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The Effect of Peer Counseling Training and Experience on Peer Counselors

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THE EFFECT OF PEER COUNSELING TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE ON PEER
COUNSELORS

by

Holly Day McFarland

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

DEPARTMENT HONORS

in

Psychology

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, UT

1996

This study was designed to measure improvement in communication skills of 11 peer counselors after training. The instrument utilized was the Interpersonal Communication Inventory which was given in a pretest-treatment-posttest format. The treatment consisted of a three month intensive training program which emphasized improving communication skills in the areas of listening, empathy and understanding. The results indicated that the peer counselors improved their communication skills dramatically. The mean on the pretest was 83.82, while the mean after the treatment was 100.09.

Introduction

In the United States, psychologists, counselors and social workers as well as professionals in other related fields have been overwhelmed by clients needing services. Many clients have been put on waiting lists. Peer counseling is not a new trend, but has recently become a more popular and common solution to this problem (Morrill, Leach, Radebaugh & Shreeve, 1987). Indeed, it has become so popular that it has not been limited to high school and college settings. Middle schools are experimenting with various forms of peer counseling programs (Garner, Martin, & Martin, 1989). Peer counselors in a university setting often take on paraprofessional status and remain under the direct supervision of professional counselors, psychologists and social workers. As the number of

clients continues to increase, the role of peer counselors becomes increasingly more important.

Recent literature focusing on the various aspects of peer counseling has demonstrated two concepts. First, students in need of help have demonstrated a willingness to seek help from peer counselors when the peer counselors are thought to be capable of providing such help (Carter & Janzen, 1994). Additionally, one studies that has focused on the needs of the client, indicated that while empathy and listening play a major role in most peer counseling situations, students want more than a supportive person with whom to share their feelings (Morey, Miller, Rosen, & Fulton, 1993). Increasing attention has been placed on giving students the necessary skills in solving problems and reacting in crisis situations that will enable them to not only listen to and support their peers, but to help them in other areas of life as well.

The second concept noted in recent research is that the peer counselors themselves seem to benefit significantly from their experiences as peer counselors (Sprinthall, Hall & Gerler, 1992). In being selected and trained to be a peer counselor, the peer counselors' communication skills improve, as does their confidence and self concept (Simon, 1993; Sprinthall, et. al., 1992; Kim, McLeod,

Rader & Johnston, 1992; Hahn & LeCapitaine, 1990; Robinson, Morrow, Kigin & Lindeman, 1991; Vijayalakshmi, 1986; Wang, 1987).

In his study entitled "A review of evaluations of peer education programs," Reginald Fennell (1993) calls for research to determine the effect and the success of peer education programs. He argues that current research gives little or no indication of the success of peer education programs. It is to this end that the present study has been conducted. This study attempts to measure the effect of a three-month training program on the communication skills of a group of eleven peer counselors by measuring their communication skills before and after their training.

Method

Participants

The participants in this study included eleven college juniors and seniors at Utah State University. Of the eleven, six were females and five were males.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study is the Interpersonal Communication Inventory (ICI), designed by Millard J. Bienvenu. This test consists of 40

questions which have been factor analyzed to yield a total communication score as well as eleven scores relating to the following factors: awareness, self-disclosure, clarity, attending, avoidance, acceptance of feedback, coping with feelings, self-expression, perceived acceptance, handling differences and dominance. The author reports split half reliability indicated by the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of .87 and construct validity indicating factor significance.

Procedure

The peer counselors were administered the Interpersonal Communication Inventory prior to receiving any training. Students next participated in a three-month training program which was designed to improve their communication skills. The training was broad and designed to cover major areas related to peer counseling. Thus, it included areas such as reacting in crisis situations, listening, reflecting and goal setting, teaching techniques which included role playing and problem solving, as well as education about the various resources offered to students by the university. The training sessions were videotaped to prepare students for videotaped mock-sessions in which they would participate as part of weekly supervision once they began peer counseling. After training was completed, the ICI was administered again as a post-test.

Results

In order to identify areas of significant change, a t test was conducted. Results indicated a dramatic improvement in the interpersonal communications scores of the peer counselors significant at the .01 level ($t = 4.13$). All factors were analyzed, but no significant improvements were made in any one area of interpersonal communication. The mean score on the ICI pretest was 83.82. The mean score on the test after training was 96.09. Females improved their communication skills more dramatically than did the males. The mean on the pretest for the males was 84.4; on the post-test, 94.4. The mean on the pretest for the females was 83.33; on the post-test, 97.5.

	PRETEST	POST-TEST
FEMALES	83.33	97.5
MALES	84.4	94.4
TOTAL	83.86	95.96

The author of the ICI obtained a mean score of 85.93 when the test was standardized and administered to adults ages 17 and up.

The results of this research indicate that the males who participated in this study scored higher on the pretest and thus, began their peer counseling training with higher communication scores. At the end of the training, however, females had improved their scores more dramatically and scored higher on the post-test.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate several areas of interest regarding the peer counselors' communication skills both before and after training. Although peer counselors entered the program scoring below (but not significantly below) the standard reported by the author of the test, all were able to improve their scores significantly after training. The mean post-test scores were significantly higher than the scores of the standardized sample.

This may indicate that peer counselors would benefit from training programs which focus on similar skills, techniques and resources as the training program in this study. Perhaps the training made such a difference in the scores on

the pre and post tests because there are relatively few undergraduate opportunities to learn and apply such skills.

One limitation of this study is the fact that it was given only as a pretest and a post-test. Administering the test as a screening device before the peer counselors were selected would have allowed each peer counselor to serve as his/her own base line.

A second limitation of this study is the small sample size. As this was a pilot study, more research is needed. It is unknown why there was such a dramatic discrepancy between pretest and post-test scores. No effort was made to determine the amount of other types of training the peer counselors may have had before they were exposed to this training program.

References

- Bienvenu, M. J. (1974). Interpersonal communication inventory. The 1974 Handbook for Group Facilitators. LaJolla, CA. University Associates.
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- Garner, R.; Martin, D. & Martin, M. (1989). The PALS program: A peer counseling training program for junior high school. Elementary School Guidance and Counseling, 24 (1): 68-76.
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Kim, S.; McLeod, J. H.; Rader, D. & Johnston, G. (1992). An evaluation of prototype school-based peer counseling program. Journal of Drug Education, 22 (1): 37-53.

Morey, R. E.; Miller, C. D.; Rosen, L. A. & Fulton, R. (1993). High school peer counseling: The relationship between student satisfaction and peer counselors' style of helping. School Counselor, 40 (4): 293-300.

Robinson, S. E.; Morrow, S.; Kigin, T. & Lindeman, M. (1991). Peer counselors in a high school setting: Evaluation of training and impact on students. School Counselor, 39 (1), 35-40.

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Vijayalakshmi, S.; Mythili, S. P. & Rao, P. K. (1986). Effect of peer counseling training on helping skills and certain psychological factors: An exploratory study. Journal of Indian Psychology, 5 (2): 50-62.

Wang, W. H. (1987). The effect of peer counselors' training program and peer group counseling in a senior high school. Bulletin of Educational Psychology, 20: 205-227.

Utah State UNIVERSITY

CONTRACT/GRANT OFFICE
Old Main Room 112
Logan, UT 84322-1415

Formal proposal
requested on
5-22-96

MEMORANDUM

TO: True Rubal
FROM: Marjorie Hudson
DATE: March 1, 1996

SUBJECT: Request for Approval from Human Subjects Committee for Proposal Entitled: "Enhancing paraeducator productivity through on-th-job staff development."

Attached is the proposal approval form CG-01 submitted to the Contract/Grant Office by Reed P. Warren regarding the above referenced proposal which has been submitted to **US Dept of Education**. As you will notice, Item No. 12 indicates that Human Subjects are involved. This memo should be signed stating the action taken by the committee and returned to the Contract/Grant Office. If you have any questions concerning the degree of involvement, please call the Principal Investigator or Marjorie Hudson at extension 71659.

We are to respond within 60 days after the submission date of March 1, 1996 therefore, we would appreciate receiving a response from you by April 30, 1996. Please sign in the appropriate space below and return a copy of this letter to the Contract/Grant Office. Thank you for your assistance.

Approved:

Reviewed and Approved

Date

Disapproved:

Human subjects committee has not approved the proposal, therefore, if the proposal has been submitted to the granting agency, it is necessary to withdraw this proposal. This action has been reviewed with the Principal Investigator who agrees.

Reviewed and Disapproved

Date

jhm



UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY

Contract/Grant Office

Control No. 96-5118
Proposal Approval Form CG-01
 Revised 3-93

1. Application Type (Check One):
☒ New ☐ Augmentation
☐ Continuation ☐ Revision

General Information

Agency Name: U.S. Department of Education

2. Date Prepared: 02 21 96 3. Proposal Time Period (anticipated award period, usually 1 year):
 From: (A) 10 01 96 To: (B) 09 30 97
Month Day Year Month Day Year Month Day Year

4. Type of Assistance
1 2
See Reverse

6. Title of Proposal (15 word maximum): Enhancing paraeducator productivity through on-the-job staff development.

7. Cost Centers: (A) College: Education (B) Department: Special Education (C) Research Ctr: CPD

8. Investigators:
 (A) Principal Investigator: Dr. Alan M. Hofmeister Social Security Number: _____ College: Education Department: Special Education

(B) Co-Principal Investigators:

<u>C. Jill Morgan</u>		<u>Education</u>	<u>Special Education</u>

Proposal Information

9. Agency Type (check one):
☒ Federal Gov't ☐ Local Gov't
☐ State Gov't ☐ Private

10. Source of Matching Funds Provided by USU (check one):
☐ College ☐ Department ☐ Research Center ☐ V.P. Research

11. IDC Allocation:
 (A) Cost Center _____ % _____ % _____ % _____ %
 Total 100% (Allocation will be made to Admin/Res Ctr unless otherwise specified)

12. Proposed Project Will Require:

<input type="checkbox"/> Special Facilities or Equipment (001)	<input type="checkbox"/> Small Animals (005)	<input type="checkbox"/> Add'l Lab or Res Space (009)	<input type="checkbox"/> Biohazardous Material (014)
<input type="checkbox"/> Radiation Equipment (002)	<input type="checkbox"/> Large Animals (006)	<input type="checkbox"/> Add'l Office Space (010)	<input type="checkbox"/> Recombinant DNA (015)
<input type="checkbox"/> Radiation Materials (003)	<input type="checkbox"/> Narcotics (007)	<input type="checkbox"/> T.V. Production Facilities (012)	<input type="checkbox"/> Disposal of Biohazardous Material (016)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Human Subjects (004)	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Library Requirements (008)	<input type="checkbox"/> Toxic Agents/Carcinogens (013)	<input type="checkbox"/> Future Financial Obligation (017)

 Note: Attach a note from Dean/Department Head when specifying special facilities, equipment, or additional laboratory and office space to be used for project.

13. Proposal Amount-All Sources:

	DIRECT COSTS				INDIRECT COSTS/FEE				TOTAL							
001 Amount From Agency	(A)	<u>1</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>5</u>	(B)	<u>1</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>5</u>
002 Amount From USU	(C)								(D)							
003 Amount From Others	(E)								(F)							
Total Funding:																

(G) If the indirect costs in item (001) are partially or fully waived, enter amount to be waived: 5877.98 Fee Included in (001B): _____

15. Give a brief (50 word maximum) layman's statement of the project with a comment as to "How this project will benefit the public":
Paraprofessionals are increasingly being used as instructional assistants to special education students, often with minimal training. This project will investigate the feasibility of training paraprofessionals in delivering reading instruction to young students with mild learning difficulties.

Note: The information within this box may be reported to the USU Board of Trustees, and other agencies. Please be complete in your explanations!

Concurrence

We certify that the staff time of individuals involved, space, equipment, alterations, cost sharing funds, facilities, vehicles, etc., required for this project are available or are part of direct cost required in this proposal. We endorse the appropriateness and quality of this proposal. Signature hereto indicates compliance with Executive Memo 89-5, Conflict of Interest, and FAR Clause 52.203-7 (see back).

Final Review and Approval (Allow Minimum 2 Days Process Time)

Principal Investigator _____ Date _____ Dean of College _____ Date _____

Department Head _____ Date _____ Director (Where Appropriate) _____ Date _____

Contract/Grant Office _____ Date _____

One complete copy of this form and the proposal are to be submitted to the Contract/Grant Office.