

The importance of the school counselor in schools



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The school is an important institution where the home, the community and the Church are all interrelated to each other defying differences of principles and beliefs. It is the school's responsibility to unify all these other three components for the best welfare of a child. In the school, everything happens according to building the child's holistic foundation such that teachers and counselors have this important responsibility of knowing what goes on inside the child's mind(schemata), what affects his behavior,(how it does and why) and what direction guidance needs to take in order to facilitate the moral uprightness and intellectual growth of the students.

Young children and teenagers are faced with numerous stressors in life. Everyday, simple instances and events can affect how a child would behave and react to the things around him. Friends are just one factor that can trigger different attitudes from students. Good friends and bad have this ability to shape the child's thought and feelings. On the other hand, family events are primary triggers of behavior. Parental separation or divorce, sibling rivalry, economic status and other family concerns are noted to be contributors to child stress. And since the school is a learning arena, there are times when stressors come in the form of learning difficulties.

Neurological and learning difficulties can be stressors in all possible moments of a student's life.

The above-mentioned stressors are known to affect the student academically, behaviorally, psychologically and emotionally. The dismal life situations often seem too difficult to handle, especially for young children that consultation happens to be one of the most effective mode of intervention.

The School Counselor and His Role

The ability of children to become successful learners highly depends on students' emotional well-being and state of mind. School counselors including teachers and mentors should be aware that shaping the child's learning and socialization skills will bring about successful study habits and positive outcomes. While the teachers are expected to provide formal instructional practices, guidance counselors are supposed to help encourage students about the advantages of learning and improved relationships with friends, classmates, family members and other people around or in their environment. The role of a guidance counselor is further reiterated by Joanna White in her article A System Approach to School Counselor According to White, consultation is a systematic approach where interdependent group of people constantly interact with each other. (White, 1998).

Consultation's nature as a system describes it to be open not only to students but also to parents, guardians, teachers and everyone that impact a student's life.

Consultation

Consultation does not have an exact definition but Caplan (1970) defined it as “ a process between two professional persons, the consultant, who is a specialist, and the consultee, who invokes the consultant's help in regard to current work problems”. One of the best definitions is by Kurpius (1978); consultation is a voluntary relationship between a professional helper and help-needing individual, group, or social unit in which the consultant is providing help to the client(s) in defining and solving a work-related problem with a client or client system. He also stresses that consultation is system

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oriented. It aims to help change aspects of the system, such as its structure or people and to change the system itself. Consultation's nature as a system describes it to be open not only to students but also to parents, guardians, teachers and everyone that impact a student's life. Furthermore, the school counselor is believed to be essential in facilitating the relationship among teams of parents, community leaders, teachers, students and other school professionals. He has the responsibility of strengthening the connections between the learner and the significant others.

Consultation Versus Counseling

Consultation and counseling are both offered on a primary (preventive) level, and both are interpersonal processes. Yet there are some distinctions. A further distinction between counseling and consultation is that consultation services are usually sought when a "system is in decline or crisis" (Nelson & Shifron, 1985). Most people do not seek counseling until they are under stress or in distress. Communication skills employed in consultation do not differ much from those used in counseling. Both counselors and consultants listen, attend, question, clarify, confront, and summarize but consultants initially focus more on content than feeling because the process concentrates primarily on problems and issues.

The difference between consultation and counseling is that "the content of the consulting interview, unlike counseling, is a unit external to the consultee" (Stum, 1982). Most counseling occurs at the designated center where a counselor is employed while a consultation takes place in a natural setting (often the consultee's work environment). Another difference between consultation and counseling is in the role of practitioners.

Consultation activities work indirectly rather than direct. Often consultants teach the consultee a skill that can be applied to a third party, whereas counseling skills are usually focus on and directly applicable to a specific individual, group, or system with which counselors work.

Models Of Consultation

Expert or provision model- In this model, consultants provide a direct service to consultees who do not have the time, inclination, or perceived skills to deal with a particular problem area. This model was the first to develop. The advantage of the model is that experts can handle difficult problems and leave consultees free to manage their other duties without work conflict. The disadvantage is that consultants are blamed if a particular problem does not get better.

Doctor-patient or prescription model- In this model, consultants advise consultees about what is wrong with the targeted third party and what should be done about it.

Medication model- In this model consultant's act as coordinators in the medication model. Their main function is to unify the services of a variety of people who are trying to solve a problem. A consultant might work this way in a school system in which a child with a disability is receiving a variety of different services that are disruptive to both the child and school.

Process consultation or collaboration model- Consultants are facilitators of the problem-solving process in the collaboration model. Their main task is to get consultees actively involved in finding solutions to present difficulties they have with clients.

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Level of Consultation

Individual consultation- Is a one to one consultation and this is where the client role plays either an active or passive consultant while the counselor role play the client. The client sits in different chairs when playing the separate roles. When passive the client gives only familiar, safe, nonthreatening advice in response to the presenting problem and there is no confrontation. When active the client reflects thoughts, feelings and strategies that are assertive and maybe frightening.

Group consultation- This is when several individuals share a similar problem (e. g., in a work setting). The group might work towards a common goal, with each member contributing some part to a joint effort. For instance a high school social studies department may consult with a school counselor regarding the high number of students who are failing.

Organization/community consultation- Counselors may function as political consultant because they are in a pivotal position to effectively communicate concern of people they serve to policy makers at local state and national level at government. These activities involve lobbying with individual representatives as well as testifying before and making recommendations.

The systematic facilitative approach to consultation

STEP 1: IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM- Help the consultee to tell about the situation

STEP 2: CLARIFY THE CONSULTEE'S SITUATION- Give attention to the following: Feelings and Specific Behaviors

STEP 3: IDENTIFY THE GOALS OR OUTCOMES- Specify the outcome in observable behaviors.

STEP 4: OBSERVE AND RECORD BEHAVIOURS- Obtain some baseline data on desirable behaviors

STEP 5: DEVELOP A PLAN OF ACTION- THE CONSULTEE'S INTERVENTION-
When will the first step be taken?

STEP 6: CONSULTEE INITIATES THE PLAN

STEP 7: FOLLOW UP- This provides an opportunity for evaluation and discussion of next step.

The Principles of Effective Consultation

Effective consultation always begins with knowing its nature. And since it was clearly defined that school consultation is basically a system intertwined with the responsibility of enhancing the bond between the student(s) and the significant people in his life, it is also essential to note how effective consultation happens. The following are a few considerations for effective consultation in a school's guidance and counseling program developed during a workshop held at the National Rural and remote Youth Affairs Conference, Choices and Chances in Wagga, in April 1993.

Effective consultation happens when the participant clearly understands why he is undergoing the consultation. For instance, parents should know why they are being called in the Guidance Office and what effect would it have for them to know the situation in the child's improvement. Parents should understand their level of power in the process. This way, they are further

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informed of what will be the outcome if they will or will not participate. Once this is done, the counselor should allow enough time for the participant to think of response.

Moreover, counselors should understand that consultation is a process of exchange. It is important that each participant will leave the consultation with new ideas and new information that will help them cope with the child condition. These exchange process will optimize the ability of each participant to contribute and get motivated for better results. The most important things a consultant should bear in mind is the fact that there is always a need for them to present themselves as people friendly and not as authority that is to be afraid of. Presenting themselves as someone approachable and “ one of them” would mean that they are willing to listen and not to be listened to. When a participant feels that the consultant is willing to listen, he will be more confident to speak out without hesitations. This increases confidence and will provide space for contribution of ideas that will help them cope with the child condition. These exchange process will optimize the ability of each participant to contribute and get motivated for better results. And since it is a system, the mentioned conference found out that some participants should be utilized as key informants:

This need not exclude the option for input by other concerned or affected people. On the other hand, it may be important to identify interests that are not represented by existing groups, and provide explicit opportunities for others to contribute. Often, existing groups believe they represent a wide body of interest. Accordingly, they may feel put down by your decision to consult beyond them. Where broader consultation is necessary, it is critical

that you inform the existing groups of your decision, and remain ready to deal with their response. The alternative is for them to feel betrayed. This may have a serious negative affect on the overall process if not resolved. Identifying and involving all sides is critical to the long term success of strategies arising from consultation, and may even generate new, innovative ideas. (ESSQ, Consultation, 2008)

The Efficient Use of Time

Time is a huge factor when it comes to consultation. It is noteworthy to identify how many participants a counselor is bound to talk to. In an ordinary school setting, a counselor is expected to talk to at least 500-1000 students. It is therefore useful for him to talk to teachers about student backgrounds and anecdotal records for him to be efficient. The records and teacher observations will be helpful in gauging the behavior and attitude of a particular student. Consulting parents will also bring about the same degree of benefit. It is the parents whom children and adolescents deal with at home. Parents can provide necessary information which teachers fail to observe because they are at home or due to other factors. It is also important to understand the age of the participant. Time can be dictated by how young the subject of the consultation is. Children are more difficult to stimulate regarding changes in life. White then explained this as she said:

Counselors who work only with children frequently fight an uphill battle to stimulate changes in children's lives. By consulting with significant adults in the child's life, counselors can foster interactions with children that are more effective. Expecting children to initiate changes in their interactions with

adults can be frustrating for counselors and both frightening and discouraging for children. (White 1993)

The Nature of Student Problems

A single problem at home can stem into many problems in school. For instance, parental separation will lead to destructive habits that will distort learning. If family relationships are not conducive for positive learning attitude, the students would rather seek for companionship from friends that may not be good for them at all. Thus, student problems are complex and have multiple origins in nature. (White, 1998) The deterioration of academic performance highly depends on the nature of problem which students are undergoing. As a counselor, it will be helpful if significant others can be considered participants in the consultation process. To further support this claim, the Educational Resources Information Center in 1996 has emphasized the impact of parental involvement in student success. Involving parents will further enhance their commitment to supporting school advocacies and programs that will aid in securing their child's welfare. There are some instances when the school, as represented by teachers and counselors, refuse or delay the consultation with parents because they are afraid to recognize that a certain problem exists. This could be detrimental to the process and will hinder useful solutions to be arrived at. Moreover, problems are also worsened by the fact that parents and teachers sometimes refuse to be consulted.

The Nature of Resistance

Since the first reason for resistance has already been identified as the refusal to consult because of denial for the existence of a problem, there are <https://assignbuster.com/the-importance-of-the-school-counselor-in-schools/>

other more triggers for participants to keep information from the consultant. The second reason would be the possibility of rapport build up between the consultee and the consultant.

When school counselors recognize this type of resistance, they can use the knowledge to work on establishing a good relationship (Randolph & Graun, 1988), rather than continuing to engage in futile attempts to convince the consultee of a particular plan of action. (White, 1998)

The third reason was further stated by Riordan Matheny, & Harris, in 1978 as the recognition of the opportunity to create alliance with the consultee.

Fourth, there are instances when parents and teachers and other participants refuse to comply because they do not agree with the course of action.

The collaborative process and the strengthening of the foundation of the consultation system can be managed well as the counselor or the consultant is able to view the reasons for resistance so that useful intervention can be applied.

Parental Resistance – Resistance is a normal characteristic of consultation. Parental resistance often stems from their need to resist blame. Their fear of being pointed to as origin of student problem usually causes them not to speak out and cooperate. Parents always believe that they have done everything to make their child good and for such it would be difficult for them to accept that their child is in a dire situation. On the other hand, some parents may have tried all necessary solutions because they have attempted to solve the problem in the past. In this case, they tend to have run out of

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hope in managing the child. Counselors should also understand that parents are also human beings and are subjected to problems of their own. Career and personal predicaments can hinder them from attending to other concerns especially if they know that the school is there to handle the situations more effectively.

Racial and other forms of discrimination also prevent parents from attending consultations. There are times when parents are ashamed of their personal achievements and educational backgrounds that they fear facing professionals like teachers and administrators.

On the contrary, teachers regard themselves as professionals and talking about student problems will be considered as an act of inability to perform their duties. Teacher resistance is not always the problem but can have the possibility to occur. According to White,

Ellis (as cited in Dougherty, Dougherty, & Purcell, 1991) also suggested that teachers sometimes resist consultation because they fear success. It is frequently the case that teachers who are successful with problem students are given more students who have difficulty in school because they are effective with them. (as cited in White, 1998).

The success of every consultation can be achieved if the school guidance and counseling department is able to let teachers and parents understand that their resistance will not help solve student problems and that their cooperation to provide information and face the real condition of the child is all the time essential in coming up with favorable solutions beneficial for the student welfare.