The relationship of attitudes between advisors in advisory roles and advisees of these advisors

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Abstract

An advisor-advisee program is one of many fundamental concepts operating in an effective middle school. To develop a successful advisor-advisee program, schools must seriously train teachers for their role as an advisor. The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between staff and students’ attitudes towards an advisor-advisee program. This study included twenty-six staff members and three hundred and twenty students. Staff and students were surveyed through the use of separate survey instruments. The surveys were used to communicate their level of satisfaction toward the advisor-advisee program. Attitudes of staff as well as students were then identified and classified as either positive or negative through the survey instruments. Students were categorized by the advisor they were assigned. The results of the study showed that there was a relationship in attitudes of staff and students towards the advisor-advisee program.
THE RELATIONSHIP OF ATTITUDES BETWEEN ADVISORS IN ADVISORY ROLES AND ADVISEES OF THESE ADVISORS

A Graduate Project
Submitted to the
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
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of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by
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An advisor-advisee program is one of many fundamental concepts operating in an effective middle school. To develop a successful advisor-advisee program, schools must seriously train teachers for their role as an advisor. The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between staff and students' attitudes towards an advisor-advisee program. This study included twenty-six staff members and three hundred and twenty students. Staff and students were surveyed through the use of separate survey instruments. The surveys were used to communicate their level of satisfaction toward the advisor-advisee program. Attitudes of staff as well as students were then identified and classified as either positive or negative through the survey instruments. Students were categorized by the advisor they were assigned. The results of the study showed that there was a relationship in attitudes of staff and students towards the advisor-advisee program.
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The Relationship of Attitudes Between Advisors in Advisory Roles and Advisees of these Advisors

The purpose of this paper is to present a review of the literature related to teachers at the middle school level who are advisors and the level of satisfaction among students in the advisor program who are being advised by those teachers. In order to fully understand the implications of this study and the role of a successful advisor, it is necessary to first establish background information about middle schools and a specific guidance program known as Advisor-Advisee.

Review of the Literature

Middle schools, as we know them today, have been in existence since the sixties and seventies. Many of these schools were being established during a time when human rights and racial equality were issues of national focus. All schools, K-12, were used as vehicles to increase justice and equality as a whole. The middle school provided a wonderful arena in which the desegregation of schools could be masterfully handled. By closing junior high schools and moving ninth grades into the high school, and moving fifth and sixth grades out of their neighborhood segregated elementary schools into the middle school the
desegregation plan was complete. Many school districts across the nation handled their desegregation woes through the adoption of a middle school (George, 1988).

School districts who had not yet adopted the middle school concept had another opportunity during the late seventies and early eighties. Shifting enrollment patterns were leaving many high schools with population deficits. By realigning attendance centers to (K-5), (6-8), and (9-12) arrangements, middle schools, once again in history, became the desirable alternative. It was not until the restructuring of the 1980's that the middle school movement became recognized as a national phenomenon and credited for being able to meet the unique needs of the early adolescent (George, 1988).

The middle school movement is undoubtedly one of the most wide spread school improvement efforts ever associated with American educational history. It makes up a very dynamic component of the K-12 continuum and is considered by many the healthiest part of American education (Beane, 1986).

Effective middle schools are in tune with the cognitive, emotional, and physical characteristics and needs that are unique to the adolescent. Adolescents are involved in a search for their inner
self within a context of enormous personal changes and complex social pressures (Beane, 1983). A total reconstruction of a student's self concept will occur as a result of the physical, social, and intellectual changes which take place during this dynamic period of change (Beane, 1986). By building on their childhood experiences, adolescents will develop adult value frames during their middle school years. In and out of school experiences have a strong influence in shaping their identity (Toepfer, 1992). A peer group will also serve as a reference point for most behaviors, beliefs and attitudes mirrored by an adolescent. Many of these displays can and will be in direct conflict with the values being advocated by adults. Because much of the formal and cognitive operations will shed a different light on the moral and value issues of life, an adolescent needs to be directed into rethinking how he/she as an individual is related to these changes (Beane, 1986).

An important way to assist students in dealing with the demands of society is to educate helping professionals to enable them to assume roles as student advocates through comprehensive guidance activities (Lee, 1982). Middle schools have invested a great deal of time and energy in establishing the structure necessary for a successful student advocacy
program. Through the assistance of adult guidance, adolescents can be taken through the process of self-understanding. To develop self-understanding, adults need to provide many accurate, realistic, and positive experiences in and out of the classroom setting. For adolescents to move through this stage of life with success, it is imperative that they receive strong adult help and guidance (Beane, 1986).

The current middle school structure has been developed to help infuse the necessary close teacher-student relationship. As suggested, strong adult relationships have been cultivated through interdisciplinary teaming and common team planning time (George, 1988). These interdisciplinary teams focus on subject area correlations passed on through subject area identities. This direction allows for the accommodation of differences in interests, motivation, and goals, that are recognized differences in adolescents (Toepfer, 1992). Exploratory courses are used to cover the aesthetic and technical concerns. Courses such as life skills, art, industrial technology, music, and computers allow the adolescent to explore personal and intellectual interests (Beane, 1990).

Guidance at the middle school is also a strong component of the total structure in the development
of personal-social skills. "The primary purpose of any middle school guidance program is to facilitate the learning process and development of young adolescents" (Gerler, 1990, p. 364). Classroom teachers provide a very important role in school guidance. In fact, it is only natural that the teacher is directly involved in the guidance of adolescents. Three specific reasons cited for teacher involvement include: (a) Students spend a great deal of time with a team of teachers each day. This involvement provides a sound position from which a personal relationship can be developed lending itself to sound guidance practices. (b) Because students and teachers are together within a classroom setting, the physical location will lend itself to a regular systematic process of guidance. (c) Any type of guidance is stronger and more effective when it can be related to the subject matter and learning activities that are taking place in the regular classroom (Gerler, 1990).

Middle schools have taken their guidance programs and armed themselves with the powerful philosophy "Every student should have an adult who has the time to know him or her well and who truly cares about that student's academic, personal, and social development" (Gill & Read, 1990, p. 31). From
this philosophy has developed one of the major characteristics of an effective middle school. Guidance remains a basic and vital responsibility of affective education, particularly to middle grade students. To actualize this guidance characteristic, many middle schools have developed a strong student advocacy program called advisor-advisee. Other names used for this program may include homebase, advisory time, teacher based guidance plan, advisory base or other building specialized names (McEwin, 1981). The advisor-advisee program is not intended to be a substitute for the middle school counselor or for guidance that is taking place as part of the regular classroom. Advisor-advisee programs are intended to provide greater emphasis upon the guidance function of the entire school. By establishing a well-defined structure for group guidance every child in the school will be provided his or her fair share of guidance at a time when they need it most (Gerler, 1990).

The basic design of a teacher-advisor plan would consist of assigning every teacher a small group of students who would meet for some scheduled part of a school day. Group size, group assignment, and staff involvement would depend on the unique needs of the building being served (Doda, 1976). Arth advocates a
preplanned period of time within the school day which affords the student an opportunity to discuss with peers and adults both academic and humane school life space concerns (Arth, 1986). Prior to implementing an advisor-advisee program, school wide affective goals would be determined. The direction in which these affective goals are to be carried out would be unique to each setting. Most popular would be the establishment of a guideline offering sequenced lessons and activities to be done during the year on a permanent weekly schedule. Components of an advisor-advisee program might include group building, academic work time, creative expression, and valuing process (Doda, 1976). The teacher-advisor is responsible for all phases of the student's life. It is vital for the advisor to know the behaviors of the child as they relate to the social and academic settings within the school setting (Brimm & Moore, 1985). Without the structure of advisor-advisee, organized guidance would become an incidental part of the total school program. Students who need the guidance help would be overlooked or forgotten (Gerler, 1990).

The reports of research dealing with affective education clearly show support for the concept of advisor programs. In addition, research has
recognized that needs of adolescents can clearly be satisfied through its use (Putbrese, 1989). However, for a program of this nature to be successful, it must have the support of the professionals involved. Typical obstacles, or what may be termed as roadblocks, to an advisor-advisee program would include, (a) A lack of ownership by advisory personnel and (b) Improperly or poorly trained teachers (Gill & Read, 1990).

Advisors should be selected with care. Socialization is a mainstay in the life of adolescents, therefore an advisor who is effective and genuine in developing positive interpersonal relationships is vital. Advisors often will keep the same advisees for an extended period of time. In a three-year middle school this allows for relationships to develop that would be deep, lasting and meaningful during a students' middle school career (Brimm & Moore, 1985). Teacher resistance towards advisory responsibility is especially true in junior high schools that are being changed to middle schools. Many of these teachers are uncomfortable and negative because they do not understand the needs of adolescents and therefore feel unprepared. Many teachers would respond with comments such as the following: (a) "Being an advisor is a counselor's
job", "I’m a teacher of subject matter, I do not want to waste my time playing games with students", (b) "It’s another preparation and I’m already overloaded", (c) "I’m not sure what I would do with a group of advisees. I’ve never had a course of guidance" (Myrick, Highland & Highland, 1986, p. 15). These types of reactions are to be expected if teachers are uncertain of what is to expected of them in the way of advisement (Myrick et al., 1986).

Staff development is an essential prerequisite for a successful advisor-advisee program. It is important to train teachers for their roles as advisors. Teachers must have specific skills, and also possess an understanding of adolescents development if there is to be an appreciation of the advisor-advisee program (Myrick et al., 1986). A formal preparation of teachers should include these components of the systemic counseling model, (a) an evaluation of traditional and nontraditional notions of helping, (b) an understanding of how educational forces impact the academic and social development of students, (c) have to apply a systemic model of helping, (d) an introduction to the conceptual basis of a student advocate role, and (e) an introduction to important student advocate skills (Lee, 1982). Effective middle school teachers will work to gain
the hearts of the young adolescents, but to do this they must be knowledgeable of the strategies which will make this happen (Dada, George & McEwin, 1987). Without appropriate teacher preparation the result will be increased discipline problems, extra unrewarded work and a tendency for them to turn off being involved in providing affective education (Dada, 1976).

To facilitate a successful advisor-advisee program schools must establish a strong student advocacy program and properly train student advocates. Yet even with these preventative measures in place, it must be recognized that educators who desire only to teach their speciality and wish to leave all other guidance responsibilities to others more qualified, will still remain (McEwin, 1981).

Statement of the Problem

As middle schools look at establishing advisor-advisee programs, it is necessary that administrators recognize the commitment of their staff to the implementation of this kind of student guidance and affective education.

The purpose of this study will be to determine if there is a relationship between the level of satisfaction experienced by students of advisors who feel negative towards the advisor-advisee program and
those students of advisors who feel positive towards the advisor-advisee program.

Procedure

Subjects

Identified as subjects for this study were 26 staff members and 320 students from XYZ middle school during the 1991-92 school year. The school was located in a moderate size community of approximately 100,000 residents. The staff members selected were individuals who had been specifically assigned to an advisee group for the school year. Students in the study were given an opportunity to participate. Three hundred and twenty of the three hundred and sixty two students in the student body were involved. All students, in grades 6-8, came into the study with an assigned advisor.

Setting

At the time this study was done, this middle school was in its second year of an Advisor-Advisee program.

Advisors had been assigned to their advisor group at the beginning of the school year. In identifying the status of the advisor groups, it was determined that 42% of the staff had continued with the same advisee group while 58% of the staff had been given a new group of advisees. New assignments
of an advisor group would have been caused by one of the following; (a) new staff members to the building replacing previous staff or expansion of a grade level team, (47%), (b) additional staff hired to keep expanded grade level groups at manageable sizes, (20%), and (c) maturation of students; staff members received new assignments for the next school year because they had eighth grade advisors from the previous year, (33%).

Advisor groups were made up of students from the same grade. Groups ranged in size from 10-16.

Design

All advisors were asked to complete a staff survey of six questions, (Appendix A). In a cover letter which accompanied the survey, it was recommended that staff members complete the surveys in confidence. They were given a period of two days to finish before a written follow up was made to secure their responses.

Students were also given a survey which contained six questions, (Appendix B). In order to assure the confidentiality of their answers, students were given a specific set of instructions read to them by a staff member prior to receiving the survey. Students completed their surveys during a designated advisor-advisee meeting time. Forms were collected
in Manila envelopes and taken directly by students to the counselors office. Teachers were asked not to move around the room as students were filling out the form. Questions that students might have had were answered by the teacher as briefly as possible. Any students who were absent from the initial survey time were identified and asked to complete the survey during an individualized time set up through the counselors office.

No names were used, both the staff and student survey forms were coded only with numeric codes. This method was used to achieve anonymity and to match advisors with advisees when the results were tallied.

Coding

The responses from both the staff and students were collected and entered into a data base file. For the purposes of this study, it was necessary to determine the attitudes of staff members and students. By assigning values to the responses on the survey form, both staff and students were grouped as either positive or negative. Questions using the three response answers of yes, sometimes, and no, were assigned the values of +1, 0, and -1 respectively. Those questions using the four response answers of not at all, sometimes, most of
the time, and all of the time, were assigned the values of -2, -1, +1, and +2 respectively. Using Table 1, both the staff and students could be easily categorized into one of the two areas.

Table 1: STAFF AND STUDENTS CATEGORIZATION FOR SURVEY RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+6</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the survey, seven staff members were identified as being negative towards the advisor-advisee program and nineteen staff members were identified as being positive towards the advisor-advisee program. Data collected from the student advisees of the seven negative staff members was then compared to data collected from the student advisees of the nineteen positive staff members.

Results

A total of 82 students were identified as being advisees of negative advisors, 49 being students who felt negative towards the advisor-advisee program and 33 who felt positive towards it. A total of 238 students were identified as being advisees of positive advisors, 84 being students who felt
negative towards the advisor-advisee program and 154 who felt positive towards it.

To compare staff and students' attitudes the statistical test of chi square was used. The null hypothesis to be tested was: there is no difference between student attitudes toward an advisor-advisee program if teachers perceive the program positive compared to teachers who perceive the program as unfavorable. The alternate hypothesis was; Students who are assigned to advisors who perceive the advisor-advisee program positively will also perceive the advisor-advisee program more positively than students who are assigned to advisors who do not perceive the program positively. Table 2 illustrates how the data was compared:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>+ SA</th>
<th>-SA</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+ TA</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(139.08)</td>
<td>(98.92)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- TA</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(47.92)</td>
<td>(34.08)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Observed counts have been shown in the individuals cells of the table. Rows of the table have been labeled as +TA (positive teacher attitude) and -TA (negative teacher attitude). Columns of the table are labeled as +SA (positive student attitude) and -SA (negative student attitude). Numbers which are enclosed by the parenthesis are the expected counts. Table 3 shows the statistical data.

Table 3: STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF DATA

\[
\text{ChiSq} = 1.600 + 2.250 + 4.645 + 6.531 = 15.026
\]

\[
\text{df} = 1.0
\]

\[
\text{P} = .0001
\]

Because the p-value was found to be .0001, rejection of the null hypothesis—there is no difference between student attitudes toward an advisor-advisee program if teachers perceive the program positive compared to teachers who perceive the program as unfavorable—would be made. Adoption of the alternative hypothesis—students who are assigned to advisors who perceive the advisor-advisee program positively will also perceive the advisor-advisee program more positively than students
who are assigned to advisors who do not perceive the program positively—is the favored finding from this study.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a relationship between the level of satisfaction experienced by students of advisors who feel negative towards the advisor-advisee program and students of advisors who felt positive towards the advisor-advisee program. The findings from this study indicate that there was a relationship in the sample which participated. Data indicate that student responses are dependent of their advisors' feelings. The findings from this study support the dependent relationship of the two groups. It is very possible that with a more random survey involving schools with advisor-advisee programs the results would reflect the same relationship.

Because current research has not focused on the specific issue which steered this study, it would be difficult to make bold statements of fact or conclusions. What was shown through the literature review indicates that teachers do need to be prepared as advisors. As pointed out by Jim Gill and Jo Ellen Read, advisor-advisee programs will be successful if time has been taken to prepare teachers for the role
of advisement (Gill & Read, 1990). What is lacking from the research is how teacher advisory preparation impacts the students as advisees. The results of this study have raised some important questions for which answers may not be available: (a) Can students' attitudes be changed towards advisement if they are provided with a positive and well trained advisor?, (b) Is the advisor's attitude the only variable which accounts for students' negative feelings towards the advisor-advisee program?

Measurements of successful advisory programs are based on the ability for these programs to meet their desired outcomes. These outcomes, affective in nature, are important in the establishment of goals and improvements for advisor programs.
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Appendix A

ADVISOR-ADVISEE STAFF SURVEY

Please answer the following questions. Circle only one response to each question.

1. Do you make a point to plan for your advisor meeting time as you would for the other classes you teach.
   
   yes no sometimes

2. Do you feel as though you are an important adult to the advisees in your advisor group? Circle the most appropriate response:
   
   (a) not at all    (b) some of the time
   (c) most of the time (d) all of the time

3. As you perceive your own advisor group, do your students like and appreciate you as an advisor? Circle the most appropriate response:
   
   (a) not at all    (b) some of the time
   (c) most of the time (d) all of the time

4. Do you like being an advisor?
   
   (a) not at all    (b) some of the time
   (c) most of the time (d) all of the time

5. Do you feel as though you have been trained to be successful in your role as an advisor?
   
   yes no

6. Do you resent the time it takes from the school day to be involved with the advisor-advisee program?
   
   yes no
Appendix B

ADVISOR-ADVISEE ADVISEE SURVEY

Please answer the following questions. Circle only one answer to each.

1. Does your advisor show concern about things that make you happy or sad?
   (a) not at all   (b) some of the time
   (c) most of the time   (d) all of the time

2. Do you feel it is helpful to have an advisor who has a special interest in you other than as a student?
   (a) not at all   (b) some of the time
   (c) most of the time   (d) all of the time

3. Would you describe your advisor as a friend.
   yes   no

4. Do you like the time you spend in advisor-advisee?
   yes   no

5. Do you like the time you spend with your advisor during the advisor-advisee activities?
   yes   no

6. If you got to choose to be a part of the advisory program would you:
   choose to be active in an advisor program
   choose not to be active in an advisor program