

THE EFFECTS OF PREVENTIVE CONSULTATION WITH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS ON CHANGING TEACHER STAFF MEETING BEHAVIORS

REY ALEXANDER CARR
University of Victoria

Abstract

Consultee-centered consultation with elementary school principals about staff meetings was shown to have a significant impact on changing teacher behaviour at staff meetings towards more effective group inter-action. This study provides much needed experimental evidence of the value of consultation processes in the schools and outlines the techniques used by the consultant. Problems in shifting counselor role from direct to indirect or preventive services are discussed.

Résumé

Lors des réunions d'un corps professoral, comment pourrait-on améliorer le comportement des enseignants afin d'établir une interaction plus profitable parmi le groupe? La consultation auprès des directeurs d'écoles élémentaires s'avère un moyen pour répondre à cette question. Cette étude fournit des évidences expérimentales très valables pour souligner la valeur du processus de consultation dans les écoles et elle esquisse les techniques employées par le conseiller. Enfin, on discute les problèmes encourus par la mise sur pied de services préventifs et d'un rôle plus indirect pour le conseiller.

Dissatisfied with heavy case loads, long waiting lists and the lack of adequately trained colleagues, counselors in British Columbia are seeking innovations which can help them manage the ever increasing numbers of troubled children in educational settings. Counselors have become sensitive to the need for preventive services and in an attempt to shed their traditional roles and broaden their impact, have become concerned with methods that have demonstrated effectiveness in promoting health, reducing susceptibility to risks, and enhancing the learning climate for all persons in the school system.

While there has been an abundance of literature supporting the need to expand the counselor's role to insure the psychological health and positive growth of *all persons* in the educational system (Banikiotes, 1973; Blocher, Dustin & Dugan, 1971; Caplan, 1964; Cottingham, 1973; Dinkmeyer & Caldwell, 1970; Jeffarees & Peters, 1974; Mosher & Sprinthall, 1971) as well as extensive literature describing the consultation model as a method of implementing preventive counseling (Brown & Brown, 1974; Dinkmeyer, 1968; Faust, 1968; O'Dell, 1974; Randolph, 1972), there have

been virtually no reports of empirical studies which adopt consultation techniques in an experimental design. In addition, while some authors have demonstrated the value of indirect or consulting services with parents and/or teachers (Meyers, Friedman & Gaughan, 1975; Schmuck, 1968; Taylor & Hoedt, 1974) to bring about changes in children, there have been no studies reported which examine the outcomes of consultation methods when the consultee is the school principal. This is surprising considering the long-standing empirical and theoretical work examining the effect the principal has on the learning climate of the school (Gross & Herriott, 1965; Halpin & Croft, 1963; Thomas, 1971). Within a preventive framework the principal is a key person to consider for consultation because of his (her) continuous interaction with all persons in the educational community, including central office personnel, but most particularly because of his (her) relationships with and responsibilities for teacher effectiveness and student learning.

Perhaps counselors have been hesitant to develop a consultation relationship with a principal because of hierarchical concerns¹ or because they

need to see how consultation with administrators can serve a valuable purpose. How can consultation with a principal result in changes in teachers and students, enhancing their effectiveness? What are the specific methods and skills involved in consultation? What are some ways in which this process can be empirically validated?

The present study was designed specifically to measure the effects of consultee-centered consultation on changing school staff meeting behavior. Because consultation usually focuses on small numbers of persons, traditional experimental designs have not been applicable, therefore limiting concrete, directly observable, behavioural data collection. This study uses a multiple baseline design which enables the direct observation of the effects of consultation. That is, changes in observed group behaviors which occur when the treatment (consultation) is introduced are inferred to be a result of the treatment since the changes did not occur until after the treatment began. The purpose of this study is to describe a form of primary prevention (consultation techniques) and to determine the effects of consultation with a principal in changing staff behavior in staff meetings.

The purposes for staff meetings vary widely from school to school or from meeting to meeting but generally focus on specific topics or decisions. How the staff interacts with each other or how they manage feelings that develop as a result of their interaction influences the atmosphere or climate of the group, no matter what the initial or stated purpose of the meeting (Walz & Miller, 1969). Focusing on this climate can enable one to characterize groups as well-functioning, effective and creative or dysfunctional and harmful to the well-being of the members. Staff meetings that can be described as friendly or warm where the staff expresses caring and openness toward each other have been characterized by Halpin and Croft (1962) as open climates. Closed climates are characterized by judgmental evaluations, little commitment and unwillingness to be open.

The climate in staff meetings may carry over to affect student learning. Rice (1968) uncovered the interaction between student achievement and an open or closed school climate. Walz and Miller (1969) concluded that "the adjustment and success of an individual student may well be a function of the type of climate of the school he attends and the extent to which the school climate is supportive of his individual needs".

How staff members relate to each other and are related to by their principals, influences their

relations with their students. The school administration is the key variable affecting school climate. When principals can increase their sensitivity to group process they will be better able to recognize and deal with interpersonal relations among staff. How a staff member is involved in the decision-making process may have more influence on the well-being of that staff member than the actual content of the decision. This study attempts to enhance the climate of staff meetings through consulting with the principal, the formal staff leader.

Subjects

Five elementary school principals volunteered for this study, three from district A and two from district B. All principals were male. The principals were randomly selected from a larger number of principals who expressed an interest in learning more about administrative effectiveness in group settings. A principal volunteering meant that his staff would be involved, and so the staff of each school was informed that their formal staff meetings would be videotaped and that they would be asked to provide written reactions at the conclusion of each staff meeting. Neither the observers (videotape raters), teachers, nor principals were made aware of the design, procedures or predictions, but the overall notion of working with the principal to improve staff meetings was explicitly stated. Most importantly for this study the observers (videotape raters) were not aware of when the treatment conditions would be implemented (when consultation was taking place).

Data Collection Procedures

The principals and their staffs were observed in formal meetings by means of videotape recording. One observer trained in group process notation, viewed the recordings for each session and rated each participant on the presence or absence of twenty specific verbal and nonverbal behaviors every five minutes for one hour, yielding 12 observations. In addition another observer attended the staff meetings, ostensibly to operate the video equipment, but also to notate the group interaction behaviors. (The in-staff observer rated each participant every five minutes to coordinate with the videotape.) Ratings were made on a form specifically designed for this study, but modeled after the Interaction Matrix developed by Bales (1950). This study was concerned with increasing the frequency of interpersonal behaviors considered to be functional to group interaction. Dysfunctional or negative behaviors were not recorded as part of this study, but were present

to some degree. Behaviors were divided into the following two categories using the system developed by Johnson & Johnson (1975); task functions and maintenance functions. Each participant received a score on each function and these scores were multiplied by each other to yield a group effectiveness score. The higher the score the more cooperative, integrative, creative, productive, and trusting is the group member. A participant's score was determined by adding the frequency of observed behaviors and dividing by the number of observation periods (12) times the number of behavior categories (20). A group score was determined by adding the individual scores and dividing by the number of participants. Each participant was rated on the following behaviors:

1. Information and opinion giver: offers facts, opinions, ideas, suggestions and relevant information.
2. Information and opinion seeker: asks for facts, information, opinions, ideas and feelings from others.
3. Starter: proposes goals and tasks to initiate actions.
4. Direction giver: develops plans on how to proceed, focuses attention on task.
5. Summarizer: pulls together ideas, restates major points.
6. Coordinator: shows relationships among various ideas.
7. Discoverer: uncovers difficulties group has in working effectively.
8. Energizer: stimulates a higher quality of work.
9. Reality tester: examines practicality of ideas, evaluates solutions.
10. Evaluator: compares group decisions and accomplishments with group standards and goals.
11. Encourager: warmly solicits participation, gives recognition, demonstrates acceptance, responsive to other's ideas.
12. Harmonizer: requests constructive analysis of differences, finds common elements in conflicts, tries to reconcile disagreements.
13. Tension reliever: eases tension and increases enjoyment through joking and suggesting breaks.
14. Helper: practices good communication skills, insures that each group member understands what others are saying.
15. Climate evaluator: asks for and shares feelings about how the group is working.

16. Active listener: demonstrates interest in speaker through eye contact, gesture, and body position.

17. Trust builder: accepts and supports openness of other group members, reinforces risk-taking.

18. Problem-solver: promotes discussion of conflicts between group members to decrease conflict and increase cohesion.

19. Process observer: watches process by which group is working and uses observations to help effectiveness of group.

20. Builder: adds to other ideas.

Multiple baseline design techniques were used following the method developed by Hall, Cristler, Cranston and Tucker (1970). More specifically, baseline data for group meetings (group effectiveness scores) where the principal had not yet received the treatment (consultation) served as a control for the changes observed in staff groups where treatment was initiated, permitting direct observation of the effects of consultation.

Interrater reliability was determined by dividing the total number of agreements by the total number of observations times 100. Average reliability was 88.2% with a range over 16 reliability checks of 73% to 91%.

At the end of each staff meeting the teachers were asked to respond to a brief post meeting reaction form modeled after the one developed by Pfeiffer & Jones (1974). The teachers ranked a series of twenty statements describing the meeting. The statements were divided into two categories: ten descriptions of what the meeting was like and ten descriptions of what the reactor's behavior was like.

Treatment Conditions

Consultation was initiated with each principal after baseline data was obtained for that principal/staff meeting group. The consultant counselor met with the principal from one to 29 days prior to the next staff meeting. (It was the existing practice of each of the principals to hold one staff meeting per month). Treatment observations were begun at the meeting following the initial consultation and were discontinued upon termination of consultation. Treatment consisted of three one hour dyadic conferences between the consultant and the principals which were initiated between conclusion of baseline and beginning of treatment (during which time no formal staff meeting took place.) In addition, each

principal received between 2 to 5 one hour consultations following the onset of the treatment observations.²

Table 1

Arrangement of Baseline and Treatment Observations for Each Principal/Staff Group

GROUP	Observation Session						
	Baseline (BL) or Treatment (T)						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	BL	T	T	T	T	T	T
2	BL	BL	T	T	T	T	T
3	BL	BL	BL	T	T	T	T
4	BL	BL	BL	BL	T	T	T
5	BL	BL	BL	BL	BL	T	T

The Techniques of Consultation

Following the model of consultee centered consultation developed by Caplan (1970) and drawing on the techniques of Rogers (1951), Carkhuff (1969) and Gordon (1974), the goals of the consultant were to assist the principal to identify and clarify his own attitudes and feelings related to staff meetings both content and process-wise, to check out and increase the accuracy of his perceptions of other's attitudes and feelings related to staff meetings, to enhance the principal's knowledge of group interaction, and to provide support for learning and applying group skills. For example, one principal believed that the main reason for staff meetings was so that the staff could get to know each other better, but he discovered that no one on the staff shared this perception. Another principal expressed the view that he was completely responsible for all decisions and that he often made decisions because staff members seemed unwilling to take the responsibility. He felt frustrated and at times defeated and often went home physically tense after a meeting. Upon checking with the staff, the principal found that he was discouraging responsibility through judging staff comments, and his cutting short discussion was seen as domination and not frustration by the staff.

The techniques used to accomplish the goals of consultation centered around:

1. Door opening, mirroring, reinforcing — directed at *increasing* the frequency of principal's statements regarding feelings, attitudes and ideas about meetings.

(I'd like to know more about . . ." or "You mentioned you weren't sure about . . ." or "Yes, uh, hu [head nod] . . ." or "It would help me if you could tell me what you mean by . . .")

2. Paraphrasing, summarizing, highlighting — directed at *demonstrating* understanding of principal's statements and focusing for some action: ("Let me see if I can put some of this together . . ." or "Let's go over what we've talked about so far . . .")

Consultant: You've mentioned several things and I'm not sure what you're trying to tell me. You think teachers should have a greater role in running the meeting, but you're concerned that if you ask them to, they will see it as another demand on their time. You want them to feel like they're part of the school and that their ideas count, but meetings seem to get bogged down by irrelevant comments.

3. Active listening — directed at demonstrating nonverbally and verbally *the feeling and expression of empathy* through recognizing and expressing the principal's feelings and perspective.

Principal: I've been wondering if it's me. The last few years we've had a lot of new teachers from the University. They seem scared of me, they're polite, but that's about it. I've tried to get them to speak up at the meetings, but it doesn't seem to do any good. There's no feeling of family here any more. (Principal sighs deeply, looks out the window.)

Consultant: You feel both discouraged because you can't seem to make contact with them, and isolated, because they're new people with different ideas. (It really seems hopeless.)

4. Advanced listening — directed at demonstrating empathy, but from a *deeper perspective*, develops implications, enables connections to be made between a series of implied feelings, themes or behaviors.

Principal: I've been reading a lot about group process for a class I've been taking and I've come across some really good ideas. I've tried to put them into practice here, but the more I read the less able I am to apply the ideas.

Consultant: You're excited about the ideas, but it seems disheartening to read so much and have so little success. I wonder if you're questioning whether you have the skill.

5. Self-disclosing — directed at *modeling* to the principal a way of expressing feelings or attitudes in a non-judgmental and noncritical way by having the consultant describe a similar experience. (Sometimes has the undesirable effect of changing the focus from the consultee to the consultant.)

Consultant: I think I know what you mean. I'll tell you my reaction and see if it's similar to yours. When I'm faced with decisions I don't think are fair, my expression is usually anger or resentment and sometimes I say things I regret later but if I go deeper, I usually find I feel hurt and terribly disappointed. I think I cover up those feelings most of the time, and instead make judgments about the people who made the decision. Is that what happens to you?

6. Transparent confronting — directed at *disclosing* the consultant's reactions to the principal's attitudes, feelings, and ideas about staff meetings. Steps 1-5 are oriented toward providing support; this method is directed at pointing out games, discrepancies, evasions and conflicts.

("Could it be . . ." or "From what you've said . . ." or "I'm wondering if . . ." or "I'm concerned that maybe . . ." or "Let me check something out with you . . .")

Principal: Lost track of the time. Sorry to be late. Could we skip next week's session, I've got a lot of budget work to get ready and could use the extra time to . . .

Consultant: (Interrupting) I'm confused. When we started you expressed your willingness to meet regularly. I'm worried about making up the time, but I'm also concerned about your feelings. I guess I'm thinking that you don't value the sessions. I feel uncomfortable when I interrupt you, but I was wondering if this was what you really wanted to talk to me about.

7. Interpreting — directed at assisting the principal to *understand* and reflect on the interpersonal dynamics involved in relationships.

Consultant: I'm really wondering how you feel about these sessions. I noticed you look away and tap your pencil when you said, "just fine". Could it be you're feeling something stronger, but you're not sure how I'll react?

8. Nonverbal imagining — directed at assisting the principal to be aware of his *total message*, to pay attention to how attitudes or feelings are being expressed nonverbally through behavior.

("I see . . ." or "I've noticed . . ." or "I imagine . . .")

Consultant: I noticed that when we first started talking about last week's staff meeting you glanced out the window several times and had your arms folded across your chest; I imagined you were uncomfortable, or that you had something on your mind.

9. Inventorying — questions or probes directed at problem-solving and assisting the principal to be concrete in thought, feeling and actions; asked in an *open-ended*, nonjudgmental fashion ("What were your feelings like?" "How did the group come to this decision?" "In what way did it influence you?" "What kinds of things might you try out to help you?").

Consultant: (Inventorying thoughts) Do you remember what was going on in your head while you saw this happening?

Principal: I was thinking that this was like pulling teeth and that some of the teachers must have resented me for bringing it up again. I guess I was also thinking how lonely it was making these decisions by myself. But that they might think I was foolish asking for help.

10. Reversing — directed at enhancing trust and autonomy when the consultant is asked a question or asked for advice. The consultant models the need for a *frame of reference* while sharing reactions to the principal's probe.

Principal: Well, you've had school experience, what would you do in this situation?

Consultant: When you ask me what I would do, I feel frozen, and a little threatened. Maybe I'm overly sensitive to questions, but it would help me if you could let me know how my reaction would help you.

Table 2
Observed Group Interaction Mean Scores
During Baseline and Consultation Periods

Group N		Observation Periods							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
A	16	Condition	B	C	C	C	C	C	C
		Mean	5.47	11.74	12.25	12.50	11.92	11.79	11.71
		Standard							
		Dev.	1.71	1.39	3.13	3.11	1.55	1.61	1.61
B	14	Condition	B	B	C	C	C	C	C
		Mean	8.85	9.90	14.60	14.51	14.00	14.25	13.19
		Standard							
		Dev.	2.66	2.69	1.71	1.95	1.91	3.71	2.51
C	10	Condition	B	B	B	C	C	C	C
		Mean	3.11	6.21	4.11	11.46	11.81	11.91	12.40
		Standard							
		Dev.	1.93	3.01	2.86	2.35	2.11	2.61	1.75
D	8	Condition	B	B	B	B	C	C	C
		Mean	8.20	8.91	8.17	6.14	14.71	14.88	13.61
		Standard							
		Dev.	1.91	2.01	2.33	2.10	2.20	2.70	2.77
E	6	Condition	B	B	B	B	B	C	C
		Mean	11.00	10.85	10.02	10.66	9.15	16.31	13.26
		Standard							
		Dev.	3.71	3.11	3.70	2.83	3.08	2.83	1.74

B—Baseline C—Consult

Results

In each school in this study, staff meetings were improved as a result of consultation sessions with the school principal. Table 2 depicts the results of the consultation sessions. Group interaction behaviors which are facilitative of effective group functioning increased in every meeting following the initial three-session consultation period, demonstrating that consultation with the principals brought about changes in teacher/principal behavior.

Only positive or facilitative reactions or expressions were used to develop the group scores, leaving out any calculations of behaviors which were disruptive to group development. However, observers noted that during baseline and treatment

conditions, the participants expressed behaviors which were oriented towards blocking, dominating, avoiding, negatively judging and criticizing — behaviors which detract from task and maintenance functions. The principals' responses to these behaviors were a key factor in reducing their frequency and increasing the frequency of facilitating behaviors. For example, during baseline conditions when a participant said, "This is really a waste of time . . ." the principal (or other group members) reacted with stoney silence, or changed the subject; whereas during treatment conditions, the principal replied, "You sound angry, but this is really important to me." To which the teacher replied, "I guess I'm just frustrated; we've been over this so many times".

While this type of interaction did not occur in every case, the important aspect is that because the principal learned a new form of interaction, negative or destructive (to the group task and process) behaviors could be dealt with more adequately, allowing the participant to shift to a deeper level of involvement and expression, becoming more concrete and personalized. The teachers became aware of the changes they were experiencing as evidenced by the post meeting reaction forms. Their rankings of descriptions of the meeting ("There was much warmth and friendliness vs. there was much aggressive behavior" etc.) changed so that correlations between baseline rankings and consultation rankings ranged from .02 to .21, indicating a very weak relationship, whereas their rankings within baseline sessions and within consulting sessions ranged from .33 to .81. The correlations are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Comparisons of Staff Post Meeting
Reaction Correlations Within Baseline
And Consultation and Between Baseline and
Consultation

GROUP	Rank Order Correlations		
	Within	Between	
	Baseline Mean	Consultation Mean	Baseline/ Consultation
A .....	.61	.74	.02
B .....	.79	.81	.11
C .....	.42	.33	.21
D .....	.37	.46	.14
E .....	.70	.71	.20

Approximately 26% of the staff members made explicit statements on their reaction forms that indicated an awareness that their principal had reacted or responded differently than they had expected. In addition, they indicated that they appreciated those changes and made a point of letting the principal involved know their feelings. These expressions of appreciation, as well as other comments that staff members made to the principals, were on occasion repeated or described by the principals during the consultation sessions. The comments appeared to be highly rewarding to

the principals and seemed to encourage them to continue to maintain their new behaviors. The implication of this cycle is that it enables the consultant to decrease consultation as the principal/teacher interaction system has become self-generating, that is, capable of producing and maintaining its own changes.

Discussion

Demonstrating the value of indirect or consultation techniques is still difficult and time consuming, and the consultant is at present without feedback as to whether these group meeting changes have had an impact on classroom interaction patterns, and have lowered the incidence and prevalence of student problems. Dinkmeyer (1970) describes consulting as one of the most important functions of a school counselor and Watson (1969) describes the value of working with principals at the elementary level, but the need to provide continuous empirical data on the effects of consultation is greater than ever. The findings of this study, that consulting with principals can change teacher behaviors, supports the idea that counselors need to expand their roles and direct their activities to include teachers and administrators as well as students.

Implicit in this new role is the idea that the counselor needs to view consultation as a way of working with all members of the educational process, not just the deviate. The counselor needs to develop ways of assessing effectiveness and evaluating the effects of current roles on the members of the school system. Remedial programs or working with disturbed children will always be an important function of counseling, but the counselor needs to look ahead towards the future to plan developmental and preventive strategies. Several factors will influence this shift in perspective. One factor will be administrative perceptions of the counselors role and the expectations of staff and students as to how a counselor "should" work. These perceptions and expectations will be joined into a certain amount of resistance that generates uneasy feelings in the counselor. This resistance will continue indefinitely unless the counselor can clearly explain and describe the consultation program. In addition, the counselor must be effective in his contacts with the staff. This means that the counselor must be an expert in human relations and skilled in the practices of helping relationships. Traditional counselor training often emphasizes direct services to children with problems, and thus may actually serve as a barrier to preventive activities, by limiting the manpower trained in its

theory and practice, the basics of *all* human relationships.

A second factor influencing the counselor's ability to change perspective is a willingness for self-examination. Present patterns of counseling may be highly rewarding to the counselor but when examined in a broader perspective, may not be very effective for a diversified educational program. Indirect services are noted for their lack of visible rewards. Long hours of planning and developing activities, and the creation of new programs for persons the counselor may never work with directly, can influence the counselor's reward system. Challenges from unaccepting superiors may be especially difficult to cope with, and for counselors who still maintain some teaching functions, changes in perspective will be overwhelming.

A third factor which will enable counselors to focus on preventive and developmental strategies will be the degree to which outside consultants or university counselor educator programs are available to assist them. I have organized a series of workshops to provide counselors with the perspectives necessary for implementing preventive strategies and in addition I serve as part of a team of counselor educators who have developed a training program which provides not only direct counseling skills, but also skills and practical experiences in preventive programs and their implementation.

Demonstrating the effectiveness of preventive programs is at present hampered by traditional research methodologies, particularly by statistical techniques using limited numbers of variables. As Broskowski and Baker (1974) have pointed out, these limited methodologies "are inadequate to cope with the complexities . . ." of preventive program services. Counselors, therefore, need to be able to apply sophisticated research methodologies that can handle the multiple goals of education. General systems theory (Bertalanffy, 1968; Churchman, 1971; Miller, 1971) or operations research (Ackoff and Rivett, 1963) may be more suited to determining program effectiveness than the methodologies currently espoused in training programs.

It has been the purpose of this study to demonstrate the value of preventive consultation in order to assist counselors to have an empirical basis on which to change perspectives. Barriers to implementing preventive approaches must be overcome in a style that demonstrates preventive principles of health promotion. As Cowen and Zax (1967) have pointed out:

It is one thing, then, to hail prevention as a noble cause; it is quite a different matter to implement this cause in the face of obstacles, both within the community and within professional groups, which impede our efforts. (p. 77)

Conclusion

Improving the educational climate of the school has been shown to increase student learning, but there have been few studies which outline the methods or techniques that can help counselors implement new roles. In this study, working with principals to change staff behavior during meetings, was demonstrated to be an effective form of intervention for a school counselor. While there is a need to conduct additional research to examine the effects on children's emotional strength, decision abilities and learning skills through consulting with administrators, a larger problem seems to be helping school counselors broaden their impact on the educational program and school community. Given the small number of adequately trained counselors and the need to develop a systematic helping network, indirect services or consultation methods will assist counseling personnel to decrease waiting lists and caseloads and to release the blocks that prevent counselors from being able to work with all children in the school system. Preventive consultation can be seen as a form of insurance which lessens the demand for costly direct services. In a time when education costs are rising rapidly, counselors must consider more effective methods of providing services, — services which strengthen resistance to learning problems and reduce susceptibility to potentially harmful situations.

Reference Notes

1. Most counselors in British Columbia have been or are presently teachers. The dual role of counselor and teacher presents conflicts as to how to relate to the administration (and other teachers). Being both line and staff, confuses the responsibilities and relationships between principals and teacher/counselors. A paper outlining the problems of teaching experience for counselors is under preparation by the author.
2. While the principals were unaware of the specific purpose of the study and were asked to maintain their regular meeting schedule, two principals initiated some form of agenda planning committee as a way of involving

teachers more actively in the meetings. One principal included a parent and a student on the committee. These actions took place after consultation began.

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