

THE
SOLUTION-
FOCUSED
School
COUNSELOR

Shaping
Professional
Practice

Thomas E. Davis and
Cynthia J. Osborn



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Brunner-Routledge

New York & London

USA

Published by
Brunner-Routledge
29 West 35th Street
New York, NY 10001

UK

Published in Great Britain
Brunner-Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane
London EC4P 4EE

Brunner-Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

THE SOLUTION-FOCUSED SCHOOL COUNSELOR: Shaping Professional Practice

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4 5 6 7 8 9 0

Printed by Edwards Brothers, Ann Arbor, MI, 2000.
Cover design by Ellen Seguin.
Edited by Catherine Van Sciver.

A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

∞ The paper in this publication meets the requirements of the ANSI Standard Z39.48-1984 (Permanence of Paper)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Davis, Thomas E., Ph.D.

The solution-focused school counselor : shaping professional practice / Thomas E. Davis, Cynthia J. Osborn.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Educational counseling. 2. Solution-focused brief therapy. I. Osborn, Cynthia J.

II. Title.

LB1027.5.D335 1999

371.4'6—dc21

CIP
99-055849

ISBN 1-56032-862-2 (paper)

We wish to thank the following individuals who have contributed to this book. First and foremost we would like to thank Jason McGlothlin, currently a doctoral student in counselor education at Ohio University, for his technical assistance in the setting up of the manuscript. In addition, he has contributed greatly to the editorial review of the text.

We would also like to thank our colleagues within our Counselor Education Programs at both Ohio University and Kent State University for their support and encouragement during the work on this project.

Finally, we would like to dedicate this book to our respective family members. To Vickie, Tom's wife, and his daughters, Alison and Olivia Davis, for their steadfast support, and to Dick Mitchell, Cynthia's husband, for his patience, persistence, and encouragement.

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PROLOGUE

At the dawn of a new century school counselors face a frontier of challenging opportunities. Questions from parents, public, and legislators about school funding, more stringent proficiency standards, and the increasing complexity and intensity of student issues represent but a fraction of waiting hurdles. School counselors have the potential to enter the new century anchored with a strong and solid foundation in the school counseling profession. Equipped with varied interpersonal-relations skills, which are learned and refined on the job and in formal graduate training, they provide a commitment to enhancing the development of young people. The near future doesn't have to be foreboding—school counselors can be reminded of, and awakened to, their potential to facilitate positive change in the students they serve. This can be done in a positive, solution-focused manner that builds on what is already working for the student.

School systems will continue in their perpetual state of flux, as is expected for educational institutions committed to providing quality and “state-of-the-art” services to students, their families, and communities. As a school counselor, however, you represent a resilient and sturdy part of that system (Anderson & Reiter, 1995; Coy, 1999). Who else but the school counselor would be expected to promulgate a vision of the possible and contribute to positive change? Who else would have an understanding of the psychological well-being of students and the elements necessary for a positive learning environment? Whether or not you are convinced, as a school counselor you possess resources and strengths well suited for a changing and challenging future.

More Than You Realized

This book is not intended to address issues associated with the roles and functions of the school counselor. We are confident that you are already aware of all of the demands and opportunities of the profession

and your role in it. It is our intention to offer a comprehensive way of shaping your professional practice as a professional school counselor. The adoption of a solution-focused mindset can enhance the way that you conceptualize your work with students, colleagues, parents, administrators, and others associated with the school environment.

What we *do* present is an alternative perspective about students, their struggles, and the manner in which they can be approached. We have found that solutions are constructed from current and accessible resources rather than discovered during archaeological excavations of the student's past. The solution-focused counselor, therefore, is not the product of formal and intensive training that could require a leave of absence from school. Rather, the solution-focused counselor is one who is able to shift his or her current vantage point to consider alternative possibilities. A different way of viewing things is often all that is needed to begin the process of building solutions.

The Solution-Focused School Counselor is intended to provide you with alternative perspectives. It represents a new set of spectacles for those who have become mired by a tiring, myopic, and uninspiring view of the school system and one's place in it. It is designed to challenge you to utilize your existing skills and assets, and those of your students and colleagues, in new ways. Seeing a situation from a different perspective opens the door to new ways of thinking and believing, and can often open one's eyes to the use of resources that had actually been present all along.

Characteristics of the Solution-Focused School Counselor

This book will hopefully introduce you to, or at least reacquaint you with, personal qualities, learned skills, and aspects of your formal training that you did not know (or had forgotten) you had in your possession. Our intention is to make you aware of and to amplify those things that you are already doing that can and do assist in generating solutions to what appear to be perennial hassles and headaches. For solution-focused counseling, you will learn, is not necessarily about practicing a brand new approach—it is about maximizing the strengths, resources, and talents you currently have. Making good use of what you already have not only expedites the process of solution construction, it allows for a more genuine, personalized, feasible, and relevant exercise in your work with students.

To assist you in appreciating what you already know and are doing as a solution-focused school counselor, and to challenge you in your

continued professional development, we have identified what we consider to be eight characteristics of the solution-focused school counselor. Some may be brand new to you, others may be somewhat familiar. Regardless of their level of familiarity, we encourage you to use these as a guide for your own development as a solution-focused school counselor. We introduce them here as a means of beginning with the goal in mind—an aspect that is central to both brief or short-term counseling approaches and solution-focused counseling.

1. Informed Practitioner

First and foremost, the solution-focused school counselor is an informed practitioner. This is particularly important in a day and age when professional accountability and credibility are expected, an issue that is discussed in chapter 2. The services you provide need to make sense not only to you and those you serve but, more importantly, need to be justifiable. This entails being able to defend your decisions and therapeutic actions not only to students, but also to their parents, teachers, school principals, the school superintendent, and school board members.

Practicing from an informed position, therefore, means that you know what and why you are doing what you are doing and can articulate this to others. This means that practicing by instinct or from your “gut” is not acceptable. As a formally trained school counselor, you are expected to put your academic instruction to the test and to operate from a theory-based perspective. Formulating a reasonable and attainable goal and selecting appropriate interventions, therefore, needs to be derived from an established body of knowledge, one that is accepted and respected in the field of counseling.

In solution-focused counseling, practicing from an informed position is not limited to knowing the principles of solution-focused counseling discussed in chapter 1. Rather, it also entails knowing who your clients are and adapting your counseling style to fit or match their worldview, developmental level, values and ideals, communication style, and other distinctive aspects or idiosyncrasies. It also entails being mindful of outcome research conducted in the counseling and psychotherapy field (research that is presented in chapter 2) and using such findings to flavor and justify the work that you do with students.

An informed practitioner is guided by counseling theory and outcome research while operating from a reasonable and justifiable premise, interacting with clients and students in a thoughtful and custom-made