

A Consultation Model For Working With An Underachiever. A Single Case Study.

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The role of a school counselor includes improving student's study skills. It involves discussion of the place and time to study, study habits and study techniques. Direct tutorial counseling is also used to improve students' grades. It is also said that study skills aimed at improving academic competence should result in higher grades among students. This paper presents a single case study looking into the effect of a consultation model in dealing with low academic achievement of a student. The process involved in the consultation will also be discussed. Among others are developing hypothesis, consulting the student's teachers, setting up regular meeting time and agreeing upon a contract. Twice-a-week sessions were then scheduled with the student. It was found that after a month of twice weekly sessions, the student's grades began to improve. In general, this paper attempts to look at the effect of a consultation model working with an underachiever using a single case design study.

Introduction

Historically, school counselors have been involved in helping school children adjust to and become involved in their school environment. Many studies have shown that a positive relationship exists between counselor guidance and academic achievement and success. Myrick (1993) states that although school counselors are concerned with the comprehensive needs of their students (i.e. educational, vocational, personal and social), the underlying purpose of school counseling programs is to facilitate the instructional process and student's academic success. Gerler (1985) found that research published in *Elementary School Guidance & Counselling* from 1974 to 1984 provided strong evidence that school counseling programs can positively influence the affective, behavioral, and interpersonal domains of children's lives and as a result, can affect children's achievement positively. The purpose of this paper is to look into the counselor's involvement in a consultation model in the improvement of a student's academic achievement. A single-case study incorporating the rational emotive therapy (RET) is also being used with the student. RET has a long history of application with school children and treatment of a variety of childhood problems including academic problems. (Grieger & Boyd, 1983).

A single-case study.

A case study is a report of an intensive analytical and diagnostic intervention on an individual or other social unit, in which attention is focused on factors contributing to the development of personality patterns and/or behavior patterns. (Shertzer & Linden, 1979). Single-case (N=1) experimental design is a methodology in which information on a single individual or several individuals is obtained concurrently has been specified developed for use in practice

settings. (Barlow & Hersen, 1984) This paper is using the single-case study in looking at the effect of a consultation model in working with an underachiever.

Rational emotive therapy

Rational emotive therapy (RET) has a long history of application with school children and to the treatment of a variety of childhood problems such as anxieties, fears, phobias (e.g. Grieger & Boyd), academic achievement (e.g. Bard & Fisher, 1983). RET is directed at bringing about a reduction in the intensity of inappropriate, negative emotions of students which are seen to be causing misery as well as making it harder for students to solve current problems and achieve future goals.

Albert Ellis (1962) described the ABC model of disturbance in which "A" represents an activating event, B represents an individual's evaluative belief (cognitions) about the event, and C represents the emotional, behavioral and physiological consequences. A stressful event such as failing an exam can be analyzed as follows.

A	= Activating event	Failing exam
B	= Beliefs (self-defeating)	"I should have passed" "I can't stand failing" "It's awful that I have failed" "This proves I'm no good"
C	= Emotional consequences Behavioral consequences	Depression Avoids speaking to friend

Ellis believed that the beliefs and attitudes a person holds about an event largely contribute to his or her level of emotional disturbance. Ellis stressed that dogmatic, inflexible, absolutist, unrealistic beliefs were more likely to lead to elevated levels of stress. Ellis found that by challenging an individual's attitudes and beliefs by asking logical, empirical and pragmatic questions, the person may start to alter their self-defeating beliefs and become less distressed. The new self-helping belief and consequences could become;

A	= Activating event	Failing exam
B	= Beliefs (self-helping)	"Although it's strongly preferable to pass, obviously I don't have to." "It maybe bad, but certainly not awful that I've failed."
C	= Emotional consequences Behavioral consequences	Sad do not avoid interactions with others.

Source : (Palmer, 1997).

Session One.

Aminah, (not her actual name) a 14-year-old form two student was referred to me by her class teacher who believed that Aminah's grades were not up to par. Her academics record showed that she had failed most of her core subjects in the previous monthly test. I reviewed Aminah academic record and found out that Aminah achievement tests were not good.

Elapsed time: 20 minutes.

Session two

I consulted with Aminah's form teacher to obtain more information concerning Aminah classroom functioning. My conversation with her form teacher revealed that (a) Aminah did not complete her work (b), she appeared careless and disorganized (c) was quite reluctant in answering teacher directed questions and usually irresponsible during class discussions. (d) often demonstrated her nervousness, most particularly around the time of monthly test and term examinations (e), experiencing some difficulty with class tasks requiring recall or long-term memory. As the months progressed, Aminah's academic difficulties became worse. As mentioned earlier, she failed mostly her core subjects of Mathematics, Science, English, Geography and History. In contrast, however, Aminah continued to achieve positive evaluation reports in religious studies.

The teacher responded that Aminah's grade has fallen. He also reported that Aminah seemed to be off-task in class and at times closed her eyes and quite often laid her head on her desk. I asked the teacher to identify the goals for Aminah to contrast them with his own goals. The teacher reported that she wanted Aminah to achieve her potential. Our discussion focused on factors that might increase Aminah's aspiration and performance. The teacher also vented his feelings of frustration about underachieving students. At the end of the session, we designed a potential intervention that would be approved by the teacher. We came to a conclusion that if both parties deemed it appropriate, we would involve the parents in the consultation process.

Elapsed time: 30 minutes

Session three.

I began the third consultation session by discussing with Aminah's form teacher. We found that he needed to readjust his shorter-term goals for Aminah to perhaps raise her performance to average. We found out that Aminah needed to develop some reasonable expectations about the consequences of high and low school performance. The teacher would engage Aminah in some goal setting that would involve raising her grades. The teacher would reinforce any rise in achievement and would ask parents to do the same thing to change performance standards.

Elapsed time: 20 minutes

Session four.

My consultation with Aminah began in session four, I determined that she lack motivation and effective study habits. I also found her feeling angry, depressed over herself for not being able to perform well in her study. Aminah was also being referred to me because of being very scared and depressed about the amount of teasing she received especially from her classmates. She felt that the teasing received was due to her low academic achievement in class. I assumed Aminah might experiencing a high level of depression and anxiety surrounding being teased. The RET treatment goal for Aminah would be as follow (a) to reduce the intensity of her depression and anxiety (ii) she would be happier with her friends at school, (iii) she would have greater emotional self-control, and (iv) she be more effective behaviorally. She would also like to get a better result in her examinations. Once Aminah's depression is reduced, her high level of anger also is targeted for change.

During the session, which occurred immediately after the morning school session ended, I have to identify a few major steps in the consultation process. Bergan & Kratochwill (1990) has identified the major steps in the consultation process as problem identification, problem

analysis, plan implementation and problem evaluation. Aminah's problem identification began with the two of us establishing the objectives to be accomplished in the consultation process. These objectives should identify the client's problems ; specify the outcomes (change) in measurable terms. Upon discussion with Aminah, we came up with a few problem identification and we managed to establish a few objectives to be accomplished.

Among the objectives that we have agreed upon were,

- i. to reduce the intensity of Aminah's depression and anxiety. This would lead to her feeling happier with her school friends.
- ii. Aminah would have greater self- control, thus she would have more effective behavior.
- iii. Aminah should get a better result in the examination.

I tried establishing a good relationship with Aminah for I know that good interpersonal relationship is important and Bergan (1977) was the first to suggest that, to be effective, consultants needed to have the skills. Listening skills is one such skill that will necessitate the counseling process. Dougherty (1995) maintains that consultant needs the active listening skills to establish basic human relationships. These basic skills would include attending such as appropriate eye contact and other non-verbal behavior and communicating to the consul tee that both the verbal message and the effective content of the message have been heard using the skills known as reflection. A follow-up session was scheduled three days later.

Elapsed time : 30 minutes.

Session five

I began session five of my consultation process by disputing Aminah's faulty and irrational thinking. The main RET techniques for disputing faulty inferences is called empirical disputation or empirical analysis (Albert Ellis, 1997). Here, I teased out with Aminah whether there was concrete evidence to support her conclusions or whether she was distorting reality. In this case, to empirically dispute the thought "all my friends are teasing me," " a class list", could be employed. What Aminah could do was to go down the list of names and place a check next to any of her friends whom do not tease her. This empirically analysis would, in a way, help her modify her conclusions to something more accurate and something that she would find easier to accept. (e.g only one or two kids are teasing me). Another effective method that I have instructed Aminah to do was to design an experiment where Aminah had to collect data over a period of two weeks. She would then have to compare the result of data collection with his/her original.

I continued my consultation with her by disputing her irrational idea that "I am hopeless" by examining the belief as it arises with a specific person. "So, when your friends call you stupid, you think you are no good. Is that right." Aminah agreed, so I established a basis for disputing her irrational self-statement dealing with self-worth. This was done by asking Aminah to complete a self-concept circle, which has her writing down positive and negative characteristics of herself (e.g. negative, getting teased a lot, not good at mathematics, positive, help mom, dad, friends, teachers and family). I am then in a position to pose basic disputation questions to dispute self-downing. "Does your friend calling you stupid take away all of the positive things about you? Do you lose all you good things? Does it make you totally stupid?".

Other irrational evaluations expressed by Aminah, which could be disputed, are; it's awful to be teased by my friend at school." "I hate it when my friends tease me at recess". The irrational statement "I can't stand my friends teasing me" would be disputed with questions such as "You mean it upsets you? Where is the evidence that you can't stand it? Have you

ever fainted?" A rational counter self-statement might be " While I don't like being teased, I can stand it."

In terms of her study habits, I discussed with her ways of improving her study habits by setting up a regular study time. After discussing with Aminah, we had an agreement. Aminah had to stay back after school. She agreed to set up a study timetable and consistently followed it. Twice a -week session were held with Aminah. The sessions involved study habits and study techniques. Direct tutorial counselling was also used to improve the student's grade. Sometimes, I asked Aminah's teacher to stay back and teach certain subjects that Aminah were weak at. After two months of twice weekly session, Aminah's grades began to improve especially in his mathematics and science subjects. I checked with Aminah's teacher and found out that there had been improvement in Aminah's grades or social habits.

Elapsed time: 45 minutes

Session six

This session was mainly held for the purposes of monitoring the progress. It was a brief session. I checked out with Aminah's form teacher. I found out that Aminah's grade had improved. Her form teacher was happy with Aminah's result. He reported that he felt better and that Aminah had made some modest academic progress.

Elapsed time: 20 minutes.

Conclusion.

Many studies have shown that a positive relationship exists between counselor guidance and academic achievement and success. This paper has looked into the role of a school counselor in improving a student's academic success. It presents a single case study looking into the effect of a consultation model in dealing with low academic achievement of the student. It was found that the consultation model used has increased the student's achievement and has positively influenced the affective, behavioral and interpersonal domains of the student. The study, which has used the rational-emotive therapy has reduced the intensity of negative emotions of the students and thus facilitate the student's academic success.

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