Introduction to School Counselors as Consultants

The importance of consultation has been discussed for years. In 1962, Gilbert Wrenn stressed its importance in his book *Counseling in a Changing World*. Faust (1968), in his now classic book for elementary school counselors, stated that consultation was more important than either group or individual counseling. Dinkmeyer and Caldwell (1970) recognized consultation as a key component of a developmental guidance program. Over the years, consultation as a counselor intervention has continued to receive support (Dustin & Ehly, 1992; Gysbers & Henderson, 2000; Paisley & McMahon, 2001; Wittmer, 2000). The National Standards of the American School Counselor Association (Campbell & Dahir, 1997) include consultation as one of four services critical to the successful implementation of a comprehensive developmental school guidance and counseling program.

Writers such as Dinkmeyer, Carlson, and Dinkmeyer (2000) and Myrick (2003) encourage school counselors to consult with adults, because children and adolescents are often powerless to make changes; therefore, it is more useful to work with the significant adults in their lives. Consultation is also time efficient. The counselor can teach the consultee skills that may be applied in similar situations. Thus, more children and adolescents can be reached through consultation than through individual or small group counseling.

The effective consultant, as described by Dougherty (2000), has the following attributes:
1. A personal and professional growth orientation
2. Knowledge of consultation and human behavior
3. Consulting skills

We have added a fourth attribute:

4. A multicultural and diversity perspective

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH ORIENTATION

An orientation toward personal growth is not something that can be taught in graduate school, but it is an attitude toward life that can be encouraged. Any activity that is new or different could be considered a growth activity, whether cognitive, physical, emotional, or spiritual. Professional growth means participating in activities that specifically lead to being a more effective consultant, and it could include academic courses, workshops, professional reading, and supervised practice.

To be effective, the school counselor must have a growth orientation. If we expect students, teachers, and administrators to make changes in their lives, we must also be willing to grow and change. The number of topics about which counselors as consultants must be knowledgeable increases each year. All of these topics cannot possibly be taught within a one-quarter or one-semester consultation course. If counselors are to remain competent in their field, professional growth activities are critical.

KNOWLEDGE OF CONSULTATION AND HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Many of the courses required for a master’s degree in school counseling, such as theories of learning and theories of behavior change, help the consultant gain knowledge of human behavior. Although other courses in a school counseling program might touch on consultation, the most effective way to gain a knowledge of consultation is to complete specific training in that area.

CONSULTING SKILLS

Preparing to become effective consultants in the school includes knowledge of:
• Consultation models/theory
• Human development
• Available resources for parents\(^1\) and teachers
• A wide range of student issues/concerns

Preparation also includes using effective helping skills and ethical guidelines to support consultative skills in facilitating:

• The individual case consultative process (with parents, teachers, and administrators)
• Parenting group meetings
• Teacher and parent workshops
• Team meetings

A MULTICULTURAL AND DIVERSITY PERSPECTIVE

The *American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Ethical Standards for School Counselors* (2004) states that school counselors must recognize that differences in clients relating to age, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic, ethnic backgrounds and other differences may require specific training to ensure competent services. This is true with regard to consultation as well as to counseling. Effective school counselors maintain a multicultural or diversity perspective in all of their interactions with students, parents, teachers, other school personnel, and community resources.

All counseling (and by extension, all consultation) is multicultural, “because all individuals are members of many cultures in which different values are required” (Herring, 1997, p. 7). Herring distinguishes between the terms *multicultural* and *diversity*. Multicultural “refers to five major cultural groups in the United States and its territories: African/Black, Asian, Caucasian/European, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American. . . .” (p. 6). Diversity pertains to characteristics other than culture, such as age, gender, race, religion or spiritual identification, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, and place of residence, such as urban, suburban, or rural. The Preamble of the *ASCA Code of Ethics* adds marital status to the aforementioned list and we believe that disabilities and learning styles are other differences that school counselors must be attuned to, especially when

\(^1\) The word *parent* or *parents* will be used to denote parents, guardians, or any other person who has legal responsibility for a child.
consulting with teachers about a student’s academic performance. School counselors must be mindful that all of the above differences may affect how parents, teachers, and others perceive consultation in general and the interventions suggested in particular.

It is not the purpose of this book to describe the characteristics of specific multicultural populations or to discuss all of the areas of diversity listed earlier. There are many good books and journals available to help the school counselor or school counselor-in-training acquire knowledge and skills in these areas (e.g., Herring, 1997; Sue & Sue, 2003; and the Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development published by the American Counseling Association). We provide the following suggestions to assist school counselors in maintaining a multicultural and diversity perspective in their work with students, parents, teachers, other school personnel, and community resources:

• Although it is helpful to understand the typical characteristics of different multicultural groups, it is important to realize that there are more differences within groups than there are between groups (Sue & Sue, 2003). Also, if you are consulting with someone from a different country, it is useful to determine their level of acculturation.

• Remember that even though some parents’ values may be very different from your values, all parents (with some exceptions, perhaps) love their children and want the best for them. Acknowledging this love and letting parents know that you care about their child and want the child to be successful goes far in getting and keeping the parents’ cooperation and assistance.

• Keep in mind that every consultee has a personal history that is unique and that influences his or her belief system (LaFromboise et al., 1996, as cited in Baker & Gerler, 2004). Taking time to learn about consultees’ belief systems not only will help establish rapport, but also will help you suggest interventions that are compatible with their beliefs. Compatible interventions are more likely to be implemented. Suggestions for ascertaining this information are provided in later chapters.

• When suggesting interventions, it is helpful to consider possible consequences regarding other family and community members (LaFromboise et al., 1996, as cited in Baker & Gerler, 2004; Mullis & Edwards, 2001). For example, if a student’s parents decide that they will not insist that the student follow the family tradition of becoming a medical doctor, help them reflect on the reactions of other family members, such as grandparents, and how they will manage those reactions.
• You also have a personal history that shapes your belief system. Take time to examine your values and beliefs. If culturally laden values and beliefs are unexamined, they are often thought to be “correct,” rather than just one way of looking at issues. After identifying your values, ask yourself how you came to have these values and if these values could conflict with the values of others.

Acquiring this knowledge and these skills might seem difficult and time consuming. However, it is worth the work required to become a skilled and effective consultant because of the rewards gained from assisting children through consultation with the important adults in their lives.

WHY CONSULT?

There are a variety of reasons why school counselors must become effective consultants in order to meet the needs of students:

• Consultation is a holistic approach to understanding and assisting students with academic, personal/social, and career issues and decisions.
• Consultation reaches the most students through the most effective use of the counselor’s time.
• Consultation experiences with teachers, parents, and administrators help to develop a positive school climate.
• Consultation with teachers, parents, and administrators empowers significant adults in the lives of the students to develop effective strategies for parenting and teaching.
• Consultation enables the school counselor to develop trusting relationships with teachers, administrators, and parents.
• Consultation is one important approach through which school counselors can make their role clear to parents and school personnel.
• Consultation provides the school counselor with an opportunity to advocate for the rights of children and adolescents.
• Consultation is the most effective way to interact with community members and referral sources that are concerned about the education of children and teens.

Whether you are a graduate student training to become a school counselor, a new school counselor just setting up your program, or an experienced
counselor seeking new ideas to expand or simplify your consultation process, we hope you find this book helpful.

The authors have been practicing school counselors and are now counselor educators. Because of our combined 38 years of experience as school counselors and our combined 53 years of experience supervising school counselor interns, we recognized the need for a practical, skills-based text to help the consultation process operate more effectively. We hope to reduce some of the anxieties you may have in working with the various stakeholders in an educational setting.

Chapter 1 introduces you to the importance of consultation in schools, discusses attributes of the effective consultant, and presents reasons for becoming an effective consultant. Chapter 1, describes several theoretical models (Adlerian, cognitive behavioral, multimodal, reality therapy, and solution focused) that the authors believe are useful in school consultation. They also describe several consultation models (behavioral, mental health, and organizational), as well as the case consultation model used in this book.

The ethical issues most germane to the consultation process are discussed in Chapter 3, including the particular concerns surrounding confidentiality when consulting about minors in the school setting. Chapter 4 provides a detailed description of the five-step case consultation model used by the authors. Issues that often must be addressed by school counselors are presented in Chapter 5. Suggestions about teaching teachers how to refer students to counselors, as well as what to tell teachers and parents to tell students about seeing the counselor are given. Consultee resistance is also addressed. Chapter 6 provides information about how to structure workshops for teachers and parents. Examples of packaged programs that are useful are also offered.

Collaboration is a skill that school counselors as consultants must develop. Parent-teacher-counselor, student-teacher-counselor, and teacher team consultation is addressed in Chapter 7. Recommendations for interventions are also provided. Chapter 8 proposes the use of classroom meetings as a way to create a schoolwide climate of cooperation. Chapter 9 offers examples of ways counselors can consult with administrators to develop schoolwide plans. Crisis intervention plans and discipline plans are presented. Chapter 10 suggests ways, such as using community task forces and speaker’s bureaus, to involve the community in the school.

There are four appendices: The first provides an overview of Adlerian theory, the second contains the ASCA Ethical Standards, and the third appendix contains the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of
Ethics. The fourth appendix is a guide to using this text to build consultation skills. It may be used by instructors who teach a class on consultation to school counselors-in-training, but also will be useful to practicing school counselors who want to enhance their consultation skills. School counselors-in-training are encouraged to read this appendix because it provides an overview of the goals for this text, as well as a self-assessment of consultation knowledge and skills. Following the reference list is an annotated bibliography that lists useful books about Adlerian theory, ethics, and consultation.

This book provides a practical model for school counselors to follow in their consultation sessions. It is designed to serve as a guide; school counselors will develop their own style for interaction on behalf of students. Building this type of program is a process; it cannot be done all at once. To build success into your plan, you must not take on too much the first year.

Consultation can be one of the most time-effective and beneficial services that school counselors provide. We encourage all school counselors to get involved in the consultation process and experience the positive results.