

**Social Psychological
Applications to School
Counseling, Therapy and
Consultation**

**Counseling roles for school
psychologists:**

- Crisis counseling
- Brief counseling
- Brief family therapy
- Vocational counseling for special education students
- Skills training
- Services can be individual and/or group

**Counseling roles for school
psychologists:**

- In contrast, school counselors may focus more on:
- Discipline
- Attendance
- Educational decision making

Counseling roles for school psychologists:

- Because of the nature of the school environment, funding issues, and research on typical treatment duration, therapeutic services of school psychologists need to be brief and focused.
- Treatment goals need to be explicit.
- It should be recognized that sometimes classroom-wide interventions or accommodations for the student are a preferred treatment approach.

Applications of Attribution Theory

- Typically, student are referred, not requesting help of their own accord.
- May not be aware of the inappropriateness of their own behavior or the relationship between their behavior and undesirable outcomes.
- Establish rapport and listen actively.
- Help student explore his attributions for his own behavior as well as others'.

Applications of Attribution Theory

- Help the student make their views explicit and challenge his attributions when they are not reality-based.
- Goal is often to help student achieve a sense of internal causality for school success and failure.
- Until the student sees his own behavior as being responsible, it cannot be modified.
- Start with language changes—"won't" for "can't," "I" statements.

Applications of Attribution Theory

- For other students, the problem might be attributing causality inappropriately, e.g. self-blame for abuse, trauma, family problems, etc.
- For others, a learned helplessness attributional pattern is the source of problems.
- Need to be taught to attribute school failures to effort or strategy, and not ability.

Applications of Attribution Theory

- Students with ADHD and on medication may form maladaptive attributions.
- May perceive their behavior as beyond their control and attribute any improvements to the medication.
- Optimum progress is noted when they perceive medication as an aid, but realize their efforts are still needed to control their behavior.

Applications of Attribution Theory

- In school crises, attributions may lead to helplessness, a sense of victimization or guilt.
- Need to explore with students the multiple extraneous things outside of themselves that may have contributed to the crisis.
- Move students quickly from a passive to active role.
- Identify what is in their control in their lives, and exert control there.

Applications of Dissonance Theory

- When you want to change students' attitudes, it is often easier to start with a behavior change.
- If behavior changes, students will need to explain to themselves why they behaved that way, and thus attitudes will move in a direction consistent with the behavior.
- By empathically listening and reflecting back your understanding of what the student shares, dissonance can be created for the student.

Applications of Dissonance Theory

- By pointing out discrepant thoughts and behaviors, the student becomes motivated to resolve the dissonance through an attitude or behavior change or a new insight.
- Brief therapy is problem-focused and dissonance-increasing through challenging the student, and ultimately leading them to self-confrontation.
- Challenge how the student conceptualizes current problems and how that conceptualization interferes with progress.

Group Process and Counseling

- Group process theories focus on how groups develop norms, pressures to adhere to those norms, and the factors that underlie deviancy from those norms.
- Social psychological factors of group attractiveness, size, environment and status of group membership can all facilitate group communication and bring about individual change.

Group Process and Counseling

- Group cohesiveness and clarity and commitment to group goals creates productivity.
- Normative behaviors are established and constructive, encouraging, and nonjudgmental feedback is given to create cohesiveness and goal-orientation.
- A psychoeducational group would have pre-established goals and agendas and students would be selected because they are in need of a certain skill.

Group Process and Counseling

- There are four levels to group dynamics:
- 1. The individual level—the counselor offers insights about an individual’s intrapersonal characteristics.
- 2. The member level—the individual’s influence on the group; the counselor would focus on interpersonal dynamics.

Group Process and Counseling

- There are four levels to group dynamics:
- 3. The group role level—focuses on the group’s influence on the individual; the counselor would focus on helping the group or family understand how the role the individual plays serves the group or family; common roles are scapegoat, leader, rebel, distracter, blamer, placater, victim, persecutor, healer, identified patient, parentified child...

Group Process and Counseling

- There are four levels to group dynamics:
- 4. The group-as-a-whole—the counselor would focus on the group dynamics and conflict within the group.
- Similar applications for family and multi-family treatment.

Applications of Self Theory

- Focuses on an individual’s attributions as well as values and talents.
- A well-adjusted person has experiences consistent with their self-concept.
- Techniques such as personality and vocational assessment, active listening, probing, and counselor self-disclosure can help a student clarify their views of self.

Applications of Self Theory

- Strong applications in vocational counseling.
- Explore personality traits, abilities, interests, and values and assist the student in finding an occupational match.

Attraction and Influence Theory

- Counselor effectiveness is affected by perceptions of expertness, attractiveness, sincerity, and trustworthiness.
- When a counselor is seen as attractive to a student because of these qualities, the counselor can serve as an influential model of prosocial behavior.
- Through role-play and didactic training, counselors can develop in students those skills that will make them attractive and accepted by their peers.

Applications of Reactance Theory

- Whenever an optional behavior is eliminated or threatened, we are motivated to restore our freedom.
- Some classroom behavioral problems that may be a reason for referral may be due to reactance, e.g. the student feeling limited or threatened by classroom rules.

Applications of Reactance Theory

- Therapeutic strategies based on reactance:
- Compliance-based paradox—counselor tells the student to enact or continue with the symptomatic behavior; when the student does so, the symptom is no longer out of control.
- Defiance-based paradox—counselor tells the student to increase the symptoms; the only way to restore their power is to reduce the symptom.

Influences of Gender & Ethnicity

- Counselors must be aware of gender differences in values and moral-thinking and ethnic and culturally-based differences and don't impose your own value system.

Social Psychological Influences on Consultation

- Consultation does not focus directly on the student/client, but influences the professionals (e.g. teachers) who have responsibility for the student.
- Collaborative problem-solving relationship.
- Consultee (teacher) continues to be responsible for the problem and can accept or reject your help.

Social Psychological Influences on Consultation

- Psychological consultant is only successful to the degree that they can influence teachers to adopt different or more effective approaches.
- The teacher is the target of your change efforts.
- What the teacher thinks about the suggestions will be influenced by their attributions for student behavior, their self-perceptions of competency, their theories of teaching, and their perceptions of your motives, credibility and trustworthiness.

Social Psychological Influences on Consultation

- Psychological consultant must focus simultaneously on the problem and on the teacher's thought process.
- Consultation relies heavily on social influence and the consultant-consultee relationship.
- Reward, coercive and legitimate power not accessible to the consultant.

Social Psychological Influences on Consultation

- Psychological consultant's influence comes from expert and referent power.
- Consultant has expert power to the extent that the consultee feels the consultant has the knowledge and skill need to accomplish the goal.
- Expertness affected by objective evidence of training (e.g. certification, title), behavioral evidence such as rational arguments and confidence, and reputation.

Social Psychological Influences on Consultation

- Consultants structuring their interview increases teacher perception of expertness.
- Trustworthiness is also important and is a function of reputation for honesty, social role (e.g. school psychologist), sincerity and perceived lack of motivation for personal gain.

Social Psychological Influences on Consultation

- Consultant has referent power to the extent that the consultee identifies with the consultant, and is attracted to the consultant's values, beliefs and behaviors.
- Referent power requires frequent opportunities for interaction in order to develop.

Social Psychological Influences on Consultation

- Prudent self-disclosure can increase the consultee's identification with the consultant and enhance attractiveness.
- However, too much self-disclosure can reduce the consultant's influence.
- Teacher liking the consultant and consultant's work are the most important factor related to the consultee's satisfaction with the consultation.

Social Psychological Influences on Consultation

- Attractiveness can further be facilitated by educating all parties about your role as consultant, the goals of the consultation, the nature and type of help offered, and the degree of confidentiality.

Influence of Teacher Attributions on Consultation

- Attributions influence the way teachers attempt to modify behavior.
- Attributions to external and unstable causes (such as effort) result in greater effort.
- Attributions to internal and stable causes (such as ability) may result in learned helplessness.

Influence of Teacher Attributions on Consultation

- If the teacher attributes a student's problems to causes within the child or the child's home, she is less likely to work toward improving the student's performance.
- There is a tendency for teachers to not accept responsibility for students' poor performance.
- Teachers tend to attribute ability as the cause of poor academic performance and home life as the cause for behavioral problems.

Influence of Teacher Attributions on Consultation

- Actor-observer bias: actors (e.g. students) tend to attribute their own behavior to situational causes while observers (e.g. teachers) attribute the actor's personality characteristics as the cause.

Influence of Teacher Attributions on Consultation

- Kelly's covariance theory: cause will be attributed to the person when the behavior is distinctive and consistent over time.
- Chronic student problems are distinctive: other students in class do not present the problem,
- And they are consistent over time: the problems occur regardless of the teacher's way of interacting with the student.

Influence of Teacher Attributions on Consultation

- Teacher's are also susceptible to the discounting principle:
- When specific information about a plausible cause is available, you discount other plausible causes.
- If the teacher has a plausible explanation, she may attribute the student's problems to that one thing while in reality, the problem might be due to multiple and interactive causes.

Influence of Teacher Attributions on Consultation

- Teachers' attributions may also serve ego-enhancing functions.
- They deny personal responsibility for student failure to preserve self-image.
- Teachers' attributions also predict how they use praise and criticism.

Influence of Teacher Attributions on Consultation

- If a teacher attributes a student's problems to lack of motivation, the teacher is more likely to criticize the student's inappropriate behaviors than they would comparable behavior of a non-referred student.
- Children with academic and behavioral problems receive a disproportionate amount of negative feedback.

Influence of Teacher Attributions on Consultation

- When teachers believe a student's behavior to be intentional, they are less likely to use rewards or preventive or remedial strategies, and relied more heavily on punishment and threats.
- When teachers attribute problems to characteristics not within the student's control (e.g. a label) they are more likely to provide, support, nurturance and instruction.

Influence of Teacher Attributions on Consultation

- Different attributions elicit different emotional reactions.
- Sympathy is elicited when failure is attributed to lack of ability (internal, uncontrollable, stable cause).
- Anger is elicited when failure is attributed to effort (controllable, internal and unstable).

Influence of Teacher Attributions on Consultation

- Students use teachers' emotional reactions as cues that they use to make attributions about themselves.
- A teacher might try to be sympathetic toward a student with the intention of preserving the student's self-esteem, but the student will perceive he has low ability and his expectancies for success will decline.

Influence of Teacher Attributions on Consultation

- Teachers may avoid anger because of the perceived threat to the self-esteem of the low-performing student, but anger reaction will communicate an attribution of effort.

Influence of Teacher Attributions on Consultation

- Success of consultation presumes some degree of acceptance of personal responsibility for the problem, and thus a capacity to effect a change.
- Teachers' attributional patterns can make consultation difficult.
- Good consultants need to generate good solutions that can be assimilated within the teacher's existing repertoire.

Influence of Teacher Attributions on Consultation

- Teachers' externalization of responsibility may be minimized by:
- Reviewing the teacher's successes with similar problems,
- Emphasizing differences in student responses to factors such as peer influence, the nature of the task, and instructional strategies,
- Empathizing with the teacher's frustration,

Influence of Teacher Attributions on Consultation

- Teachers' externalization of responsibility may be minimized by:
- Reframing frustration as an indication that the teacher is invested in finding ways to help the student,
- Discussing your own failures with similar situations,
- And avoiding evaluative/judgmental comments.

Influence of Teacher Attributions on Consultation

- Teachers' externalization of responsibility may be minimized by:
- Accepting the teacher's initial attributions in order to establish a shared meaning,
- Then explore additional causal attributions.

Influence of Cognitive Dissonance and Justification on Consultation

- External justification (such as a reward) may cause one to engage in a behavior in the short-term, but may jeopardize long-term generalizable change.
- When a consultant wants a teacher to engage in a certain behavior, it is important to use the minimum amount of external justification necessary.

Influence of Cognitive Dissonance and Justification on Consultation

- Sources of external justification can include:
- The consultant's interpersonal attractiveness such as empathy, warmth and listening,
- Promises of large improvements in the problem,
- Personal appeals to the teacher,
- And promises of future assistance.

Influence of Cognitive Dissonance and Justification on Consultation

- If the consultation results in positive change and you want the results to be maintained and generalized, the consultee/teacher must accept personal responsibility for the change.
- Help the teacher attribute undesirable teacher strategies to external causes, such as lack of support from the administration.

Influence of Cognitive Dissonance and Justification on Consultation

- Point out that the teacher wants to be an effective and reinforcing teacher and that you understand they chose their profession because they want to help children.
- The teacher's willingness to participate in consultation is a demonstration of his or her desire to employ different strategies.

Influence of Cognitive Dissonance and Justification on Consultation

- The reason the teacher is not doing what you recommend already is that the teacher has opinions, attitudes and beliefs that are not supportive of performing the intervention.
- If you do get them to perform the intervention, their actions will be dissonant with those cognitions.

Influence of Cognitive Dissonance and Justification on Consultation

- Inducing a teacher to perform that behavior may be the result of:
 - Rational arguments
 - The interpersonal attractiveness of the consultant
 - The hope for a problem resolution
 - Or other affective or logical factors.

Influence of Cognitive Dissonance and Justification on Consultation

- Getting a public commitment from the teacher to do the intervention will serve as a cognitive dissonance-inducing “foot-in-the-door.”
- “Is this something you plan to try?”
- “When do you think you will begin the plan?”
- “When can I come back next week to assess if the student is responding to the plan?”

Influence of Cognitive Dissonance and Justification on Consultation

- There will be little dissonance arousal unless the teacher perceives that he or she is acting out of choice.
- You can increase the perception of choice by:
 - Asking the teacher to make suggestions,
 - Recognizing the teacher’s contributions to the intervention plan,
 - Emphasizing the teacher’s freedom to accept or reject suggestions,
 - And encouraging the teacher to make decisions.

Influence of Cognitive Dissonance and Justification on Consultation

- Teachers find solutions generated through collaborative problem solving as more acceptable.

**Influence of Teacher Self-Efficacy
on Consultation**

- Teacher beliefs about his/her ability to influence student problems affects their effort, persistence, and the types of strategies they employ.
- A teacher's self-efficacy is two-fold: the belief that he/she has the skills needed to bring about learning, and their teaching self-efficacy—their belief in their ability to bring about change.

**Influence of Teacher Self-Efficacy
on Consultation**

- Consultants should attempt to increase teachers' sense of control over problems by providing information about successful classroom interventions with similar problems.
- If teachers think they are able to successfully implement an intervention or resolve a problem on their own, they are likely to initiate and persist with an intervention.

**Influence of Teacher Self-Efficacy
on Consultation**

- Teachers' self-efficacy with certain interventions can be increased through modeling of the intervention and role play.
- Experienced teachers typically have more self-efficacy, and consequently are less likely to participate in consultation or to change their behavior as a result of consultation.

**Influence of Teacher Self-Efficacy
on Consultation**

- When working with an experienced teacher, the following are recommended:
- Ask the teacher his/her observations, inferences, and suggestions prior to offering your own,
- Give the teacher credit for his/her unique perspective on the problem,

**Influence of Teacher Self-Efficacy
on Consultation**

- When working with an experienced teacher, the following are recommended:
- Freely admit your own lack of knowledge and ask for instruction from the teacher,
- Avoid overt attempts at persuasion,
- And encourage teacher-ownership of recommendations that emerge from the consultation.

**Influence of Reactance Theory
on Consultation**

- When a consultant suggests a course of action, the teacher may feel a threat to his or her freedom, experience reactance, and restore the sense of freedom by rejecting the suggestion or engaging in other counter-productive behaviors.
- Again, experienced teachers pose the greater challenge and are more likely to experience reactance.

**Influence of Reactance Theory
on Consultation**

- The consultant can minimize the likelihood of reactance by the following:
- Emphasizing that agreeing to a present suggestion does not imply any need for future compliance.
- Emphasizing that engaging in a new behavior does not threaten old behaviors, but is an addition to the teacher's repertoire

**Influence of Reactance Theory
on Consultation**

- The consultant can minimize the likelihood of reactance by the following:
- Allowing the teacher to exercise his or her freedom by stating the pros of a contrary position,
- By not accepting a teacher's position too strongly.
- Paradoxical interventions can minimize reactance but are not recommended as they may adversely impact the consultant's credibility and trustworthiness.

**Influence of Acceptability of
Interventions on Consultation**

- Intervention acceptability is influenced by:
- Amount of time required
- Teacher skill required
- Risk to the target child
- Effects on other children
- Perceptions of effectiveness,
- And whether it is described in pragmatic terms.
