

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GUIDANCE IN CANADIAN URBAN AREAS: A STUDY OF PRESENT COUNSELLOR FUNCTIONS

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to clarify the status of elementary school guidance in Canadian urban areas. Information on the counsellor's background and the counsellor's work setting were obtained from the responses on the *Counsellor Data Blank* which was developed by the authors and the 100-item *Guidance Services Opinionnaire*, a modified version of the Raines Opinionnaire, which was used to determine what the counsellor was presently doing in the school. Results on counsellor characteristics indicated that the typical counsellor had some limited guidance training — either a guidance diploma or was in the process of completing such requirements. The counsellor had at least two years teaching experience and his professional affiliation was usually with the local or provincial association. Many counsellors were faced with large counsellor-pupil ratios. Most of the guidance programs were begun in the late 1960's. In terms of present activities counsellors focused their energies on individual contacts concerning children with learning or adjustment difficulties. The results were also examined in terms of Developmental and Traditional approaches to elementary school guidance. The results indicated that counsellors were frequently involved with the traditional activities.

Résumé

Cette étude avait pour but de déterminer l'état de la consultation au niveau élémentaire dans les régions urbaines du Canada. Les auteurs développèrent le *Counsellor Data Blank* afin de connaître le genre de formation que les conseillers avaient reçu. L'utilisation du *Guidance Services Opinionnaire*, une forme modifiée du *Raines Opinionnaire*, révéla les responsabilités et les tâches propres à ces conseillers. L'information obtenue indique que le conseiller typique avait reçu une certaine formation en consultation — soit qu'il détenait un diplôme ou était en voie de l'obtenir. Le conseiller avait déjà enseigné pendant au moins deux ans. Il appartenait à une association professionnelle soit au niveau local ou provincial. Plusieurs conseillers devaient s'occuper d'un très grand nombre d'étudiants. La plupart des programmes de consultation dans ces écoles avaient débuté à la fin des années '60. Les enfants qui éprouvaient des difficultés au niveau de l'apprentissage ou du développement accaparaient la majorité du temps et des énergies du conseiller. Quant aux approches utilisées, les conseillers qui ont participé à cette enquête semblent avoir recours surtout aux démarches de type traditionnel.

In today's complex and rapidly changing society educators are faced with many responsibilities and demands. Today children are expected to learn more and in a deeper way than their predecessors. McNassor (1967) succinctly states that, "never before has the adult generation expected so much of children . . ." (p. 84). While these demands have intensified so have many socio-economic problems. For example, there has been a trend toward increased

urbanization and mobility. Woodroof (1970) sees these changes as pressures which may, "destroy a child's sense of individuality . . ." and ". . . deprive children of a sense of stability" (p. 29).

Part of the response to these demanding problems is reflected in a number of provincial commissions that have initiated changes in educational structure and objectives (e.g., Parent Report — Quebec, 1963;

Hall & Dennis Report — Ontario, 1968; Worth Report — Alberta, 1972). A common theme in these reports is the need to humanize and individualize education where children have the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential. Guidance programs have traditionally concerned themselves with these objectives. Such programs have now been introduced into the elementary school at an increasing rate. This is especially evident in the United States where the number of elementary school counsellors almost doubled in the two year period 1968 to 1970 (Van Hoose & Vafakas, 1968; Van Hoose & Kurtz, 1970).

In Canada there is evidence of a growing interest in elementary school guidance but little research has been conducted that would indicate the nature and extent of these programs. Some research (Oksanen & Van Hoose, 1972; Altmann & Herman, 1971; McCulloch, 1971) has been conducted in various provinces. Results indicated that there was a recognition of need but services were sparse. Most of the researchers recommended further studies to examine the counsellor's work setting, his background and the functions performed by counsellor.

Little is known about the numbers of elementary school guidance specialists in Canada, what their backgrounds are and what they actually do. If plans

are to be made for the future development of elementary school guidance it seems important to have a clear picture of what presently exists in the field. Considering the confusion that exists at this early stage of development, it seems appropriate to the writers that an effort be made to clarify the current status of guidance in the elementary schools of Canadian urban areas.* The present study yielded the number of counsellors, the characteristics of their work settings, the nature of their professional experience and training, and the present guidance functions of counsellors.

METHOD

Sample and Procedures

Seventeen urban areas were selected for the study. Fifty-two school systems were identified as shown in Table 1. A letter outlining the purpose of the study, describing the procedures and requesting permission to conduct the investigation in the school district, was mailed to the senior school administrator. Once the number of counsellors was determined for the districts, materials in the form of separate school packages or envelopes were mailed to the guidance directors. A total of 263 counsellors were identified within 52 school systems. Of the 52 identified school systems only two did not reply to the initial letters of introduction to the school administrators. A number of school systems were only partially involved in the study. Only the *Counsellor Data Blank* was completed in two school systems. These systems chose not to

*This study is part of a broader project which is presently in progress.

TABLE 1
IDENTIFIED SCHOOL SYSTEMS, NUMBER OF COUNSELLORS
IDENTIFIED AND RESPONDENT RETURNS

Province	Number of School Systems Identified	Number of Counsellors Identified	Respondent Returns for Instruments
Newfoundland	4	10	0
Prince Edward Island	1	3	2
Nova Scotia	2	2	2
New Brunswick	1	2	2
Quebec	5	12	5
Ontario	15	168	99
Manitoba	10	4	2
Saskatchewan	4	2	0
Alberta	4	44	34
British Columbia	7	24	17
Totals	52	263	162

complete the *Guidance Service Opinionnaire*. However, all systems indicated the number of counsellors who were functioning in the elementary schools. The total percentage response for counsellors was 71.5 (n = 162) compared to the total potential respondents of 228 counsellors.

Instruments

The *Counsellor Data Blank* was constructed by the writers to obtain information about the counsellor and his work setting. Counsellor information dealt with such data as sex, age, experience and professional preparation. The following areas were included under the counsellors' work setting characteristics: data regarding the grades and numbers of pupils served; information concerning percentage of time spent in guidance and other capacities; information regarding related personnel services.

The second instrument, the *Guidance Service Opinionnaire*, was used to determine what the counsellor was currently doing, i.e., role behavior. This instrument was modified by including four items that were meant to increase the number of items having a developmentalist orientation to elementary school guidance and the addition of one further item on research and evaluation. The modified version therefore consisted of 100 items, each listing a different activity to which the respondent was asked to select one of five frequency of activities; the categories being, Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Usually, Always.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results and discussion pertaining to the major highlights of the study will be provided below, preceded by a descriptive title.

Characteristics of the Counsellor

The *Counsellor Data Blank* provided information on the counsellor and his work setting. About 25 per cent of the counsellors were over 45 years old and of the total sample 59 per cent were males.

Regarding professional background and experience, 85 per cent had an elementary school teaching background. About 72 per cent of those with elementary teaching experience had taught more than four years in the elementary school. Secondary school teaching was not the usual background of counsellors in the study. Only 25 per cent of the counsellors had any secondary school experience. Administration background was even less with only 15 per cent of the counsellors indicating experience of this type.

The findings on professional training of counsellors are presented in Table 2. As indicated, about 77 per cent of the counsellors had an undergraduate degree. Approximately 22 per cent held a guidance certificate without an academic degree and about 10 per cent of all counsellors had no formal guidance preparation.

TABLE 2
FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE OF COUNSELLORS IN VARIOUS
CATEGORIES OF PROFESSIONAL GUIDANCE PREPARATION

Degree or Diploma	Frequency	Per Cent*
Undergraduate degree	125	77
Graduate degree	52	33
Guidance diploma	100	62
No formal guidance preparation	15	10

*Figures do not total 100 per cent since counsellors may be represented in more than one category.

To obtain more information on the nature of the counsellors' training, counsellors were asked to indicate the courses they had taken. The following five courses or areas of study were taken by over 75 per cent of the counsellors: Principles of guidance, group guidance, statistics, general psychology and

counselling theory. Courses taken by less than 25 per cent of the counsellors were, school administration, clinical psychology, remedial reading, psychology of the gifted, thesis and internship. About two thirds of the counsellors had taken a supervised practicum in counselling.

When asked to list additional courses that had been taken relevant to elementary school guidance the following were mentioned: behaviour modification, Reality therapy, Adlerian approaches to counselling children, and growth or encounter groups. In this additional list none of the counsellors mentioned such courses as developmental psychology, seminars on elementary school counselling or workshops on the use of play media in counselling young children.

Affiliation in professional associations was primarily in provincial or local associations (about 72 per cent) whereas only 22 per cent belonged to the national association — the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Association.

Most of the counsellors were relatively new in their positions. About 70 per cent had been elementary counsellors for one to three years.

Discussion of Results on the Characteristics of the Counsellor

It is interesting to note that slightly more than half of the elementary school counsellors were male in elementary schools that are predominantly staffed by females. An interesting question is, do elementary school guidance positions lead to administrative positions or is the elementary school counselling function a type of administrative position now?

Teaching experience, considered an essential counselling prerequisite by some guidance authorities (Paterson, 1970), was the usual background of the counsellors in the study. It should also be noted that this experience was quite relevant to elementary school guidance since most of the counsellors had taught for several years in the elementary school.

While the majority of counsellors had relevant professional background, fewer counsellors were fully trained in guidance and counselling. Results on several elementary school guidance surveys in the United States generally indicated that American counsellors were better prepared than those of the present study. For example, Greene (1967) found that over 55 per cent of the counsellors in his study had graduate degrees. After an extensive survey of elementary school guidance, Hart (1961) concluded that,

. . . the typical applicant for the position of elementary school counsellor had a Master's degree, a special credential designed for both secondary and elementary counsellors, and about three years successful classroom teaching experience . . . (p. 209)

When individual course background is examined it seems unfortunate that certain courses were not taken by most of the counsellors. For example, group dynamics, human relations and human development

all seem relevant to the developmental-consultant approach to elementary school guidance, yet these areas were not studied by many counsellors. Courses on individual diagnosis were also absent in the background of many counsellors. Only two thirds of the counsellors had studied child psychology and few had taken any courses on the exceptional child. In their survey of elementary school guidance in Alberta, Altmann and Herman (1971) found that administrators recommended the following as the most important courses for the preparation of elementary school counsellors: diagnostic training, child psychology, supervised counselling practicum and experiences in consulting. Hart (1961) presented a similar list of recommendations after soliciting the opinions of superintendents, principals, teachers and counsellors. It would appear that in recommended preparation areas, the counsellors in the present study were relatively weak.

The majority of the elementary school counsellors in the study preferred local professional association membership rather than national association affiliation. One wonders if this may be partially due to the fact that local associations offer greater opportunities for programs and workshops specifically related to elementary school guidance.

In sum, it would appear that the typical elementary school counsellor in this study had some limited guidance training — either a guidance diploma or was in the process of completing such requirements. The counsellor had at least two years teaching experience, usually in the elementary school and his professional affiliation was usually with the local or provincial association.

Characteristics of the Counsellors' Work Setting

The majority (61 per cent) of counsellors functioned in typical elementary grades (k or 1 through 6, 7 or 8) and a relatively large number (about 32 per cent) served in "other" grade arrangements such as Middle Schools (Grades 6, 7, 8) and Senior Elementary Schools (Grades 7 and 8).

From the data obtained on the *Counsellor Data Blank* several positions were combined to provide an indication of the percentage of counsellors serving in typical combined positions. The combined positions were, elementary counsellor-elementary teacher, elementary counsellor-administrator, and elementary counsellor-secondary counsellor. A combined position meant that an individual worked a certain percentage of his time in both positions.

As indicated in Table 3 most counsellors were full-time in elementary schools. In some instances counsellors held combined positions that included multiple combinations of those shown in Table 3. For

TABLE 3
 FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE OF COUNSELLORS IN FULL-TIME
 POSITIONS AND THREE COMBINED POSITIONS

Combined Positions	Frequency	Per Cent
Full-time elementary school counsellor	92	57
Elementary-Secondary school counsellor	24	15
Elementary School teacher-counsellor	20	12
Elementary School administrator-counsellor	7	4

example, some counsellors functioned as an elementary school counsellor, a secondary school counsellor, a teacher and an administrator. Some counsellors reported that they also held other positions, such as, remedial reading specialist, psychologist, educational diagnostician, etc. About 10 per cent of the counsellors were functioning in these multiple capacities which involved more than the combination of two positions.

The counsellors' work load in terms of pupil enrollment is presented in Table 4. Results show that about 60 per cent of the full-time counsellors were responsible for more than 750 pupils. In some instances counsellors reported that they served in as many as ten schools and were responsible for more than 9500 pupils.

On the combined positions about 60 per cent of the counsellor-administrators were also responsible for over 750 pupils. Most counsellor-teachers served in the 250 to 749 pupil population range. Results for elementary-secondary school counsellors showed that half of the counsellors were serving elementary school populations in excess of 1500 besides serving in the secondary school.

Although there was considerable variation in counsellor load, about two thirds of the counsellors indicated that they served in one school only. Of the full-time counsellors one third were in one school and about 10 per cent served in five or more schools. The relatively large figure of counsellors in a single school seems due to the fact that some were counsellor-teachers or counsellor-administrators. These individuals due to their combined functions, are usually restricted to one setting.

Elementary school guidance programs in the study seem relatively new since approximately 80 per cent had been in operation for no more than six years.

The next topic concerns the extent of ancillary or supporting services in the elementary school. The service personnel were, social workers, psychologists, psychometrists, remedial teachers, speech therapists and "others". "Others" were consulting psychiatrists, remedial reading specialists, perceptual specialists, curriculum resource personnel, public health nurses, volunteers and physicians.

The results, though quite varied, indicated that in most cases part-time services were available in the counsellor's school. Very few schools, that is, less than four per cent had a full-time support person in a counsellor's school. An exception was the remedial teacher. About 20 per cent of the schools had the services of this teacher.

Although in the majority of cases part-time ancillary services were available, many schools were without such assistance. For example, 49 per cent did not have social worker assistance and 16 per cent were without psychologists.

Of the personnel indicated under "other", reading clinicians and consulting psychiatrists were mentioned most often. About five per cent of the schools had psychiatric and reading clinician assistance. Another position mentioned was the perceptual specialist or learning disability consultant. These specialists were available in about four per cent of the schools.

Discussion of Results on Characteristics of the Counsellors' Work Setting

It would appear that a large proportion of elementary guidance workers were faced with large counsellor-pupil ratios. About two thirds of the counsellors were attempting to serve over 750 pupils. In their review of various recommendations for counsellor-pupil ratios Brown and Hathaway (1969)

TABLE 4
 ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PUPIL ENROLLMENT SERVED BY FULL-TIME
 ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELLORS AND BY THREE
 OTHER COMBINED POSITIONS

Professional Capacity	Pupil Enrollment In Terms of Frequency and Per Cent									
	0 to 249		250 to 749		750 to 999		1000 to 1499		1500 or more	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Full-Time Counsellor	0	0	38	41	20	22	14	15	20	22
Elementary- Secondary Counsellor*	6	25	6	25	0	0	0	0	12	50
Elementary Teacher- Counsellor	0	0	16	80	4	20	0	0	0	0
Elementary Administrator- Counsellor	0	0	2	29	2	29	2	29	1	13

*These figures do not include pupils served in the *Secondary* school.

found that 1:750 was the maximum and 1:450 was the minimum recommended ratio.

The present work setting findings are not too encouraging when compared with similar aspects of surveys conducted in the United States. For example, in the Vafakas (1967) survey of elementary school guidance it was estimated that 70 per cent of the counsellors in the United States were functioning on a full-time basis. Greene (1967) found that about one third of the full-time counsellors in the United States were serving pupil populations in excess of 1000. In the present study about two thirds of the full-time counsellors were responsible for pupil populations in excess of 750. In a study conducted by Brown and Hathaway (1969) they found that about 40 per cent of the pupils were referred to the guidance counsellor. With a counsellor serving 750 pupils the referrals from teachers alone, if identified in the same proportion, would number about 300! It seems impossible for counsellors working under these conditions to effectively meet the expectations of teachers and principals.

Of interest is the fact that elementary school guidance programs in the present study were relatively new. These results are similar to Green's

(1967) findings on elementary school guidance in the United States. He found that most of the programs had been in operation for about four years. Thus, it seems that a majority of the elementary guidance programs in Canadian urban areas were conceived in the late 1960's.

Counsellor Role Behaviour

The *Guidance Services Opinionnaire* was the data source for determining what the counsellor was presently doing in the school, i.e., counsellor role behaviour. To simplify the analysis and to reveal the general direction of responses the five response categories (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Usually, Always) were combined into three. The *Never-Rarely* combination indicated a negative direction; *Always-Usually* depicted a positive direction, and the *Sometimes* category remained as a neutral choice.

In keeping with the desire to focus only on highlights, the results will be presented in a categorized rather than an item-by-item fashion. When over *two-thirds* of the counsellor responses were in a particular response category (Rarely-Never; Sometimes; Usually-Always) that item was chosen as a "highlight" for presentation and discussion. When

over two thirds of the counsellor responses on an item fell in the *Usually-Always* response category the activity was considered a "frequent" one. "Infrequent" activities referred to items where at least two thirds of the counsellors' responses were in the *Rarely-Never* response category.

When the findings were examined to note "frequent" activities, several clusters of items were evident. These clusters seemed to coincide with the guidance function classifications that have been described by a number of authorities (Joint ACES-ASCA Committee on the Role of the Elementary School Counsellor, 1960; Muro, 1969). These classifications were, counselling, consulting, and coordinating.

Counselling referred to individual contacts with children presenting learning or adjustment difficulties. Over 85 per cent of the counsellors, "provide individual counselling on a continuing basis for those children presenting learning or adjustment problems".

Consultation referred to parent and teacher consultation. The emphasis of these consultations was on *individual* conferences with particular reference to children having *specific difficulties*. For example, 70 per cent of the counsellors, "help the teachers cope with children who present learning or adjustment problems." In parent consultation over two thirds of the counsellors, "conduct parent conferences to discuss a child's needing help in terms of a special class or agency referral." These items represent individual, crisis-oriented consultation as compared to consultation on normal, expected development of all children. The latter type of consultation was an "infrequent" activity of the counsellors.

Such activities as the identification and referral to various agencies and professionals were considered as coordinating functions. As an example of the coordinating function, over two thirds of the counsellors "identify and refer children to community agencies."

Another area of "frequent" activity was *child study* or *child assessment*. Two items that referred to this area were, "Analyze cumulative record information to better understand the child" and "Recommend children to be screened for special classes for gifted or slow learners."

Several item clusters were also identified when examining the results of "infrequent" activities. One of these clusters referred to inservice work with the school staff. Of the five items specifically related to staff inservice all were infrequently done by the counsellors. As mentioned above, consultation with

teachers on normal, expected development of children was an infrequent counsellor activity. Group sessions in which the staff might discuss their concerns was another infrequent activity. Over two thirds of the counsellors were infrequently involved in, "assist[ing] teachers in the development of a unit on social relationships."

Group work with parents was another area of infrequent activity. This parent group work referred to discussions on the meaning of ability and achievement tests, on discussions about normal expected child development, and on discussion groups with parents whose children have similar problems.

Other infrequent activities were in the Appraisal service area. Most of these items referred to the use of sociometric inventories. Home visits to *each* child's home were seldom done. Also mentioned as being infrequently performed were clerical tasks like keeping the child's cumulative folder up to date.

In sum, counsellors seemed to focus their energies on individual contacts concerning children with learning or emotional difficulties. Staff development and the use of groups were not usual counsellor activity.

Discussion of Results on Counsellor Role Behaviour

A striking feature of the results on counsellor role behaviour in the present study is their similarity to the findings on other studies on the same topic (Raines, 1964; Greene, 1967). The emphasis seems to be on specific problem situations and as such it seems appropriate to describe the role behaviour in Faust's (1968) terms as "Traditional". Considering the typical counsellor-pupil load revealed previously it seems to the writers that counsellors should invest their energies in teacher and parent group consultation and in group counselling with children. Of course this viewpoint requires elaboration and discussion. At this point, however, many questions arise about the counsellors' role behaviour. Some of these questions are: To what extent are counsellors satisfied with their present activities? Do they prefer other activities; if so, what are these preferred activities? What are the reasons for the crisis-corrective emphasis? Is it because teachers and principals prefer this approach?

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, by examining the results in detail it becomes clear that in some urban areas elementary school guidance is practically non-existent. No attempt was made in the present study to determine the proportion of the population without counsellors. Such research would provide a more realistic picture

of the extent of elementary school guidance services. Suspicions are that the portion of the population without counsellors would indeed be quite large. It should also be mentioned that the study is limited in a "National" sense due to the lack of representation of some provinces.

An important limitation of the present study was the confusion surrounding the term *elementary school counsellor*. In some urban areas, senior school administrators excluded some specialists from the study because they were visiting teachers, consultants, adjustment counsellors, special counsellors and so on. Further research is required to discover what these variously termed specialists do. In effect, extensive studies are needed to investigate how children's needs are being met no matter what the name of the specialist involved.

Research effort is necessary in the area of children's needs, strategies to meet such needs and basic program effectiveness.

The whole area of elementary school counsellor preparation requires considerable scrutiny. Few counsellors seem to have special preparation for their role. Is a general counsellor preparation sufficient or should elementary school counsellors receive intensive specialized training? What should be included in elementary school counsellor preparation programs?

Questions regarding counsellor role still plague us. Should a counsellor be an educator, a social worker or a psychologist? Much of our professional literature propounds a developmental, non-crisis approach, yet the present study revealed that most counsellors are operating to meet special needs of individual children.

Are counsellors' energies focused by their own role preferences or are they fulfilling the expectations of others? The writers found that teachers and principals generally preferred that counsellors perform traditional counselling functions, yet counsellors had preferences for developmental activities. It seems that counsellors have certain preferences but they do what others expect.

The field of elementary school guidance seems to be replete with a myriad of questions and concerns. The need for special resource consultants and counsellors is generally recognized but services are sparse. Budgetary restrictions are commonplace yet our most valuable natural resources — our children, our human potential is seriously threatened.

The school is the one institution with constant influence in a world of changing values, mores and

faltering family influence. The school has a responsibility to influence not only in matters of the brain but also of the heart. McNassor (1967) suggests that the counsellor is in the school,

... to help make it possible for some children to become what never was intended for them. He is there to help assure that all the children develop the spirit along with the brain. He is there as a new professional working with teachers and parents to help children meet contemporary challenges without losing too much sleep. (p. 86)

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