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Improving Teaching and Learning: A Counseling Curriculum Model for Teachers

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Although counseling is relatively new as a profession, counseling services have been provided for many centuries. Counseling in various forms exists in all human societies around the globe, and the ways it is delivered vary broadly in different cultures and communities.

Historically, individuals who have naturally and consistently assumed the counseling role have been the teachers. In classical antiquity, Socrates was Plato's teacher and counselor; Aristotle was the student and counselee of Plato; Alexander the Great was the student and counselee of Aristotle. How did these great men manage to achieve high levels of self-actualization, obtain insight and self-awareness, and succeed in their goals and endeavors? What was the role that the counseling component of the teaching relationship played in their life achievements?

The relationship between teacher and student is central to an individual's educational experience and growth process. Many of us can recall a teacher whom we were very close to, a teacher who helped us build our self-confidence, focus and define our goals, and follow our dreams, and who counseled us successfully in a difficult moment. For some of us, a teacher may have very well been what Socrates had been for Plato.

The Counseling Component of Teaching

The counseling and teaching professions present similar characteristics associated with becoming an effective helper in the school setting. Important factors in the helping/teaching relationship are showing unconditional positive regard, genuineness, the promotion of a climate of safety, the ability to be empathic and a good listener as well as to understand not only the students' verbal behavior but also their nonverbal messages, facial expressions, and body language (Cormier & Hackney, 1999). Both teachers and counselors must be familiar with the therapeutic effect of silence (Hutchins & Vaught, 1997). Listening attentively to the students may be all that is necessary to resolve their concerns.

In American society, the counseling profession has been promoted. Specialized counseling programs are offered for youth and families through various community agencies. However, students in public and private schools have continued to receive insufficient guidance and counseling to complement their classroom learning. According to the American Counseling Association (ACA), although the recommended student-to-counselor ratio is 250:1, the U.S. national average ratio is 478:1, and some schools don't even have one full-time counselor (ACA, 2005, p. 4).

Many teachers today make unnecessary referrals to the school counselor because they choose not to counsel their students even for simple issues, claiming that this is not their job or that they do not have the necessary counseling skills and training. As a result, the workload of the counselor becomes even heavier, and students at risk who are truly in need of counseling services do not receive the attention they need.

The Need for Counseling Skills in Teaching

Although the teacher is not the school counselor, often he or she is the first person to listen to student problems, respond, and suggest ways of intervention and resolution. Elementary, junior high, and high school students experience problems related to their normal development and often encounter academic, personal, and interpersonal problems. These problems may have a negative impact on their learning and academic performance. Special education students and students whose home language is other than English have to deal not only with their normal developmental issues but also with concerns associated with their special learning needs (Erford, 2003).

Teachers experience daily problems related to communicating effectively with their students and are in need of interpersonal and multicultural communication skills to reach each and every student and deal with a broad range of emotional, cognitive, social, and moral development student issues (Holmgren, 1996; Paisley & Hubbard, 1994). Students

from low, middle, and high socioeconomic backgrounds, from culturally and linguistically diverse families, and at different age and ability levels are in need of teachers who can listen and understand their concerns.

Teachers interact with parents from various ethnic, social, cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. Often parents turn first to the teacher for support and advice when their children encounter academic, social, emotional, and other problems. Teachers must have good communication skills which enable them to establish rapport and develop a trusting and helping relationship with parents.

Except for individual student issues, teachers have to deal with critical incidents which affect all students' learning. Still vivid in my mind is the day of September 11th of 2001, when I was teaching a first-grade class in a school located 5 minutes away from the Pentagon. I still remember the horrifying sound of the crashing plane and the feelings of terror. The school had only one counselor and over 30 classes. The individuals who had to respond first to the crisis were the teachers. And a few days later, when schools resumed regular schedules, teachers were again the ones who had to debrief the terrorist attacks with their students (Gouleta, 2002). The need for counseling and crisis intervention training for teachers was evident.

However, even when all things go relatively well and without any critical incidents, the knowledge of counseling skills is essential for teachers to promote student learning and well-being. Teachers can play a key role in resolving student issues and concerns. However, although teachers can be wonderful therapeutic helpers to their students, they should not engage in long-term counseling or take on the role of the counselor. After an initial evaluation of the student or parent concern, teachers must make a professional decision whether they should make a referral to the school counselor. Teachers should work closely with school counselors, and both professionals must be prepared to respond to a diverse population of students. This calls upon both professionals to be multiculturally sensitive and aware. It is noteworthy that many teachers have left the teaching profession to become school counselors after a taste of counseling in the classroom.

The Counseling Curriculum for Teachers (CCT) Model

During my career as an educator in private and public school settings as well as in universities, I have witnessed numerous teachers expressing the need to acquire knowledge about the main counseling approaches, strategies, and techniques which will enable them to work successfully with culturally and

linguistically diverse and exceptional students and families.

Counselors, counselor educators, and teacher educators need to work together and provide education and professional development opportunities to preservice and inservice teachers in order to obtain the necessary counseling skills which will allow them to become effective educators. Schools of education must offer at least one counseling course especially created for and tailored to the needs of classroom teachers. For this purpose, I suggest the CCT Model, which aims to increase teachers' knowledge of basic counseling skills applicable to the teaching profession. The CCT Model can help teachers acquire a teaching/counseling style tailored to their own personality and student population so they can be more effective in assisting students who face developmental, academic, emotional, physical, medical, mental, social, and familial issues which negatively affect their school performance (Erford, 2003; Johnson, Musial, Hall, Gollnick, & Dupuis, 2003).

The CCT Model highlights five major areas: (1) contemporary therapeutic systems for working with diverse student populations and their families; (2) basic counseling strategies and techniques; (3) multicultural counseling concepts, issues, and practices; (4) philosophical, ethical, and legal issues; and (5) counseling learning activities.

First, the CCT Model introduces the contemporary theories and approaches of counseling commonly used with students and parents: Adlerian, Person-Centered, Gestalt, Reality, Behavior, and Rational Emotive Behavioral (Corey, 2001; Holmgren, 1996).

Second, the CCT Model presents basic counseling strategies and techniques applicable in working with diverse students and families and can enhance teacher-student and teacher-parent communication. Some of these techniques are listening techniques (paraphrasing, clarifying, perception checking), questioning techniques (probing, open-ended questioning, the Socratic method), constructive feedback and leading techniques (direct leading, indirect leading, focusing), reflecting techniques (reflecting feelings, content, and experience), summarizing techniques, confrontation and interpretation techniques, informing and supporting techniques (giving information, advice, suggesting, reassuring), debriefing and crisis intervention techniques (building hope), and using appropriate and culturally sensitive body language, tone of voice, and speech rate (Borich, 2004; Cormier & Hackney, 1999; Evans, Hearn, Uhlemann, & Ivey, 1998; Hutchins & Vaught, 1997).

Third, the CCT Model discusses multicultural counseling concepts, issues, and practices aiming to enhance teachers' communication abilities by

increasing their awareness of their own limitations, biases, worldview, and values, and how their values influence their interactions with students and parents. Concepts such as acculturation, assimilation, cultural identity, cultural norms, cultural intuition, cultural anxiety, familism, and individualism (Johnson et al., 2003; Vontress, Johnson, & Epps, 1999), and issues such as appropriate use of interpreters, verbal behavior, and body language during parent-teacher conferences are analyzed. The implications of oppression, racism, discrimination, stereotyping, and historical hostility are discussed (Johnson et al., 2003; Vontress et al., 1999). The different traditions, health beliefs, values, and religious, cultural, and nutrition practices of diverse students and families are presented as well as ways of demonstrating respect, interest, and nonjudgmental attitude.

Fourth, the CCT Model discusses the major philosophies and underlying assumptions of the counseling theories identifying their similarities and differences with educational philosophies and theories; for example, existentialism is an underlying philosophy for both counseling and education approaches (Corey, 2001; Johnson et al., 2003). It also examines key concepts with respect to human development, culture, and social history as they relate to psychological and educational problems of students. It defines the terms—*counselor, counselor education, teacher, teacher preparation*—and describes the common ground of the teaching and counseling professions while it outlines the differences and similarities between the role of the teacher and the role of the counselor. It delineates, analyzes, and discusses student rights and ethical issues affecting counseling interventions in the classroom (Corey, 2001; Erford, 2003; Johnson et al., 2003). It assists teachers in formulating a philosophy and professional dispositions about their professional role in relation to communicating and interacting with diverse students and parents.

Fifth, the CCT Model creates opportunities for learning activities so that teachers practice multicultural counseling techniques and strategies in their interactions with students and parents. Teachers are exposed to a combination of activities consisting of demonstrations, presentations, peer review, role-playing and simulation, case studies, and small group exercises such as presentations of audio- and videotapes of themselves practicing counseling techniques in working with a student or parent (Evans et al., 1998; Holmgren, 1996; Hutchins & Vaught, 1997; Paisley & Hubbard, 1994). Teachers evaluate student issues for appropriate intervention and referral decisions through case studies. They demonstrate various types of group counseling interventions in a classroom setting and interpret student

and parent behavior and body language through role-play. Finally, they analyze attitudes and beliefs about diverse student populations within the context of one's role as a school professional.

With the understanding that teaching and learning are dynamically related and one cannot occur without the other, and that learning can not take place without addressing the emotional, mental, and physical needs of students, teachers can become powerful supporters of their students. With basic counseling training as suggested by the CCT Model, teachers can help their students maximize their academic potential. University programs must consider the teachers' need for basic counseling knowledge and skills and offer courses with this focus. School counselors must assist teachers in this direction through professional development opportunities at the school level. Working together, teachers and school counselors can better serve diverse students and families and create strong communities of successful learners.

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