Where SEEDS Grow and Flowers Unfurl

Lindy K. Richmond-Modeste, M.A., Clinical-Community Psychologist

Legal Aid Counseling Clinic

St. George’s, Grenada
Abstract

In an era steeped with the desire for instant gratification, working to change human behavior requires professionals to embrace novel and culturally relevant approaches to effectively foster behavior change in their clients. The Cultivating SEEDS System Framework facilitates this agenda while simultaneously allowing specialists to enjoy their practice.

BACKGROUND

The Legal Aid and Counseling Clinic (LACC) in Grenada embarked on a mission to increase the effectiveness of its Alternatives Program by utilizing the Cultivating SEEDS System Framework. As a budding psychologist, this framework was entirely new to me. Exposure to the concepts and strategies through in-depth training and as a co-facilitator of the LACC’s Alternatives Program, left me eager to implement it as part of my practice. This workshop was facilitated by the creator of the Cultivating SEEDS System Framework, Dr. Yvonne Murray-Larrier and Mrs. Calisha Purcell-Charles, author of the new Alternatives manual.

This initiative is a diversion program for juveniles who have matters in court and who are mandated to attend a 15-week program once per week for two hours. The ultimate goal of this program is to engender positive behavior change. We utilized the new Alternatives manual which followed the Cultivating SEEDS System Framework and the RUMMERTIME process. The participants were 15 young men, ages 14 to 17 years, most of whom attend secondary school. Their court matters were mainly related to causing harm and sexual misconduct. An enclosed, air-conditioned room was used with chairs arranged in a circle to facilitate group processing and to reduce the idea of a classroom setting. In this “Safe Place”, group agreements and posters hinged on the RUMERTIME process were displayed on the walls.
CONTEXT

The Cultivating SEEDS (Social-Emotional Education in Diverse Settings) Systems Framework promotes social-emotional development by using an agriculture metaphor. This framework supports theoretical perspectives that purport that like plants, human development is impacted by the conditions which exist in the environment. Participants are given the opportunity to examine and reflect on the impact of their soil – the environment in which they were born and bred – on their lives and environs. They were allowed to view this process in plots and rows and to consider the society in which they live (home, school, community, government) in comparison to our ecosystem. These goals of introspection and reflection are achieved through self-awareness, decision-making, self-management, social awareness, self-expression and relationship management exercises.

Processing in the group is guided by the concept RUMERTIME. This form of intervention process encourages participants to recognize, understand, manage, express and reflect (RUMER) on their thoughts, interactions, mindsets and emotions (TIME). It promotes emotional intelligence while enkindling positive behavioral change. Use of an agriculture metaphor not only makes this framework unique, but also culturally relevant, as most families in Grenada do some measure of farming for commercial or domestic purposes. It further presented a non-threatening forum for participants with literacy challenges to express themselves healthily and effectively – through drawing or speaking. Use of gamification and a high level of interaction, makes the Cultivating SEEDS System Framework and the RUMERTIME process different from traditional interventions; taking less of a didactic approach.
REFLECTION

This process has certainly added to my growth personally and professionally and has positively impacted the youths involved. The training reminded me that everyone has a story and as a mental health professional, I must own my story – deal with my “stuff” – as uncomfortable as it may be so that I can be most effective as I assist my clients to do the same. I have also learnt that being a contemporary behavior change specialist requires open-mindedness, thinking imaginatively and having an awareness of the context in which I serve. Additionally, I am now more mindful of the energy I bring into the “safe place”, as I make a more deliberate effort to remain down-to-earth and to have fun while guiding the client in doing the work.

Most importantly, over a 15-week period I have been privileged to witness the growth of young men who were labeled as “bad”. These young men who exhibited behavioral problems in school quickly grew cooperative and enthusiastic about the sessions. As the sessions progressed, they became less resistant and more willing to do the “work”. They were also able to self-regulate their emotions and derived better insight into their situations. By termination, their conversations among themselves were different as they used terms they learnt and advised each other to make good decisions. Most interestingly, there were no drop-outs from the program. This fact speaks volumes as the drop-out rates for such diversion programs tend to be significantly high.

I eagerly anticipate utilizing this new skill set with future clients. I believe that every professional who promotes behavior change should be exposed to the Cultivating SEEDS System Framework and the RUMERTIME process. Let’s Rumerize!