

IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING COUNSELLING SKILLS TO TEACHERS

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The intent of this paper is not to equip teachers with the background or the skills to act as the school counsellor or psychologist but, to make everyone aware that in India only a limited number of schools have counsellors. The knowledge of counselling skills is essential for teachers to promote student learning and well-being. Teachers can play a key role in resolving student issues and concerns. The classroom teacher spends more time with students than any other professional in the school and is thus most likely to influence students. They are the ones, after all, who interact with children on a daily basis. If a child is going to approach an adult for assistance or advice, it will probably be the teacher whom he/she has come to trust over many hours of work and play together. The major skills of Counselling that can be included are competence, acceptance and flexibility, integrity, sensitivity, listening, empathy, confidentiality and understanding.

KEYWORDS: Counselling skills, Teacher's Role in Counselling, Career Guidance, Competence, Acceptance and Flexibility, Confidentiality and Understanding.

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this paper is to bring into limelight the importance of imparting counselling skills training to teachers. The integration of the subject

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knowledge of teacher and counselling skills will enhance their effectiveness. The knowledge of counselling 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 counselling or take on the role of the counsellor but provide some counselling when needed to the students. The objective of this paper is not to equip teachers with the background or the skills to function in the role of a school counsellor or psychologists but to bring to the awareness that in India, there are very few schools who have school counsellors and only one or two in one school to cater the needs of all the students in the school.

Counselling 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 counselling role have been the teachers. In classical antiquity, Socrates was Plato's teacher and counsellor; 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 endeavours?

The relationship between teacher and student is central to an individual's educational experience and growth process. Many can recall a teacher with whom a very close relationship was shared, a teacher who helped to build the self-confidence, focus and define the goals of life, and follow the dreams, and who counselled successfully in a difficult moment. Although they may lack the professional training of counsellors, school teachers have a long tradition of helping students with personal problems. They also interact with the students daily, and thus are in an excellent position to provide personal direction. In fact, effective teachers share many of the same traits as effective counsellors: ability to empathize with students, patience and flexibility, excellent interpersonal skills, openness to new ideas, and awareness of individual differences (Gouleta, 2004). Good teachers also habitually promote and sustain positive group interaction in their classes, and develop a helping relationship with both students and parents. In all these ways, the teacher's role is closely allied to that of the counsellor.

UNDERSTANDING COUNSELLING

Counselling is a process which takes place in a one to one relationship between an individual beset by problems with which he cannot cope alone and a

professional worker whose training and experience have qualified him to help others reach solutions to various types of personal difficulties (Hahn & Maclean, 1955).

Counselling is an interactive process characterized by a unique relationship between counsellor and client that leads to change in the client in one or more of the areas like behaviour, beliefs and values and level of emotional distress (Welfel & Patterson, 2011). There are few misconceptions regarding counselling, they are counselling is advice giving, making suggestions, recommendations, influencing the values, attitudes, interest, and beliefs.

The major skills of Counselling that can be included are competence, acceptance and flexibility, integrity, sensitivity, listening, empathy, confidentiality and understanding.

Competence: It means that individual should be proficient in counselling, they stay informed about the most effective ways of handling a situation. Their competence is based on metacognitive knowledge. They tolerate ambiguity and they can examine unstructured situations. Competence also includes the awareness of their own expertise that is they know what they are not sufficiently competent and refer to the right expert (Guindon, 2011).

Acceptance: Acceptance is a warm regard for the client as a person of unconditional self-worth and of value, no matter what his condition, his behaviour or his feelings are (Rogers, 1961). Accepting every statement of the counselee is a major characteristics of a counsellor. The attitude of positive acceptance is a must as the counselee is a bundle of feelings of being disappointed and accepting such feelings unconditionally is a major component of counselling.

Flexibility: Counselling is not rigid mechanical applications of formulas for producing behaviour change. Counsellors are free to move naturally, quickly and easily in their thinking and feeling in order to adapt to the nuances of client behaviour.

Listening/Attending: Orienting oneself physically to the client to indicate one is aware of the client, and, in fact, that the client is given full, undivided attention. Methods include eye contact; nods; not moving around, being distracted, eye contact, encouraging verbalizations; mirroring; body postures and language; leaning forward, etc. Researchers estimate that about 80 percent of communication takes place non-verbally. This skill requires capturing and understanding the verbal and nonverbal information communicated by the client.

Empathy: Empathy is the action of understanding, being aware of, being

sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of another. Dymond (1949) describes empathy as the imaginative immersion of oneself into the thinking, feeling and acting of another thus structuring the world as client does.

Sensitivity: It is the part of empathy. It implies that an individual feels empathy for fellow human beings regardless of their circumstances and offers back acceptance with kindness and warmth. Sensitivity is exhibited when acceptance is offered to others. Accepting the humanity of a person does not imply condoning specific behaviours that may be unacceptable or dangerous (Guindon, 2011).

Integrity: It involves personal values that guide ethical behaviour. Integrity is something we choose to do. It is partly based on one's own moral and ethical beliefs. It involves trustworthiness and an individual is accountable for their actions (Guindon, 2011).

Confidentiality: Although confidentiality is important in counselling it does not apply very much to all situations e.g. most people will openly say what they feel about the problem they are having. However, ensuring that confidentiality is maintained as the client would feel greatly offended if any information about him or her is disclosed to other people. This means that counselling must be done individually and privately.

Understanding: Understanding as an ability to grasp clearly and completely the meaning the client is trying to convey (Tyler, 1961). Counsellor should be able to participate completely in the client's communication and his comments should harmonize with what the client is trying to convey.

THE NEED FOR COUNSELLING SKILLS IN TEACHING

The counselling 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 behaviour but also their nonverbal messages, facial expressions, and body language (Cormier & Hackney, 1999). Both teachers and counsellors 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.

Teachers function quite differently from country to country. For example, in India there are very few schools who have counsellors not because of lack of

funds but rather because of recognition that teachers are the ones who are best positioned to serve in counselling roles (Kottler & Kottler, 2000) They are the ones, after all, who interact with children on a daily basis. If a child is going to approach an adult for assistance or advice, it will be the teacher whom he/she has come to trust over many hours of work and play together. The National Policy on Education (1986) and National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (2009) do not clearly define the role of Teachers as counsellors as National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards in United states of America. One of the six primary roles identified is the counselling and guidance function of teachers. This function refers explicitly to the teacher's role in providing skilled counselling. But indirectly it talks of imparting the knowledge of Educational Psychology, guidance to students, developing empathy in the mind of teachers, and developing a caring and understanding attitude.

The knowledge of counselling skills is essential for teachers to promote student learning and well-being. "Teachers engage in appraisal of pupils' characteristics, adjustment of behaviour, evaluation of individual performance, etc., and may even undertake some individual counselling. To the extent that these functions are performed professionally, teachers are participating in guidance practice" (Mathewson, 1962). 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 counselling or take on the role of the counsellor. 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 counsellor. Teachers should work closely with school counsellors, and both professionals must be prepared to respond to a diverse population of students.

The teacher's role as a counsellor is a powerful one. It has been difficult for many teachers to assume this role because: there is little training given in the subject, many teachers feel that subject matter and cognitive learning is the total focus of educators, some teachers feel a sense of mystification about counselling, the role suggests a deeper commitment than many teachers have wanted, some teachers resent additional responsibility and mostly the role is considered to be an adjunct position.

Although the teacher is not the school counsellor, 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 have to deal not only with their normal developmental issues but also with concerns associated with their special learning needs (Erford, 2003). Teachers are expected to help in the counselling services through:

1. Studying and diagnosing children.
2. Identifying and referring pupils needing special assistance.
3. Preparing and maintaining guidance records.
4. Helping pupils develop effective study habits.
5. Contributing to pupils educational and vocational planning and placement (Rao, 2008).

The impact of teachers on student learning is increased when students are taught by well-prepared professionals who combine their knowledge of the content and instructions with a deep sense of caring about their students. Effective teachers are not only caring (Johnson, 1997) but also culturally competent and attuned to their students' interests and need both in and out of school (Cruikshank & Haeefe, 2001). This valuing of the student as an individual is important in establishing and sustaining relationships. Teachers who show that they care about students enhance the learning process and serve as role models to students (Collinson et al., 1999). Teachers who adopt a relationship-building approach to classroom management by focussing on developing the whole person are more likely to help students develop positive, socially-appropriate behaviours. The characteristics of effective teacher-student relationships are not related to the teacher's personality or whether the teacher is well liked by the students. Instead, the relationships are characterized by specific behaviours, strategies, and fundamental attitudes demonstrated by the teacher (Bender, 2003). This approach involves taking personal interest in students; establishing clear learning goals; and modelling assertive, equitable, and positive behaviours (Hall & Hall, 2003; Rogers & Renard, 1999).

Teachers are being consulted by pupils on a wide variety of problems. The problems which come up most frequently are educational in nature. Listed in the order of frequency they are: choice of courses, learning difficulties, choice of occupation, and choice of college, failure, study habits, and graduation requirements. Teachers are also consulted on the following personal problems, although somewhat less frequently: health, home relationships, character problems, personality difficulties, social problems, financial problems, boy-girl relationships, and religious problems (Miller & Lefever, 1938).

There are major three levels of counselling: Informal counselling, Non specialist counselling and Professional counselling. The teachers can offer non specialist counselling where the students can approach the teachers for their emotional and adjustment problems (Kochar, 2006). When counsellors' hands are normally full as a result of dealing with high-risk students who have special needs or severe emotional problems like suicidal ideation, rest of the students who may need help for mild emotional problems are not able to access the counselling services like sibling rivalry, separation anxiety etc., can get some solace. It will permit the teacher to observe and make sense of what children are thinking, feeling, and doing. It will allow them to gain access to their inner world, earn their trust, and truly understand what they are experiencing. From such an empathic position, the teacher will help them feel understood and will help them reach greater clarity. They can help them make difficult decisions and will help them take constructive action.

TEACHERS' ROLE AS CAREER COUNSELLORS

Guidance in unorganized and informal manner has in all places and all levels been a vital aspect of the educational process. Educational and career counselling becomes particularly essential for students who are at the stage of choosing their field of study for their future careers. In view of the increasing complexity, people need help to cope with the challenges of life that would begin with the process of guidance and counselling to students at secondary level. Good teachers have always been interested in providing understanding assistance to students to help them overcome the problems of choosing subjects, vocations, career options and information about all (Kochar, 2006). In the Indian situation where parents are not well equipped with helping their children to make choices of vocation, very few schools have the facility of guidance personnel as many people stay in rural areas where they have access to only their teachers. The data illustrated that teachers do act as career counsellors in schools in Gilgit-Baltistan. In the rural and mountainous area where parents are uneducated, they mostly rely on teachers for their children's guidance and career counselling. (Murtaza & Khan 2012). Teachers role in guidance programme can be outlined as under:

1. **Establishing personal contact with students:** Teacher, by virtue of remaining in constant touch with the students, is personally acquainted with them. He can gather adequate knowledge about a student's environment, activities and friend circle through his guardian.
2. **Serving as a link:** Teacher can also act as a link between guidance experts, guardians and youngsters.

3. **Extending cooperation:** Teachers can extend their full cooperation to the principal and the counsellor to run the guidance program successfully.
4. **Making available vocational information:** When a teacher accepts the responsibility of doing guidance work then his job is not only to teach but also to scrutinize all the various activities of a student. He should also make available to students the information about essential educational qualifications and skills for taking up a particular occupation and discuss about future growth (Kinra, 2008).

The researcher is putting up the ideas that have been implemented in Fiji where the Ministry of Education has come up with this initiative to assist teachers in the teaching and learning process in classrooms as well as behaviour management of students. From May 2010 to February 2011, 18 secondary and primary schools with 440 teachers have undergone workshops on basic counselling skills.

CONCLUSION

To conclude it can be said that teachers can be exposed to skills of counselling at two levels one at pre-service where teacher training programs are imparted like Bachelors and Master's in education, though it is already an optional course but it should be included in core papers as not all students may be interested in it and second to in-service teachers who are already working. This will improve on the teaching competency and make the learning process more smooth and effective.

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