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School Counselors' Role in Reducing Aggression in Children in Alternative Education Programs

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School Counselors’ Role in Reducing Aggression in Children in Alternative Education Programs

by

Deirdra Sanders-Burnett

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Counselor Education Department of Leadership, Counseling, Adult, Career, Higher Education University of South Florida

Co-Major Professor: Cynthia Topdemir, Ph.D. Co-Major Professor: Herbert Exum, Ph.D. Tony Tan, Ed.D. Jennifer Wolgemuth, Ph.D.

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Keywords: Aggression, Alternative Education Programs, School Counselors

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Dedication

I thank God for giving me the heart, spirit, and strength to achieve my scholarly goal. I thank God for the many blessings he has bestowed upon me throughout my journey to obtaining my Ph.D.

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. I thank my husband Kent Burnett for his unwavering support. I appreciate my youngest brother Charles Keith Sanders, who provided me a home throughout my doctoral journey. My undying love and gratitude go to my parents, Charles and Alice Sanders who set high expectations for me and believed that there was not any task that I could not achieve. I thank them for the many sacrifices they both made so that I could have a better life. I thank my brothers Virgil Sanders, Stephon Sanders, and Bryon Sanders, for carrying on the daily needs of our family as I took a sabbatical to dedicate time to my educational endeavors. My gratitude also goes to Aunt Gladys Smith, for your monthly calls of encouragement and words of wisdom. I am grateful to my ancestors and other family members who paved the way for me to receive a quality education and whose shoulders I stand on.
Acknowledgments

In Godly reverence, I thank him first for life and all my experiences that have brought me to this point in my pursuit of academic excellence. I thank God for the many blessings he has bestowed upon me throughout my journey to obtaining my Ph.D.

To my committee members: Dr. Herbert Exum, thank you for believing in me. Dr. Cynthia Topdemir, thank you for advocating for me and opening many doors to new opportunities. Dr. Tony Tan, thank you for helping me to understand resilience and to connect with my inner strength. Your corrective feedback stretched me to strive for research that could impact the masses. Dr. Jennifer Wolgemuth, thank you for sparking my interest to conduct qualitative research which has led me to write the most important manuscript in my life, this dissertation. Dr. Jeffrey Kromrey, thank you for being my example of a master professor and gently guiding me through statistics. Dr. Marylou Taylor, thank you for seeing my potential and igniting my passion for climbing to higher heights in academia. I am grateful to Dr. Carlos Zalaquett, for providing me with the tools to sharpen my skills as a counselor, scholar, and teacher. Thank you for helping me face my most significant challenges and giving me the confidence to lift my voice. To Dr. Judith Ponticell, thank you for your leadership, encouragement, and support. To all my professors and teachers at the University of South Florida, thank you for your passion and dedication to the teaching profession that enabled me to receive the highest degree in academia. To Dr. Jane Katz, thank you for enhancing my writing skills and helping me to shape my dissertation into a scholarly manuscript. To Mrs. Lisa Adkins
and Mrs. Sandy Turner, thank you for your guidance and providing timely assistance to my numerous requests. Shandale Terrell Ed.D., thank you for your encouragement.

I acknowledge the participants in this research for sharing their valuable experiences and knowledge. To the members of my counselor education consortium, I am grateful for your support. I believe the relationships we have established will last a lifetime. To my fellow brothers and sisters in the faith, thank you for your prayers and encouragement through my journey. To Mrs. Erma Davis, Mr. and Mrs. John Moses, thank you for claiming my academic success. To Mrs. Brenda Richard, thank you for your corrective feedback that enabled me to advance my skills as a writer. To Ms. Pamila Bowman, thank you for your flexibility and collaboration in co-teaching Bible school classes.

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Abstract

Despite efforts to reduce the occurrence of physical aggression in traditional school environments, some students persist in engaging in physical aggression and are assigned to alternative education programs as an alternative to expulsion. However, relatively little is known about the types of services that school counselors provide to help these students. This case study investigated the services that school counselors provide to the young children attending disciplinary alternative education programs in a public-school district in central Florida. The participants consist of two school counselors who provided services to the students assigned to the alternative disciplinary programs and two district-level administrators of the alternative programs.

The school counselors provided responsive services to meet the immediate needs of the students in the alternative programs. These included individual counseling, multi-tiered systems of support and crisis intervention. The counselors also provided interventions to teach students appropriate social skills, decision-making skills, responsibility, and self-regulation. In addition, the school counselors provided indirect services to students by collaborating with parents and stakeholders which include teachers, social workers, administrators, and community agencies.

This case study includes multiple sources of data: (a) face-to-face semi-structured interviews, (b) observations, (c) artifacts, (d) documents, (e) field notes, and (e) member checks. Nine descriptive categories emerged from the data analysis: (a) Reasons assigned, (b) Process of placement, (c) Counselors’ experience, (d) Services and interventions, (e) Assessments, (f)
Theoretical orientation, (g) Barriers to providing services, (h) Counselors’ perceptions regarding outcomes, and (i) Counselors' recommendations for future practice. Surprisingly, the case study’s findings reveal that the school counselors believed that the services they provide do not meet the students’ needs.

This case study contributes to the body of knowledge about this under-researched population of counselors and under-served population of students by examining the unique experience of school counselors providing services to students who engage in physical aggression. Implications for further research, policy, and practice are presented.
Chapter I

Introduction

Background

In this dissertation, I explore the views and experiences of counselors who work in a Type II alternative school in a school district in central Florida. These counselors are charged with helping students address and resolve the disruptive behavioral issues that they displayed in their regular school setting. In this Introduction, I provide background information on alternative schools, on the work of counselors in those schools, on the issue of disruptive behavior and on its connection to mental health. I define the study’s guiding questions, along with the study’s context, purpose and potential contribution, and its underlying assumptions and theoretical framework. Finally, I define key terms.

Alternative schools and educational programs are designed to meet unique student needs that usually cannot be met in the traditional schools. Alternative programs are housed within the regular school settings, typically in separate facilities removed from the rest of the school (Carver, Lewis, & Tice, 2010). Raywid (1994) identified three types of alternative education schools. Type I programs are schools of choice that have an alternative pedagogy and innovative and programmatic themes for content. All students may attend Type I programs by choice. Type II programs are designed for students who have been disruptive in the traditional school setting. These programs focus on modifying students’ behaviors, reintegrating students into the traditional school setting, and are considered the school of “last chance” prior to being expelled from school. Type III programs are designed for rehabilitating, remediating, and enabling
students to return to their traditional school setting (Foley & Pang, 2006). Type III schools focus in particular on remediating students’ academic and social-emotional issues, and providing students access to therapeutic services such as counseling and social services (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Lange and Sletten (2002) identified an additional alternative school described as a combination of Types I, II, and III.

Students may be assigned to Type II alternative programs or schools due to suspension or expulsion from traditional schools (Lehr, Moreau, Lange, & Lanners, 2004) or fighting (Becker, 2010). Students are often expelled from traditional schools as a result of physical or verbal aggression towards others, possession of weapons or drugs, and disruptive or defiant behaviors (Tsang, 2004). In 61% of public school districts with alternative schools and programs, students could be referred to alternative programs solely for engaging in physical attacks or fights (Carver, Lewis, & Tice, 2010). Most students attending alternative programs will be at risk of educational failure because of temporary or permanent withdrawal from the traditional school where the educational success rate is higher.

Table 1.

Number of Students Assigned to Alternative Programs in Florida; Data on Student Discipline Aggregated by Race Gender, and School Year, 2012–2013 through 2015–2016.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black/African American</th>
<th>Hispanic/Latino</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</th>
<th>American Indian/Alaskan Native</th>
<th>Two or More Races</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015/2016</td>
<td>2,168</td>
<td>3,062</td>
<td>1,487</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>2,028</td>
<td>5,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014/2015</td>
<td>2,067</td>
<td>2,843</td>
<td>1,371</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>1,913</td>
<td>4,690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013/2014</td>
<td>2,393</td>
<td>3,015</td>
<td>1,433</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>2,023</td>
<td>5,159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012/2013</td>
<td>2,113</td>
<td>2,945</td>
<td>1,355</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>1,921</td>
<td>4,802</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this study, I report on counselors in a single school district in central Florida. In that district, students from kindergarten through fifth grade can be assigned to the district’s alternative education program for engaging in an expellable offense such as assault, battery, fighting, and confrontation with a school board employee (Code of Student Conduct, 2017). As Table 2 shows, 419 students from that district were assigned to a disciplinary alternative school during the 2015–2016 school year (Florida DOE, 2017). Seven of the children were kindergarten age. Black and Hispanic students and boys were disproportionately represented in this group.

Table 2.

Number of Students Assigned to Alternative Programs in the Study’s School District; Student Discipline Data Aggregated by Race, Gender, and School Year, 2012–2013 through 2015–2016.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black/ African American</th>
<th>Hispanic/ Latino</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Hawaiian Pacific Islander</th>
<th>American Indian/Alaskan Native</th>
<th>Two or More Races</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015/2016</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014/2015</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013/2014</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012/2013</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Intensive and high-quality services should be provided to these children, to enable them to return to their regular classrooms/schools where they can demonstrate appropriate social skills. Counselors in these alternative schools to which students are assigned for disciplinary reasons play an important role in preparing these children to return to their regular schools. Recognizing that this “at-risk” student population is underserved, school counselors are challenged to provide responsive interventions to meet the students’ needs. Mullen and Lambie (2013) contend that school counselors’ comprehensive counseling programs in alternative schools and programs should be developed based on the unique needs of the schools’
stakeholders, and in accordance with the standards of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). In these counseling programs, preventive and responsive interventions can be delivered to students through such diverse methods as classroom, individual, and small group counseling sessions (ASCA, 2005, 2012, 2016a).

In order to understand better the challenges that school counselors face in providing students with responsive interventions, I now discuss the issue of aggressive behavior in the context of mental health

**Aggressive Behavior and Mental Health**

Fifty-two percent of the nation’s school districts have reported that engaging in physical attacks or fights was sufficient reason for transferring students to alternative schools and programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a, b). Aggression not only affects the perpetrator, the observer, and the victim, but can also interrupt the educational process and the school environment, and impact the community (Brookmeyer, Fanti, & Henrich, 2006; Goldstein, Young, & Boyd, 2008). Alsaker & Olweus (2002), Farrington (1991), and Moffitt (1993; all cited in Card, 2011) contend that aggressive children are at risk for poor academic performance, disengagement from school, and peer rejection. Furthermore, engaging in physically aggressive behaviors during childhood is likely to increase the risk of maladjustment in adolescence and during the transition into adulthood (Dodge, Coie, & Lynam, 2006). Aggressors are at high risk for delinquency, peer rejection, future substance use, school dropout, and engaging in criminal behavior, underemployment/unemployment, and poor marital relationships in adulthood (Alsaker & Olweus, 2002; Card, 2011). Aggression is also a predictor of future violence during adolescence and adulthood (Tremblay et al., 2004).
In the United States, aggressive behaviors in children are the leading cause of referrals for mental health services (Berk, 2009). Aggressive children are often diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant and Conduct Disorder (Dobson, 2010). According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013), aggression and conduct disorders in children include a persistent pattern of violating rules, aggression toward people and/or animals, destruction of property and or theft (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Moreover, Card, Isaacs, & Hodges (2007) report that victims of aggression reported psychological problems including anxiety, depression, poor social/personal relationships such as peer rejections and having fewer friends, and low self-esteem. The annual cost to society to treat disorders in children and adolescents is estimated at $247 billion and impacts society through health care, special education services, time spent in the juvenile justice system, and decreased productivity (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013).

During the 2015–2016 school year, the following physically aggressive acts were reported to the Florida (FL) School Environment Safety Incident Report system from the Florida district in which I conducted my study: 371 incidences of battery, 430 incidences of fighting, and 120 incidences of physical attacks. The alternative program featured in this study reported 11 incidences of battery and three incidences of physical attacks (Florida DOE, 2017). Physical aggression resulting in physical injury included pushing, hitting, kicking, punching, or destruction of property (Berk, 2009). Lee, Baillargeon, Vermunt, Wu, & Tremblay (2007) and Scheithauer (2003; as cited in Grumm, Hein, & Fingerle, 2011) reported that approximately 5% to 15% of children between five and eleven years of age exhibit clinically relevant aggressive behaviors such as fighting, hitting, and kicking in school.
Children show physical aggression not only towards their peers, but also towards their teachers. Although teachers are in a position of authority, they are often victims of children’s aggression. Although teachers’ reports of being physically attacked by students varied from state to state, 1% to 7% of public school elementary teachers in Florida reported being physically attacked in 2003–2004 (Dinkes, Cataldi, & Lin-Kelly, 2007). According to the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (2016a), 209,800 teachers in the United States reported being physically attacked by their students during the 2011–2012 school year. Complementing the statistics on aggression from children aged 5–11, physical attacks against teachers occurred mostly at the elementary school level at a rate of 8.2% (n = 160,700) as compared to 2.6% (n = 49,100) for secondary school teachers. Furthermore, 177,300 female teachers reported being attacked by their students as compared to 32,500 male teachers during the 2011–2012 school year (Zhang, Musu-Gillette, & Oudekerk, 2016).

**Statement of the Problem**

According to the Centers for Disease Control’s Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) conducted in 2015, nearly 8% of students had been in a physical fight on school property one or more times during the 12 months prior to the survey (Kann et al., 2016). Nationwide, about 6% of students had not gone to school at least one day during the 30 days before the survey because they felt they would be unsafe at school or on their way to or from school. Over the last two decades, the media has captured a snapshot of violence and children’s aggression on school campuses. For example, in their 2003 press release, “School violence hits lower grades”, USA Today reported examples of primary school students demonstrating physical aggression (kicking, biting, scratching, and hitting) towards both their classmates and teachers. Elementary school principals, teachers, and support professionals shared that they saw an increase in violence and
aggression among their youngest students, with some of the most violent students in kindergarten through second grade. As a result, some schools resorted to stricter discipline, such as suspending students as young as pre-kindergarteners from school or referring them to alternative programs. To change the behavior of these aggressive children, other principals and educators attempted to provide early interventions such as counseling services, crisis interventions, peer mediation programs, and engaged families (Toppo, 2003).

Thus, an increasing number of elementary school students are assigned to alternative disciplinary programs. Lehr, Moreau, Lange, & Lanners (2004) reported that 61% of the states participating in their study provided alternative education services to first- through fifth-grade students. A study of school districts in Texas from 2002 to 2007 revealed that 110 districts referred pre-kindergarten and kindergarten children to disciplinary alternative schools (Texas Appleseed, 2007).

While counselors are available in traditional school environment to work with aggressive children, they are often too busy to provide intensive counseling to highly aggressive children. Unruh, Bullis, Todis, Waintrup, and Atkins (2007) discovered that some alternative schools participating in a national study implemented comprehensive school counseling programs to address students’ emotional needs. Of the approximately 75% of the participating schools that did offer services, these provided either individual or group counseling, or skills training.

School counselors are skilled in such techniques as counseling, consultation, and student appraisal (Florida DOE, 2010). Coy (1999) maintains that the education that school counselors have received equips them with the skills required to provide for school children’s academic, social, and personal needs. Because of their expertise, school counselors are often viewed as the
most qualified professional to work with at-risk students and are in an optimal position to work with the at-risk students assigned to alternative programs.

However, although there is an increased number of alternative programs (Kleiner, Porch, & Ferris, 2012) and students assigned to alternative programs (Snyder, Brey, & Dillow, 2016), the published research on counselors’ role and responsibilities working within alternative programs is limited (Helems, 2001). The research I reviewed previous to this study evaluated the strategies and interventions that researchers and practitioners use to reduce the occurrence of physical aggression among children (Grumm, Hein, & Fingerle, 2011; Metropolitan Area Child Study Research Group, 2002; Smith, Pare, & Gravell, 2002). Yet, less is known about the strategies that school counselors in particular use to reduce physical aggression exhibited by marginalized students attending Type II alternative education disciplinary schools. These strategies, and counselors’ experience in using them, constitute valuable information and evidence about effective action. If evidence-based strategies to reduce aggression for children in alternative programs are not implemented, children may maintain aggressive behaviors and receive further suspensions and expulsions from schools.

Because school counselors working with aggressive children in alternative discipline programs appear to have been largely omitted from prior studies, their knowledge has not been available to shape policy and practice. Smith-Adock, Webster, Leonard, and Walker (2008) posited that school counselors could play a vital role in student success by offering counseling services to meet the wellness issues of students in alternative education programs. In this study, I describe the services and interventions that a sample of school counselors provided to children through their comprehensive counseling programs in the alternative programs.
Context for the Study

The context of this study is the alternative discipline program for a school district in central Florida. As a Teacher Resource Specialist for these programs, I noticed an increase over the last decade in young children being suspended, expelled, and assigned to the district’s alternative discipline school for physical aggression towards both teachers and their peers. Some students were expelled from the traditional school setting and assigned to the alternative discipline programs because they demonstrated such physically aggressive behaviors such as hitting, pushing, spitting, fighting, and destruction of property.

During the 2012–2016 school year, the number of students assigned to the alternative discipline program used for this study ranged from 97 to 419 students (Florida DOE, 2017). Although the Florida DOE does not report the grade level of the students assigned to the alternative programs or students assigned to the program multiple times, I noticed that, after exiting the alternative discipline K–5 school and returning to their traditional schools, some children continued to engage in physically aggressive behaviors, resulting in further suspensions, expulsion, and reassignment to the discipline alternative school.

Previously, the students had been assigned to an alternative discipline school that provided educational services for children in kindergarten through fifth grade. The alternative school operated independently from the local traditional schools. The primary service providers were teachers, paraprofessionals, and a social worker. Students who were judged to need additional services were referred to the school psychologist for an evaluation as part of a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). A few students received services from the district’s contracted mental health counselor. However, a school counselor was not assigned to the alternative school, and the students attending that program did not have access to a school counselor.
However, during the 2016–2017 school year, the district transitioned their alternative discipline school from a school with a separate facility to alternative discipline programs operating within four traditional school campuses throughout the school district. Because of that change, children assigned to an alternative education program in the study district could receive services and interventions from a school counselor. Helems (2001) stated that “school counselors are in an ideal position to provide services to students identified as ‘at-risk’ or assigned to alternative programs.” Furthermore, the 2005 American School Counselor Association’s (ASCA) National Model requires that school counselors meet the needs of students attending alternative education programs.

With this background in mind, I conducted this case study because of my interest in describing the services and interventions that school counselors use to reduce and eliminate children’s physical aggression in K–5 children assigned to the alternative discipline programs. More specifically, three things led me to conduct this study: my experience working with physically aggressive children assigned to a Type II school in Florida; my interest in providing services and interventions that will reduce the children’s aggressive behaviors; and, the lack of studies that have focused on school counselors’ role in reducing such physical aggression in the children assigned to Type II programs.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this case study is to explore and describe the services, assessments, interventions, and counseling theories that school counselors in one school district in central Florida use to reduce and eliminate physical aggression in K–5 children who have been assigned to alternative discipline programs because of aggressive behaviors. The additional purpose of
this descriptive case study is to address the gap in the literature regarding school counselors in alternative education programs, and their expertise and experience.

The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What services did school counselors provide to kindergarten through fifth-grade children assigned to alternative education programs to reduce physical aggressive behaviors?
2. What assessments are school counselors using to identify aggression in children?
3. What prevention and interventions strategies are counselors using to reduce physical aggression?
4. What theoretical orientations are counselors using to provide interventions for children demonstrating aggressive behaviors?

**Significance of the Research**

Despite the increase in the number of students assigned to alternative discipline programs, limited research appears to be available concerning school counselors’ perceptions and thoughts, and the services and interventions that they provide to children who are at risk for educational failure, expelled from traditional schools, and assigned to alternative programs. Consequently, this case study will provide insight into an area that appears to be understudied.

According to Greenberg et al. (2003), Welch et al. (2001), and Zins et al. (2004; all as cited in Facts About School Mental Health Services, 2006), “students who receive social emotional support and prevention services achieve better in school” (para. 10). Information gathered from this study may serve to educate counselors, helping professionals, the particular district where the study was conducted, and other districts, about assessments and intervention strategies that school counselors in alternative programs use currently to help children reduce their demonstrated aggressive behaviors. Furthermore, school counselors may develop
knowledge of effective behavior strategies that can be used as early interventions for preventing children from engaging in physical aggression. Additionally, once the children return to their traditional schools, the school counselors in the traditional school setting could continue to reinforce the strategies that the students learned to prevent them from re-engaging in aggressive behaviors and receiving further suspensions and expulsions. The findings from this study may also be useful in developing future trainings constructed from evidence-based practice to equip school counselors to work with students assigned to these programs.

Because school counselors are the target audience for this research, I solicited the participation of school counselors working in alternative programs for kindergarten through fifth-grade children for the case study. Thus, the study communicates directly with its audience, conveying the lived experiences of these school counselors. The findings of the study could contribute to helping counselors understand their own role in serving marginalized students assigned to these alternative settings. The findings could also lead to changes in practices and policies in the study’s district, such as developing new counseling programs, and could provide support for additional resources and services for school counselors and students involved in alternative discipline programs.

**Assumptions Underpinning the Study**

The assumptions underpinning the study focus on school counselors’ practice. Based on the review of the available literature, I assumed that school counselors used a variety of assessments including teacher reports, child behavior checklist, parent reports, and direct observations to assess children’s aggression. I also expected that school counselors used a combination of interventions grounded in Social Cognitive Learning Theory (Bandura, 1978) and Bio-Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) to reduce the occurrence of physical
aggression and ameliorate children’s behavior. I expected that counselors used brief therapy sessions to counsel victims and perpetrators of aggression, and that they referred students to administrators for disciplinary actions such as detention, in-school or out-of-school suspension, and expulsion to prevent students from engaging in physical aggression.

**Conceptual Framework**

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework for the study and illustrates the relationship among the primary concepts and variables involved in this study. As Figure 1 shows, school counselors may administer assessments framed in the Information Processing Model (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968) to understand the risk factors that contribute to students’ use of physical aggression. Assessments based on information processing may assist school counseling in providing interventions that assist children in modifying their perceptions of others and responding with less aggression. These risk factors include deficits in the social processing system which lead children to mistaken others’ actions as hostile; children’s negative memories and beliefs regarding the other’s intent are a fundamental part of this mechanism.

School counselors may also provide services, framed in Bio-Ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), to reduce children’s physical aggression by working with the child, their families, and their peers within the school environment. Furthermore, school counselors might implement interventions based on Social Cognitive Learning Theory (Bandura, 1978), assisting children to replace their illogical thoughts with rational thoughts through problem-solving skills. When school counselors provide these services, children’s physical aggression may diminish or be eliminated. Without these vital services, physically aggressive children may continue their aggressive behaviors, be suspended, or expelled from the traditional school environment, and re-assigned to alternative education programs.
**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework of the Study’s School Counselors, Theoretical Orientations, and Children’s Aggressive Outcomes, With and Without School Counselors’ Services.
Definition of Major Terms

Alternative education programs. There is not a commonly established definition of what constitutes alternative schools and programs (Lange & Sletten, 2002). However, researchers such as Booker and Mitchell (2011), Cortez and Cortez (2009), and Texas Agency (2007; as cited by Mullen & Lambie, 2013) define alternative education schools and programs as public or private educational institutions that provide services to kindergarten through 12th-grade students who have been removed from their traditional school setting by their school and/or district administration for disciplinary reasons. The purpose of such Type II disciplinary alternative schools and programs is to provide educational services that meet the unique needs of the students who have been disruptive in the traditional school setting. Type II disciplinary alternative schools have also been labeled as “last chance programs” prior to expelling students entirely from the school system. Additionally, Raywid (1994) identified two other types of alternative education schools. Type I programs have an alternative pedagogy and innovative and programmatic themes for content; students may attend Type I programs by choice. Type III programs are for rehabilitating, remediating, and enabling students to return to their traditional school setting (Foley & Pang, 2006). Type III schools focus in particular on remediating students’ academic and social emotional issues, and providing access to therapeutic services such as counseling and social services (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Lange and Sletten (2002) also identified an additional alternative school that is a combination of Types I, II, and III.

CHAMPs Classroom Management Strategy. Based on the principle that behavior occurs for a reason, and can be taught and changed, CHAMPs (Conversation, Help, Activity, Movement, Participation) is a collection of recommended prevention strategies that provide teachers with universal classroom support. CHAMPs is a systematic proactive approach that
teaches students how to behave responsibly and respectfully in the classroom setting and during all transitions in the school environment (Sprick, 2009).

**Florida Baker Act.** *The Florida Mental Health Act of 1971* is a Florida statute under Chapter 394 that allows for the involuntary examination of an individual through involuntary or emergency commitment. In order for law enforcement officials, court judges, mental health professional, or physicians to enact the Baker Act, there must be substantial evidence that an individual has a mental illness, which the Baker Act explains as “the intent to harm oneself, others, or be self-neglectful” (The Florida Mental Health Act of 1971, 1971).

**Florida School Counseling Framework.** The Florida School Counseling Framework is a model designed to guide school districts and schools in developing and implementing school counseling programs. The framework includes standards-based curriculum and activities which include fifteen program standards and seven student standards (Florida DOE, 2010).

**Nonviolent Crisis Intervention.** Nonviolent Crisis Intervention (CPI) training provides human service professionals and educators with verbal and physical behavior management strategies to de-escalate anxious, disruptive, aggressive, and out-of-control individuals. Educators and human services providers are trained to appropriately respond to perpetrators’ verbal and physical aggression at the earliest stage while providing for the care, welfare, safety, and security of everyone involved in a crisis situation. Furthermore, CPI training encourages a person-centered approach aimed at team problem-solving skills to prevent, defuse, or positively manage risk behaviors. Professionals are trained to demonstrate respect, dignity, empathy, emotional and physical support, and collaboration that promote independence and provide the vulnerable person with the opportunity to make appropriate choices (Crisis Prevention Institute, 2015).
Positive Behavior Support. Positive Behavior Support is a school-wide system of support focusing on proactive strategies that define, teach, and support appropriate student behaviors to produce positive school environments. Positive Behavior Support incorporates problem solving, behavior analysis, system change perception, data-driven decision-making, and assessment-based interventions to create climates conducive to teaching and learning. Based on a Behavioral Systems approach, students are taught positive social behaviors through direct instruction in behavioral expectations, modeling, and by reinforcing positive social behaviors. Key principles of Positive Behavior Support include interventions that prevent problem behaviors, proactive instructions that teach and improve social behaviors, data-based decision making, and fundamental change to the school system that supports best practice procedures within the school environment (Positive Behavioral Intervention & Supports, 2017).

Problem Solving/Response to Intervention. Problem Solving/Response to Intervention (RtI) is a multi-tiered system designed to provide instruction and interventions for all students. Students are provided with three levels of academic and behavior instruction and interventions based on their individual rate of learning and level of performance. Tier One consists of core instruction. Students are provided supplemental academic or behavioral instruction in Tier Two. Students who are not demonstrating success at Tier One or Tier Two receive core instruction, supplemental instruction, and intensive instruction at Tier Three. Data are collected during each tier. A student who is not successful at any of the tiers may be referred for more intensive support and recommended for a comprehensive evaluation to determine if the child meets eligibility criteria and needs Exceptional Student Education. The levels are increased in intensity and duration based on an individual student’s level of response to instruction. A team consisting of general education teachers, special education teachers, the school psychologist, and social
workers monitor the progress of the students and determine whether the intensity and duration of
the instruction and interventions should be increased or decreased. Parents are updated with
information regarding the instruction and interventions implemented, their child’s progress,
academic and behavioral goals, and the qualification of the professionals providing the
instruction frequently (Parent information about Problem Solving/Response to
Instruction/Intervention [PS/RtI], 2017).

**School Counselors.** School counselors are certified professionals trained in school
counseling who possess unique skills and qualifications to address the academic, personal/social,
and career needs of all students. The primary roles and responsibilities of Florida school
counselors include the following: conducting student screenings and appraisals; providing
individual and group counseling; student academic advisement and career planning; consultation
and collaboration with families, staff, and administrators; serving on school-based teams for
problem solving/response to intervention; referring students for in-school and community
professionals; and, designing and delivering comprehensive school counseling programs based
on student data, the needs of the school, and the student population (Florida DOE, 2010). Mullen
and Lambie (2013) said that school counselors also design counseling programs within
disciplinary alternative education programs, based on the American School Counselor
Association national model (ASCA, 2005) and the unique needs of the school’s stakeholders.

**Organization of the Dissertation: Chapter Content**

Broadly, the case study that follows includes a review of relevant previous research, an
overview of the study methods and procedures, significance and implications of the study, and
the expected results and dissemination of the findings of the study. Chapter 1 has provided an
overview of this study whose purpose is to examine the services that school counselors provide
to students assigned to alternative programs to reduce physical aggression. This chapter includes a description of various types of alternative education programs, the prevalence of students assigned to alternative programs, and the reasons for students’ assignment to Type II disciplinary alternative education programs. In Chapter Two, I provide an in-depth review of the studies and other literature relevant to this topic. Chapter Three discusses the methods for conducting the study; the results of the case study are in Chapter Four. Finally, in Chapter Five I discuss the study’s results and make recommendations for future research and practice regarding school counselors’ role in providing services and interventions to physically aggressive students from kindergarten through fifth grade who have been assigned to alternative discipline programs.
Chapter II

Literature Review

In Chapter Two, I discuss the literature on how children learn aggressive behavior; these models of learning to be physical aggressive are based, variously, on the Information Processing Model (Atkinson & Shifrin, 1968) Bio-Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1978) of learning and development. This chapter will further provide a discussion of the relevant research on the roles of (a) school counselors, (b) alternative education schools and programs, and (c) prevention and intervention strategies for reducing aggression. A summary concludes the chapter.

Theoretical Frameworks Used to View Children’s Aggression and Aggressive Behaviors

Interventions designed to prevent and reduce children’s aggression should be derived from tested theory. Broadly, Bio-Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), Social Cognitive Learning Theory (Bandura, 1978) and the Information Processing Model (Shifrin & Arkinson, 1968) offer orientations that inform counselors’ therapeutic approaches to providing interventions for students with aggressive behaviors. Research and practice centered on these theories have allowed researchers, counselors, and educators to identify and implement evidence-based interventions that reduce the occurrence of children’s aggression. I contend that interventions that integrate these theoretical approaches can be effective in assessing, preventing and reducing children’s aggression. Such prevention and intervention strategies can include providing children with alternate models of aggression resolutions, providing a supportive environment for victims of aggression, enforcing anti-bullying and programs in schools, teaching
children problem-solving skills, and implementing attribution training strategies that include perspective-taking and restructuring individual’s knowledge about aggression. In addition, students who demonstrate aggressive behaviors may benefit from participating in nonviolent sports that promote social, psychological, and physical development. Furthermore, intervention should also be targeted at the environment that stimulates and tolerates aggressive behaviors. To prevent and reduce children’s aggressions, schools could benefit from providing programs that include training for students together with their parents.

These various strategies for addressing children’s physical violence in school represent integrations of the three theoretical frameworks. I now present a brief description of each framework, to clarify its basic tenets clear.

 Bronfenbrenner’s Bio-Ecological Systems Theory. In his Bio-Ecological Systems Theory, Bronfenbrenner (2005) described five systems that interact with and influence the developing person’s thoughts, feelings, and actions. These systems constitute environmental factors that interact with the child’s characteristics; they may contribute to the child learning and engaging in aggressive behaviors, and may also be related to creating useful interventions First, Bronfenbrenner (2005) defined the microsystem as “the immediate environment of the developing person, within which direct manipulation and face-to-face communication are possible”. The microsystem includes the child’s physical, social, and psychological avenues for initially learning about the world, and how to live. Two processes that promote development at the microsystem level are the people with whom children interact and the activities in which children engage. The three intimate settings of the child’s microsystem include the child’s home, peer group, and school (Swick & Williams, 2006). Rogoff (2003) reported that children’s
microsystem provides them with their earliest memories that can either recall a nurturing environment or experiences of violence.

The mesosystem is the first system beyond the developing child’s immediate environment that influences the developing individual. The mesosystem surrounds the microsystem and comprises the interaction between two or more microsystems (Thomas, 2005). For example, the child’s family may interact with the child’s school regarding the child’s social-emotional, academic, behavioral, and medical needs.

Although the developing person does not have direct interaction with the exosystem, this environment still influences development, learning, and experiences in the child’s immediate setting (Thomas, 2005). The child’s exosystem may consist of the child’s parents’ workplace or of a school board’s decisions that affect the child. For example, if a parent’s workplace is near the child’s school rather than far away, the parent would be able to visit the child’s school quickly to assist if the child were engaged in aggressive behaviors. In another example, a school board may decide that students who show physical aggression towards a school employee will be expelled from their regular school and be required to attend an alternative discipline school. The child’s academic and behavioral performance in school can thus be affected.

The fourth and outermost system of the bio-ecological system, the macrosystem, comprises the cultural milieu in which the child lives. It includes values, laws, religion, ethnicity, community, and the government practices and policies in the developing person’s society. Such cultural values may include following school rules and obeying people in authority (Thomas, 2005).

The chronosystem is the final ecosystem that affects the developing person. The chronosystem includes historical events and changes in individuals or environments that occur
over time and influence the developing person (Unger, 2012). For example, witnessing domestic violence could affect a developing child throughout their lifetime.

**Social Cognitive Learning Theory.** Bandura’s Social Cognitive Learning Theory (1978) focuses on how learning changes behavior through observing the behavior and the consequences of the behavior for the subject and for others. The theory contends that, because behavior is learned, it can be unlearned. Furthermore, Social Cognitive Learning Theory posits that behavior can be changed through conditioning, shaping, and behavior modification, using reinforcers (Miller, 2011).

This theory is based on *reciprocal determination*, which proposes that learning is the result of the interacting variables of personal, behavioral, and environmental factors. Based on this concept, an individual’s personal beliefs and attitudes affect their learning and can affect their interpretation of environmental cues and behaviors. Behavioral factors involve the response a person makes in a situation. *Self-efficacy* is the degree to which a person has confidence in his/her ability to perform a task to achieve a goal. *Outcome expectancy* is the perceived relationship between performing a task and receiving a specific outcome because of task completion. *Environmental factors* are the roles parents, teachers, and peers perform. Self-efficacy and outcome expectancy influence behavior. Bandura also observed that the developmental status and reputation of a model, as well as an observer’s ability to set an achievable goal based on the standards provided by a model, influence the observer’s effectiveness in learning and performing a desired task. Furthermore, according to Bandura (1978), learning occurs interactively by performing a task or by vicariously observing a model performing the task or by discussing the task (Bruning, Schraw, & Norby, 2011).
Bandura used this social cognitive learning framework to conceptualize aggression. He defined aggression (1978) as behavior that results in personal injury and or physical destruction, and held that aggression is a multifaceted phenomenon that serves various purposes. Not all injurious and destructive behavior is determined to be aggressive; the intention of the act determines if the act is deemed aggressive. The greater the attribution of intent to an actor to cause harm, the greater the likelihood that the act is deemed aggressive (Bandura, 1978).

**Information Processing Model.** The Information Processing Model (Atkinson & Shifrin, 1968) focuses on how the human mind processes the information that people receive from their environment. The model posits that learning begins when humans receive information from their environment through their senses. Children receive information from observing others. The information then goes through several cognitive processes: the individual attends to the information, encodes it, engages with it, rehearses it, stores it, and retrieves it. For example, children notice that aggressive behavior attracts attention from others. As children develop, they compare new information with previously stored information; having encoded the new information, they use it for further thinking and learning. As children engage with or observe the information they receive, the information is rehearsed, stored in long-term memory, and retrieved for use (Miller, 2011).

Researchers have reported that children’s memory can affect them negatively. Based on the Information Processing Model (Atkinson & Shifrin, 1968), researchers propose that as children’s knowledge increases, they often make inferences that are not completely supported by the information they originally received from their environment. Children’s memory, social knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and expectations (or, schemas) can so have a negative effect on children through stereotyped views, biases, and negative scripts. *Scripts* are mental
representation of events that occur in a systematic order in a person’s life in specific situations. A person’s script informs them of what they believe is supposed to occur in a given situation. People use their scripts to generalize outcomes from previous events and projects expectations into new events and situations (Miller, 2011).

According to the Information Processing Model (Atkinson & Shifrin, 1968), children who are aggressive have deficits in their social processing system. Because of their social knowledge, biases, scripts, attitudes, beliefs, schemas, and the expectations of others, aggressive children often mistakenly attribute their hostile intentions to the influence of others in their environment, providing evidence of an active information processing system. Relatedly, children who are aggressive often perceive and interpret an ambiguous event, such as being accidently bumped by a peer, as intentional and hostile, and they respond with reactive aggression towards the other person (Miller, 2011).

**Alternative Education Programs**

I now report on literature concerning alternative education programs and characteristics of such settings. In 2001, the National Center for Education Statistics conducted the nation’s first study of public alternative schools and programs for students at-risk for education failure (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002). The study provided information pertaining to enrollment and services available for students attending alternative programs nationwide and included the following: During the 2000–2001 school year, over 39% of public schools provided alternative schools for at-risk students. Sixty-five percent of the districts were most likely to have only one alternative school. Fifty-nine percent of public alternative settings for at-risk students were in separate facilities from a regular school. Of the districts providing alternative education for at-risk students, 10%–21% of districts offered alternative programs for students in first through fifth
grade. Districts in the southeast United States with high minority student populations and high poverty were more likely to have alternative education programs as compared to other districts (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002). Largely, districts with alternative schools and programs had policies requiring that services such as crisis and behavioral interventions be provided for students attending alternative schools and programs; 79% of the districts with alternative schools and programs nationwide had policies requiring such services for students attending these schools and program (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002).

Foley and Pang (2006) conducted a quantitative study using the Bio-Ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) to examine the administration, funding, and physical settings that support alternative education programs in Illinois. The study’s second aim was to identify the student population and educational support services provided by the alternative education schools and programs. Eighty-four alternative education directors or principals completed a questionnaire constructed to identify six characteristics of the alternative education program. The domains examined included program administration, administrators’ education and experience, faculty and support staff, student population, educational programs, and forms of supports within the school and from the community.

Findings pertaining to the administration of the alternative education programs revealed that 52% of the programs were provided for by the Illinois State Board of Education; independent districts operated 22% of the programs and 20% of the programs were provided by the association of school districts through special education organizations (Foley & Pang, 2006). Many of the alternative programs (80%; n=40) were operated in off-campus facilities with limited access to physical education facilities, libraries, and science facilities. A general education curriculum was the primary educational program provided in the alternative schools.
Furthermore, one third or less of the programs included parental involvement such as parent training, parent-teacher association, or newsletters for parents. Social workers were the primary service providers, followed by counselors, paraprofessional educators, school nurses, school psychologists, and vocational educators (Foley & Pang, 2006).

Of the eighty-four alternative education administrators who completed the questionnaire, 66% (n = 33) earned Master’s degrees, 22% (n = 2) obtained educational specialist certification, 20% (n = 10) earned doctoral degrees, and 10% (n = 5) earned a Bachelor’s degree. The program directors or principals of the alternative education programs averaged 5.30 years of experience with an average of 12.61 years of teaching experience in the general education setting. The participants reported an average of 3.59 years of special education teaching experience.

The student population varied across programs. Some alternative education programs reported serving students between the ages of 7 and 21. Student with disabilities were more prevalent in these alternative programs. Of the students served, 49.89% identified as having emotional and behavioral disorders, 13.07% had attention deficit with hyperactivity, 12.42% had attention deficit disorder, 10% were learning disabled, 6.36% were mentally impaired, 4.68% were communication disordered, and 1.60% were sensory impaired. Admission criteria for enrolling in the alternative education programs consisted of expulsion from traditional school, social-emotional/behavioral issues, suspension from traditional schools, academic underachievement, potential drop-out, and referral by the home school (Foley & Pang, 2006).

Within the limited research available describing the administration, funding, and facilities that support alternative educational programs, this study provided information on the student population, the staff, and school program characteristics that may be beneficial to practice and to program development and evaluation. The study assisted in identifying the education and support
service providers for students attending alternative education programs, and identified the reasons for students’ assignment to alternative programs.

Further, the researchers reported that a general education curriculum was the primary course of study for students attending alternative education setting. Because the alternative education program was designed to meet the needs of disruptive youth who were considered at risk for school failure, a question left unaddressed in this study is whether the school could benefit from a curriculum designed to teach behavior management strategies such as skills training and positive behavior supports for social-emotional and behavioral issues. Therefore, despite the usefulness of this research, it would have proved even more useful by investigating the effects of a curriculum designed to address the specific behavioral issues of students assigned to alternative education programs.

**School Counselors’ Roles in Florida Public Schools**

I now turn to the literature on school counselors. According to the Florida School Counseling Framework (Florida Department of Education [DOE], 2010), a model presenting the “best practices” that guide school counseling programs, school counselors are obligated to enhance the learning of all students. All students need solid emotional and social skills that will allow them to achieve the optimum benefits from their educational program. Professional school counselors advance students’ performance by focusing on academic achievement, social, personal, emotional, and career development through prevention and intervention strategies. The School Counseling Framework contends that school counselors spend much of their time providing direct services to all students that allow every student the opportunity to benefit from comprehensive school guidance programs. Program services include individual and group counseling, advisement in problem-solving skills, and consultation with stakeholders regarding
methods to assist students (Florida DOE, 2010). Furthermore, the Framework outlines the unique knowledge, abilities, skills, and attitudes that equip school counselors to meet the unique needs of diverse pre-K–12 students (ASCA, 2012).

The American School Counselor Association’s ethical standards for school counselors mandate that professional school counselors demonstrate the attitude and belief that every student deserves access to school counseling programs that support their social and personal development (ASCA, 2016a). The skilled professional is trained to implement various counseling theories and techniques that are appropriate for school settings. Such counseling theories include Reality Therapy (Glasser, 1965), Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (Dobson, 2010), Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (Dobson, 2010), Adlerian therapy (Murdock, 2013), solution-focused brief counseling (Murdock, 2013), person-centered counseling (Murdock, 2013), and Family Systems work (Murdock, 2013). Furthermore, students receive counseling services through multiple modes such as individual counseling, small group counseling, or whole group classroom lessons (ASCA, 2012).

Additionally, the 2005 ASCA National Model requires school counselors to meet the needs of students attending alternative education programs (Perepiczka, 2009). Furthermore, ASCA (2016b) issued position statements that pertain to school counselors’ educational preparation, their role in providing comprehensive services, addressing student discipline, and working with at-risk students. The counselors’ responsibilities identified in the Florida School Counseling Framework (Florida DOE, 2010), the American School Counseling Association, and its position statements can be applied also to school counselors working with students in alternative programs.
School counselors concerned with all students’ social and emotional needs attempt to create safe school environments conducive to students demonstrating respect and civility toward each other in all educational settings (ASCA, 2016a, b). Furthermore, counselors strive to use scientific research-based treatment, techniques, and modalities, grounded in theory, that promote individuals’ mental health and wellbeing (ACA, 2014). Counselors also attempt to implement evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies that will decrease aggression and increase children’s appropriate pro-social skills. For example, they use a skill-based text, *Skillstreaming the Adolescent: New Strategies and Perspectives for Teaching Prosocial Skills* (McGinnis & Goldstein, 2012) to target maladaptive behaviors and teach appropriate decision-making skills. Mullen & Lambie (2013), who also recommend *Skillstreaming the Adolescent*, proposed that it also may be used by to decrease aggressive behaviors and increase appropriate prosocial skills.

**Prevention and Interventions to Reduce Children’s Aggression**

Finally, I look at literature on efforts at preventing and remediating children’s aggression, organized around the three theoretical frameworks described earlier. Counselors and researchers strive to implement evidence-based interventions to prevent and reduce children’s aggressive behaviors. Evidence-based strategies for increasing students’ ability to demonstrate positive prosocial skills include conducting assessments, counseling, and teaching students positive relationship skills such as attribution retraining. I describe research related to each of these prevention and intervention strategies in the following section.

**Assessment for aggression based on the Information Processing Model.** The Information Processing Theory seeks to explain how people acquire new information, how they store information and recall it from memory, and how previous knowledge guides and determines what and how they will learn (Snowman, McCown & Biehler, 2011). Information
Processing is an approach for uncovering mechanisms of change in how children and adults detect information, operate on information, store, access, and modify information for future use.

Based on this model, several researchers (Chaiken & Trope, 1999; Strack & Deutsch, 2004) distinguished between explicit and implicit aggression. Explicit aggression is identified as a conscious and deliberate act aimed at causing pain or doing harm. Implicit aggression is regarded as an automatic, non-intentional act in which situations trigger cognitions, motivations, and behavior (Todorov & Bargh, 2002). Bushman and Anderson (2001) stressed that aggressive acts have responses that are on a continuum ranging from automatic response to controlled response requiring information processing. Rudman (2004) proposed that early developmental events may shape implicit aggression concepts more than they shape aggression explicit concepts. Making the distinction between explicit and implicit aggression can impact the prediction of aggressive behaviors.

Grum, Hein, and Fingerle (2011) conducted a study to measure the validity of the Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998) as a measure for predicting children’s implicit and explicit aggressive behavior. One hundred and one elementary children (53 boys and 48 girls) between nine and eleven years of age ($M=9.70$, $SD=0.51$) from Hess, Germany participated in the study. To measure explicit aggression, the children completed a German version of the aggression subscale of the Youth Self Report (Arbeitsgruppe Deutsche Child Behavior Checklist, 1998). Implicit aggression was measured with the Implicit Association Test. First, based on demographic information, the children practiced discriminating between self and others. Next, the children were required to perform modules demonstrating their ability to discriminate between the attribution categories of aggression (i.e., hit, argue, shout, kick fight, exasperate) or peacefulness (i.e., help, laugh, play, like, hug, and get along). Finally, using the
The children played a competitive reaction-time task that simulated aggressive behavior between peers in a realistic setting (Grumm, Hein, & Fingerle, 2011).

The results of the study indicated that the construct of implicit and explicit aggression could serve as a reliable predictor of children’s aggressive behavior, and that the IAT is a valid measure of implicit and explicit aggression. The authors determined that using measures of implicit and explicit aggression would aid in understanding children’s aggressive behavior in schools. Therefore, the study provides support for using the IAT to measure aggression in future research with elementary school children. Furthermore, measures such as the IAT that can be used to gain insight into an individual’s motivation for aggression could also lead to developing appropriate interventions and prevention programs (Grumm, Hein, & Fingerle, 2011). Measures of children’s aggressive behaviors, such as the IAT, could be used as a valid tool to assess children’s motive for aggression and assist educators and counselors in preventing children from performing aggressive behaviors in schools.

**Interventions to reduce children’s aggression based on a Cognitive-Ecological approach.** The Metropolitan Area Child Study Research Group conducted a longitudinal, quasi-experimental field study using a Cognitive-Ecological Approach (Mayer, Van Acker, Lochman & Gresham, 2011) an expansion of the Bio-Ecological model, around preventing aggression in children living in an urban setting. According to Guerra, Eron, Huesmann, Tolan, and Van Acker (1997), when the Cognitive-Ecological model is used in preventive intervention, it is focused on modifying both the individual’s social-cognitive and the contextual related factors relevant to learning aggression, such as learning aggressive behaviors from the community, school, and family environment. The researchers used the “Yes I Can” program, a two-year 40-lesson, social-cognitive curriculum covering the following five areas of social cognition related to risk
for aggression: self-understanding, social perspective taking, and beliefs about aggression, social problem-solving skills, and behavioral scripts. The study’s purpose was to examine children’s aggressive behavior, and the intervention’s impact on positive behaviors serving as proactive factors that aid in improving academic achievement.

The longitudinal study lasted for eight years. The researchers supported Yoshikawa’s (1994) and Zigler, Taussig, & Black’s (1992) concept that “earlier is better” (Metropolitan Area Child Study Research Group, 2002), and the result of comprehensive reviews that intervention programs beginning as early as preschool can have a long-term positive impact on preventing delinquency. The 1,500 high-risk children who participated in the study came from 16 different schools in Chicago and were students in grades 2–6. Approximately 47.6% were African American, 36.8% were Hispanic, and 15.5% were non-Hispanic White.

The participants were assessed using measures from peers and teachers. Children were asked to nominate their classmates who engaged in 10 physically and verbally aggressive behaviors (e.g., pushing and shoving other students, taking others’ belongings, yelling at other students). Students completed a pre-assessment and a post assessment over a two-year cycle of interventions and assessments. Teachers completed Teacher Referral Forms of the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach, 1978, 1991) during the 1st and 2nd years of the intervention (Metropolitan Area Child Study Research Group, 2002).

The students were divided into eight cohorts and were assigned to one of four groups. The first group of students was assigned to a no-treatment control group. The second group of students received a general enhancement classroom program that implemented “The Yes I Can” universal intervention program. The third group received a general enhancement program and small-group peer-skills training designed to improve cognition and behavior, and minimize peer
reinforcement of aggression by changing peer group norms of standards of behavior. The fourth group of students was assigned to a general enhancement model and small-group peer skills training, plus one-year family intervention program designed to provide family support. The family support group provided parents with assistance in recognizing and reinforcing prosocial behavior demonstrated by their children. Parents also were assisted in improving their parenting skills, for example, skills in monitoring their children’s peers and enhancing their family communication.

The researchers noted several limitations of the study. First, the study included only 16 schools with significant difference between the types of community and schools (inner city vs. urban poor), and it lacked ethnic diversity because most of the participants were African American. Second, not all of the participants remained in the study. Once an individual left a school, he/she was no longer considered a participant in the study. Third, in addition to individual attrition, there was also school attrition, with entire schools leaving the study.

The results of this study provided evidence that children learn aggression and/or are involved in aggression through exposure to violence in their families, schools, and peer groups (microsystem) over time (chronosystem). The prevention and intervention strategies suggested by this study included working with individuals, families, schools, and children’s peer groups, as well as enforcing other policies that would have an impact on reducing children’s opportunity to engage in aggressive behaviors. Suggested interventions included recommendation based on the Bio-Ecological framework for implementing comprehensive early intervention programs that include the linkage between the families and schools (mesosystem).

The study’s results were consistent with earlier studies and underlined support for early intervention programs during kindergarten and elementary school years. Moreover, the study
provided support for the idea that comprehensive interventions provided during early grades can be effective for children in schools adequately equipped with resources to support learning and the development of students exhibiting aggressive behaviors. The results indicate that high-risk children in communities with limited resources require more intensive interventions other than general universal interventions.

Tolan (2001) proposed that children from school communities in impoverished communities with minimal economic resources and less ecological support may view violence ambivalently: Violent behaviors may be seen as better than being victimized. Comments from such children reveal that their parents told them to maintain the advantage in violent or potentially violent situations. This suggests to schools that children and parents may need to be trained together to lower aggression in high-risk children. Also, city officials may be able to provide resources in the communities where these families live.

This research examined children’s aggression through Bio-Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The results of the studies provided evidence that children learn aggression and/or are involved in aggression through exposure to violence in their families, schools, peer groups (microsystem) over time (chronosystem).

Social Cognitive Learning interventions designed to reduce the occurrence of children’s aggression. Researchers and educators strive to implement positive interventions to decrease aggression in children and increase positive prosocial skills in schools. Social Cognitive Learning interventions, based on Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1978), focus on developing interpersonal problem-solving skills (Kennedy, 1982 as cited in Dykeman, 1995), interpersonal understanding (Selman, 1980, as cited in Dykeman, 1995), and taking the perspective of others’ point of view. Interventions based on social cognitive learning theory
include a sequence of modeling techniques by which one observes, imitates, and plays out behaviors that demonstrate appropriate alternative behaviors as opposed to aggressive behavior (Selman & Schultz, 1990, as cited in Dykeman, 1995).

Cognitive intervention strategies based on Social Cognitive Learning theory (Bandura, 1978) involve helping individuals by identifying illogical thoughts, substituting them with rational thoughts, and developing alternative personal constructs. Cognitive interventions often target perceptions, expectations, self-statements, self-appraisals, and problem-solving skills. Activities such as role-playing and role-taking experiences provide individuals with opportunities to practice more adaptive thoughts and constructs in replicated life experiences (Selman & Schultz, 1990, as cited in Dykeman, 1995).

Smith, Pare, and Gravelle (2002) describe The Eclipse Program that combines group counseling that emphasizes communication skills, emotional self-monitoring, and responsible decision making, and judo training that promotes social, psychological, and physical development. The authors hold that occasional situations require aggressive responses and external attributions; however, the goal of The Eclipse Program was to reduce these behaviors to appropriate levels.

The Eclipse Program was implemented with students who demonstrated school behavior problems in Ottawa, Canada. Grade 9 students \( n=50 \) participated in the alternate sessions of counseling and judo for one hour each day over a 10-week period. Two instruments were used to measure the constructs of aggression and locus of control. The Nowiscki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale (NSLC) measures whether individuals attributed their experiences to their own decisions and actions (internal locus of control) or to factors outside of their control (external locus of control). The Aggression Questionnaire (AQ) was used to measure aggressive
tendencies in the following domains: physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, hostility, and indirect aggression.

Students with higher-than-average aggressive tendencies upon entering The Eclipse Program reported reductions in their aggressiveness at the completion of the program. Students who began the program with a tendency to attribute responsibility for personal experiences to external factors reported a shift toward taking more personal responsibility for their actions over the course of the Eclipse Program. Students of average or low aggressiveness and students with an internal locus control at the beginning of Eclipse did not report any systematic pattern of change on these variables. On the NSLC, the pre-test scores did not differ significantly from post-test scores, \( t(43) = 1.7, p = .10 \). On the AQ, pre-test scores for the sample did not differ significantly from post-test scores, \( t(42) = .90, p = .38 \) (Smith, Pare, & Gravelle, 2002).

The study had several limitations, including a small number of participants, which reduced the generalizability of the findings, and the absence of a control group. The study was in its pilot stage, and adjustments could have been made to the methods during the study. Furthermore, the data from the parents of the participants was incomplete due to the limited availability of people for phone interviews. Future studies could also include a review of school attendance and discipline data (Smith, Pare, & Gravelle, 2002).

The studies described previously in this chapter applied the Social Cognitive Learning theory (Bandura, 1978) to the phenomena of aggression, reporting how children learn aggressive behaviors by observing others in their environment and the outcomes that others receive because of their aggressive actions. The result of the studies supports previous studies that children learn aggressive behaviors by interacting with their environment and by observing the actions in their families, communities, peers, and models they view on television and virtual games.
The studies described here utilizing or evaluating the Eclipse and Skillstreaming programs offer possibilities for practice and theoretical frameworks that school counselors and practitioners can utilize. They provide examples of programs grounded in Social Cognitive Learning Theory (Bandura, 1978) that are used for working with educators, families, and children to ameliorate and reduce children’s aggression. The studies also suggest policy changes that recommend early intervention by educators to prevent aggression, as well as to enforce prevention and intervention strategies in school programs. With respect to future research, the authors suggest that future studies can continue to assess children’s aggression and identify the role that school personnel play in children’s aggression. In addition, future studies should include sample designs with participants from similar backgrounds and characteristics.

Assessing the Literature Review

I conducted this literature review by searching in significant and up-to-date educational and psychologically-oriented databases thoroughly, using relevant key words of note (e.g., “school counselors and alternative education,” “counseling interventions and alternative schools,” “children’s aggression and alternative schools and programs”). Interestingly, the search yielded a small amount of relevant research, with even fewer publications addressing the role of school counselors in alternative education schools and programs. For example, Elementary School Guidance Academic and Counseling published a single study, conducted by Benshoff, Poidevant, and Cashwell (1994), that focused on school counselors as consultants on discipline in schools.

In the past, several ineffective methods have been used to try to change children’s behavior by punishing children for demonstrating aggressive behaviors. Such strategies have included suspension and expulsion for public school systems. Research has proved that these
actions only provide temporary change, were ineffective in changing children’s behavior long-term, and unsuccessful in addressing the underlying cause of children’s aggression. However, research based on such theoretical foundations as Bio-Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), Social Cognitive Learning Theory (Bandura, 1978) and the Information Processing Theory (Shifrin & Atkinson, 1968) have suggested useful diagnostic tools and identified interventions to reduce the occurrence of children’s aggression. Therefore, it is vital that researchers, counselors, and educators implement evidence-based prevention and interventions techniques to reduce the occurrence of childhood aggression. The relative lack of material on school counselors’ informed strategies for working with young children who exhibit violent behaviors in school speaks to the need for compiling and describing those strategies.

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter Two addresses various aspects of the literature concerning children who display violent behaviors in school and efforts to remediate these behaviors. Research describing the administration, funding, physical setting, curriculum provided, and population of students assigned to the alternative education programs (Foley & Pang, 2006) is included. The chapter summarizes three theoretical models – Information Processing (Shifrin & Atkinson, 1968), Bio-Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), and Social Cognitive Learning Theory (Bandura, 1978) – that are significant in conceptualizing children’s aggressive behavior, and presents research on programs that have been used to address children’s aggression, based on these theoretical orientations. I note that the studies reviewed did not specifically discuss the services that school counselors provide to reduce physical aggression in children assigned to alternative education programs. Thus, the literature review highlights the value of this case study, which focuses on the role of school counselors who provide services to physical aggression assigned to
alternative Type II alternative education programs. I discuss the methods for this study in Chapter Three.
Chapter III

Methods

In Chapter Three, I discuss and describe all aspects of the study’s methods and procedures, including the case study design, the research paradigm, the case, the setting, the participants, data collection procedures, data analysis, and the researcher’s role in the study. I also discuss validity and ethical issues pertaining to the case study. The chapter concludes with a brief summary.

Introduction

The alternative education programs located in the district where I conducted the study provided services to students who were expelled from their traditional public school settings in lieu of expelling them completely from the school system without any educational services. As noted previously, the alternative discipline programs were located on the campuses of four traditional schools throughout the school district. Therefore, the school counselors who were assigned to provide services to the children in these four traditional also provided services to children assigned to the alternative discipline programs.

Questions Guiding the Study

According to Stake (1995) questions stemming from the researcher’s intrinsic issues, also referred to as etic issues, could result from the researcher’s experience, early contact with the case, or from literature from other relevant cases that had puzzling or problematic findings. Emic issues are those that emerge from the people inside the case. The questions guiding this inquiry emerged from my previous experience as a counselor, my experiences working with physically
aggressive students in an alternative discipline school, from my search for literature that discussed the services and interventions for students in alternative schools, and from my role as a participant observer inside the case. Because of my dual connection to this study, my questions and issues are then both etic and emic.

The objective of this study was to answer the following questions:

1. What services do school counselors currently provide to kindergarten through fifth-grade children assigned to alternative education programs to reduce physically aggressive behaviors?
2. What assessments are school counselors currently using to identify aggression in children?
3. What prevention strategies and interventions are counselors currently using to reduce physical aggression?
4. What theoretical orientations are counselors currently using to provide interventions for children demonstrating aggressive behaviors?

Design and Paradigm

Case study. As stated previously, the purpose of this case study is to describe the services, interventions, and assessments that school counselors at alternative education discipline programs in public schools provide to physically aggressive children who are assigned to these programs in order to reduce their aggressive behaviors. I judged that a descriptive case study would be the best approach for realizing the study’s purpose. Yin (1994) defined a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (p. 16). Merriam (1998) defined a case study as an “intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (p. 21). Tellis (1997) contended that “case
studies are designed to bring out the details from the viewpoint of the participants by using multiple sources of data” (p. 3).

Further, the rationale for choosing to conduct an interpretivist qualitative study was that I could describe the choices, and actions of the two school counselors from the perspectives of and with the interpretation of multiple participants and multiple data sources. I now discuss the interpretivist paradigm in more detail.

**Interpretivist paradigm.** According to Lichtman (2013), interpretivist studies focus on analyzing meaning that people confer on their own actions. Using an interpretivist theoretical orientation, I focused on the participants’ lived experience (Merriam, 1998) and how they constructed their knowledge of children’s physically aggressive behavior and the meanings that the school counselors conferred on the services and interventions that they used to reduce the children’s aggression. As a participant observer, I interacted with and observed the counselors during meetings with parents, students, administrators, and other student service providers. Through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the counselors, I gathered information regarding the school counselors’ interpretation of the services, assessments, and interventions that they provided. In order to gain a clearer understanding of these services and interventions, as well as the counselors’ perceptions of them, I collected artifacts and reviewed documents pertaining to the services and interventions that the counselors described in their interviews. Accordingly, I present the case from the perspectives of multiple participants and compare the findings of the case study to my assumptions prior to data collection.

**Case, Setting, and Participants**

Having established my decision to conduct a case study with an interpretivist orientation, I now describe the basic components of the study: the case, the setting and the participants.
The case. As stated, this single-case study using interviews, observations, artifacts, documents, and field notes (Yin, 2014) describes the services, interventions and assessments provided by two school counselors to two elementary alternative education discipline programs in a school district in central Florida. Only four alternative elementary schools in the district provided services for physically aggressive students who were expelled from the traditional school setting, and only one school counselor was employed by each of the four alternative education discipline programs within the study district.

Setting. The district has 150 schools and more than 100,000 students (District Public Schools, 2017). The four alternative disciplinary programs educate students enrolled in elementary schools who demonstrate violent, disruptive, and noncompliant behaviors in their original school setting and have failed to respond to behavioral interventions. The programs, which are designed to modify students’ behavior, are located on the campus of four public elementary schools throughout the district. Students who are recommended for expulsion from the public-school system and are allowed to attend an alternative program instead of being expelled from the school system without receiving educational services, are served at the alternative school that is closest to their zoned traditional school. The alternative programs provide educational services to public school elementary students who are expelled from 89 elementary schools within the school district. Each alternative program is staffed with a teacher and paraprofessional in each classroom. As noted, each of the four elementary schools has one school counselor.

The students assigned to the alternative education program, who include pre-kindergarteners through fifth graders, are separated from the general student population and are served in a single classroom within the school or in a portable separate from the school structure.
The number of students assigned to the alternative education programs fluctuates throughout the academic school year. In Alternative Discipline Program A, a single classroom was designated as the alternative education classroom. Although the classroom was housed within the school facility, the students were separated from the general education population for all academic and non-academic subjects. The students were permitted to use the schools’ physical education and lunchroom facilities. Students attending the Alternative Discipline Program B were housed in a portable located away from the school’s main buildings. Students are assigned to the alternative education program for either 45 days, 90 days, or up to one calendar school year (District Public Schools, 2017).

The goal of the alternative programs is to create an environment that reduces the occurrences of targeted behaviors and enhances academic progress through diagnostic and prescriptive teaching strategies, social skills training, and behavior management plans. The program is designed to provide a positive systematic environment, which serves as a framework for correcting inappropriate behaviors. The program provides educational services to students who cannot be maintained at their home schools as the result of their behaviors and returns the student to the general education school setting after the duration of their expulsion.

Participants. Two school counselors currently employed at the K–5 alternative discipline programs, and two administrators, a Director of Discipline, and an Assistant Principal of the public school district where the study was held, were recruited to participate in the case study. The two school counselors were selected because of their willingness to participate in the case study and their roles as school counselors at the alternative education programs. The administrators were selected because of their district-level supervisory roles and the knowledge
they possess about the alternative discipline programs. I now provide more detailed background for both sets of study participants.

Although social workers, behavior analysts, and a school psychologist also provided services to students at the alternative education programs, this study focused only on school counselors. Although the study district has seventy-six elementary public schools, only four of the schools have school counselors who provide services to kindergarten through fifth-grade elementary students, as well as elementary students assigned to the alternative education program.

According to the district’s job description for elementary school counselors, school counselors are responsible for providing a comprehensive school counseling program that addresses students’ academic, personal/social, and career development to promote student achievement. Counselors are given the responsibility of providing services to students, parents, and the community. The counselors are also responsible for providing direct preventive and responsive services, such as working with students individually or in groups, as well as making referrals to other agencies as appropriate (District Public Schools, 2017).

The two school counselors had diverse counseling, teaching, leadership experiences, and experience in working with physically aggressive children. School Counselor A holds a Bachelor’s degree in Social Work, a Master’s Degree in Marriage and Family Counseling, and a Master’s Degree in Education Leadership and Management. The counselor’s work experience includes teaching general education students and exceptional education student in traditional education schools and a school designed to educate exceptional education students. As a teacher and administrator at the school for exceptional students, this counselor worked with physically aggressive students who were on probation for being aggressive towards teachers and
community members. Moreover, this counselor worked as a guidance counselor in a pre-kindergarten through fifth grade school setting for five years.

School Counselor B had a Master’s Degree in school counseling and had worked as a school counselor and teacher for twenty-eight years providing services to students in pre-kindergarten through college levels. The counselor shared that she selected the school counseling major instead of majoring in mental health in order to work with families to meet their needs whether it involved social/emotional needs regarding death, divorce, or assisting their child in making academic decisions regarding course selections. The counselor’s career as a teacher provided her with “on the job” training in working with aggressive children. In her previous positions as a middle school and high school teacher, the counselor stated that she was not required to manage children’s aggressive behaviors. Children who engaged in aggressive behaviors were referred to the school’s dean and resource officer to receive such disciplinary actions as a verbal reprimand or suspension. However, in her current position as an elementary school counselor, the counselor described her role as a member of a team of professionals responsible for addressing students’ aggressive behaviors. The counselor also stated that she had observed more students demonstrating aggressive behaviors during the previous three years while working as an elementary school counselor as compared to the previous twenty-six years at the middle school and high school level.

Two district administrators of discipline were selected as secondary participants in the study because they were knowledgeable about the programming of the alternative education discipline programs in the study district and able to provide descriptive information regarding the alternative education program, procedures used to assign students to the programs and their input regarding staffing the programs. The Director of Discipline supervises all major discipline
related to the Code of Student Conduct (2017). The Assistant Principal of the Division of Juvenile Justice assists the director with administrative duties of special programs. These administrators had the authority to make decisions about various operations of the program, including such processes as facilitating recommendations to the school district’s discipline committee regarding students’ placement in the alternative programs. The administrators also assisted in determining the personnel staffing for the alternative education programs.

According to the district’s job description for the Director of Disciple, the director is knowledgeable of educational administration and programming at the specialized schools and has the following responsibilities: (a) supervising major discipline issues related to the student Code of Conduct; (b) mediating between the district office and school administrators related to discipline; (c) conducting student discipline hearings with other district personnel; (d) remaining current on pedagogical studies related to restorative justice and programming for alternative education; (e) conducting discipline hearings; (f) dealing with the student Code of Conduct; and (g) making recommendation for the improvement of specialized school programs and student discipline procedures based on research (District Public Schools, 2017).

Methods and Procedures

Broadly, data collection for this study included face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with two district administrators and two school counselors at two alternative discipline programs. The interviews were based on an interview guide and featured open-ended questions. Other data collection efforts included recordings; transcriptions; field notes; observations of the counselors in their work settings; artifacts used by the administrators pertaining to children’s placement in an alternative program and artifacts pertaining to interventions and theories used by the school counselors; and documents. Artifacts and documents were collected through face-to-face visits
with participants, e-mails, and from internet research. I now describe the methods of this study in more detail.

During the initial phase of this study, I contacted the four school counselors and the two administrators to inform them of the study and inquire whether they were interested in participating in the study. Two of the four school counselors, the Director of Discipline, and the Assistant Principal consented to participate in the study.

**Interviews.** An in-depth, semi-structured interview with each participant was a primary data collection activity of this study. Interviews were conducted using an interpretivist theoretical perspective, with the goal of understanding the meaning the school counselors placed on the services and interventions they provided to the students (Roulston, 2010). Although I have previously worked as a mental health counselor at an alternative education school and a school counselor in a traditional school setting, and I currently work as a Teacher Resource Specialist for the target district, my primary concern as a researcher was to understand the participants’ perspective (Merriam, 1998). Prior to and during the interview, I identified my views and preconceived beliefs. I was careful not to impose them on the informants as I attempted to hear their voices and to understand the meaning they conferred on their actions.

I constructed questions designed to elicit information about the participants, the setting, and the procedures used to place students in the alternative programs, and the services and interventions the school counselors provided. The questions were used to develop a semi-structured interview guide containing primary research question and sub-questions. This guide assisted me in focusing on the experiences of the counselors and bracketing my beliefs (Stake, 1995). The questions were developed based on my interest in the case and my review of previous literature on children aggression, alternative education programs, school counselors’ roles, and
counseling theories. The open-ended probing questions consisted of a combination of personal questions. These were used to obtain the professional backgrounds of the participant, factual questions, and personal belief questions pertaining to the assessments, services, prevention strategies, and the interventions that the school counselors use (see Appendix C).

These are the questions that I developed and used in interviewing the school counselors. In order to obtain background information about these counselors and their experience working with physically aggressive students, I asked, “What training and experiences have you had in working with young children with physical aggression?” The questions “Which physically aggressive children are assigned to the alternative programs?” and “What process is used to assign students to alternative programs?” assisted me in understanding the type of children assigned to the programs and the procedures used to place the students in the program. Finally, the questions “What type of counseling services do you provide to the students in the alternative education programs?” and “What interventions do you deem to be effective with children who demonstrate physical behaviors?” allowed me to gain insight into the services and interventions the counselors provide to the physical aggressive children attending the discipline programs.

I also conducted one semi-structured interview with each of the two district-level administrators of the alternative discipline programs, the Director of Discipline and the Assistant Principal of the Division of Juvenile Justice programs, in order to gain an understanding of the administrators’ perception of the alternative education discipline programs in which physically aggressive children were assigned and the process used to assign students to the program. I also wanted to discover which prevention and intervention strategies were implemented at the
alternative education program when the school counselors provided counseling services to students exhibiting aggressive behavior.

I visited and spoke with the participants several times prior to the individual interviews to build rapport and to assist the participants in gaining an understanding of the research topic, the purpose of the study, and the interview questions. I also contacted the school counselors prior to the interviews and observations via telephone to build rapport, and communicated with the school counselors via telephone, email, and text messages, as well as in face-to-face visits to the school counselors’ work site. I reviewed the consent form for participating in the study with each participant, providing overview information. The participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the interview format, how the information they shared with me during the interview would be used, and the anticipated length of the interview (between 15 and 60 minutes) and other time requirements, the risk and benefits of participating in the study, the right to withdraw from the research at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses. Participants were informed that their interviews would be recorded. I gave the participants the opportunity to ask question regarding the study and their participation in the study. Each participant willingly signed the consent form to participate in the study. Also, prior to the interviews, I contacted each participant to schedule mutually agreed-upon dates, times, and locations to conduct the interviews that were both convenient and provided privacy for the participants.

The interviews with the participants ranged from fifteen minutes to one hour. The interviews with the Director of Discipline and the Assistant Principal of the Division of Juvenile Justice were conducted at the participants’ office. Interviews with the school counselors were conducted at a mutually agreed-upon location that provided the counselors with anonymity.
In the interviews, the district administrators provided background information describing of the alternative discipline programs, reasons physically aggressive children are assigned to the programs, and the procedures followed to place students to the program. The semi-structured interviewing process proved fruitful in discovering the prevention strategies and interventions school counselors used to reduce children’s physical aggression, the theories the interventions are grounded in, as well as barriers they faced that hindered them from providing those services. The two school counselors shared their viewpoints on multiple topics related to their work with physically aggressive students in alternative programs.

As a researcher with prior experience as a school counselor in a traditional school setting, a mental health counselor, and an administrator in an alternative education setting, I sought to be aware of my experiences working with physically aggressive students in alternative schools as I focused on the school counselors and tried to captured their experience, their beliefs, perspectives, and opinions. I met with the participants after the interviews to conduct member checks to verify the accuracy of the information the participants shared with me and to discover the participants’ opinions about the research. After the interviews with the administrators, I also read additional literature pertaining to procedures the administrators stated they followed in assigning students to the alternative programs, as well as literature pertaining to the interventions that the school counselors discussed during their interviews.

After interviewing and observing the participants, I collected documents that they discussed to supplement key concepts that I was not able to observe. Each participant received either a copy of his or her transcribed recorded interviews or written responses face-to-face or via email. The school counselors also received a copy of their observations. One school counselor provided revisions to her transcribed interview.
**Interview data.** I listened attentively to the participants’ responses and asked probing and clarification questions to obtain additional information from the participants. Interviews with the School Counselor B and the Assistant Principal were audio-recorded. However, to respect the wishes of School Counselor A and the Director of Discipline, their interviews were not recorded. Rather, the director wrote the answers to the interview question on the interview form, and the counselor typed the responses to the interview questions. During the interviews with the participants, I took limited notes to ensure that I provided individual attention to each participant. I used active listening skills, clarification, and probing questions to hear the voice of the participants and capture their experiences as they answered each question. After each interview (and observation), I thanked each participant for their time and relocated to a private room to write field notes and organize artifacts. I reviewed the recordings and the responses to the interview questions in order to process the information the participants shared. The write-ups were brief notes to spark my memory of the conversations and to remind me of documents I needed to collect later.

I carefully reviewed the recorded and written responses to the interviews as I listened and search for emerging descriptive categories and patterns. After reviewing the audio recordings of School Counselor B and the Assistant Principal, I manually transcribed these two interviews, and then met again with the participants to conduct member checks and member reflections. I gave each participant a copy of her interview. I allowed each participant the opportunity to confirm or deny the accuracy of the contents in their interviews and recommend additions and/or deletions to their interviews. I also asked the participants to provide feedback regarding their thoughts about my study. Three participants replied that they found the research interesting and
enlightening. One participant expressed the value of reviewing the theories that may be used by school counselors.

**Observations.** As a participant-observer, I conducted multiple observations with each of the school counselors at their school sites. Each observation lasted for one hour.

As a Teacher Resource Specialist for the study’s alternative education program, I was in a unique position to actively engage in the activities of the case and observe the counselors at their schools as they provided services and interventions to the students assigned to the program. As a participant-observer, I had the opportunity to access multiple data sources and the perspectives of the two school counselors in the study regarding the services they provided. The data sources supported the information the counselors shared with me during their interviews. As a participant-observer, I observed one school counselor seven times and the second counselor eight times, with each observation lasting an average of one hour. I observed the counselors meeting with administrators, teachers, social workers, academic support teachers, behavior analysts, parents, and students during transition meetings as students entered and exited the alternative programs.

My unique position allowed me to observe the counselors’ activities and form my perception of their actions as a person inside the case (Yin, 2014). Also, this unusual position allowed me to take an “active membership role” by engaging in activities that advanced the school counselors’ opportunities to work with parents and other school professionals (Merriam, 1998). As a participant-observer, I conducted transition meetings at the school sites with the school counselors and a team of professionals in the helping profession as students entered the alternative programs and exited the alternative programs to return to the traditional school setting. I invited parents, students, administrators, school counselors, teachers, social workers,
and academic behavior support teachers, and behavior analysts to the transition meetings for students entering and exiting the alternative education programs.

During the meetings, the counselors obtained information from parents, students, and team members such as historical data regarding the students’ physically aggressive behavior, academic performance, social and emotional performance, as well as, the students’ need. The school counselors along with the team members also reviewed individual education plans for exceptional students who were exceptional student education, Section 504 plans for students with disabilities, and the students’ placement in the multi-tiered system of supports order to determine if the students needed more academic and behavior support.

The school counselors shared information with parents and team members how they would be involved in providing services to the children while they were in the alternative discipline programs. After learning about the onset of one student’s physical aggression, one school counselor offered a parent a resource list and an application for the student to attend a grief camp. Another school counselor provided parents with information pertaining to the CHAMPS (Conversation Help Activity Movement Participation; Sprick, 2009) behavior system used at her school to teach students responsibility and manage students’ behaviors. During exit meetings from the alternative discipline programs, the counselors recommended strategies and interventions to administrators and other school counselors they believed could help the children control their physical aggressive behaviors as they returned to the traditional school settings.

Visits with the school counselors allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of how they work collaboratively with parents and community agencies to provide students services. After the parent informed one counselor that her child’s physically aggressive behaviors began after the death of a family member and separation from another significant person in the child’s life,
the school counselor provided the parent with an application form and referral to a grief counseling program. The school counselor also shared several community referral resources with the parent. As I visited the first school counselors’ school, she informed me that, after a student demonstrated severe harmful behaviors, the counselor conducted a threat assessment to determine if the student was a danger to himself and others, and had the student “Baker Acted” (i.e., involuntary or emergency commitment for a mental health evaluation; Florida Mental Health Act of 1971, 1971) and transported to a crisis stabilization facility. An additional visit with the school counselor gave me the opportunity to witness the school counselor discussing a reward agreement with a student and a teacher regarding the student’ behavior. After a parent informed the school team at one transition meeting that her son was receiving services from several community agencies, the counselor asked the parent to sign an “exchange of information form” that would allow her to communicate with the community agencies and obtain medical, psychological, and social/emotional information about the child that could assist the team in providing appropriate services for the student.

Artifacts and documents. According to Stakes (1995), researchers often use documents to substitute for activities they could not observe. Documents consist of a variety of visual and physical materials that are relevant to the study and in existence prior to the study (Merriam, 1998, p. 112). Artifacts are forms of documents and physical objects found within the study setting (Merriam, 1998, p. 117). I collected and analyzed documents of concepts that the participants referred to in their interviews and that I believed were relevant to understanding the services the counselors provide and answering the research questions. The documents also served as substitutes for the school counselors’ activities that I could not observe (Stake, 1995).
During and after the observations and interviews with the participants, I collected the following artifacts and documents that the participants referred to during their interview to validate, augment, and triangulate the data I received from the multiple participants and sources;

During an intake meeting to enroll a student in the alternative school, a parent informed the team that her child began to demonstrate physical aggressive behaviors after the loss of several significant people in his life. Therefore, School Counselor A provided the parent with several referral resources that consisted of an “Aunt Bertha” business card, a list of community referral resources, and an application to attend “Camp Brave Heart” grief camp.

Artifact 1. Aunt Bertha business card.
The Aunt Bertha.com business card connects parents with local programs, resources, and support for families and children. The website allows parents to search for free or reduced cost services in their local areas such as mental health services, food, housing, transit, medical care, financial assistance, education, as well as job training, employment, and legal assistance.

Artifact 2. List of Mental Health Providers and support groups
This list provides a list of support groups for students, mental health providers, and Baker Act-receiving facilities for children

Artifact 3. 2017 Camp Brave Heart Application
This is an application package that permits students to attend an annual camp for children and teens that have experienced the death of a loved one. Camp Brave Heart is an affiliate of Good Shepherd Hospice
• During a field visit, School Counselor A informed me that a student demonstrated harmful behavior, requiring her to conduct a threat assessment. The study district has specific procedures and guidelines for conducting a threat assessment. The Study District’s Threat Assessment/Intervention Procedures and Guidelines outlines the procedures for assessing a student’s levels of threat, measures to insure student safety, site team assignment, data collection/screening/parent notification, and disposition/recommendations.

  Artifact 4. Threat Assessment/Intervention Procedures and Guidelines

• Transition meetings are held as students enter and exit the alternative programs. In order to discuss the students’ needs, the participants follow a transition meeting agenda. The agenda is used for intake and exit meetings as students enter and exit the alternative programs. The agenda serves as a list of items to be addressed during the meetings and signals the participants of their time to provide information to the team members. Team members listed include Parent, School Counselor, Teacher Resource Specialist, Academic Behavior Support Teacher, Social Worker, Behavior Analysts, Administrators, Dean, Exceptional Student Education Facilitator, and Teachers.

  Artifact 5. Transition meeting agenda.

• During intake and exit meetings parents informed the transition team that their children were receiving services within the community such as mental health counseling. The school counselors also recommended community services to parents, as well as, contacted the community agencies to receive and provide information about the children. In order for the school counselors to discuss confidential information about the students
the parents were required to sign a consent form that allowed an exchange of information between the two agencies.

Artifact 6. Exchange of information between agencies consent form.

- School Counselor B brought a list of counseling theories (Artifact 7) with her to the meeting allowed her to describe the counseling theories that her services and interventions are grounded. Summary of counseling theories and approaches inclusive of major counseling theories, view of human nature, the role of the counselor, and counseling goals.

- During their interviews, both counselors discussed their use of Nonviolent Crisis interventions (CPI) strategies they use to de-escalate children’s aggressive behaviors and intervene when a child becomes physically aggressive. Therefore, I reviewed the Nonviolent Crises Intervention Training Participant Manual (Artifact 8). The training manual provides a basic understanding of crises intervention methods that emphasize early intervention and nonphysical methods for preventing, managing disruptive behaviors, reinforcing preventive techniques. The manual also provides verbal de-escalation skills, releases, and holding skills that can be used with students in crises as a last resort.

- As students enroll and exit the alternative program the transition team reviews the MTSS tier level the child is in and decided whether to increase or maintain the level of services the students received during the transition meetings. As discussed in their interviews, both school counselors are an integral part of this decision-making process. Artifact 9 illustrates the Problem Solving/Response to Intervention PS/RtI process. The handout provides a definition, illustrations, and examples of Problem Solving/Response to
Intervention and multi-tier system of support (retrieved from study district.net). The handout defines PS/RtI as a multi-tiered approach that includes resources designed to meet the needs of all students (retrieved from study district.net).

- School Counselor-B described the CHAMPS behavior management approach as an intervention that she uses with the children assigned to the alternative discipline programs. The CHAMPS fact sheet (Artifact 10) defines CHAMPS as an evidence-based approach to classroom behavior management and a collection of recommendations for classroom structure, teaching expectations, conducting observations, enhancing student motivation, and correcting misbehavior (Sprick, 2009). The worksheets (Artifact 11) consist of a classroom management teacher checklist and reproducible classroom management activities.

- During their interviews, the district administrators referred to the “Code of Student Conduct” as they described the type of students assigned the alternative program, the reasons students are assigned, and the process used to assign students to the programs. The Code of Conduct describes the rights and responsibilities of the school board with regard student conduct. The code also includes appeal procedures and student consequences for violating the Code. The Code also includes recommended instructional strategies, behavior interventions, and techniques to involve and communicate with parents.


Data Analysis

According to Stake (1995), data analysis is the process of giving meaning to our first impressions and to the final collection of data. I used an iterative, inductive, and deductive
coding process to identify the main categories in my data. I drew upon methods discussed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) to analyze the data I collected in this study; I discuss those methods in this section. Broadly, I drew upon the methods of constant comparison to analyze the data, collecting data units from multiple sources, beginning with specific concepts within an interview or document and comparing them with concepts in another data source (Merriam, 1998). I repeatedly compared one unit of data with another unit of data, looking for similar patterns (Merriam, 1998). I searched for these common patterns and meaning units within each interview, observation, document, field note, and artifact. Patterns that related to each other were then grouped to create categories. I then compared the categories between the individual interviews, observations, and artifacts, searching for commonalities. The data I analyzed consisted of interviews and observations that I conducted with the two administrators and two school counselors. Artifacts, documents, field notes I wrote during my field visits pertaining to the services, assessments, and interventions the counselors used to reduce the children’s physical aggression at the alternative discipline programs were also analyzed.

I now describe the process of data analysis in more detail. First, I reviewed the literature for relevant research pertaining to my research interest. I then generated inquiry questions and created a “start list” of researcher-generated codes of key variables, a method referred to as “deductive coding”. After generating the temporary codes, I laid my “start list” aside prior to collecting my data.

Second, I conducted a first cycle coding process. I used “inductive coding” by coding meaning data units in the transcripts and written interview responses. I used a holistic coding method of providing a temporary single code to a large unit of raw data. I identified patterns of descriptive units of data within each interview. I tallied the number of times the descriptive data
units emerged. I compared the descriptive units of data between the interviews and created codes that described the common descriptive data units. I selected the most important codes that were related to my questions.

I next used a second cycle coding process. I used the coding framework from the interviews to analyze each of the documents, artifacts, and field notes, looking for key concepts and common descriptive data units. Furthermore, I continued to code the common key concepts between the data sources. I compared units of data to one another with in each data source and grouped the similar data into categories. I tallied the number of times a common concept appeared. I compared each data source with each other identifying common descriptive categories. I continuously compared codes between my data sources.

During the second cycle coding, I coded identified patterns and grouped data units into categories and subcategories as common ideas emerged (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). I continued to review literature regarding analyzing data within case studies. As I read literature pertaining to coding, I created codes and revised codes as new categories emerged; this process is called “inductive coding” (Merriam, 1998). I eliminated codes from my “start list” and descriptive categories that did not directly address my inquiry questions. For example, I eliminated the code “service providers” and “alternative programs”. I constantly compared units of data within each data source and between the multiple data sources. Inductive coding and reading of literature led to generating descriptive categories.

Finally, I developed a hierarchy, selecting the smallest number of codes and descriptive categories to represent the key concepts emerging from the data (Lichtman, 2013). Themes, patterns, and theoretical constructs emerged progressively during the data analysis, allowing me
to be open to the information the administrators and school counselors shared, bringing meaning to the raw data, as well as linking my data to my previously reviewed literature.

*In vivo coding* and *attribute coding* provided basic descriptive information such as school setting, participant experience, and school counselors’ job roles in providing services to the children assigned to the alternative programs. I coded and reported quotes from the participants to hear and honor their voice and mobilize their stories with in the context of the study. Jotting allowed me to write notes and later insert comments as I analyzed the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). A summary table that connects my inquiry questions to the data sources and data analysis used is provided in Table 3.

**Table 3.**

*Connection of Inquiry Questions with Data Sources and Data Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What services do school counselors provide to kindergarten through fifth-grade children assigned to alternative education programs to reduce physical aggressive behaviors?</td>
<td><em>Transcribed interview questions:</em> District administrators’ interviews #8, #9 for school counselors’ interviews #2b, #11 <em>Participant-observations:</em> Counselor A, Counselor B <em>Documents:</em> Heartland, AuntBertha.com business card List of Mental Health Providers Camp Brave Heart application Exchange of Information consent form <em>Field notes:</em> Counselor A, Counselor B</td>
<td>Patterns Tallies/Tabulating Categories Themes Coding Jotting Pattern Matching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What assessments are school counselors using to identify aggression in children?</td>
<td><em>Transcribed interview questions:</em> School counselors’ interviews #13, #2b, #11 <em>Document:</em> Team member meeting agenda</td>
<td>Patterns Tallies/Tabulating Categories Themes Coding Jotting Pattern Matching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. What are prevention and interventions strategies counselors using to reduce physical aggression?</td>
<td>Transcribed interview questions: School counselors’ interviews #4, #10, #11</td>
<td>Patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Documents: District’s Threat Assessment /Intervention Procedures and Guidelines</td>
<td>Tallies/Tabulating</td>
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<td>Categories</td>
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<td>Pattern Matching</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Transcribed interview questions: School counselors’ interviews #5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Documents: Nonviolent Crises Intervention Manual</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Problem Solving/Response to Intervention PS/RtI illustration</td>
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<td></td>
<td>CHAMPS Fact Sheet</td>
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</table>

According to the two school counselors’ perspectives, the counselors implemented services and interventions grounded in a combination of theories including Behavior Theory (Skinner, 1953), Social Cognitive Behavior theories (Bandura, 1978), Choice Theory (Glasser, 1965), and Reality Theory (Glasser, 1965). As the result of analyzing the data from multiple sources and comparing the data to the previously reviewed literature, the data helped me to describe the school counselors’ experiences and their perceptions of the services they provided to the children in alternative programs and so answer the research questions.

Because the data were collected from multiple sources, I could use them in the process of triangulation to cross-verify meaning and interpretation. Stake (1995) described the purpose of data source triangulation as “the process of seeing if what we are observing and reporting carries the same meaning when found under different circumstance and if a case remains the same at other times, other spaces, as people interact differently” (p. 122–123). In analyzing the data that
came in different forms and from several sources, I noted that my findings converged; more significantly, the process of triangulation helped me to develop a deep and nuanced understanding of the topics of interest.

**Researcher’s Role**

According to Merriam (1998), “interpretivist case studies include rich descriptive data”. McDonough and McDonough (1997; as cited in Zaidah, 2007) proposed that the data are also “used to illustrate, support, or challenge the researchers’ assumptions held prior to data collection”. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of South Florida in the Curriculum and Instruction Counselor Education Program with a cognate in Educational Psychology. I have a Master of Arts in Guidance and Counselor Education, a Master of Arts in Specific Learning Disabilities, and a license in Mental Health Counseling. I have a Certified Educator Certificate in Guidance and Counseling PK–12, Exceptional Student Education K–12, and Specific Learning Disabilities K–12. Moreover, I have 32½ years experience as a teacher, counselor, supervisor, and resource specialist.

My professional career and my personal interest motivated me to conduct a single case study on school counselors’ role in reducing physical aggression in children in alternative education discipline programs. During my career, I worked as a school counselor and mental health counselor both in the private sector and in the public-school setting. Upon completing my second Masters’ degree and obtaining my license, I began working as a mental health counselor in an alternative education school. The alternative education school provided educational services for kindergarten through fifth-grade students who were expelled from the traditional public education system as the result of serious Code of Conduct violations such as a battery, guns, weapons, dangerous objects, continuing interference with the education process, and
confrontation with a school board employee. I noticed that a significant number of the students assigned to the alternative programs previously demonstrated or engaged in physically aggressive behaviors.

Although teachers, social workers, and school psychologist at the alternative school implemented strategies to reduce the children’s aggressive behavior, the alternative education discipline school did not have a certified school counselor to provide services and interventions to the physical aggressive children. As previously stated, school counselors’ training prepares them to work with at-risk students (ASCA, 2012); they have unique knowledge, abilities, and skills to meet the needs of diverse students (ASCA, 2012). I noticed that while some students reduced their physical aggressive behaviors, other students continued to engage in the aggressive behaviors. As a result, some students received out-of-school suspensions for their aggressive behaviors. Also, after leaving the alternative discipline school, the persistent physically aggressive behaviors of some students caused them to return to the program.

During my doctoral studies, I took a Qualitative Research in Education course that required me to conduct a qualitative research study. That study stimulated my interest in conducting a case study of the one kindergarten–fifth-grade alternative education discipline school. Since taking that course and starting my dissertation, that alternative school has closed and the students are currently served at alternative education programs within traditional school settings. Furthermore, the students assigned to the alternative discipline programs can now receive services from the school counselors at the traditional schools.

As Merriam (1998) wrote, “Because the primary instrument in qualitative research is humans, all observations and analysis are filtered through that human being’s worldview, values, and perspective, there are multiple interpretations of reality. The researcher brings a construction
of reality to the research situation which interacts with other people’s constructions or interpretations of the phenomenon being studied. The final product of this type of study is yet another interpretation by the researcher of others’ view filtered through his or her own.”

Although my previous positions, experiences, and literature reviews formed my perception of services and interventions that could be implemented to reduce children’s physical aggression in alternative schools, as a researcher I was interested in obtaining the perspectives of other counselors in the field. As I decided on my research topic, I had an intrinsic interest (Stake, 1994) in understanding what services and interventions the school counselors in the alternative schools in this one school district provided to assist the children in reducing their physical aggressive behaviors and improving their social skills. Therefore, I decided to conduct a case study on this topic.

As a researcher, my role in this study was to gather the views of the people I believed to be most knowledgeable about the services, assessments, interventions provided to physically aggressive children in alternative education programs to reduce their aggression, and to describe these actions to the reader. Moreover, the findings of this study reflect my construction and descriptions of the two school counselors’ interpretation of the services and interventions they provide. The findings of this research may provide readers with rich descriptions of the services and interventions that two school counselors use in the target alternative discipline programs that will allow them to make their own generalizations regarding the use of these services and interventions into reducing children’s aggression (Stake, 1995).

**Validity and Ethics**

I established the validity of the counselors’ interview questions using cognitive interviewing with two doctoral candidates who had previously been school counselors. The
original interview questions were used to identify any difficulties that may have affected the respondent’s feedback. Based on the respondents’ feedback, I made minor adjustments to my research questions.

According to Stake (1995), “data triangulation is an effort to determine if what we are observing and reporting conveys the same meaning when found under different circumstance.” With triangulation in mind, data were collected from interviews, observations, artifacts, and documents. First, I collected data from multiple sources and the different participants to confirm the emerging findings and triangulate my data, increase the credibility of the findings of the study (Merriam, 1998). I conducted face-to-face interviews with two district administrators and two school counselors at two alternative discipline programs. The interviews with School Counselor B and the Assistant Principal were recorded. The Director of Discipline and School Counselor A responded to the interview questions in writing. I conducted observations of the school counselors in their work settings. Furthermore, I collected artifacts and documents reflecting the information the participants shared with me during their interviews. The data sources were used for data triangulation. Next, as a participant-observer, I conducted multiple observations of the two school counselors at their schools over six months. Finally, I conducted member checks by providing the participants with a copy of their transcribed interviews, my interpretation of their observation, and a description of the artifacts and documents. I asked the participants to review the data and verify whether my interpretation of the data they shared with me accurately represented their perceptions (Meriam, 1998).

I used the following procedure to ensure the ethical principles and guidelines for conducting research involving human subjects (American Psychological Association, 2010). First, I contacted each participant face-to-face to inform them of my study, the requirements of
participating in the study and to inquire whether they were willing to participate in the study. Next, I verbally provided an overview of the research and gave the participants time to consider whether they were interested in participating in the study. Then the participants received a consent form about their willingness or lack of willingness to participate in the study with information about the study’s purpose, their time commitment, the confidentiality of their information. The voluntary nature of the research was emphasized with each participant, as well as each participant’s option to withdraw from the study at any time. The participants were informed that their identities would not be indicated or recorded. Therefore, I provided the participants with pseudonyms to protect their anonymity throughout my study. The participants had the opportunity to obtain information and answers to questions regarding the study any time before, during, and after the study.

Although observations of the participants occurred in their work setting, face-to-face interviews occurred at a mutually agreed-upon confidential location. The participants were informed that their interviews would be recorded and their decision not to be recorded would be honored. The participants received a copy of their transcribed interviews. I conducted a member check and allowed the participants time to review their transcript and recommend changes to their interviews and observations based on their perceptions of their actions during the events. One school counselor suggested minor grammatical changes to the transcript. I gladly received her recommendations and made the recommended changes.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I have discussed the research methodology that I used in the qualitative descriptive case study in which I took an interpretivist perspective. I have discussed the data collection process, as well as data analysis. Data collection techniques included semi-structured
interviews based upon an interview guide containing open-ended questions, audio recording of interviews, transcription of interviews, field notes, observations, documents, and artifacts used by the administrators pertaining to placement procedures, services, interventions, and theories used by two school counselors. This chapter defined the case, described the study setting, participants, and the researchers’ role. Data analysis included a constant comparative analysis within and between multiple data sources. Furthermore, as reoccurring patterns of key ideas and descriptions emerged, I created codes and categories for the data. I also discussed the appropriateness of the research design, paradigm, methods, procedures, and analysis. Finally, the validity and ethical assurance were presented. In Chapter Four, I present the findings of the case study.
Chapter IV

Findings

Introduction

As I have established, the purpose of this descriptive case study is, using the informants’ multiple perspectives and experiences (Stake, 1995), to describe the services, interventions, and assessments that school counselors at a particular public alternative education discipline program in central Florida provide to physically aggressive children who have been assigned to this program to reduce their physically aggressive behaviors. According to Merriam (1998), “a descriptive case study in education presents a detailed account of the phenomenon under study” (p. 38). Also, “interpretive case studies contain rich descriptions of data that are used to develop conceptual categories to support theoretical assumptions held prior to the gathering data” (p. 38). I restate the questions that guide this inquiry:

1. What services do school counselors provide to kindergarten through fifth-grade children assigned to alternative education programs to reduce physically aggressive behaviors?
2. What assessments are school counselors using to identify aggression in children?
3. What prevention strategies and interventions are counselors using to reduce physical aggression?
4. What theoretical orientations are counselors using to provide interventions for children demonstrating aggressive behaviors?
In this chapter, I present the results of the study, including the following sections: introduction, results of data collection and analysis for both interviews and observations, how the results relate to the research questions, and the summary.

**Emerging Descriptive Categories**

By comparing the different types of data and grouping together data with similar meaning, my analysis of the interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts yielded nine main descriptive categories; some of these nine have additional sub-categories. *Reasons assigned*, the first descriptive category, includes two sub-categories: (a) code and (b) physical. *Process of placement*, the second descriptive category, contains four sub-categories: (a) progressive discipline, (b) forms, (c) mandated, and (d) parental choice. The third descriptive category, *Counselors’ experience*, is composed of two sub-categories: (a) counselor and (b) teacher. *Services and interventions*, the fourth descriptive category, contains ten sub-categories: (a) group sessions, (b) mental health, (c) referrals, (d) behavior interventions, (e) individual counseling, (f) CPI, (g) multi-tiered system of support, (h) social/emotional, and (i) parent involvement. The fifth descriptive category, *Assessment*, has one sub-category, interview. The sixth descriptive category, *Theoretical orientations*, revealed four sub-categories: (a) combination of theories, (b) Behavior, (c) Cognitive Behavior, and (d) Reality Theory. The seventh descriptive category, *Barriers to providing services*, includes four sub-categories: (a) limited time with counselor, (b) resistance to change, (c) family dynamics, (d) more students are presenting with mental health problems. The eighth descriptive category, *Counselors’ perceptions of the outcomes of services*, has the sub-category of students’ needs are not met. Finally, the ninth descriptive category, *Counselors’ recommendations for future practice*, had the sub-category of needing more training. I now look more closely at each descriptive category in turn.
Descriptive category 1: Reason assigned. This category included descriptions of the reasons that physically aggressive children were assigned to the alternative discipline programs. The Director of Discipline reported that students are recommended to attend an alternative education discipline program based on the “Code”. I interpreted the “Code” to mean the district’s Code of Student Conduct (2017). The Code of Student Conduct is a handbook that prescribes the rights and responsibilities of the School Board and students regarding students’ conduct while attending school, a school-sponsored activity, while riding the school bus, or when at a school bus stop. The Code of Student Conduct also includes recommendations for behavior interventions, discipline and appeal procedures, as well as student consequences for violating the Code (Code of Student Conduct, 2017). The study district’s Code described alternative education programs as a type of discipline program designed to meet the needs of students in grades kindergarten through five who violate the prescribed rules for student conduct. These students can only be assigned to an alternative education programs for committing an expellable offence and remain at the alternative school for the duration of the expulsion. Furthermore, students who violate the Code of Conduct during their placement at an alternative education program may receive more severe disciplinary actions such as expulsion from school, with or without educational services (Code of Student Conduct, 2017; see also Appendix N).

The district’s Code of Conduct defines physical aggression as behavior “including but not limited to hitting, pushing, spitting, stalking, and destruction of property.” According to the Code, students can be referred to the alternative discipline program for demonstrating the following physically aggressive behaviors: physically attacking another person, assault, battery, fighting, hazing, and confrontation with a school board employee (Code of Student Conduct, 2017). The assistant principal, Administrator B, informed me that students are recommended to
an alternative program for engaging in physical aggression when he shared the following comment:

If they are physically aggressive with any type of school board staff, if you have multiple participants involved in a fight, you could be recommended for alternative education. If students show a continuous bullying that becomes physical over time they could be recommended for alternative education.

**Descriptive category 2: Process of placement.** This category comprises descriptions of the process that the district follows to assign physically aggressive students to an alternative education program based on the school district’s student Code. The process includes implementing progressive disciple, documentation, approval from the director of disciple or designee and students’ parents. The assistant principle, Administrator B, described the process that the district uses to assign students to the alternative discipline programs:

It goes through progression discipline. The administrator at each school calls into the discipline office and they give us a description of what’s going on campus. It can be discussed with the director of discipline or a designee and they will decide whether to go with a lesser discipline or to go through with the recommendation. If it goes through, then they have a packet that they must complete with the student’s information; their grades, discipline, attendance, description of what happened, referral, witness, and witness statements. After all of that is completed in a packet, it goes to the Director of Discipline. The packet is reviewed to make sure it is complete. Once the packet is complete, parents can choose to have a Level 1 hearing with the principal. Once a Level 1 hearing is schedule with the principal the outcome of that hearing is presented. If the principal sticks with the
recommendation the parent can request a Level 2 hearing. A Level 2 hearing is scheduled with the Director of Discipline. This process also applies to general education students. The only extra step for special education students would be to have a manifestation hearing before you have the Level 2 hearing. The manifestation hearing determines if the behavior is a manifestation of the student’s disability or not. Once we go through that entire process at the end of the Level 2 hearing, then the Director of Discipline will make the final decision on whether the student will attend an alternative education program or not. If it is mandated by the school system, the parents still have a choice. A parent can decide to send a student to the alternative education program or they can choose another program outside of the school system, as long as that student is out of school for 90 days.

The Director of Discipline referred me to the student Code of Student Conduct (2017) that describe the process the district uses to assigned students to the alternative education program. After the interview with district administrators, I compared the interview with the district’s code of conduct. I confirmed that the assignment process described in the Code matched the process described in the interview.

Section 3.02 of the Code of Conduct (2017) describes the process of implementing progressive discipline as follows:

Progressive discipline utilizing corrective strategies that consider the student’s age, exceptionality, previous conduct, probability of a recurring violation, intent, attitude, and severity of the offense, documentation of current supports in place and implemented whenever possible. Progressive discipline shall be considered and utilized in all instances
when deciding what disciplinary action should be Principals or designee shall impose disciplinary action in a progressive manner.

Descriptive category 3: Counselors’ experience. This category comprises the two school counselors’ education and experience working with physically aggressive children. During their interviews, both school counselors reported that they had teaching experience at various educational levels and experience as a school counselor. When asked to describe the educational background that prepared her to provide preventative and responsive services to all students, Counselor A responded: “My education background includes the following: B.A. Degree in Social Work, Master's Degree in Marriage in family counseling, Master's Degree in Education Leadership and Management, Doctoral Degree in Education Leadership and Management.” Counselor B responded:

I have a Master's in counseling. This is my twenty-eighth year in counseling. I will be starting my twenty-ninth year. I have worked with children from pre-k to graduation to college so I have all the realms. I spent 20 years in high school and middle school. I taught both middle school and high school. I taught Spanish, I’ve taught Latin, I’ve taught science and I taught reading for special needs children.

When asked about her training and experience in working with young children with physical aggression, Counselor A responded this way:

My work experience includes the following: High School Teacher— ESE program for 2 years, Lead Teacher— ESE program for 3 years, Regular education teacher for 4 years, and Guidance Counselor of grades Pre-K—5th grade for 5 years. The training I have had working with children with physical
aggression includes my years as both a teacher and lead teacher at... ESE. The students that were serviced at the locations had IEPs, all were being seen by a mental health counselor, and some were on probation for aggression towards teachers or other members in the community.

Counselor B added this to her earlier answer:

I've had to get what I call a lot of on-the-job training through my career because I have found out that as a counselor or as a classroom teacher I dealt with many aggressive children and many of them had to be addressed in a different way. And I felt that as a classroom teacher it was easier for me to diffuse them than if I brought a second party to diffuse it.

**Descriptive category 4: Services and interventions.** The data gathered from interviews and documents addressed these two central research questions: *What services do school counselors provide to kindergarten through fifth grade children assigned to alternative education programs to reduce physical aggressive behaviors?* and *What prevention strategies and interventions are counselors using to reduce physical aggression?* Results from the interviews, observations, and documents revealed that the school counselors provided individual counseling to students as needed. Interventions that the school counselors provided to the physically aggressive students attending alternative education discipline programs included positive behavior supports, crisis intervention, de-escalation skills, multi-tiered system of supports, and social/emotional skills training. The administrators and counselors shared that their goal is to prevent students from continuing their physical aggressive behaviors, as well as preventing children from returning to the alternative education discipline programs once they
leave. With this goal in mind, both school counselors also sought parental involvement and provided parents with referrals to community agencies.

When I asked the participants about the services provided to physically aggressive children in the alternative programs, the administrators and counselors made the following statements:

Administrator B

We have school counselors, we have behavior interventionist, we have school psychologist. They go out and speak with the students, they have group sessions with the students, they have one-on-one sessions with the students, they have one-on-one interventions with the student and the parents and so students receive a number of counseling services as well as interventions to prevent them from continuing those aggressive behaviors, as well as not returning to the alternative setting.

Counselor A

Mainly the counseling services that I provide to the student that are the alternative education program are outside resources.

These services include but are not limited to grief counseling groups, mentoring groups, as well as helping the parents locate residential treatment centers.

When discussing interventions for physically aggressive children, Counselor A focused on the use of proactive strategies in which the counselor develops rapport, uses calming and verbal de-escalation skills, and provides the child with a safe environment. During the interview, Counselor B elaborated on several interventions that are used to prevent students from engaging in physical aggressive behaviors and interventions to de-escalate the behavior once it occurs.
With a focus on building caring relationships, the counselor implements multiple systems of supports to assist children in feeling that they are safe and to help them to remain calm. The CHAMPS collection of recommended strategies (Sprick, 2009) is one set of interventions the counselor used during the school year to assist physically aggressive students develop a positive interaction with teachers, as well as demonstrate responsible behavior. The counselor is one of three adults on the campus who allow children to visit, to talk, and to calm down instead of running away or demonstrating physical aggression such as hitting. The counselor also tells the students daily that she cares for them.

As students enter the alternative education program, they are placed in the multi-tiered system of support where a team of professionals determines behavior goals, closely monitors the students’ response to interventions, reinforces taught behavior strategies, and provides parents daily feedback on the students’ performance. Home visits and phone calls are made to parents frequently to let them know that school staff need the parents to work collaboratively with them to help the child achieve success and that the counselor is focused on the child’s best interests.

When asked about the interventions provided to the children attending the alternative education programs, the school counselors made the following statements:

Counselor B

For me as a classroom teacher just like now as a counselor I believe that what is most important for me is to build that relationship with that student. Because you know once you have that relationship is easier for you to fix that behavior with the student than to bring third parties in that the student do not know, or aren’t used to their ways, or do not know how to deal with them. I am expected to be a part of the team that deals with aggressive behavior.
Counselor A

I provide behavioral support, crisis intervention counseling such as Baker Acts, suicidal at-risk questioners, course work recommendations and individual counseling if needed.

I use de-escalation skills a lot when dealing with aggressive students.

I just sat and talked with the student. The student was angry because he was taking off the computer and did not want to complete the classwork. While talking with the student I found that the student had trouble reading and the fact that he was acting out because he did not like to read in front of the other students. After about 10 minutes, the student calmed down and we came up with strategies to help the student in reading.

Counselor B

It's about building relationships, setting goals, students know they have a safe place to come to.

Positive behavioral support systems are set up to provide a proactive approach to the behaviors.

…bringing different professionals into a team setting and being able to problem-solve.

When we see that a child is having aggressive behavior or disruptive behavior we implement multiple systems, one being called the “CHAMPS” program, to work with the students to try to teach them some responsibility, self-control, just some cooling down mechanisms, escape mechanisms…

…the person working with them truly cares for them.
The relationship is the most important thing when you are counseling a student in my opinion.

I tell my students every day that ‘I love you’.

I spend a great portion of my time every day set aside to take parents phone calls, make parent phone calls, or to do home visits. So, they will know the school really needs to see you and really want you to be a part of it.

Multi-tiered system of support for behavior that way we could sit with the student, the alternative education teacher, the parents, and come up with some strategies and some interventions that will work in the classroom.

A lot of social/emotional skills were taught within the classroom and then they were reinforced as that student move throughout our campus.

**Descriptive category 5: Assessment.** This category comprises the methods that counselors use to gain information pertaining to students’ physically aggressive behaviors. Interviews with the school counselors revealed answers to the research question: *What assessments are school counselors using to identify aggression in children?* Common methods of assessments used by the school counselors were interviews with families in the form of social histories, information received from other professionals, and one-on-one conversations with students attending the programs. During student intake meetings into the alternative programs, the school counselors asked the parents and stakeholders probing and clarifying questions to gain information regarding the students’ physical aggressive behaviors. When asked what assessments counselors use with physically aggressive children, Counselor A replied:
I will ask questions about family history, ask the student questions about what makes them angry, and identify any reward that student would like to work towards.

We use a lot of problem solving meetings bringing all the experts together. We had multiple meetings with the mental health counselor which would come to our school twice a week. His guardian ad litem came to the meetings. His foster mother would come to the meetings. The liaison between children and Foster Care, and the school psychologist. This child really required a team of twelve to fourteen people to meet multiple times and problem-solve to see what interventions would work for him. Unfortunately, right now he is in the process of having a psychological evaluation.

Descriptive category 6: Theoretical orientation. This category addresses this research question: What theoretical orientations are counselors using to provide interventions for children demonstrating aggressive behaviors? Data collected from interviews with the school counselors and artifacts allowed me to understand the counselors’ perceptions of the theoretical orientation they use to provide counseling and intervention services.

The services and interventions used by both school counselors at the alternative programs to address children’s physical aggression included a combination of Behavior Theory (Skinner, 1953), Cognitive Behavior theory (Dobson, 2010), and Reality Theory (Glasser, 1965). Counselor A implemented interventions grounded in Behavior, Cognitive Behavior, and Reality theories that provided feedback to the student, and rewarded a student for making appropriate choices, as well as held the child accountable for his/her actions. The school counselors made the following comments when asked about the theories guide their interventions:
Counselor A

There is mixture of theories that guide my interventions. Dealing with students you learn one theory does not work for all students. There must be a combination of approaches or theories used. Students are rewarded for making good choices. This when combined with B.F. Skinner (Operant Conditioning) reinforcing good behaviors with rewards. Glasser Choice Theory, providing a safe place where the students want to learn because they feel that someone cares about what happens to them, and Cognitive Behavioral strategies that helps the teacher become more of a monitor and hold the students more accountable for their actions are all approaches that works in the school system. These are strategies that are more proactive and give feedback and reward the students for making the right choices.

Counselor B:

I will say that the Social Behavior Cognitive counseling would be the most. The reason is because I am very goal-oriented that set goals and I feel that student very early on if you are teaching them to set a goal and try to meet that goal and if they don't meet that goal then you go back and tweak it.

An observation of one school counselor and an artifact received from the second counselor provided support for their description of the counseling theories they use with children. During a visit with Counselor A, I observed her discussing a reward with a student. Counselor B brought a list of counseling theories with her to the interview. When I asked about her theoretical orientation, she stated that, if she had to choose a theory, she would choose Social Behavior Cognitive theory, as evident in the quotation above. The counselor proceeded to circle Cognitive Behavior theory on her list of theories.
**Descriptive category 7: Barriers to providing services.** This category comprises the challenges that the school counselors faced when providing services and interventions to the children attending the alternative programs.

The counselors explained that some families had a history of problems within the home that affected the children. The counselors also shared their belief that some children did not learn the appropriate behaviors and social skills from their home environment that they could apply in the school setting. When asked about some of the barriers that they had experienced in implementing interventions with physically aggressive children, School Counselor A stated: “Parents and the student's inability to want to change.”

Counselor B also shared the challenges that she experienced when implementing interventions to meet the students’ needs. Although the counselor reached out to gain parent involvement, sometimes parents were resistant to collaborating with the school personnel. However, the counselor demonstrated persistence in gaining parent involvement by making daily phone calls and home visits. On one occasion, the counselor said she asked a School Resource Officer to accompany her on a home visit and worked through the legal system to obtain parental consent for a child to receive an evaluation. Counselor B made the following statement regarding the barriers she faced with some parents and students.

Dealing with students that are in an alternative education program, some with broken homes, dealing with the loss of a family member or just not having the love, support and structure at home become a problem with how students relate to others outside of the home. The fact that his home life is so broken transfers into him bringing all that aggression to school and they cannot departmentalize where to leave one and where to begin another.
During site visits, I observed the school counselors showing parents and students warmth and unconditional positive regard as they engaged in conversations with the parents and students during transition meetings.

The availability of time and skills to investigate the causes of the children’s physical aggression and provide interventions for changing the severe behaviors was a concern that both counselors faced. The counselors believed that the time the students were assigned to the program was too short; Counselor A expressed her belief about this barrier this way: “The program that the students are currently served in is too short. This does not give the counselor or the teacher time to address the real needs of the student.” As noted, there was only one school counselor at each elementary school who provided services to both the students attending the traditional school setting and the students assigned to the alternative programs, thus limiting the time the counselors spent with both groups of students. Although the counselors believed that their time with the students in the alternative programs was limited, I observed them meeting and collaborating with other professionals (teachers, social workers, administrators, and school psychologist) to provide services to the children in the alternative programs.

Equipped with a Master’s degree in school counseling and nearly thirty years of experience as a teacher and a school counselor, Counselor B said that she did not feel prepared to address the intense physical aggression that an increasing number of children exhibited. Along with a changing society, the counselor also stated her belief that the number of students with mental health issues was increasing, which may contribute to more students exhibiting physical aggression. Some students were reported to need more intense therapy and referrals to community agencies which might be able to help the parent and student resolve their issues in a
more private setting. The counselor also reported that she believed other counselors faced some of the same barriers when attempting to do their best to meet students’ needs:

Now kids are coming with huge mental health issues. Behavior, how they are expected to behave, how to sit and listen, how to actively engage in a conversation and they must be taught that. They are just not bringing those social skills to school anymore. They are not a part of the home environment, so we are having to go back and teach them.

I observed both counselors working with stakeholders during meetings and exchanging information to provide services and interventions for the children’s mental health needs. Counselor A provided a parent with a list of community resources for mental health services and grief counseling for her child (Appendix N).

**Descriptive category 8: Counselors’ perceptions of the outcomes of services.**

This category revealed the school counselors’ beliefs about the outcomes of the services and interventions they provided to the children in the alternative education programs. Although the school counselors provided numerous services to reduce physical aggression in the children attending the programs, and despite saying that the students’ immediate needs were met, both counselors revealed that they did not believe the services they were currently providing were meeting the core needs of the students. When I asked each counselor, “Do you believe the services you are currently providing are meeting the needs of the students you serve?”, I received the following responses:

No, I do not believe the services that I am providing to the students in the alternative education program are meeting their needs. The program that the students are currently served in is too short. Students because of the long bus ride
are reluctant to attend school on a regular basis. Depending upon when the students enter the program, they could have a very short stay. Such as, if the students enter in May, the students are only required to remain in the program until the end of the school year. This does not give the counselor or the teacher time to address the real needs of the student. (Counselor A)

I do not. I feel that it is meeting the immediate needs of our students but unfortunately, I don't think we are given as many tools, as many man hours, or time to really delve into what is causing these students to have such severe behaviors. (Counselor B)

**Descriptive category 9: Counselors’ recommendations for future practice.** This category revealed the school counselors’ recommendations for overcoming the barriers they face in providing services and interventions. Near the end of their interviews, both school counselors suggested that more training is needed for school counselors to deal with children’s aggressive behaviors. Counselor B concluded by saying, “I do believe that as our society changes, counselors should be given the opportunity to go to multiple training on different techniques for dealing with aggressive behaviors because I'm seeing more every day”. When asked which training could be recommended for counselors to assist them with helping physically aggressive children, Counselor B suggested the need for counselors to receive training in the kinds of de-escalation skills taught to educators and helping professionals during Crisis Intervention (CPI) training.

**Participant-Observer Observations**

The second major component of my data collection and analysis is the observational data that I collected. As a Teacher Resource Specialist for the alternative
discipline programs, I was in unique position to observe the school counselors providing services and interventions to students at their schools. In the role of a participant observer, I conducted meeting with the counselors, parent, students, and support staff for students entering and exiting the alternative education programs. The meetings were held in the school counselors’ office at one school and a conference room at the other school. Each meeting lasted thirty minutes to one-and-a-half hours. The transition meetings were held with school administrators, teachers, a social worker, parents, behavior analysts, the student assigned to the alternative education program, and the school counselor.

However, for this study I only documented my actions and the activities of the school counselors. As noted and recorded in Appendix D, I conducted a total of nine observations of two school counselors. During each of the observations the school counselors collaborated with stakeholders to provide services on behalf of the students.

I describe here some examples from my observations. I observed Counselor A reviewing students’ Individual Education Plans, Functional Behavior Assessments, 504 Accommodations, students’ status in the multi-tiered system of supports, and the students’ behavioral performance and needs with the team. At an intake meeting, a parent informed the team that the student began to demonstrate physical aggressive behaviors after the death of a loved one and the separation from another significant person in the child’s life. Counselor A gave the parent an application for the student to attend the “Camp Brave Heart” grief camp for students and teens. The counselor also provided the parent with a list of community agencies and an “Aunt Bertha” business card to access community resources (see Appendix N). While meeting with the counselor during another visit to the school, I observed the counselor having a discussion with a teacher
and a student regarding the student’s behavior and the possibility that this student’s behavior would merit a reward.

Similarly, I was also able to observe Counselor B interacting with other professionals and providing indirect services to students. In addition to discussing the children’s academic and behavior performance, progress in the multi-tiered system of supports, Counselor B also discussed the CHAMPS behavior management system implemented at her school with a parent during a transition meeting. After a parent informed the team that her child was receiving services from an outside agency, the counselor asked the parent to authorize an exchange of information that would allow the counselor to communicate with the community agency and request records regarding the child that could assist the school in meeting the student’s educational needs (see Appendix N).

Additional visits with the school counselors provided further insight into the services and interventions the counselors provided to the students assigned to the alternative discipline programs. The study showed that the school counselors provided individual counseling and crisis intervention as needed. Upon arriving at the participants’ four school, I was asked to have a conference with one of the alternative education students with whom the counselor had several one-on-one counseling sessions. After arriving at Counselor A’s school, I was informed by the school counselor that she conducted a threat assessment for a student attending the alternative discipline program and the student was “Baker Acted”. Based on the district’s Threat Assessment/Intervention Procedures and Guidelines, a Crisis Team member, that could include a school counselor, conducts a threat assessment in all cases involving a threat of physical harm against a person or persons to determine if the threat requires further investigation. If a threat
appears to pose an imminent and danger to the safety of others, a child can be referred to a community mental health agency and Crisis Stabilization Unit using Baker Act Procedures to receive further evaluation and interventions. During a site visit, I observed a parent being informed that a student would be taken to a local Crisis Stabilization Unit as a School Resource Officer completed documents to transport the student.

**Deductive Assumptions Compared to Case Study Findings**

According to Yin (2014), a pattern matching technique is used to compare the findings of a case study with predicted findings prior to data collection. Therefore, before my data collection, I compared the descriptive categories that emerged from the case study to the hypotheses I made based on my review of the literature.

**Deductive assumption 1.** This assumption concerns the counselors’ theoretical orientation in providing interventions. The American School Counselor Association (2012, p. 8) contends that school counselors are trained in various counseling theories such as Cognitive Behavioral Theory (Dobson, 2010), and Social Cognitive Learning Theory (Bandura, 1978) and in implementing counseling techniques grounded in these theories. ASCA also claims that school counselors also provide counseling services such as individual counseling and brief counseling. Therefore, I hypothesized that school counselors in the current study would use a combination of interventions grounded in Social Cognitive Learning Theory and Bio-Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) to reduce the occurrence of or severity of the physical aggression of students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Additionally, I expected that counselors would use brief therapy sessions to counsel aggressive children.

The descriptive categories that emerged from the case study showed that the school counselors implemented interventions based on a combination of counseling theories that include
Social Cognitive Learning Theory (Bandura, 1978), Cognitive Behavioral Theory (Dobson, 2010), and Reality Theory (Glasser, 1965). The Metropolitan Area Child Study Research Group (2002) used the “Yes I Can” program, based on a Cognitive-Ecological approach (Mayer, Van Acker, Lochman & Gresham, 2011), to teach students self-understanding and problem-solving skills. Smith, Pare, and Gravelle (2002) used The Eclipse Program to teach students emotional self-monitoring, and decision-making skills. Recalling Dykeman’s (1995) use of Pair Therapy, a social cognitive strategy, to teach students self-control and problem-solving skills, the school counselors in this study also used techniques grounded in Social Cognitive theory, such as the CHAMPS model (Sprick, 2009), to teach students such social/emotional skills as problem-solving and responsible decision-making. In the current study, a student received positive reinforcement and rewards from School Counselor A for demonstrating appropriate behavior; this kind of behavior shaping and modification has its roots in Bandura’s Social Cognitive Learning Theory (Miller, 2011).

In addition to the theoretical orientation of counselors’ practice, this assumption extended to how the counselors would approach their therapeutic practice. According to the American School Counselor Association (2012), school counselors provide individual and group counseling services. School Counselor A informed me that she provides individual counseling as needed and small group counseling including grief counseling. The American School Counselor Association (2016a) standards contend that school counselors attempt to create a safe school environment. During an interview, School Counselor B related expressed that she built relationships with students, helped students to understand that her office is a safe place to go and calm down, and helped children to understand that their aggressive behaviors were putting others at risk of harm. Seventy-nine percent of alternative schools in the National Center for Education
Statistics national study (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002) had policies requiring crisis interventions. During their interviews, the counselors stated that they use crisis intervention techniques, such as de-escalation skills, to assist students in remaining calm and safe.

The counselors also used multiple strategies to develop rapport and work collaboratively with both students and parents. During an interview, Counselor B shared various strategies and resources she used to communicate with parents and involve parents in engaging in their child’s education. These include phone calls to parents, home visits, as well as visiting parents at other facilities to involve parents in educational decisions regarding their children.

The School Counseling Framework tasks school counselors with the responsibility of consulting with stakeholders regarding methods to assist students (Florida DOE, 2010). As a participant-observer, I observed the school counselors meeting with parents and professionals to gather information about children and provide children interventions through the multi-tiered system of supports (see Appendix N). Therefore, taking account of all the evidence collected from interviews and observations, my findings did support my assumption.

**Deductive assumption 2.** A study conducted by Grum, Hein and Fingerle (2011) showed that measures based on the Information Processing Model (Atkinson & Shifrin, 1968) could serve as reliable predictors of children’s aggressive behavior and assist in developing appropriate interventions to address children’s aggression. Therefore, I hypothesized that school counselors conducted assessments framed in the Information Processing Model to understand the risk factors that contribute to students engaging in physical aggression. The findings of the case study show that the school counselors relied on informal assessment techniques derived from the Information Processing Model to assess children’s physical aggression such as interviews with parents and other adults, including teachers, behavior analyst, social workers, and school
administrators. The school counselors also asked the children to explain the cause of their physical aggressive behavior. Therefore, the findings of the case study were similar to my assumption.

**Deductive assumption 3.** Research conducted by Tsang (2004) found that students were expelled from schools as the result of physical or verbal aggression towards others, possession of weapons, and disruptive or defiant behaviors. According to the district’s Code of Student Conduct (2017), students who violate the Code while attending the alternative program could be referred for more severe disciplinary actions than those described in the Code. The disciplinary actions include expulsion. Therefore, I predicted that school counselors in the current study would refer students to administrators for such disciplinary actions as detention, in-school or out-of-school suspension, and expulsion to prevent students from engaging in physical aggression. However, the descriptive categories that emerged from my case study showed that the school counselors collaborated with parents and other stakeholders to refer students for additional services and assessments in school. Furthermore, the school counselors referred parents to community agencies that provided services such as grief counseling and mental health services. Therefore, the predicted categories from the current study did not support my assumption.

**Summary of Findings**

In Chapter 4, I have presented the results of the data collection and analysis. The data in this study come from face-to-face interviews with the counselors and administrators, observations, related field notes, and artifacts and documents. Taken together these data provide insight into the counselors’ perceptions of their work with physically aggressive children.

The data collected also offer insight into the services, assessments and interventions that the school counselors provided to reduce the physically aggressive behavior of the kindergarten
through fifth-grade children who were assigned to the alternative education programs. Further, they offer insight into the theoretical orientations that guide counselors’ services; information provided by the two administrators reinforce the counselors’ descriptions and views. These data also provide experience-based insight about reasons for students’ placement in alternative education programs, barriers that counselors face in providing services, and counselors’ recommendations for overcoming these barriers.

The analysis of these data resulted in nine descriptive categories, with multiple sub-categories. These categories and sub-categories make up a compendium of information about the counselors, the range of series they provide to the children they serve, and the counselors perceptions about their role and their work. The nine descriptive categories are: (1) Reason assigned; (2) Process of placement; (3) Counselors’ experience; (4) Services and interventions; (5) Assessment; (6) Theoretical orientation; (7) Barriers to providing services; (8) Counselors’ perceptions of the outcomes of services; and (9) Counselors’ recommendations for future practice.

I note that, despite the broad range of services and the caring attention that the experienced and highly trained counselors provide, some of the school counselors asserted in their interviews that, although their services and interventions could address students’ immediate needs, they did not meet the students’ core needs. The counselors attributed this to various barriers. Therefore, the counselors recommended that counselors need more training that will better prepare them to address children’s physical aggression.

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter 4 has presented the results of the data analysis. Nine descriptive categories emerged from the analysis of the interviews, observations, artifacts, and documents. The nine
categories provide information in the following areas: background information regarding the alternative discipline programs; answers to the study’s central research questions regarding the services intervention, and assessments that counselors provide; the counselors theoretical orientations; and the counselors’ recommendations for future practice. Chapter Five comprises a discussion of the implication of the findings as well as limitations of the study and recommendations for practice and future research.
Chapter V

Discussion and Recommendations

Chapter Five presents a discussion of the study’s results including implications, limitations, and recommendations for future practice and research. This chapter begins with a brief summary of the study and closes with conclusions regarding the study overall.

Introduction

The case study describes the services, interventions, assessments, and counseling theories that two school counselors use to reduce the occurrence of physically aggressive behaviors from the children assigned to the alternative education discipline programs in one district in central Florida. I collected data from multiple sources and analyzed them using methods drawn from Merriam (1998) and Yin (2014) to identify common patterns and descriptive categories with and between data sources. I conducted interviews with two district administrators of the alternative education discipline programs and, notably, with the two school counselors working with the students assigned to the two alternative education programs in order to enumerate, describe, and better understand the services and interventions that the school counselors use in their work. Observations of the counselors and administrators supplemented the interviews. I also collected documents and artifacts to supplement, corroborate and contextualize the counselors’ activities and services that I could not directly observe. The documents and artifacts further helped me to build an in-depth understanding of the counselors and their work.
Case Study Convergences With Previous Research

In this section, I examine the findings of this study from the perspective of findings from prior studies and related research. I use the answers to each of the study’s questions to guide this examination.

Question 1. What services do school counselors currently provide to kindergarten through fifth-grade children assigned to alternative education programs to reduce physically aggressive behaviors?

During the interviews, the school counselors expressed that they provided one-on-one counseling services, such as talking with the children attending the alternative discipline programs as needed to reduce their physically aggressive behaviors. The counselors also consulted and collaborated with parents, teachers, administrators, social workers, and other services providers as they advocated for the needs of students.

The National Center for Education Statistics, which conducted the nation’s first study of public alternative schools and programs for students at-risk for education failure in 2001, asserted that 79% of districts with alternative schools and programs had policies requiring that services such as crisis and behavioral interventions be provided to students attending alternative schools and programs (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002). My interviews with the school counselors, and review of documents and field notes gave a compendium of the procedures that the counselors used to provide behavior interventions and crises services to students attending the discipline alternative programs in their district. For example, the counselors referred physically aggressive children for school-based services such as psychological testing and services for students with exceptional educational needs. Furthermore, the school counselors
worked collaboratively with parents to exchange information with community agencies and refer students to community agencies for more appropriate services.

The counselors were well prepared, by both experience and background, to provide a broad array of services. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2016b) issued position statements that pertain to school counselors’ educational preparation for their role in providing comprehensive services, addressing student discipline, and working with at-risk students. The ASCA proposed that school counselors provide preventive and responsive interventions delivered through classroom, individual, and small group counseling. Other interventions include advice in solving problems and consulting with stakeholders regarding methods to assist students (ASCA, 2012) and creating a safe environment conducive to students demonstrating respect and civility towards each other (ASCA, 2016b). Furthermore, the ASCA’s National Model (2005) required school counselors to meet the needs of students attending alternative education programs (Perpiczka, 2009).

The Florida School Counseling Framework (Florida DOE, 2010) outlined the special knowledge, abilities, skills, and attitudes that equip school counselors to meet the unique needs of diverse pre-K–12 students. The Florida School Counseling Framework also stated that school counselors are obligated to enhance the learning of all students.

Interviews with the two school counselors provided support for the American School Counselor Association Model (2005) and for the Florida School Counseling Framework (Florida DOE, 2010) by revealing that the school counselors received specialized credentials in counseling and had intensive experience working with physical aggressive children in diverse school settings. The counselors’ experience working with physical aggressive children ranged
from working with students within traditional school settings and working with students in exceptional student education alternative schools.

**Question 2. What assessments are school counselors currently using to identify aggression in children?**

Research conducted by Grum, Hein, and Fingerle (2011) revealed that measures of implicit and explicit aggression would aid in understanding children’s motivation for aggressive behaviors and lead to developing more effective interventions and prevention programs. However, evidence from the interviews with two school counselors and my field notes indicated that the counselors primarily used interviews with children to ascertain the factors that led to their aggression actions; thus, they relied primarily on self-report or verbal assessment of explicit aggression. The school counselors also received social histories regarding a student’s behaviors from parents and other professionals knowledgeable about the student; while these constituted indications of explicit aggression, they also are in the form of narrative or first-person report rather than formal measures. Given that implicit measures of aggression, assessed formally, are somewhat difficult to achieve, it is not surprising that the school counselors in this study focused primarily on interviews as their source of information on children’s behavior and the reasons for it.

**Question 3. What prevention strategies and interventions are counselors currently using to reduce physical aggression?**

The Florida School Counseling Framework has mandated that school counselors provide services to all students, allowing every student the opportunity to benefit from school-based comprehensive guidance programs that are grounded in various counseling theories (Florida DOE, 2010). Clearly, as this research indicates, the physically aggressive children assigned to
alternative education discipline programs also receive school counselors’ comprehensive guidance services.

The school counselors in this study provided interventions they viewed to be effective in preventing children’s aggression and reducing the intensity of aggressive actions once they occurred. These interventions consisted of building positive relationships with children and their families, individual and group counseling, social and emotional skills training, and academic assistance. In addition, they provided crisis services by conducting threat assessments, individual counseling, group counseling, and nonviolent crisis intervention strategies (CPI) such as verbal de-escalation, and referrals to community agencies for more intensive services.

They also provided students assigned to the alternative programs with behavior interventions strategies, advice in problem-solving, and social/emotional skills training. The students received positive behavior supports and were placed in a multi-tiered system of support. This was consistent with Mullen and Lambie (2013), who used the Skillstreaming program to target maladaptive behaviors and teach appropriate decision-making skills and who implemented the Eclipse program, designed by Smith, Pare, and Gravelle (2000), to teach at-risk students communication skills, emotional self-monitoring, and responsible decision making.

Reminiscent of the programs implemented in the previous studies, the school counselors in this study utilized the CHAMPS program (Sprick, 2009) to teach physically aggressive students self-control, emotional-regulation, and skills in taking responsibility. The current research supported previous research of school counselors’ use of evidence-based prevention and instructional strategies.

Earlier research has made the case for early intervention programs and parent involvement. Yoshikawa (1994) and Zigler, Taussig, and Black (1992) (as cited in the
proposed that such interventions programs should be started as early as preschool. The counselors in this study gave evidence of their commitment to such programs. Through the “Yes I Can” intervention program, students in grades 2–6 were provided training in social cognition such as social problem solving and self-understanding. Also, parents received training in parenting skills. Not only did the school counselors in the current study stress early interventions efforts, but they expressed the importance of building positive relationships with parents and involving parents in their children’s educational decisions.

As members of the multidisciplinary team, the counselors participated in the MTSS process by monitoring student progress, and referred students for more intense services such as evaluation to determine eligibility and placement into exceptional student education programs, or referrals to outside agencies for additional services. In addition, the school counselors collaborated with parents, academic behavior interventionist, social workers, the teacher resource specialist, as well as administrators regarding student’s education performance and needs. As Counselor B stated, “Numerous attempts were made to involve parents through telephone calls, invites to meetings, and home or agency visits.”

Thus, the intervention actions and strategies documented in the case study were consistent with the actions and strategies noted in the Metropolitan Area Child Study Research Group’s (2002) study, which recommended early intervention and schools working with families in a collaborative effort to improve students’ behaviors.

**Question 4.** What theoretical orientations are school counselors currently using to provide interventions for children demonstrating aggressive behaviors?
The case study showed that school counselors implemented interventions grounded in a combination of theories so as to reduce physical aggression in children attending alternative discipline programs. As Counselor B said, “Dealing with students you learn that one theory does not work for all students”. In that light, the counselors identified Behavior Theory (Skinner, 1953), Cognitive Behavior Theory (Dobson, 2010), and Reality Theory (Glasser, 1965) as theories they use most often. Thus, the findings of the current study supported ASCA (2012) literature maintaining that school counselors be trained to implement counseling theories appropriate for the school setting such as Reality Therapy (Glasser, 1965), Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (Dobson, 2010), Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (Dobson, 2010), and Family Systems Theory (Murdock, 2013); ASCA, 2012).

However, counselors also used other theoretical models both to understand and address children’s violent behaviors. For instance, The Information Processing Model (Atkinson & Shifrin, 1968) posits that children who are aggressive often perceive and interpret an ambiguous event as being intentional and hostile, and so respond with reactive aggression towards the other (Miller, 2011). An interview with a Counselor B provided the following example of a school counselor using the information processing system to assess the cause of a student’s aggression:

A student was throwing chairs and books around the classroom. I had the teacher take the students out of the classroom and I just sat and talked with the student. While talking with the student I found that the student had trouble reading and the fact that he was acting out was because he did not like to read in front of the other students.

Social Cognitive Learning Theory (Bandura, 1978) posits that behavior can be changed through conditioning, shaping, and behavior modification using reinforcers (Miller, 2011). An observation of one school counselor and an interview with another school counselor provided
examples of school counselors using rewards to modify students’ behaviors, thus providing evidence of use of this theory.

Bio-Ecological Theory posits that children learn aggression through exposure to aggression from families and peers (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The results of the research conducted by the Metropolitan Area Child Study Research Group (2002) provides support for school programs that encourage parent involvement. Similarly, the results of this case study described strategies that school counselors in alternative discipline programs used to include families as they provided services to children. For example, Counselor B stated, “I spend a great portion of my time every day to make parent phone calls or do home visits. So, they will know the school really needs to see them and want them to be a part of it.”

These examples indicate that the findings from the present study are generally consistent with those of previous related research. However, my findings frequently expand on those from earlier research, offering more and more detailed information about the counselors, their efforts and the effects on the children. Also, my findings sometimes offer refinements to the findings presented by previous research.

**Revised Conceptual Framework**

As a result of this case study, my conceptual framework has undergone a number of changes. The revised conceptual framework is presented as Figure 2.

As Figure 1 shows, my original conceptual framework, I assumed that school counselors provided assessments framed in the information processing model in order to understand how children learn aggressive behaviors, process the information they have received, and retrieve their previous knowledge to respond aggressively towards others. The findings from my study
revealed that school counselors conduct assessments through interviews with the children, parents, social workers, and teachers to understand how children learn aggressive behaviors.

**Figure 2. Revised Conceptual Framework**
While informed by the Information Processing Framework, the interviews are not formal features of this framework.

Similar to my original conceptual framework, my revised conceptual framework (Figure 2) shows that school counselors make use of a combination of theories inclusive of Behavior Theory (Skinner, 1953), Cognitive Behavior Theory (Dobson, 2010), Reality Theory (Glasser, 1965), and Bio-Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) to provide services and interventions for aggressive children in the alternative programs. The interview results, however, suggest that they rely heavily on Behavior Theory.

My previous conceptual framework noted that, without interventions and services, children continue to engage in aggressive behaviors that result in suspension and expulsion from schools. Although this assumption has not changed, my revised framework clearly illustrates the types of services and interventions that school counselors currently implement in order to reduce and eliminate children’s aggressive behavior. As described previously and noted in the framework, school counselors provide individual and group counseling, referrals to agencies, behavior interventions, crisis intervention, and multi-tiered systems of support to the students in order to reduce their aggressive behaviors. They also provide students with social/emotional support as well as some services that include parent involvement.

As Figure 2 summarizes, the school counselors shared their belief that they were unable to meet the core needs of the children assigned to the alternative programs due to the barriers that they faced. These barriers included: (a) the children’s and parents’ resistance to change their behaviors, (b) the counselors’ belief that they were not equipped to meet the needs of the increasing number of students attending school with mental health issues, (c) the counselors’ lack of knowledge of interventions to address children’s aggression, (d) problems within the
children’s family system, and (e) the limited time the counselors believed they had to spend with the aggressive children assigned to the alternative programs. As noted in my revised conceptual framework and in my discussion of the study’s results, the counselors recommended that they receive additional training in services and interventions that could help them become more effective.

Although the counselors faced barriers in providing services and interventions to the children assigned to them, I believe that they were more effective than they thought in providing the services and interventions that helped the children reduce their aggressive behaviors, at least provisionally, and return to and remain in their traditional school setting. Recognizing this, I include “Children’s needs met provisionally” in the revised framework’s Outcome box.

**Researcher’s Reflections**

The purpose of my study was to investigate school counselors’ perspective on their role in working with physically aggressive students in alternative programs. The focus of my study was identifying the assessments they conduct and the services and interventions that they provide to reduce and eliminate the children’s aggression, a topic of personal and professional importance to me.

I was well acquainted with all the study participants and met with them multiple times prior to the start of the study in order to develop rapport. Nevertheless, I noticed that, when I transitioned from a colleague working with the participants in a shared setting to a participant-observer conducting a case study, my role as a researcher seemed to have hindered the participants’ verbal interaction with me. Although each of them willingly provided their consent to participate in the study, two of the participants appeared to resist expressing their opinions when engaging in dialogue and answering questions during their interviews. Further, although all
of the participants initially agreed to be interviewed, two participants not only declined to be interviewed, but also declined to speak. One participant very quickly wrote brief answers to the interview questions rather than respond verbally, and another typed the responses without speaking. Neither of these participants shared additional information about the research topic during their interviews.

Conducting my study led me to become much more aware of the impact on the school counselors of working with physical aggressive students in an alternative program. On the one hand, I became aware that the school counselors were passionate about helping all students enhance their academic, social, and emotional skill. However, on the other hand, I observed the counselors’ high levels of stress and frustration with feeling overwhelmed by the many roles and responsibilities they are required to perform. Although the counselors had a desire to provide effective services to the aggressive students, they believed that their other roles and responsibilities hindered them from providing the services that could meet the children’s core needs.

Further, while the counselors did believe that the services they provided may have met some students’ immediate needs, they also felt that the students’ long-term needs were not currently being met. They identified the short duration of time the students were assigned to the program as the main barrier: It simply did not provide the school counselors with sufficient time to meet the students’ needs. Students were coming to school from home environments that had a history of family problems, and their problematic home lives carried over into the school setting. Students did not have school readiness social skills, such as how to engage appropriately in conversations or demonstrate appropriate behavior.
Confidentiality laws regarding students were also seen as an impediment because these laws hinder the exchange of information between agencies. This created another barrier for counselors attempting to meet the needs of students attending alternative education discipline programs. Relatedly, the counselors said that they were seeing greater numbers of students with severe mental health issues beyond what they had been trained to handle. In order to address this barrier, one counselor recommended that school counselors should have opportunities to attend trainings that would teach them the techniques for handling the aggressive behaviors that are becoming more prevalent.

As stated, the counselors’ multiple responsibilities and limited time for providing services led them to feel that they were not effective in meeting the children’s core needs. I often observed the counselors tirelessly attempting to fulfill the multiple roles; one counselor showed me her calendar, which gave evidence of the many roles she performed. I often observed the counselors moving from directly working with students to meeting with stakeholders about the children (see Appendix N). However, despite the counselors’ doubts about their effectiveness, I believed that the services they provided made a major difference in the lives of most of the children attending the alternative program. During the study, I noticed that many of the children’s physically aggressive behaviors were reduced or eliminated. Most importantly, all the children were able to reduce their aggressive behaviors enough so that they could return to their traditional school setting and not return to the alternative programs.

**Future Research and Practice**

Results of my case study suggest possible future research that could benefit the school counselors working in alternative education settings, the alternative education settings themselves, and ultimately and importantly, the children who enact physical violence in school.
In this way, this study may serve as a change agent by supporting and empowering the counselors who work with the children in alternative programs. I offer here recommendations for such research in these three categories.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The study lends itself to future research regarding the trajectory of physically aggressive children in alternative education programs. As elementary students age and enter middle school and high school, counselors may wonder which students may continue to demonstrate aggressive behaviors, with the attendant responses of being expelled from the traditional schools, and assigned to alternative education programs. Future research might investigate differences between interventions used by middle and high school counselors in alternative education programs to reduce student’s physical aggression, or possible long-term effects of interventions offered when children are still in elementary school.

The current study has examined the school counselors’ role in reducing aggression in kindergarten through fifth-grade children. Future studies could investigate the possible contribution of teachers and other helping professionals, such as school social workers and mental health counselors, in reducing children’s aggression in these same programs.

Research conducted by Grumm, Hein, and Fingerle (2011) revealed that measures of implicit and explicit aggression, such as the Implicit Association Test (Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998), could serve as valid predictors of children’s aggression, could aid in understanding the individual’s motivation for aggression, and could lead to developing appropriate intervention and prevention program. Therefore, future research could investigate the effectiveness of the use of measures of implicit and explicit aggression in designing interventions for students assigned to alternative education discipline programs.
Recommendations for Alternative Education Discipline Programs

This study shows that the limited availability of mental health resources plus the short duration of children’s assignment to K–5 alternative education discipline programs constrains school counselors from fully providing children with indicated services. Consequently, I offer these recommendations:

1. The length of the assignment should be extended for students who are not served by Exceptional Student Education programs.
2. The school district should hire additional school counselors to serve students at the alternative education programs. This means that traditional schools with alternative education programs within their schools would have two school counselors.
3. The counselors who are hired for alternative education programs should have experience in both school counseling and mental health counseling.

Recommendations for School Counselors

The study revealed that some school counselors (a) do not feel equipped to deal with students who are physically aggressive, (b) often provide services to children who come from homes with a history of family conflict. Therefore, school counselors should

1. Seek out current literature, research, evidence-based curriculum, and professional development training that will provide them with information and training in managing physically aggressive children.
2. Remain knowledgeable about and develop further familiarity with community and educational services for physically aggressive children and refer children to community agencies.
3. Continue to build relationships and shared efforts with stakeholders to maintain collaboration between home and school environments.

4. Collaborate with student service providers, parents, and other stakeholders in the effort to address the needs of children assigned to alternative education programs.

The results also indicated that school counselors primarily use interviews to assess and comprehend children’s aggression. However, school counselors should

5. Learn about valid and reliable measures of aggression, such as the Implicit Association Test (Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998), that assess implicit and explicit aggression. The use of such evaluative tools could assist counselors in implementing interventions that target the motive of children’s physical aggression.

Limitations

There were limitations associated with this case study that may impact the trustworthiness of the study’s findings. First, the study occurred during a school year in which the district transitioned the alternative education from a single alternative school to four alternative education programs placed within four traditional schools; structurally, that school year was not representative of counselors’ customary working arrangements. The counselors may have been in the process of adjusting to the novelty of the program as well as adjusting to meeting the needs of the unique population of students assigned to the alternative education programs in their schools. Second, the study did not include any observations of the students outside of the school setting. Parents’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the alternative school’s programs in changing students’ behavior might have been a valuable additional data source. Third, while the study’s planned method called for audio-recording all interviews, only two were recorded, per the participants’ preferences. There may have been systematic differences between
the participants who permitted their interviews to be recorded, and those who did not. Certainly the quality of the interview data seems to have been affected: The interviews that were recorded were noticeably longer. Finally, although the study did include multiple data sources, triangulation of data, and member checks, trustworthiness of findings may have been enhanced by the presence of an external auditor.

Summary

The focus of Chapter Five has been a discussion of the implications of the research investigating the services and interventions provided by school counselors to reduce physical aggression in children assigned to alternative education discipline programs in central Florida. Findings from the current research supported prior literature and research pertaining to alternative education discipline programs, school counselors’ role in providing comprehensive services to all students, prevention and intervention aimed at reducing children’s aggression, assessments for aggression, and counseling theories.

Among the findings of this case study is the perception of school counselors in alternative education discipline programs that children are presenting with more severe mental health problems in their schools. The school counselors believe that they are not adequately prepared to address both the growing number of children with severe mental health issues and the students who show physical aggression. During a follow-up conversation, both school counselors expressed feelings of being overwhelmed with the responsibilities of providing comprehensive services both to the students attending the traditional school setting as well as the physically aggressive children in the alternative programs. After this study, one school counselor transferred to another school without an alternative program. The second school counselor expressed an interest in exploring job opportunities at other school sites within the district.
Based on the research, I have offered recommendations for addressing school counselors’ concerns for the students and their own effectiveness, and to help improve the effectiveness of the alternative education discipline programs overall. Additionally, I recommend ongoing research to better serve the children in the alternative programs. Because school counselors are subject to burnout, additional research might investigate the impact on school counselors of working in such programs. Future research could also investigate parents’ perception of the school counselors’ effectiveness in reducing their children’s aggression. Finally, since the district does not currently have a job description for school counselors working in alternative programs, counselors’ knowledge regarding their roles in such programs might be explored, with an eye to formalizing counselors’ professional responsibilities.

**Conclusion**

Despite school counselors’ efforts to provide services to reduce physical aggression in young children attending traditional schools, some children continue to behave aggressively, and in response are expelled from public schools and assigned to alternative education discipline programs. The counselors expressed their belief that, while the children’s immediate needs were met, the services provided did not address the underlying issues of the children’s physical aggression. The school counselors discussed several barriers they faced in providing services, and recommended that school counselors receive training that would prepare them to meet these children’s needs.

After considering previous research and other literature, and the results of this case study, I identified several recommendations that could reduce school counselors’ barriers to providing services to these physically aggressive children. I also made recommendations for future research as it relates to the findings of this study.
I believe that the insights gained from this case study could broaden the professional perspectives of school counselors, administrators, and other professionals regarding the services and interventions that school counselors provide to children in alternative programs. Moreover, the current study expands the research on students assigned to alternative education discipline programs by describing the services and interventions that the school counselors provide to these students. The results of the study also expand the research conducted by Smith-Adock, Webster, Leonard, and Walker (2008) who contended that school counselors may provide a significant role in student success by offering counseling services to meet the wellness issues of students in alternative education discipline programs. The study describes the services, interventions, and assessments that school counselors provide to physically aggressive children in alternative discipline program further adding to the body of knowledge regarding school counselor’s roles in meeting the needs of physically aggressive children in alternative programs.
References


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Appendix A
Interview Introduction

Good morning, Miss/Mr. _______. Thank you for taking your time to come and sit with me, and for this interview, my name is Deirdra Sanders-Burnett. I am a doctoral student at the University of South Florida and I am conducting research on school counselors’ role in reducing aggression in children alternative programs. I am collecting data for my dissertation. The interview should take less than an hour. I will be taping this session, I might be writing some notes however, I can't write that fast, so I will be recording. You have given consent. This information will be kept anonymous, I will ask you a few interview questions. You have signed a consent form for me to conduct this interview to ask you the questions. Your participation is voluntarily, the information that I received will be kept confidential as much as possible. At any time if you decide that there is a question that you are not comfortable answering, please feel free to refrain from answering it. If there is other information that you think would be beneficial in this interview, please, discuss that information also. Anytime you want to withdraw your consent then you will be granted permission to do so. Do you have any questions about the interview so far?
Appendix B

Consent for Participation in Research

I volunteer to participate in a research study conducted by Deirdra Sanders-Burnett from the University of South Florida. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about services provided by counselors to reduce the occurrence of physical aggression demonstrated by young children assigned to alternative education programs. The interview will be included in a research study that I am conducting at the University of South Florida. The interview will also be used as part of dissertation research study.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, no one on my campus will be told.

2. I understand that most interviewees will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.

3. Participation involves being interviewed by researchers from the University of South Florida. The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made. If I don't want to be taped, I will not be able to participate in the study.

4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

5. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

6. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

_________________________________________________    ______________________________
My Signature                                      Date

_________________________________________________    ______________________________
My Printed Name

_________________________________________________    ______________________________
Signature of the Investigator

For further information, please contact: Deirdra Sanders-Burnett M.A., NBCT, LMHC #8069
Appendix C
Counselor Questions:

1. What grade level of students do you serve?

2. Do you work with student referred to or currently in alternative education programs?
   a. If no, describe the population of students you work with and the services you provide to them.
   b. If yes, what type of counseling services do you provide to the students in the alternative education programs?

3. Do you believe the services you are currently providing are meeting the needs of the students you serve?
   a. If no, what are your reasons?
   b. If no, what other services do you believe would be beneficial?

4. What interventions do you deem to be effective with children who demonstrate physical aggressive behaviors, and why do you believe they are effective?

5. What theories guide your interventions?

6. Describe your educational background and prior work experiences?

7. What training and experiences have you had in working with young children with physical aggression?

8. What type of training would you recommend to other counselors who work with students who demonstrate physical aggression?

9. What type of training would you recommend to other counselors working with students in alternative education programs?
10. What populations of children do counselors find most resistant to interventions designed to reduce physical aggression?

11. Can you walk me through a specific time that you used an intervention to deal with a physical aggressive youth?

12. What are some of the barriers that you have experienced when attempting to implement interventions with physical aggressive children?

13. What assessments do you use using with children who demonstrate physical aggression?

14. What questions do you have for me regarding this interview?
Appendix D
Administrator Questions:

1. What grade levels does your alternative education program serve?
2. Describe the reasons that students are placed in your alternative education program?
3. What process is used to assign students to alternative programs?
4. Which physical aggressive children are assigned to alternative programs?
5. What is the typical length of time a student spends in your program?
6. Are students assigned to an alternative school in a separate facility or an alternative program within a traditional school setting?
7. Is participation in your program by choice of the parent or mandated by the school system?
8. Does a school counselor provide services to the students attending the alternative program?
9. What services and interventions are provided to students who demonstrate aggressive behaviors while attending alternative programs?
Appendix E
University of South Florida IRB Response

IRB Studies > School Counselors' Role in Reducing Aggression in Children in Alternative Education Programs

Activity Details (Study that has never been approved is Closed)

Author: Various Menzel (Research Integrity & Compliance)

Logged For (Study): School Counselors' Role in Reducing Aggression in Children in Alternative Education Programs

Activity Date: 5/22/2017 4:24 PM

Comments: The Vice Chair, Dr. Kristen Salomon has reviewed this study and has determined: "The activities described in the application consist of Program Evaluation/Quality Improvement. The study information would appear to be descriptive and would not appear to contribute to generalizable knowledge. This is not to say that the activities do not have value, just that these activities do not appear to meet the definition of research under USF HRPP policy and are therefore not under USF IRB oversight. It would be accurate to state that 'this study has been reviewed by the USF IRB' albeit not formally approved; because it is not research subject to our approval."
Appendix F

Study District Approval to Conduct Research

Our Mission: to provide a high quality education for all students

SCHOOL BOARD OF COUNTY, FLORIDA PHONE

June 6, 2017

Deirdra Sanders-Burnett 1106 Meadow Lark
Lane
Winter Haven, FL 33884
Re: School Counselors' Role in Reducing Aggression in Children in Alternative Education Programs

Dear Ms. Sanders-Burnett:

The Office of Assessment, Accountability, and Evaluation has approved your request to conduct research. Your research activities are effective from June 6 through August 30, 2017. Should you desire to continue your research efforts beyond the aforementioned period, you must submit a request for an extension no later than August 2. Any significant changes or amendments to the procedures or design of this study must be approved by resubmitting a request for research that clearly identifies these methodological changes.

In the interest of continued research benefits and the coordination of research interests, we ask that you mail one copy of your finalized research product and a one-page executive summary for our research webpage at the conclusion of your study. This information, and any other relevant information you may have, will be filed in our research library, and added to the annotated listing of research projects. We look forward to reading the results of your study and any suggestions they may offer toward improving counseling services for students.

If you have any questions, or if I can be of any further assistance, please contact me or David Bustos.

Best wishes on your research endeavors.

Joe McNaughton III
Senior Director
Assessment, Accountability, & Evaluation
County Public Schools
1915 South Floral Avenue, FL
Appendix G

Participants’ transcribed interviews

Administrator A

School Counselors’ Role in Reducing Aggression in Children in Alternative Education Programs

Administrator Questions:

1. What grade levels does your alternative education program serve?
   P1: Response: K-12

2. Describe the reason that students are placed in your alternative education program?
   P1: Response: Code

3. What process is used to assign students to alternative programs?
   P1: Response: Due Process/Forms

4. Which physical aggressive children are assigned to alternative programs?
   P1: Response: Code

5. What is the typical length of time a student spends in your program?
   P1: Response: 45/90

6. Are students assigned to an alternative school in a separate facility or an alternative program within a traditional school setting?
   P1: Response: Both

7. Is participation in your program by choice of the parent or mandated by the school system?
   P1: Response: Mandated
8. Does a school counselor provide services to the students attending the alternative program?
   P1: Response: Yes

9. What services and interventions are provided to students attending alternative programs who demonstrate aggressive behaviors?
   P1: Response: Social and Mental Health

Administrator B

Mrs. Sanders-Burnett: Good morning, Mr. _______. Thank you for taking your time to come to the interview and sit with me, and for this interview, my name is Deirdra Sanders-Burnett. I am a doctoral student at the University of South Florida and I am conducting research on school counselors’ role in reducing physical aggression in children alternative programs. I am collecting data for my dissertation. The interview should take less than an hour. I will be taping this interview, I might be writing some notes however, I can’t write that fast, so I will be recording. So, let’s go over the consent form. Basically, it says:

I volunteer to participate in a research study conducted by Deirdra Sanders-Burnett from the University of South Florida. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about services provided by counselor to reduce the occurrence of physical aggression demonstrated by young children assigned to alternative education programs. The interview will be used for a dissertation research study I am conducting at the University of South Florida.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, no one on my campus will be told.
2. I understand that most interviewees in will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.

3. Participation involves being interviewed by researchers from the University of South Florida. The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made.

4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

5. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

6. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

If you feel comfortable you may go ahead and sign the consent.

P2: signed the consent

Mrs. Sanders-Burnett: signed the consent

Mrs. Sanders-Burnett: You have been given a copy of the consent. This information will be kept anonymous. I will ask you a few interview questions. You have signed a consent form for me to conduct this interview to ask you the questions. Your participation is voluntarily. The information that I received will be kept confidential as much as possible. At any time if you decide that there is a question that you are not comfortable answering, please feel free to refrain from answering the question. If there is other information that you think would be beneficial in
this interview, please, discuss that information also. Anytime you want to withdraw your
consent then you would definitely be granted permission to do so. Do you have any questions?
Administrator B: “No ma’am”

Mrs. Sanders-Burnett: What grade levels does your alternative education program serve?
Administrator B: Our alternative education program serves Kindergarten through twelfth grade.

Mrs. Sanders-Burnett: 2. Describe the reason that students are placed in your alternative
education program?
Administrator B: “First off, we have a zero-tolerance policy. So, when students bring any type of
weapon to school they're automatically recommended for alternative ed. Then it goes through a
progression discipline. The type of incidents that are recorded can cause students to be
recommended for alternative ed. Also, if they commit a felony crime on-campus or off-campus
they could be recommended for alternative education.

Mrs. Sanders-Burnett: So, you said if they commit a felony off-campus they can be
recommended?
Administrator B: Yes.

Mrs. Sanders-Burnett: Which physical aggressive children are assigned to alternative programs?
Administrator B: Students that if they commit a strong-arm robbery on campus, if they are
physically aggressive with any type of school board staff, if you have multiple participants
involved in a fight, if you could be recommended for alternative education. If students can show
a continuous bullying that becomes physical over time, they could be recommended for
alternative education.

Mrs. Sanders-Burnett: What process is used to assign students to alternative programs?
Administrator B: The admin. at each school call into the discipline office, and they can give us a description of what’s going on campus and it can be discussed with the director of discipline or a designee and they will decide. From there, for them to go with a lesser discipline or to go through with making a recommendation. If it goes through, then they have a packet that they have to complete with the student’s information; their grades, discipline, attendance, description of what happened, referral, witness, witness statements. All of that is completed in a packet and once that packet is completed it goes to the director of discipline. The packet is reviewed to make sure it's complete once the packet is complete, parents can choose to have a level 1 hearing with the principal. Once a level 1 hearing is schedule with the principal, and the outcome of that hearing, if the principal sticks with the recommendation then from there, the parent can request a level 2 hearing, and a level 2 hearing is scheduled with the director of discipline; now even that's for general education students. The only extra step for special ed students would be to have a manifestation hearing before you have the level 2 hearing. In the manifestation hearing determines if the behavior is a manifestation of the student’s disability or not. Once we go through that entire process at the end of the level 2 hearing then the director of discipline will make the final decision on whether the student attends an alternative education program or not.

Mrs. Sanders-Burnett: What is the typical length of time a student spends in your program?

Administrator B: Students can spend anywhere from 45 days up to a full calendar year based on the offense. If students are given a full calendar year, that could be with services or without services.

Mrs. Sanders-Burnett: Are students assigned to an alternative school in a separate facility or an alternative program within a traditional school setting?
Administrator B: Our elementary students K-5, they are at an alternative school within a
traditional school setting. Our secondary students 6 to 12 are placed at a separate facility. We
have four elementary sites that are on traditional school settings and we have two separate
facilities for secondary students.

Mrs. Sanders-Burnett: Is participation in your program by choice of the parent or mandated by
the school system?

Administrator B: It’s both. Once it is mandated by the school system, the parents still have a
choice. Say a student if given 90 days to attend and alternative school setting a parent can
decided to send a student to the alternative education program or they can choose another
program outside of the school system as long as that student is out of school for 90 days, but they
have to show proof of attending school.

Mrs. Sanders-Burnett: Does a school counselor provide services to the students attending the
alternative programs?

Administrator B: Yes. A school counselor is provided for services to students attending the
alternative programs on every site… four elementary sites as well as our two secondary sites.

Mrs. Sanders-Burnett: What services and interventions are provided to students attending
alternative programs who demonstrate aggressive behaviors?

Administrator B: The services and interventions that are provided to students attending
alternative programs demonstrating aggressive behaviors… not only do we have school
counselors, we have behavior interventionist, we have school psychologists… they go out and
speak with the students, we have… they have group sessions with the students they have one-on-
one sessions with the students… they have one-on-one interventions with the student and the
parents and so students receive a number of counseling services as well as interventions to
prevent them from continuing those aggressive behavior as well as not returning to the alternative setting.

Mrs. Sanders-Burnett: Ok Mr._____ Is there any other questions or information you think would be beneficial for us to know?

Administrator B No, ma’am. That is all I have to add at this time.

Mrs. Sanders-Burnett: Thank you for participating in this interview, and I will be scheduling a follow-up meeting with you to do a member check.

Administrator B: You are welcome. Thank you.

Counselor A
SB: What grade level of students do you serve?
CA I currently serve students in grade Pre K- 5th grade.

SB: Do you work with student referred to or currently in alternative education programs? If no, describe the population of students you work with and the services you provide to them. If yes, what type of counseling services do you provide to the students in the alternative education programs?
CA Yes, I work with both. Mainly the counseling services that I provide to the student that are the alternative education program are outside resources, behavioral support, crisis intervention counseling such as Baker Acts, suicidal at-risk questioners, course work recommendations and individual counseling if needed.

SB: Do you believe the services you are currently providing are meeting the needs of the students you serve? If no, what other services do you feel would be beneficial? If yes, Why?

CA No. I do not believe the services that I am providing to the students in the alternative education program are meeting their needs. The program that the students are currently served in is too short. Students because of the long bus ride are reluctant to attend school
on a regular basis. Depending upon when the students enter the program, they could have a very short stay. Such as, if the students enter in May, the students are only required to remain in the program until the end of the school year. This does not give the counselor or the teacher time to address the real needs of the student.

SB: In the past, I have helped or provided the parents with outside community resources. This way the students are still receiving services long after they leave the program. These services include but are not limited to grief counseling groups, mentoring groups, as well as, helping the parent's located residential treatment centers. Many of these students have family issues that date back years. By provided the family with outside resources can help the family hopefully resolve some of the issues and learn strategies to deal with them in a more private setting.

SB: What interventions do you deem to be effective with children who demonstrate physically aggressive behaviors and why?

CA The interventions I deem are more effective is for the teacher to be more proactive. Being proactive, the teacher is able to recognize the triggers that cause the aggression. Once these triggers are identified, teacher is able to have a proactive approach. Stating with providing, the student with a cool down period, assigning the student to an adult they have a rapport with, and using de-escalation strategies.

SB: What theories guide your interventions?

CA There is mixture of theories that guide my interventions. Dealing with students you learn one theory does not work for all students. There must be a combination of approaches or theories used. First, dealing with students that are an alternative education program, some
with broken homes, dealing with the loss of a family member or just not having the love, support and structure at home becomes a problem with how students relate to others outside of the home.

Positive behavioral support systems are set up to provide a proactive approach to the behaviors. Students are rewarded for making good choices. This when combined with B.F. Skinner--operant conditioning--reinforcing good behavioral with rewards, Glasser choice theory, providing a safe place where the students want to learn because they feel that someone cares about what happens to them, and cognitive behavioral strategies that helps the teacher become more of a monitor and hold the students more accountable for their actions are all approaches that works in the school system. These are strategies that are more proactive and give feedback and also reward the students for making the right choices.

SB: Describe your educational background and prior work experiences.

CA: My education background includes the following: B.A. degree in Social Work, Master's degree in Marriage in Family Counseling, Master's degree in Education Leadership and Management, doctoral degree in Education Leadership and Management.

My work experience includes the following: High School Teacher-Countywide ESE program, 2 years; Lead Teacher- Countywide ESE program, 3 years; regular education teacher, 4 years; Guidance Counselor services of grades Pre-K- 5th grade, 5 years.

SB: What training and experiences have you had in working with young children with physical aggression?

CA: The training I have had working with children with physical aggression includes my years as both a teacher and Lead teacher at Countywide ESE. The student's that were
serviced at the locations had IEPs, all were being seen by a mental health counselor, and
some were on probation for aggression towards teachers or other members in the
community.

SB: What type of training would recommend to other counselors who work with students who
demonstrate physical aggression?

P.3 Training that I would recommend for working with students with physical aggression is
de-escalation training and all staff should be trained in CPI.

SB: What type of training would you recommend to other counselors working with students
in alternative education programs?

CA: Same question (See answer to question #8).

SB. What children populations do counselors find interventions to reduce physical
aggression to be most and least effective?

CA: In my opinion, I think younger children benefit more with the interventions, if there is
not an underline medical issue. But on the other hand, I believe all students with the
proper reinforcements and proactive strategies can change and interventions will be
effective.

SB: Can you walk me through a specific time that you used an intervention to deal with a
physical aggressive youth?

CA: I use de-escalation skills a lot when dealing with aggressive students. One particular case,
I had a student who was throwing chairs and books around the classroom. I had the
teacher take the students out of the classroom and I just sat and talked with the student.
The student was angry because he was taking off the computer and did not want to
complete the classwork. While talking with the student I found that the student had trouble reading and the fact that he was acting out was because he did not like to read in front of the other students. After about 10 minutes, the student calmed down and we came up with strategies to help the student doing reading.

SB: What are some of the barriers that you have experienced implementing interventions with physical aggressive children?

CA: Some barriers that I have experience with implementing interventions with physical aggressive children are parents and the student's inability to want to change.

SB: What assessments do you use using with children who demonstrate physical aggression?

CA: Many of the assessments that I use I create to tailor the needs of that student I will ask questions about family history, ask the student questions about what makes them angry, how can we help as teachers or counselor, and identify any reward that student would like to work towards.

SB: Do you have any question of me regarding this interview?

CA: No

Counselor B

Mrs. Sanders-Burnett: Good evening Participant 4 Thank you for taking your time to come to the interview and sitting down with me for this interview. My name is Deirdra Sanders-Burnett. I am a doctoral student at the University of South Florida and I am conducting research on school counselors’ role in reducing physical aggression in children alternative programs. I am collecting data for my dissertation. The interview should take less than an hour. I will be taping this
interview. I will be writing some notes however, I can't write that fast, so I will be recording.

Let’s go over the consent form. Mrs. Burnett read the consent form orally to the participant.

I volunteer to participate in research conducted by Deirdra Sanders-Burnett from the University of South Florida. I understand that the research is designed to gather information about services provided by counselor to reduce the occurrence of physical aggression demonstrated by young children assigned to alternative education programs. The interview will also be included in the research for a dissertation at the University of South Florida.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, no one on my campus will be told.

2. I understand that most interviewees will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.

3. Participation involves being interviewed by researchers from the University of South Florida. The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. Artifacts will be collected. Pictures will be taken of material used by participants. An observation will be conducted of the school counselor implementing the services. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made.

4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.
5. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

6. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

CB: signed the consent

Mrs. Sanders-Burnett: signed the consent

You were present for quite a few of those meetings I had with parents. So, you can include it.

Mrs. Sanders-Burnett: You will be given a copy of the consent. This information will be kept anonymous. I will ask you a few interview questions. You have signed a consent form for me to conduct this interview to ask you the questions. Your participation is voluntarily. The information that I received will be kept confidential as much as possible. At any time if you decide that there is a question that you are not comfortable answering, please feel free to refrain from answering the question. If there is other information that you think would be beneficial in this interview, please, discuss that information also. Anytime you want to withdraw your consent you will be granted permission to do so.

Mrs. Sanders-Burnett: Yes, do you have any questions so far? I will give you a copy of the consent form as well as the transcript.

CB: No

SB: What grade level of students do you serve?

CB: Currently pre-k through 5th

SB: Do you work with student referred to or currently in alternative education programs?

CB: We have not had any students that has been referred to the alternative education programs at my school because we do so much with them to try to keep children from ever going to
alternative education program but, we do have an alternative education program at my school so I work with those incoming students once they arrive at my center.

SB: Can you tell me a little bit about what you do with those students to prevent them from being referred to the alternative education program?

CB: We have a belief that every child's behavior happens for a reason at my particular school so when we see that a child is having aggressive behavior or disruptive behavior we implement multiple systems one being called the Champs program to work with the students to try to teach them some responsibility, self-control, just some cooling down mechanisms, escape mechanisms, and we have implemented an effective programs for our children with severe emotional behavioral issues if they feel like the classroom is closing in on them they had passes to three different people on campus myself being one of them and the students can come and find one of those three people and spend some time with them as a calming period.

SB: So, you also referred them to other staff members to spend time with to calm down.

CB: That's correct, the child got to pick three staff members on campus if they are having a major meltdown, if they felt like they were having a major issue, if they were going to run or if they or make poor choices they could come and see one of these three people on campus. They could come and either speak with them, just sit quietly with them, or whatever was most effective for them to change or alter their behavior.

SB: What type of counseling services do you provide to the students in the alternative education programs?

CB: All students that came to our alternative program this year once they came in they went on a multi-tier system of support whether they came to our school with or without it they
went under a multi-tiered system of support for behavior that way we could sit with the student, the alternative education teacher, the parents, and come up with some strategies and some interventions that will work in the classroom. A lot of social/emotional skills were taught within the classroom and then they were reinforced as that student move throughout our campus.

SB: Do you believe the services you are currently providing are meeting the needs of the students you serve?

CB: I do not. I feel that it is meeting the immediate needs of our students but unfortunately, I don't think we are given as many tools, as many man hours, or time to really delve into what is causing these students to have such severe behaviors that they cannot stay in their home schools and are having to come to an alternative education program.

SB: So, sounds like you are saying that because they are sent for such a short duration of time there may not be enough time for you as a counselor to find out the main cause of their aggressive behavior.

CB: I don't feel that I have enough time as the receiving counselor but, sometimes I also feel that their home counselor did not have the time or resources to delve into it also because once I received them they were are already in an alternative program. What could we have implemented at their home school so that they would have never had to come to my program?

SB: What other services do you feel would be beneficial for the students to receive?

CB: I know that since we try not to send any students out of our school unless it's a major situation some of the things that we do is consistency and follow through I think that students from an early age, earliest as Pre-K they need to be told what is expected.
Behavior, how they are expected to behave and they have to be taught that. A lot of our students are coming to school now do not know how to sit and listen. They don't know how to actively engage in a conversation. They don't know what it is to wait your turn. They are just not bringing those social skills to school any more.

SB: So the foundation, the readiness skills have not been taught.

P4: They are not as part of the home environment, so we are having to go back and really teach them.

SB: You're saying that some of the skills you are not seeing there's a connection between the home and the school and the students may not have received some of the skills within that environment and then it translates into the school setting.

CB: That’s correct, and they are not coming in ready to learn.

SB: What interventions do you deem to be effective with children who demonstrate physical aggressive behaviors and why?

CB: I think that the most important thing for any student is that they have to buy into the fact that the person working with them truly cares for them. I don't care what model you use, what theory, how much time you spend with them, if the student does not feel like they are an integral part of your life they are never going to buy into anything that you have to say. The relationship is the most important thing when you are counseling a student in my opinion.

SB: What theories guide your interventions?

CB: I wouldn't say that one does but if I had to say that choose one I will say that the social behavior cognitive counseling would be the most. The reason is because I am very goal-oriented that set goals and I feel that student very early on if you are teaching them to set
a goal and try to meet that goal and if they don't meet that goal then you go back and t weak it. I feel that goal setting is ultimately setting every student up for success.

SB: Let me go back to one question that you discussed a little bit as far as working with families or parents or the home environment. Do you do any connection as far as working with the parents with this type of student?

CB: I feel like it is very important that counselors work with all parents, but especially with parent of students who are having problems in a school. However sometimes that is not possible once your schedule is not conducive to the family, the family just will not buy in to coming to the school, the time that is required because they either don't have the transportation, they don't have the means, they don't have a good feeling about what school is like, or if they have negative feelings about dealing with the school personnel, and those are all things that impede our jobs as counselors. But it’s something I am very avid about trying to get to the families. I spend a great portion of my time every day set aside to take parents phone calls, make parent phone calls, or to do home visits. I know they are not recommending that any more but, I probably did 80 home visit last school year just at my school alone seeing families that just we were reaching out to them and they wouldn't come. Either I went with the social worker, the SRO, administrator, or with another person so they will know the school really needs to see you and really want you to be a part of it. Was that successful, yes and no you are always going to have the parent that it doesn't matter how many times you visit and call. I find for the most part if a parent feels that a counselor keeps calling them they will come around and say “Hey, they really have my child's best interest”.

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SB: So, you reached out to the parent, you spent time working with the parents showing them that I really care and want to help their child to be successful and that you are here to help them.

CB: That is my passion. However, that put some of my deadlines behind. Whether it was paperwork or whatever because whenever you're dealing with a family to better a child it is very time consuming and unfortunately, we just don't have enough time that we need every day to advocate for our students’ behalf.

SB: Describe your educational background and prior work experiences?

CB: I have a master's in counseling. When I did my degree, there were two distinct tracks that was a mental health track and there was a school counselor track at my University. I chose to go the school track to work with social/emotional and help families to better meet their needs whether there was divorce in the family, or just separation, or death, or what classes your child needs to take for middle school, what classes your child needs to take for high school. However, I find that now that's not what they are expecting me to address. Now kids are coming with huge mental health issues. I almost need part of the counseling profession that I maybe didn’t touch on because twenty years ago when I went into counseling we were told not to touch those because those subjects were taboo so now the whole process is changing. This is my twenty eighth year in counseling. I will be starting my twenty-ninth year. I have worked with children from pre-k to graduation to college so I have all the realms. I spent 20 years in high school and middle school. I taught both middle school and high school. I taught Spanish, I’ve taught Latin, I’ve taught science and I taught reading for special needs children and I'm a school counselor now.
SB: So, you have a diverse background teacher, counselor, across the spectrum kindergarten to collegiate. What training and experiences have you had in working with young children with physical aggression?

CB: I've had to get what I call a lot of on-the-job training through my career because I have found out that as a counselor or as a classroom teacher I dealt with many aggressive children and many of them had to be addressed in a different way. And I felt that as a classroom teacher it was easier for me to diffuse them than if I brought a second party to defuse it. For me as a classroom teacher just like now as a counselor I believe that what is most important for me is to build that relationship with that student. Because you know once you have that relationship is easier for you to fix that behavior with the student than to bring third parties in that the student do not know, or aren’t used to their ways, or do not know how to deal with them. However, in secondary I was a counselor for a short time in secondary they don't deal with aggression at all. It was a discipline issue. If a student gets aggressive it was the deans’ job and the officer that was on the campus. Counselors just don't deal with that but, in elementary I have to wear a new hat. I am expected to be a part of the team that deals with aggressive behavior and I have seen more aggressive behaviors in the three years the that I have been at elementary school counselor than the 26 years that I have been in secondary.

SB: So you talked about building relationships with the student. What other things do you do to help them? You mentioned talking to them and calming them down.

CB: It's about building relationships, setting goals, students know they have a safe place to come to. That my office is a safe place, they are welcome to come with me but they have to calm down and the aggression has to stop. If there is hitting, and screaming, and biting,
and hitting the wall because they're trying to take you from the classroom to a different
the students that I work with once they see me we do calming techniques, we do
breathing, go to your happy place. I use lots of those techniques to deescalate them and
once they are the deescalated and going into the zone and calming down and usually
eventually maybe not in the moment they would tell me what enraged them if they truly
are enraged.

SB: What type of training would recommend to other counselors who work with students
who demonstrate physical aggression students attending alternative education programs?

CB. I believe that I as a counselor I believe we need more training on this. You hear about a
child maybe throwing a chair or something but now some of the behaviors that we are
seeing they have to do with their mental health issues and they are very severe. For
example, for instance I had several students who multiple times required CPI and had to
be restrained. These children were small, but they were so angry and so enraged that it
took an officer to settle them down.

SB: It's sad that they are so young and they are very aggressive at a young age.

CB. There was nothing that anyone at my school could do. And we tried all kinds of skills,
and all kinds of training, and all the de-escalation skills, and we have a mental health
counselor that comes once a week even she was unsuccessful at times. So, I do believe
that as our society changes counselors should be given the opportunity to go to multiple
training on different techniques for dealing with aggressive behaviors because I'm seeing
more every day.

SB: What children populations do counselors find interventions to reduce physical
aggression to be most and least effective?
CB: I think different ages require different things sometimes the smaller children if they are angry you can just go and hug them and say take a deep breath and they settle down. And some of the children are so angry and are so physically violent that they literally have to be restrained within a small area until the episode passes and parents are called and the whole intervention team has to come to deal with an episode. Special needs children at my school. I have two self-contained units, an ESE Pre-K unit, and over 60 inclusion students that are all special needs children that are being transitioned. I have autistic kids that run. I have six children that run and we may go three days without running and we may have all six running on the same day. So, different interventions are required for different ones. What I try to do as a counselor, I have that rapport with those children so when their need is to run they are to run to me. That is their safe place.

SB: They know where to go and it protects the students. And it protective the staff when the students know where to go. Unfortunately, we have older students that are in our self-contained classes that have recently come to us with three months, within five months and they have been at multiple sites and some of those are not effective because they don’t have the buy in, they don’t have the relationship with me which takes time to build. And usually when we are getting to that point some have transferred, and they are no longer at our school. They don't have that continuity. They don't have that relationship with specific adults knowing that they are going to keep them safe who they can go and talk to.

CB: I think that any intervention that you are going to use… for me, the thing that is most effective is I tell my students every day that, “I love you. I do not like the behavior you just demonstrated, but, I love you.” And when kids hear that continuously daily from a
counselor that is life altering.

SB: Giving them that unconditional positive regard.

CB: I will say, “I'm not happy with your behavior right now but I do love you.” Sometimes that makes them react and stop.

SB: Knowing that their basic needs are met. Can you walk me through a specific time that you used an intervention to deal with a physical aggressive youth?

CB: I have had to multiple times. Towards the last couple of days of school this year we had a child who is special needs. He has been in DCF custody, in and out of foster homes, reunited with his family, and mom lost custody again. Mom is in the process of having their parental rights terminated so this child was at our school in first grade and he was difficult in first grade but we could manage. He had a brand new teacher then he has a little escalate and we have to deescalate, redirect, do a timeout, and then he could function. By the end of this year the family dynamics were so difficult that his only way of dealing with it was throwing. He destroyed the teachers’ classroom many times. Right before school was out we not only had to have one SRO there, we had to have two policemen to calm him.

SB: So, the family dynamics, what is going on in the household has really affected the child and that behavior then affects his performance at school.

CB: Yes, the broken family dynamics and the fact that the child is at the end of second grade going to third grade he's a smart student. We were looking at ESE services so the first thing I do with the team is do a KBIT to see where he is. He has a 110 IQ so he is a smart student but the fact that his home life is so broken transfers into him bringing all of that
aggression to school and he cannot departmentalize where to leave one and where to begin another.

SB: What are some of the barriers that you have experienced implementing interventions with physical aggressive children?

CB: Lots of barriers. Confidentiality, unfortunately we are a team we all should be able to communicate but it gets very complicated. The mental health person can only tell me so much information. The doctor won't talk to me. Sometimes confidentiality is very important. Sometimes these cases become very complicated cases. It becomes a real hindrance to the process. Also consent this parent is in the process of having their rights terminated, however the courts will not help by allowing the child to be evaluated and to be place in a more appropriate education setting which cannot be done unless the parents would sign parental consent. Because she was in jail and could not attend the meetings that became a real barrier. There were several visits that had to be made to the jail before the parent would finally agree to give us permission for the evaluation.

SB: So, there's a barrier between exchange of information between service providers.

CB: Between entities.

SB: Do you use specific assessments? How do you gather information about what caused the aggressive behavior?

CB: We use all kinds of tools. We use a lot of problem solving meetings bringing all the experts together. We had multiple meetings with the mental health counselor which would come to our school twice a week. His guardian ad litem came to the meetings. His foster mother would come to the meetings. His mother was invited to all of the meetings. The very last meeting she was back in jail because of an incarceration. She was not able
to attend the meeting. The worker from the Department of Children and Families came. The liaison between children and Foster Care, and the school psychologist. This child really required a team of twelve to fourteen people to meet multiple times and problem-solve to see what interventions would work for him. Unfortunately, right now he is in the process of having a psychological evaluation. We are looking at Other Health Impaired. It came to our attention that he has a diagnosis with post-traumatic stress disorder and they were looking at medicating him. We felt that because he already had those medical issues along with the family dynamics, giving him support through the Exceptional Education Program might be advantageous in the future.

SB: Do you have any question of me regarding this interview?

CB. I know that research is very important to perfect our craft. I am not a new person to education although my counseling experiences is limited to less than 10 years, my overall experience to the education process, and I am a 30-year veteran. I feel like a brand-new counselor coming into the system being expected to deal with this aggressive behavior, do not have the tools or have not been given the tools to execute the profession to the best of our ability. Even myself I am always looking for new interventions and new ways of doing things and bringing different professionals into a team setting and being able to problem-solve. We are seeing very aggressive behavior in elementary schools now and I truly don't care how long you have been a counselor, I don't think we are equipped to deal with these behaviors. I do feel that we need more training and I feel that we need more support.

SB: Thank you, I value, and I really appreciate the information and the experience that you have shared with me and hopefully this research will be a step in the right direction as far
as providing interventions and information regarding practice within the profession and any assistance that emerging counselors or seasoned counselors can gleam from this that will help serve the population of students that we have. You talked about the changing dynamics in our society, the more intensity of the behavior, and the increasing number of students demonstrating this behavior.

CB: A lot of my friends are 20+ years and they are seeing things that they have never had to deal with in their careers. I am at a Title 1 school and I deal with this difficult population of student all the time. Some of my colleagues do not. They are at cream of the top institution but they are even seeing a need and they are alarmed at what they are having to do at their school. And they also feel that they are unprepared to do the best possible job to meet students’ needs.

SB: Thank you
Appendix H
Alternative Education Checklist

Student Name: ______________________________
Student Id#: _______ School: ____________________

*Place all Documents in the following order before scanning*

- Alternative Education Form
- Notice of Disciplinary Action
- Step 1 form
- Alternative Education Expectations
- Copy of Discipline
- Copy of Students Grades
- Copy of Attendance
- Copy of Summary
- Written confession from students if obtained
- Student witness statements
- Staff statements
- Victim statements
- Signed student Contract
- Code Acknowledgment Form
- Emergency Card
- Police Report
- Pictures
- Videos
- Manifestation (Requested ONLY by Discipline office)

Assistant Principal Signature: __________________________
Note: this form should be signed only after the assistant principal has checked the
document for completeness and has verified all documents are included.
Appendix I
NOTICE OF DISCIPLINARY ACTION FOR NON-ESE STUDENTS

School Name
(School Address)

LEVEL 7 - ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION DISCIPLINARY PROGRAM

Parent/Guardian Name and Address

To: To The Parent or Guardian of

Student Information

Name:
Identification Number:
Date of Birth:
Telephone Number:

Code of Student Conduct Information

Section:
Violation:

Alternative Education Disciplinary Program Information

Term of Suspension:

AEDP Center: __________________________
Effective Date: __________________________

Step 1 Appeal Hearing: Date - Time -

Notice of Assignment to Alternative Education Disciplinary Program: I have recommended and the superintendent's designee (Senior Director of Specialized Services) has approved the student's Out-of-School Suspension as indicated above and assignment to an Alternative Education Disciplinary Program (AEDP) for violation of the Code of Student Conduct Protection Ordinance 97-20 Section 4 provides that a minor who has been suspended or expelled from school shall not be in or remain in a public place, in an establishment, or within 1000 feet of a school between 8:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. on school days. The AEDP is a form of discipline designed to meet the needs of students who are unsuccessful in the normal school environment and involves assignment and transfer to the above-identified AEDP center. The student must attend and successfully complete the assignment prior to returning to his or her regular school. During the assignment, the student will not be allowed to participate in any extra-curricular school activities at his or her regular school nor will he or she be allowed on his or her regular school campus except for transportation purposes. The student's failure to report to the AEDP center on the effective date mentioned above will be deemed an unexcused absence unless a Stay Order has been granted. After you have had an opportunity to discuss this incident with your child, please contact me if you have any questions.

Appeal Procedures (Step 1 - Principal’s Hearing): If you do not request the scheduled hearing noted above nor otherwise respond to this notice prior to said hearing date, it will be assumed that you do not oppose the disciplinary action taken. If you do not agree with the disciplinary action taken, please contact my office to confirm that you would like to have a hearing before the principal as indicated above. For additional information about appeal procedures or a request for a Stay Order, please see the Code of Student Conduct.
Certificate of Service: I hereby certify that the above-identified student has been placed on notice of the above-referenced violation and afforded an opportunity to give his or her explanation. I also certify that the original of this notice has been given to the student for hand-delivery to the parent(s) or guardian(s) and that a true and correct copy of this notice has been forwarded to the parent(s) or guardian(s) by United States regular mail on this 19th day of February, 2015.

By ______________________________________

______________________________________

Administrator's Signature    Student's Signature
Appendix J
Alternative Education Expectations

Office of Discipline
County Public Schools

Alternative Education Expectations

In order to successfully complete the Alternative Education requirement, the student must:

- Maintain a positive attitude at all times
- Respect his teachers and classmates
- Attend all classes and arrive on time
- Actively participate in all activities and assignments so that course credits are earned towards promotion
- Listen to adults and correct behaviors appropriately
- Be in dress code at all times and bring necessary school materials
- Complete their duration (45 Days or 90 Days) and be released at the nine week intervals.
  Note: major discipline issues can extend the time a student remains at the alternative education site and could result in recommendation for expulsion.

If the parent decides to utilize another option such as Virtual School in lieu of attending the Alternative Education Center, they will need to complete a semester and have final grades when ready to transition to their zoned school. Failure to do so will result in the student having to attend the Alternative Education Center to complete their duration. In this instance, the student may end up exceeding their original duration.

We encourage all our students to be successful when needing to attend the Alternative Education Centers. In order to do so, we request that our parents take an active role in their child's education and follow these steps:

- Maintain an open line of communication with the school at all times
- Ensure that the student maintains good attendance and attends classes on a regular basis
- Make the school aware of any issues concerning the student in an effort to
  Ensure the behavioral and academic success of the student

By doing this, we create a healthy environment for our students and staff.

Administrative Signature

Student Signature

Parent Signature

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Appendix K
STEP 1: PRINCIPAL'S MEETING - LEVELS 7 THROUGH 8

STUDENT INFORMATION

Name: ____________________________________________

Identification Number: ____________________________________________

Date of Birth: ____________________________________________

Telephone Number(s): ____________________________________________

Student Code of Conduct Information

Section ____________________________________________

Violation: ____________________________________________

Disciplinary Level: ____________________________________________

PRESENT AT HEARING (Please list full names, relationship, and titles of all persons present at the hearing) ____________________________________________

________________________________________

FINDINGS OF FACT (Please be thorough and specific): ____________________________________________

CONCLUSIONS (Explain how findings support alleged violation): ____________________________________________

DECISION: The disciplinary action is hereby affirmed ( ), Cancelled ( ), or modified ( ) as follows:

________________________________________

If the decision is to impose an Out-of-School Suspension - Long Term (Level 6), then such decision is final and there shall be no further appeal. If the decision is to assign the student to an Alternative Education Disciplinary Program (Level 7) or to recommend Expulsion (Level 8), and if the parent(s) or guardian(s) does/do not agree with that decision, then the parent(s) or guardian(s) may request a Step 2 Administrative Hearing before the Director of Student Discipline or his designee.

*NOTE: If a senior has been referred to an alternative program for the remainder of the year they will not be allowed to participate in commencement activities.

PARENTAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT: I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this Record of Appeal - Student Disciplinary Action and that I have read or been advised of the information contained herein and on this ________ day of _____________________________, 20_____.

__________ I hereby request a Step 2, Administrative Hearing (please check if applicable).

__________ I DO NOT request a Step 2

________________________________________

Parent’s Signature

________________________________________

School

Principal's Signature or Principal Designee
### Appendix L
Categorical Analysis Table
CATEGORICAL ANALYSIS TABLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Categories</th>
<th>Sub-categories (Frequency)*</th>
<th>Meaning Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reasons assigned</td>
<td>Code (1)</td>
<td>“If they are physically aggressive with any type of school board staff, if you have multiple participants involved in a fight, you could be recommended for alternative education. If students show a continuous bullying that becomes physical over time they could be recommended for alternative education.” (Administrator B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process of placement</td>
<td>Progressive discipline (2)</td>
<td>“Goes through a progression discipline.” (Administrator B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forms (2)</td>
<td>“The admin. at each school call into the discipline office and they can give us a description of what’s going on campus and it can be discussed with the director of discipline or a designee and they will decide. From there for them to go with a lesser discipline or to go through with making a recommendation. If it goes through, then they have a packet that they have to complete with the student’s information; their grades, discipline, attendance, description of what happened, referral, witness, witness statements. All of that is completed in a packet and once that packet is completed it goes to the director of discipline. The packet is reviewed to make sure it’s complete once the packet is complete, parents can choose to have a level 1 hearing with the principal. (Administrator B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mandated (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parental choice (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once a level 1 hearing is schedule with the principal and the outcome of that hearing if the principal sticks with the recommendation then from there the parent can request a level
2 hearing and a level 2 hearing is scheduled with the director of discipline now even that's for General education students. The only extra step for special education students would be to have a manifestation hearing before you have the level 2 hearing. In the manifestation hearing determines if the behavior is a manifestation of the student’s disability or not. Once we go through that entire process at the end of the level 2 hearing then the director of discipline will make the final decision on whether the student attends an alternative education program or not.” (Administrator B)

“It is mandated by the school system the parents still have a choice. Say a student if given 90 days to attend and alternative school setting a parent can decided to send a student to the alternative education program or they can choose another program outside of the school system as long as that student is out of school for 90 days.” (Administrator B)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counselors’ experience</th>
<th>Counselor (4)</th>
<th>“Guidance Counselor services of grades PreK- 5th grade — 5 years. Master's Degree in Marriage in family counseling” (Counselor A) B.A. Degree in Social Work (Counselor A) High school teacher (Counselor A) ESE teacher (Counselor A) Lead teacher (Counselor A) Regular education teacher (Counselor A) I taught reading for special needs children and I’m a school counselor now. (Counselor B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>Counselor (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Services and intervention Provided | Group session (2) One on one counseling (2) | “We have school counselors, we have behavior interventionist, we have school psychologist.” “They go out and speak with the students, we have they have group sessions with the students they have one-on-one sessions with the students they have one on one interventions with the student and the parents and so students receive a number of counseling services as well as interventions
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Referrals (2)</td>
<td>“Mainly the counseling services that I provide to the student that are the alternative education program are outside resources, behavioral support, crisis intervention counseling such as baker acts, suicidal at-risk questioners, course work recommendations and individual counseling if needed.” “These services include but are not limited to grief counseling groups, mentoring groups, as well as, helping the parent's located residential treatment centers.” “I use de-escalation skills a lot when dealing with aggressive students.” “I just sat and talked with the student. The student was angry because he was taking off the computer and did not want to complete the classwork. While talking with the student I found that the student had trouble reading and the fact that he was acting out because he did not like to read in front of the other students. After about 10 minutes, the student calmed down and we came up with strategies to help the student doing reading.” (Counselor A) It's about building relationships, setting goals, students know they have a safe place to come to. (Counselor B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior intervention (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual counseling (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-tiered system of support (2)</td>
<td>“Positive behavioral support systems are set up to provide a proactive approach to the behaviors.” (Counselor A) “…bringing different professionals into a team setting and being able to problem-solve.” (Counselor B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social (2)/emotional (2)</td>
<td>“When we see that a child is having aggressive behavior or disruptive behavior we implement multiple systems one being called the “CHAMPS” program to work with the students to try to teach them some responsibility, self-control, just some cooling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parent involvement (2)

down mechanisms, escape mechanisms…” (Counselor B)
“…the person working with them truly cares for them” (Counselor B)
The relationship is the most important thing when you are counseling a student in my opinion. (Counselor B)
I tell my students every day that I love you. (Counselor B)
I spend a great portion of my time every day set aside to take parents phone calls, make parent phone calls, or to do home visits. So, they will know the school really needs to see you and really want you to be a part of it. (Counselor B)

“multi-tiered system of support for behavior that way we could sit with the student, the alternative education teacher, the parents, and come up with some strategies and some interventions that will work in the classroom. “A lot of social/emotional skills were taught within the classroom and then they were reinforced as that student move throughout our campus.” (Counselor B)

Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social history (1)</th>
<th>“I will ask questions about family history, ask the student questions about what makes them angry, and identify any reward that student would like to work towards.” (Counselor B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview (2)</td>
<td>We were looking at ESE services so the first thing I do with the team is do a KBIT to see where he is.” (Counselor B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence Screener (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theoretical orientations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Combination of theories (2)</th>
<th>There is mixture of theories that guide my interventions. Dealing with students you learn one theory does not work for all students. There must be a combination of approaches or theories used. Students are rewarded for making good choices. This when combined with B.F. Skinner (Operant conditioning) reinforcing good behavioral with rewards, Glasser choice theory, providing a safe place where the students want to learn because they feel that someone cares about what happens to them, and cognitive behavioral strategies that helps the</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavior (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reality Theory (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Behavior Theory (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
teacher become more of a monitor and hold
the students more accountable for their
actions are all approaches that works in the
school system. These are strategies that are
more proactive and give feedback and
reward the students for making the right
choices. (Counselor A)

I will say that the social behavior cognitive
counseling would be the most. The reason is
because I am very goal-oriented that set
goals and I feel that student very early on if
you are teaching them to set a goal and try
to meet that goal and if they don't meet that
goal then you go back and tweak it.
(Counselor B)

<p>| Barriers                          | Short assignment limits time with counselor (2) | “The program that the students are currently served in is too short. Because of the long bus ride students are reluctant to attend school on a regular basis. They could have a very short stay. This does not give the counselor or the teacher time to address the real needs of the student.” (Counselor A) “Parents and the student's inability to want to change.” (Counselor A) Dealing with students that are an alternative education program, some with broken homes, dealing with the loss of a family member or just not having the love, support and structure at home becomes a problem with how students relate to others outside of the home. (Counselor A) the fact that his home life is so broken transfers into him bringing all that aggression to school and he cannot departmentalize where to leave one and where to begin another. (Counselor B) Now kids are coming with huge mental health issues. (Counselor B) Behavior, how they are expected to behave, how to sit and listen, how to actively engage in a conversation and they have to be taught that. They are just not bringing those social skills to school any more. They are not a part of the home environment, so we are having |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exchange of information between professionals (1)</th>
<th>to go back and really teach them. (Counselor B) Confidentiality, unfortunately we are a team we all should be able to communicate but it gets very complicated. The mental health person can only tell me so much information. The doctor won't talk to me. Sometimes confidentiality is very important. Sometimes these cases become very complicated cases. It becomes a real hindrance to the process. (Counselor B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>Student needs are not met (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>More training needed to deal with children aggressive behaviors (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Frequency represents the number of participants responding in a specific pattern.
### Appendix M

#### Observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (3) Observation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/12/2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/8/2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
significant family members of one of the students, and the separation from another significant person the child’s life, the counselor provided the student’s parent with a list of referral agencies, a business card to access community resources (Aunt Bertha), and an application for the student to attend a grief camp for children and teens Camp Brave Heart).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Observer’s role</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Observer’s and school counselor’s actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 9/16/2016  | Conference room at the Counselor’s school       | Participant-observer     | Transition meeting for student entering the alternative discipline program | During the transition meeting the school counselor met with a team of educational support personnel, a student, a parent to discuss the reason the student was assigned to the alternative education program, review the students’ social/emotional, and academic strengths, weakness, and behavioral needs. The support team consisted of two school administrators, a Teacher Resource Specialist, a Social Worker, an Academic Behavior Support Teacher, and an alternative education teacher. During the meeting, I also reviewed the status of the students’ Individual Education Plan status in the Multi-Tiered System of Support. After parent informed the team that the student was receiving services from community agency, the school counselor asked the parent to sign an exchange of information for that would allow the counselor
11/7/2016
11/30/2016
1/20/2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/7/2016</td>
<td>Conference room at the Counselor’s school</td>
<td>Participant-observer</td>
<td>Transition meeting for student entering the alternative discipline program As I conducted the transition meetings for students entering the alternative education program with a team of support educators including administrators, a teachers, social workers, parents, and students, the school counselor listened attentively, occasionally asking the students and the parents clarifying questions regarding the students’ academic and behavior performance, and informing the parents that she would be available to provide counseling services to the student as needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/7/2017</td>
<td>Conference room at the Counselor’s school</td>
<td>Researcher-participant</td>
<td>Conference with school counselor Upon arriving at the participant’s four school. I was asked to have a conference with one of the alternative education students that the counselor she had several one-on-one counseling sessions with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/17/2017</td>
<td>Conference room at the Counselor’s school</td>
<td>Participant-observer</td>
<td>Transition meeting for student exiting the alternative discipline program The school counselor met with a team of educational support personnel, a student, a parent, and a school administrator to exit a student from the alternative education program and transition the student back to a traditional education school. As the team reviewed the students’ behavior and academic performance, the school counselor made provided the receiving school’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/3/2017</td>
<td>Conference room at the Counselor’s school</td>
<td>Participant-observer</td>
<td>Transition meeting for student exiting the alternative discipline program As I conducted a meeting with team educational service providers inclusive of teachers, behavior analysis, a counselor, and two behavior analysist to transition a student exiting the alternative program back to the traditional school setting the school counselor listened attentively to the information shared between the participants, reviewed the students’ information regarding the students’ level in the Multi-Tiered System of Supports, and her knowledge about the child’s behavior performance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix N

Reflections on interviews and observations

I offer here some notes on interactions with both the administrators and counselors that occurred prior to or during the interviews or observations, and that shaped my approach during those data-collecting activities.

As I entered the district administrator’s office to schedule and discuss the interview, I presented Administrator A with the consent form and interview questions. The participant quickly read and signed the consent form, and then read the interview questions and recorded answers to the interview questions, occasionally providing brief answers orally and referring to the “Code”. Within fifteen minutes of entering this participant’s office, the interview ended as quickly as it began. There was not an opportunity to record the interview. Having interacted with the participant on numerous occasions, I felt that this was a typical response from this participant and stopping the participants’ actions to record the session would have been counterproductive.

I believed the “Code” referred to the district’s Code of Student Conduct, which is published on the internet. Therefore, after the interview, I reviewed the Code to gather further information regarding the reasons students were recommended for alternative education and the process implemented by the district to place students in an alternative program. During the interview, I noticed several neatly stacked papers and folders on the participants’ desk, which may have been student disciplinary files.

Administrator A reported that kindergarten through twelfth-grade students assigned to an alternative education program receive educational, social, and mental health services from a
school counselor. Once a student engages in a serious misbehavior as defined by the Code of Conduct, the student can be recommended to attend an alternative program based on the following procedure: The required forms are completed, due process is followed based on the established procedures listed in the Code of Conduct, and the parent agrees with the recommended placement.

Upon arriving at Administrator B’s office to conduct the interview, I noticed a sign attached to the exterior wall of the building labeled “Hearing Office”. The interview was conducted in a conference room adjacent to the participants’ office. I noticed a “Code of Student Conduct” and several folders containing the description of alternative education programs on a table in the conference room. The participant provided detailed information describing the districts’ alternative disciplinary education program, reasons students are recommended to attend the program, the process the district follows to assign a student to the programs and the services students receive once the student is placed in the program. As I exited the conference room, I observed a parent with her child sitting in the lobby waiting to meet with the participant for a discipline hearing. The secretary then notified the assistant principal that the parent had arrived for her hearing appointment.

I met with School Counselor A several times in order to build rapport, to obtain information regarding the school counselors’ role at the school setting, and inform the participant of my research. During these visits, I observed this counselor in conference with parents and school support staff including the K–5 alternative education teacher, social worker, an academic behavior support teacher, school administrators, the teacher resource specialist, parents, and students. Counselor A engaged in discussions regarding students’ behavior, academic performance, social/emotional needs, documented accommodations, and providing parents with
referrals to educational and community resources such as grief counseling or assistance for mental health services. I noticed this counselor consulting with the teacher of a student in the alternative education program about the student’s behavior and deciding who would be rewarded as the result of the student’s performance.

The observation and the interview with School Counselor B were similar to the observation and interview with Counselor A. School Counselor B brought notes that she jotted down and descriptions of theories to the interview to share with me. On several occasions, I observed this school counselor meeting a team of professional that included administrators, a social worker, an academic behavior support teacher, behavior analyst, parents, a teacher resource specialist, parents, and students to discuss the academic and behavior performance of students. The counselor often suggested recommendations regarding behavior interventions to help students engage in appropriate behavior in the alternative education program classroom and within a traditional education school setting.
Member check for participant (4)

(@aol.com)To: CB <p4@aol.com>

Counselor B.docx (44 KB)
Dear Research Participant,

Thank you for your insight and powerful interview. You will find a copy of the transcript attached for your review. Please check for accuracy and that your responses are being reported correctly. Please review the transcript making any deletions, additions that you believe are necessary. By your act of reading the transcript, if I do not hear from you within 5 days, I will assume that you agree with the transcript. Please feel free to contact me at (863) xxx-xxxx or via e-mail at @aol.com should you have any questions.

You are truly amazing,
Deirdra Sanders-Burnett
Doctoral Candidate
University of South Florida
Counselor Education Program

-----Original Message-----
From: CB <p4@aol.com>
To: <@aol.com>
Sent: Wed, Jul 5, 2017 11:21 am
Subject: Re: Email for corrections
On Jul 5, 2017, at 11:21 AM, p4 <CB@aol.com> wrote:

I hope this will be received by you. I have tried to send for several days.
daisy

</Counselor B corrections.docx>

-----Original Message-----
From: Deirdra <@aol.com>
To: p4 <CB@aol.com>
Sent: Mon, Jul 3, 2017 6:29 pm
Subject: Email for corrections

Hello Mrs. CB,
My personal email is @aol.com
Thank you,
Deirdra Sanders-Burnett
Email for corrections

Sent from my iPhone
-----Original Message-----
From: Deirdra <@aol.com>
To: p4 <p4@aol.com>
Sent: Mon, Jul 3, 2017 6:29 pm
Subject: Email for corrections

Sent from my iPhone
<Co

wwjdeileen@aol.com
To p4 <p4@aol.com>
Slideshow
Observations counselor B.docx (22 KB)
Consent form for Counselor B.... (130 KB)
Summary of participant 4 inter...docx (19 KB)
Participant 4 Field Note.docx (17 KB)
Hello (CB),

I hope your year is going well in your new position a middle school counselor. I am completing my data collection notes that will be included in my dissertation. I am sending you copies to review and recommend the necessary corrections that you believe are needed. I would like to provide an accurate representation regarding my interview with you and observations during our meetings.

Thank you for your assistance,
Deirdra Sanders-Burnett
(863) 224-3225

Re: Mrs. Sanders-Burnett participant 3 data collection

CB (CB@aol.com) To: Deirdra<@aol.com>
Looks Good. You will be a doctor soon lol.
Congrats,
P4