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PREVIEW

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**Robbins, Julene R., Ph.D.**

**The University of Nebraska - Lincoln, 1990**

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PREVIEW

CONSULTEE AND CLIENT BEHAVIOR CHANGE FOLLOWING CONSULTATION

by

Julene R. Robbins

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Interdepartmental Area of Psychological  
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Under the Supervision of Professor Terry B. Gutkin

Lincoln, Nebraska

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DISSERTATION TITLE

Consultee and Client Behavior Change Following Consultation

BY

Julene R. Robbins

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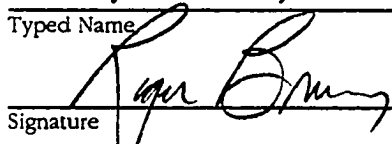


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## CONSULTEE AND CLIENT BEHAVIOR CHANGE FOLLOWING CONSULTATION

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University of Nebraska, 1990

Advisor: Terry B. Gutkin

The current study was designed to address the major criticisms of past consultation research. A multiple baseline design across subjects was utilized to enable the examination of the remedial and preventive effects of consultation interactions between a school psychologist and first grade teachers. The behavior of three target students was observed and recorded as well as teachers' behavior toward students exhibiting presenting problems and other students in the classroom. Additionally, the development of consultee brainstorming skills was examined at several junctures during the study using a pencil-and-paper task.

The findings of this investigation indicate that the behaviors of the students and teachers did not change appreciably. Qualitative data gathered during the course of the study provided valuable insights as to possible factors affecting consultative outcomes. Future consultation research should address the problems associated with certain small-N research designs, broaden the range of qualitative data collection, and continue to examine the effects of organizational characteristics, school climate, contingencies, and setting events upon school-based consultation.

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Finally, it is to my mother, Rose, and to the memory of my father, Murrell, that I dedicate these efforts. Their perspectives on the value of education and perseverance have served me well throughout my life.

J.R.R.



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PREVIEW

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Consultation in the schools has received increasing attention in the last decade. A review of consultation literature conducted by Mannino and Shore (1975) and Medway (1979), as well as a meta-analysis of consultation studies completed by Medway and Updyke (1985), indicate that research findings support the consultation services provided by school psychologists. These findings indicate that consultation does appear to be effective in modifying the behavior and attitudes of consultees and their clients.

Consultation has been described as having two goals: the remediation and the prevention of client problems (Caplan, 1970; Reynolds, Gutkin, Elliott, & Witt, 1984). The overall effectiveness of consultation as a model of indirect intervention with teachers in a school setting needs to be evaluated by determining whether the presenting problem was remediated and whether the teacher will be able to prevent similar problems in other students by generalizing the skills that were developed during the consultation interaction with the consultant. These skills refer to content skills such as intervention planning as well as process skills such as problem solving (Reynolds, Gutkin, Elliott, & Witt, 1984).

The consultation research that has been reviewed by Mannino and Shore (1975), Medway (1979), and Alpert and Yammer (1983) has primarily examined the efficacy of consultation with regard to

remediation of student problems. Few studies have examined the preventive aspects of this model. Given the number of problems in schools related to academic achievement, behavior, and social/emotional issues, preventive interventions have become a necessity (Cowen, 1984).

Additionally, many of the consultation studies have been characterized by important research design deficiencies. Major criticisms include the lack of specificity in describing actual consultation techniques and the use of self-report data rather than the observation and compilation of actual behavioral data from consultants, consultees, and clients. Meyers, Pitt, Gaughan, and Freidman (1978) and, more recently, Gresham and Kendall (1987) argued that the use of single case experimental designs are a necessary next step for consultation research in order to examine consultation's effects on individual behavior. Other advantages of the single case designs include the specification of treatment conditions to aid in research replication, control conditions, and design flexibility.

The current study is designed to address the major criticisms of past consultation research. A multiple baseline design was chosen in order to enable the author to examine the remedial and preventive effects of consultation interactions between a school psychologist and first grade teachers. The behavior of the clients (first grade students) was observed and recorded as well as consultees' (teachers') behaviors directed toward students exhibiting presenting problems and other students in the classroom. Finally, the development of

consultee brainstorming skills was examined at several junctures during the study using a pencil-and-paper task.

PREVIEW

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Consultation has been recognized as a significant component in the practice of school psychology. Professional school psychologists have indicated that consultation is one of the most preferred job functions (Fisher, Jenkins, & Crumbley, 1986; Gutkin & Curtis, 1990; Yoshida, Maher, & Hawryluk, 1984). A growing need to address low academic achievement, discipline problems, and social/emotional problems in the student population has precipitated the shift from traditional assessment-based psychology practice to a more consultative role for psychologists in schools (Ysseldyke, Reynolds, Wienberg, Bardon, Heaston, Hines, Ramage, Rosenfield, Schakel, & Taylor, 1984). Additionally, the value of consultation has been reinforced by teachers and administrators who view it as one of the most important services provided by school psychologists (Curtis & Zins, 1981; Gutkin & Curtis, 1990).

No single definition of consultation has been universally accepted among school psychologists; however, Medway's (1979) definition of the term was used in the present study. He stated that consultation is a process of "collaborative problem-solving between a mental health specialist (the consultant) and one or more persons (the consultee) who are responsible for providing some form of psychological assistance to another (the client)" (p. 276). In schools, consultation typically involves the school psychologist as consultant,



a teacher or administrator as consultee, and a student as the client ultimately receiving assistance through the problem-solving process.

### Core Characteristics of School-Based Consultation

Gutkin and Curtis (1982, 1990) have outlined core characteristics which distinguish consultation from other service delivery models. In comparison to individual psychotherapy, consultation is unique in that it is an indirect method of serving client populations. In individual psychotherapy, the psychologist works directly with the client (student) in order to effect change in behavior or attitude. In consultation, the psychologist (consultant) interacts primarily with other professionals (consultees) who then work directly with clients. This indirect service enables the consultant to provide aid to greater numbers of clients than would be possible given the time constraints of individual therapy.

A second core characteristic of consultation is the nature of the relationship between the consultant and the consultee. The focus of the consultation relationship is on work-related concerns. In contrast to individual psychotherapy in which the personal concerns of the client are directly addressed by the psychologist, the consultant and consultee only focus on personal concerns as they are related to work-related issues.

Also characteristic of consultation is the collaborative nature of the interactions between the consultant and the consultee. Gutkin and Curtis (1982, 1990) have pointed out that the consultant

and consultee have coordinate status with each bringing significant individual expertise and professional perspective to the problem-solving process. It is important in consultation that the consultant and consultee are viewed as coequal professionals. The consultee will then become actively involved in problem solving and will develop a feeling of ownership of the intervention plan developed with the consultant (Curtis & Meyers, 1985).

Additionally, the collaborative relationship between the consultant and consultee is initiated voluntarily by the consultee. The consultee is not coerced into accepting the suggestions of the consultant, but active in the development of the intervention ideas. At any time during the problem-solving process, the consultee maintains the right to reject the ideas of the consultant. It is also important for the consultee to understand that the consultation relationship is confidential. In order for open communication and an atmosphere of trust to be established, the consultant and consultee should agree on which aspects of their communication will remain confidential.

#### The Problem-Solving Process

D'Zurilla and Goldfried (1971) have described problem solving as a process rather than simply emitting an effective response in a problematic situation. They suggested that the problem-solving task is "one of learning to combine previously acquired responses in a novel way so as to produce a new response . . . to form a new association between this response pattern and the particular problematic situation

in question" (p. 109).

Five general stages of problem solving have been described by various investigators with a high level of consensus (D'Zurilla & Goldfried, 1971; Osborn, 1963; Parnes, 1967). The stages include (a) general orientation (i.e., "set" or attitudinal factors), (b) problem definition and formulation, (c) generation of alternatives, (d) decision making (i.e., evaluation and selection) and (e) verification.

Gutkin and Curtis (1982, 1990) have developed the following seven-stage process specifically for use by school-based consultants. This particular version of the problem-solving sequence will be utilized in this study. Variations of this sequence have been presented by other authors (Bergan, 1977; Brown & Kelly, 1976; Schmuck, Runkel, Arends, & Arends, 1977).

Define and clarify the problem. Gutkin and Curtis (1982, 1990) suggested that in this initial stage it is important to define the problem in concrete, behavioral terms. Unfortunately, it has been found that teachers tend to report student problems in vague terms rather than clearly focusing on operational definitions (Lambert, 1976). Bergan and Tombari (1975) found that using behavioral terms rather than medical model definitions increased consultee expectation for problem solution. Witt and Elliott (1983) supported the notion that the initial problem identification interview is probably the most difficult, yet the most important aspect of successful consultation. An investigation by Bergan and Tomabari (1975) examining predictor

variables associated with consultation found that consultants who were most successful in identifying problems were also usually successful in solving presenting problems.

Additional activities which should occur during this problem-solving stage include gathering pertinent information and specifying goals for the consultation interaction. Identifying subissues or hidden agendas which become apparent during consultation is also important to insure the success of the interaction (Reynolds, Gutkin, Elliott, & Witt, 1984).

Analyze the forces impinging on the program. Bandura's (1978) notion of reciprocal determinism is helpful in conceptualizing problems in this stage of the problem-solving process. Client behavior, personal characteristics of the client, and the environment within which the client functions all affect problem solution. Identifying the factors which may affect problem solution and examining the ecological context within which the problem must be solved is believed to be necessary in order for the problem-solving process to be effective (Gutkin & Curtis, 1982, 1990; Lewin, 1951). Data gathering for accurate diagnosis of the problem is essential and may include interviews and observations in order to assess the problem from an ecological perspective. Reynolds et al. (1984) pointed out that the use of norm- and criterion-referenced tests, behavioral assessment, sociometrics, work samples, and medical histories may all be important measures of the ecology of the problem. These authors also suggested that individuals and systems always possess certain strengths which are

resources that can be utilized to solve presenting problems.

Brainstorm interventions. Generating possible solutions which are appropriate to the problem situation is the task at this stage. Osborn's (1963) research on "brainstorming" was originally used as a procedure for facilitating "idea-finding" in groups. Four basic rules were developed from this research. First, criticism is ruled out. Adverse judgment of ideas must be withheld until later. Second, "free-wheeling" is welcomed. Third, quantity is desirable, and, finally, combination and improvement are sought. Parnes (1967) suggested that "limited criteria thinking," in which individuals allow their imaginations to "run loose" but limit their responses to those that are relevant to the problem situation, is actually more productive than free association in brainstorming alternative solutions.

Research on the deferralment of judgment principle suggested that when compared with critical instructions, noncritical or low critical instructions result in significantly more responses in general and more "good" responses in particular (Bayless, 1967). Parnes (1967) noted that there was a significant correlation between total quantity of ideas and number of "good" ideas, which reinforces Osborn's "free-wheeling" notion. Osborn (1963) described the use of a technique called "forced relationships" which involved combining responses in order to increase their quality. Finally, Goldfried and D'Zurilla (1969) observed that subjects tended to phrase their responses in general rather than specific terms, prompting Maier (1960) to suggest that subjects be requested to state their solutions in terms

of specific rather than general actions.

Evaluate and choose among alternatives. During this stage, individuals must consider each possible problem solution and make a determination of suitability for the presenting problem. Johnson, Parrett, and Stratton (1968) have found that individuals are not always capable of identifying accurately the best of the alternatives they have generated. Gutkin and Curtis (1982, 1990) suggested that the consultant then has the opportunity to share evaluative skills in helping the individuals determine which solution they would find most successful given the context of the problem.

Specify consultee and consultant responsibility. Gutkin and Curtis (1982, 1990) pointed out that this stage is crucial for success. Pinpointing who is specifically responsible for each proposed action will insure that details will be covered and the likelihood of success will be increased.

Implement the chosen strategy. Gutkin and Curtis (1982, 1990) stated it should never be assumed that because an intervention or solution has been agreed upon, it will be carried out as planned. They pointed out that if the problem-solving process had proceeded optimally, the likelihood of failure at this point should be minimized. However, systems and individuals introduce factors into the situation which cannot be envisioned. Furthermore, consultees may find they lack skill, or find the solution to be more time consuming than originally planned. For these reasons, systematic follow-up is

necessary in order to address these problems before the solution is no longer felt to be viable.

Evaluate the effectiveness of the action and recycle if necessary. Meyers, Parson, and Martin (1979) have suggested that at this stage the consultant's role is to evaluate with the consultee the effectiveness of the problem solutions. If the outcomes were less than expected, the consultant-consultee team reconvenes and returns to an earlier stage in the problem-solving process to formulate alternate problem solutions.

#### Goals of School-Based Consultation

Consultation has been described as having two goals: remediation and prevention of client problems (Caplan, 1970; Reynolds, Gutkin, Elliott, & Witt, 1984). Remediation refers to the ultimate solution of the referral problem presented by the consultee. Attempting interventions in the regular classroom in order to aid students exhibiting learning or behavior problems has long been viewed as important (Wang, 1987). For non-consultative traditional services, the role of the teacher is largely terminated following his or her referral of the presenting problem to the school psychologist. The school psychologist then performs the appropriate direct service (i.e., assessment, therapy, behavioral intervention planning) with minimal input or assistance from the teacher. Gutkin and Curtis (1981) suggested that without active participation of the teacher, who ultimately determines

what events will happen in the classroom, the remediation of the presenting problem is not likely to occur.

Consultation is an effective method of introducing interventions into regular classrooms prior to the traditional referral process, which is typically both costly and time consuming. Fairchild (1976) pointed out that the lag time between the referral and the implementation of problem interventions is shorter with indirect service than with the traditional referral assessment process.

The second major goal of consultation is the prevention of client problems. Problems of school adjustment and educational failure are prevalent to an alarming degree in America. As many as 13% of all 17-year-olds are functionally illiterate, and the average level of achievement on most standardized high school examinations is lower than it was when Sputnik was launched in 1957 (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Additionally, the personpower shortage in psychology is critical. Albee (1968), Knitzer (1984), Meyers, Parson, and Martin (1979), and Saxe, Cross, and Silverman (1988) all pointed out that a limited number of trained mental health professionals serving an ever-growing student population in need of such services reinforces the need for the use of indirect service methods of intervention to achieve preventive outcomes.

The goal of prevention of student problems can be met through the consultant's ability to share content as well as process skills (Reynolds, Gutkin, Elliott, and Witt, 1984). Content refers to the informational aspects shared during the consultation interaction, such