

Strength based counseling -A collaborative approach

The strength perspective- the root assumption of this perspective is that many of the venues of human service and education, of child welfare & mental health, of prevention and intervention by apparent necessity and by tradition must not focus upon problems, deficits, disorders and pathologies. In this regard it is important to understand that everyone has a basic belief about what is right. All children know to some level what is right and if the environment does not suffocate and mute they have an inner wisdom. All children like adults have skills, capacities and talents that can be used for their movement towards their aspirations, the meetings of their challenges and amplify their quality of life. We cannot possibly know the upper limits of an individual's ability to grow and change; even when a child messed up trying to deal with a problem, he or she learned things from that –about the self and about the world. So the reserves of potential and what one can do is infinite. To unleash it, it needs belief.

What good are we as helpers if we cannot solve problems? A positive hopeful orientation is to the future is more important in the long run for healing and helping than focus on depressing past. A focus on innate wisdom and health of individuals is more far more productive than scrutinizing what is wrong and deficient. The core of strengths based counseling is work is to help unleash potential skills, talents and assets.

The strength perspective invites you to think differently about children we counsel and teach. The central idea is can be summarized as CPR ie

C-denotes courage, capacity and competence-of students and people whom we intend to help

P-denotes potential, possibility and promise –gives the purpose to the student

R-denotes –reserves, resilience, resources and resourcefulness- that is present and could be utilized to enable the student.

To relate a few of my own every day experiences of dealing with students I have found the concept most effective. The first step is to change approach from **Problem** to **solutions**, from *what is not* to *what is*. For example for building student resiliency and taking a strength based point of view, there are many ways to discern the strengths of students. Three things are of immediate usefulness :-

1. Let students know that you are interested in their capacities and talents, their hopes and dreams.
2. Encourage individuals to tell their stories that are relevant to the concerns at hand, for eg achievement and self regard. As you hear students talking you hear them defining their strengths –times when they faced a challenge, times when they overcame a block, they tried, they did.
3. As you hear them sharing their abilities in different situation, mirror them back to students and give them a language with which to begin to affirm, appreciate and act on those strengths.

Some of the questions that are found very useful are related to their esteem, their perspective, what creates possibility and what gives them support. For example, What is that you really like about yourself?, In spite of what you have faced, you are thriving till now, how? What is your view of the problem? How do you think your current situation can change to a more positive one?

Research continues to show that if just one person is steadfast in his or her belief in a child, it can make a significant difference in how that child feels about himself or herself. It does not matter if that person is a parent, a relative, a neighbor, a coach, a tutor, or a counselor. What matters are the caring, the support and the mirroring back of positive images of the child. ***Strength based counseling is a strong advocate for positive change for***

students-it will occur within the confines of personal, friendly, respectful, supportive and collaborative relations with teachers , counselors and parents .

Everyone-every child, every individual, every family, every group, every community and yes every teacher and parent –has assets, resources and capacities. There is always something more, something new something more and something else that needs attention. It's all about pulling resources together in school and in community to help students. Students as they grow up would want to be living independently in the community, working, using leisure time well and establishing relationships with others. This approach is based upon the identification, development and support of individual and community strength to achieve normalization.

My love for school counseling and dedication to the positive development of capable and caring children is contagious. We all as parents, teachers, friends and confidantes can take up counseling as a means to meet this goal.

To quote Benard one of the earliest practitioners to use strength based approach –*“I suggest that we need to begin with belief in the innate resilience of every human being and with the metaphor that all of us who work with youth are gardeners ,whose young people are flowers in our care.....In our role as gardeners we do not tamper with the seed –the flower is in there”*

It needs belief and just a little conscious effort . I believe all children deserve regardless of their life experiences a positive , rigorous and enriching school experience ...I work to make that possible !

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