

STUDENT OBSERVATION REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Working with young people is hard and demanding no matter how skilled you are with them. Young people all come from different backgrounds with different upbringings and cannot necessarily be categorized as one. Due to their different backgrounds, ironically, they bring out the worse in you as well as the best. Sometimes, they push you to the edge, drawing you into a battle field. Assessing and observing the students' needs for a student counsellor, has been a challenge in itself. Students have constantly challenged the teacher's authority, by disrupting the class, eating, sleeping, singing, pretending to be sick and making commentary remarks. They have explicitly display their dislike for the English language, both in verbal and bodily language. It is easy to say that a student is lazy in the classroom or that they are sleeping in the classroom and not doing their work. However, what is actually going on in their minds and why would they choose sleep over paying attention in class? Being an actor in the field of education as well as an observer has provided great understanding in knowing the students' needs in the past few months.

This report draws attention to three main sections. It first directs attention to the students' internal struggles; followed by the consequences of their internal struggles and finally, recommending helpful mechanisms that can be used to help these students to thrive academically and socially.

STUDENT'S INTERNAL STRUGGLES

Some students can be present in class, yet absent. Sometimes it can result from lack of understanding of the lesson or they might just be struggling with a situation. Unless they are questioned, they would not volunteer any information and we adults often seal the deal as laziness, disrespectful or dullness. It is through one on one conversations that one gets to understand the student's state of mind. In so doing, one might come across depression, anxiety, self-esteem, stress, perfectionism, sleep, peer pressure and even eating disorders.

Through different activities in the classrooms and numerous conversations with students, as well as the conversations they have amongst themselves, it is possible to assume that many students do struggle a lot with peer pressure (self-identity). Other signs drawn from their

attitudes in class have demonstrated that some might be struggling with low self-esteem. Furthermore, they might be struggling with stress, which can emanate from the need to be heard. Many students might have unresolved circumstances, which they struggle with and these can lead to unfathomable actions.

peer pressure

After observing students in the classrooms for six months, it is safe to say that some of these students are struggling with their self-identity. They are struggling with who they are and what they want. Peer pressure occurs when one person has to choose between what they want and what will please their friends. They are faced with the dilemma of peer satisfaction and self-satisfaction, thus drawing themselves into an internal conflict. Through class lessons and discussions, especially in the examination classes, some young men have acknowledged that most of their choices are as a result of peer pressure. When directly challenged to change, they admit the difficulties. Their friends will look at them differently and call them names. Thus they wager between being “the black sheep” or following the majority.

Low self esteem

Low self-esteem is experienced when one feels negativity towards themselves, judging who they are and not really able to see one’s value and worth. This can stem from rooted negative beliefs (LSE Student Counselling Service, 2015) from the adults in their lives, be it parents, teachers, or relatives. It can also result from one’s background and their status in society. In year three, students were asked to share with each other what their parents’ occupations were. From the exercise, it was revealed that most of them were from dysfunctional homes with single parents, and some were embarrassed because of their parents’ occupations. Whenever a discussion in class touches on their parents, they react very strongly. They reaction in anger or build an attitude, which often hides their fears and embarrassment. How can this be confronted? What measures are in place to help these students deal with who they are?

Stress:

Sometimes it is hard to draw the line between stress and depression. Yet, a person who is stress, is often responding to events that may make them feel threatened. To deal with this,

some people can develop an energetic attitude, which helps them reduce the situation's effect on them or it can produce a totally opposite effect. A lot of stress can lead to headaches, panic attacks, stomach aches, dizziness, exhaustion, low motivation and poor concentration. With students, it is not easy to pinpoint exactly what is wrong with them, because they have used the same excuse many times in class that the adults overrule it as lies. Some complain so much about headaches, stomach-aches and exhaustion. However, when students open up and speak about their home situations, you can see the stress points in their lives. These stress points can lead to a variety of feelings, such as anxiety, low self-esteem and depression.

Depression

Depression can thus lead to a student's isolation and avoidance. Isolation enables them to pull apart from their parents and groups, because they do not want to bring others down or have their feelings affect them. They might feel worthless and believe others don't care about them. Others tend to avoid their circumstances, especially when they are too difficult and overwhelming to engage with.

Conversations with some students revealed that they live with parents or step-parents who do not understand their feelings and they try to make life unbearable for them. Others stated that they live with relatives who consider them as no bodies. These young people are treated no less than street children, hence they build a defence mechanism. Through the pain and maltreatment from the adults in their lives, they classify all other adults under the same category. One student openly confessed that at home, she does not speak much nor express herself about what is going on. So she cries alone and the only comfort she has is her friends when she comes to school. Hence in school, she takes up the opportunity to speak and express herself. The challenge right now is to help them know when to express themselves, and not during lessons.

Students device different mechanisms to deal with the events in their lives. Sometimes a student maybe sleeping in class, there's no explanation, thus we assume they do not want to be in the class and lack interest for the class. However, they might be struggling internally and to them, sleep becomes the better option. During a lesson, a young man was sleeping in class. When he was touched to wake up, he got so angry and told the teacher never to touch him. The teacher was quite irritated by this. He had no right to talk to a teacher in that manner nor

to sleep in class. His next words however, made the teacher guilty. He said “you don’t know what is going on at home, so don’t talk to me like you know me”. The teacher realized that the student might be struggling. The teacher scheduled a meeting with him and when they finally met, he apologized for his actions in class. However, he was not ready to explain what was going on. What becomes of these feelings stored up inside?

CONSEQUENCES OF INTERNAL STRUGGLES

Not knowing what to do with their feelings and the situations in their lives, students device their defensive mechanisms by grouping with those who will listen to them and see things from their viewpoints. Thus, they discharge their loads on their peers, especially when the adults in their lives are not listening. In as much as this sounds comforting, it has a downside. Once these groups encounter a conflict, they spew up some of the loads, which their friends had off loaded, resulting in a huge discriminative scandal.

Discrimination among students

Peers are a good place to feel comfortable and at ease, yet, they are also a place of destruction each depending on their goals. Students have little skills in dealing with conflict, which brings about their destruction and that of their peers. This conclusion stems from a number of incidents witnessed between students.

One of the major incidents was from one of the senior classes. On a Wednesday afternoon in April 2016, a group of young ladies gathered in the Senior Discipline Master’s office over a disagreement. Painful words were exchanged, and secrets were revealed in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Students use each other’s backgrounds and experiences to create enmity and look down on one another. In an exchange of insults, comments such as “Look at you who have aborted many times” “Look at you who has a baby”, “Your father abandoned you, because you were worthless”, “Look at you who has had a baby with your brother and he abandoned you. Are you not ashamed?” “I am not like you who has slept with many boys around here”. “You cannot compare yourself with me. I am twenty-one years old and still a virgin, and you?” The list of statements is endless.

Such words do bring trauma to the individuals who have had bad experiences and are trying to ameliorate their way of life. Many tears were shed on that day. At the end, they were asked to bring their parents the next morning. The next morning, they were cleaning the different corridors. The question we should ask is whether cleaning helped to resolve the matter? When they are through with their punishment, will it change the way they see their friends and take away the discriminative statements? How can they deal with conflict in a more dignified manner?

Fear of torment

Students have a lot to say, but to whom will they confided in? Who is there to listen and make a difference in their lives? Furthermore, why are they so afraid to speak about their circumstances? Going back to the young man who offered no further information on what was going on at home, we can focus his silence on the culture they have grown up in. The African cultures have taught us not to share our internal torments with members outside of the family homes. This is truly a good value, for it preserves the family secrets. However, this also produces silent abuse. Students complain about the home situation, but will not accept any intervention.

They are afraid to speak out in fear of being treated worse than before. In their own way, they withdraw from the family setting and hide in their rooms or find comfort in friends. Some prefer to eat outside with friends than to eat at home, where their worth is not appreciated. When asked if they would like a visit to their home for observation, they say no, because they would not want to be beaten afterwards. They would rather play the good/bad child, than to be blamed for bringing trouble on the family. In as much as this demonstrate loyalty, it grieves the victim of abuse. It prevents students from getting the help they need, and promotes "silent abuse", which nurses their anger towards the people around them.

When they do grow up, they become monsters, meaning they develop strong hatred for anyone who tries to minimize them or take advantage of them or insults them. some of their attitudes in class are reflected in some adults we converse with on a daily basis. It will not be surprising to find them fighting on the road, trying to defend their honour. Is violence however the only way to settle conflict?

Although, some have no such defence mechanisms, they look to you as an ideal adult in their life who cares. This is reflected in their written essays, as they pour their hearts and minds. Though they may not speak, they listen to the advice that teachers pour out through their lessons in class. Some do have loving parents, but the company they keep coax them to be rebellious. What can be done to help these young people?

RECOMMENDATIONS

Students try to blend in with everyone else, dissuading themselves that their load is not that heavy. How can we ease their loads? How can we turn their negative energies into positive energy? In many homes, students do not know what love is all about, and have no idea how to demonstrate it. Violence, which does not have to be physical, is their constant meal, because insults are hurled at them and they digest all of them without reciprocating. At the end, they build up anger which can never be broken through force or words of wisdom. Therefore, what can be done to revoke what has already been rooted in them?

Workshops

Many people lack what we call a people's skill, which means a good way of communicating with others without the use of force. Hence this report would suggest that the school should designate a day every month, to hold a workshop within the school, to help the students in their self-development process by focusing on different themes. These themes could centre around; Conflict resolution, Friendships, Families, Confidentiality, Self-esteem (stress and depression), Anger management, Leadership and forgiveness.

Conflict resolution: focuses on different methods of approaching a disagreement, such that both parties are able to listen to one another without feeling accused.

Friendships: focuses on building lasting relationships with friends

Families: focuses on settling disagreement in families without favouritism

Confidentiality: focuses on understanding feelings and being able to keep secrets no matter how painful the person has hurt you.

Self-esteem: focuses on roots of self-esteem and how to develop positive self-esteem

Anger management: focuses on dealing with anger and turning negative energy into positive energy

Forgiveness: focuses on helping people forgive through love, although we might feel justified in our anger.

Student Counsellor

This report also recommends that an expert who understands the various needs of students should be available to help the students go through various experiences and still retain their self-worth. A student counsellor plays a key role in any of the educational institutions and their job does not involve directly with teaching, but giving advices and providing guidance to the students about their personal or academic life. A student counsellor often helps the students to deal with the pressures of life and is also responsible for monitoring the overall psychological growth of the students. Counsellors identify problems, such as alcohol and substance abuse, family violence or problems between students. In response, they use a variety of counselling methods and conflict resolution skills to resolve these problems.

Counsellors also help students find their appropriate educational path and help them stick to it. A student counsellor's responsibilities according to St. John, The School of Counsellor, 2011, include:

- Guiding the students regarding their career decisions and helping them understand their potential and providing help to pursue their goals.
- Helping the students understand their skill sets and provide ways to utilize them
- Providing information about the various universities and professional enterprises and advising them about various requirements
- Advising the students on their personal problems and helps them to resolve them
- Engaging the parents and the school authorities, for coming up with a solution, if the child faces some big problem and together they help the child.
- Recognizing the behavioural issues and provides solutions to handle them.
- Holding various sessions with the students to identify the problems, that the child faces and try to understand their troubles and advise them.
- Working as a mediator between the student and the college authorities, if there is an argument and tries to resolve it.

- Implementing and delivering early intervention and community education programs in consultation with the Heads of school.

A student counsellor, provides counselling and a support service for students, as well as support the Students and teaching staff to meet the social and emotional needs of students by providing advice for individual learning plans. They participate in Crisis management planning when such situations arise, and there have been a number of cases at CEBER. Thus they provide a confidential counselling service for students, their parents and staff as per the institutions' principles.

Although the above recommendations are rich, they are certainly not easy to accomplish. Not everyone will be enthusiastic about opening up to a stranger. Thus, it requires a lot of support from the administration, teaching staff and parents. It will need full cooperation from all the adults in the students' lives to help form them as great men and women of tomorrow. These two methods focus on self-development and mentality change, which is one of the key reasons why social science has become mandatory in the country. To make Citizenship more practical, we need to help the young people with their self-development by attacking the root causes of their problems.

REFERENCES

- LSE Student Counselling Service (2015). Self Help Resources.
St. John (2011). School Counsellor. Role Description.

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