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THE SELECTION AND EVALUATION OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS.

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The author reviews a number of different approaches to selecting counselors on both the pre-service and in-service levels, then provides some guidelines for evaluating counselor competence. Counselor selection studies surveyed include: (1) those describing the differences between counselors and non-counselors, (2) those concerned with differences between effective and ineffective counselors, (3) prediction studies, and (4) trait and characteristic studies. The author advocates a shift in focus from what the counselor is in terms of a static model to what he does and how he is to behave. Critical incident cases and coached client methodology are explored as means to achieve the necessary shift in focus. The final section is devoted to problems in evaluating counselor competence. A distinction, for evaluative purposes, is made between competence in the one-to-one counseling relationship (which involves technical professional judgments) and effective contributions to the broader guidance program of the school, which can be accurately assessed by administrators. (Author)

The Selection and Evaluation of School Counselors

John M. Whiteley

April, 1968

The purpose of this chapter is to review a number of different approaches to selecting counselors on both the pre-service and in-service levels, then to provide some guidelines for evaluating counselor competence.

Counselor selection studies will be surveyed including: 1) those describing the differences between counselors and non-counselors, 2) those concerned with differences between effective and ineffective counselors, 3) prediction studies, and 4) trait and characteristic studies.

Advocating a shift in focus from what the counselor <u>is</u> in terms of a static model to what he <u>does</u> and how he is to <u>behave</u>, critical incident cases and coached client methodology will be explored as a means to achieve the necessary shift in focus.

The final section is devoted to problems in evaluating counselor competence. A distinction for evaluative purposes is made between competence in the one-to-one counseling relationship which involves technical professional judgments and effective contributions to the broader guidance program of the school which can be accurately assessed by administrators.

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The existing research evidence is disappointingly inadequate in counselor selection. Hill (1961), in reviewing a report by Barry and Wolf (1958), notes that almost no research has been attempted in this area. Barry and Wolf (1958) found only 14 of 411 articles in the Personnel and Guidance Journal dealt with "counselor training." Only two of 136 articles based on research were on counselor training.

In fact, a search of the literature by Hill and Green (1960) found no "major" longitudinal study of selection, training, placement, and evaluation (Hill, 1961. Pg. 355).

Descriptive Studies

Descriptive studies of the differences between counselors and some norm groups of non-counselors have proven popular, if of marginal value. Scores on paper and pencil personality tests have typically been employed in these descriptions. Hence, we have the Barron Ego Strength Scale and the F scale used by Patterson (1967), the California Personality Inventory used by Morelock and Patterson (1965), the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule used by Kemp (1962), Patterson (1962), and Foley and Proff (1965), the Allport-Vernon Lindzey Study of Values used by Wrenn (1962), the Guilford-Zimmerman Temperament Survey by Wrenn (1952) and Cottle and Lewis (1954), the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory used by Wrenn (1952), Cottle and Lewis (1954), Patterson (1962), and Foley and Proff (1965), the Strong Vocational Interest Blank by Foley and Proff (1965), Kriedt (1949), and Patterson (1962), and the Kuder Preference Inventory by DiMichael (1949).

Patterson (1968) in reviewing these studies, summarized their utility in selection in the following manner:

1) The differences, though statistically significant, are so small as to be of little practical significance or use;
2) when compared to scores of other college graduate students on some of the instruments, such as the MMPI, the scores of counseling students are little different;
3) although it is suggested that scores of students at the advanced practicum level of training are higher than the scores of beginning students, probably through a process of selection, it cannot be assumed that these students are better counselors, or better potential counselors than the beginning counselors;
4) there is some evidence (Mahan and Wicas, 1964) that some counseling students do not appear to possess characteristics usually considered desirable in counselors. This suggests that there are differences in the concept of the nature and function of counseling and of the related characteristics of the counselor.

Effective and Ineffective Counselors

Another popular, if equally unproductive approach, has been to describe the differences between effective and ineffective counselors. Again, paper and pencil personality tests have proven to be the typically employed instruments.

These particular studies* have been reviewed elsewhere by Patterson (1968,pp.) and the interested reader is referred there for a detailed evaluation.

The limitations in this type of study are several. The most serious were rated by Sprinthall, Whiteley, and Mosher (1966):

> What is a valid yardstick for measurement of success in counselor training? Usually an overall "global" judgment has been used in which a group of counselor educators, after observing counselor candidates, rank orders them. The major shortcoming with this approach is simply that bases for judgment are almost entirely intuitive (for example, see Blocher, 1963). No specification is given as to what kind of behavior distinguished those subjects adjudged most competent from those considered least competent. It is necessary, in terms of possible replication, to have some explicit guide lines which indicate how students were rated. This also requires some rather explicit

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* Arbuckle, (1957) Betz, (1963); Brams (1961); Cahoon (1962); Carson, Hardin, and Shaws (1964); Combs and Super, (1963); Demos, (1964); Demos and Zuwaylif (1966); Dispenzieri and Balinsky (1963); Kemp (1962); McDaniel (1967). Milliken and Paterson (1967) Mills and Mencke (1967); Russo, Kelz, and Hudson (1964); Sattler (1964); Stefflre, King, and Leafgren (1962); Whitehorn and Betz, (1960); and Wicas and Mahan (1966);

theoretical statements from which operational judgments may be derived (189-190).

Patterson (1968) specified some additional limitations of the studies of effective and ineffective counselors. The differences found between them which are statistically significant are too small to be important in selection. Also, whether the differences existed prior to training is not clear.

Prediction Studies

Another approach to counselor selection has been prediction studies, normally using admission criteria as the independent variable and practicum ratings on a semester's supervised experience as the dependent variable.

These studies typically lack a theoretical rationale for their independent variables. Or if one was employed, it was not explicated. This lack of specification of an integrated theory may account for failures in replication.

A more serious deficiency is the lack of attention to the complexity of what is being (or attempted to be) predicted. Is there any reason to suppose that academic achievement in courses like tests and measurements or the psychology of personality is in any way related to effectiveness in one-to-one counseling? Whether or not a student can pass the courses in a counselor education program of a didactic nature is an important consideration in choosing candidates for graduate study. Reading comprehension as a variable (Callis and Prediger, 1964) may be a useful inclusion when justified on academic grounds.

But the problem in predicting success is two-fold. First, a candidate must have intellectual ability sufficient to passing courses in testing, vocational development etc. Second, given this minimal level (whatever it is - and it undoubtedly varies from institution to institution) of intellectual ability, what are the personal qualities associated with effective counseling?

These problems must be studied together. Academic potential needs to be partialled out first. Research can then be done on personal qualities as they relate to effectiveness in counseling free from the question of academic potential.

While the focus of prediction studies has been on "performance" in counseling,* the studies have been predominately with counselors in training. This group is obviously convenient to research. They normally constitute a "captive" population. As the profession is just beginning to learn the intricacies of predicting effectiveness, this is a useful place to start. It should be kept in mind, however, that "success" in training - and its prediction - represents at best only a proximate criteria. The ultimate goal is prediction of effectiveness in subsequent performance as a school counselor in on-the-job performance.

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* Patterson (1968) has reviewed the small number of prediction studies in the literature: Blocher (1963); Callis and Prediger (1964); Dole (1963, 1964); Ohlsen (1967); Rank (1966); and Wasson (1965). He noted major problems with the criterion. Since grades are not acceptable, most studies use ratings, but ratings are strongly influenced by who is doing them, as the Dole (1964) study showed. And counseling defined within the one-to-one relationship means different things to different raters (interpreting tests, vocational placement, etc. Krupfer, Jackson, and Krieger, 1959).

Characteristics and Trait Studies

A traditional area for research in counsel selection has been the use of counselor characteristics or traits. The assumptions are explicit. Personality traits such as sociability or friendliness are conceptualized as relevant dimensions within the personality organization of the counselor. The assumptions of this approach are problematic. Certainly the research evidence is equivocal. Cottle (1953) notes that, "It seems obvious that most of the attempts to evaluate the personal characteristics of counselors are sporadic and unrelated" (1953, p. 450).

There is little in this research that attempts to relate a specific rationale for particular traits to a theory of counseling except in the most general sense, i.e., if counseling includes working with people then the counselor ought to score high on a trait of "liking" people. Descriptions of the counselor as a person range from qualities such as "Belief in each individual" and "Commitment to individual human values" (ASCA 1964) to the counselor "as a woman" (Farson, 1954).

Bowler and Dawson (1948) distinguished such "traits" as objectivity, respect for the individual, self understanding, mature judgment, ability to listen and keep confidences, resourcefulness, reliability, sense of humor, constructive criticism, and personal integrity. For Cox (1945) among 24 salient traits were fairness, sincerity, health, personality, a sense of mission, good character, and whole philosophy. Graves (1944) distinguished such features as integrity, vitality, judgment, health, industriousness, high personal standards, adaptability, training, and experience.

It seems rather fruitless to continue this line of inquiry. Human qualities may indeed be relevant to counseling. The consideration of traits is not going to reveal the relationship of human qualities to effective counseling.

It is necessary to shift the focus from what the counselor <u>is</u> in terms of a static model to an evaluation of what the counselor actually <u>does</u>. By assessing what he is to <u>do</u> - how he is to <u>behave</u> in the role of the counselor - it will be possible to have operational criteria of competence. These operational criteria of competence - such as those delineated in the Counselor Rating Blank (see Appendix B) may then be related to higher order personality dimensions for use in selection.

By attempting first to specific the behaviors which are desirable on the part of the counselor, it is then possible to relate these behaviors to higher order personality factors with a systematic theoretical rationale. Such a rationale is lacking in the simple bivariate studies which characterize the research literature.

The behaviors in the COUNSELOR RATING BLANK represent an attempt to specify operationally what the counselor is to <u>do</u> in the one-to-one counseling relationship. Similarly, the SCHOOL PERFORMANCE RATING BLANK (see Appendix A) represents an attempt to specify operationally what the counselor is to <u>do</u> in his guidance responsibilities outside of one-to-one counseling.

As higher open personality variables, cognitive flexibility (Sprinthall, Whiteley, and Mosher, 1966; Whiteley, Sprinthall, Mosher, and Donaghy, 1967; Allen and Whiteley, 1968) and psychological openness

(Allen, 1967; Allen and Whiteley, 1968) have been related to counselor behavior.

Briefly stated, cognitive flexibility is the capacity to think and act simultaneously and appropriately in a given situation. It refers to dimensions of open-mindedness, adaptability, and a resistance to premature closure in perception and cognition. Rigidity assumes the opposite, and intolerance of ambiguity or an excessive need for structure.

Effective counselor behavior results from the ability to remain cognitively flexible; to respond, for example, to both the content and feeling which the client communicates. The implication is that the rigid counselor, unable to respond to the demands of the interaction with the client, construes the situation without reference to the client. This might take the form of seeking early closure on the client's problems and systematically "tuning out" additional responses by the client. Flexible behavior, in contrast, would imply a general avoidance of either excessive structuring in the counseling situation, or the complete ambiguity of nondirection.

In counseling, psychological openness is an essential precondition to the understanding of the thoughts and feelings of other persons. Freud observed that lack of insight into one's own psychological processes is an important source of distortion in the therapist's perception of his patients. It appears to many theorists that a counselor's own feelings are important sources of information in the process of unraveling the emotional communications of others, for example, Bakan (1956), Bordin (1955), Katz (1963), and Schafer (1959).

Furthermore, psychological openness of the counselor is an essential factor in the establishment of an interpersonal atmosphere conducive to client exploration. Rogers (1957) asserts that the openness of the counselor to his own feelings ("congruence") is one of the "necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change." Similarly, Jourard (1964) posits a "dyadic effect" in counseling. That is, the extent to which clients are able to risk self-recognition seems to be related to the willingness of counselors to take the same risk.

The use of a theoretical framework - whether it be higher order personality variables like cognitive flexibility and psychological openness - or some other rationale will go a long way toward eliminating the deficiencies of the bivariate studies characterizing the research literature.

Selection of Counselors in Secondary Schools

The literature reviewed above is applicable to selecting counselors, but the bulk of it has been oriented to selecting graduate students, and choosing among counselors-in-training. The purpose of this section is to present some guidelines more directly applicable to selecting already trained counselors for positions in secondary schools.

Initial attention in secondary school selection should be given by the school administrator to the quality of training. Relevant here is the degree held, the amount of applicable course work, and particularly the supervised counseling experience.

Had this approach been in use by school administrators, the studies conducted by Dyer (1957), Siller (1962) would not have resulted in such

disconcerting findings in the area of testing. Testing is an important responsibility of a counselor. Yet a Project TALENT survey (Siller, 1962) found that twenty-eight percent of practicing school counselors had no psychometic background at all, and another twenty-five percent had but one to three credit hours. Bluntly stated, over half of the counselors are unqualified to assume responsibility for a testing program.

Dyer (1957) found that seventy-two percent of the counselors in his sample were incapable of making a valid prediction study of how tests were related to school functioning. Sixty percent had never even constructed local test norms.

Counselors as a group have not been too effective in defining their role. Prior to hiring, it is important to:

1) have the applicant give a specific operational definition of what he sees his function to be in the secondary school.
2) have the applicant articulate in detail what he sees his long range objectives to be.
3) work out with the applicant what the bases of evaluating his performance should be.

When the pool of candidates for a position has been narrowed down by the procedure outlined above, it is then feasible to employ several techniques with a common denominator of requiring the applicant to demonstrate what he would <u>do</u> - how he would <u>act</u> - in professionally relevant situations.

Critical Incident Cases

The first of these action oriented professionally relevant situations is provided by the "critical incident" cases. The cases have been developed as a series of "crisis" situations in counseling. The applicants are asked to write out their responses as quickly as possible since the framework for evaluation has been created to see how quickly they can, in a sense, "think on their feet."

The Case of John (Whiteley, Sprinthall, Mosher, Donaghy, 1967) is illustrative:

> As a counselor in a school, you have been seeing a student, John, on numerous occasions for what is sometimes called personal counseling. He is a very conscientious student, yet worried constantly about his academic work. These concerns have been the focus of the most recent sessions.
>
> During the mid-term exam period, in fact, just a minute or two before he is to take his exam in history, he appears at your door. You look up from your work, with some surprise--you notice his eyes are moist as he struggles to say--
>
> "May I come in and see you?"

On the Case of John, subjects are asked to indicate: 1) what their specific response would be to the question; and 2) their thoughts and feelings about the situation, particularly the dimensions they found troublesome as counselors.

One method of evaluating applicant responses would be on a flexible-rigid dimension. From the point of view of scoring criteria, a flexible response generally would involve at least two dimensions: a) an acceptance of the student in an "open" way, and b) a specific mention of getting him to the exam with an offer to see him after the exam. Ideally the counselor might offer to go with the boy and talk about the specifics of the exam as they go. Also the answer should mention the significance of the boy presenting himself to the counselor at this moment. Examples of responses classified as flexible and rigid are provided by Whiteley, Sprinthall, Mosher, and Donaghy (1967) and Allen and Whiteley (1968).

In evaluating applicants, the flexible-rigid dimension is only one of a series of options. The key point is that the guidance staff could evaluate the applicant using the general question, "Did this counselor respond to the situation in a way that I would want myself or a colleague to respond."

Coached Client Methodology

The coached client methodology is another approach which attempts to require the applicant to demonstrate what he would do and how he would act in a professionally relevant situation. A "coached client" is analagous to an actor playing a role - in this case a role of a student seeking help from a secondary school counselor. His role is constructed in such a manner that he will confront the counselor - or an applicant for a counseling job - with a variety of problems resembling those confronted by a counselor doing his job.

An important technical problem is to have the client behave in a reasonably consistent manner from interview to interview - without structuring the interview so tightly that the counselor cannot have sufficient free reign to display his own style in approaching counseling problems.

For selection in the public schools, a standard "client" role could be constructed resembling the problems in the particular district. The coached client's repertoire should include the typical problems that are normally confronted by the counseling staff in doing their work. If it is a school where eighty percent of the students go to college, the role would obviously include questions typically asked about college choice. The intent would be to assess the applicant's facility and knowledge in answering these types of questions. If the school is one where only twenty-five percent of the students go to college and vocational placement is a critical role, the coached client's repertoire would be very heavily weighted on questions of vocational choice and technical education.

What the coached client methodology is attempting to anticipate is the kind of concerns that a counselor will confront as part of his day-to-day work. The intent is not to entrap the applicant into difficult kinds of situations that are very unusual, but to assess how he works on what the typical problems are he will confront if hired.

Using a "coached client", each applicant would be asked to counsel the client for twenty or thirty minutes. The sessions would be video taped. By video taping the applicant counseling sessions, at the end of

the interview schedule for the position the guidance staff could assess not only the usual criteria which are employed in counselor selection, but actually view the comparative counseling approaches of the applicants to the kinds of problems which are typical to the district.

Evaluating Counselor Competence

It is to the problem of providing guidelines for evaluating counselor effectiveness that this section will be directed. While competency in areas like testing are relatively easy to establish, the general problem of evaluating quality in professional performance is much more elusive.

It is particularly difficult in the public secondary schools when the people doing the evaluating, typically the school principal or another administrator, are laymen as far as the technical professional issues are concerned.

It is possible, however, for an administrator in the position of a principal to make important, valid evaluations of some aspects of professional functioning. Counselor educators and Directors of Guidance can make equally important evaluations of other aspects of professional functioning. Taken together, these evaluations would provide a comprehensive assessment of counselor effectiveness in the role of the school counselor.

School administrators can evaluate how a counselor is working in relation to the rest of the school on dimensions such as:

1) The quality of contact with parents, teachers, and other relevant persons.

2) How current educational and occupational resource material is.

3) Professional memberships, activities, and publications.

4) The number and quality of new programs and other innovations in counseling which are initiated.

5) The contributions to school policy and procedure which are derived by counselor studies of such topics as dropouts, attendance, subsequent college or vocational success of the high school's graduates.

6) The knowledge of resources available in the community to assist students.

7) Dependability and judgment in the completion of administrative tasks and in the handling of student and parental concerns.

8) The quantity and quality of his knowledge about developmental concerns of students which is translated into meaningful school policy.

The SCHOOL PERFORMANCE counselor rating blank (see Appendix A) has been developed to provide school administrators, principals, and guidance directors with a systematic method of assessing counselor merit as it relates to his functioning in the school.

The SCHOOL PERFORMANCE rating blank is composed of seven sections: overall competence, relations with the school administration, relations with teachers, relations with parents, the school testing program, vocational opportunities for pupils, and educational opportunities for pupils.

The OVERALL RATING OF COMPETENCE is based on a seven point scale ranging from extremely effective to negative effectiveness. This is viewed as a composite, summary rating reflecting total performance.

The RELATIONS WITH SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION, RELATIONS WITH TEACHERS, and RELATIONS WITH PARENTS sections are rated on four dimensions: communication, cooperation, initiative, and responsibility. Each dimension has seven possible ratings.

Communication relates to clarity and explicitness in defining in practice the role of the counselor. Cooperation refers to the willingness to work closely with others in program implementation. Initiative is in terms of suggestions for program improvement and anticipating difficulties. Responsibility is defined in terms of appropriateness and follow through as problem areas.

The dimensions of the SCHOOL TESTING PROGRAM, VOCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUPILS, and EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUPILS are defined on seven point scales in terms of knowledge and communication. Knowledge is defined in terms of extent of relevant information about a problem or program. Communication evaluates the extent to which that knowledge is communicated as part of professional practice to others in the school.

The SCHOOL PERFORMANCE counselor rating blank can be used by school administrators or guidance directors to assess the effectiveness of the counselor in relation to the school guidance services.

The problem of assessing effectiveness in the one-to-one counseling relationship remains to be discussed. Since it is conducted privately with only the counselor and the client present, the usual method

employed in teacher evaluations of classroom observation is not possible. Since most school administrators are not former counselors, they have the difficulty of not knowing how to assess technical competence in the one-to-one counseling relationship, as they can assess teacher competence.

The one-to-one relationship is a vitally important area in counselor competence. The technical nature of the task makes it an area in which counselor educators and guidance directors can cooperate to strengthen the practice of counseling in the secondary schools.

Audio tape recordings submitted by the counselor at regular intervals could be evaluated anonymously by counselor educators using a predetermined set of uniform criteria. Since the criteria would be public knowledge, the counselors working under a competence system would have standards for which to strive. School administrators would have technical, objective evaluations of effectiveness in one-to-one counseling which could be another important factor in the overall assessment of competence.

One method for assessing effectiveness in one-to-one counseling is the COUNSELOR RATING BLANK (Appendix B) developed by Whiteley, Sprinthall, Mosher, and Donaghy (1967). The COUNSELOR RATING BLANK assesses flexibility in the counselor's behavior on dimensions of examination, exploration, collaboration, objectivity, stylistic repertoire, handling the unexpected, use of interpretation, and response to supervision.

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