

Notes on Counselling Interventions*

In attempting to formulate a comprehensive and effective program of counselling (for a school or school district) I believe that it is helpful at the outset to distinguish between those counselling and guidance activities which aim to change the conditions which clients (pupils) are subject to from those counselling and guidance activities which aim for change in the individual. I will call the former preventive counselling and the latter personal counselling. Examples of preventive counselling (within the context of the school) include: consulting with teachers; school procedure change; family counselling; involving the business community in work-study programs; curriculum reorganization; cooperation with other community agencies in programs to reduce causes of delinquency, VD, etc.

Personal counselling, on the other hand, refers to the various types of one-to-one counselling which can be used to aid the individual to change, grow, develop, and solve problems in constructive ways.

When a counsellor counsels with a client, we may say that an intervention is occurring. The counsellor is intervening in the life-situation of the client. In this brief paper I will outline six categories of counselling intervention and will indicate that in each instance an intervention may be one of three sorts: valid, degenerate, or perverted.

The term intervention as I am using it, implies two assumptions:

1. that there is a clear distinction between counsellor and counsellee and that the counsellor is offering some enabling or 'helping' service to the counsellee, and
2. that there is a clear and voluntary contract between counsellor and counsellee to the effect that the counsellee freely elects to avail himself of the services of the counsellor; and that the counsellor freely elects to provide them.

From the perspective of my analysis any intervention (of the six categories I will shortly outline) is valid if both counsellor and counsellee undertake their work together on a free and voluntary basis. An intervention is defined as degenerate when (1) any element of unsolicited interference occurs; (2) when the counsellor manipulates clients (uses the other for his own self-interest ends); or (3) when the counsellor compulsively intervenes (for example, always applies one method of counselling to all clients regardless of their individual needs).

Perverted intervention refers to any intervention on the part of the counsellor to cause the client harm and leave him disabled, or to humiliate, put down, restrain or persuade a client against his own best interests. Examples are: using false information, gossip, slander, making deliberate attacks on one who is emotionally vulnerable, seduction, supporting an individual on a course of self-destructive folly, or subjecting a client to extreme stress, etc.

*From: Peavy, R. V. Dialectical Counselling: Theory and Practice in prep.

The Six Categories of Intervention

AUTHORITATIVE INTERVENTIONS

1

Prescriptive: Give advice, make judgments, state rules. A prescriptive intervention is one that explicitly tries to direct the behavior of the client, especially behavior outside of the counselling encounter.

2

Informative: Teaches, informs, interprets. An informative intervention seeks to impart new knowledge and information to the client.

3

Confrontive: Challenges, direct feedback is given. A confronting intervention tries to directly challenge a restrictive belief/attitude/behavior of the client.

FACILITATIVE INTERVENTIONS

4

Cathartic: Releasing emotions in client-encourage laughter, crying, trembling, raging. A cathartic intervention enables the client to discharge painful emotion, to state and express emotions healthily.

5

Catalytic: A catalytic intervention encourages self-directed problem solving, insight, self-exploration, self-responsibility. Counsellor empathizes, encourages reflection.

6

Supportive: Counsellor accepts, confirms, validates. A supportive intervention affirms the worth and value of the other person; nurtures, provides positive emotional acceptance and support.

The first three interventions may be called authoritative because the counsellor takes an overtly assertive role and the emphasis is on what the counsellor is doing. The last three may be termed facilitative because the emphasis is on what the client is experiencing and/or doing and the counsellor's role is more unobtrusive. It is very important to remember that each of the six types of intervention may be either valid, or degenerate, or perverted. No category in its valid form has, a priori, more value than another. Effectiveness in counselling lies in knowing when to use a particular intervention, and in being able to use interventions skillfully. The validity of a particular intervention rests upon the counsellor's ability to use an intervention skillfully and to choose the intervention appropriate to a specific client with a specific need.

The categories of intervention are not exclusive of each other. There is a relatively 'pure' form of each which can be identified but in practise they are interdependent. In my experience at least a degree of supportiveness is required for effective use of the other five interventions.

These six categories transcend the differences between various 'schools' of counselling, therapy, interviewing, social casework, etc. From my perspective, a truly skillful counsellor is one who:

1. is proficient in each mode of intervention,
2. can determine which intervention(s) is best for a given situation and is able to change tactics as the situation develops, and
3. is aware at any time which type of intervention he/she is using and why.

Further, I believe that these intervention skills can be learned and that formal or in-service training programs can be, and should be, organized to enable counsellors to become more proficient in their use. Needless to say, perhaps, is that there are many specific techniques, skills and concepts which are subsumed under each intervention category.

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October, 1976