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Planning and implementing of peer counseling programs: A comparison of three models

Barbara Colleen Osborne
University of Northern Iowa

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Abstract

The 100% to 700% increases in divorces affecting children, reported child abuse cases, and suicides have intensified pressures on American youth in the last two decades (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1980, 1982). Such pressures compound children's concerns about who they are and what worth they have to themselves and to others (Seegrist, 1982). Because of the heightened stress on youth and the resulting large additional demands on their school counselors' time, counselors have been under pressure to devise ways to deal with these additional responsibilities and concomitantly effectively manage the remaining myriad components of their counseling programs. Successful community programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Weight Watchers, and Big-Brothers/ Big-Sisters prompted some people to believe that this concept of peer counseling, which is a process in which non-certified, trained, and supervised individuals offer listening, support, alternatives, and other verbal and nonverbal interactions to members of a similar group seeking assistance (Mamarchev, 1981), could be adapted to fit the needs of school counseling programs (Buck, 1977; Heit, 1977).

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING OF PEER COUNSELING PROGRAMS:
A COMPARISON OF THREE MODELS

A Research Paper
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of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education

by
Barbara Colleen Osborne
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A Comparison of Three Models

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ment for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

Audrey L. Smith

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Date Approved

~~Advisor/Director of Research~~

Robert Krajewski

10/24/85
Date Approved

~~Second Reader of Research Paper~~

Robert Krajewski

10/24/85
Date Received

~~Head, Department of Educational
Administration and Counseling~~

The 100% to 700% increases in divorces affecting children, reported child abuse cases, and suicides have intensified pressures on American youth in the last two decades (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1980, 1982). Such pressures compound children's concerns about who they are and what worth they have to themselves and to others (Seegrist, 1982).

Because of the heightened stress on youth and the resulting large additional demands on their school counselors' time, counselors have been under pressure to devise ways to deal with these additional responsibilities and concomitantly effectively manage the remaining myriad components of their counseling programs. Successful community programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Weight Watchers, and Big-Brothers/Big-Sisters prompted some people to believe that this concept of peer counseling, which is a process in which non-certified, trained, and supervised individuals offer listening, support, alternatives, and other verbal and nonverbal interactions to members of a similar group seeking assistance (Mamarchev, 1981), could be adapted to fit the needs of school counseling programs (Buck, 1977; Heit, 1977).

Developing a peer counseling program requires effective planning and implementation. Therefore, this paper will examine the planning and implementation stage of three well-known programs, compare and contrast them, and in conclusion identify the essential elements needed by those considering using a peer counseling program in their school.

The programs selected for this study were developed by Hamburg and Varenhorst (1972), by Samuels and Samuels (1975), and by Gray and Tindall (1978). The programs were chosen because much of the literature found on the topic of peer counseling in the schools cites them as providing the basis for the respective writings (Anderson, 1976; Fink, Grandjean, Martin, & Bentolini, 1978; McManus, 1982; Raiche, 1979; Rockwell & Dustin, 1979; Varenhorst, 1974).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Planning and Implementation Stage of Three Selected Programs

Hamburg and Varenhorst Program

The first secondary peer counseling program was started in March, 1971, in the Palo Alto, California, school district (Charnofsky & Charnofsky, 1985; Hamburg & Varenhorst, 1972; Varenhorst, 1973). During

the 1970-1971 school year, a survey instrument asked students to respond to questions regarding the counseling and guidance services in the Palo Alto school and regarding the kinds of counseling services which they would like to have but were not then receiving (Hamburg & Varenhorst, 1972). Responses indicated that although students did not want to replace the adult counselors, they did feel a need for peer help in areas in which this help would be unique because of the age and experience similarity (Varenhorst, 1973).

On the basis of student responses, a peer counseling project was developed by Dr. Barbara Varenhorst, Coordinator of the Palo Alto Counseling Program, and by Dr. Beatrix Hamburg, Clinical Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Stanford University. The goal of the Palo Alto program was to train peer counselors to help students who were lonely, isolated, alienated, or socially handicapped in some way (Varenhorst, 1973).

Hamburg and Varenhorst first developed their long-range objective, which was to "develop a totally self-sustaining peer counseling program that can function effectively with a minimum necessity for involvement of outside mental health professionals"

(1972, p. 568). After determining this objective, they designed a pilot phase which assessed the feasibility, community acceptance, and potential value of the project. They also formed a planning committee which included students, parents, teachers, counselors, central office staff, and themselves and from which encouragement and suggestions were generated. This pilot phase reflected Ewing's (1969) first law of planning which states that a program should meet the needs of the organization, individuals, and groups to be served.

Hamburg and Varenhorst (1972) presented their objective, along with an outline for their training program, requirements for an administrative person who would assume responsibility for the program, background information, and procedures to be used in their peer counseling program to the superintendent of schools, all guidance people in the district, the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), and the school board. The co-developers stated that this entire pilot phase was very time- and energy-consuming but proved very vital to the success of the program.

After receiving final approval from the school board for the peer counseling program, they next recruited students, most successfully by speaking

to assemblies, sending letters, and putting articles in the student newspapers.

Samuels and Samuels Program

The peer counseling program developed by Samuels and Samuels (1975) had a somewhat different orientation from that of Hamburg and Varenhorst (1972). Named PRIDE (Professional Resources in Developmental Education), it originated as a drug prevention program in the Dade County School System, Dade County, Florida, in 1972, in an effort to provide students with additional counseling resources and an outlet for ventilation of feelings.

Samuels and Samuels (1975) focused on the administration and faculty when implementing their program. After having gained the support of the principal, they provided a detailed explanation of the program at a general faculty meeting, where they presented a faculty information sheet. This sheet stated the purpose, the method for selection of potential peer counselors, the proposed training schedule, the objectives of the training, the methods to achieve the objectives, and the ultimate long-range goals of the peer counseling program. Also at this meeting, the faculty's help was solicited and questions were answered.

After dealing with the faculty, they then turned their attention to the students. They gained student interest and support by talking to classes, contacting counselors and teachers for their recommendations, putting up posters in the school, and making announcements to students.

Gray and Tindall Program

Finding little research that dealt with the teaching of counseling skills to nonprofessionals, in the early 1970's, Gray and Tindall (1978) developed their own highly structured, step-by-step training procedure for peer counselors, which was field tested in the Pattonville and Rockwood School Districts. Their goal for training peer counselors was to augment the impact of the counselors in the two school systems by utilizing paraprofessionals to improve self-concepts, improve racial understanding, and help with academic difficulties.

Gray and Tindall first assessed the needs of the group to be served in order to develop a strategy for bringing about the change that was needed and researched all available material on the topic of peer counseling. Next, the groundwork for the program was laid by informing the school administration and funding

agencies as completely as possible by presenting a complete written proposal, including a budget outlining funding needs. Allen (1973) concurred that budgeting should be included as a major activity of planning.

Finally, Gray and Tindall (1978) gained administrative, staff, and community support. Administrators were invited to read short articles, attend programs, visit peer counseling projects, and attend meetings on peer counseling. Interested staff members were encouraged to solicit ideas and help with proposal writing, program development, publicity, logistics, and other parts of the total project. Community support was gained by forming an advisory board, sending letters, inviting social service agencies to visit the school, and publicizing the program through graphic presentations to support groups, newspapers articles, spot radio announcements, and radio interviews.

A large amount of time, energy, and commitment was involved in the structured sequence of organization, development, and implementation that was necessary for success. Evans, Anderson, Sweeney, and Williams (1984) substantiated that planning a project should be logically structured into a step-by-step process.

Comparison and Contrast of the Programs

Little quantitative research has been done on the organization and implementation stage of peer counseling programs, even though several who have done research in peer counseling agree that planning and implementation can make or break a program (Anderson, 1976; Bowman & Myrick, 1980; Gray & Tindall, 1978; Rockwell & Dustin, 1979; Samuels & Samuels, 1975, Varenhorst, 1973). This section of the paper will first compare and then contrast the planning and implementation stage of the peer counseling programs of Hamburg and Varenhorst (1972), Samuels and Samuels (1975), and Gray and Tindall (1978) in order to establish the essential elements of the planning and implementation stage of a successful peer counseling program.

Comparison

As previously indicated, all three programs obtained the support of administration and faculty before beginning their peer counseling programs. Hamburg and Varenhorst (1972) accomplished this by forming a planning committee using faculty and staff and by presenting public relations programs explaining the peer counseling program at Palo Alto. Similarly, Samuels and Samuels (1975) gained the support of the

faculty by soliciting the help of faculty at a general faculty meeting and presenting them with a faculty information sheet. Likewise, Gray and Tindall (1978) acquired the support of the faculty and administration by presenting them with a complete written proposal.

This principle is also supported by other literature. Bowman and Myrick (1980) reported that they first went to their principal with an outline of the possible benefits to the school from a peer counseling program. They then went to the teachers for support of their program. Another writer, Anderson (1976), found in his research that misinformation or negative attitudes on the part of the school principal and faculty led directly to the reduction or elimination of peer counseling programs. Anderson also stated that understanding and support from parents was vital to peer facilitator programs.

Another similarity of the three programs was that each recognized the importance of publicizing widely, although each used different methods. The objectives and procedures were presented to the PTA by Hamburg and Varenhorst (1972). Articles were also put in the school newspaper advertising the peer program. Equally important, Samuels and Samuels (1975)

publicized the peer counseling program by putting up posters about the program. Likewise, Gray and Tindall (1978) informed the public of the peer counseling program by newspaper publicity, spot radio announcements, and radio interviews.

In other literature, Fink et al. (1978) also supported the use of advertising. This group found that advertising a peer counseling program increased the use of the peer program through self-referral.

In each of these three successful programs, two major principles for a successful program were emphasized. These were gaining the support of the administration and faculty and publicizing the program widely.

Contrast

Each of these peer counseling programs also had its unique characteristics. For example, Hamburg and Varenhorst (1972) and Gray and Tindall (1978) found that a successful peer counseling program required a lot of time, energy, and, especially, commitment. Other researchers, Rockwell and Dustin (1979), concurred with Gray and Tindall and thus suggested starting slowly, perhaps allowing as much as a year for planning. In contrast, Samuels and Samuels (1975) made no mention of this.

Another difference in the three programs was the formation of an advisory committee. This was an idea that Hamburg and Varenhorst (1972) used. Rockwell and Dustin's (1979) article agreed with this idea, and through their research they found that this helped in the success of the peer counseling program. On the other hand, neither Samuels and Samuels (1975) nor Gray and Tindall (1978) discussed this concept.

Another difference in the three programs was that Gray and Tindall (1978) dealt with budget planning and funding in their program. This was accomplished by a complete written proposal. However, this very important point was not mentioned in the other two programs that were researched.

The next contrast in the three programs was that Hamburg and Varenhorst (1972) successfully used small group approaches and one-on-one contacts to gain the interest of students for their program. On the other hand, Samuels and Samuels (1975) gained interest for their program by making announcements to the students and talking to individual classes.

Furthermore, Samuels and Samuels (1975) differed from both Hamburg and Varenhorst (1972) and Gray and Tindall (1978), who assessed their peer counseling

programs early in the process. Hamburg and Varenhorst concentrated on assessing community acceptance, feasibility, and potential value of the project within the pilot phase. Similarly, Gray and Tindall assessed the needs of the group that was to be served in order to develop a plan to bring about change. However, Samuels and Samuels did not mention making an assessment early in the program.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The programs of Hamburg and Varenhorst (1972), Samuels and Samuels (1975), and Gray and Tindall (1978) have been reviewed and then compared and contrasted with each other and with other relevant literature. As a result of the insights gained from this analysis, those considering peer counseling programs should include these five essential elements of the planning and implementation state: (a) commitment of time and energy to the program, (b) assessment of the specific situation, (c) attention to budget needs, (d) support from school and community, and (e) publicity to increase involvement in the program.

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