

INFORMATION PAPER 2

CONSULTATION

As part of the Renewed Service Delivery System, consultation should provide the means by which systematic problem-solving will be conducted. The purpose of this paper is to describe a general model for such consultation along with important characteristics and procedures. The current literature is replete with specific models of consultation. (See Idol, Paolucci-Whitcomb & Nevin, 1987; Kratochwill & Bergan, 1986; and Zins, Curtis, Graden & Ponti, 1988, for three notable examples). In this paper, "consultation" is intended to be a generic term which does not advocate the use of any specific model to the exclusion of others. Instead, it is intended to delineate a number of important characteristics and procedures that are believed to be essential to any model. In addition, "consultation" is described as a function that can be served by a number of educators with different job titles, not just by those whose job title is that of "consultant."

DEFINITION

Consultation is the process by which two or more persons work together as a team to solve a student's school performance problem. A consulting professional will be defined as the person who provides problem-solving support to another person, the consultee, who has primary responsibility for the student and who has requested the assistance. The student or other beneficiary of the consultative relationship is described as the client. Most commonly, the consultee will be responsible for providing direct services to the client, while the consulting professional should provide indirect service by engaging in the consultative process with the consultee. However, this does not preclude the possibility of the consulting professional providing direct service, such as individual counseling, to the client as well.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CONSULTATION

The general model proposed here emphasizes three specific facets of consultation:

1) Collaborative consultation. Consultation should be a voluntary process, initiated by the consultee. Each team member should be an active participant in the consultative process, with each member contributing a unique set of knowledge and expertise. Relationships among team members should be non-hierarchical and collegial. Intervention planning and its outcome for a particular client should be the shared responsibility of all team members, although the consultee should retain the right to make a final decision about the specific nature of an intervention.

2) Behavioral consultation. Consultation should be a process of data-based decision-making. A student's learning or adjustment problems should be defined behaviorally. Hypotheses about factors related to the problem should be generated and tested. Antecedent, situation or consequent conditions should be identified. Interventions should focus on altering environmental factors in such a way as to develop new behaviors or modify the frequency with which existing behaviors occur.

3) Problem-solving consultation. Consultation should involve the application of a systematic problem-solving procedure with the following steps:

- 1) development of a behavioral definition of the problem,
- 2) generation of hypotheses, predictions and assessment questions related to the identified problem,
- 3) functional and multi-dimensional assessment designed to test the hypotheses and respond to the assessment questions,
- 4) preparation of a goal statement,

- 5) development and implementation of an intervention,
- 6) progress monitoring to determine the effectiveness of the intervention,
- 7) decision-making about the outcome of the intervention.

INTENDED OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION

The first outcome of successful consultation should be an improvement in student performance with regard to the behavior(s) of concern. A second outcome should be the enhancement of problem-solving skills on the part of the consultee. This outcome is preventive in nature, in that it is hoped that the consultee will apply these problem-solving skills to any similar situations which occur in the future.

STEPS IN THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

A systematic sequence of problem-solving steps has been identified in this paper. Corresponding to this problem-solving sequence is a specific set of tasks to be carried out as part of the consultation process. These tasks are described below:

Problem Identification: This task is the most critical phase of the consultation process. During the Problem Identification phase, a behavioral definition of the problem is developed, hypotheses and assessment questions are generated, and a functional assessment of the behavior and related factors is conducted. The role of the consulting professional in this phase should be to assist the consultee with all aspects of problem identification. The problem behavior should be defined in objective, observable terms. The consultee's expectations with regard to the problem behavior should be clarified. A tentative statement about the severity of the problem and the related environmental events/conditions should be developed.

This phase of consultation also involves the development of hypotheses and assessment questions. The hypotheses should describe possible reasons why the problem behavior is occurring. Relevant existing information about the hypotheses should be reviewed. When information is not available to either confirm or reject the hypotheses, assessment questions should be written. These assessment questions should allow the collection of meaningful information that is necessary in order to plan an effective intervention. Specific data collection procedures should be selected and the team members responsible for data collection should be identified.

Problem Analysis: In this phase, the consulting professional should provide assistance in analyzing the data collected during the Problem Identification phase. Efforts are focused upon intervention planning and goal-setting. The measured behavior itself should be analyzed in order to determine if it is severe enough to warrant an intervention. The environmental events/conditions surrounding the behavior should also be analyzed to determine if a functional relationship exists between these conditions and the problem behavior. In this manner, the hypotheses generated as part of problem identification can be either confirmed or rejected. Confirmed hypotheses can be used to suggest possible interventions.

Team members should brainstorm a variety of possible interventions and, from these interventions, the one judged most likely to be successful should be selected. The intervention plan should be specifically delineated along with roles and responsibilities for each participant. A goal should be written describing the desired change in student performance, and a plan should be established for on-going progress monitoring during implementation. The consulting professional should participate in all stages of this process, and should also assist by ensuring that the established goals are reasonable and that the necessary supports are available to ensure adequate implementation of the intervention plan.

Plan Implementation: During this phase, the role of the consulting professional should be to provide support to the consultee who is directly responsible for implementing the intervention. The consulting professional should make arrangements to meet with the consultee periodically throughout the implementation period and/or, with the permission of the consultee, should also observe the

intervention plan in operation. The four primary responsibilities of the consulting professional in this phase should be: 1) to ensure that the intervention plan is being implemented as designed, 2) to serve as a resource to the consultee if any implementation problems are encountered, 3) to ensure that data collection continues so that there will be a way of measuring the effectiveness of the intervention, and 4) to assist the consultee in analyzing the data from progress monitoring efforts. Progress monitoring data should be examined in order to determine if the intervention is effective in improving the student's performance. If the data indicates that the intervention is not sufficiently effective, team members should work together to make a change in the original plan in order to increase the intervention's effectiveness.

Plan Evaluation: If the student has not met his/her goal at the end of the intervention period, the consulting professional should provide assistance with additional problem-solving and the possible formulation of a new plan. If the student has met his/her goal, a plan may be devised to ensure the maintenance and generalization of the improvement. Consideration may also be given to identifying a new problem behavior and recycling through the problem-solving/consultation sequence. When appropriate, the problem-solving team may also give consideration to making a change in service/program placement for the student.

SUMMARY

Under the Renewed Service Delivery System, consultation should provide the means by which systematic problem-solving will be conducted. Consultation is defined as the process by which two or more persons work together as a team to solve a student's school performance problem. Three specific traits characterize the general model of consultation presented in this paper: collaboration, a behavioral orientation and problem-solving. The intended outcomes of consultation include benefits for the client as well as for the consultee.

REFERENCES

- Idol, L., Paolucci-Whitcomb, P., & Nevin, A. (1987). Collaborative consultation. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed, Inc.
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- Zins, J., Curtis, M., Graden, J., & Ponti, C. (1988). Helping students succeed in the regular classroom: A guide for developing intervention assistance programs. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.