Educational Consultation: An Examination Of Strategies For Dealing With Consultee Resistance

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess perceptions of the consultant’s effectiveness in dealing with consultee resistance. The findings support the appropriateness of literature-recommended techniques for dealing with resistance.

In a discussion of in-service teacher education, Tyler (1971) reminded the reader that exposure to new materials alone should not be the sole pathway to professional growth; the importance of the acquisition of new skills and understandings is paramount. Consultation appears to be the primary vehicle through which inservice training goals in education might be attained. Although not using the term consultation, Rubin (1971) summarized succinctly the belief system upon which consultation for the inservice training of teachers rests,

\[\ldots\] as educational reform occurs, teachers will need to acquire new skills; \ldots these skills can be mastered only through methodical and intelligent training; \ldots it is possible to
Dougherty (1990) listed several major types of consultation. Of those types, consultee-centered case consultation (Caplan, 1970) appears to be appropriate for use in educational settings. The primary goal of consultee-centered case consultation is consultee acquisition of knowledge and skills so that he or she may function more effectively with a current client as well as future, similar clients. The consultant has formal training in a particular professional specialty, whereas the consultee may or may not have professional training. The relationship is assumed to be voluntary, collaborative, nonhierarchical, and confidential.

It is generally assumed that the consultee is open to and motivated toward change. In many instances, however, such is not the case. In consultee-centered case consultation, as well as in other types of consultation, consultants may encounter resistance.

According to Dougherty (1990), consultee resistance is defined as a failure of the consultee to constructively participate in the consultation process. Piersel and Gutkin (1983) defined resistance as failure of the consultee to engage in problem solving. Some examples of types of consultee resistance include requests for personal counseling, stereotyping, and consultee concerns that consultation will take too much time and uncover consultee’s problems or inadequacies (Randolph & Graun, 1988). Although not using the term resistance, Caplan (1970) suggested verbal focus on the client, the parable technique, and nonverbal focus on the case as techniques that later have been regarded as appropriate approaches to handling certain types of resistance.

Providing personal counseling or therapy is not recommended as an appropriate technique for dealing with consultee resistance (Caplan, 1970). Although confrontation is not specifically addressed in the literature, Caplan (1970) encouraged consultants to accept the consultee’s view. Thus, it would appear that confronting a consultee with his or her resistant behavior is not an appropriate approach for handling consultee resistance.

It is acknowledged that consultee perceptions of the consultation process are of paramount importance. According to Dougherty (1990), "the perceptions of the consultation process by the parties involved are critical in determining the success of consultation" (p. 5).

In a previous study (Randolph, Patterson, Barnes, & DeLoach, in press), the senior author of the present study investigated counseling students’ perceptions of consultant effectiveness when the consultant used various techniques for dealing with consultee resistance. Specifically included were (a) literature recommended techniques, (b) counseling techniques, and (c) confrontation techniques. Participants were graduate community counseling majors who had completed a graduate course in consultation and undergraduate counseling majors who had not completed such a course. The participants were shown a five-minute videotaped vignette in which (a) the consultee requested personal therapy, (b) the consultee stereotyped the third-party client, and (c) the consultee expressed negative perceptions of the consultation. The consultant in each tape dealt with these manifestations of consultee resistance using one of the three techniques listed above. The participants then responded to four statements regarding the effectiveness of the consultation. The overall results indicated that subjects responded differentially to the conditions. The senior author also reported a significant difference between (a) the literature recommended techniques and confrontation techniques conditions, and (b) the counseling and confrontation techniques conditions. A non-significant difference was observed between the literature recommended techniques and the counseling techniques conditions. On the other hand, the graduate students were more likely than their undergraduate counterparts to recognize that use of the counseling techniques was inappropriate for dealing with resistance. The authors concluded that resistance management training was needed for professionals who assume consultant roles.
Randolph et al. (in press) were interested in determining the generalizability of the findings of the previous study to the school setting. Accordingly, these authors reviewed the literature to determine whether a study like the previous one by the senior author had been conducted with graduate and undergraduate teacher education majors. Being unable to locate such a study, the authors decided to conduct a study with graduate and undergraduate teacher education majors as subjects.

Subsequently, the present investigation was designed to assess perceptions of the consultant’s effectiveness when using (a) literature recommended techniques, (b) counseling techniques, and (c) confrontation techniques for dealing with consultee resistance. Since the graduate-level teachers were experienced, expectations were that they would respond differentially to the three different techniques. Also in question was whether the undergraduate teacher education majors would respond differentially to the three different techniques.

**Method**

**Participants**

A convenience sample of 51 graduate (G) level teachers and 81 undergraduate (UG) teacher education majors volunteered for the study. The 132 participants were stratified by degree level and randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions. In each condition, there were 17 G and 27 UG. Undergraduates were drawn from a population that was: 85% female, 15% male, 87% Caucasian, and 13% African American. Graduates were drawn from a population that was 75% female, 25% male, 86% Caucasian, and 14% African American. Teachers and teachers-in-training were chosen for this study because many of them have or will have the opportunity to utilize consultation services.

**Procedure**

Each participant in the investigation viewed a video depicting one of the three experimental conditions. Each video was made in a room equipped with a stationary-mount video camera; scripts for the three conditions depicted concerns expressed by classroom teachers and were identical except for variations in the approach to dealing with consultee resistance. Each video included a five-minute vignette in which (a) the consultee requested personal counseling/therapy, (b) the consultee stereotyped the third-party client, and (c) the consultee expressed the negative perception of consultation that it would take too much time and uncover consultee problems/inadequacies. Independent judges were used to validate the content of the videos, as well as the equivalency of videos across all three conditions. Actors were second-year graduate students. The same actors were used in all three videos. Judges and participants were blind to the hypotheses being investigated.

In condition one, the consultant used the literature-recommended techniques for dealing with each resistance scenario. In response to the consultee request for personal counseling/therapy, the consultant responded with (a) open-ended leads, summarization, and paraphrasing to keep the focus on the third-party client; (b) supportive refocus leads; and (c) referring and referral leads (Randolph & Graun, 1988). In condition two, the consultant responded with counseling leads to encourage personal affective exploration and encouraged the development of a counseling relationship. In condition three, the consultant used the direct confrontation approach. Neither counseling techniques nor direct confrontation were recommended in the literature for managing consultee resistance.

After viewing each of the three segments of videotape, each participant responded to four statements indicating to what degree (a) the consultant’s behavior was appropriate, (b) the consultant was skillful, (c) the outcome of the consultation is likely to be positive, and (d) he/she would be likely to choose this consultant if in need of assistance. Each participant rated the four statements on a 5-point Likert-type scale where 5 equaled the highest and most positive rating and 1 signified the lowest and least positive rating.

**Results**
A 3 x 2 (treatments x graduate-undergraduate status) multivariate analysis of variance MANOVA was used to assess overall differences on the four dependent variables. The MANOVA (Table 1) indicated a significant main effect for treatments \( F(8, 182) = 5.34, p < .001 \). The MANOVA did not reveal a significant difference for graduate-undergraduate status, or an interaction between treatment conditions and graduate-undergraduate status.

### Table 1

**MANOVA Summary**

<table>
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<th>Source</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatments</td>
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<td>26.35</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduate/Undergraduate</td>
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<td>2.38</td>
<td>ns</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treatments x Graduate/Undergraduate</td>
<td>8,246</td>
<td>.76</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2

**Scheffes Group Comparison Summary for Treatment Conditions**

| Comparison | Variable 1 | | Variable 2 | | Variable 3 | |
|------------|------------|-----|------------|-----|------------|
|            | Means      | p   | Means      | p  | Means      | p  |
| A vs. B    | 4.20/3.61  | < .05 | 4.22/3.56  | < .05 | 3.81/3.41  | < .05 |
| A vs. C    | 4.20/2.20  | < .05 | 4.22/2.33  | < .05 | 3.81/1.98  | < .05 |
| B vs. C    | 3.61/2.20  | < .05 | 3.56/2.33  | < .05 | 3.41/1.98  | < .05 |

**Note.**

A = literature recommended techniques; B = counseling techniques; C = confrontation techniques

Variable 1 - The consultant’s behavior was appropriate.

Variable 2 - The consultant was skillful.

Variable 3 - The outcome of the consultation is likely to be positive.

Variable 4 - If I were in need of help, I would choose this consultant.

### Table 3

**Comparison of Graduate and Undergraduate Means for Technique by Dependent Variables**

| Comparison         | Variable 1 | | Variable 2 | | Variable 3 | |
|--------------------|------------|-----|------------|-----|------------|
| GR vs. UG for A*   | 4.04/4.36  | .32  | 4.08/4.36  | .28  | 3.59/4.02  | .43  |
| GR vs. UG for B*   | 3.59/3.63  | .04  | 3.61/3.51  | .10  | 3.37/3.46  | .09  |
| GR vs. UG for C*   | 1.94/2.46  | .52  | 2.10/2.56  | .46  | 1.76/2.20  | .44  |
Note. Where GR = graduate; UG = undergraduate; A = literature recommended techniques; B = counseling techniques; C = confrontation techniques

Variable 1 - The consultant’s behavior was appropriate.

Variable 2 - The consultant was skillful.

Variable 3 - The outcome of the consultation is likely to be positive.

Variable 4 - If I were in need of help, I would choose this consultant.

Scheffe’s group comparisons were computed for treatments (Table 2). For all four dependent variables, the literature recommended techniques condition received significantly higher ratings than the counseling techniques and the confrontation techniques conditions, and the counseling techniques condition received significantly higher ratings than the confrontation techniques condition.

Discussion

The MANOVA indicated that graduate level teachers and undergraduate teacher education majors responded differentially to the three conditions (i.e., literature recommended, counseling, and confrontation). The overall means for the literature recommended techniques condition were significantly higher than those of the counseling techniques and the confrontation techniques conditions and the overall means for the counseling techniques condition were significantly higher than those of the confrontation techniques condition for all four of the dependent variables.

The overall findings provide some support for the consensus that the literature-recommended techniques for dealing with consultee resistance were appropriate. Although there was no overall statistical significance on the MANOVA for graduate/undergraduate status (Table 1), a comparison of graduate and undergraduate ratings for the confrontation techniques condition reveals differences of .35 to .52 Likert scale points across the four dependent variables (Table 3). It was apparent that graduate subjects were considerably more likely to recognize the inappropriateness of using confrontation techniques when functioning as a consultant. Conversely, undergraduate subjects were less likely to recognize the inappropriateness of confrontation as a technique for dealing with consultee resistance. Accordingly, it was recommended that both graduate level teachers and undergraduate teacher education majors receive some training in how to effectively utilize a consultant.

That the confrontation techniques condition was rated significantly lower overall than the other conditions for all group comparisons (Table 2) served to support the consensus of the consultation literature, since subjects recognized the inappropriateness of using confrontation techniques to deal with consultee resistance. The overall finding of a significant difference between the three technique conditions supported that of a previous study. On the other hand, in the previous study, a non-significant difference was observed between the literature recommended and the counseling techniques conditions; whereas in the present study, a significant difference was observed. It appears that teachers were more likely than counselors to recognize that providing counseling is not an appropriate means of dealing with consultee resistance. Perhaps the counseling approach is so ingrained in counselors that they are less likely to recognize its inappropriateness as a tool for dealing with resistance.

The present study implied a continued need for training to explicitly address appropriate roles of consultants. Since the consultant’s method for dealing with consultee resistance has a significant impact upon perceptions of consultant effectiveness, it is apparent that consultants should be trained in resistance management. Specifically, for a basic consultation course, role-
play activities are suggested for helping students acquire skills for dealing with consultee resistance.

Future studies might include other types of consultee resistance, as well as other techniques for its management. It should be noted that the present study involved videotaped simulations, the advantage of which is a high degree of experimental control. On the other hand, the trade-off that accompanies the use of such simulations is a reduction in generalizability. The use of actors to portray a consultant and a consultee in videotaped vignettes may contribute to more readily identifiable differences than might be the case in real life situations. Accordingly, recommendations were that future studies of a similar nature be done in field settings. Of course, one must recognize that there may be limits on the types of studies that may be done in field settings. For example, dealing with consultee resistance using techniques that are contraindicated in the literature may raise ethical concerns.

References


