

Enhancing Student Aspirations: A Goal for Comprehensive Developmental Guidance Programs

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The purpose of this paper is to explore the role comprehensive developmental school guidance programs can play in enhancing rural student aspirations. The basic premise is that aspirations begin early and that they develop throughout life. Therefore, all students, beginning in Kindergarten, can be helped to build positive aspirations by the many adults in their environment. These adults (parents, teachers, administrators, counselors, community members) can work together in comprehensive developmental programs managed by school counselors. In this paper, developmental guidance is explained and research is reviewed which supports the notion that developmental guidance programs do in fact address the needs of rural students.

INTRODUCTION

This paper proposes that enhancing student aspirations is an important goal of developmental guidance programs in schools. It suggests that school counselors can organize the efforts of teachers, administrators, parents, community members, and people in business and industry to enhance student aspirations and that a K-12 comprehensive developmental guidance program is an appropriate framework for intervention.

DEVELOPMENTAL GUIDANCE

The philosophy undergirding developmental guidance is one that is congruent with the goal of enhancing students' aspirations. According to Perrone (1982), there are certain attitudes which are the focus of developmental guidance programs. These include (1) a sense of worth, (b) a sense of uniqueness (feeling satisfied with oneself), (c) a sense of direction (taking charge of one's life and striving to achieve), (d) a sense of self-sufficiency (developing the necessary skills for a chosen lifestyle), (e) a sense of belonging, (f) a sense of potency (being self-motivated and accepting responsibility for one's life), and (g) a sense of commitment.

Developmental guidance programs are preventative, rather than remedial/crisis-oriented, in their approach to school counseling. A comprehensive, K-12 developmental guidance program helps enhance student aspirations by working with all students regarding their academic, personal/social, and career/vocational growth and development. Developmental guidance operates from the assumption that, even though environmental obstacles exist, children have the potential for positive growth, development, and personal achievement (Gysbers, 1988;

Myrick, 1987; Wilson, 1986). Developmental guidance programs try to help all students overcome obstacles as they grow.

Traditional school counseling programs have too often focused on one-on-one, crisis-oriented counseling. Traditional programs are too often unplanned, unstructured, and remedial in their approach. In such programs counselors have been limited to working with a few problem students, helping them through crisis situations, rather than working with all students and helping them develop comprehensive life skills. Comprehensive developmental guidance programs are different in that the developmental needs of *all* students are addressed through classroom guidance activities, small group counseling, and individual counseling. Developmental guidance programs are structured, systematic, accountable, and proactive. This approach requires the involvement of administrators, teachers, school staff, parents, and members of the community, with the school counselor serving as the hub. The school counselor is responsible, therefore, for managing the total program, but not for implementing the many facets of the program. All of these people work together to enhance student aspirations by helping students develop academically, make responsible decisions, resolve conflicts, take risks, develop leadership skills, develop positive self-esteem, behave responsibly, and make informed choices about their careers and lifestyles.

The Wisconsin Developmental Guidance Model (Wilson, 1986) offers specific examples of how counselors, administrators, school staff, parents, and community members participate in guidance programs. For example, their efforts are strengthened and integrated regarding such topics as learning styles, tests and measurements, self-esteem, goal-setting, conflict resolution, the developmental process, creating a positive learning climate, recognizing rapid changes in technology, interpersonal

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relationships, problem-solving skills, individual differences, and career decision-making. School counselors coordinate programs that use school/community partnerships to create awareness of the world of work. Community members serve as mentors and role models for students who are interested in specific occupations. School counselors work with parents to enable them to assist their children with study skills, homework, taking responsibility, and building positive self-esteem.

ADULT ROLES

School counselors in developmental guidance programs make teachers, administrators, parents, and community members aware of the particular needs of students in each school. Through such mediums as teacher inservice training, grade level meetings, subject area meetings, administrative meetings, parent education, and community presentations, the school counselor helps these groups define their roles in meeting student needs and raising student aspirations. For example, teachers plan and implement classroom guidance units with the counselor. These units may focus on such topics as self-esteem, motivation, locus of control, identifying personal strengths, understanding feelings and behaviors, and decision-making. Teachers are also encouraged to integrate such concepts into the on-going classroom environments and curricula. A classroom teacher while teaching reading, might do the following, have students make collages about themselves by cutting out self-descriptive letters, words, and pictures from newspapers they read. Talking about this activity would allow the teacher to introduce concepts such as self-esteem, personal strengths, and understanding of feelings and behaviors.

Administrators participate in developmental guidance programs by creating accepting, positive atmospheres in schools, encouraging participation of entire school staffs, parents, and community members. Principals can schedule time for small groups, classroom guidance, teacher inservice activities, and advisor/advisee, peer helper, teen theatre, substance abuse, career education, parent education, and community mentorship programs: each of which can come under the umbrella of a comprehensive developmental guidance program. In addition, principals identify and/or provide the necessary space and supplies for programs.

Parental involvement is especially important. If parents and counselors communicate well, counselors can encourage parents to continue to promote the goals of guidance programs at home.

Finally, community members play significant roles in developmental guidance while rounding out the total student environment. As role models, community members can provide classroom guidance units or school assemblies on such topics as career and vocational roles, work responsibility, social responsibility, family responsibility, and community responsibility. Community members can also be mentors and invite students to observe or work with them outside of the schools.

Leadership possibilities can also be facilitated by community members.

REVIEW OF RESEARCH

There is a paucity of research in developmental guidance but what exists supports the notion that developmental school guidance programs do in fact address the needs of rural students. Myrick, Merhill, and Swanson (1986) studied fourth graders' attitudes toward school. They provided classroom guidance units on feelings, behaviors, attitudes, making positive changes, being lovable and capable, and looking for personal strengths. They found that students who participated in the units were more likely than students who did not participate to:

- (a) finish class assignments on time;
- (b) say kind things to others;
- (c) believe that others were interested in what they had to say;
- (d) be good workers at school; and
- (e) think that school made them feel happy and successful.

Teachers viewed students who participated in the classroom guidance units, more than those who did not, as

- (a) working hard on their assignments;
- (b) following directions and school rules;
- (c) accepting helpful corrections and suggestions;
- (d) getting along well with others;
- (e) liking their teachers;
- (f) being liked by their teachers;
- (g) believing that they were important and special persons;
- (h) liking to come to school;
- (i) liking who they were;
- (j) viewing school as making them feel happy and successful; and
- (k) knowing how to make friends.

Gerler (1985) reported that 11 out of 12 studies he reviewed demonstrated that counselor consultation with teachers improved students' classroom behaviors deemed necessary for academic success. Regarding self-esteem, Gerler found that four studies of programs conducting affective education in classrooms and small groups had demonstrated improvement in student self-esteem. In addition, he reported that 10 studies had reported the following improvement in specific students', teachers', and parents' abilities. Students had better relationships with peers, parents, and teachers. Teachers showed improved professional competence. Parents improved in parenting skills, parenting attitude, and communication skills. In another study, Jackson and Reeves (1978) found that parental support and involvement in the schools increased with the efforts of elementary school counselors. Also, Splete (1971) studied elementary school counselors as they consulted with classroom teachers regarding understanding their students and found that counselors did influence teachers' expectations for their students.

Regarding changing family structures, Roseby and Deutsch (1985) studied the effects of a social role-taking

group on children of separated and divorced parents. These children received training in social role-taking and assertive communication skills. The results indicated positive changes in beliefs and attitudes about being in divorced families. Having a positive attitude about your family increases self-esteem. Drake and Shellenberger (1981) and Holdahl and Caspersen (1977) suggested that programs for the entire school staff and student body were a way to create awareness of and acceptance of family changes. Breen (1987) conducted a study during which fifth grade students, their teachers, and their parents were informed about nuclear family, single-parent family, and stepfamily structures through classroom guidance units, small groups, teacher inservices, and parent meetings. These students more often said they liked to talk with their teachers and actually began making more contacts with their teachers after intervention. It appears as though they perceived increased involvement and understanding on the part of the teachers. In addition, these students felt less reported fear of abandonment by family members after intervention.

In a recent study, Quaglia and Breen (1989) found that Perrone's (1982) quality of life attitudes, described above, are generally perceived as important aspects of students with high aspirations. Rural students and educators were asked to describe attitudes of those who they thought had high aspirations (Table 1). Students who received special services (gifted/talented and upward bound) and educators, used different quality of life descriptors than a group of students, 9-12, who had not received special services. As a group, their responses seemed to focus more narrowly on education and money, and less often on quality of life attitudes which typified the gifted/talented and upward bound students. This suggests, then, that average students might have enhanced aspirations if they received more attention. Average students, who may be falling through the cracks in traditional school guidance programs, can be helped to

develop quality of life skills and goals in comprehensive developmental guidance programs which focus on the attitudes expressed by Perrone. Therefore, realizing that developmental guidance programs provide services for *all* students (including the average ones, who seem too often ignored in traditional guidance programs) we see that a comprehensive developmental guidance program can be a major factor in enhancing student aspirations.

CONCLUSIONS

Enhancing aspirations should be a goal of developmental guidance. School counselors who manage comprehensive, K-12, developmental guidance programs can help enhance aspirations by combining the efforts of many influential individuals in students' environments. All of these individuals should be involved in providing supportive environments in which students can develop positive self-esteem, take risks, and explore varied career and lifestyle options. McIntire, Marion, and Quaglia (1990) point out differences in the roles of counselors in rural schools from those of counselors in urban and suburban schools. These differences allow rural school counselors to be even more influential in enhancing student aspirations. Counselors in rural schools have the opportunity to develop strong supportive relationships with students because of generally smaller numbers of students and greater parent and community involvement than in large urban schools. Additionally, rural counselors, since they are likely to be isolated or the only counselor in a system, network with school counselors in other systems in order to combine resources and provide varied opportunities and experiences for students in schools and communities with limited resources and role models.

Rural students too often have low personal/social academic, and career/vocational aspirations. Developmental guidance is an umbrella for programs such as advisor/advisee, peer helper, teen theatre, substance

TABLE 1
Responses to: "I believe an individual with high aspirations will want to . . ."

Top 5 Responses from:			
Average Students	Gifted and Talented Students	Upward Bound Students	Teachers
graduate from high school	have high self-esteem	take charge of their life	have high self-esteem
make a lot of money	be self-motivated	have high self-esteem	be satisfied with self
have high self-esteem	constantly strive to achieve more	be satisfied with self	be self-motivated
graduate from college	be satisfied with self	be self-motivated	take charge of their life
attend college	take charge of their life	constantly strive to achieve more	constantly strive to achieve more

abuse, career education, parent education, and community mentorships which can enhance students' aspirations.

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