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PHILOSOPHICAL BELIEFS OF COUNSELOR TRAINEES

ABSTRACT: In this study, comparisons of measured philosophical beliefs, philosophical positions related in an interview, and counseling behavior were made for 22 counselor trainees at the University of Maine at Orono. The measurement of philosophical beliefs was made by using the *Ames Philosophical Beliefs Inventory*. High agreement was found between these three methods of evaluating philosophical beliefs. Many trainees were unable to explain or understand their philosophical belief or show its implications in counseling behavior. Suggestions for the improvement of counselor education, based on the findings, are listed.

Many authors have stated a variety of positions on how various philosophical points of view can affect the training and subsequent practice of counselor trainees. Hadley (1958), for example, argues that "it is indefensible to infer . . . that the formulation of counseling goals is independent of the value-judgments of counselors (p. 152)." Counselor trainees who seek to articulate a consistent posture to the client must choose between Realism, Idealism, Pragmatism, Phenomenology, and Existentialism. It is possible that this range of philosophical belief is confusing to counselor trainees and negatively affects their counseling practice.

Beck (1963) has compiled an extensive bibliography of significant work that supports the importance of philosophical constructs in relation to counseling practice. Cribbin (1955); Curran (1960); Patterson (1958); Chenault (1968); Ames (1968); Dey (1969); and Kratochvil (1969) have contributed differing interpretations regarding philosophy in counseling. However, each investigator has stated that the counselor must understand his philosophical beliefs if counseling is to be authentic and meaningful. The counselor must know what he believes and why he believes it. Successful counseling occurs when the counselor accepts the belief system by which he lives, but does not impose it upon his client.

It is the position of the investigators that the philosophical belief systems of counselors as expressed in counseling interviews has not been extensively researched. Furthermore, techniques for assessment of a counselor's philosophical belief system may provide counselor educators with the tools to understand counselor-client interaction and goal setting within the interview. The major purpose of this study was to determine whether the *Ames Philosophical Belief Inventory* (APBI) measured philosophical values of counselor trainees. A secondary purpose was to determine the relationship between APBI scores and counseling practice.

METHOD

During the spring term of 1969, the APBI (Ames, 1968) was administered to 24 students (17 men, 7 women) enrolled in a counseling practicum at the University of Maine at Orono. The counselor trainees were randomly divided into two groups and interviewed after completing the APBI. The interviews were semi-structured and included the following interview questions:

1. What is your philosophical position?
2. Which of these philosophical statements best describes you? (The counselor trainee was given a copy of Ames' descriptions of the philosophical positions: Realist, Idealist, Pragmatist, Phenomenologist, and Existentialist.)
3. What is it about this philosophical position that attracts you?
4. Do you agree with the Ames' description of you? (The Counselor trainee was provided with a copy of his APBI profile.)

The counselor trainees were asked to submit one audio tape of a counseling session of their choice to serve as a specimen of counseling behavior. The audio tapes of counseling practice were rated for evidence of philosophical position by both investigators prior to discussing the APBI test profile with the trainee. The following *Philosophical Behavior List* was developed to aid in rating the audio tapes. The list was developed from material presented in Morris (1961) and Butler (1957).

PHILOSOPHICAL BEHAVIOR LIST

1. *Realist Behaviors:*
 - a. Gathers interpretable data from client.
 - b. Persuades client to change behavior to become more self-disciplining.
 - c. Verbally predicts possible client behavior.
 - d. Explains to client how he, the counselor, solves problems.
 - e. Changes client's environment.
2. *Idealist Behaviors:*
 - a. Verbalizes societal goals as absolutes.
 - b. Brings client to seek the truth and avoid error.
 - c. Seeks to elicit client's feelings of anxiety.
 - d. Directs the client towards his spiritual welfare or the good life.
 - e. Directs the client to endure suffering with dignity.
3. *Pragmatist Behaviors:*
 - a. Asks client to describe experiences.
 - b. Helps client to identify causal agents.
 - c. Helps client discern and verbalize his behavioral patterns.
 - d. Verbalizes several hypotheses for client to apply.
 - e. Forces client to try out solutions that may reduce tension.
4. *Phenomenologist Behaviors:*
 - a. Builds a strong relationship with the client.
 - b. Allows client to clarify his perception of the problem.

- c. Reflects and interprets client's information.
 - d. Helps client explore attitudes and feelings.
 - e. Asks client to direct the interview.
5. *Existentialist Behaviors:*
- a. Uses variable counseling techniques.
 - b. Accepts client's needs and supplies indicated stimulation.
 - c. Avoids prolonged behavioral mechanisms.
 - d. Changes content emphasis if probing seems imminent.
 - e. Focuses client on his attitude toward his problems.

Counseling behavior scores for each counselor trainee were obtained by averaging the raw scores of the rated counseling session. A pilot rating session was conducted on three non-study audio tapes and the results compared for inter-judge agreement. The inter-rater reliability was .90. Subsequently, the counselor trainee tapes were rated using the *Philosophical Behavior List*. Counseling protocols of each counselor trainee were scored on a five point scale (0 = no identifiable philosophical position to 4 = high agreement with a philosophical position). The counselor trainee's philosophical position was judged to be that which received the highest total score from both judges.

In addition, each counselor trainee responded to a questionnaire that provided the investigators with biographical data regarding interests, aspirations, and experiences which would contribute to a better understanding of the trainee's background. This information was scanned for significant experiences that would provide further insight into the philosophical beliefs of the counselor trainees.

Chi-square analysis (Siegel, 1956) was used to determine whether there was a significant difference between verbalized philosophical positions and APBI scores. This was done because of the nominal nature of the APBI scores. Differences between APBI philosophical positions and actual counseling behavior were also analyzed in the same manner.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The high relationship between APBI scores and verbalized philosophical position implies that the APBI accurately assessed the values of 84 percent of these counselor trainees. When the frequencies of specific verbalized philosophical position are compared with the students' highest APBI score a nonsignificant chi-square of 3.9 for 4 degrees of freedom was obtained. This indicated little difference between those measures.

Further analysis of the data reveals a nonsignificant difference between measured APBI philosophical position and actual counseling behavior. The APBI scores for phenomenology and existentialism, when combined with actual counseling behavior, appear highly similar. The computed chi-square was 0.75 for 3 degrees of freedom for a sample of 22. Thus, APBI scores and counseling behavior appear highly related.

The scores indicated a clustering of APBI scores in the existentialist category for 15 of the 22 subjects. Also, 15 of 22 subjects practised a phenomenological approach in their counseling practice. This trend suggests that these counselor trainees are intrigued by the Existentialist position but in reality practiced phenomenologically oriented counseling. This may have been caused by the *emphasis* on acceptance that the existentialist counselor has toward man and a lack of precise counseling techniques inherent in this position. It is possible that the counselor trainees could not differentiate between the phenomenological or existentialist philosophical positions, and were attracted by the *freedom* that existentialism purports to offer.

DISCUSSION

In view of the findings reported here, it is imperative that a new emphasis be given to philosophical readings in training programs. If these counselor trainees are *typical* of those entering the profession then it is essential that their philosophical understandings be increased by intensive study of philosophy. The findings indicate an inadequate understanding of the main streams of philosophical thought, particularly existentialism. It would be difficult under these conditions to function as a model for clients if one does not understand his own value system. As Strickland states, "...increased understanding of philosophical, theoretical, and methodological orientations also provides greater understanding of counseling relationships (1969, p. 174)."

Is it feasible to use the APBI for counselor selection? As another piece of evidence to aid in understanding the potential counselor, the APBI has considerable promise. Based on APBI scores the counselor education staff could plan differential training experiences to broaden the philosophical understandings of future counselors. The educated counselor is one who has a solid understanding of several philosophical positions and their relationship to counseling. This research indicates that the APBI has potential for helping the counselor trainee sort and define his philosophical belief system. If the APBI were used in conjunction with the counseling course or a counseling practicum, it would aid the trainee in assessing his counseling goals. Also, the counselor trainee could determine through content analysis of his counseling tapes the philosophical orientation of the interview sessions and whether imposition of counselor beliefs upon the client is occurring. As one member of the sample stated,

The way you conduct yourself is important, because it would be hypocritical for me to be functioning this way and feeling I believe this way and find out that I'm not really this kind of person at all.

As many of the sample stated "It is difficult to really verbalize my philosophical position." Counselor trainees need help from counselor educators in developing philosophical understandings of self and relating this to their counseling practice.

Those members of the sample group scoring high in the Idealist category were quick to point out that they had never had a course in philosophy, but believed in absolutes. Several of these counselor trainees were attempting to implement an Idealist-Phenomenologist philosophy in their counseling practice. We were asked by several of the trainees if this was legitimate counseling practice. It was more appropriate for the investigators to suggest that high scores in all of the five categories could lead to eclectic behavior in the counseling situation. The form or direction of the counselor's help can only be labeled directive or non-directive if the counselor trainee scores high on either end of the APBI continuum.

To summarize, the APBI scores were in agreement with interview data in assessing a counselor trainee's philosophical counseling practice. However, distinct difficulties were encountered. First, several counselor trainees were unable to understand their APBI profile because of an inadequate background in philosophy. Second, the APBI requires the counselor educator to understand all five philosophical positions on the APBI in order to make significant interpretations to counselor trainees. There is a distinct possibility that the APBI may not be comprehensive in measuring all philosophical beliefs, e.g. Neo-Thomism.

The general trend in our counselor trainee sample was to act consistently with one philosophical position. For these counselor trainees it was difficult to explain why they acted in certain ways and many trainees found it was difficult to accurately describe their philosophical position or belief. Additional research is needed to determine how their counseling behavior was influenced by interaction with a particular counselor educator. Future research efforts will gather data to determine the importance of the counselor educator as a force that influences the students' philosophical positions.

It is recommended that the following be incorporated into programs of counselor training:

Formal Course Work

1. Introduction to Counseling should be taught by a team of counselor educators to ensure that the trainee is exposed to a variety of counseling positions.
2. Trainees should read and discuss major philosophical materials.
3. Seminars should be organized in which counseling cases are discussed from philosophical points of view.
4. Simulation techniques such as role playing, microcounseling, games, interactive video tapes, etc., should be developed in which philosophical decisions and their applications in counseling are demonstrated.
5. Professional philosophers should be invited to present philosophical positions and interpretations.

Counseling Practicum

1. Trainees should be encouraged to practice a counseling position of their choice.
2. Trainees should evaluate their counseling beliefs as they apply to various client belief systems.

3. Practicum supervisors should serve as stimulators of continual value analysis on the part of the trainee.
4. Trainees should receive training in procedures for analyzing counseling tapes for expressions of philosophical beliefs.
5. Trainees should be assigned clients in cooperative teaming with other trainees to facilitate mutual belief inspection.
6. Practicum supervisors and trainees should analyze samples of each other's counseling behavior to ensure intensive interaction.
7. Practicum should come early in the training so that the trainee has more opportunities to modify belief or practice if required.

In sum, knowledge of philosophical belief is an essential ingredient to achieve real understanding of man's potential.

RESUME: Cette étude compare les croyances philosophiques mesurées aux positions philosophiques exprimées en entrevue et aux comportements en counseling de 22 conseillers-étudiants de l'Université du Maine à Orono. Les croyances philosophiques furent évaluées par le "Ames Philosophical Beliefs Inventory". On a observé un haut niveau de concordance entre ces trois méthodes d'évaluation des croyances philosophiques. Plusieurs conseillers furent incapables d'expliquer ou de comprendre leurs croyances philosophiques ou d'en dégager les implications en counseling. L'auteur suggère diverses mesures susceptibles d'améliorer la formation en counseling.

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