

# Consultation and Collaboration in Special Education Programs: Adapting the American Model to the Saudi Arabian Context

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## Abstract

In Saudi Arabia, families of special needs children deal with several specialists who contribute to the development of parents' skills and instruct them about the proper care for their children. However, some families experience pressure due to contradictory information and conflicting suggestions from specialists regarding the condition and diagnosis of their children. This research investigates the concept of consultation and collaboration as applied and researched in the USA and emphasizes its importance among workers and specialists in special education programs. The research analyzes several aspects of consultation and collaboration, differentiates between each one, shows their importance and illustrates the scientific techniques used in this process. The research concludes that officials should focus on activating the role of consultation and collaboration in special education programs. It also reveals the importance of training workers in special education in pre-service, with field work on employing the several techniques of consultation and collaboration. Moreover, in the specific context of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, specialists must build on the American experience in the application of consultation and collaboration and aim for scientific planning and implication and continuous assessment of consultation and collaboration.

**Keywords:** Consultation, Collaboration, Special Education, workers in special education.

## 1. Research background

Counseling and collaboration involve the formation of groups and the exchange of ideas and proposals, which contribute to the development of communication skills and teamwork. The importance of such skills has increased over time as have the complexities and requirements of the environment. This process has required members of a community to interact objectively and perform collective work based on cooperative and reciprocal interactions. The main role that educators play in helping students to learn, communicate, collaborate and work effectively is through schools which should provide a structure that meets students' needs and helps them develop their own personal skills. Friend and Cook (1996) noted that the beginnings of counseling date back to the areas of health and mental management; for instance, Caplan (1970) trained team members to mentor adolescents with mental disorders prior to World War II. Caplan's work has contributed to the development of mental health and school health services. Encouraging results have been found from providing counseling services through the school's psychologist. Advisory roles have been expanded to encourage teamwork relationships, and to strengthen these relationships to help teachers, all employees and parents deal with future problems and come up with urgent solutions (ibid.).

During the 1950s, a professional dialogue led to the development of strategies for the provision of advisory services. By the mid-1960s, school counseling was included in psychic summaries and mentors began to develop the concept of psychosocial services. From the advisory service, the orientation in the collective working relationships of mentors and psychologists reflects the interest in the influence of these individuals, groups and systems on students (Friend & Cook 1996; Dettmer, Thurston & Dyck 2005)

Since the beginning of the fifties, the consultant's plan was to provide services with interest in the literature of special education and there are examples of counseling in the field of speech therapy. Programs for people with hearing and visual impairments also appeared with early emphasis on consulting the teacher of students with hearing disabilities and behavioral disorders. The behavioral movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s fueled the desire for alternative models to intervene and use time and other resources. Tripartite consultation involved using behavioral principles in the field of school. This tripartite model is the basic mode in which many models and consultative methods have been built in modern times (Friend & Cook 1996).

The early literature on special education contained references to the most important methods of training teachers in order to serve students with disabilities at the primary school level. In 1970, the model of the teacher's program was developed using a consultant teacher to serve students in the intellectual disability class and to put it into practice (Dettmer, Thurston & Dyck 2005).

Therefore, the seventies were one of the active periods in the field of special education, at a time when positive aspects of support for intensive private education emerged together with the federal policy industry for disabled students, and technical developments in the education practices of students with disabilities. In the mid-1970s, counseling began to be seen as an important factor in serving students with special needs. Special education became a key element in the development of counseling and teamwork in schools (Friend & Cook 1996)

By the mid-1980s, counseling had become one of the most important educational trends to serve students with disability. The interest in school counseling increased in the 1980s, when the National Task Force, sponsored by the Education Unit of the Council of Disabled Children, sent a report to the Education Departments recommending teacher counseling services within the continuum of special education services. Guidance was provided to develop consulting options, to define the role of the consultant, pre-service and in-service requirements, and to adopt a number of programs to develop the team. The report included a list of specialists in special education with experience in school counseling. The report also included a list of publications that illustrated the importance of school counseling. In 1987, members of the University of Texas School Counseling Research and Training Project sponsored the Austin School Counseling Seminar, entitled "Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Theory, Research, Training and Practice of School Consultations." The panelists and the participants came together for a period of three days for the purpose of discussion and planning. One of the outcomes of the seminar was a paper presented by the group on the most important issues affecting the future of school counseling (Dettmer, Thurston & Dyck 2005)

In 1990, the teacher education unit of the Council of Disabled Children organized a workshop entitled "School Counseling and teamwork programs and practices", which was a major event at the Children's Council Conference held in Toronto. These social movements and school development movements in the 1980s and 1990s worked to activate the role and importance of consultation and teamwork, which contributed to an increase in the number of journals, periodicals studies, extension programs, federal grants, training plans, as well as some teacher preparation programs which were applying school counseling and teamwork (Dettmer, Dyck & Thurston 2002). McLaughlin and Boettcher (2009) emphasized that the issue of counseling and teamwork has received increasing attention in the past decade amongst special education teachers and higher education teachers, due to efforts to find integration classes in special education schools and programs.

Despite the evolution of the subject of counseling and collective action in America and other developed countries in the past decades, the situation in the Arab world is still lacking in the use of such subjects, especially among those working in the field of special education such as teachers (special education, public education), psychologists, social workers, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and speech therapists who work together to achieve common goals to serve students with disability. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to identify what counseling and collaboration are and the most important points of success in applying them to ensure the quality of teamwork in the field of special education. Furthermore, this research tries to bridge the knowledge gap, given the lack of research in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the topics of counseling and teamwork, as discussed in the following section.

## **2. A brief overview of counseling and collaboration in Saudi Arabia**

To-date only a few researchers such as Abunayyan (2006, 2007) and ALBattal (2013) have discussed the importance and application of the concepts of counseling and collaboration in the Saudi Arabian context. Abunayyan pointed out that the Arab World in recent years has come to pay attention to the education of students with special needs in the least restrictive and most comprehensive environments of services. However, the current reality of private education services in the Arab world is still traditional and depends on the individual work of specialists, whether in institutes or specialized centers, private classrooms and resource rooms (Abunayyan 2006). Although these places are considered as educational alternatives in the provision of special education services, they do not allow the interaction of all specialists in the field of education, especially in the education of people with special needs. Abunayyan attributed this lack of collaboration and teamwork to the scarcity or lack of teacher training programs, whether in the field of special education or general education or in other related fields such as psychology, occupational therapy, natural and social services. Indeed, he noted that the workers in the given field were not given the opportunity to interact and participate in decision-making and hence could not provide a comprehensive service, to the detriment of the student (ibid.).

In the same context, ALBattal (2013) explained that the teaching and evaluation of goals for students with learning difficulties in the regular classrooms is one of the most important factors leading to the success of the educational integration process in Saudi Arabia. Since teachers in regular classrooms may lack the necessary information about pupils with learning disabilities and their teaching methods may be limited by virtue of specialization, it is necessary to raise the level of interaction between those teachers and teachers of children with special needs through the process of consultation and teamwork. Consultation and teamwork will allow teachers of all disciplines to exchange ideas and opinions, enrich knowledge and develop skills to create an appropriate educational environment that enables these students to attain, adapt and integrate into the regular school. However, the challenge facing educators in Saudi Arabia, according to ALBattal (2013), is to give enough attention to the process of consultation and teamwork between the teachers of students with learning disabilities and the teachers of public education. The scarcity of studies that examine the subject of counseling and collaboration and identify the knowledge and level of teachers in schools attached to integration programs in Saudi Arabia is an obstacle to the promotion of these two important concepts in the special education field in the

country.

Moreover, in his review of international studies, ALBattal (2013) highlighted the growing academic interest in the process of counseling and collaboration as part of the new requirements in the field of special education. These concepts, mentioned in the American Public Law, the law of the education of disabled persons, are seen as important steps towards the transition towards full integration. This has made the subject of counseling, collaboration and related topics, such as counseling and educational integration, one of the most common research topics in the field special education at present (ibid.).

In contrast to the American context, Saudi Arabian teachers' work is more individualized than collective. ALBattal's study showed the low level of teachers' attitudes towards collaboration, their lack of familiarity with and knowledge of the skills and roles to be played in collaboration, their general lack of awareness of the importance of counseling and collaboration and positive returns on both teacher and student. Therefore, he emphasized the importance of overcoming the obstacles that may reduce the level of collaboration and weaken the interaction between teachers. Teachers should have the appropriate knowledge and expertise in the following three areas: cognitive structure, communication and interaction skills and problem solving and trends among individuals as important requirements for the practice of teamwork (ibid.).

In addition, the researcher (through her academic and field experience in the field of special education in Saudi Arabia) has noticed that the families of students with special needs also suffer from psychological stress due to their distrust of information and services provided to their children in special education programs. The lack of coordination between specialists and their inability to work as an integrated work team capable of consultation among them as a specialized team or with the parents were the most important elements of the team in the field of special education. These factors are a necessary indicator of the importance of educating workers in the field of special education on the importance of the role of both counseling and collaboration in helping students with special needs and their families to reach the services and achieve the desired goals. Therefore, the researcher sought through this research to review the most important literature on the subject of counseling and collective work based on studies and experiments which were conducted in the USA. It is clear that all the workers in the field of special education in Saudi Arabia need to have a sound scientific knowledge in order to understand the value of consultation and collaboration and apply these concepts in their work environment.

The sections below discuss the concepts of counseling, collaboration and assess their importance and application in the special education sector. The studies reviewed have been conducted in the USA where the topic has been extensively researched.

### **3. Counseling and Collaboration**

Dettmer, Thurston and Dyck (2005) explained that the definition of school supervision should be general enough to be applied in a wide range of school structures and settings, and the definition should be flexible so as to adapt to local needs. There were broad definitions and synonyms related to the word "counseling". Counseling is defined as an activity in which educators and parents collaborate within the school area by communicating, collaborating and coordinating efforts as a team to serve the cognitive and behavioral needs of students. In addition, consultation is a collaborative process where the counselor assists teachers and other employees in the educational environment to think through problem solving and develop skills that make them more effective in working with students. Dettmer *et al.* (2005) referred to counseling as an activity in which educators and parents join forces in the school through cooperation, communication and coordination of efforts among themselves to serve the students' behavioral and educational needs (ibid.).

The consultation is based on three basic elements: the consultant, the counselor and the beneficiary. The consultant is defined as the competent specialist who facilitates communication, cooperation and coordination of teamwork among the rest of the educators in order to identify their cognitive and behavioral needs, and planning, implementing and evaluating educational programs to meet these needs (Friend & Cook 2013). Shakhs and Damati (1994) identified the counselors as those who are a source of services in special education. They provide diagnostic services, in addition to helping teachers and strengthening their abilities, rather than providing services directly to students and parents. The consultant is the one who provides a direct service to the beneficiary and is considered an intermediary between him or her and the counselor. The beneficiary is the individual, the group, the administration, the community or sometimes even the nation that benefits from the consultant's services (ibid.).

Friend and Cook (1996) referred to two types of counseling: (1) The direct method which allows the counselor to work directly with students with special needs. For example, a learning disability counselor or a language and language specialist can use a method with the student, while the parent or counselor (classroom teacher) remains watching or helping with the method. (2) The indirect method: the consultant and the consultant interact to identify the problems of the beneficiary, and find alternatives, solutions and appropriate services, and the consultant provides these services directly to the beneficiary, and thus the consultant provides an indirect service to the beneficiary by the consultant. The counselor therefore does not work in isolation but in

collaboration with other individuals. The concept of collaboration is discussed in the paragraphs below (ibid.).

In the autumn of 1990, a CBS Television documentary showed collective work between teachers. The introduction showed that schools that offer strong group activities are more successful than schools where teachers and staff work independently. Group-oriented schools are ideal models for granting authority to teachers and decision-makers together, but teamwork is no longer as effective as possible. Successful education requires the spirit of fellowship and participation between professionals and parents; in fact, the ethics of cooperation were disabled or absent in schools during the 1970s. Schools would need careful guidance to develop counseling and collaboration or teamwork systems. Collective work has been defined as a method of direct interaction between at least two parties that are equal and mutually involved in decision-making as they work toward a common goal (Friend & Cook 2013). Thus, collective action requires assistance and cooperation. Communication, co-operation and co-ordination are vital aspects of the collective action process. Shulman believes that collective action involves a very important element: the group, defined as a social unit of self-will and capacity, consisting of a number of individuals, including a relationship where the common interests of the members interact with rules, values and standards that regulate their behavior. In such a situation, members have an emotional cohesion that shows the existence of the group. Practitioners engage in different practices and forms of teamwork, all of which have one goal: to work together to solve a problem they face while working with students with special needs. Collective work may take the form of a number of individuals working together to achieve certain objectives according to a set of mandatory official rules and standards and in accordance with certain regulations and laws (Shulman 1968).

Consultation and collaboration are interactions between people working together to solve a problem or achieve common goals. In the event that all these processes occur within the school, they involve interaction between special education workers and parents with special needs children, but there are subtle differences between them. The consultation is based on the consultant's contribution to his or her specialized expertise in the educational problem, while the consultant provides the service directly using those experiences.

When consultants cooperate, they share responsibility and they work to find alternatives and solutions to the problem. As for teamwork, the roles of the work leader and his or her followers will grow and develop, with all individuals involved in solving the problem and each playing a role in the implementation of the plan (Friend & Cook 2013). Examples of collective work among the workers in the field of special education are:

- Purposeful discussions.
- Constructive listening.
- Helping to identify the most important problems.
- Facilitating problem solving.
- Encouraging alternative solutions.
- Acting as mediators in the educational process.
- Explaining some of the ambiguity facing employees.
- Leadership or participation in various activities.
- Participation in the exchange of information and education.
- Participation in assessment and evaluation activities.
- Participation in various educational and administrative committees.
- Follow-up of educational issues and complaints in various disciplines.

#### **4. Factors that led to the importance of consultation and collaboration in the field of education for the individual**

##### *4.1. The Regular Education Initiative (REI)*

The Public Education Initiative is a call to integrate its efforts with special education, a small wave that has helped generate waves of educational development. The demands to contain the increasing costs and concerns about the classification of students have contributed to the integration of public education with special education. The main motivation for integration was the mainstreaming movement of Public Law 94-142, which recognized the status of students with disabilities in a less restrictive environment, where classrooms are responsible for students' success. In order to fulfill this new responsibility, teachers have received promises of help from special education practitioners (Friend & Cook 1996). The impact of the Public Education Initiative on collective counseling will be negative if they are considered opposing forces, while the impact will be positive if the public education initiative can clarify the concepts and practices of counseling, in addition to force, openness and democracy. This generates a collaborative approach to solving problems and dealing with many school dilemmas. The initiative is an opportunity to learn about its willingness to respect and evaluate individual differences among students. Education in its developmental state can completely exceed special education for students with minor disabilities and provide a new system for teachers and students with educational and behavioral problems. It is believed that educators of special need children should consider themselves as contributing members of the education community, working to integrate within public education (Friend & Cook 1996, 2013).

#### 4.2. *At Risk students*

A re-examination of the eligibility criteria for students for special education services is one of the most important outcomes of the Public Education Initiative. Many states have introduced more restrictive conditions, bringing a number of students from special education programs into public classrooms without any special services. Class teachers often refer to those students and others who have failed for many reasons as students at risk: those who fall into different categories and their exposure to educational problems is relatively high (Reynolds 1989).

Therefore, some decision-makers have promoted the concept of shared responsibility between educators in the public and private spheres with a view to providing more coordinated and comprehensive educational measures for all students, including those at risk. In the meantime, individuals will not have to wait for the attendance of the relevant educators to save them. Many students have special and behavioral needs. A third of eligible students can be described as having trouble at school in the USA. If learning needs are added to gifted students, this ratio will increase significantly to 10% of students enrolled in public schools who will be eligible for special education services, while another 10% to 20% have problems learning from simple to medium that affect their progress in school (West & Idol 1990). Under-age children in poverty-stricken communities received much attention during the 1960s, with the adoption of the Public Law 457-99, which expanded the attention and care of children at this stage. Public schools now have special services for children with disabilities at age three and above. The general law went beyond the attention of the school classes and became inclusive of the family, and all workers in the field of special education. It also authorized the funding of grants for experimental and pilot programs of a training nature.

The increase in programs for children with pre-school disabilities requires increased collaboration among professionals, parents and interested persons. In fact, collaboration with consultation and teamwork is the core of these programs (Dettmer, Dyck & Thurston 2002; Dettmer, Thurston & Dyck 2005). Early intervention programs for children with infant and toddler disabilities have increased following the first legislation on childhood. Parents and practitioners are an integral part of education and education of children with special needs. Most children in early intervention programs suffer from severe disabilities. The services of people working in various disciplines are essential, in addition to parents' effective participation in treatment through home programs.

Where services are provided, children are stimulated and guidance is given to parents. Under Public Law 99-457, this is beyond classroom interventions as the transition from pre-school programs requires strong and continuous efforts of co-operation and teamwork. Therefore, teachers at this stage need to identify the essential skills required in kindergarten in order to prepare the child for that environment. The contribution of these teachers to primary school programs is hence useful in ensuring the successful start of preschool children and requires the co-operation and collective action of all parties involved with young children (Dettmer, Thurston & Dyck 2005)

#### 4.3. *Transition from school to the adult world*

The belief was that no parent or teacher could provide sufficient assistance that required collective efforts with students who left school to enter the world of work and life with adults. Awareness of the importance of the transitional period for students with disabilities in the eighties coincided with interest in collective action. Without teamwork, students cannot successfully move into adult life (Dettmer, Thurston & Dyck 2005). The general approach that emerged from the school development movement was only suitable for 40% of the students, while the rest of them would remain unemployed or occupy jobs that are less than their qualifications and abilities. The aim of the transition programs during the 1980s was to help students with special needs access education services that will enable them to lead a meaningful life and further progress in their working lives. To make this transition successful, all parties and agencies have to work systematically with each other to plan the process. Counseling and teamwork are therefore useful in providing such support (Dettmer, Dyck & Thurston 2002).

#### 4.4 *The American Agenda 2000*

In April 1991, President Bush and the Minister of Education introduced a four-part educational strategy called the American Agenda 2000. This agenda outlined a strategic plan for a number of education objectives that the state is required to achieve by the year 2000, including proposals and criteria for the new national tests (Dettmer, Dyck & Thurston 2002; Dettmer, Thurston & Dyck 2005). The following six goals are included in this agenda:

- Each child must start school and be prepared for learning
- Graduates of higher schools in the United States must be increased by at least 90%.
- All students should be subject to a middle- and upper-level examination to measure their progress in the main subjects.
- American students should be ranked first in the world in the collection of science and mathematics.
- All adults must have skill, knowledge and citizenship.

- Each school should be drug-free and provide the appropriate educational environment (ibid.)

Some educators described America 2000 as strong, optimistic, and promising as it aimed to mobilize public opinion and focus national energies on education without bureaucratic structures (Doyle 1991). Some criticized the plan as calling for a paradigm shift that did not contribute to the restructuring of schools as required. Howe emphasized that the three main drawbacks to this agenda were school funding, the growing poverty among children and young people, and the cultural and ethnic diversity of American society (Howe 1991). As it appears, the plan ignored the proportion of students with special needs through the use of standardized tests and standards that were not suitable for students with low achievement and did not focus on other evaluation methods that rely on students' working papers and progress in their educational and behavioral performance. Although this plan was not successful as a result of the previous conclusions, it has further emphasized the importance of consultation and teamwork for the future development of schools.

## 5. Key elements of consultation and collaboration

### 5.1 *Determination of role in counseling*

Friend and Cook (1996) explained that the role of the counselor is determined by the situation that is needed: the counselor may provide information to school administrators, may be a teacher of learning difficulties, or help the trainer assess the problem. This concept supports the contemporary perception of special services, which emphasizes that the needs of the student and not the student classifications determine the type of service and the method of submission. There are several elements, as explained by Dettmer *et al.* (2005).

#### 5.1.1 *Clarification role.*

The most important element in the implementation of the consultation is to clarify the role. Until managers become familiar with the concepts of counseling, teamwork and the ways in which they can participate as partners and members of the team, uncertainty remains because of the lack of clarity about the consultants' presence or lack of knowledge of what they should do. Each employee must understand his or her responsibilities and roles, and such roles must be coordinated to make the efforts clear and concrete.

#### 5.1.2 *Belonging to role in terms of inclusiveness.*

Counselors feel the absence of role-playing, which makes it seem to them that they do not belong to a particular school or administration. Counselors may complain of being isolated from their professional colleagues or teachers in public classes, especially if the counselor is directly involved in the learning process. Therefore, it should be made clear to all employees that the counselor cannot be a panacea for all their troubles. This will help to rectify the erroneous argument that consultants are considered to be at risk of job security for the rest of their staff. It is therefore necessary to have a sense of belonging and a spirit of fraternal co-operation between advisors and staff who all seek to achieve one common goal.

#### 5.1.3 *Role expectations*

The consultant's staff may expect too much, or too little, to see very urgent results, and expect the counselor to solve and fix all the problems facing the student. If this does not happen, they underestimate the value of the consultation and judge it as a failure. The more active the consultation services and the collective work with the staff, the more positive the outlook will be. So, consultants should set reasonable goals for themselves and not try too much, and involve all those in special education.

### 5.2 *Setting up a framework for consultation and collaboration*

The development of a framework for consultative and group work requires the development of consultative structures, administrative details, and the creation of the appropriate time and place for the meeting, so that consultation is as appropriate and as non-invasive as possible.

#### 5.2.1 *Structure of consultation and collaboration*

Counselors need a structure in which to carry out their roles and determine their responsibilities, and therefore need to develop a number of strategies for consultation and teamwork that serve the school, community and family, and meet all the needs of students. Advisors should not hesitate to design their own consultation system, through trial and error, so that the model is appropriate. The best way to start preparing the structure is to explore the views of the specialists in addition to studying and observing the different structures in systems similar to the current work of the consultant.

#### 5.2.2 *Determining the time and place for consultation and collaboration*

Lack of time is one of the most pressing obstacles to consultation and teamwork. Administrators should therefore take care of the scheduling responsibilities; consultants need to work together. If working conditions are restructured to allow greater flexibility in scheduling time, workers can create time to work together with their colleagues and find appropriate solutions to various problems. This will help build bridges between private and public education while expanding the role of support services needed by students with disabilities. In organizing time for consultation, an appropriate place should be provided in which the consultation should be carried out. The area should be calm and suitable for use. It needs a relatively scientific specificity to allow for the exchange

of trust and information and to stimulate meaningful discussion.

### *5.2.3 Counseling management*

Counseling is an affordable means of service for students with disability. But there is a risk of ignoring the financial issues that dictate the way the service is offered. Assigning huge workloads to consultant teachers may provide material in the near term, but it may cost a lot in the future if the student does not improve. For this reason, attention must be given to determining the burden of each consultant to ensure that the needs of students are met.

### *5.3 Evaluation of counseling and collaboration*

Assessment and support is one of the four main elements of counseling and teamwork. Educators and all those working in the field of special education need to evaluate the effectiveness of counseling and teamwork, so as to ensure continuity of support for these educational and support services.

#### *5.3.1 Consultation evaluation*

Evaluation of the consultation is a requirement for continuity in obtaining the time and place of the consultation, and the participation and acceptance of the administrative officials in proving the effectiveness of the consultation as a professional practice in education in order to keep up with the philosophy of teamwork. The consultation evaluation should be planned in collaboration with officials with different roles. However, there are a number of drawbacks. As McGaghie (1991) pointed out, it covers a narrow range of practice situations; it is biased towards the assessment of acquired knowledge; it has little focus on the direct assessment of practice skills; it generates measurement problems. All these drawbacks are strong criticisms that are supposed to be taken into account when assessing counseling and teamwork. McGaghie (1991) emphasized that the key to professional assessment is to verify the nature of the professional role and not only to collect the information that the experts believe the newly consulted can obtain. It is crucial to check the goals and what needs to develop and support multipliers to achieve, which is due to the diversity of problems and professional needs (ibid). Therefore, consultants need to evaluate at each stage of the consultation so that they can move in the right direction. The evaluation should include a variety of data collection methods in order to provide as much information as possible to the beneficiary group. The collective work may have a lack and inadequacy for various reasons: not allocating time for interactions, or if the staff did not get ready, or in the absence of administrative support; so they must exclude these reasons before reducing the usefulness of the consultation.

#### *5.3.2 Participation in counseling and collaboration*

Friend and Cook emphasized the importance of voluntary participation that a consultant must demonstrate before consulting and teamwork planning. The involvement of all staff in needs assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation of advisory services and the development of the Task Force and Communication will lead to the development of a spirit of teamwork and the achievement of all common objectives for those services (Friend & Cook, 2013)

#### *5.3.3 Accept consultation*

Effective teamwork requires practice and experience, where consultation changes. This is why both consultants and practitioners need to accept these models and adapt to the positive or negative changes that accompany them. Most importantly, the beneficiaries need and should encourage administrative support, so consultants should provide opportunities to invest in these positions.

### *5.4 Preparing for consultation and collaboration*

Training programs for the acquisition of counseling and teamwork skills are essential, so counselors should provide opportunities and incentives for those who have experience in consulting and group work. It is important to enable the various segments of the staff to acquire the skills of counseling and teamwork before, during and after the service by defining the importance of counseling and teamwork, and training them to be assistants in this process, and prepare them to work as consultants and training counselors as consultants and advocates for the integration of these services.

## **6. Examples of consultative processes used in the field of education**

### *6.1 The Tripartite Model*

The triangular model is defined as a classic consultation model that has resulted in many counseling models. This model includes three elements: advisor, counselor and beneficiary. In these models, consultation is not provided directly. The service is transferred from the counselor to the beneficiary through the consultant (Dettmer, Thurston & Dyck 2005)

### *6.2 Stephens Model Systems*

The system model was developed by Stephens in 1977 (ibid.). It is an extension of the instructional approach to education. The model consists of five stages:

Evaluation, monitoring, data collection  
Detailed objectives, identifying the problem  
Planning, finding ways to solve the problem  
Implementation of the plan, measuring progress  
Evaluation, data analysis.

Data is collected on the behavior of the beneficiary, after which the intervention is planned, and additional data are collected to compare the effects of the intervention. If the treatment plan is not effective, further assessment is made; the counselor will assist the consultant to conduct a standard benchmark assessment, which will make the consultant an integral part of the program and allow him or her to gain the skills to use after the counselor leaves (*ibid.*).

### *6.3 Model Advisory Committee*

The Advisory Committee model is an alternative method of consultation, consisting of a group of working individuals and specialists in special education. The Committee meets from time to time as necessary to study referrals, assess problems, create development plans and evaluate the results of such plans and programs. The consultant is available to assist the Committee as needed. The Advisory Committee is a familiar pathway for those working in the field of special education who have experience in the aspects of evaluation and referral, preparation of programs and solving problems in the field of education (Dettmer, Dyck & Thurston 2002; Dettmer, Thurston & Dyck 2005)

### *6.4 Group Consultation Form*

The concept of group counseling is presented as a model in which the consultants are partners in the consultation by identifying problems, planning intervention strategies and implementing recommendations through teamwork. The key models used in counseling have unique characteristics that make them useful in particular situations and needs. For consultants and beneficiaries, each of these models has strengths and limitations that distinguish one from one another (*ibid.*).

## **7. Communication processes and their importance for consultative and collective work**

Communication is a vital component of human relations in general, but it is also the basis for co-operation and teamwork among educators. Communication includes both speaking, listening, managing differences among individuals, and handling complaints and concerns. Elements of successful communication include understanding, confidence, independence and flexibility. Good communication facilitates conflict resolution; on the other hand, ineffective communication creates a vacuum that generates misunderstanding and mistrust. The elements of trust, commitment and effective interaction are crucial to non-conflict relationships. Through these elements, effective communication becomes the basis for collaboration and teamwork between educators and parents with special needs. The counselor has the responsibility to strengthen communication for the interaction method. Communication that reduces disagreement and enables employees to raise their self-esteem is perceived as the most important and most sensitive processes in consultation. Moreover, communication skills are often ignored in the formal preparation programs for the educational staff. Communication for consultation and teamwork is crucial in order to serve students with special needs. Effective communication requires a number of skills, as explained below (Safran 1991). The key skills for effective communication are:

### 1- Respondent listening

Respondent listening is the key to communication between educators and parents. Communication starts with listening, and listening means active listening through which a clear understanding of words and emotions is expressed. Responsive listening skills enable a person to understand what others are saying and feeling. When the counselor uses correct listening methods, he or she will be successful in solving the problem (AlJayousi 2002).

### 2- Emphasis skills

Emphasis skills include verbal and nonverbal behavior that enables employees to exchange respect, meet professional needs, and defend their rights without the control of others. Procrastination means achieving the goals without damaging the relationship or respecting others. Emphasis skills include the following aspects:

- Indicate behavior objectively.
- Select your feelings by name.
- Say what you want to happen.
- Express interest in others.
- Use body language (*ibid.*)

### 3- Conflict management skills

Differences are part of life and occur when there are disagreements between people about needs, values, goals and personalities. If the parties cannot give and take, by consolidating their views and dealing constructively

with their differences, interpersonal conflicts will worsen. Many studies have indicated that whenever there is a relationship between members of the group, there will have to be an increase in the productivity of the group; where there is an atmosphere of tension it will be exacerbated and impractical. The difference is a process in which individuals try to damage and shorten the performance of the other party. It may begin with excitement, then competition and end with confrontation. Communication and listening are the best way to solve such problems (AlJayousi 2002). Consultants and collaborators need to have the proper conflict management skills as they have the responsibility to resolve these differences in collective ways. This is achieved only by using the skills of listening and constructive debate, and the recognition of the real existence of the problem, and the desire to resolve it. Conflict management skills help individuals deal with the emotions that coincide with disagreement. It also has a multiplier effect in promoting closer relationships when working to solve the problem. Collective problem-solving skills help to resolve conflicting needs to satisfy all parties while unresolved problems are addressed and relationship preserved (Dettmer, Dyck & Thurston 2002)

#### 4- Barriers to Communication

The program of building relationships through negotiation defined three main barriers to communication: the assumption of no need for speech, one-way communication, and sending mixed messages These are discussed in turn below (ibid.).

-Assuming no need to speak

Perhaps the most important explanations of unsuccessful communication in a relationship is the common assumption that there is no justification for discussing a particular matter. Some professionals in the field of advisory and collective work lack a sense of the problem or aim to reduce the presentation and debate about the content, despite its importance for the parties, the recipient or beneficiary.

-One-way communication

The assumption is that communication is to tell others something, because communication is effective only if there are two ways; it is not enough to have a transmission only, but there must be reception. Therefore, reasonable listening and exchange between individuals is essential. The consequences of one-way communication can be as bad as those that have no way at all. If communication only sends views alone, it limits the opportunity to learn new things and discourages the other from contributing to finding a solution.

-Send mixed messages

In order for communication to be effective, it must be consistent. What is being said today should be consistent with what will be said in the coming days. The words should be coherent as well as the actions that were issued. The lack of consistency undermines the ability to build an effective communication relationship. In order to overcome such obstacles, important points and components that contribute to the success of the communication process must be taken into account: permanent consultation before making decisions, listening positively, planning operations in a sound scientific manner, and taking into account the essential elements of effective interpersonal relations (AlJayousi 2002; Beckman 2003). Elements of an effective relationship include:

- Rationality (balance between emotion and sanity)
- Understanding (learn how others see things)
- Communication (consult and listen before making decisions)
- Convincing not forcing (negotiating with others)
- Acceptance "accepting differences"
- Taking responsibility (ibid.).

### **8. The role of counseling and collaboration to assist special education workers in the following processes**

Consolidate and co-ordinate the various efforts and their interdependence in common goals that are beneficial to the educational process.

Make decisions for students who require special educational services and support, and help the workers in how to deal with such important decisions.

Coordination of various services and programs (e.g., educational, psychological, social, health), which is the real key to success.

Exchange experiences, ideas and different information to solve problems of common concern.

Provide innovative and creative solutions to solve various problems for students and their families.

Deal more effectively and efficiently with a wide range of individual student needs.

Raise the level of self-esteem of all employees and provide respect and appreciation for the views of all different disciplines and sites.

Develop the necessary skills to achieve the mental health of the workers, including helping others who face frustration and failure, and control of concern and expression of needs and resolve disputes.

Provide a good method of communication at all levels between employees, as misunderstandings are common, and in order for the human relationship to be meaningful, everyone must work to understand each other's viewpoint, to unite efforts and achieve common goals.

Stay away from the conflicts in the diagnostic and training information, which is one of the most important sources of frustration and difficulties experienced by parents of children with special needs when dealing with workers in various disciplines (Beckman 2003).

Increase the motivation for harmony and cohesion among all workers in the field of special education, and away from individual decisions that are illogical and practical.

Based on the above discussion, recommendations can be made specifically for the Saudi context where the concepts of counseling and collaboration are absent from the special education sphere.

## 9. Conclusion and recommendations

The above review focused on the American context and explained the evolution in counseling and teamwork models as from the 1950s. Such models have been essential in ensuring the success of special education programs in the USA and the effective integration of children with special needs in society. This situation can be contrasted to the present reality in the Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia, where consultation and teamwork based on scientific foundations and formal models as reviewed in this research are lacking.

The current state of programs for children with special needs is mostly based on the views and directions of educators instead of proper theoretical scientific research (Abunayyan 2006; ALBattal 2013). Therefore, a review of the literature on counseling and teamwork in developed countries and an understanding of the main concepts and their application in the field of public education and special education will allow researchers and educators in Arab countries to enhance their knowledge and apply these important concepts to their work taking into account the local context. In other words, special education programs in Saudi Arabia can benefit greatly from the knowledge developed in the West where collective work is seen as one of the most important elements in the successful provision of special education services. Previous research, as explained above, has shown that professionals involved in special education programs need to cooperate with counselors and consultants and consolidate their efforts in order to share information and eliminate the inconsistency in their work. It is essential to understand the needs of the beneficiary to be able to provide effective guidance and support. An approach based on collaboration and consultation will help in the achievement of students' goals and also ensure a line of communication with the parents. Families of students with special needs suffer from psychological pressure and workers in the field of special education may lack a sense of credibility in the absence of consultation and work as a team. In addition, the involvement of parents in educational programs is a significant aspect of consultation and teamwork.

In light of the above, the following recommendations are made with regards to consultation and collaboration in the specific context of Saudi Arabia:

- 1- Activate the role of both counseling and teamwork in the field of special education in the country.
- 2- Benefit from the experiences of some countries in how to conduct counseling and team work in the correct way, and overcome all the obstacles.
- 3- Pursue proper planning, realistic implementation, continuous evaluation of both counseling and teamwork, and avoid individual and random ways of implementing them on the ground.
- 4- Train workers in the field of special education on the use of techniques and methods of counseling and teamwork.
- 5- Train individuals to use the skills of communication and listening as they are the real key to the success of both the process of consultation and teamwork.
- 6- Provide research and scientific studies on the importance of counseling and teamwork and its role in the integration of educational services provided to individuals with special needs.

The implementation of the above recommendations will help enhance the quality of education programs for children with special needs in Saudi Arabia. This will in turn positively influence their quality of life and that of their parents.

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