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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes that consultation meets the definition of an educational technology and examines reasons why it has not been utilized more frequently by practitioners. First, it defines an educational technology and compares consultation to exemplars of educational technologies (such as classwide peer tutoring) and to non-exemplars (such as whole language). The occasional misuse of consultation is noted but its lack of use is especially emphasized. Well-known reasons for this lack (such as a tendency to place the difficult-to-teach students in special education) are considered, but the politics of school reform are seen as a major reason for consultation's research-to-practice gap, as it is out of step with current reformist thinking. Ways in which contemporary education reform clash with the technology perspective in general and with consultation in particular are discussed, including: (1) the perceived greater value of local knowledge (insiders) versus that of technology developers (outsiders); (2) bottom-up versus top-down decision making (with consultation seen as fostering bureaucratic complexity and centralization); (3) egalitarianism versus expertise; (4) collegiality versus isolation; (4) revolutionary change versus incremental change; and (5) subjective knowledge versus objective knowledge. School reformers and technology developers are urged to learn from each other and to differentiate between collaboration and consultation. (Contains 49 references.) (DB)

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Consultation as a Technology and the Politics of School Reform

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Consultation as a Technology and the Politics of School Reform

Consultation has plenty going for it. It is well known (Friend, 1985; Kratochwill, Elliott, & Rotto, 1995; Zins & Erchul, 1995). It addresses important and timely service delivery needs (e.g., Kratochwill & Van Someren, 1985; Polsgrove & McNeil, 1989; Safran & Safran, this issue). It is regarded as worthwhile by consultants and teachers (e.g., Kratochwill, Elliott, & Rotto, 1995; Kratochwill & Van Someren, 1985). And, although still more can be learned about it (e.g., Alpert & Yammer, 1983; Gresham & Kendell, 1987; Meyers, Pitt, Gaughan, & Freidman, 1978; Sheridan, Welch, & Orme, this issue; West & Idol, 1987), research demonstrates that consultation can positively affect the lives of students and teachers (e.g., articles by Gutkin, Safran & Safran, and Sheridan et al. in this issue).

An Educational Technology

Consultation has plenty going for it because it is an educational technology. An educational technology is (a) an instruction, curriculum, or set of materials whose organization or structure is (b) sufficiently specific that it can be applied systematically and (c) implemented repeatedly in an identical manner in various settings (see Greenwood, Carta, & Hall, 1988; Pogrow, 1996). Greenwood et al. (1988) have written this about educational technologies: "There must be no ambiguity about what is to be implemented, when it is to be done, and how long it is to be done" (p. 260). The consistent, methodical application of educational technologies is greatly enhanced by the availability of high-quality materials that are prepared expressly for practitioners and are comprehensive in scope.

Behavioral consultation, as well as other variants of consultation, can be considered a technology because of their clear, logical, and systematic model and problem-solving process, their emphasis on student outcome data, and their insistence on connecting outcomes to process. Furthermore, many classroom-based interventions closely associated with

consultation are based on the applied behavior analytic literature, incorporating interventions that have been validated in university laboratories and public school classrooms for children and youth for more than three decades. Colleges and universities offer well-established training programs in consultation, and authoritative textbooks and practitioner manuals are available on the subject.

Widely known programs that qualify as technologies include Classwide Peer Tutoring (Delquadri, Greenwood, Whorton, Carta, & Hall, 1986), Success For All (Slavin, Madden, Dolan, Wasik, Ross, & Smith, 1994), and Direct Instruction (Gersten, Carnine, & White, 1984). Non-exemplars of educational technologies include team teaching, teacher assistance teams, whole language, and detracking; whereas one or more of these may have merit as expressing a moral imperative or a provocative idea, none represents a clear model or set of procedures or specific skills required of those who will implement them. Moreover, in contrast to consultation (and especially behavioral consultation), team teaching, teacher assistance teams, and the like cannot claim an empirical database demonstrating a cause-and-effect connection between the activities and improved student or teacher performance.

As Delquadri, Slavin, and Gersten and their respective colleagues can attest, educational technologies, like ancient Rome, are not built in a day. They demand from developers an uncommon willingness to undertake a project of invention that begins with a prototype, and then proceeds through several cycles of implementation, evaluation, and revision. Developers of exemplary technologies not only submit themselves to a time-consuming iterative process; they also subject their developing work to the careful, and not always kind, scrutiny of those who eventually will be its users -- teachers, administrators, parents, and students. Some developers enlist these consumers as active and co-equal partners in the invention process.

Abused and Neglected

Of course, this is not to say that all who implement consultation -- or any educational technology, for that matter -- do so properly and successfully. Many educational technologies are challenging to implement. In our own research on Mainstream Assistance Teams (e.g., Fuchs & Fuchs, 1988, 1989), we have observed the difficulty experienced by some consultants and teachers in identifying most important problems or generating appropriate treatment solutions, in establishing and maintaining the kinds of relationships with consultees that nurture commitment to the process, in collecting data that confirm or question the effectiveness of chosen interventions, and so forth. (On problems with implementation of consultation, see also Flugum & Reschly, 1994; Reschly & Ysseldyke, 1995; Zins & Ponti, this issue.)

More surprising than the misuse of consultation by some is the infrequency with which practitioners use it at all (a fact virtually unmentioned by the contributors to this special issue). In 1991, a national survey found that school psychologists spent only about 15% of their time doing consultation (Wilson & Reschly, 1995, Table 3). Apparently, the situation has not improved. In the course of writing this article, the first author asked five researchers in school psychology with expertise in consultation to estimate the time school psychologists spend consulting. Most estimates ranged between 10% to 20%.

Thus, although we have learned how to conduct effective consultation, most practitioners appear to use it sparingly, if at all. This disconnect between what we know and what we do is but another example of the gap between research and practice (e.g., Fuchs, Fuchs, Harris, & Roberts, in press; Gersten, Vaughn, Deshler, & Schiller, 1995; Gettinger, 1995), a phenomenon in which information of practical relevance "only sporadically [finds] its way into educational practice, even when the research has produced substantial knowledge

related to problems of real-world importance" (Malouf & Schiller, 1995, p. 414). The infrequency with which consultation is conducted is distressing for obvious and not-so-obvious reasons. An obvious reason: Given the high levels of student academic failure and misbehavior and the increasingly large number of students referred, tested, labeled, and placed in special education's already overcrowded classes (e.g., MAGI Educational Services, 1995), it is tragic that effective technologies like consultation are unused by many.

A second, not so apparent result of the research-to-practice gap is that it undermines support for the educational R & D enterprise. The failure to use consultation and other research-based best practices reinforces an impression in Washington that educational research is unimportant, irrelevant, and primarily for the amusement of the researchers. To wit:

If you leave [them] to their druthers, they will come up with largely an irrelevant research agenda. Congress still believes education research is more contemplative of the navel than anything that will benefit education. (William Biskey, aide to Senator Paul Simon and a member of the Senate education subcommittee, quoted in Wilson, 1987, p. A22)

Why Isn't Consultation Used More Often?

So, why isn't consultation used more often, when research shows incontrovertibly that it can be a powerful solution to many school-related problems?

Well-Known Reasons

There are at least a couple of related and well-known answers to this question. One: consultation tends to compete with special education placement. Many teachers believe that a difficult-to-teach student is better off in special education (e.g., Gottlieb, Alter, Gottlieb, & Wishner, 1994), irrespective of the availability of consultation services. Two: as an

important consequence of many teachers' preference for special education placement, school psychologists tend to spend much of their time testing students for special education eligibility. Another consequence is that, especially in big-city school systems, special educators have large direct service caseloads. Thus, many special educators and school psychologists who otherwise might wish to offer consultation services cannot do so because of job responsibilities and time constraints (see Gresham & Kendell, 1987; Huefner, 1988; Idol-Maestas & Ritter, 1985).

Politics of School Reform

But there is another reason for consultation's research-to-practice gap: As a technology, it is out of step with current reformist thinking. It clashes with a zeitgeist that might be described as a theology of liberation. Many reformers, for example, say students must be granted freedom from a narrow and mind-numbing basic skills orientation, which should be replaced by curricula that require higher-order thinking. The rhetoric of liberation calls for students to be unchained from teacher-led instruction and educated through child-directed inquiry; it asserts that the tyranny of biased standardized achievement tests, with their procedural-knowledge-only focus, be overthrown by adopting "authentic" assessments; and it urges that low-SES underachievers and special-needs children be set free from homogeneous and "segregated" classes through detracking and inclusion.

Further, liberationists say teachers are to be emancipated (a) from hyper-bureaucratized, authoritarian school systems through decentralized decision making, like site-based management, and (b) from subservient relationships with academicians/researchers by insisting on co-equal partnerships. Finally, researchers, too, are included in this vision of liberation: they are to be released from the strait-jacketed confinement of 20th-century scientific methods through use of naturalistic inquiry (a.k.a. ethnographic, or

phenomenological, or qualitative techniques).

With some of these objectives, we are in strong agreement. However, in the current climate, consultation's demonstrated effectiveness seems insufficient. Critics of consultation as a technology sometimes seem less concerned with ends and more concerned with means -- like roles and relationships. They take issue with the "how," neglecting the "what," namely, successful teaching and learning. This sort of attitude reminds the first author of a college coach who was fond of saying, "You'll play my way or it's the highway, regardless of whether we win or lose." Following is a handful of important ways in which tenets of contemporary education reform tend to clash with a technology perspective in general and consultation in particular.

Insiders versus outsiders. Many reformers claim that the local knowledge of practitioners (insiders) is more powerful than the general knowledge of technology developers (outsiders). According to Goldenberg and Gallimore (1991), Sizer (as reported in Goldberg, 1996), and others, practitioners must develop their own interventions because knowledge of details will be invariably different for each local site, and the standardized procedures of behavioral consultation, classwide peer tutoring, Success For All, and Direct Instruction cannot possibly accommodate such uniqueness and variance. For these reformers, technologies are useful only to the degree that they provide practitioners with "idea starters," or inspiration.

Bottom-up versus top-down. School reformers express antipathy for the top-down decision making of school bureaucracies, a sentiment in keeping with the importance they attribute to local knowledge. Reformers like Bolin (1989, as cited in Murphy, 1991) tend to see teaching as a moral activity, which should be controlled by teachers, not by administrators. Giroux (1988, as cited in Murphy, 1991) sees teachers as intellectuals who

should lead discussions about the nature and purpose of schooling. A bottom-up perspective calls for a devolution of control, the decentralization of decision making. Each school faculty, says Guthrie (1986), should become "the fundamental decision-making unit within the educational system" (p. 306, quoted in Murphy, 1991). For some reformers, consultation is like fingernails scraping against the chalkboard of change. Consultation has been charged with fostering "bureaucratic complexity and centralization" (Pugach & Johnson, 1989, p. 219), especially when conducted as part of district-wide prereferral activity by "specialists" (i.e., school psychologists and special educators) with an allegiance to the district's central office.

Egalitarianism versus expertise. Explicit in reformers' affirmation of practitioners' local knowledge and support for decentralized control is the objective to empower teachers. Indeed, reformers seem well aware of an inverse relationship between a shrinking of the bureaucracy and a growing need for teacher empowerment. Teachers should view themselves as professionals; others, including administrators and academicians, must treat them as such. An important dimension of teacher empowerment is the notion of egalitarianism. In the view of McCarthy and Peterson (1989, as reported in Murphy, 1991), teachers in restructuring schools "are professionals. . . . [They] participate in decisions affecting the entire school and frequently perform leadership tasks. To perform in this fashion they need to be more collegial, to develop more interdependence with peers, and to share their knowledge with others in a variety of settings" (p. 32).

According to Pugach and Johnson (1989), consultation's purportedly "expert" orientation works at cross purposes with this egalitarian, reformist spirit:

From the outset, consultants bring to the relationship the belief that their methods, which are often behavioral, are not in the repertoire of the classroom

teacher and are likely to be bypassed unless a consultant directs teachers to these interventions and demonstrates their potential. Although it may be unintentional, such a belief implies a lack of respect for the professional knowledge and expertise of the classroom teacher. (p. 221)

Some education reformers tend to describe special education and school psychology consultants as passé, out of step, and even destructive to the egalitarian, reformist spirit. Consultants are characterized as Big Brother or as the stereotypical Jewish mother; authoritarian or smotheringly solicitous -- in either case, controlling. Teachers, we are told, are often better off without consultants (e.g., Pugach & Johnson, 1995).

Collegiality versus isolation. The idea of a school as a "learning community"; the move towards site-based management, which requires teachers to engage in regular and important discussion with colleagues; teachers' increasing reliance on colleagues' judgments about the quality of their work (Murphy, 1991); all these changes are breaking down the traditional isolation of teachers and fostering collaboration in its place. Teacher Assistance Teams -- group-oriented and collaborative by definition -- are very much in synch with the new reformist spirit. One-to-one consultation, by contrast, is seen by some as unwittingly maintaining, if not promoting, teacher separateness and privateness. Such an approach is presumed to foster the following construction: "Johnny is the teacher's problem" instead of "Johnny is a student about whom all his teachers need to think together."

Revolutionary change versus incremental change. The Carnegie Forum has written, "We do not believe the educational system needs repairing; we believe it must be rebuilt to match the drastic change needed in our economy if we are to prepare our children for productive lives in the 21st century" (1986, p. 14). This reflects the views of many reformers that "fundamental revisions [are] needed in the cultural institutions of the larger

society, in the ways that educational systems [are] organized and governed, in the roles adults [play] in schools, and in the processes used to educate America's youth" (Murphy, 1991, p. ix). In short, the current system is perceived by many as beyond repair, in need of a complete overhaul, restructuring, revolution.

Critics of consultation rightly point out that consultants, by contrast, focus on discrete behaviors and skills, working child-by-child and teacher-by-teacher. They are not happy that the change facilitated by competent consultants is incremental in nature, modest in scope. Some detect in this relative conservatism an implicit endorsement by the consultation model of the traditional organization and structure of schools, roles of students and teachers, and so forth. Such apparent acceptance of the status quo may be seen by at least some reform-minded educators as a drag on their efforts or, worse, an expression of anti-change. One can almost hear some reformers yelling at consultants the way Ken Kesey did at the Merry Pranksters, "Get on the bus or off the bus."

Subjective knowledge versus objective knowledge. Technology developers proceed on the assumption that some sorts of knowledge, at least, are durable and can be validated, codified in texts, and taught with confidence in training programs. By contrast, many reformers seem to have fallen under the spell of a popular caricature of "deconstruction," believing that all knowledge is fragile and tentative, that claims to know are baseless and necessarily dogmatic. Moreover, we are told that reform-inspired initiatives, like child-directed inquiry, are unavoidably improvisational in nature and situated in unique, never standard, contexts.

Such [reform] initiatives cannot determine directly teachers' actions or decisions. Shulman has concluded that they can, at best, "profess a prevailing view, orienting individuals and institutions toward collectively valued goals, without necessarily

mandating specific sets of procedures to which teachers must be accountable." (Ball, 1995, p. 355, emphasis in original)

At a different level, consultation ultimately requires student outcome data to determine its effectiveness and worth. Much has been written about how to gather valid data on classroom behavior and academic performance. Further, behavioral consultants in particular may rely on well-established single-case designs to determine cause-and-effect relationships between interventions (independent variables) and student outcomes (dependent variables). The implicit epistemology shared by consultants is that knowledge can be assumed to be valid or true independently of individual human thought and action, and hence, to be objective knowledge. However, as indicated by Murphy (1991), some reformers are re-examining this understanding of knowledge. A new view holds that all knowledge is internal and subjective, that its truth depends on the values of the individual persons working with it and the unique context within which that work is conducted. Thus, some reformers may reject the very basis on which consultants define and measure their worth.

Consultation and the Zeitgeist: Is a Reconciliation Possible?

It is no small irony that consultation is effective and unpopular for the same reason: It is an educational technology. Consultation is effective because its developers have perfected over time a cogent problem-solving model and a set of methodical, replicable, and practical steps that leads participants through the process. Moreover, consultant and teacher have available to them an armamentarium of validated classroom-based interventions addressing a wide range of school-related problems.

Consultation is unpopular, and is used less frequently than it might otherwise be, because its model, methods, and interventions tend to be seen as out of step with, and even contrary to, the zeitgeist of education reform. This perception of consultation is both accurate

and inaccurate. It is misleading, for example, to describe consultation (including behavioral consultation) as a controlling process and denigrating of teachers' professionalism (see, for example, Pugach & Johnson, 1989, and Graden's, 1989, response). It also is incorrect to suggest that teachers can do quite well without special education and school psychology consultants, thank you very much. The suggestion that teachers have all necessary expertise to achieve whatever they wish is unsupported by research on school change. This research indicates that (a) many teacher- and school-initiated reforms have failed because they were not linked to resourceful consultants (see, for example, Gersten, Morvant, & Brengelman, 1995; Glang, Gersten, & Morvant, in press), and (b) it is important to establish co-equal partnerships of researcher/consultants and teachers (e.g., Joyce, Weil, & Showers, 1992). Thus, research indicates that successful reform making frequently requires an outside force working in partnership with school faculties to prompt, guide, and structure effective changes in practice (e.g., Donahoe, 1993; Hamilton & Richardson, 1995; McLaughlin, 1990; Sickler, 1988).

On the other hand, there appear to be fundamental differences separating consultation as a technology and the reformist zeitgeist. As indicated, many reformers believe that, by definition, educational technologies violate the importance of local knowledge, and consequently, technology developers cannot hope to achieve widespread adoption of their standardized inventions. For their part, developers express skepticism that teachers can develop their own instructional approaches, curricula, materials, and so forth, principally, but not only, because teachers do not have the time to do so (see Pogrow, 1996). On a more basic level, the two sides appear to disagree on the very possibility of knowledge. (Which does raise an interesting question: If knowledge is impossible, why teach?)

Given such differences, we are uncertain whether a complete reconciliation between

technology developers and school reformers is possible. Short of a complete resolution of differences, both sides can at the least learn from each other. Developers, for example, need to demonstrate greater concern for the indisputable uniqueness of situations in which teachers and students work. There are more than 15,000 school districts in the nation, and it is silly to think that a given technology can be used with equal effectiveness everywhere.

Technology developers might explore the "tolerance" of their inventions, that is, how much variance in implementation of the procedure is possible without diminishing the technology's effectiveness. Relatedly, practitioners might be encouraged to "customize" an invention in ways that may make it more meaningful and suitable. The effectiveness of the altered version can also be studied. Employing practitioners as partners in such an exploration may foster closer understandings and ties between "outsiders" and "insiders" and generate more viable solutions for teachers and students.

As for education reformers, we believe they can show greater recognition of the importance of accountability and of the centrality of student outcomes in any meaningful discussion of accountability (see Egner & Lates, 1975). For example, the reformist literature currently is saturated with collaborative solutions to all kinds of macro-to-micro school problems. Teacher Assistance Teams and team teaching are two such variants well known to special educators and school psychologists. Whereas many have touted their potential as prereferral interventions and inclusionary strategies, there is virtually no direct evidence that they strengthen students' academic performance or improve their school behavior (see Gottlieb et al., 1994). And this is no deep dark secret. In a recent publication of The Council for Exceptional Children (1991), several academicians and practitioners, who have given considerable thought to collaboration strategies, had this to say:

Research needs to differentiate between collaboration and consultation. (Joel Meyers)

Research is needed to understand what occurs when collaborative interactions are in place. (Marilyn Friend)

Some people look at collaboration and question why three people are needed to do the job of one. (Barbara Thomas)

We don't know what the key ingredients are to effective collaboration . . . and the processes that are most effective. (Anne Schulte)

Many studies citing the effectiveness of collaborative approaches on pupil outcomes have not separated the collaborative process from the actual intervention used, thus making it difficult to know what variable affected change and to what degree. (Lynne Cook)

Given the lack of knowledge about Teacher Assistance Teams, team teaching, and other variants of collaboration, does it make sense -- is it professionally responsible -- right now for individuals and professional organizations to push for their widespread adoption? Instead, shouldn't reformers be advocating for the urgent but careful study of these interesting ideas and their effects on student outcomes?

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