Evaluation of Japanese School Counseling Program: Qualitative Case

Study in a Japanese Junior High School

Steven Randolph Zaffuto
(Received September 30, 2004)

Abstract

The Japanese school counseling program has undergone considerable developmental transitions since the implementation in 1995. The organizational structure of the Japanese educational institutions has presented unique and significant influential factors regarding the establishment and implementation of program design and delivery. Within any organization the consideration of cultural, individual, economic, and political differences are essential in ensuring the success of the program outcome. Although the organizational structure, approaches and vocabulary pertaining to guidance do vary in comparison to western fundamentals, educational reform created by the recent surge in psychological and social developmental problems confronting Japan has shown that not only do basic definitions and concepts transcend international barriers but has also provided an opportunity for Japan to contribute an eastern perceptive and approach to a westernized institution of practice.

Key words : School Counselor, Guidance, Program Evaluation

With the recent increase in demands for guidance on issues pertaining to academic, social, psychological and career development for the average Japanese junior high school students, it has never been more essential for the Japanese educational system to abandon traditional models for an effective comprehensive guidance program that will encompass all relevant resources to meet the challenges of today's student population. Challenges facing the student population have become intricate and mutlicausal extending beyond the confines of the educational community. It would be naive and inaccurate to suggest educational institutions as the sole reason for the increase of developmental problems, as it would also be a mistake to assume the institutions themselves obtain the appropriate resources and personal to address the current challenges facing Japanese youths.

An integrative and collaborative approach can provide the services necessary for addressing the interrelated challenges facing the schools, families and communities. Research from Seto and Ishikuma (2002) shows that there are needs for a strong connection between internal and external resources to ensure that programs are equipped to provide comprehensive services. Accountability is fundamental in devising a program that inspires shared responsibilies from each stakeholder in a collaborative effort, to eliminate learning obstacles, close the learning gaps and to achieve school goals (Dahir & Stone, 2003).

In order to establish a collaborative approach it is necessary to consider elements of program implementation on both levels of program design and delivery. It is essential to consider design components that concentrate on planning and policies elements by addressing the "when, why, by whom, and on what authority" a program is

implemented. Application elements are addressed through program delivery components focusing on the "how" planning and policies are applied within the program (ASCA, 2003). Through focusing on the implementation of program design and delivery of an established guidance program the present explorative case study will attempt to bridge the gap among program stakeholders in efforts to achieve the intended outcome of providing a guidance system which effectively addresses the interrelated challenges facing the student population, schools, families and communities.

Takano and Uruta (2002) recommend a reconstruction of program design to increase accessibility by enhancing collaboration between psychological and educational professionals to create a psycho-education system of support. Seto (2000) addresses several areas of program design and delivery by identifying various stakeholder levels and activities that are essential for the coordination of a team support program. The need for a joint effort among stakeholders is further endorsed by Iechika and Ishikuma (2003), by addressing the functions of a coordinating committee for psychological and educational services for junior high schools. Results suggest a similar program implementation trend of collaborative actions concentrating on consultation, team support, grade and school level adjustments, and the promotion of psychological and educational service management.

In a study involving collaboration between school counselors and school nurses, results showed that role conflict is an influential factor in determining cooperation styles. The school nurse's degree of willingness to cooperate and actively participate in the school counseling system was in correlation to the degree of satisfaction with expected school counseling activities (Ito, 2000). Nakashima, Harada, Kusano, Ota, Sasaki, Kanai, and Kageyama (1997) confirm that depending upon the school level, either elementary or middle school, teacher's expectations towards the school counselor's role, knowledge, nature or characteristics and systems vary. In a self-evaluation study of school clinical activities of school counselors (Ito, 1999), results illustrate that the school counselor's job responsibility guidelines have established a sense of relief among students and guardians. However, due to a high pride complex among faculty members, the school counselor's responsibility guidelines have produced feelings of anxiety and resistance.

To achieve a system level of guidance, further exploration into areas of management, leadership and organizational application are necessary (Iechika & Ishikuma, 2003). An extensive literature review of school counseling program evaluation has revealed only moderate information regarding both program design and delivery. Reports have not allowed for consideration of demographic influences and stakeholders interaction, therefore not allowing for a broader efficient observation. The obtained results advocate a systematic collaborative approach and address specific operational components that have an effect upon this collaborative system. To guarantee further educational advancements educational organizational assessment and dynamics will require additional consideration (Seto, 2000).

Since the implementation of a school counseling program in the mid 1990s application of school counseling services were considered in the developmental stage leaving schools with little alternatives but to develop inconsistent school counseling program design and delivery based upon a trial and error approach. A reorganization of school counseling program application focusing on collaboration among all stakeholders has been recently endorsed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (Kurihara, 2005). While earlier research is effective in presenting universal results, consideration of demographics and a focus on the collaboration of all stakeholders is essential to determine how the results were realized. A qualitative research approach was applied which is beneficial in understanding the organizational culture of a school that influences the success of a program (Sarason, 1982).

Method

Subjects

This case study was performed at "T" middle school in the Hiroshima prefecture of Japan. The school was established 12 years prior and has increased from 474 students to 1,100 students with 14 classes. School counseling services were implemented four years prior, in the spring of 1999. The school counselor has attended this school

once a week from 9:00 am until 5:00 pm on Wednesday for three years. The school counselor is a member of the Japanese Certification Board for Clinical Psychologist and has worked as a school counselor for seven years.

The interview participants consisted of six teachers from the *seito-shido* guidance committee, school counselor, principal and vice-principal, and a school nurse. The school counselor was a male in his mid forties, the *seito-shido* guidance committee members consisted of 4 males and 2 females ranging from the ages of thirty to forty, the principal a male in his mid fifties, the vice-principal a female in her mid forties and the school nurse a female in her mid forties. Each participant was chosen for his or her exclusive relation to the overall student guidance system.

Procedure

Interviewer

The interviewer was a second year PhD candidate from the United States of America with previous experience as a school counselor. The case study was performed over a two-week period. Research consisted of individual audio taped interviews, interview transcript review, observation of school counselor activities, participation observation in the *seito-shido* guidance committee weekly meeting procedures, program documentation review, and literature review in both English and Japanese.

Content of Questions

To avoid miscommunication due to a possible language barrier, all questions were written in both Japanese and English and interviews were audio taped for further review. To develop an understanding of the program logic, rationale, objectives, and accountability, interview questions focused on program design, delivery and outcome. Questions were all open-ended with a slight variation in accordance with the appropriateness for the participant's position. The following is a sample of the *seito-shido* guidance committee questions.

1. What are the goals or objectives of the *seito-shido* guidance committee and school counseling support service program?
2. How has the *seito-shido* guidance committee and school counseling support service program achieved these goals and objectives?
3. What has been the short-term and long-term outcome of the *seito-shido* guidance committee and school counseling support service program?
4. Has there been any unexpected outcome of the *seito-shido* guidance committee and school counseling support service program?
5. How have you been able to meet the needs of the students through the *seito-shido* guidance committee and school counseling support service program?
6. What type of administration/regional support has the *seito-shido* guidance committee and school counseling support service program received?
7. In your opinion what are the components that should be considered for evaluation in the *seito-shido* guidance committee and school counseling support service program?

Results

Analysis

To establish validity and objectively identify the participant's answers or any additional emerging themes from the interviews, written transcripts of the interviews were made in Japanese. Two volunteer female Japanese graduate students that have experience and education in Japanese school counseling assisted as independent reviewers. The 2 independent reviewers were instructed to examine the transcripts and to identify the answer or any additional comments made by the interview participants. The reviewers then evaluated all identified answers and comments as

positive, negative or neutral. Criterion for positive and negative evaluations were described respectively as, any beneficial or adverse influence to the students, teacher, guardian, and administration in relation to the school counseling and the *seito-shido* guidance program.

Identified and evaluated comments from all 3 reviewers were compared and classified as congruent, incongruent or singular. Comments that were identically evaluated as positive or negative by two or more reviewers were considered congruent and conversely comments that were not positively or negatively evaluated by two or more reviewers were consider as incongruent. Comments recognized and evaluated as positive or negative by only one reviewer were classified as singular. Incongruent and singular topics were considered subjective; therefore, to ensure validity and reliability these comments were eliminated from the analysis.

From the combined results of the 3 reviewers there were a total of 73 congruent comments that formulated a total of 23 topic categories (see table 1). The 23 topic categories were ascribed to the following three categories pertaining to program delivery and design: consultation, existing services (delivery) and administrative support (design). Comments involving program delivery consultation occupied 51% with a total of 37 comments. Program delivery existing services congruent comments maintained 33% totaling 24 comments. The remaining congruent comments of 16% pertained to program design administrative support producing a total of 12 comments.

Table 1 Number of Comments by Participates in Three Categories

Category		#	Topic Category	Participants				
				Principal	Vice-Principal	School Counselor	Shido	Nurse
Program Delivery Consultation	51%	1	Teacher, SC, Nurse Collaboration	*2+		2+	*1-/3+	1+
		2	Team Approach	1+	1+	2+	5+	1+
		3	Community Support	1+	2+		1+	
		4	Family Support		1+	1+		
		5	Organizational Weekly Communication	1+		1+	2+/2-	1+
		6	In-service Training			1-/1+	1-	
		7	Open School Environment		1+		1+	
Program Delivery Existing Services	33%	8	Problem Awareness		1+	1+		2+
		9	Counseling Approach	1-				
		10	Teacher Perceptive	1+		1+	1+	
		11	Support Services		1+	2+	3+/1-	1+
		12	Testing and Assessment			1-		
		13	Forecast /Projection			1+		
		14	Safe Environment				1+	1+
		15	Prevention				1-	
		16	Privacy				2+	
		17	Service Awareness				1+	
Program Design Administrative Support	16%	18	Program Development	1-/1+				
		19	Administration Support	1+		1-	1+	
		20	Data Collection		1-	2-		
		21	Program Evaluation			1-	1-	
		22	Certification			1-		
		23	School Counseling Professional Association Establishment			1-		

Note*
The + sign indicates a positive evaluation

The − sign indicates a negative evaluation

Quantity distribution of the 18 comments obtained from the administrative participant group(principal and vice-principal), were 10 positive and 0 negative for consultation, 3 positive and 1 negative for existing services and 2 positive and 2 negative for administrative support. For the school counselor participant's 20 comments, there were 7 positive and 1 negative for consultation, 5 positive and 1 negative for existing services and 0 positive and 6 negative for administrative support. The *seito-shido* teacher participant group had a total of 28 comments which resulted as 12 positive and 4 negative for consultation, 8 positive and 2 negative for existing services and 1 positive and 1 negative for administrative support. The nurse presented a total of 7 comments with 3 positive and 0 negative for consultation, 4 positive and 0 negative for existing services and 0 positive and 0 negative for administrative support.

Program Delivery Consultation

The outcome distribution from all participant groups shows a higher concentration toward program delivery with an unequal balance of comments pertaining to program design. Evidence of a team approach and collaboration components within the area of program delivery consultation, can be seen through the combined total of 18 positive comments. Both the principal and one *seito-shido* teacher expressed the ideal of team approach and collaboration as "the combined efforts among all teachers to establish cooperation in job position and responsibility." In addition, to ensure the establishment of solid cooperation between stakeholders several participants mentioned the importance of respecting professional and privacy boundaries.

Negative results totaling 4 were reflected in both the communication and in-service training components. According to the principal, the vice-principal and a *seito-shido* teacher, communication is achieved through "open discussion in the weekly *seito-shido* meetings and by utilization of the written weekly *seito-shido* guidance report." In addition, the principal expressed the importance of communication as a means of "providing support among teachers so that teachers are not overwhelmed with pressure." However, evidence of concerns for communication were recognized by a *seito-shido* teacher who commented "while our written communication is efficient, often group members forget to follow through with verbal communication causing a failure in the established action plan."

While discussion with the school counselor is encouraged, in-service training has been at a minimal at this school. The school counselor addresses in-service training by stating, "although other school's teachers and guardians have wanted lectures, I think this school does not want lectures. Each school has a different policy on how to utilize a counselor, I think this is a problem." On the other hand, several teachers and the principal explained that most training services come from resources within the community and the broad of education.

Program Delivery Existing Services

Components of support services, which entail services that help to solve student problems, obtained a high concentration of 7 positive comments, counseling approach and prevention received 2 negative comments. This suggests that the operational components to meet the student's needs are established, but the theoretical element is lacking. The principal expressed frustration in the counseling approach applied to non-attending students, "Japan has accepted the U.S. approach to gently encouraging students back into school, but we should be more demanding and push them harder."

Several *seito-shido* teacher's articulated concerns in regards to proactive direct services such as assessment, prevention and development. One *seito-shido* teacher emphasized that "the program helps to solve the problem after it occurs, but we need to help students learn how to avoid a problem before it occurs." Although the program is responsive and utilizes various levels of expertise, an underline concern was the importance of assisting the students in developing coping skills.

Program Design Administrative Support

A significant interest was the counterbalance in negative results obtained within the program design administrative component. Each topic category received 1 or more negative comments with a noteworthy deficiency in positive comments. This becomes more distinctive when compared with the two program delivery elements of consultation and existing services.

Topic categories of program development and administration support generate similar areas of concern in regards to stakeholder's investment, with both topic categories receiving 1 negative comment each. According to the principal, program development is "the yearly plan which includes program goals and organizational functions." The lack of shared and equal decision contribution to the yearly goals and organizational functions from all stakeholders is apparent in the principal's comment that, "approval of the teacher's established program plan and goals will be

accepted only after corrections have been made based upon the principal's suggestion." An additional comment from the principal attributing to this effect is "while teacher's objections are considered, every teacher must comply with the established plan or the teacher will be fired."

Data collection and program evaluation topic categories accumulated the highest level of 5 negative comments. The lack of data collection and program evaluation has limited the school counselor and the *seito-shido* teacher's ability to establish accountability of program outcome. A barrier in data collection was presented by all participant groups which reported that many "non-attending students enter school occasionally to partake to counseling or club activities only to return home upon completion." While partial participation is viewed as a crucial step in the process of becoming fully acclimated back into the school environment, ambiguousness of the student's actual status has limited a thorough and accurate representation of program result data. Although the school counselor and administrative teachers appreciated the significant contribution that program evaluation has on program development, both groups also believe that due to the under, developed state of the current school counseling and the *seito-shido* guidance program, program evaluation would be premature. The school counselor expressed that "because the program direction is given by the principal there is no standardized manual approach that could be evaluated."

Topic categories of certification and school counseling professional association establishment obtained 2 negative comments introducing the concerns for a lack in professional establishment among school counselors. According to the school counselor, "in Japan, psychological certification is not considered important and national recognition has not been established." Furthermore, "the school counseling job is not limited to people with certification. People in similar fields or people without certification are eligible to work as a school counselor."

Discussion

The outcome distribution of positive and negative comments from both the administrative and operational *seito-shido* teacher participant groups show a higher concentration toward program delivery with an unequal balance of comments pertaining to program design. This lack of balance resembles the enigma embedded within the original implementation approach of school counseling services in 1995. School counselors were dispatched from the MEXT to various schools, yet teachers and administrators were unaware of the program logic or goals. As to be expected, this created a vague program introduction placing many schools in a position of uncertainty limiting the efficient utilization of the resources provided. This is not an uncommon situation, according to Brinkerhoff (1989), due to vague and inefficient training of principles and techniques many organizations report insignificant benefits of newly implemented programs despite resource input.

The higher concentration towards program delivery could represent the stakeholder's urgent attempt to understand and effectively apply a well-intended program. Inconsistency among various schools and stakeholders could result without a thorough understanding of program design elements such as policy, logic and goals, thus decreasing the success in providing appropriate services for the targeted population. To make certain that collective efforts of social and educational intervention achieve the desired effects, sound and responsive program planning is necessary (Owen & Rogers, 1999).

The lack of knowledge and experience with school counseling services, counseling approaches and conflicts in ethical and legal practices has created barriers in program delivery and design. One of the primary reasons for the utilization of a school counselor is to develop an external perceptive of the current problems confronting the students as well as enhancing the teacher's knowledge and training from an outside resource. Since the beginning of implementation in 1995, there has been no universal job descriptions or program design, so many school counselors have been forced to comply with administration demands or program goals, hindering their ability to maintain a neutral or objective position. According to Rye and Sparks (1991), "Any program may be dictated by administrative needs if the basic philosophy and rationale for the program is not fully developed and understood by a community support system" (p.263).

The school counselor's results of this study revealed a more equal distribution indicating an awareness of both the administrative and operational aspects of the program. The dual concentration could be attributed to the fact that the school counselor is obliged to adhere to both the Japanese Certification Board for Clinical Psychologist and the MEXT guidelines, therefore enhancing program awareness. In addition, the school counseling education and training allows for a broader range of recognition for the fundamentals involved with establishing a comprehensive program that entail various program stakeholders.

On the contrary, the current configuration between the Japanese Certification Board for Clinical Psychologist and the MEXT has also accounted for the school counselor's limitation in actively participating in policy development. Maintaining adherence to policy guidelines from both interest groups has narrowed the boundaries of job responsibilities. Occupying the status of a separate entity from the school infrastructure affords minimal time and freedom to perform duties that encompass a comprehensive school counseling program. Consequently, insight or awareness of local community issues and reform is difficult to achieve.

While in most Japanese schools, program logic, goals and policy are determined by the administration, maintaining annual consistency with these organizational principles is not always possible. In the Japanese educational system principals, vice-principals and teachers are transferred every three to five years. In addition, the acquisition of school counseling services is considered yearly within the annual budget. Apprehension of program investment within the stakeholders appeared through the shared concern of the possible change in the program foundation upon the inevitable transfer of the current administration.

In a majority of Japanese industrial organizations there is a traditional consensus approach, referred to as *ringi*, in which every division head must give an official stamp of approval before a new policy or procedure is implemented. While this process is notorious in regards to lengthy systematic change, once a joint decision is determined throughout all organizational levels, proper implementation and collaboration of services to achieve the intended outcome is practically guaranteed. Approximately 9 years ago, the Ministry of Education (now MEXT) thrusted a new division of school counseling services into an educational infrastructure that lacked the required knowledge or experience for successful implementation. It is possible to view this laissez-faire approach as a means to promote the utilization of the *ringi* approach to encourage and empower the school level administration to take a proactive role in program development.

The acceptance and utilization of a school counselor within the formerly established *seito-shido* guidance program has proven to be a challenge on both administrative and operational levels. When traditionally one's role as a teacher has been defined not only as an educator but also as a support provider, the liberation of these roles to another entity creates a sense of ambiguousness and apprehension. Defining professional boundaries while continually expanding one's knowledge and insight of the essential principles underlining the framework of the professional counter-part has created an opportunity for professional maturity among all stakeholders. Despite the struggle with acceptance of prominently westernized principles and practices, and to maximize the school counseling resources; administrators, teachers and school counselors have united efforts resulting in the emergence of an amalgamate guidance program which will have no choice but to continue to evolve in accordance to the needs of the targeted population, the students.

References

American School Counseling Association. (2003). *The ASCA national model: A framework for school counseling programs.* Alexandria, VA: Author.

Borders, D. L., & Dury, M. S. (1992). Comprehensive school counseling programs: A review for policymakers and practitioners, *Journal of Counseling & Development*, **70**, 487-498.

Brinkerhoff, R. (as cited in Owen, 1999). Evaluation training in Business and Industry. *New Directions in Program Evaluation*, **44**, 5-19.

Dahir, A. C., & Stone, B. C. (2003). Accountability: A M.E.A.S.U.R.E. of the impact school counselors have on

student achievement. *ASCA Professional School Counseling*, **6:3**, 214-221.

Iechika, S., & Ishikuma, T. (2003). A coordination committee for psychological and educational services in a junior high school. *Japanese Journal of Educational Psychology*, **51**, 230-238.

Ito, M. (1999). Self-Evaluation of school clinical activities by school counselors: Relation between their activities and some characteristics of schools. *Japanese Journal of Educational Psychology*, **47**, 521-529.

Ito, M. (2000). Evaluation and opinions of school counselors by school nurses working with them. *Japanese Journal of Counseling Science*, **33**, 30-39.

Kurihara, S. (2005). *The enrichment of school counseling and training of teacher-counselors* (in press).

Nakashima, Y., Harada, K., Kusano, K., Ota, N., Sasaki, E., Kanai, A., & Kageyama, H. (1997). What teachers of compulsory education want from school counselors. *Journal of Japanese Clinical Psychology*, **15**, 536-546.

Owen, J. M., & Rogers, J. P. (1999). *Program evaluation forms and approaches*. Australia: Allen & Unwin.

Rye, D. R., & Sparks, R. (1991). Planning and management: Keys to a successful K-12 counseling program. *The School Counselor*, **38**, 263-267.

Sarason, S. (as cited in Murray, Levitov, Castenell, & Joubert, 1987). *The culture of the school and the problem of change*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Seto, K. (2000). Influence of organizational characteristics on high school counselors' efficacy. *Japanese Journal of Educational Psychology*, **48**, 215-224.

Seto, M., & Ishikuma, T. (2002). Coordinating team support for high school students: Ability and power factors. *Japanese Journal of Educational Psychology*, **50**, 204-214.

Takano, A., & Uruta, U. (2002). Student counseling as a service: From the point of view of help-seeking behavior. *Japanese Journal of Educational Psychology*, **50**, 113-125.