Bridging the Gap Between Home and School: Behavioral Consultation

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Introduction

The issue of lack of parent involvement with elementary aged students has become a national issue. All children will be in need of an excellent education to be successful in today’s world and in the future. Often times learning differences and motivational factors create a barrier for students to access the education and curriculum provided to them at the school they attend. Connecting schools, family and the community can be very helpful for the school who is working with the student who is struggling academically (Griffin & Steen, 2010). Often times the roles for school counselors are complex within this domain of school-family-community partnerships (Griffin & Steen, 2010). Moreover, families can be more successful in addressing the barriers for students by working with the schools and the community within a strong partnership (Taylor & Adelman, 2002).

Existing Strategies

Effective models exist to bridge the gap between family involvement and student academic success. These include assigning interactive homework, creating opportunities for the student’s family to come into the classroom and school environment, family volunteers and utilizing the student’s family as educators (on careers or various interests) (Walker, Shenker & Hoover-Oempsey, 2010). Additionally, forming a positive, welcoming relationship with the family can be facilitated by use of a welcoming staff for new students (Walker, Shenker & Hoover-Oempsey, 2010). Fostering sensitivity to nontraditional caregivers can also help this positive relationship, helping teachers learn about their students through contact with families and communicating the importance of parent involvement to the families (Walker, Shenker & Hoover-Oempsey, 2010).
Bridging the Behavioral Gap Between Home & School

Parent involvement can be in the form of receiving direct parent education and consultation from a school counselor. Benefits of parent education and consultation include improved parent-child relationships, improved behavior at home and school, improved accepted responsibility, parent involvement in the school and improvement in school achievement (Vernon, 2009). Family and parental involvement within the academic domain of their children has been positively correlated with many outcomes including but not limited to higher academic achievement, school attendance, students’ motivation to take on assignments and aspirations for higher education (Holcomb-McCoy, 2010).

Many research studies demonstrate that high levels of parental involvement increase the likelihood that the student will go to college (Holcomb-McCoy, 2010). When parents, educators and others in the community all work together to help the student learn as best they can and all take responsibility for helping the child learn, the gap between home and school becomes smaller. This is called the theory of overlapping spheres of influence and can be applied to consulting with a parent to assist them with developing a system to help their child complete their homework effectively during these formative years of their academic lives (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010).

Behavioral Consultation

A form of this type of consultation can be within the domain of behavioral consultation. In behavioral case consultation, a school counselor acting as a consultant would provide a direct service to a consultee (parent) that would help manage the behavior of a client (their student) (Dougherty, 2009). The school counselor would first have to do an effective analysis to
determine what the issue is and from there determine a course of action that fits best, possibly using behavioral technology such as a token economy system if motivation and staying on track appears to be the issues at hand.

**Importance of Homework Skills**

A major issue that this behavioral consultation model between home and school would be effective with addressing is the issue of completing homework, reading assignments and project in the elementary school levels. Developmentally, at the elementary level, many children have difficulty sitting and completing homework assignments. There are strong links between homework completion and overall academic performance (Theodore, Dioguardi, Aloiso, Carlo & Eccles, 2009). Homework is important because it teaches children how to manage distractions, increases self-efficacy, increases responsibility for learning, helps students learn how to set goals and learn how they work most effectively (time of day, space they work in, etc) (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011). Self-regulation in terms of homework develops over time with a great deal of practice starting in the elementary years. Students can be trained to increase their self-regulation during homework assignments (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011). This self-regulation could be taught with the guidance and motivation of a token economy system or form of positive reinforcement system.

School counselors can reach out to parents who are having difficulty helping their students complete their homework by consulting with the parent and setting up a behavioral intervention for this problem. These types of behavioral plans would be used for students who do not necessarily have an Individualized Education Program (IEP), but rather lack the proper motivation levels needed to complete the assignment.
**Token Economy Development**

Including positive reinforcement for completion of homework and assignments could increase the likelihood of the homework being completed for a given night. Moreover, this could include a token economy where a student earns a sticker or another form of a token for each part of the assignment, time spent on the assignment or each single assignment completed. The details of the behavioral intervention plan would be written up by the school counselor and accepted by both the parent and if the student is developmentally able to agree informatively, the student should agree to the plan as well. At the end of the earned tokens, the student could earn an item or free time at home. This would have to be an item that is reinforcing to the student so their motivation to complete the assignment or homework is increased.

**Looking Forward**

Homework and assignments teach even very young students how to manage their time and focus on the task at hand. Homework also helps students apply what they have learned in class to a specific assignment. Learning early in their academic career how to self-regulate and how to utilize effective time management can benefit a student dramatically in their future. Making the positive steps early on to develop these skills can be extremely beneficial to the student as they move on to middle school, high school and college/the workplace.

Additionally, the time a student does their homework is a great opportunity for students to have a dialogue with their parents about what they are learning in school. This has potential to strengthen the student-parent relationship in relation to school experiences. However, if the
child is resisting completing their homework then this valuable opportunity for the parent and child is not occurring.

School Counselors’ Role

It is vital for parents to be involved in their child’s educational, career and socio-emotional development. School counselors can help bridge this relationship to help the student academically. School counselors are in a perfect position to bridge the gap between the school and the home. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model as well as the new School Counseling Competencies name school counselors as the leaders in family-school collaboration (ASCA, 2004).

The School Counselor Competencies include the school counselor’s role in “collecting, analyzing and interpreting relevant data including process, perception and results data to monitor student behavior and achievement” (ASCA, 2004). School counselors’ involvement in students’ behavioral management in the home in relation to assignment completion is very appropriate and in alignment with the ASCA National Model as well as the Massachusetts Model for Comprehensive School Counseling programs. School counselors have extensive training in behavioral modification and behavioral models in terms of helping students academically and socially.

School counselors are also trained to have a high level of multicultural competency which would benefit the school counselor working with families and parents of diverse backgrounds to find a system that best fits them and their student. Some families may not be open to behavioral consultation from a school counselor due to their cultural background while other families may welcome the consultation. School counselors employ the ability to be
sensitive to others beliefs, needs and desires. A school counselor can consider how parents may feel about their child’s difficulty with homework and how this is impacting their daily life.

Conclusion

School counselors are concerned with matters related to the academic, career and personal/social development of the children they work with. As previously supported, homework is critical in development of self-regulation and further learning of material amongst other benefits. This is also a way that school counselors can create partnerships with parents and families. The topic of behavioral consultation in terms of completion of homework lies within the area of expertise for the school counselor and would serve many benefits for the students’ academic, career and personal/social development.
References


