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ABSTRACT

This study compares reasons high school students give for being in school with the types of assistance they associate with their counselors. In addition, the "fit" between the kinds of services students think they need and the kinds of services they are willing to accept from counselors are examined. Field research methodology was utilized and resulted in a low proportion of responses, which is pointed to as a major limitation of the study. Generalizations made on the basis of such a restricted sample are considered tentative and should be interpreted with caution. These generalizations are: (1) students tend to view the counselor as helpful in educational or vocational planning more than personal concerns; (2) students tend to view improving themselves, as opposed to getting into college or job training, as the most important reason for being in school; (3) there is a discrepancy between the kinds of services which students think they need and the kinds of services they will accept from their counselors. (Author/PC)

"The Consistency of Student Priorities with Perceptions of the Counselor as a Source of Help"

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Purpose

The purpose for this study was to compare the reasons high school students gave for being in school with the types of assistance they associated with their counselors. In addition, the "fit" between the kinds of services students think they needed and the kinds of services they were willing to accept from counselors was examined. Ideally, students would see counselors as a source of assistance in the same areas in which they felt school was important.

Since this study deals exclusively with students' perceptions, it seemed only reasonable that the sole source of input should be students. Students have been used as a source of input in various investigations which dealt with the nature and success of school guidance programs and, in particular, counseling services (Duncan, 1967; Gladstein, 1969; Jenson, 1955; Severinsen, 1966). Although most studies have relied upon surveying only those students who received counseling, studies by Tipton (1969) and Wortman (1969) surveyed students without regard to whether or not the students received counseling. The advantage of surveying both clients and non-clients is that it can provide the counselor with information about the attitudes of a representative sample of all of those for whom the guidance counselor is responsible. This distinction is important since the use of "clients only" would likely provide a different perspective from that of "all students."

Methodology

Sample:

This study was conducted in the fall of 1971. The counselors who participated in this study met the following qualifications: (1) the school in which they were currently employed was within a 125 mile

radius of Toledo, Ohio as indicated by their school's telephone area code as listed in the Directory of Ohio School Counselors (Frericks, 1970); (2) were employed in a school which had at least one three-quarter time counselor and no more than one full-time and one half-time counselor; and (3) were willing to participate in this study.

Through a series of mailings, the first being sent to 114 counselors based on criteria #1 and #2 above, the final sample of twenty-three schools was obtained. The total number of usable student-completed surveys was 1,658. The final sample of twenty-three schools represents approximately a 20% participation rate based on the initial population of 114. It is not uncommon in field research to have such a low proportion of favorable responses. This is one of the limitations of field research in general and of this study in particular. This low response rate may be explained by the fact that those counselors who decided to participate in this study also agreed to take a paper and pencil personality survey which was a part of a larger study being conducted at the same time (Weinrach, 1972).

Instrumentation

The Guidance Program Evaluation Student Survey, Form A-4 (GPES) (Wysong, 1971) is a 105 item multiple-choice instrument which measures, as the name implies, student perceptions of a school's guidance program. In addition, it measures student attainment of specified guidance objectives which are based upon Wysong's (1968) taxonomy of guidance objectives. This instrument and earlier versions of it have been used extensively by the Ohio State Department of Education for the purposes of providing school counselors with feedback about their guidance program. This study was concerned with students' responses to six items, 95, 101-105 which are presented in tables 1 and 2 below.

Procedures

Once the sample was obtained, the counselors were mailed copies of the GPES, IBM answer sheets and directions for its administration. Return postage paid envelopes were provided. Participating counselors received a computer print-out of the results based on the responses of students in their schools. For the purposes of this particular aspect of the original study, the responses of all 1,658 students who were all juniors were combined and were not treated individually by school.

Results

Items 101 to 105 of the GPES provide the students with the opportunity to rank in order of importance the ways in which counselors might be of assistance to students. The order was determined by ranking the cumulative frequency of each item. Table 1 summarizes the results. Students tend to view the counselor as being highly instrumental in assisting them in making future educational or vocational plans. However, students do not view the counselor as a source of assistance where personal problems are concerned. Students ranked second the counselor as a source of assistance in relation to problems with course selection and school activities. It is interesting to note that the students who participated in this study ranked as their least important priority of ways in which a counselor may be of some assistance, the area of counseling students with personal and social problems (see Table 1).

Item 95 asks the students: "Which of the following is the most important reason to you for being in school?" Over one-third of the students responded "Improving yourself." The results have been ranked in descending order from the alternative with the highest frequency of response to the lowest in Table 2.

Discussion

If counselors were asked to identify the one type of counseling they would like to be most identified with, most would probably select helping clients with personal concerns. Few would probably like to be identified primarily as a source of educational or vocational planning. Yet this is precisely how the students who participated in this study viewed their counselors. Counselors were associated more readily with educational and vocational types of guidance than with assisting students with personal concerns.

It is interesting to note that although the students saw the counselors as assisting them in their educational and vocational planning, (Table 1) they did not view school (Table 2) as especially facilitative in this direction. Most students identified the most important reason for being in school as "improving yourself." The lowest ranked reason for being in school was "training for a job." In essence, students were saying that their schooling was largely irrelevant to their progress in later academic or vocational pursuits.

Counselors were viewed by students as being able to assist them in post high school planning although this was not one of the students' priorities for being in school. Apparently, these students looked more to the counselor than to the school curriculum to help them in their post-high school activities. On the basis of these findings, though, it is impossible to identify other aspects of the school program which may be even more discrepant from the students' motives for being in school than are their views of the counselor. These results would tend to suggest that although counselors appear competant in implementing various areas

of the guidance program, these areas do not coincide with the stated priorities of the students for being in school.

There is a poor if non-existant "fit" between the kinds of services students felt that they needed and the kinds of services which they were willing to accept from counselors. If students had viewed their counselor as a source of assistance in improving themselves then they would have logically ranked the counselor higher as a source of providing assistance with personal concerns. Yet they didn't. There is no fit between what students expected from high school and the role counselors played in helping them achieve their goal. Students' expectations of school in general and counselors in particular do not coincide. As a matter of fact, they appear to be opposites. The area in which the students saw the counselors as most helpful was not especially important to them and the area which was most important to them was not viewed as one where the counselors could be of assistance.

Generalizations from this data are difficult to make at best. One of the limitations of field research often is the nature of the sample. Yet this is one of its greatest assets. Where else can one obtain data about how students perceive counselors but from students? To obtain a truly based representative sample is often impossible. Counselors in the field frequently tend to be reluctant about cooperating with university based researchers. However, there are some generalizations that can be tentatively made.

The reader is urged to consider these generalizations as tentative and interpret them with caution. The following generalizations are based upon the responses of 1,658 eleventh-grade students attending twenty-three high schools.

* Students tend to view the counselor more as a source of assistance with educational or vocational planning than with personal concerns.

* Students tend to view improving themselves as opposed to getting into college or job training as the most important reason for being in school.

* The ways in which students see the counselors being a source of assistance and the reasons for being in school do not coincide.

* There is a discrepency between the kinds of services which students think they need and the kinds of services they will accept from their counselor.

Table 1

Student Rankings of Ways in which Some Counselors Can Be of Help to Students Based on a Frequency Distribution of 1,658 Students' Responses to Questions 101 to 105 of the GPES

Alternative	Number*	Percent*	Rank
4. Helping students plan for an occupation or further education after high school	675	40.70	1
1. Helping students with problems in their school subjects or school activities	332	20.00	2
3. Helping students know more about their aptitudes, interests, or personal traits	321	19.40	3
2. Helping students select or change their schedule of school subjects	475	16.60	4
5. Helping students with their personal problems or with the troubles they are having with other individuals	554	33.40	5

* Column totals represent less than the entire sample because of omissions of responses

Table 2

Student Ranking of the Most Important Reason for Being in School Based on 1,658 Students

Alternative	Number	Percent	Rank
2. Improving yourself	621	37.50	1
4. Getting a diploma	300	18.10	2
3. Getting into college	296	17.90	3
1. Training for a job	225	13.60	4
5. I don't know	182	11.00	5
omit	34	1.90	6

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