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Current Developments in School Counseling in Japan

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This article briefly reviews the history of school counseling in Japan and provides an overview of its current developments in schools and in the education system of Japan. The current development of the role of school counselors — and of school counseling in general — is examined from the perspective of the underlying educational and cultural framework. The focus of school counseling in Japan is to provide therapeutic interventions for students' psychological problems by individual counseling, and through support and care of students' overall mental health. The major variables influencing the development of school counseling are the policies of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology and the prefecture boards of education. The critical issues associated with effective implementation of school counseling are the diverse needs of schools in various regions, the central role and function of counseling and guidance within the school and community, and the integration of other student support personnel in the school of Japan. Future challenges and directions in the development of school counseling in Japan are discussed.

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Early Development

In 1947, the education system in Japan was reformed to extend compulsory education to the level of junior high school or lower secondary education for all Japanese students. Over 96% of junior high school students continue their study in high schools (Okano & Tsuchiya, 1999, p. 63). The prefecture board of education, the education authority of schools in Japan, developed a general guidance and counseling system for all students, which is still implemented today.

Historically, student guidance and counseling in Japan has been integrated into the daily work of teachers. Traditionally, teachers are generalists. Until recently, schools seldom employed specialists. With their knowledge and skills of child development and behavior, teachers were believed to be well placed to offer timely guidance and counseling to students (Okano & Tsuchiya, 1999). In a society that perceives teachers to be all things to all students and regards teachers as "almighty," they were expected to provide necessary support to students who have a variety of problems and concerns. Teachers, in fulfilling guidance and counseling role, made home visits (as they still do today). During home visits, they might provide consultation and advice to students and their parents.

Of course, problems arising in schools are beyond the capacity of a teacher to solve alone. Sometimes it was necessary to look for solutions from outside sources. Kyoto Counseling Center opened in the mid-1950s. It was one of the first centers of its type and still continues to provide counseling services at a new site. The counselors were school teachers and university professors who conducted individual counseling with parents, and often used play or sand play therapy with children. Many school counselors still use play therapy and sand play as part of their repertoire of skills with younger children.

In the 1950s, Carl Roger's *Client Centered Therapy* appealed to school educators and others in the field of mental health for its non-directive approach (Sato, 2007). In the 1960s, *Client Centered Therapy* became a focus for individual counseling and guidance in schools. The expression "counseling mind," which was used by the Japanese to describe such terms as "unconditional acceptance" and "empathy," became part of the educational and counseling terminology. "Counseling mind," as a counseling approach, had a sound basis, but did not solve all the problems in schools.

In 1965, the professional association known as the School Education Counseling and Guidance Association endorsed teachers for performing school counseling and guidance roles (Imai, 2006). Three other academic societies involved in school counseling and guidance also promoted teachers and educators doing school counseling and guidance. Each of these societies provided certification for school counseling.

In the 1970s, Jungian psychology became popular, primarily through the writings and works of the late Dr. Hayao Kawai, Japan's foremost clinical psychologist who made great effort in fostering school counseling. But it was not until relatively recently that a specific mental health expert called the "school counselor" has been employed part-time in schools to conduct individual counseling.

The School Counselor: A New Beginning in Education

In 1995, the Ministry of Education implemented a school counselor pilot project to address the increasing problem of students who refused to go to school and of family violence (Kawai, Otsuka, & Murayama, 1998). Traditionally, schools solved these problems internally, with the assistance from the boards of education. The Ministry of Education decided upon a revolutionary approach by bringing in outside experts of clinical psychology to help schools. These clinical experts were to be

called “school counselors” (Kawai et al., 1998). The title “*clinical* school counselor” had been discussed, but was later dropped in favor of “school counselor,” a term that is used in other countries.

Prior to the implementation of the school counselor pilot project, there was a tragic incident that shocked the nation. In 1994, a junior high school student committed suicide as a result of bullying. With subsequent mass media coverage highlighting numerous problems in schools, the education budget for the school counselor pilot project was increased considerably. In the first year of the project, 154 elementary, junior high, and senior high schools participated, and a school counselor was appointed in each of the schools. Of these school counselors, 134 were licensed clinical psychologists. The remaining counselors were psychiatrists and university professors from the designated fields of psychiatry and higher education (Kawai et al., 1998).

The number of participating schools increased dramatically each year, from 553 in 1996 to almost twice as many schools (1,065) in 1997 (Okamoto, 2008). In 1998, there was almost a tenfold increase compared with 1995 in the number of schools participating in the project. In addition, in 4,000 schools, retired teachers and youth group leaders in the community were designated as “advisors in the classroom for easing children’s minds.” These non-threatening and non-authoritarian advisors provided a therapeutic opportunity for children to express their feelings freely in a friendly setting and comfortable manner. In such a setting, children could be at ease and did not need to withhold any troubled feelings (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [MEXT], 2005).

Over the first few years, the schools and counselors gained experience as they adjusted to the demands and processes of counseling in a school environment. Each school has a unique culture and also

unique problems, pressures, and resources. The school staff comprises the principal, vice principal, and classroom teachers, including the nurse teacher (school nurse). Traditionally, all teachers assume responsibility for the well-being and welfare of their students, as explained above, and hence every teacher plays an important role in guidance and counseling. But teachers were now, for the first time, experiencing having to work with an outside specialist, a licensed clinical psychologist in the role of a school counselor, to provide more comprehensive counseling to the students. Unfortunately, without clearly defined roles and expectations for staff (including the counselor), the teachers' perceptions about and the school counselor's view of counseling often took different pathways. In the early period of school counseling, teachers' way of giving advice and providing guidance to students might differ significantly from the school counselor's therapeutic way of counseling and psychotherapy. This naturally caused problems. With little knowledge and understanding of school culture, the school counselor's transition from operating in a clinical setting to a school setting was complex and complicated (Yagi, 1997).

Over time, and with experience, the new school counselors enhanced their understanding of school culture and were then able to work more closely with teachers to support students' psychological health and mental well-being (Yamashita, 2004). School counselors now play integral and vital roles in counseling students and parents, providing consultation to parents and teachers, and lending support to a healthy school climate (Arabori, 2007; Kuramitsu, 2004b; Tabata, 2008; Yoshi & Yamashita, 2008).

Based on research that investigated the improvement of educational counseling systems in 5,500 schools in prefectures and designated cities, MEXT (2002) suggested that school counselors were effective in intervening and preventing the negative behaviors of children and youth,

and in providing consultation to parents and teachers, especially in how to better communicate with children.

Current Status of School Counseling

Part-time school counselors still work 8 hours per week in all junior high schools and in some kindergartens (Sugano, 2004). School counselors work in most elementary schools and in many senior high schools. The number of working hours may vary from different prefectures and even from different cities, depending upon the education budget that supports the number of school counselors in its schools.

Most school counselors continue to use a clinical model because they are trained and licensed as clinical psychologists. They are licensed by a private foundation, the Japanese Certification Board for Clinical Psychologists. Every five years, school counselors who are licensed as clinical psychologists must undergo professional development and earn enough credits to continue as school counselors for the next five-year cycle. School counselors are prepared and trained as clinical psychologists at the graduate school level and do not have any internship training in a school setting.

School counselors' approach to working with children and youth is generally psychotherapeutic. Due to limited working hours of 8 or less per week, the major functions of school counselors are psychotherapy and consultation (Kuramitsu, 2004a). Using their wide range of knowledge and skills, school counselors provide expertise in the student case conference team, participate in student guidance meetings, and coordinate peer support teams (Nakauchi, 2007). School counselors also work with the most difficult students.

Involvement of School Staff

In their primary and secondary roles, teachers and other school

personnel contribute to the overall guidance and counseling of students and to students' general mental health and well-being. Without close collaboration between school staff and school counselors, the service provided would be far less effective.

Students have a homeroom teacher at each grade and educational level, and the major role of the homeroom teacher is to provide frontline guidance and counseling related to students' academic, personal, and social growth and development. The teacher may refer students and their parents to the school counselor, the board of education's education counseling center, and the child guidance clinics for further counseling and consultation.

As regards teachers' secondary or adjunct roles, there are designated teachers in charge of specific guidance and counseling areas to support classroom teachers. A teacher is assigned to assist classroom teachers with students' discipline and educational life. Another teacher is appointed to help classroom teachers with students who have personal or social problems, and another teacher is selected at each grade level to aid classroom teachers with any students who encounter difficulties in academic studies. These teachers in charge of specific areas of guidance and counseling also make referrals to and work collaboratively with the school counselor (Fukuda, 2008).

Another significant person in the school is the school nurse. This person is employed full-time as a teacher in every school. The school nurse provides health services and "psychological first aid" to students. Students usually find the school nurse's health room relaxing and comfortable. The health room, being free from the structure and climate of the classroom, is a place where students can talk with the school nurse and be with their friends. The school nurse provides listening ears for the students and makes referrals to the school counselor. The school

nurse is thus a key person to liaise regularly with the school counselor (Fukuda, 2008).

Case Study Approach

Many school counselors use a case study approach in their work with children and youth. They may seek supervision on challenging cases (Kashima, 2008). In their training and in their clinical work settings, licensed clinical psychologists have often participated in supervision of difficult cases and can draw on this experience. School counselors regularly have to attend city or prefecture counselor meetings or participate in school counseling case study with supervision.

Bullying and school refusal are major challenging cases for school counselors. Within and outside the classroom, bullying continues to be a serious problem in schools today. With the widespread use of cell phones, cyber-bullying is now the major method of bullying. Cyber-bullying includes using abusive chain e-mails, creating underground fake school bulletin boards to pick on students, targeting multiple students by name calling, and using fake names and addresses when tormenting victims on the Internet. The school counselor needs to counsel students who are bullied and students who are bullies (Arabori, 2007). A case study approach can be most helpful here.

Related to bullying is the problem of school refusal because many bullied students refuse to go to school (Nathan, 2004). The term “school refusal” includes situations of which students absent themselves from school for a variety of reasons. It includes the Japanese term “futoko,” which is a more global and inclusive word for school refusal or school non-attendance. The school counselor provides consultation to parents whose students refuse to go to school (Arabori, 2007; Kuramitsu, 2004c), and also works closely with students who come to school but refuse to go to class. The school counselor makes home visits to give advice,

guidance, and support to students of school refusal and to consult with their parents on school non-attendance.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology: An Extended View of School Counseling

In a hierarchical education system, MEXT determines the direction and development of school counseling. MEXT's current view of school counseling is comprehensive and inclusive of a wider school community. According to MEXT (2005), one of the major priorities in education is to strengthen the educational counseling system at the elementary school level. In addition to increasing the number of school counselors at the elementary school level, there were to be "advisors" who were available to children and parents in 910 elementary schools to augment the educational counseling system. There were to be "cooperators to promote student guidance" who were also available to elementary school children and their parents in 210 regions and provided collaboration with community organizations to strengthen the school's student guidance system.

One of the priorities in the Education Reform Plan for the 21st Century is to improve the school counseling system with an increased number of school counselors (MEXT, 2005). The challenge for the future development of school counseling comes from the added value placed on counseling, whether in its present structure or in its more comprehensive extension.

Future Challenges and Directions in the Development of School Counseling

A continuing challenge for school counselors is to define precisely their role and functions and the school counseling parameters in working with teachers, especially those whose adjunct role is guidance

and counseling. The prefecture board of education dictates where teachers and school counselors are placed (Okamoto, 2004). When new teachers come or school counselors change to work in other schools, the challenge of school counselors is to understand each school's culture, establish a good working relationship with its teachers, and get to know the students (Kuramitsu, 2004a; Sato, 2007).

The ongoing challenge in the development of school counseling in Japan is the limitation of time (Sato, 2007). With the current financial situation, the time for school counselor is being curtailed in some schools. In some situations, their work is expanded to include providing services to another school but within the same limited time. The number of school counseling cases has increased and has extended to include the growing child abuse cases and special education referrals (Kanaoka, 2008). In many situations, the school counselor goes to a school only once per week. When there is an urgent problem and the school counselor is not there, this presents significant difficulties, and can compromise the school's ability to respond promptly (Sato, 2007).

According to news reports, domestic violence and divorce rates are rising; family crises and single-parent households are becoming increasingly prevalent (Nathan, 2004). Labor shortage is mounting and the number of immigrant populations whose first language is other than Japanese are growing. With these escalating family and societal problems impacting on children and youth, school counselors face other impending challenges. They become involved in counseling of children and youth from other cultures (and consulting with their parents). They need to face the challenge of developing multicultural competencies and sensitivity (Yagi, 1998; Yagi & Oh, 1995).

With the introduction of school social workers in 2008, school counselors now need to expand their skills to work productively with

another student support person at the school. There may, at times, be conflicting or overlapping roles and functions between the school counselor and the school social worker. This may change the direction and development of school counseling.

Another current issue is the matter of licensing. There are two major groups of psychologists, one comprising licensed medical psychologists who work primarily in hospitals, and the other consisting of licensed clinical psychologists who work in hospitals, clinics, and schools. In 2001, there was a study to determine the feasibility of combining these two licenses into one national license for mental health counselors. Having one national license would enhance the status and development of school counselors. However, in 2005, the proposal for making one national license was suspended due to the opposition from the medical association.

The future development of school counseling is currently being considered. A school counseling and guidance committee in MEXT is contemplating future directions that counseling and guidance may take in schools. School counselors who have a license as clinical psychologists can remain school counselors and recognized by MEXT. However, some regions and schools have insufficient school counselors who are licensed clinical psychologists. Para-professional counselors from the academic societies involved with school counseling and guidance also provide school counseling. Several academic societies involved with school counseling and guidance are coming together and proposing one type of certification for school counseling to MEXT. Without a national school counselor license, the status and development of school counseling will be limited.

In a conservative society and under a hierarchical education system, development in school counseling has been slow. However, it has moved beyond the provision of only one-on-one counseling to closer

collaboration between the counselor and teachers to support the mental health care of all students (Murayama, 2008). School counseling is heading toward a crossroad with new challenges from the introduction of school social workers, the proposal for another type of school counselor certification, and ongoing school and societal changes. Undoubtedly, the future direction of school counseling in Japan will continue to be shaped in response to the current and future needs of society and of the school community.

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日本學校諮商的近期發展

本文概述日本學校諮商的歷史，並綜論在學校和教育制度層面，日本學校諮商的近期發展。文章從日本的教育和文化理念，剖析學校諮商和學校諮商師的近期發展。日本學校諮商的重點是透過個別諮商，為有心理問題的學生提供介入治療，並為照顧學生整體心理健康而給予關懷和支持。文部科學省和縣教育委員會的政策對學校諮商的發展有關鍵的影響。至於學校諮商能否有效實施，則與各區學校的不同需要、學校和社區內諮商輔導的主要角色和功能、與其他學生支援人員的協作等因素相關。本文最後探討日本學校諮商面對的挑戰和發展方向。