

Crossing the Divide Between Teaching And Counselling In Secondary Schools In Mauritius

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Abstract: There are at the moment issues that are cropping up in schools in Mauritius which are calling for the need to introduce counselling in schools. At the same time, some are claiming that teachers are best suited to provide counselling because they see students for a long period of time and given their knowledge of educational psychology, they can identify those students who might be in need of counselling. The aim of this paper is to explore the issue of teachers crossing the divide between teaching and counselling in secondary schools in Mauritius. Data has been collected from seven participants who participated in a Nominal Group Technique. Findings reveal that teachers do not easily picture themselves as counsellors. Yet the author proposed a series of actions which might help cross the divide between teaching and counselling and thus shift counselling from being ingressive to being egressive to teaching.

Keywords: Teaching, Counselling.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, more attention is given to the roles and responsibilities of schools. This is also the case in Mauritius which is a small island found in the Indian Ocean with a population of nearly 1.2 million people. Education is free and compulsory from the age of 3 to 16. It is also free for those students who attend the University of Mauritius. School counselling in Mauritius is not a new phenomenon. It started in the mid-2000. Yet, there are no school counsellors who are posted in schools.

The importance of counselling in schools is at the moment a burning issue as two secondary school students just committed suicide and a third one is in hospital after an attempt at suicide. At the same time, there is a video which has been posted on the internet showing a gang of seven girls verbally and physically abusing another girl in a classroom. We got to understand that it happened during the lunch break. The video which made a buzz on the internet was shocking and lead people to question the role of schools in the socialisation of students and of the pressing need of students to be provided with counselling. According to reports these girls are provisionally accused of child ill-treatment. As these incidents became public, more cases were being reported to the police and there is now growing awareness that such cases cannot go unnoticed. Furthermore, some students in a girls' school have vandalised school property to protest against too much discipline and the school has had to close down for a day. While some parents are supporting the actions of their daughters, the pictures of the classrooms and the property which was damaged leads to further questions about the role of each stakeholder in the education sector. These incidents reinforce the importance for schools to cater also for the social and emotional needs of the students. Though a small island, we are dealing with a big issue (Eriken, 2001).

Parsons (1937) found that education is a means of socialisation of the population into the dominant culture, values and beliefs of a society and also as a means of selecting people for different types and levels of education. This involves building a social hierarchy. Althusser (1972) argued that education is the reproduction of economic relations structure. Schooling, argued Althusser, is an 'ideological state apparatus'. The role of schools is to make sure that the type of labour which they produce will do the work co-operatively, because they find that the system is just and fair. The educational system is to provide the right type of labour to fill in the jobs made available by the economy structure. Some can even argue that the educational system is not designed to develop human potential but to limit it.

However, despite the conflict between these two theories, there seems to be a need for schools to broaden their range of responsibilities beyond their traditional ones of providing education. Werthein (2003, pp.605) argues that 'school is still seen as one of the few concrete vehicles for change or social mobility for a large part of the population'. He further argued that schools are seen as a place for protection.

Hence, there is today a call to expand the roles of schools and to include the provision of counselling services to adolescents. Farmer and Farmer (1999) concluded that schools play an important role in delivering services to adolescents with emotional and behavioural problems. While Green et al (2005) found that students who have persistent behavioural or emotional difficulties are more likely to be excluded from school and leave school without having obtained their educational qualifications. Furthermore various reports have identified school counsellors as playing a fundamental role in identifying and intervening in the prevention and treatment of early onset mental illness in adolescents (Herman et al. 2004; Riggs & Cheng, 1988; Sawyer et al. 2000). Mosley (1993) argued for the offer of counselling in all schools 'as a vital positive force in pupils' lives, a means of helping young people 'think for themselves', make their own decisions, value their own integrity' (p.105).

Furthermore, Mushaandja et al. (2013) also claim that counselling in schools is essential because it is one way to deal with 'the adverse impact of psychosocial problems on the emotional well-being academic performance of learners' (p.78). It has also been found that there are 'perceived improvements in attainment, attendance and behaviour of young people who have accessed school-based counselling services (Pybis et al, 2012) and are called upon to 'create supportive pathways that allow all students to succeed' (Erford, 2003, p.8).

However, the current emphasis on promoting academic success has focused attention away from the broader function of schools which is to produce productive, fulfilled citizens. When schools are mainly concerned with 'delivering' an academic curriculum, other aspects of the role of the school, such as providing personal and social education tend to be overlooked. This leads to insufficient attention being paid to the needs of children for counselling and therefore a lack of appreciation for the key role which teachers can play in meeting these needs.

Instead, there is a move to encourage teachers to become counsellors. Hornby (2003) found that there is now a call for "teachers being able to use basic counselling skills in order to help a substantial number of their students". McLaughlin (1999) claimed that teachers are idyllically placed to provide counselling to students who are struggling with life events. Additionally, Bowers and Hatch (2002) posited that despite the fact that teachers were not officially trained as counsellors, they nevertheless were providing students with counselling. This is also the conclusion that Lai-Yeung (2014) reached as they claimed that 'apart from subject teaching, teachers are entrusted with many responsibilities nowadays. Guidance and counselling are some of their major duties'. Many earlier studies conducted on this issue also supported this (Lung & Luk-Fong, 1998; McGuinness, 1998, Mushaandja et al,2003).

Statement of The Problem:

Many studies have pointed out that adolescence is proving a difficult time for adolescents (Offer et al. 1991; Frymier & Gransneder, 1989; Mellbin et al. 1992b; Thompson & Rudolph, 2000). Hence we notice that adolescence is a period of transition and one where adolescents have to face many challenges. It seems that adolescents find it difficult to overcome their problems. It seems that that they do not have the necessary resilience to get through their problems.

According to Wassef et al. (1995) students who perceive themselves to be at risk often choose to see a counsellor who offers supportive therapy. Offer et al. (1991) also pointed out that adolescents at risk also choose to see school counsellors. Once adolescents find themselves unable to cope some choose to go for counselling. In Mauritius, the authors of the Action Plan (1998) said that our education system "has served its purpose for many years and has enabled us to manage successfully our first phase of industrialisation" (p.3). However, they also recognised that it "has many limitations" (p.3) and one of the limitations which they identified was that the education system failed to cater for the overall development of the child.

Many schools have tried to address this failure and have come up with different schemes and programmes. One of the solutions was to encourage teachers to become counsellors. While reviewing the literature much is said about school counselling programme, or school counsellors, but little has been said about the role of educators acting as counsellors. One study by Wright et al. (2007) showed that 24 educators were trained as counsellors and that there was a positive effect on the low and high-risk youth groups. However, the issue concerns crossing the divide between teaching and counselling. Can teachers cross the divide? Can teachers become teacher counsellors?

Research question:

- What do teachers have to say about crossing the divide between teaching and counselling?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Skills needed by a counselor:

According to Cornier (2008) much of what is accomplished in counselling is dependent on the quality of the relationship between the counsellor and the client. The counselling relationship is characterized by security, safety, privacy and healing. These characteristics are derived from a theoretical approach to counselling called the person-centered approach developed by Rogers (1957). In fact, Rogers (1957) defined what he believed to be 'the necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change to occur' (p.95). These are empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence. Over time, these concepts have evolved but are recognized as 'core conditions' in the therapeutic process (Clouser & Bozarth, 2001). Recent studies have supported the importance of these core conditions (Norcross, 2001).

Empathy:

Bohart and Greenberg (1997a) wrote an entire volume on empathy. In fact the counsellor must be able to understand the client's experience and feel with or emotionally resonate to the client's experience as if they were their own but without losing the 'as if' quality (Rogers, 1957; Bozarth, 1997). Furthermore, Means and Thorne (2000) define empathy as 'a continuing process whereby the counsellor lays aside her own way of experiencing and perceiving reality, preferring to sense and respond to the experiences and perceptions of her client' (p.41). Empathy implies the ability to perceive the client's world from the client's point of view (Sutton & Stewart, 2009). Hence there is need for the counsellor and the client to be fully and open with each other. In his seminal work Kohler (1929) finds that 'empathy relates more to understanding of the feelings of the other people'. Rogers (1975, p.3) finds that empathy is 'one of the most potent factors'. This implies that the counsellor has to give empathic understanding to the client in order to trigger trust and a better understanding of themselves. The presence of empathy is felt by the use of 'specific empathic phrases by the therapist in the Rogerian mold' (Cleare-Hoffman, Hoffman &

Wilson, 2013). Furthermore, various studies have shown that empathy contributes to therapeutic change (Bohart, Elliot, Greenberg & Watson, 2002, Wampold, 2001, Watson, 2001).

Unconditional positive regards:

Counsellors also have to display unconditional positive regards (Rogers, 1957). The importance of this lies in its ability to facilitate a long-term working relationship (Farber & Lane, 2002). However, this is considered as a very debatable issue in client-centered counselling (Lietaer,1984). Cornier (2008) claims that to show positive regards is to value the client. The client is shown to be unique and worthwhile. Karasu (1992,p.36) goes further and explains that to provide positive regard is to provide an ‘overall sense of protection, support or acceptance, no matter what is divulged’. This implies having ‘ no conditions of acceptance’, providing ‘warm acceptance’ and ‘ caring for the client as a separate person’. In fact it serves to restore the client’s unconditional positive self regard. It is also inclusive in that as a counsellor we must accept ‘all the parts of the client’s feelings and experiencing, including even the part (s) that may be uninterested in changing’ (Wilkins, 2000, p.27). Hence, emphasis is put on what the teacher/counsellor should do as well as the attitude which the teacher must display towards the client. The teacher must be able to accept student and respect them. Farber and Dolin (2011) maintain that this feeling has to be monitored and adjusted to meet the needs of the clients. Mearns and Thorne (2002) explain that unconditional positive regards represent ‘ consistent acceptance of and enduring warmth towards her client’ (p.64).

Congruence:

Rogers (1961) defines congruence as a term to ‘indicate an accurate matching of experiencing and awareness’ (p.61). Lietaer (1993) finds that congruence means authenticity. There are practices which are associated with being congruent. It implies that the counsellor must experience the ability to be aware of his own internal experience and be transparent in that he must be able to communicate to the other person what is going on within. There is awareness of what is going on inside which is an internal process and then the act of sharing which represents external. Hence the aim of being congruent is to establish trust (Rogers, 1961). Congruence does not hide relationship feelings and thoughts and thus communicates them in such a way to build trust and openness in the dyad. This is done out of the genuine wish to help, not to manipulate the client. It should not be perceived as a strategic move. The therapist must be authentic and must be sensitive to the needs of the client and adjust the level of congruence accordingly (Cleare-Hoffman, Hoffman & Wilson).

III. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research has been undertaken. Data has been collected using nominal group technique. This method has been devised by Delbecq & Van De Ven (1971) to facilitate group decision-making. This method is found appropriate when ‘ a specific question is to be addressed in depth among a target population’ (Potter, Gordon & Hamer, 2004, p.226). It can help in problem identification, development of solutions and establishing priorities. This method involved a pre-meeting preparation and the input of the seven participants limited to a meeting of one and a half hours. At the end of the meeting the task was completed and the results were available. Furthermore, research bias was minimized because of the structure which was followed for the nominal group technique.

First, participants were welcomed and the purpose and procedure of the meeting was explained. Then participants were given a piece of paper on which the research question was written. They were given fifteen minutes to write down their answers. They were instructed to work alone, in silence and not to consult with other participants. Next, in a round-robin way, one idea per participant was expressed by the participants and recorded on a flip-chart. The process went on until all ideas were recorded. No debate was entertained at that point but participants were told to record any new idea which came to their mind. There was then a group discussion. This involved a thorough discussion of all ideas. The facilitator recorded what was being said by the participants. This lasted fifty minutes. The last step involved voting and ranking of the ideas. This meant getting the ideas in a priority order and the idea which they considered most important got a 1 and so on.

IV. IMMEDIATE RESULTS

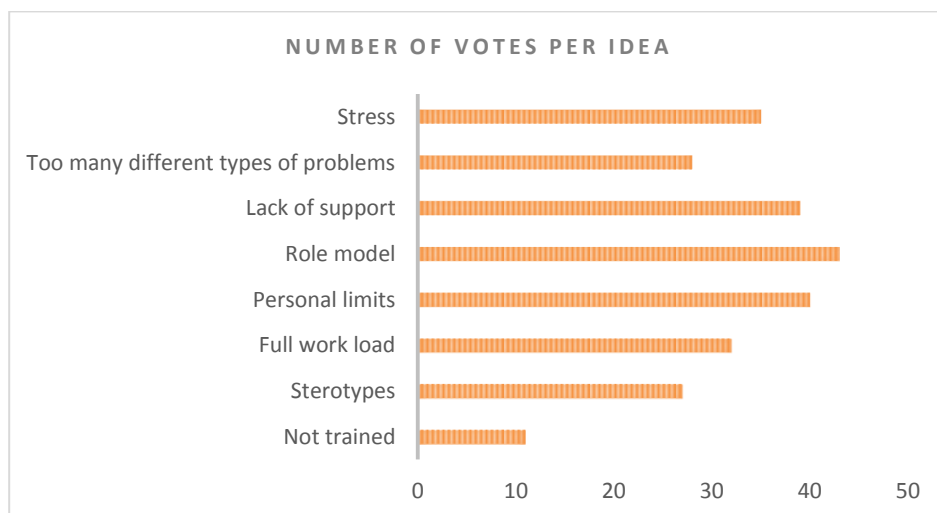


Fig. 1

1. Not trained

After the voting, this idea was considered the most important issue by the participants. Participant B explained that in his training to become a teacher, he did a module on psychology and another module on adolescence. He was not trained in counselling. He revealed that the knowledge gathered in these two modules did not prepare him to go and provide counselling to students. Participant C explained that he found that there is need to have additional training to become counsellors, while participant E revealed that 'we cannot be everything!'. This idea was also expressed by Participant C who added that because of her lack of training she is 'afraid of doing more harm than good'. Another comment made concerned the fact that students who need counselling need 'serious specialized help, not teachers playing at being counsellors'. Furthermore, participant B, added that after having read a few books on counselling, he felt that it is 'complex' and cannot be 'improvised'. Hence we find that the teachers do not have much of the core therapeutic conditions.

2. Stereotypes

This is the second most important issue identified by participants. Participants A and C talked about the fact that in the course of their careers they are called upon to grade pupils' work and hence they tend to categorise students. Furthermore, it was also revealed that teachers having worked with pupils sometimes they tend to develop stereotypes. These stereotypes threat prevent good relationships to develop between teachers and students. Furthermore, as mentioned by participant B, if teachers do not address these stereotypes threats they tend to develop a climate of segregation. This poses a problem and a limit to the wellbeing of students. Hence as noted by Participant D, it is difficult to overcome their tendency to stereotype pupils. If teachers cannot consider students equally, then it will be difficult to offer pupils the kind of consideration which counselling requires from them. As counsellors, teachers are expected to be able to extend to their students unconditional positive regards. This is difficult when they grade students' work. They are somehow already putting the students in different categories.

3. Too many different types of problems

Participants found that young people are facing 'too many different types of problems'. Participant F told about an encounter with a student who was having problems at home and at school'. Participant D talked about 'how things are different today' and 'how the students are not like us'. The participant felt that the situation is complex because youngsters may be facing a whole array of problems and they are not sure how to handle these different issues. Participant E is of the opinion that teachers 'can be taught rapidly how to handle students with learning difficulties' but he also realized that all students do not all have that problem. The main issue seems to be that participants feel that they will not be able to be effective as counsellors because of all the contextual factors affecting young students. Whilst teachers noted the different type of problems which students face, they did not mention the fact that they can understand or can put themselves in the shoes of the students. Hence there is not empathy which is expressed. The issue is always seen from the point of view of the teachers.

4. Full work load

Another issue concerns teachers' work load. Participants explained that they have a full work load. Furthermore, when colleagues are absent they need to replace them. This represents additional work. At the same time, nowadays, teachers are under a lot of pressure and 'have a lot of preparation to do'. Although participant C admitted that teachers are sometimes accused of always 'complaining', he is nevertheless of the opinion that teachers have a lot to do. Over and above their normal duties, they are expected to prepare lesson plans and collaborate with other teachers. Hence the participants found that they 'do not even have an hour left during the day to do all the other duties apart from teaching'. Additionally, participant C noted that he felt 'unappreciated' with the school administration always putting more demands on teachers. Participant E spoke about 'needing to rest' and 'enjoy some quiet time during the day'. Hence for teachers, it seems that they are already struggling with a tight schedule and do not see how they can spare time for counselling. When counsellors are involved in counselling they must be willing to share with their clients and must be willing to be congruent. Again, much is said about the teachers' conditions but very little is mentioned about the teachers reaching out to the students.

5. Stress

Participant A spoke about 'needing to be healthy and fit' to be involved in counselling. He went on to explain that usually 'teachers face a lot of stress-related illness'. He explained that 'having to deal with large class size is tiring'. He also mentioned the 'lack of parental involvement, lack of student engagement, lack of funds and appropriate support' as reasons which are making teachers feel stressed. Participant D explained that the working conditions and 'the pressures under which we work is too much!'. Although still a taboo, participant A revealed that many teachers find it difficult to 'function properly'. He explained that 'we try to do our best, but most of the time, it's not enough!'. Participant C mentioned that there are 'unrealistic targets' set for them. This makes them feel increasingly 'cynical' and 'resentful'. Hence when we take stock of what these participants are saying, it seems difficult to picture these teachers who are working under so much pressure to be able to provide counselling as well. It would be difficult then to engage in counselling where the teachers are expected to be present and fit for their clients so that they can show empathy, unconditional positive regards and congruence.

6. Role model

Participant F explained that usually teachers act as role model for their students. They are to 'inspire' their students. Teachers have pedagogical content knowledge and help students to learn content. They are supposed to be content experts. Furthermore, participant D revealed that a teacher needs to be passionate about teaching. He also needs to be 'sensitive to the feelings of the students'. Additionally a teacher needs to 'encourage his students', 'boost their self-esteem', 'pamper them',

'be responsive to their needs', 'communicate well with them', 'have good classroom management skills'. When we look at that list which is definitely not exhaustive, we come to realise that apart from teaching, teachers have lots more to do. Participant E explained that it's already hard to be 'a role model' and wondered how to be a counsellor, as he believed that even more is expected from a counsellor. Again, we have another reason which is put forward to justify the situation. Hence it seems that teachers do not have much of the core therapeutic conditions which would facilitate counselling.

7. Personal limits

Participant F remarked that 'there is a limit to what we can do! There is a strong feeling that teachers are expected to 'take care of all the problems and issues which are cropping up in society'. Furthermore, participant D noted that 'we have multiple roles and as such have multiple responsibilities which are already time and energy consuming!'. Another participant added that they are becoming 'Jack of all trades, but master of none!'. He also felt that teachers cannot stretch themselves further. 'We are hearing about multitasking, but we are already doing that!' Again the tendency to add upon the responsibilities of teachers seem to be a major hurdle to cross the divide between teaching and counselling. There is a strong feeling that what they are already doing is overwhelming and leave them 'exhausted'. In fact, participant A mentioned being 'burnout'. This expresses their state of feeling empty, and devoid of motivation. It seems hard for the participants to admit, but they may have reached a point 'beyond caring'. Additionally, participant C explained that there is a tendency to know the 'minimum' about the students. He mentioned that he 'might know their names', but he may not know his student as closely as he thought he did. He revealed that he realized that he only knew a part of their lives but it may be difficult for them to learn more. A further reason is put forward to explain that it would be difficult to cross the divide between counselling and teaching as teachers are so burdened with work, that they cannot even consider the idea of being able to develop the skills necessary to provide counselling to students.

8. Lack of support

Participant A explained that teachers do not get enough support. He explained that students, parents and even school administration does not show appreciation for hard work. He added that in some schools, the head of school required teachers to do lot of paperwork which takes a lot of time. Furthermore, teachers are strongly encouraged to use a variety of activities and teaching strategies. Teachers are also expected to be creative, innovative and inventive and to incorporate information communication technology in their teaching. However, participant B explained that despite all these expectations, the teachers do not receive much support and the schools are not willing to invest in training. Here again, another reason to justify why the divide between teaching and counselling is not so easy to cross. Yet, it can be questioned whether teachers would be able to extend to students empathy, unconditional positive regards and congruence, if they were given the appropriate support as the teachers are more inclined to see why they cannot provide counselling.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on what have been revealed by the participants, the following recommendations could be implemented in order to help cross the divide between teaching and counselling. Hence they map out the future direction which can be given to the teaching profession.

1. Appropriate training in counselling could be provided to teachers so that they can acquire the skills needed to become counsellors. Hence teachers should be encouraged to join courses in counselling. They need to be provided with the appropriate support and motivation. They also need to have a reduced timetable so that they can focus on practicing the skills that they are acquiring during the course. Hence practicing teachers could be sent to follow counselling courses. At the same time, another option could be to include some exposure on counselling in initial teacher education. This would serve as a foundation on which to graft further professional development.

2. In addition in order to get into the mindset of becoming counsellors, teachers must be fully aware of the various issues that are impacting on their students. Hence they need to include these in their thinking and reflect upon the means and ways to address these issues. They have to develop an inclusive approach in treating all students. This approach needs to be equitable. They must not discriminate among students. Teachers must remain focused on their practice and their mission and ensure that they tackle issues related to race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation and other marginalized conditions which exist in society. This will develop a different kind of rapport between teachers and students and this can serve as a stepping stone to move from teaching to counselling. Students will start to perceive their teachers differently and vice versa.

3. Teachers should be encouraged to engage in reflexivity. Teachers have to always question themselves. It is essential that they are fully aware of their identities and what is important to them and how they can achieve their objectives. It is important that they question the status quo, reflect upon their own biases and how these are impacting on the relationship which they have with their students. They need to consider how to get rid of these biases. They also have to consider how to handle those who resist crossing the divide between counselling and teaching which is being proposed. Furthermore, by developing instruction practices which are more inclusive and which cater for the needs, contexts, experiences and perspectives of students, teachers build rapport with students and this can greatly help in the counselling process.

4. Teachers need to acquire positive beliefs about students. They need to challenge, deconstruct and change negative beliefs and misperceptions about students. They need to model practices which are designed to promote inclusion and value diversity. They need to create supportive environment and actively develop links with students. It has to be noted that there is more to counselling that just following a course in counselling. The counsellor has to acquire a new perspective about students.

5. The heads of schools have to promote a positive school climate. Heads of schools, together with the teachers need to work on developing positive school climate so that all the students feel at ease. They also need to communicate their expectations to their students and to establish and reinforce practices and procedures which will help students enjoy their schooling experiences. This will help students see their teachers from a different perspective which might help them go to their teachers for counselling.

6. Teachers need to go for self-care. Since, teachers feel stressed and burnout, there is indeed need for them to take care of themselves. Counsellors, because of the hard demands which are put upon them are advised to go for self-care. This can also be recommended for teachers. Teachers could be advised to pay attention to feedback from colleagues, to accept the support from colleagues, spouses, friends and other people at school. They are also encouraged to have a balanced life that provides them with the necessary activities and time to take care of themselves and indulge in activities which help them to let go of their stress and the burnout feeling. They could then consider moving into counselling.

The above recommendations are there to try to bridge the gap between the state of being a teacher and the state of being a counsellor. It requires that teachers develop the three core conditions as determined by Rogers (1951) since findings reveal that they do not exhibit these core conditions. Hence, we find that the whole issue of teachers crossing the divide between teaching and counselling rests upon the assumption that counselling is considered as ingressive in the way that it has its roots external to teaching and is being pushed into education. It does not consider counselling as being egressive, that is having its roots in teaching and can be considered as part and parcel of teachers' role. Yet, today can we still consider that we need a teacher and a counsellor, or that we can have a teacher counsellor?

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International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences

 Vol. 2, Issue 3, pp: (78-84), Month: May - June 2015, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

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