously participate in self-examination regarding what they believe about the students they serve (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004). Because school counselors are not required to complete clinical supervision throughout their profession, this study points to the importance of professional development in fostering a better understanding of how educational policy and the core beliefs of those who implement the policy can ultimately impact student achievement. If current policies are designed to increase rigor, equity, and access for all students (The College Board, 2007; NCLB, 2001), but the counselors who are implementing those policies feel isolated and frustrated, or whose core beliefs do not align with the policies' ideals, there exists the potential for a dangerous disconnect, where the conveyance of expectations are unclear at best, or alarmingly low at worst. School systems, local schools, and school counselor educators have at their fingertips two useful models for professional development in understanding core beliefs. First, and noted earlier in the chapter, are the Advocacy Competencies supported by the American Counseling Association. The competencies provide a framework for rich discussion as well as practical planning in how school counselors experience advocacy within the multiple domains and how to move outside of their comfort zone, to become more effective change agents on a social and political level. Second, Cheryl Holcomb-McCoy (2004) explored the self-efficacy of school counselors using the School Counselor Multicultural Self-Efficacy Scale (SCMEC), and found that if school

counselors do not perceive themselves as capable of performing tasks related to equity and diversity, they will likely avoid or downplay those tasks. The parallelism is important to note. Just as students perform according to their perceived ability to achieve tasks, so do the school counselors who serve them. By encouraging a better self-reflection and an understanding of the self-efficacy of school counselors, school and system leaders as well as school counseling educators can create a useful discussion about how core beliefs impact student achievement.

Limitations

This study examined the experiences of eight school counselors, in the State of Georgia, surrounding the change to the single diploma. While the emphasis on a single policy within a single state limited the scope of the study, the more general rationale is relevant across school systems and settings. No Child Left Behind was a national movement that changed the way educators use data to design and assess instruction (2001). So, the scope of this study was intentional, as the change to the single diploma within the state of Georgia provided a vehicle to explore how school counselors experience change in policy and what they believe about preparing all students for college. Across the nation, however, there exists the same debate about whether all students can and should consider college as an option (Steinberg, 2010). The College Board's National Office for School Counselor Advocacy launched a campaign for school counselors to become active voices and advocates for increasing course rigor for all students, specifically the underserved. So, while the scope of this study should be noted as a limitation, the rationale and central question are relevant on a much larger scale.

While small samples are not considered a limitation in qualitative research, it is important to note that the findings in this study can only be attributed to the participants who shared their experiences of the change to the single diploma. Results should not be generalized to other

populations. Additionally, the study was designed using a single interview with each participant, followed by member checking. While participants were perceived to be honest in their experiences with the phenomenon, prolonged engagement with participants, including a follow-up interview, may have generated a deeper understanding of their experiences. Finally, a third limitation was the unknown influence of response bias. Participants knew that the primary researcher had experience in high school counseling and therefore might have shared content that was perceived as socially desirable.

Implications for Future Research

This study gave voices to school counselors who found themselves struggling to understand and implement a significant change in policy, while developing plans to help their students find success in high school and beyond. The themes that were identified through data analysis points to the potential for numerous subsequent studies. First, qualitative design using case study methodology would elicit interesting and useful data. The schools surrounding the primary researchers' city of residence are large, typically serving over 3,000 students in each high school. The impact of the change to the single diploma on a single counseling department might seem small in scope, but there lies the potential for a large number of students to be affected by how the policy is perceived, translated, and supported within a single school. Second, a quantitative study would be useful in understanding the perceptions of the single diploma on a larger sample of high school counselors, across the State of Georgia, including rural, urban, and suburban school settings. Further, a national survey could be used to look at the broader debate of whether all students should prepare for college. The College Board, The Education Trust, The National Office for School Counselor Advocacy, and the Southern Region Education Board have launched campaigns to increase the rigor in schools to better prepare students for today's college

and career requirements. These campaigns indicate that this is a national issue and not limited to the State of Georgia. Third, a study designed to examine the experiences of school counselors surrounding the use of the Advocacy Competencies, specifically in the political and social domains, would provide valuable input for school counselor educators and staff development coordinators. Lastly, this study pointed to a sense of disconnect between policy-makers and school counseling practitioners. This finding raises an important question; how do we bridge the communication gap between policy-makers and practitioners? If it were possible to identify school counselors who consider themselves proficient advocates in the social and political domains, a qualitative study examining their perceptions of best practices and personal experiences would be extremely useful to the profession.

Summary

The United States, once the leader in college graduates for adults ages 25-34, now ranks twelfth in the world (College Board, 2010). President Obama has challenged the country to ensure that by the year 2020, The United States will once again lead the global community with the highest number of college educated individuals (US Department of Education, 2010). The poignancy of this goal lies within shocking data, that the United States is the only first-world nation whose young adults are less educated than older adults (College Board, 2010).

During the 2009 economic crisis, the unemployment rate for high school drop outs was 15.7 percent, while the unemployment rate for college graduates was 4.7 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). An individuals' level of educational attainment matters. These statistics bring the current debate about how we prepare students for life after high school to a dire level. While the creation of policies aimed at increasing expectations for all students is important, more important is how those policies are being interpreted and implemented on the ground level. How

educators, and in the case of this study school counselors, experience changes in policy and how that affects their work with children is important to explore. Should all students be prepared for college? There exists some discrepancy between how policy-makers and school counselors interpret that question. Achieve, Inc., a group of State Governors and corporate leaders from around the country, feel it doesn't matter. "Successful preparation for both postsecondary and employment requires learning the same rigorous English and mathematics content and skills. No longer do students planning to go to work after high school need a different and less rigorous curriculum than those planning to go to college." (Achieve, Inc., 2010). On the contrary, participants in this study felt that there was a need for a distinct diploma, or safety net, for students who are unable to complete a college preparatory diploma and a more rigorous curriculum. Social Cognitive Theory's emphasis on the effects of self-efficacy on academic and career aspirations possibly supports both views. On one hand, higher expectations improve self-efficacy, improving the range of options a student considers after high school (Bandura, et al., 2001). On the other hand, students who are not successfully completing required courses potentially face detriment to self-efficacy and, participants worried, face risk of dropping out. So how can these views be reconciled so that policy-makers, who want to hold students to the highest standards and practitioners, who want to see students succeed, speak a common language about post-secondary preparation? ACA's Advocacy Competencies point to communication and collaboration between the policy makers and practitioners; between school counselors, who are "in the trenches" as Brian noted, and "they" who create policy. This study's findings support effective advocacy that encompasses continuous dialogue between school counselors and policy-makers, so that policy and practice serve the same purpose, to prepare students for the highest

level of academic achievement, resulting in a students who are ready for the increasingly difficult demands of college and career (US Department of Education, 2010).

References

- Achieve, Inc. (2010). Raise high school graduation requirements. Retrieved from <http://www.achieve.org/GradRequirements>
- American School Counselor Association (2010). Executive Summary of The ASCA National Model. Retrieved on June, 10, 2010 from <http://www.ascanationalmodel.org>
- American School Counselor Association (2004). Ethical Standards. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolcounselor.org>
- Ansalone, G., & Biafora, F. (2004). Elementary school teachers' perceptions and attitudes to the educational structure of tracking. *Education, 125*(2). 249-258.
- Arredondo, P., Toporek, M. S., Brown, S., Jones, J., Locke, D. C., Sanchez, J. and Stadler, H. (1996). Operationalization of the Multicultural Counseling Competencies. AMCD: Alexandria, VA.
- Aydin, E. & Tugal, I., (2005). On the influences of grouping practices on classroom teaching. *Essays in Education (Online Journal), 14*. Retrieved on May 26, 2009 from <http://www.usca.edu/essays/vol142005/aydin.pdf>
- Bailey, D., Getch, Y., & Chen-Hayes, S. (2003). Professional school counselors as social and academic advocates. In B.T. Erford (Ed.), *Transforming the school counseling profession* (pp. 411-434). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Bandura, A. (1994). Self-efficacy. In V. S. Ramachaudran (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of Human Behaviour*(4). Retrieved from <http://www.des.emory.edu/mfp/BanEncy.html>

- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman.
- Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 1-26.
- Bandura, A. (2002). Social cognitive theory in cultural context. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 51(2), 269-290.
- Bandura, A., Barbaranelli, C., Vittorio Caprara, G., & Pastorelli, C. (1996). Multifaceted impact of self-efficacy beliefs on academic functioning. *Child Development*, 67, 1206-1222.
- Bandura, A., Barbaranelli, C., Vittorio Caprara, G., & Pastorelli, C. (2001). Self-efficacy beliefs as shapers of children's aspirations and career trajectories. *Child Development*, 72(1), 187-206
- Baum, S., & Ma, J. (2007). *Education Pays: The benefits of higher education for individuals and society*. Washington DC: The College Board.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010). Labor statistics from the current population survey. Retrieved from <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/surveymost>
- Braddock, J. H., & Slavin, R. E. (1992). Why ability grouping must end: Achieving excellence and equity in American education. Paper presented at the Common Destiny Conference, 1992. Retrieved on June 22, 2009 from www.eric.ed.gov
- College Board (2010). Regional college and career readiness train-the-trainer institute: Guidebook for trainers. Session presented at the meeting of the National Office for School Counselor Advocacy, Atlanta, Georgia.
- Creswell, J. W. (2006). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications.

- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications.
- Eder, D. (1981). Ability grouping as a self-fulfilling prophecy: A micro-analysis of teacher-student interaction. *Sociology of Education*, 54(3), 151-162.
- The Education Trust (2010). National Center for Transforming School Counseling. Retrieved on July 4, 2009 from <http://www.edtrust.org/dc/tsc>
- Gamoran, A., & Berends, M. (1987). The effects of stratification in secondary schools: Synthesis of survey and ethnographic research. *Educational Research*, 57(4), 415-435.
- Georgia Department of Education (2008). Georgia performance standards & graduation requirements. Retrieved on June 29, 2009 from <http://www.doe.k12.ga.us>
- Grossen, B. (1996). How should we group to achieve excellence with equity? Retrieved on May 23, 2009 from <http://www.eric.ed.gov>
- Grimmet, M. (2003). *Endorsement of professional standards for effective practice by practicing professional school counselors*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from The University of Georgia's electronic theses and dissertations database.
- Grimmett, M. A., & Paisley, P. O. (2008). A preliminary investigation of school counselor beliefs regarding important educational issues. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development*, 47, 99-110.
- Hallinan, M. T. (2000). Ability group effects on high school learning outcomes. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association. Retrieved May 24, 2009 from <http://www.eric.ed.gov>
- Hallinan, M. T. (2004). The detracking movement: Why children are still grouped by ability. *Education Next*, 4(4).

- Hamacheck, D. (1995). Expectations revisited: Implications for teachers and counselors and questions for self-assessment. *Journal of Humanistic Education & Development*, 34(2), 65-75.
- Holcomb-McCoy, C. (2004). Assessing the multicultural competence of school counselors: A checklist. *Professional School Counseling*, 7(3), 178-183.
- Holcomb-McCoy, C. (2007). *School Counseling to Close the Achievement Gap*. Thousand Oakes: Corwin Press.
- House, R., & Hayes, R. L. (2002). School counselors: Becoming key players in school reform. *Professional School Counseling*, 5, 249-256.
- House, R. M. & Martin, P. J. (1998). Advocating for better futures for all students: A new vision for school counselors. *Education*, 119(2), 248-256.
- Ireson, J. & Hallam, S. (2009). Academic self-concepts in adolescence: Relations with achievement and ability grouping in schools. *Learning and Instruction*, 19, 201-213.
- Koretz, D. (2008). *Measuring up: What educational testing really tells us*. Boston: Harvard University Press.
- Lewis, Arnold, House & Toporek (2003). Advocacy competencies. American Counseling Association. Retrieved from <http://www.counseling.org>
- Lockwood, J. H., & Cleveland, E. F. (1998). The challenge of detracking: Finding the balance between excellence and equity. Retrieved on May 24, 2009 from <http://www.eric.ed.gov>
- Lotan, R. (2006). Teaching teachers to build equitable classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*. 45(1), 32-39.
- Loveless, T. (1998). The tracking and ability grouping debate. *Fordham Report*, 2(8).

- Moustakas, C. E. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- National Center for Educational Statistics (2010). Retrieved on June 3, 2010 from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d09/tables/dt09_384.asp
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 107th Cong. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/nclb>
- Oakes, J. (1985). *Keeping track: How schools structure inequality*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Oakes, J. (1987). Tracking in secondary schools: A contextual perspective. *Educational Psychology*, 22(2), 129-153.
- Oakes, J. (2008a). *Keeping track: How schools structure inequality* (2nd ed.). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Oakes, J. (2008b). Keeping track: Structuring equality and inequality in an era of accountability. *Teachers College Record*, 110(3), 700-712.
- Paisley, P. O. & Hayes, R. L. (2002). Transformations in school counselor preparation and practice. *Journal of Counseling and Human Development*, 35(2), 1-10.
- Pallas, A. M., Entwisle, D. R., Alexander, K. L., & Stluka, M. F. (1994). Ability-group effects: Instructional, social, or institutional? *Sociology of Education*, 67(1), 27-46.
- Parker-Burgard, D. (2009). Report card shows gains, lingering achievement gap. *District Administration*. Retrieved on June 11, 2009 from <http://www.districtadministration.com>
- Pigford, A. B. (1990). Instructional grouping: Purposes and consequences. *Clearing House*, 63(6), 261-263.
- Ponterroto, J. G. (2005). Qualitative research in counseling psychology: A primer on research paradigms and philosophy of science. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), 126-136.

- Ridley, C. R., Mendoza, D. W., Kanitz, B. E., Angermeier, L., & Zenk, R. (1994). Cultural sensitivity in multicultural counseling: A perceptual schema model. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 41*(2), 125-136.
- Rist, R. C. (2000). Student social class and teacher expectations: The self-fulfilling prophecy in ghetto education. *Harvard Educational Review, 70*(3), 266-302.
- Siedman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Slavin, R. E. (1987). Grouping for instruction in the elementary school. *Educational Psychologist, 22*(2), 109-127.
- Steinberg, J. (2010, May 15). Plan B: Skip college. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com>
- The United States Department of Education (2010). ESEA reauthorization: A blueprint for reform. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/index.html>
- Usher, E. & Pajares, F. (2006). Inviting confidence in school: Invitations as a critical source of the academic self-efficacy beliefs of entering middle school students. *Journal of Invitational Theory and Practice, 12*, 7-16.
- Watanabe, M. (2007). Lessons from a Teacher Inquiry Group about Tracking: Perceived Student Choice in Course-Taking and its Implications for Detracking Reform. *Teachers College Record, 109*(9), 2136-2170.
- Weinstein, R. S., Gregory, A., & Strambler, M. J. (2004). Intractable self-fulfilling prophecies: Fifty years after Brown v. Board of Education. *American Psychologist, 59*(6), 511-520.

Appendix A

Consent Form

I, _____, agree to participate in a research study titled " School Counselors' Experiences of the Single Diploma: Should All Students Prepare for College?" conducted by Stacy Dehnke from the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services at the University of Georgia (542-4142) under the direction of Dr. Pamela O. Paisley, Department of Counseling and Human Development Services, University of Georgia (542-4142). I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at anytime without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of high school counselors surrounding the change to the single, college preparatory diploma with the hope of better understanding their beliefs about whether all students should consider college as an option. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

- 1) Participate in an interview about my experiences as a school counselor during the change to the single diploma.
- 2) The interview will last 60-90 minutes and will be audio taped.
- 3) Someone from the study may call me to clarify my information.

The benefits for me are that I can reflect on my experiences as a school counselor during current educational reform and reflect on my beliefs about college preparedness for students. The researcher also hopes to learn more about the experiences of school counselors during the change to the single diploma and their beliefs about preparing students for college.

No risk is expected but I may experience some discomfort during the interview if the topic of the change to the single diploma is stressful. These risks will be reduced in the following ways: Full disclosure of the study's purpose will be provided before the interview. After the interview, I will receive a copy of the transcript for my approval. Should I want or need to make changes to my responses, I may do so at any time during the interview or upon reviewing the transcription.

No individually identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission, except if it is necessary to protect my welfare if required by law. I will be assigned an identifying number and this number will be used on the interview notes and transcription. The key to the identifying information will be kept on a password secured computer and coded data will be filed on a separate computer. Audio tapes will be transcribed and then destroyed to eliminate the possibility that I can be identified.

The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project.

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

Stacy J. Dehnke
770-985-6172
sjcart54@hotmail.com

Signature

Date

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

Appendix B
Interview Protocol

Interviewee: _____ Date: _____

1. How long have you been working as a high school counselor?
2. Can you tell me about the demographics of your school?
3. What is your role as a high school counselor?
4. Tell me about your experiences of the change to the single diploma.
5. How does the change to the single diploma affect your role as a school counselor?
6. How does the change to the single diploma affect students?
7. Do you believe that all students should prepare for college?
8. Do you believe that all students can complete a college preparatory curriculum?