EDITORIAL

The Promise of Motivational Interviewing for Securing a Niche in the RtI Movement

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In a previous editorial, we (Frey, Sabatino, & Alvarez, 2013) proposed consultation as an important vehicle to keep the role of school social workers relevant within educational reform effort known as response to intervention (RtI). Specifically, we highlighted our belief that school social workers could make a substantial contribution to the academic mission of the schools by helping staff identify and adopt evidence-based practices (EBPs); coordinating the provision of interventions across the now very familiar three-tiers of support; and providing training and ongoing consultation support to encourage and sustain high-quality implementation. Consultation viewed in this way is particularly relevant given the research demonstrating that overall, implementation of EBPs in education is often of very low quality and frequently overlooked (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Freidman, & Wallace, 2005; Sanetti Hagermoser & Kratochwill, 2009).

Consultation in the context of intervention adoption and implementation is a relatively new application of a familiar practice across multiple disciplines. Specifically, consultation has traditionally involved problem solving to address teacher concerns with individual students. Recently, however, a growing body of literature is addressing consultation specifically within the context of treatment integrity. Fixsen et al. (2005) considered a coaching approach to be a fundamental component of effective treatment implementation. A coaching model to consultation is a collaborative approach between a coach and interventionist that aims to support and ensure treatment integrity (Stormont & Reinke, 2012). The process of coaching often involves some combination of the following: collaborative planning, teaching through modeling and practicing, direct supervision, performance feedback, and follow-up meetings.

To coach teachers toward improved implementation fidelity, we suggested that school social workers need two skill sets. The first involves defining the critical aspects of the EBP. The second skill set relates to influencing the behavior of staff—typically a teacher. In the previous editorial, we summarized some recent literature related to this issue, including the work of some research groups that have begun to adopt motivational interviewing (MI), as described by Miller and Rollnick (2012), to influence teacher behavior. We believe MI is an approach that will become the focus of specialized instructional support personnel from multiple disciplines during the next decade because it has strong theoretical support and an excellent empirical base for changing adult behavior in substance abuse and health settings, and it fills an important need in education (that is, changing teacher behavior through consultation). Furthermore, we believe MI will have appeal to school social workers because consultation is an important function (Frey, Lingo, & Nelson, 2010; National Association of Social Work, 2012) associated with our roles and because many school social workers desire roles in which their clinical skills are used (Frey & Dupper, 2005). Next, we provide an overview of MI and discuss possible application of these skills to address a variety of roles and functions associated with school social work practice.

OVERVIEW OF MI

Miller and Rollnick (2012) defined *MI* as "a collaborative, goal-oriented style of communication with particular attention to the language of change" and went on to say "it is designed to strengthen personal motivation for and commitment to a specific goal by eliciting and exploring the person's own reasons for change within an atmosphere of acceptance and compassion"

(p. 29). Theoretical and empirical support to justify the use of MI is found primarily in the mental health and substance abuse literature. From a theoretical stand, MI is based on the belief that how one talks about change is related to how one acts. Simply stated, the more one talks about or argues for change, the more likely one will change. Conversely, the more one verbalizes reasons against change, the less likely one is to change. MI, therefore, is an approach that helps accelerate the change process "by literally talking oneself into change" (p. 168); this is facilitated by developing a supportive environment/relationship and evoking change talk, or any self-expressed language that is an argument for change. Thus, MI involves an intentional attempt to evoke and explore change talk while simultaneously reducing non-change talk, referred to as sustain talk, within an accepting, affirming, and nonjudgmental relationship (Miller & Rollnick, 2012).

In addition to a strong theoretical base, there is substantial empirical support for MI. The evidence provides compelling support for the notion that therapists can influence clients' (in our case, parents, teachers, administrators, and other school personnel) expressions of change talk and that there is a relationship between client change talk and behavior. In a classic study of parent noncompliance within mental health, Forgatch and Patterson (1985) demonstrated therapists' efforts to change parent behavior through education and confrontation elicited immediate parent noncompliance, whereas efforts to support parents decreased the likelihood of noncompliance. More recently, implementation of MI strategies has been associated with increased change talk (Glynn & Moyers, 2010; Miller, Yahne, Moyers, Martinez, & Pirritano, 2004; Moyers & Martin, 2006). Further, goal-directed change talk is associated with subsequent behavior change (Amrhein, Miller, Yahne, Palmer, & Fulcher, 2003; Miller, Benefield, & Tonigan, 1993; Sellman, MacEwan, Deering, & Adamson, 2007). As noted in our previous editorial, MI is a recent but increasingly important addition to the school-based consultation and intervention literature.

Educational researchers are beginning to pick up the MI mantle with encouraging results across applications with parents and teachers as well as alone and in conjunction with other EBPs (see Connell & Dishion, 2008; Frey et al., in press; Frey, Small, et al., 2013; Herman et al., 2012; Lee et al., in press; Reinke, Frey, Herman, & Thompson, in press; Reinke, Lewis-Palmer, & Merrell, 2008). Initial applications of MI in schools have demonstrated promising results and are likely to expand in the coming years.

THE PROCESS AND SKILLS OF MI

MI contains four fundamental processes: (1) engaging, (2) focusing, (3) evoking, and (4) planning. A practitioner can implement MI without having engaged in the fourth process, but application of the first three processes is a necessity. The core strategies associated with MI are described by the OARS acronym (open-ended questions, affirmations, reflections, and summaries) and an overall "spirit" that includes partnership, evocation, acceptance, and compassion (Miller & Rollnick, 2012). Although the OARS strategies may be new to many educators, they are not likely new to school social workers—certainly not those with clinical experience and skill. Strategic use of the OARS strategies to direct a person toward change requires skill and training in this approach, as it is a unique and defining feature of MI. A primary task of an individual using an MI approach is to increase the probability that change talk will emerge spontaneously in the conversation. To this end, a school social worker would attempt to facilitate dialogue that directs (that is, evokes) parent or teacher talk about the disadvantages of the current practices (assuming they are inconsistent with desired practices) and the advantages of adopting or implementing the behaviors that define treatment integrity for an identified intervention (that is, target behavior). Differentially responding to change talk requires the school social worker to listen intently, avoid taking an "expert role," and recognize change talk. Simultaneously, the school social worker must support autonomy and relegate the choice and responsibility for executing the target behavior to the parent or teacher, who remains the expert in this decision process.

The various types of change talk as well as the strategic use of the OARS strategies within four MI processes to elicit and respond to change or sustain talk are beyond the scope of this editorial. However, for most school social workers, the spirit of MI, as well as some of the skills that define its use, should be familiar for several reasons. First, the approach is similar to other well-regarded

counseling approaches taught in schools of social work and accepted within the social work practice community. Similarities to other approaches include the following: developing a supportive, trusting, relationship as an enabling feature of change (for example, client-centered therapy), helping others focus on specific behavior change (cognitive therapy, behaviorism, solution-focused counseling), and avoiding confrontation (that is, systemic family therapy). Although the emphasis on evocation, or the strategic use of strategies to leverage one's motivation and commitment to engage in a target behavior, will likely be new to those not trained in MI specifically, it is reasonable to believe that school social workers may be the professionals in many schools with the greatest potential to learn this practice.

CONCLUSION

The RtI movement introduces new possibilities for specialized support personnel to reinvent their roles and contributions to the mission of education. Improving the extent to which teachers, administrators, and other school staff adopt and implement EBPs with fidelity is a promising niche in school-based practice, and MI offers an approach that fits well with social workers' strengths–based orientation and client-centered counseling skills. Schools are beginning to identify personnel who will assist to ensure that EBPs are implemented well, often discussed within the context of a "coach." It would behoove school social workers to fill these roles, and leveraging our skills related to adult motivation appears to be a reasonable strategy. The practice of MI has impressive theoretical and empirical support in other fields for changing behavior in the presence of motivational issues. We believe it would behoove school social workers to take up this mantle and that promoting this unique skill would have substantial value, from both a public relations and a practical standpoint. Many school social workers may already have the client-centered counseling skills associated with this practice and, therefore, need only to learn to apply them strategically within the spirit and processes described earlier.

FAREWELL!

I (Andy) have served as the assistant editor for *Children & Schools* for 2.5 years, and this editorial ends my service in this capacity. It has been a pleasure to work with Michelle, our talented editors and authors, and the NASW Publications staff. Something tells me this may not be my final farewell, but that remains to be seen. For now, I step down feeling positive about the direction of the journal. CS

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