

# Postmodernism, Therapeutic Common Factors, and Innovation: Contemporary Influences Shaping a More Efficient and Effective Model of School Counseling

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## ABSTRACT

School counseling lacks clarity. This confusion is the result of competing models and confusing standards, domains, and competencies. This article offers a simplified model of school counseling entitled the "Six 'C' Model" (i.e., Care, Collaboration, Champion, Challenge, Courage, and Commitment). The interactive model is informed by the following contemporary influences: (a) postmodernism, (b) the therapeutic common factors, and (c) innovative educational research.

## POSTMODERNISM, THERAPEUTIC COMMON FACTORS, AND INNOVATION: CONTEMPORARY INFLUENCES SHAPING A MORE EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE MODEL OF SCHOOL COUNSELING

This article espouses a position relative to school counseling as well as presents a model of school counseling informed

by postmodernism, the therapeutic common factors, and innovative educational research (e.g., Henderson and Milstein's Resiliency Wheel, 1996; Search Institute's Internal Assets, 2000). The authors believe that Albert Einstein was correct when he said, "everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler" ("Simplicity Quotes," n.d.). The field of education and, more specifically, school counseling tend to complicate their roles by implementing intricate models, policies, and procedures. Educators and school counselors can easily get trapped in the minutia.

The American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) National Model (2005) articulates an approach to school counseling that parallels the aforementioned complications vis-à-vis an elaborate model with a laborious delivery plan. While the basic underlying research and principles are sound, it is easy to get consumed by the details (e.g., domains, standards, competencies, skills, knowledge, awareness, etc.). Add State

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criteria to this model, not always consistent with ASCA, and one has a recipe for gridlock in terms of providing attentive, effective, and efficient school counseling services.

The following article introduces a new model of school counseling entitled the "Six 'C' Model." The model emanates from contemporary movements in mental health and education that are not entrenched in school counseling research and/or literature. Therefore, the following section will concisely expose the reader to the following influences: (a) postmodernism, (b) the therapeutic common factors, and (c) innovative educational research. This overview should allow for the reader to contextualize the "Six 'C' Model." Following the overview will be an introduction to, and explanation of, the "Six 'C' Model" of school counseling. Finally, implications for school counselors will be provided.

### **POSTMODERN INFLUENCE**

Before one has a basic understanding of postmodernism, it is important to tackle a few of the underlying tenets associated with modernism. An essential assumption of modernism is that there is an actual reality with enduring properties that is independent from those who observe it (Erwin, 1999). The continued proliferation of scientific methodology otherwise known as modernism guides treatment and influences an array of subspecialties, which includes mental health (Miller & Thoresen, 1999). According to Hansen (2004), modernism applied to counseling "means that counselors can objectively observe clients and accurately come to know

particular truths about them" (p. 131).

The authors believe that one can extend modernistic influences to school counseling because school counselors occasionally embrace a mental health identity over that of school personnel and/or educator. This position is reinforced by Martin (2002), who asserts that school counselors have typically been provided with mental health-focused training and while this training provides school counselors with skills to be mental health professionals, it falls short of providing the skills necessary to promote academic success. Therefore, because one's training as a school counselor is steeped in technique acquisition and skill development, as well as an understanding of external pressures (e.g., national and state models), a modernistic philosophy continues to permeate one's understanding and programmatic efforts in school counseling. School counseling and mental health share a modernistic orientation that views the student and/or client through an objective and/or collective lens as opposed to a subjectively and/or individually oriented understanding of self and truth.

The authors believe postmodernism offers the ideal backdrop for the "Six 'C' Model" because of its primary emphasis on the individual construction of meaning and knowing. Postmodernism asserts that meanings are created, not discovered by individuals (Leary, 1994). In other words, as Rosen (1996) states, "a totally objective reality, one that stands apart from the knowing subject, can never be fully known" (p. 5). Therefore, knowledge represents a combination of the observer and the observed (Hansen, 2004). Hansen goes on to raise some interesting postmodern oriented

questions about counseling: (a) Can a counselor ever gain accurate client knowledge?, and/or (b) Do clients and counselors co-construct healing narratives? Postmodern philosophy, literature, language, and its basic tenets are ambiguous and complex, thus, beyond the scope of this article.

It is important to note that mental health and school counseling have operated under a modernistic paradigm far too long and continue to minimize the clients/students construction of truth and understanding relative to what they need in life and school. The "Six 'C' Model" builds upon this philosophical momentum by recognizing and celebrating students and their ability to positively orient their lives in concert with a caring school counselor. Additional influences on the "Six 'C' Model" are derived from the common factors literature.

### **THERAPEUTIC COMMON FACTORS INFLUENCE**

In the spirit of Einstein's quote and congruent with school counseling's need for efficiency and effectiveness, the common factors literature further supports the "Six 'C' Model." There are a number of common factors identified relative to mental health. The common factors, as understood by the authors, deviate from modernistic elements via the celebration of an individual's contribution to change vis-à-vis the therapeutic relationship as well as what one brings to the counseling experience. More specifically, the authors will use four factors as identified by Hubble, Duncan, and Miller (1999). Hubble, Duncan, and Miller built upon the research of Lambert (1992) and Lambert, Shapiro, and Bergin (1986). They identified the following four

common factors: (a) client or extratherapeutic factors; (b) relationship factors; (c) placebo, hope, and expectancy; and (d) models and techniques.

Factor one, client or extratherapeutic factors, according to Lambert (1992) are the personal and environmental dimensions that one inherently brings to therapy (e.g., support systems, coping skills, etc.). These factors account for 40% of the therapeutic outcome. Factor two, relationship factors (e.g., care and empathy), according to Lambert account for 30% of the outcome. Factor three, placebo, hope, and expectancy contribute up to 15% of the outcome and reflect the client's hope and expectation for a positive therapeutic experience (Frank & Frank, 1991; Lambert). Finally, factor four; models and techniques contribute up to 15% of the outcome (Lambert).

It is apparent from the aforementioned percentages that structured or predictable aspects of counseling (e.g., techniques and/or therapeutic orientations) influence positive client outcomes in a negligible manner. Therefore, one may surmise that individual characteristics (i.e., client or extratherapeutic factors) when united with a collaborative therapeutic venture (i.e., therapeutic relationship) have the greatest influence on positive outcomes. For a school counselor, outcomes could mean positive growth in one's personal/social development, career development, or academic development. The final influence on the "Six 'C' Model" is innovative educational research (e.g., Henderson and Milstein's Resiliency Wheel, 1996; Search Institute's Internal Assets, 2000).

## **INNOVATIVE EDUCATIONAL INFLUENCE**

The Education Trust's (2003) National Initiative for Transforming School Counseling (TSCI) as well as ASCA's National Model (2005) have influenced and informed the development of contemporary school counseling programs. For example, this influence is reflected in ASCA's annual Recognized ASCA Model Program(s) or (RAMP) awards (ASCA, n.d.). Award recipients represent national school counseling programs recognized because of their commitment to delivering a comprehensive, empirically driven school counseling program (ASCA, n.d.). Despite efforts like the RAMP awards, the authors believe that Henderson and Milstein's (1996) Resiliency Wheel and the Search Institute's (2000) Internal Assets provide for greater depth and simplicity in delivering school counseling services. The Resiliency Wheel and Internal Assets serve as the final influence to the development of the "Six 'C' Model."

According to Galassi and Akos (2004) and Osterman (2000), research has demonstrated that one's need for belonging affects academic attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and ultimately one's level of achievement. The inference is that positive outcomes begin with interpersonal relationships. Henderson and Milstein's (1996) Resiliency Wheel is composed of six factors with arguably, "a caring and supportive environment" as the key factor followed by: (a) setting and communicating high expectations, (b) providing opportunities for meaningful participation, (c) increasing prosocial bonding, (d) setting clear, consistent boundaries, and (e) teaching life skills.

Underlying all of these aspects is the influence of a relational dynamic.

Unfortunately, connecting a student or students with an educator who can provide these aspects is increasingly difficult, in part, due to the scarcity of time. Time is a commodity with which most educators can ill afford to part. However, as postmodernism reveals and the common factors demonstrate, positive relationships in which individuals are valued and challenged can influence positive outcomes. It is the authors' belief that school counselors can facilitate the central principles of the Resiliency Wheel in students and thus promote academic, personal/social, and career growth.

The Forty Developmental Assets proposed by the Search Institute (2000) and more specifically the four internal assets of (a) educational commitment, (b) values, (c) social competencies, and (d) positive identity also support a relational dimension. According to Galassi and Akos (2004), the school counselor plays a critical role in assisting students to develop internal assets. Cultivation of these four assets is critical to a student achieving academic, personal/social, and career success, because as Benson (1997) states, schools and communities must marshal efforts to erect assets in students/children if we expect them to develop into healthy and productive citizens. School counselors are a vital part of this effort and can make valuable contributions to a student's journey through life and school. The "Six 'C' Model" of school counseling collapses the aforementioned contemporary influences into a basic model that is transferable to any student, under any condition, at any time.

**THE "SIX 'C' MODEL" OF SCHOOL COUNSELING**

The following model is a comprehensive effort to encapsulate the essence of school counseling and present school counselors with a model that is applicable and adaptable to any situation (e.g., academic, career, personal/social, crisis, etc.). Figure 1 displays the model and reflects its simplicity. Its simplicity is not only visual, but also practical. It is an inter-related model that functions symbiotically. The model's inter-

relationships are not exclusive, linear, or fixed. For example, a student may present with a learning disability and together the school counselor, student, and parents/guardians facilitate courage so that advocacy for accommodations with the school can take place. This example is focused on one inter-relationship between courage and care in the "Six 'C' Model." Every interaction and/or intervention is filtered through a "caring" relationship between the school counselor and relevant stakeholders.

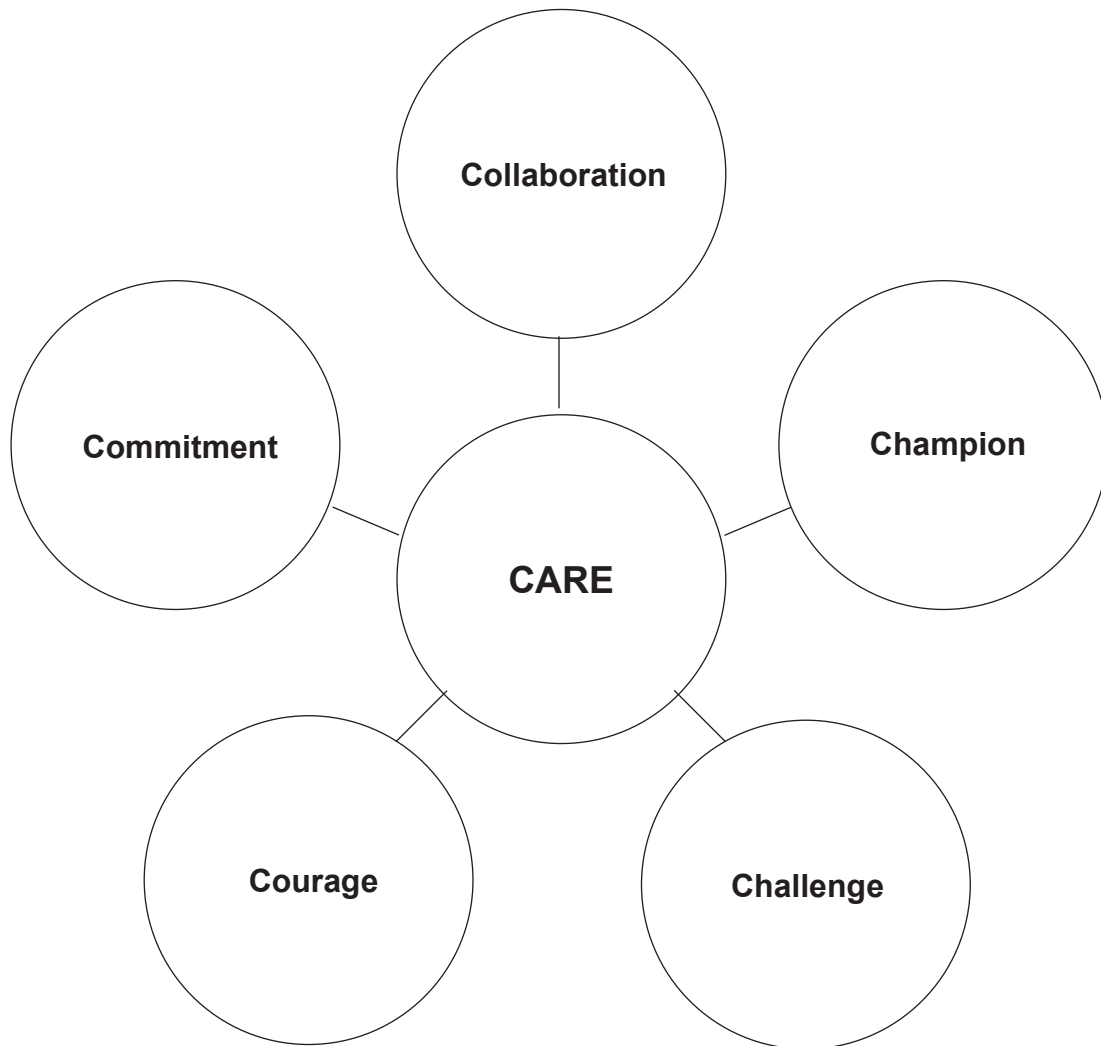


Figure 1. Six 'C' Model of School Counseling. Care is the central ingredient informing all other dimensions of the model.

Overall, the model is informed by care and this dimension serves as the central ingredient for all other elements. Care is defined by Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary as "to feel interest or concern; to have a liking, fondness, or taste" (Mish et al., 1999, p. 173). The "Six 'C' Model" and school counseling informed by care attends to, and values the relational dimension. The "Six 'C' Model" constructed around care seeks to facilitate the following features in students, teachers, administrators, parents/guardians, and all stakeholders: (a) collaboration, (b) champion, (c) challenge, (d) courage, and (e) commitment.

Instead of providing literal definitions of collaboration, champion, challenge, courage, and commitment, the authors believe it would be more fruitful to qualitatively describe these features through the language of Reality Therapy and the work of William Glasser. These two elements capture the essence and inter-relatedness of the "Six 'C' Model." For example, Sharf (2004) discusses that throughout the counseling process in Reality Therapy, a friendly relationship is established and as time progresses the friendliness is combined with firmness. This demonstrates how care interacts with collaboration and challenge. Furthermore, Glasser (1972) asserts that a counselor must show that he or she cares about the client and is willing to process anything the client and/or counselor considers worthy of change. This example demonstrates once again care, but also its inter-relationship with courage and commitment. Finally, inherent to a school counselor's role is advocacy for students, staff, self, and the field of school counseling. Advocacy is

understood in the "Six 'C' Model" as champion.

In short, it is the position of the authors that if school counselors seek to facilitate the features of the "Six 'C' Model", regardless of the situation, positive outcomes are likely to follow. Inherent to the "Six 'C' Model" is a non-expert (i.e., postmodern orientation) approach in which individuals and/or groups (e.g., school counselors and students; school counselors and parents; etc.) work together to construct meaning as well as facilitate advocacy, appropriate risk taking, appropriate confrontation, and the fostering of dedication to co-constructed goals. These goals can be academically oriented, personally/socially oriented, or career oriented. The fundamental difference between this model and current movements in school counseling (e.g., Education Trust, ASCA, etc.) is that the philosophy and application remains consistent regardless of what situation (e.g., crisis, classroom guidance, individual counseling, group counseling, etc.) is presented and/or who is presenting it (e.g., parent/guardian, administrator, teacher, or student). The "Six 'C' Model" is fluid, adaptable, efficient, effective and most important, uncomplicated.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS**

The implications for school counseling are straightforward. The culture of school counseling and education in general is one that values evidence-based outcomes, efficiency, and effectiveness. The "Six 'C' Model" addresses these aspects and allows for school counseling to legitimately attribute positive growth to



services rendered regardless of domain (e.g., academic, career, or personal /social). This position may appear tenuous, but one need not look any further than the empirical validation associated with the therapeutic common factors.

Empirically validating counseling interventions continues to be a challenge, but the therapeutic common factors proved the value of "flexible" dimensions (e.g., therapeutic relationship). Based on the research, one can reasonably assume that these "flexible" dimensions make a difference when combined with competence and/or adequate training in the foundations of a profession. Therefore, it is our belief that school counselors who provide caring service as well as facilitate the other key features (e.g., collaboration, challenge, courage and commitment) in their students and/or other stakeholders on a consistent basis, will be able to demonstrate empirically that their interventions contribute to growth and development. This empirical "proof" could be gathered by conducting research efforts utilizing a pretest-posttest control group design.

Additionally, it is understood that school counseling mandates can be unique to school districts and to schools within a district. The simplicity of this model allows for one to position it within the context of whatever is needed. Thus, there is a universal quality to the "Six 'C' Model" and this collective quality is consistent with what Martin (2002) describes as a new vision for school counseling. Martin suggests moving school counseling from a position of maintaining the status quo, to "one of cutting-edge social action, advocacy for access, and support for success for all

students..." (p. 152). Moreover, Martin recommends that instead of making students feel good or simply providing students with mental health services, school counselors need to aggressively empower students to construct successful futures. The "Six 'C' Model" is a positively oriented model that is congruent with Martin's call to action for school counselors.

Finally, the greatest implication of the "Six 'C' Model" for school counselors is that it offers flexible standardization. A flexible as well as standardized model can be advantageous for a profession (i.e., school counseling and/or school counselors) that is typically defined by individuals trained in a different discipline (i.e., educational administration and/or administrators). The "Six 'C' Model" allows for school counselors to operate consistently regardless of the variability in their defined role. Whether one is facilitating the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) or facilitating a small group, positive change occurs through the "Six 'C' Model."

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The Editorial Board of the *GSCA Journal* is requesting that practicing school counselors, supervisors, counselor educators, and other professionals interested in the promotion of school counseling in Georgia submit articles for publication in the next issue of the *Journal*.

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