PEER COUNSELING: EFFECTIVE METHODS TO PRODUCE POSITIVE CHANGES

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PEER COUNSELING:

EFFECTIVE METHODS TO PRODUCE

POSITIVE CHANGES

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A Research Paper

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of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

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by

Martha Dixon Brice

May 1991

To the Graduate and Research Council:

   I am submitting herewith a Research Paper, written by
Martha Dixon Brice entitled "Peer Counseling: Effective
Methods to Produce Positive Change." I have examined the
final copy of this paper for form and content, and I
recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree, Master of Science, with a
major in Secondary Guidance and Counseling.

_____
Major Professor

Accepted for the Graduate and
Research Council:

_____
Dean of the Graduate School

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

In the decades before the emergence of the two-career family and the single-parent household, a child was more likely to form his or her value system from within the family rather than from other sources. Unfortunately, in recent years our youth have used such sources as uninformed peers, motion pictures, rock groups, television programs, advertisements, and paperpack novels to build on their shaky value systems.

Our adolescents are faced with a number of problems different from those with which their parents and grandparents had to contend. A 1940 survey revealed the top seven problems of America's public schools. They were talking out of turn, chewing gum, making noise, running in the hall, cutting in line, violating the dress code, and littering. In contrast, today's top seven problems are alcohol abuse, drug abuse, pregnancy, suicide, rape, robbery, and assault (Schapiro, 1989). The choices and decisions with which our high school students are faced tax their abilities to cope.

As student problems increase, the strain is felt in our school counseling programs. The ability of our guidance counselors to meet the needs of their

students is limited (Morrill, 1986). In addition, the role of the school psychologist is not what it should be. As a result of such legislation as P.L. 94-142 and budgetary constraints within education, the school psychologist's role is limited to a small number of handicapped students (McManus, 1984). There is a need to somehow expand or complement our school counseling programs - to reach and help more of our students.

When confronted with a problem, it is a natural process for some students to turn to a peer for empathy and moral support (Morrill, 1986). McManus (1984) pointed out that because peers are already in the natural environment, they are in an ideal position for providing help to others. In addition, as Kaplan (1978) noted, "a peer counseling program capitalizes on adolescents' natural use of their contemporaries as a transitional reference group between childhood's emotional dependence on parents and their own adult autonomy" (p. 2).

Using students as helpers dates as far back as the first century, A.D., with extensive reports of effective student helper programs throughout history. During the 1800's in England, Joseph Lancaster assserted that one teacher could handle 1,000 students effectively through his monitorial system of peer teaching (McManus, 1984).

The concept of using students as academic helpers continued to develop over the years to include having students provide assistance to their peers in other areas, such as social-emotional development. Peer counseling has continued to grow. According to Carr's study (cited in Rosenroll & Dey, 1990), there were only 10 peer counseling programs documented in Canada in 1979. However, by 1986, that number had grown to more than 1,000, most of which were school-based programs. Many schools throughout the United States have developed peer counseling programs in which students have been trained as counselors in the social, academic, and emotional spheres (Buck, 1977; Kaplan, 1978; Kehayan, 1987; McManus, 1982; Thomas, 1987). Thomas (1987) reported the PAL (Peer Assistance Leadership) Program developed by the Austin Independent School District in Austin, Texas, was instrumental in the 1985-1986 school year for positive changes in the following areas: self-concept, behavior, academic performance, dealing with peer pressure, and avoiding problems with drugs or alcohol.

Other programs showed that counselees gained in problem-solving ability and communicative skills (Buck, 1977), attendance and decisiveness (Schweisheimer & Walberg, 1976), and improved grades and self-esteem (Kehayan, 1987).

A variety of peer counseling programs has optimistically been developed in many schools. A review of the current literature indicates a number of different methods of choosing and training peer counselors in these programs. Likewise, numerous avenues for carrying out and evaluating peer counseling programs have been implemented.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the methods used in the selection and training of peer counselors as well as the methods of evaluating peer counseling programs. The goal is to determine the most effective ways to produce positive changes in student self-concept, attitudes about drug and alcohol use, and attendance.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Selection of Peer Counselors

The literature reviewed for ths study indicates a wide variance in approach to the selection process. The methods used range from choosing students based on little or no requirements to a combination of several methods.

Reporting on the Total Involvement Program (TIP), Mitchum (1983) stated that any student could be a peer counselor regardless of citizenship, grades, or personality. In this program the counselor and teachers chose the peer counselors. They considered a good basis for the choice of peer counselors to be that half should be chosen because of their special needs and the other half because of their value as models. They reported successful peer counselors with low grades, poor self-concepts, and behavior problems. However, no mention was made of how this program was evaluated.

Other programs have used sociometric peer nomination devices to identify the most empathic students (e.g., Schweisheimer & Walberg, 1976). This process was followed by teacher screening and personal interviews.

Rockwell and Dustin (1979) suggested the use of self-selection, teacher and student input, counselor

recommendations, and some objective criteria for student selection. Morey, Miller, Fulton, Rosen and Daly (1989) used an application and interview process.

In Bowman's study (cited in Campbell, 1983), a variety of students were selected for different purposes. Students were chosen with high academic achievement because they needed and wanted a challenge. Some were chosen because of their desire to be in the program and others because of their ability to reach out. Still others with low self-concepts or negative school attitudes were chosen out of their need for positive, successful experiences.

Students in Buck's study (1977) were required to meet the following criteria:

1. Junior or senior in high school.
2. Enrollment in a psychology and/or social science course.
3. Identification by teachers and counselors as possessing high leadership ability, character traits, and desire to help others.
4. High score on the Interpersonal Relationship Rating Scale (p. 362).

Buck explained that high scores on this rating scale "appear to be related to effective interpersonal relationship skills with both adults and peers and to

a strong desire to relate well with, and to assist, other people" (p. 362).

The most complete description of the selection of students for peer counseling was given by Leibowitz and Rhoads (1974). Application, the first step in their selection process, indicated the students' desire to help their peers with a variety of problems. Then the 50 applicants were screened by the supervisor of the training program.

The next step was a recommendation made by the faculty members. The teachers based their decisions on the students' maturity, emotional status, dependability, and their general effectiveness in relating to peers. Subsequently, the 50 applicants were interviewed to explain fully about the program and the training involved. The interviewer also attempted to subjectively judge each student's suitability based on the same personal dimensions used by the teachers.

The final part of the interview was a role-playing episode. Each student was given the stimulus condition of a fellow student using drugs, who had been caught by his parents. After a year had passed, he felt a lack of trust and communication with his parents. The applicants' task was simply to "help the student with his concerns" (p. 281). From this

selection process, 12 of the 50 applicants were chosen as peer counselors.

In all of the literature reviewed, one common element in the selection of students as peer counselors appears to be the personal qualities which enable students to enter into a caring, understanding, empathic relationship.

Patterson (1986) summarized the works of several theorists and therapists and their agreement on the influence of the relationship between the therapist and client. Specifically, the personal qualities which contribute to this type of relationship are empathy and understanding. The relationship is referred to as an "essential ingredient," the "central focus," and the "primary focus" (p. 549). In addition, Fiedler (cited in Patterson, 1986) concluded that a good therapeutic relationship, as seen by the therapists in his studies, can be compared to a good interpersonal relationship.

Recalling the first year of the peer counseling program at Northeast High School in Clarksville, Tennessee, B. Hays (personal communication, March 28, 1991) concluded that empathic understanding and communication skills are the two most important qualities of a successful peer counselor. In agreement with her is one of the present program's leaders, G. Mallory (personal communication, April 10,

1991). The most effective peer counselors are those who are not only empathic and attend well, but also are able to demonstrate these qualities through verbal and nonverbal communication.

Training of Peer Counselors

Most authors agree that peer counselors need a systematic approach in preparation for specific tasks, and that this training is the most important component of a successful peer counseling program (Campbell, 1983; McManus, 1984). The age and developmental functioning levels of the peer counselors must, of course, be considered in determining the training for the specific types and manner of presentation. However, in general, the components proven most effective in a training program include the experiential, didactic, and pragmatic (McManus, 1984; Schweisheimer & Walberg, 1976). These components involve the use of instructions, modeling, behavioral rehearsal, and immediate performance feedback in teaching reflective listening, improving communication skills, communicating and understanding feelings, decision-making, and problem-solving (McManus, 1984; Morrill, 1986).

The amount of time devoted to training students to be peer counselors varies depending on the program. Mitchum (1983) advised training for a period of at

least five weeks with sessions scheduled twice weekly. Leibowitz and Rhoads (1974) conducted training in a series of nine weekly sessions, two and one-half hours each, held during regular school hours. In another study 32 sessions were conducted over a period of 16 weeks (Buck, 1977). Morey, Miller, Fulton, Rosen, and Daly (1989) held ongoing training sessions, meeting for one hour twice a week throughout the academic year.

All of the previously mentioned training programs were conducted as part of research studies. In the literature reporting school-based peer counseling programs, the training of students is offered as an elective course. One example of such a program is the PAL (Peer Assistance and Leadership) Program developed by the Austin Independent School District (AISD) (Thomas, 1987). The in-class training of PAL students targets such areas as self-awareness, group dynamics, communication skills, helping strategies, problem-solving and decision-making, tutoring skills, substance abuse prevention, and knowledge of community resources. A PAL Sponsor's Manual and PAL Course Description and Curriculum Guide, available from the AISD, is used in the course. In addition to the elective course, students attend workshops conducted by numerous community organizations, the University of

Texas, and by counselors and social workers in private practice.

Operating in the Fort Lee schools in Fort Lee, New Jersey, is another peer counseling program, the Peer Outreach Service Team (POST). Kehayan (1987) reported that POST's peer counselors enroll in a one semester leadership development course which focuses on developing communication skills, defining helping roles, and promoting realistic self-appraisal. This program also provides additional training sessions which teach communication skills, rapport building, story telling to promote positive change, and extensive tutoring skills.

It is interesting to note that both the PAL and POST programs benefit from the services of past peer counselors. They help by monitoring, training, and advising present peer counselors. In the PAL Program these counselors, called the PAL Advisory Council (PAC), sponsor workshops and retreats, work with high-risk students in a summer school program, and conduct a Saturday morning support group for junior high students (Thomas, 1987; Kahayan, 1987).

Kaplan (1978) reviewed still another peer counseling training program which offers its participants academic credit for a one semester course. The training's main objective is to have the students develop their qualities of caring, trust,

empathy, honesty, and respect in which personal growth can occur. There is particular focus on teaching the peer counselors how to become sensitive to nonverbal communication and to identify and reflect verbal content and feeling. Throughout the course the peer counselors maintain a journal of their experiences in class. Then, toward the end of the course, they have opportunities to lead the group within the class. Before it is agreed that the peers are ready to facilitate groups, they submit audio tapes which demonstrate their effectiveness in listening, responding, and problem-solving.

In a report of a peer counseling program at Valhalla High School in San Diego County, California, McManus (1982) noted that training of the nine peer counselors in the first year of the program was conducted in the students' homes during the evenings by the school psychologist. In the succeeding years of the Valhalla model, training was provided in a six-week, daily summer program involving 48 hours of classroom experience. The trainers (the school psychologist, a community resource person from a local community mental health agency, and four to six peer counselors) focus upon development of specific skills geared to peer tutoring and peer counseling activities. Then, during the year the peer counselors receive instruction in group development and dynamics,

ethical standards and confidentiality, community awareness and resources, interviewing tactics, and common problem areas for adolescents.

The most innovative training program found in the literature was reviewed by Rosenroll and Dey (1990). Called a centralized approach to training, it evolved from the needs of several school-based peer counseling programs in the three school districts in Vancouver Island, located off the southern coast of British Columbia, Canada. By providing training for all the island's peer counselors and consultation to the school-based supervisors, the training center enabled the schools to have trained peer counselors ready to assist on the first day of school. This afforded the supervisors more time for other duties in their programs, including needs assessment, selection, supervision, and evaluation. It also provided a peer counseling network for school counselors and peer counselors to share ideas, resources, and frustrations.

Rosenroll and Dey (1990) reviewed the progress of this centralized training program over a period of three years, 1985-1988. Each of the three-hour training sessions was held during July and August with emphasis on communication skills in experiential topics. The trainers were experienced and had also received training through the Peer Counseling

Institute, a 10-day intensive program offered by the University of Victoria. Carr and Saunders' Peer Counselor Starter Kit and Varenhorst's Curriculum Guide for Student Peer Counseling (cited in Rosenroll & Dey, 1990) were used by the trainers throughout the students' training.

During the three school years this program was reviewed, the training center provided guest workshop leaders, and the schools organized information workshops on such topics as suicide, eating disorders, humor in counseling, substance abuse, relationships, and self-esteem. In addition, the Peer Counseling Center's City-Wide Project offered a Peer Counseling Summer Camp in 1990 (Rosenroll & Dey, 1990).

Effective training of peer counselors is considered one of the most important components in peer counseling programs. However, the time and funds needed to operate a peer counseling program, especially the training, is scarce in our school systems.

Rosenroll and Dey (1990) reported that the centralized approach to training is less expensive than school-based training. However, they recommended the piecemeal funding through grants from private organizations and government agencies utilized in the Vancouver study be replaced by consistent long-term funding to enable the project to stabilize and grow.

At Northeast High School in Clarksville, Tennessee, the funds and time used to operate the peer counseling program have come from the guidance department (B. Hays, personal communication, March 28, 1991). Guest speakers and the counselors gave their time to help train the students, but Mallory (personal communication, April 10, 1991) stated there was far too little training provided because of the trainers' lack of time. This problem could be lessened if a training course offered as credit could be added to the curriculum.

Evaluation of Peer Counseling Programs

Evaluation of peer counseling programs, although often overlooked, is important for two main reasons (Rockwell & Dustin, 1979). First, it is essential to know if the peer counselors actually helped the counselors. This information is needed to ascertain the program's worth, need for improvements, and possibly to generate further support for the program. It is also important to know if the program's goals were met. If the objective is to produce positive changes in student self-concept, attitudes about drug and alcohol use, and attendance, then these areas must be evaluated.

As noted by Dougherty and Taylor (1983), school counselors most often do not have the time to use exhaustive research methods in their peer counseling

programs. The methods they cite which can be performed without skill in sophisticated research methodology are pre-post, comparison group, and self-report.

The pre-post method provides information to help the evaluator determine if some change occurred during the implementation of the program. For example, measuring students' attitudes about drug and alcohol use before peer counselors assist them and again at the end of the program can help the counselor ascertain if any positive changes have taken place. However, unless a control group is used, it is difficult to determine if change has occurred because of the program or because of variables such as student maturation and life experiences.

The comparison group method, as reported by Dougherty and Taylor (1983) and Morrill (1986), is probably the most effective method of evaluation counselors have used. This method helps the evaluator to be more confident that significant results are truly the result of the program rather than outside variables. The drawback is that more time must be spent by the counselor to select a control group and use proper statistical procedures to analyze resulting data.

The self-report method includes such instruments as checklists, rating scales, or questionnaires.

Using these counselor-designed instruments gives data
which may be useful to the counselor, the peer
counselors, the school, and the community. However,
it is considered a weak method because of lack of
preciseness in the instruments, making interpretation
of results more subjective as compared to
well-researched published instruments (Dougherty &
Taylor, 1983; Morrill, 1986).

Most of the literature reviewed revealed the use
of self-report evaluations. Morey, Miller, Fulton,
Rosen, and Daly (1989) reported the use of the Peer
Counseling Consumer Satisfaction Questionnaire
(PCCSQ). The PCCSQ is a 23-item self-report
instrument which uses a five-point Likert-scale
format. How students perceived the helpfulness of the
peer counselors in nine specific areas of concern was
measured.

The results of this study indicated that most of
the students (75%) were comfortable meeting with a
peer counselor. Fifty-seven percent felt the peer
counselors were good listeners, and 50% believed the
peer counselor would maintain confidentiality.
However, only 38% of the counselors reported that peer
counselors had given information which was helpful in
dealing with specific concerns. This was evidenced by
a distribution skewed toward "not helpful" in four of
the nine problem areas (family, drugs, alcohol, and

adjustment to high school). In the other five areas (school, relationships at school, boyfriend-girlfriend relationships, plans for the future, and feelings about self) the ratings were bi-polar. The researchers of this study (Morey, Miller, Fulton, Rosen and Daly, 1989) felt a possible explanation for this lack of perceived helpfulness may have been the result of training. The peer counselors were trained not to give adivce, but perhaps they should have been trained to provide information which would prove to be helpful to the students in solving problems and making decisions. Further research was recommended.

In another study (Buck, 1977) a questionnaire completed by referring teachers provided valuable information about the training of peer counselors. Because of the peer counselors' contact with their counselees, both in school as well as out, through phone calls made to counselors when they cut class or did not attend school, improvement was noted in attendance. A weakness in training was noted due to a lack of change in student academic progress. As a result, it was recommended that a tutoring component be added to the training program.

Thomas' report (1987) indicated that the PAL Program was evaluated with a self-report method. At the end of the 1985-1986 school year, 90% of the counselors reported they found the program worthwhile.

Regarding specific areas with which the 104 peer counselors dealt, the 750 counselors at 21 AISC schools reported the following positive responses: improving self-concept (79%); improving attendance (70%); improving academic performance (88%); avoiding problems with drugs and alcohol (74%); and being more confident about succeeding in school in the future (87%). Not only were there no negative responses noted, but similar responses were also reported to have been given in the previous years dating back to 1980.

Behavioral data and anecdotal records were used to evaluate the Valhalla model (McManus, 1982). Data maintained over a four-year period were compared to baseline data prior to the counselees' involvement in the program giving the following findings: academic improvement, 73%; improvement in class attendance, 83%; and either no increases or reductions in the frequency of disciplinary referrals, 94%. In addition, counselor self-report data, along with reports from teachers, parents, siblings, or friends indicated improvements in school attitude, self-esteem, and study skill behaviors in over 85% of the counselees.

Schweisheimer and Walberg (1976) evaluted their peer counseling experiment by measuring 16 variables both at the beginning and at the end of the counseling

period. The variables and their reliabilities are listed in Table 1. A 72-item questionnaire using five-point Likert scales was completed by 122 potential dropouts (53 counseled and 69 controls).

Univariate F ratios were significant at or beyond the .05 level for attendance, $F(1,77)=4.11$, and for decisiveness, $F(1,77)=5.12$. The experimental group attended school more often following the counseling period than before (90.58% versus 87.40%), while the control group showed a decline in attendance (89.11% to 87.89%). The experimental group also outperformed the control group in decisiveness with an average of 1.52 points to a control group gain of only .38 points.

Although the impact of this experimental program was small, it was during the project's developmental period that the results were based. After the first year, many changes and refinements were made in the way the program was implemented (Schweisheimer & Walberg, 1976).

As reported by Kehayan (1987), POST's peer counselors made a significant, positive impact on their counselees. Through the use of standardized instruments and obsevational assessments it was determined that the counselees improved their grades, attendance, and self-esteem. It was also reported that they developed positive co-curricular activities

TABLE 1
Variables in Criterion Battery

Variable	Reliability[a]
General self-concept	.59
Body image	.66
Decisiveness	.71
Academic adequacy	.50
Interpersonal adequacy	.68
Emotional control	---
Equanimity	.76
Optimism	---
Locus of control	---
School attitude	---
Family relations	.70
Mutual support	.61
Teachers' ratings	.88[b]
Grade point averages	.56
Attendance	.39
Discipline referrals	.18

[a]Unless otherwise noted, numbers represent test-retest correlations based on an independent sample. Some coefficients are missing because of slight differences in the scales administered.
[b]Internal consistency reliability computed from the Spearman-Brown adjusted mean item correlation using z transformations.

and outlets. In addition, the outcome of surveys completed by the counselees revealed receptive and positive responses to the peer counselors.

In addition to measuring the effects of peer counselors on their counselees, it is also advised that program evaluations should include assessments on the peer counselors and the general climate of the school (Dougherty & Taylor, 1983; Rockwell & Dustin, 1979). By demonstrating the effectiveness of the total program through evaluation, counselors can increase the likelihood of the continuance and expansion of their programs to provide maximum benefit for the students and the schools.

Evaluation should also be an ongoing process rather than just an end-of-the-year task. McManus (1984) advised maintaining behavioral records on all peer counselor tasks and periodically summarizing the collected data. He also noted that informed, qualitative data, such as notes from teachers, parents, and others are just as important as hard data.

CHAPTER III
Summary and Conclusions

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the most effective methods of selection and training of peer counselors and to investigate the methods of evaluation most appropriate for a school peer counseling program. In so doing, the desire was to ascertain the most effective means for a trained peer counselor to help bring about positive changes in counselee self-concept, attitudes about drug and alcohol use, and attendance.

Research of the literature revealed a variety of selection and training processes. Selection processes include the use of sociometric peer nomination devices, teacher and/or counselor recomendations, personal interviews, student application, or a combination of two or more of these methods. Certain personal dimensions of potential peer counselors are also taken into consideration. These qualities include maturity, emotional status, dependability, and effectiveness in relating to peers which is shown by the student's ability to be caring, understanding, and empathic. The ability to communicate, both on a one-to-one basis as well as in a group, is desirable.

Training, the most important component of a successful peer counseling program, involves the use

of instructions, modeling, behavioral rehearsal, and
immediate performance feedback. Specific skills which
are taught and practiced in most programs are
reflective listening, communication, communicating and
understanding feelings, decision-making,
problem-solving, and tutoring. In addition, some
programs provide instruction on topics such as ethical
standards/confidentiality, group development and
dynamics, and community awareness and resources.
Depending on the goals of the school program, further
information is provided on specific topics such as
drug and alcohol abuse, suicide, peer relationships,
family relationships, and other adolescent concerns.

The amount of time devoted to the training
process ranges from a few weekly sessions to semester
courses with workshops presented throughout the year.
Most often, the amount of training offered depends on
funds set aside for the program, the amount of time
the school counselor can spare, and the availability
of qualified trainers.

Evaluation methods used in peer counseling
programs are pre-post, comparison groups, and
self-report. Using questionnaires, a self-report
method, has been used most often probably because this
enables the counselor to design measures of desirable
program outcomes at a local level. Although the
comparison group method provides the most conclusive

evidence of the effectivness of a program, it is also
the most time consuming for the counselor, requiring
extra time to select a control group and use
appropriate statistical procedures to analyze the
resulting data.

Conclusions

According to the results of the programs
evaluated in this literature, some conclusions can be
drawn. First, regarding the selection of students as
peer counselors, there is a common element. Although
the selection process may differ, one personal quality
is sought in potential peer counselors; the ability to
enter into a caring, understanding, empathic
relationship. More research is needed to determine
the most effective method of selection, but it is felt
by this writer that the selection process should
include at least two of the following: application,
to show desire on the student's part; a high score on
a device such as the Interpersonal Relationship Rating
Scale, which can indicate effective interpersonal
relationship skills; and teacher recommendations.

Although the validity of the subjective types of
evaluation can be questioned in the three most
successful programs found in this literature, they can
be used now to make a point. The most extensive
training programs, which comprise a semester course
for credit as well as additional workshops throughout

the year, can be found in the Valhalla model, the PAL
Program, and the POST Program. Each of these programs
can boast of an extensive curriculum as well as highly
qualified trainers. The centralized approach to
training on Vancouver Island can also be placed in
this category. This suggests a need for thoroughness
of training on preferably a semester basis.

A review of the literature does not reveal a
particular selection or training procedure most
conducive to positive changes in counselee
self-concept, attitudes about drug and alcohol abuse,
or attendance. Further research needs to be conducted
to determine particular procedures which, if followed,
will yield positive results.

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