

Brief Counseling in Schools: a Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC) Approach for School Counselor in Indonesia

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Abstract

In order to solve the problems on school setting which faced by students, then one of the activities performed by school counselors is to provide counseling services to students. School counselors spend a considerable amount of time addressing problems with complex solutions, such as poor grades, fights in the hallway, drug abuse, bullying, chronic absences, and uncooperative parents. School counselors are expected to help remedy all of those problems. Limited time in the school setting makes school counselors amenable to a new approach, especially because of the disproportionate counselor-student ratio. By looking many approaches that counseling can take with, a brief format ideally fits the school counseling environment. One popular approach to brief therapy used in the practice of therapy or counseling approaches today is the Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC). Solution-focused brief counseling offers the unique contribution of affirming clients' strengths. SFBC is future-oriented and solution-focused rather than problem-focused to resolve current concerns rather than find the cause of the problem. SFBC is considered more time-efficient and more realistic for a school setting than other time-intense approaches. SFBC emphasizes the concept of wellness which students are seen as having the resources to solve their own problems. Counselors feel more upbeat as they help students to recognize their strengths and resources. Focusing on solutions and achieving goals can reinforce counselors in feeling they are doing their job more confidently and more competently.

Keywords: Brief counseling, solution focused brief counseling approach, school counselor

1. Introduction

In order to solve the problems on school setting which faced by students, then one of the activities performed by school counselors is to provide counseling services to students. School counselors spend a considerable amount of time addressing problems with complex solutions, such as poor grades, fights in the hallway, drug abuse, bullying, chronic absences, and uncooperative parents. Because of expectations of principals, overwhelming caseloads (often more than 500 students), increased severity of mental illness in students, and increased school violence, many school counselors become overwhelmed and find they have little time left to commit to counseling students. School counselors are expected to help remedy all of those problems (Birdsall & Miller, 2002).

With a great expectation and the role of the counselor ill-defined, it can contribute to an atmosphere in the schools of mistrust and resentment (Davis & Osborn, 1999 in Birdsall & Miller, 2002). The negative school climate can be a factor in counselors' feelings of ineffectiveness as their time is spread so thin among so many tasks. These feelings of frustration and limited power can have a negative effect on students. How can the school be transformed from a problem-focused environment to an environment that promotes a positive atmosphere? How can the school counselor contribute to this transformation?

How about in Indonesia? Theoretically, the level of high school counselor has percentage of time responsive service delivery (including counseling) 15-25%. The time given is very limited compared with the other two services are basic services and individual planning (Ministry of Education, 2007). In addition, the school counselor in Indonesia have a responsibility in providing guidance and counseling services to students with a ratio of 1:150. It means that one counselor to guide learners in 150 schools. In the guidelines of BK (*Bimbingan dan Konseling*/ guidance and counseling –red) noted that formal education, especially for counseling services are not scheduled specifically because it is incidental. With some of the things mentioned are the less time spent by the counselor to carry out professional counseling services to students.

In the development of repertoire of counseling approaches today, known for an approach or strategy that brief intervention (brief counseling). In essence, brief counseling emerged as an answer to the demands of the priority service needs. Additional practicality, effectiveness and efficiency, especially in terms of time constraints and interventions focus on specific interventions in order to achieve the desired solution by counselee (Gladding, 2009; Cappuzi and Gross, 2007). Brief counseling is basically not a specific approach or model that is different/special about the theory and practice of others, but rather describe the therapy or counseling is limited in time (time limited) which uses the forces, to understand the context of the problem and focused on the present and

future (Lines, 2006). One popular approach to brief therapy used in the practice of therapy or counseling approaches today is the Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (Sperry, 2010).

2. Study Overview of Brief Counseling and Solution-Focused Brief Counseling

Brief counseling has contributed to the literature consistently since 1985 when Steve de Shazer at the Mental Research Institute introduced the basic principles (Littrell, 1998; Murphy, 1997). Brief Counseling approach focuses on successful solutions that clients are using already, it tends to be easier for the client to practice and expand. In addition, problems are not seen as evidence of an underlying pathology (Berg & Miller, 1992, in Birdsall & Miller, 2002). Cappuzi and Gross (2007) suggested that a brief counseling have characteristics or traits such as (a) focus of the intervention (treatment) on specific and obvious thing; (b) time is used effectively; (c) restrictions on destinations and therapeutic outcomes clearly defined; (d) orientation at the current time (here & now); (e) rapid assessment and intervention in the process of integrating assessment; (f) reviewing the frequency of therapeutic advances and refused to form an ineffective intervention strategy; (g) collaboration between therapist and client is a very important; (h) flexible and practical in the use of interventional techniques. Solution-focused brief counseling (SFBC) has emerged in the last 15-20 years as a form of brief or short-term counseling and as an alternative to the problem-focused approaches that have prevailed in counseling practice (Metcalf, 1995; Murphy, 1997; Sklare, 2005). Solution-focused brief counseling offers the unique contribution of affirming clients' strengths. SFBC is future-oriented and solution-focused rather than problem-focused to resolve current concerns rather than find the cause of the problem. Based on these characteristics, then the SFBT approach is included in the category including brief counseling

3. Solution-Focused Brief Counseling Approach in Schools Setting

From the many approaches that counseling can take, a brief format ideally fits the school counseling environment (Amatea, 1989; Hinkle, 1993; Kral, 1990 in Birdsall & Miller, 2002). Limited time in the school setting makes school counselors amenable to a new approach, especially because of the disproportionate counselor-student ratio. Metcalf (1995) adapted solution-focused brief counseling (SFBC) principles specifically for schools. One study suggested that the brief counseling format is best suited to "children's emotional regulation" and "school-related issues" (Lee, 1997).

Children, especially in an early developmental phase known as concrete operations, have not developed insight into their actions. When a counselor engages a child to focus on solutions, the opportunity to work together on solutions rather than problems becomes more positive and less punitive, and may not damage the fragile sense of developing self. School problems might reflect deeper issues at home, but the school counselor has limited ability to work with these concerns. The responsibilities under the control of the school counselor are to help the child adapt to the school environment. When a child feels successful and positive in school, it contributes to academic success and may mitigate some of the concerns at home.

Murphy (1997) points out other advantages for school counselors using the solution-focused model, including an increase in cooperative relationships among school staff members, parents, and students. These people feel more positive about working toward a resolution rather than looking at the same problem again and again. Murphy also recognized that SFBC is considered more time-efficient and more realistic for a school setting than are the other often time-intensive approaches. SFBC emphasizes the concept of wellness, in which students are seen as having the resources to solve their own problems (Berg & Miller, 1992 in Murphy, 1997).

4. Research results regarding The Effectiveness of the SFBC in School Settings

There are several studies on the effectiveness of SFBC especially in school settings. Some results of these studies such as:

4.1. The results of evaluations conducted by Franklin, Moore and Hopson (2008) also showed that SFBT is effective in dealing with children who have behavioral problems in the classroom or in a school setting. Five to seven counseling sessions are used to help teachers to solve student behavior problems at school

4.2. Franklin and Streeter (2004) in (Franklin, Moore, and Hopson, 2008) also shows the results of research on the presence of students' attitudes SFBT obtain more satisfying and effective than the attitudes of students from school attendance is regular or not treated with SFBT. Furthermore, from the results of the study also found that the obtained results of a positive behavior change in students who experience academic difficulties (Franklin & Streeter, 2003; Krai, 1995; Metcalf, 2002; Murphy, 1997; Sklare, 1997; Webb, 1999 in Franklin, Moore, and Hopson, 2008).

4.3. Treppe, Dolan, McCollum and Nelson (2006:136) that SFBT effective in primary school students (elementary school), junior (middle-school) and high school (High School).

4.4. Mulawarman (2010) also suggested from the results of his research by using a mixed method design (embedded experimental) indicates that applying the Solution Focused Brief Counseling can improve self-esteem in high school students. The results of this study has seen quantitatively from the results found that there

are differences in levels of self-esteem when students before getting SFBT intervention and after getting SFBT intervention. On the qualitative side based on the results of conversation analysis is found that in the early sessions of counseling, counselee helped them feel more comfortable and get a mindset or a clearer picture of the problems they face.

5. Steps of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling Approach

Seligman (2006) suggests the stages in the SFBC. The stages are as follows:

5.1. Establishing Relationship

Building relationships is needed to establish good relations and collaboration between the counselor and the counselee to the achievement of the expected changes. In building a good relationship, the counselor shows concern, acceptance, appreciation, and understanding of the counselee as unique individuals. One way to quickly interact with counseling at the beginning of the meeting is to conduct a neutral topic of conversation that can build up awareness counselee strengths and sources of themselves for the development of solutions to problems that it faces. Change is a process of interaction because it is a collaborative relationship counselor and counselee is very important. Through this collaboration counselee counselor can understand the world so as to jointly construct a problem that can be solved since the beginning of the counseling relationship.

5.2. Identifying a solvable complaint

Counselors use the questions in such a way that it communicates optimism and hope for change and empower the counselee. Problems experienced by counselee as something normal and can be changed. For example, counselors asked counsees "When we talk about your hobby," "What makes you meet Mr./ Ms in the counseling room is?" "Rather than" "What is bothering you?" "Or counselor asks" "What will you accomplish/ change?" "Rather than" "what can I help you?" SFBC counselors often use scaling questions to establish a baseline condition of the counselee and facilitate the identification of possibilities and progress in counseling.

5.3. Establishing goals

Counselor and counselee collaborate to determine specific goals, observable, measurable and concrete. The goal is basically to form one of the forms of the following purposes (a) changing what is done in a problematic situation, (b) change the view or frame of mind about the situation of the problems encountered, and (c) assessing the cracked-source, solution, and excess-excess of the counselee. SFBC counselors often use miracle questions to establish the goals of counseling. The questions that accompany the miracle questions allows counsees imagine that the problem is solved, raises hopes of facilitating the discussion of how such a miracle to happen in reality. Individual response to miracle questions usually provide input for counselors with a variety of solutions that can be used to help the counselee resolve the problem.

5.4. Designing and Implementing Intervention

Interventions designed to prevent problem behavior patterns by showing alternative ways of reacting to problems. Counselors integrate understanding and creativity in the use of counseling strategies to encourage changes slightly. The question though is often used at this stage is to "change what has happened?" "What has worked in the past when you solve the same problem with this issue?" "How do you make it come true?" "What will you do to make it happen again?"

5.5. Termination, Evaluation and Follow-up

The counselor uses questions scaling techniques to determine changes in comparison with the initial change counsees counseling. Having problems counsees resolved satisfactorily then they can terminate counseling process. Counselor encourage counsees to be a counselor for himself and apply problem-solving skills to new problems it faces. Counselors conduct follow-up counseling services to keep abreast of changes in the counselee.

6. Specific Techniques of SFBC

Here are some specific techniques of the SFBC (Corey, 2009; Seligman, 2006; Macdonald, 2006), such as:

6.1. Exception-finding questions (Questions discovery exception)

Questions about the times which counselee is free from problems. The discovery of exceptions to help the counselee clarify the conditions change, have the strength and ability to solve problems, provide tangible evidence of completion and help the counselee find herself a forgotten power. E.g. "When you can manage this problem thoroughly?" "When you do that is different from that now?" "Let me point out times when you are free from trouble!"

6.2. Miracle questions (Question miracle)

Leading questions counselee imagining what would happen if a problem experienced magically resolved. This technique helps to clarify objectives and highlight exception problem by stimulating the counselee to imagine a solution and eliminate barriers in solving problems and building expectations for change. For example, the counselee asked, "Imagine that one night, when you are sleeping, a miracle happens and all your problems solved. How do you know that your problem is solved?" "What do you do when it is demonstrated that solved your problem thoroughly?"

6.3. Scaling questions (Question-scale)

Questions that ask the counselee make the abstract becomes concrete, obscure becomes clear by quantifying strengths, problems, circumstances or changes in the counselee. Such statements counselor, "On a scale ranging from 1 to 10, where 1 means you have no control at all of your problems and 10 means you have full control over your problem, then the range of numbers which you put yourself in that scale? and "What do you need so that you can go up one number in the scale?"

7. Implications of The Implementation of SFBC to Practice Counseling in Schools

Overall, SFBC appears ideally appropriate for school settings. Many adolescents struggle with academic problems, personal problems, or both, as they pass through various stages of life. An important part of maturing is to be able to problem solve. SFBC is an approach that can help students enhance their self-esteem and belief in their own abilities. The approach focuses on students' strengths instead of their weaknesses. On otherwords, SFBC shifts students' thoughts away from their difficulties and toward the power that is within each of them to make and implement plans that can lead to brighter future. Through relatively few sessions in most cases, students seem to gain confidence in themselves by focusing on solutions rather than problems (Brasher, 2009)

Even so, as reported in Littrell et al. (1995), school counselors must use caution and be ethically aware of when SFBT's use is appropriate. For example, Stalker et al. (1999) stated SFBT is not effective for complex or long-standing problems. They purported SFBT could even be harmful if used inappropriately. Birdsall and Miller (2002) explained that SFBT should not be used with serious issues such as suicidal tendencies, abuse, and eating disorders. Also, some clients may be able to move on without an examination of the past whereas others may not. Additionally, school counselors must remember even though the solution-focused process is simple, much skill is required to help students set small, meaningful goals. Thus, counselors who desire to use the solution-focused approach should attend workshops devoted to further training about the approach. They should also become familiar with its techniques and knowledgeable regarding its suitability for each situation.

8. Conclusion

The solution-focused brief counseling model seems ideally suited for schools. This approach shows promise because it focuses on students' strengths and assets rather than their weaknesses and only a few meetings are needed to help students get on the right track. The model is relatively easy to master, and once school counselors change the emphasis of counseling from problems to solutions, they see the students they counsel gain confidence. Counselors feel more upbeat as they help students to recognize their strengths and resources. Focusing on solutions and achieving goals can reinforce counselors in feeling they are doing their job more confidently and more competently.

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