
Comprehensive Guidance and Counselling Programs: The Beechville-Lakeside-Timberlea Experience

Janice Graham-Migel

Halifax Regional School Board

ABSTRACT

This manuscript provides an overview of the Comprehensive Guidance and Counselling Program in the Beechville-Lakeside-Timberlea (B-L-T) Community. It focuses on program development, including the needs assessment and description of programs designed to meet specific needs of students (self-esteem, anger management, conflict resolution, study skills, work habits, career education, peer support programs, student wellness, the B-L-T Teen Health Centre, etc.), program evaluation, staff training, and community involvement. This overview illustrates how the Comprehensive Guidance and Counselling Program takes on the challenge of meeting the needs of the whole person in children and adolescents.

RESUME

Cet article fournit un aperçu général du programme intégré d'orientation et de counseling (*Comprehensive Guidance and Counselling Program*) de la communauté de Beechville-Lakeside-Timberlea (B-L-T). Il se concentre sur l'élaboration de programme, qui comprend, entre autres, l'évaluation des besoins et la description des programmes conçus pour répondre aux besoins particuliers des élèves (l'estime de soi, la maîtrise de la colère, la résolution de conflits, les techniques d'étude, les habitudes de travail, la préparation à une carrière, les programmes de soutien par les pairs, le bien-être des élèves, le Centre de santé pour adolescents de B-L-T, etc.), l'évaluation des programmes, la formation du personnel et la participation communautaire. Cet aperçu général montre comment le programme intégré d'orientation et de counseling entreprend de répondre aux besoins de la personne toute entière chez les enfants et les adolescents.

A Comprehensive Guidance and Counselling Program is designed to assist the personal, social, educational and career development of students. It is a total school program that requires a professionally qualified guidance counsellor for full implementation (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, 1999). The program has defined benefits and outcomes for all students and is developed locally through needs assessments within provincial guidelines. There are four main components of the program:

1. Guidance Curriculum: Structured experiences presented systematically through classroom group activities.
2. Professional Services: Counselling, consultation and coordination activities to meet the immediate needs and concerns of students.
3. Life/Career Planning: Activities which assist students to monitor and manage their own learning and make plans for life and career development.
4. Program Management and System Support: Activities which establish, manage, maintain and enhance the program.

HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

In June 1996, Beechville-Lakeside-Timberlea (B-L-T) School, was chosen by the Nova Scotia Department of Education to pilot a Comprehensive Guidance and Counselling Program during the 1996-97 school year. B-L-T School, representing the Halifax Regional School Board, was one of seven sites across the province. B-L-T School had a population of over 1200 students in Grades Primary to Nine.

In August 1996, training was provided by the Department of Education for guidance counsellors and representative school administrators. In October 1996, a full-day inservice was held at B-L-T School to explain the program to staff members. The design phase took place during the 1996-97 school year and the implementation phase occurred during following two years. The program is now in its fifth year of operation and has moved to a new school that was built in Beechville, called Ridgecliff Middle School (Grades 6 to 9), which opened in September 1999. In this manuscript, I provide a practical overview of the program and its development. It represents a guidance counsellor's perspective, outlining the various components of the programs that were initiated to meet the needs of students.

FORMATION OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

A Comprehensive Guidance and Counselling Advisory Committee was formed in November 1996. The Advisory Committee, coordinated by the guidance counsellor, was comprised of administrators (principal and vice principal), teachers from various grade levels, two senior students in Grade 9 (representing both the English and French Immersion programs), parents, and community members. Input was also given to the committee by the guidance consultant from the Department of Education. The purpose of the committee was to give members an opportunity for meaningful input into guidance and counselling programs and services. Its mandate was to conduct a needs assessment at B-L-T School, determine what resources are available, and assist in designing and implementing programs to meet those needs.

During the first year of the program, the Advisory Committee met each month for two hours. Regular monthly meetings were necessary for the design and compilation of data from the needs assessment. During subsequent years, the meetings were held every second month, with subcommittee meetings held on an as-needed basis.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A needs assessment was designed by the members of the Advisory Committee. School staff completed a questionnaire, students from the Advisory Committee held student focus groups, and the entire student population participated in a needs assessment in the classroom. Parents and community members also participated in the needs assessment through a survey devised by parent and community members on the Advisory Committee.

According to the needs assessment completed during the 1996-97 school year, the top five priority issues at B-L-T School, in order of importance, were as follows: Anger management/conflict resolution, work habits/study skills, career education, communication skills, and self-concept/self-esteem. A goal of the Advisory Committee was to have three issues that the entire school could work on during the school year. Therefore, the Advisory Committee decided to concentrate school-wide efforts (Grades Primary to Nine) on the first three priority issues. These issues continued to be a priority during the next two school years, as the consensus was that additional time needed to be spent on these issues in order to make a difference.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

The following is an outline of how B-L-T's Comprehensive Guidance and Counselling Advisory Committee addressed the above-mentioned priority issues:

Anger Management/Conflict Resolution

After attending a Second Step Violence Prevention "train the trainer" program in October 1997, I provided training in Second Step to teachers from various grade levels at B-L-T School. This training, which took place in March 1998, assisted teachers with the use of Second Step as a violence prevention curriculum. Financial contributions from the school, Parent-Teacher Co-Op, and grant monies enabled B-L-T School to purchase Second Step kits (Committee for Children, 1998) to be used in the classroom.

With the assistance of a "Positive School Climate" grant, a six-week anger management program (Briggs & Greenberg, 1998) was contracted to a community agency specializing in alternative programs for youth and families. In February 1998, this agency began a "pull-out" anger management program for students in Grades 7 and 8, followed by a "booster" session to reinforce skills. In addition, two parent workshops on anger management were conducted. The first was an information session for parents with children in the program. The second workshop was designed to assist parents in dealing effectively with children and youth who display anger, argumentative, and rebellious behaviours.

In the fall of 1998, the anger management/conflict resolution program was implemented more fully. With financial assistance from the Professional Development Assistance Fund (PDAF) Committee of the Nova Scotia Teachers Union and the school's Parent-Teacher CoOp, program materials were purchased and a full-day inservice on the Second Step program was held for all B-L-T School staff. This inservice provided an opportunity for staff to gain an understanding of the Second Step program and review classroom materials. Also in October 1998, an evening information session on the Second Step program was held for parents. In response to requests from the parent information session, two four-week follow-up workshops were conducted, entitled "A Family Guide to Second Step." Evaluation of these workshops by a parent on the Advisory Committee indicated that they were very well received. Mid-year evaluations of

the Second Step program were completed by staff in January 1999 and year-end evaluations of the program were completed by a sample of students in June 1999. The results of these evaluations were also very positive.

One external indicator of success for this program came from the National Crime Prevention Centre of the Department of Justice. In February 1999, a substantial grant was received from the Community Mobilization Program of the National Crime Prevention Centre (National Crime Prevention Centre, 1998) to support programs in Comprehensive Guidance and Counselling related to crime prevention. Another indicator of community involvement in the program was evident when one of the parents on the Advisory Committee attended a round table discussion in Ottawa, exploring ways that communities may take a more active position in the prevention of crime. In addition, three parent members of the Advisory Committee assisted with organizing parent workshops on anger management and study skills, and provided helpful input as to what parents want to learn in the workshops.

Work Habits/Study Skills

A multi-component approach was used to address the second priority item identified in the needs assessment. In September 1997, students from Grades 1 to 9 purchased a school agenda (Premier School Agendas, 1998). In addition to the daily calendar found in most school agendas, the ones purchased contained motivational tips on topics such as: managing time, setting goals, successful studying strategies, career preparation, and planning your future. Homeroom teachers reviewed the proper use of the agenda and the guidance counsellor met with each class to review the use of the agenda and explain the importance of good work habits and time management. Later in the school year, a workshop on Study Skills was conducted for parents. This workshop emphasized how parents could assist their children in developing better study habits and the impact that could have on their overall school performance.

During the next school year, two members of the Advisory Committee (high school students who previously attended B-L-T School) gave a presentation to the Grade 9 students on "Steps to Achieving Success" (A Presentation by Teens for Teens). This presentation covered: Balancing social life, school work and family life, time management and organization skills, setting goals, and the use of the student agenda. This presentation was particularly relevant because it was students speaking to students about the topics. Feedback was very positive from both students and staff.

Career Education

In May 1998, B-L-T School hosted a "Career Awareness Day" for students in Grades Primary to Nine, planned by school staff and the Advisory Committee. Parents and community members spoke to students about their careers and the world of work. Although B-L-T School had many career days over the years for Grade 9 students, it was the first year it was held for students at all grade levels.

Several other activities provide additional career education experiences for students. For example, a parent on the Advisory Committee arranged to have a keynote speaker who had just returned from a mountain climbing expedition in the Himalayas (Aikenhead, 1997) address the junior high students on the subject of having goals in life and following your dreams. Each November, Grade 9 students participate in Take Our Kids to Work Day. Also, all grade levels participate in Take Our Daughters to Work Day held every year in April. These experiences are followed up by having students give verbal reports on their job shadowing experiences when they return to class the following day. Students also research careers for which they are interested and prepare a written report on their experiences.

ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES

In addition to the school-wide programming outlined above, there were several other important components of the Comprehensive Guidance and Counselling Program at B-L-T School. These components represent further examples of the resource pool that can be created when schools partner with other organizations.

Inventory of Resources

A goal of the Comprehensive Guidance and Counselling Program is to establish an inventory of resources to address the needs at the school. One teacher and two students from the Advisory Committee established a database of available and needed school resources. Inventory forms are completed by staff to identify resources currently available and others needed.

B-L-T Teen Health Centre

The Teen Health Centre at B-L-T School is another example of community involvement in the Comprehensive Guidance and Counselling Program. The B-L-T Teen Health Centre (Boutilier, 1997; Brown, 1999; Graham, 1999), which has been in operation since 1996, has been funded over the years through the Nova Scotia Department of Health, corporate sponsorships, the Parent-Teacher CoOp, and grant monies. The Teen Health Centre is an initiative that was supported by the B-L-T Primary Health Care Project (Lalonde, 1995), established to identify health and social needs. Although many needs were identified, one of the priority areas was Teen Health. The Teen Health Centre is also involved in an Adolescent Mental Health Project that is a partnership with the Halifax Regional School Board, the IWK/Grace Health Centre, and Dalhousie University (Kusumakar & Santor, 1998).

Staff of the Teen Health Centre includes a coordinator, clinical health nurse, public health nurse, drug intervention project coordinator, and school psychologist.

Also, a dietetic intern works with the Teen Health Centre as part of Mount Saint Vincent University's Dietetic Internship program. In the fall of 1998, the intern developed a food policy for B-L-T School and developed

a “Healthy Eating at School” program (Hiltz, 1998). Although the Teen Health Centre is open only part-time, there is a health professional in the Centre on a daily basis.

A student Teen Health Advisory Committee (THAC) meets weekly with the Teen Health Centre Coordinator to plan activities for the year. Also, at each Comprehensive Guidance and Counselling Advisory Meeting, a student member of THAC gives a report from the Teen Health Centre. Every year, the committee is active in hosting a Health Week, including an Open House for parents and community members. The Teen Health Centre Management Committee meets quarterly throughout the year and an annual report is written at the end of the school year. Depending upon the funding received, the school hopes to maintain these services each year.

Peer Helper/Peer Mediation/Peer Tutoring

A Peer Helper program is ongoing. Students attended a two-day training retreat, held in conjunction with another junior high school, which includes training in peer mediation; race relations, cross cultural understanding and human rights (RCH); and the sexual harassment policy. In addition, a number of students take part in a Peer Tutoring program, tutoring students at various grade levels.

One very positive by-product of these initiatives is that B-L-T School met the criteria and was designated as a member of the “League of Peaceful Schools” (Van Gorp, 1998). The League of Peaceful Schools has been developed to provide support and recognition to the growing number of schools which have declared commitment to creating a safe and peaceful environment for their students. In November 1998, three assemblies were held at B-L-T School to commemorate the designation during which a flag and a plaque were presented to declare B-L-T’s membership in the League of Peaceful Schools.

Rainbows Program

In January 1999, a parent from the B-L-T Community initiated the Rainbows program that offers peer support for children and adolescents dealing with the loss of a parent through separation/divorce and/or death. Community members were recruited to take the training and become facilitators. Trained facilitators included the guidance counsellor and a teacher from B-L-T School, and six other adults. An evening information session was held for parents and weekly Rainbows sessions were held in the evening from January to May for groups of children who had lost a parent to separation/divorce and/or death. Also, a weekly Rainbows group was held during the school day, for students who had lost a parent to death.

Integrated School and Community Drug Intervention Project

The Integrated School and Community Drug Intervention Project is a partnership between B-L-T School, the Halifax Regional School Board, Department

of Health, and Dalhousie University (Poulin & Baker, 1998). Its purpose is to address drug use among adolescent students. To this end, a drug intervention coordinator was hired in January 1999, to work with staff, students, parents and community members to look at ways that the school and community can help with the prevention of drug use.

Race Relations, Cross Cultural Understanding and Human Rights

Race Relations, Cross Cultural Understanding and Human Rights (RCH) continues to be an important focus at B-L-T School. Student leaders are involved through the Peer Helper training retreat described earlier, where a portion of the training was devoted to the RCH policy, including the sexual harassment policy. It is important for students to have an understanding of these policies. One of the teachers on the Advisory Committee attended several inservices through the RCH Department of the school board and shared information from these inservices with the B-L-T staff. This teacher also coordinated assemblies to commemorate Martin Luther King Day in January, 1999.

Sharing Information About the Program

The full support of school administration and teaching staff, and their commitment to the Comprehensive Guidance and Counselling Program, permitted extensive sharing of the program and its impact with other jurisdictions. The vice principal made a presentation at inservices in Cape Breton and Cole Harbour, Nova Scotia. I presented at an inservice for the Halifax Regional School Board guidance counsellors and a workshop for the Nova Scotia School Counsellors Association. The vice principal and I provided a presentation at inservices held at Coldbrook and Chester Basin, Nova Scotia. Personnel from other schools made visits to B-L-T School to learn more about the program. Currently an initiative is underway to create a web page so that more people may access information about the program.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Comprehensive Guidance and Counselling Advisory Committee at B-L-T School, comprised of the guidance counsellor, guidance consultant, administrators, teachers, students, parents and community members, continues to provide input regarding what is needed in a guidance and counselling program to make it comprehensive. The four main components continue to be important parts of the program: Guidance curriculum, professional services (including individual counselling for students and referrals to outside agencies), life/career planning, and program management and system support.

The Comprehensive Guidance and Counselling program at B-L-T School was very successful during its initial years. As the implementation phase continues at Ridgecliff Middle School, it carries on its mandate to operate in the four domains related to the personal, social, academic, and career development of

students, addressing the needs of students in the Beechville-Lakeside-Timberlea Community.

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About the Author

Janice Graham-Migel is a Guidance Counsellor with the Halifax Regional School Board. She holds a Master of Arts in Education degree (Educational Psychology) from Mount Saint Vincent University and also completed graduate studies at Dalhousie University. Ms. Graham-Migel was the recipient of the Counsellor Practitioner Award at the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Association national conference in Calgary, Alberta, in May 1999.

Address correspondence to Janice Graham-Migel, Guidance Counsellor, Ridgecliff Middle School, 35 Beech Tree Run, Beechville, Nova Scotia B3T 2E5.