
APPLICATION OF SOLUTION-FOCUSED BRIEF COUNSELING: A PANACEA TO STUDY BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The topic of this article is Application of Solution-Focused brief Counselling (SFBC): A Panacea to Study Behaviour Problems among Secondary School Students in Nigeria. The article seeks to indicate how SFBC can be utilized in reducing study behavior problems in schools. Many students in secondary schools have plethora of problems ranging from their inability to do their assignments, allocating time for study to concentration while studying and preparing for examination etc. Again counselors in secondary schools are saddled with lots of responsibilities that they have few times for their clients. With the assistance of SFBC, many of the student's problems can be minimized. SFBC focuses on the students assets rather than their deficits and only a few meetings are needed to assist the students get on track to solving their issues. SFBC as postmodern techniques can be used in variety of settings.

Keywords: *Solution-focused Brief Counseling Assists, and Deficit*

INTRODUCTION

There are hundreds of thousands students in our secondary schools who perform poorly in their academics due to poor study behaviour. These students do not avail themselves for assistance either because there are no counsellors in the schools or due to ignorance of the services of counselors. As a result of this, many end up performing poorly in examinations or ultimately dropping out of school.

Many counselors are saddled with enormous duties due to the large number of students who either by design or accident, get to their office for assistance. The ling services which make their job very cumbersome. Therefore, a need for a counselling technique that will

help these students to handle the study behavior problems with dispatch becomes urgent.

OBJECTIVE OF THIS ARTICLE

The objective of this article is to demonstrate that SFBC, if understood and carefully applied in school setting (by counsellors, teachers, administrators and even clients) can be a great means for reduction of study behavior problems in secondary schools in Nigeria.

CENTRAL PHILOSOPHY OF SFBC

As with any counselling model, there are rules of thumb that reflect the core beliefs and leads to the most effective use for SFBC. (Berg and Miller 1992, P. 17).

There are three basic rules proposed by Deshaizer (1987, P. 59) for counsellors using SFBC.

The first rule is that: Delsha (1987) said that making an issue out of something that is not as issue for client can cause difficulties in areas that were previously manageable to them. Counselling should focus on generating solution, not additional concerns. This implies that clients need to work on what they see as causing them difficulties; otherwise the counsellor's agenda becomes the focus of the counselling. Following this rule means that counsellors subscribe to the philosophy that client (not the counselor) determines the goal of counselling.

Rule two "Once you know what works, does more of it" Recognizing those interventions that clients report as successful gives the counsellor valuable information. Once successes are identified, counsellors have client replicate them. The temptation to become more elegant or try something different to move more quickly should be avoided. An assignment that has previously worked has an excellent chance of succeeding again.

In the big picture, clients tend to miss things that are working for them. They tend to direct attention instead to what is wrong and not working. Problems grown disproportionately in relation to the solutions which generally grow unnoticed. People tend to describe problem as always happening or goals as being never attained. These absolutes are not true 100% of the time. For example, students are not always tardy for class, always disturbing the teacher, or never doing homework. There are instances when they are on time, are cooperating with the teacher or are taking responsibility for doing their homework. These moments of success are frequently forgotten or generally unrecognized. Therefore, it is important for counsellors to pay particular attention to indications of what works for

each and every client so that these solutions can be replicated. In adhering to this rule, counsellors commit to the belief that all people have been successful in overcoming their problems at various times in their lives. They have the ability to succeed again.

Third rule states "If it doesn't work, don't do it again" "So something different". There are people with work ethic, that promotes the concept that "If at first you don't succeed try, try again" when trying again it is important that you use different strategies to yield different results. In counselling, however, when, confronted with difficulties, clients tend to use the same familiar coping strategies because that is all they already know how to do. Walter and Peller (1992) described this common example of these phenomena where in people repeat ineffective strategies over and over. People often misplace an item such as a wallet or a set of keys. On searching for the item and not finding it on the kitchen table, they check the dresser in the bedroom unsuccessfully, followed by the counter in the bathroom and then back to the kitchen table once again. If the item was not on the table before, why would it be there now? Repeating something that didn't work doesn't make sense: continued exploration in new location is a more logical choice. Subscribing to this third rule helps counsellors reformulate their ideas about resistance, because when clients demonstrate reluctance or appear uncooperative, they actually are telling counsellors what does not work for them.

SOLUTION-FOCUSED ASSUMPTIONS

The basic philosophy of any counselling approach carried with it basic assumptions counsellors need to internalize for the model to work. Adhering to these assumptions keep the counsellor on track. Various solution-focused practitioners articulate in their own way the assumptions inherent in the solution-focused

approach. According to Walter and Peller (1992), there are five basic assumptions: First assumption contends that when we concentrate on success, beneficial changes will take place. The focus should be directed towards what is right and working for the client as opposed to what is wrong and troublesome. Practicing "solution talk" as rather than "Problem talk" facilitates the process. This is a rather difficult assignment for novice solution-focus counsellors because most mental health providers have been conditioned to look for problems. Shifting from problem to solution identification requires conscious effort and repeated practice.

The second assumption asserts that every problem has identifiable exceptions that can be found and transformed into solutions. Clients are also inclined to review their problems as always happening. When in reality, their problems fade away at times. Though problems come, there an instance when problem isn't present and clients fail to understand the significance of this exception. It is up to the counsellor to listen carefully for hints that signals where, when and how exceptions occur as a step in helping client develops solutions.

The third assumption is that small changes have a ripple effect that expands into larger changes. When client alter their behavior ever so slightly, it causes a chain of reaction in response to the initial change. Those affected by the change find themselves adjusting to their responses, which in turn elicit further changes in the client. Therefore positive changes beget new positive changes.

The fourth assumption recognized that all clients have all it takes to resolve their difficulties. By highlighting client's strengths and how these strengths are initiated rather than focusing on deficits, changes occur more rapidly. Clients and counselor together face

the task of fully exposing moments of success and perhaps, most importantly identifying what clients have done to make these moments happen. Exploring client's road map to success steers them toward an empowering adventure. Accenting children's previously unrecognized resources challenges them to prove their competency.

The fifth assumption concludes that client's goals are viewed in positive terms reflecting what clients want to do rather than in negative terms. As clients relate their goals, in negative terms, recounting what they don't want counsellors are charged with helping clients identify positive worded goals that reflect what they do want to happen. Clients are empowered as they envision themselves accomplishing a measurable goal. Therefore, solution-focused Brief Counselling can be applied in school setting where counsellors, teachers, administrators who know the philosophy and assumptions of SFBC can apply to help many students with study behavior problems.

CONCEPTS OF STUDY HABITS

Making studying a habit is an essential quality of a good learner. Therefore, students need to be introduced into the process of learning how to study so as to perform well in their academic pursuit. Students therefore, need to recognize that there is a process to be followed when learning, doing assignment, allocating time for study, concentration while studying, preparing for examinations and many other processes (Awabil, 2012). All these when realized and put into practice, constitute good study behavior. According to Anagbogu (1992) study habit is a systematic and organized way in individual behaves towards his or her homework, assignment, reading, note taking, study periods, consultation, and allocation of time, concentration and habit of tackling examinations. Also Patrick and Gaza

(cited in Ahlatrogab, Deku and Dramanu, 2008) posited that study habits are behaviours directed at effective learning. This indicates that good study behaviours are usually manifested in the learner's response to classroom work, assignment, reading, note-taking, concentration and strategies used in examinations.

Through study behaviour, or a prescribed pattern of study behaviour, students are assisted toward the achievement of their learning goals (Ochanya, 2010). Study habits are attitudes, behaviours and styles learners adopt in the process of learning. Ochanya, further indicated that poor study habits include noisemaking during study periods, ineffective time management, inappropriate techniques for review of learning materials and incomplete notes or bad note taking. All these constitute constraint to learning and achievement leading to failure (Awabil, 2012).

Due to high populations in secondary schools and coupled with students' awareness of counsellors' roles, many of the counsellors are becoming overwhelmed with assigned responsibilities. Thus, there is little time left to counsel students and as such, many of the counsellors feel discouraged because they have quite limited to give students a few sessions of counselling. This leaves the counsellors helpless as to what next to do to cope with the teeming population of student coming for counselling bearing in mind the main motive of their becoming counsellor is to assist students solve their academic and other personal social problems.

SOLUTION-FOCUS BRIEF COUNSELLING

Solution-Focus Brief Counselling (SFBC) is a recent approach in assisting students with poor study habit to overcome subsequent problems Sklare (2005), it focuses on student assets rather than their deficit and

only a few meetings are needed to help students get on track to resolving their issues. According to Sobby and Cavallaro (2010), SFBC is a Postmodern Therapeutic Technique because many of the steps in the SFBC process resemble techniques learned in other approaches and the model is relatively easy to master. According to Sklare (2005), this technique will make students confident as they begin to recognize their strength and resources that were previously unnoticed (Deshazer, 1988). The students will begin to repeat their successes and success begets success and so the counsellor becomes energized and hopeful. By practicing SFBC, counsellors will deliver to their clients, the kind of assistance that motivated them to the profession and thus brighten their outlook. Because of its positive, solution-focus, SFBC can be used in wide range of setting (Webb, 1999).

Again, most of the counsellors in school setting seem to indicate that counsellor education programmes do not prepare them adequately to cope with the realities on the ground especially the population and diversity of problems the students are encountering. Counsellor education programme typically emphasizes theoretical models of counselling that requires long term therapy than school counsellors have the time to offer. Long term therapy implies in-depth assistance, which is beyond the school counsellors work (Sklare, 2005). While it is important for school counsellors to understand the theoretical underpinnings of all counselling, theories, expecting school counsellors to apply these models in school setting is unrealistic. To solve this problem, SFBC which is a technique that is efficient, effective and positive in its used of time can be employed (Dejong and Berg, 2008).

Furthermore, most counselling approaches used in counsellor education programmes focus on problems, thus implying that something is wrong with

the client. This emphasis on deficit according to Sklare (2005), lead to an extensive and time consuming exploration of problems, etiology, histories and causes.

The media also contribute to the concept that those needing counselling have deficits and have failed in some aspects of their lives (Downing & Harrison, 1992). Television and newspaper that promote counselling accentuate people's inability to cope with everyday issues. Students exposed to these descriptions may see themselves as dysfunctional and believe that seeking help may further emphasize their negative attributes. With this perspective, students' reluctance to talk to counsellors who stress their fault is understandable. In many cases, students who seek help are referred by their parents or schools personnel for this reason rather than being "customers" of counselling they come as visitors, usually honoring either a request or ultimatum, and therefore, do not commit themselves to the process. The real customers are the parents, teachers, administrators and other adults who want the students changed. They own the problem (Sklare, 2005).

According to Kral (1994), counsellors also can inadvertently be transformed into customers if they become more interested in change than do the children they serve. Youth who are referred to counsellors may view counselling as serving those who really sent them, which results in resistance.

Sklare (2005) is also of the opinion that the difficulties of providing effective counselling are compounded by the expectation that immediate observable changes will occur. The managed-care trend reflects what is now demanded in the mental health arena. Counselling is to be effective and quick because mental health practitioners are required to limit the number of sessions to which they are to be paid. Overburdened teachers, like managed-care providers are frustrated with their students' behaviour, academic

problems or both. They send youth to the counsellor for a quick fix as if the counsellor has a magic wand. Failure to rehabilitate an individual instantly can result in teachers losing confidence in counsellors and in the counseling process. The more counsellors are seen as failing to furnish essential counselling services and programmes, the more school communities question counsellors value in schools. But with SFBC many of these threatening issues will be taking care of.

SFBC, ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS

SFBC is also a counselling technique if well studied and learnt. It may even be practiced by administrators and teachers especially in schools where students' enrolment is low and where such schools are lacking funds to pay the counsellors.

In such situations, the principal and/or assistant principal could benefit by using SFBC method with students. Due to the easy techniques involved in SFBC e.g. use of miracle question, exception question, scaling, etc. anybody including significant individual in the life of a student can employ SFBC to minimize the said student problem.

MORE WORD ON SFBC

Through the work of some innovative practitioners (Stancin, 2003; Berg & Muller, 1992; Deshazer, 1985) a new model of counselling has emerged that can have tremendous impact in school settings. The strength of this technique has been recognized in a number of articles (Bruce, 1995; Lafountain, Garner & Harrison 1996; Sklare, 2000). Some authorities like Dejong and Berg (1998) reported that 78% of children 12 years old and younger and 89% of children 13-18 years of age made progress toward their goals in counselling 7-9 months of SFBC.

The SFBC is a counselling technique that focuses on the solution to the problem that brought them rather than on problem itself. The emphasis here is not on the problem that brought students to counseling but on possible solutions. The movement to a solution-focused removes the need for in-depth exploration of the historical antecedents of client's problems.

Taking the investigation of the causes and origins of problems out of the process dramatically shortens the time needed for counselling. When the focus is on solution counselling becomes brief. Moreover, as the focus changes to solutions, actions become of primary importance and insight is deemphasized. These outcomes make SFBC an effective model for working with children with study behaviour problems. Because insight is not necessary, this approach offers a good fit, because the approach is relatively easy to master since it emphasizes problem solving by students providing the solutions and the assistance to do this is provided in the school settings.

Solution-focused counsellors found that by using students' word, counselling becomes easier for the clients to comprehend. By using students' language, counselling becomes personalized to meet their needs. Students' ability to communicate at a familiar level and recognize that they are understood creates an ideal solution (Sklare, 2005). Another aspect of this method which suits children well is the focus on using language that directs them to take positive actions. This technique makes children with study behaviour problems to improve quickly. It also enables them to adopt those good study behaviours that will help them achieve good academic performance.

Most often, children arrive at counsellors or administrators doors because either they or the persons referring them want them to stop doing something bad (fighting, disrupting, talking and playing).

Negative goals are very difficult to accomplish because to imagine themselves not doing something, children must replace those thoughts with something concrete. Developmentally, children need examples of what they are to start doing. The solution-focus present children with what they can do and also calls for client to determine the outcome of their goals for counselling. Counselling focuses on client desires, not on the desires of the counsellors or administrator. Clients are viewed as being their own experts because they know what is bad for them (Sklare, 2005).

STUDY BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS IN SCHOOLS AND THE USE OF SFBC TECHNIQUE

There is a link between learning strategic and learning outcomes in the economy of literature that has to do with study behaviour. Many students in developing world have been grappling with this problem because it affects their academic performance. Gettinger and Seibert (2002) have observed that success in all academic content areas is associated with effective study skills or strategies. Nouchi, Slakouri and Nakhei (2008) also indicated that students with effective study skill habit can be said to be closely related to higher academic performance (Awabil, 2012). Yahaya, 2005; Olayinka, 2008). These studies indicate that the better the study behaviour, the higher the academic achievements.

In dealing with study habits, variables that come to mind include the following: time management skills, concentration, starting each study session on time, getting the materials one needs before one sits down to study, studying in a quiet place, making use of school library, note taking, note making, writing good assignment, correcting errors, consultation skills, reading skills, procedure in study and examination taking skills, etc.

Though many of the counselling technique have attempted to solve problems arising from improper use of these variables, the author is of the opinion that solution-focus brief counselling can be of greater assistance in solving students problem especially study behaviour problems. As noted by Corey (2009) one of the main tenets of solution-focused brief counselling is that only a small change is necessary. The counsellor emphasizes these principles with the clients by having them participate in the first task, which is to look for counselling change.

Through SFBC, clients learn to rely on their own strengths and resources by being asked exception questions, which is a task that helps client focus on situations in their lives when they would have expected the problem to come (Cavallaro, 2010).

Due to the fact that solution-focused brief counseling has a positive orientation, which assumes that people are healthy and have the competency to construct, people do have the ability to solve daily life challenges. It is a non-pathological and non-deficit focused approach. The counsellor to maintain an optimistic attitude by helping client regain their awareness of their competencies is of immense value (Dejong & Berg, 2008). The counsellors' role is to build clients' hope by creating positive expectations of change being possible. The clients are encouraged to look for what is working in their lives in contrast to their previous unsuccessful problem-focused approaches.

SFBC is a non-deficit approach that emphasizes the client's strengths through the use of its techniques, which include the pre-counselling change, exception questions, the miracle question, scaling question, formula first session task and the therapeutic feedback. The client is active and directive in the participation of these techniques (Sobhy & Cavallaro, 2010). With regard to study behaviour problems SFBC is a good counseling

technique that can handle all the problems since the clients is an active participant in the SFBC.

According to Sobhy and Cavallaro (2010) just by scheduling an appointment with the counsellor, client change has already occurred. The counsellor would ask the client a prompting question like this, "What have you done since you called for the appointment that has made a difference in your problem?" According Sobhy and Cavallaro (2010), by being asked this question, clients are more likely to think of their obstacles in an optimistic, positive frame of mind rather than a deterministic problem-focused context.

Clients learn to rely on their own strengths and resources by being asked exception question. These questions remind clients that problems are not "all-powerful and have not existed forever" (Corey 2009, p. 384).

Study behavior problems can be solved and as such students can even so to speak, solve their problems without seeing the counsellors in other related study habit problems.

CONCLUSION

With its positive orientation, solution -focused brief counselling (SFBC) assumes that clients have the necessary strengths and resources to create solutions to their problems in a limited amount of time (Dejong & Berg, 2008). Solution-focused brief counselling is used in a wide variety of settings and is particularly useful in schools and most especially with students with study behaviour problems. SFBC is a counselling technique that can be used where counsellors have limited amount of time to address large case load. The technique used in SFBC includes pre-counselling and scaling questions and the counsellor's message.

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