

## COUNSELLOR ROLE — CANADIAN SCENE

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### Abstract

A random sample of 220 CGCA members was surveyed, using a 44 Item Counsellor Role Questionnaire (CRQ), for present and preferred functions and responsibilities. Their clients and administrators were asked to respond to the CRQ in terms of how frequently CGCA members should perform each item.

The most frequently reported activities of counsellor respondents were in the area of counselling clients with educational-vocational and personal-social psychological problems.

Sixty per cent of counsellor respondents did not engage in group methods, consultation with other counsellors, public relations activities and research as often as they felt they should. Counsellors differed with their clients on twice as many CRQ items as they did with their administrators.

Counsellors, clients, and administrators reached consensus on eight CRQ items, including counselling for educational-vocational and personal-social problems; confidential note-taking; consultation with other counsellors, community service agencies, and other helping professionals; and client follow-up.

### Résumé

On a fait parvenir un échantillon pris au hasard de 220 membres de la SCOC, en employant un *Questionnaire sur le Rôle du Conseiller (QRC)* portant sur leurs fonctions et responsabilités préférées. Leurs clients et administrateurs devaient répondre au QRC concernant la fréquence par laquelle les membres de la SCOC devraient exercer chaque fonction.

Les réponses les plus fréquentes concernant les activités des conseillers se trouvaient dans les domaines de la consultation scolaire et de l'emploi et des problèmes personnels et psycho-sociaux.

Soixante pour cent des répondants n'ont pas participé aux méthodes de groupes, à la consultation entre conseillers, aux activités de relations publiques ni à la recherche de la façon dont ils auraient dû y participer. Les cas de vue divergentes sur les points du QRC entre conseillers et clients se sont avérés deux fois plus nombreux qu'entre conseillers et administrateurs.

La réponse des conseillers, des administrateurs et des clients a montré un consensus sur huit points, y compris la consultation scolaire et de l'emploi, les problèmes sociaux et personnels, la prise de notes privées, la consultation avec d'autres conseillers, des agences du service communautaire et d'autres professionnels qui prêtent leurs concours, ainsi que la consultation supplémentaire avec les clients.

This paper is the sequel to a plot study already published in the *Canadian Counsellor* (Brown, 1974b), and concludes the research project. For a more complete and thorough report of the research including a detailed introduction, review of the literature, instrumentation, design, and results see Brown (1974a).

### METHOD

A 44 Item Counsellor Role Questionnaire (CRQ) was adapted from the one used by Brown (1974b). The CRQ covered a broad spectrum of functions and responsibilities, and was designed for use in a variety of work settings.

A data blank similar to that of Merchant (1973) was used to gather biographical information, and additional functions and responsibilities not included in the CRQ.

The CRQ and data blank were sent to a stratified random sample of 220 CGCA members, representing 25% of the total membership. The counsellors were asked to respond to the CRQ both in terms of how frequently they were performing, and how frequently they judged they should perform, the functions and responsibilities listed, by selecting one of five frequency responses: never, rarely, sometimes, usually, and always.

Each CGCA member was also requested to ask

her/his next client, and her/his immediate administrator, to respond to the CRQ in terms of how frequently they judged the counsellor should perform the items listed.

### RESULTS

Number of questionnaires returned, with percentage returned in parentheses for each category, were as follows: CGCA members, 147 (73%); counselees, 95 (57%); and administrators, 101 (60%).

#### *Characteristics of the Canadian Counsellor*

Bearing in mind the limitations imposed by the fact that only CGCA members were included in the study, a composite picture of the Canadian counsellor is beginning to emerge, as follows:

Of the Canadian counsellors who responded 69% were male, and the bulk were in the age bracket 35-44 years. They were mainly employed in some sort of educational institution, with the largest single group working in secondary schools.

Most of the CGCA respondents had taught and 65% held a university degree, at the master's level, with specialization in counselling courses.

The bulk of the counsellors had been exposed to a counselling practicum, under supervision, and were members of their provincial guidance and/or counselling associations. Only 52% of the counsellors were engaged full-time in counselling activities.

#### *Services Offered, and Not Offered, by CGCA Members*

The bulk (60% or more) of the counsellors provided counselling and information services for counselees with educational and vocational problems. They were also engaged in providing counselling for clients with personal-social psychological problems.

Alternatively, the counsellors tended not to provide counselling for clients with legal problems. Use of interview summaries outside the counsellor's office was rejected by the majority of the counsellors. Public relations activities such as interpreting counselling services to the public, members of other helping professions, and community helping agencies, were infrequently engaged in. Counsellors tended not to take major responsibility for counselling research, nor to assist with such research.

Finally, the respondents infrequently arranged interviews with potential employers, even when clients desired this service.

#### *Job Satisfaction of CGCA Members*

Counsellors were satisfied with their level of involvement on only two CRQ items: providing in-

formation and counselling for clients with educational and vocational problems.

CGCA members reported that they did not engage in the utilization of group methods, consultation with other counsellors, public relations activities, and research, as frequently as they would prefer to.

Functions not listed in the CRQ which counsellors wrote-in, as requested on the Data Blank, and which they felt restricted their usefulness, focused on involvement in routine clerical duties, such as time-tabling, credit counting, and registration of new students, school record keeping, checking university and other application forms, giving out transcripts, and administering psychological tests.

Other areas of concern were the supervision of halls, cafeteria, attendance checking, and part-time teaching duties. Attendance at various committee meetings, such as the "commencement committee," and various administrative and departmental meetings, was a final area of concern.

Additional job frustrations which could not be considered functions or responsibilities, but nevertheless worthy of note, included poor facilities, small budget, non-availability of specialists for referral, inadequate staffing of community support agencies, lack of time, responsibility for too many schools and students, and negative attitude of administrators toward some types of counselling, notably *group methods*.

Functions not included in the CRQ but deemed vital by the counsellors included family counselling, consulting with teachers and various support staff, curriculum development, involvement in extra-curricular functions, conducting parent seminars, and teacher-student counselling.

Examples of involvements judged novel and progressive by the researcher included: scheduling of "getting to know you" sessions for students and teachers early in each term, "open" family counselling for groups of families, small group sessions for teachers aimed at discovering common goals and difficulties, parent effectiveness programs, and teacher-student-parent-counsellor conferences. Other innovations were: informal school visits of representatives of business and industry to facilitate more prolonged career consultations than has been traditionally possible on career days, utilization of parent volunteers in various guidance related ways within the school, coordination of a "creative job search program" by a team of English teachers and counsellors, classroom visits by the counsellor, on request, aimed at improved teacher-student relations, and the creation of a course in personality.

*Areas of Disagreement Among CGCA Members, Administrators, and Counselees Regarding Counsellor Role*

There were less clear-cut differences of opinion regarding counsellor role between counsellors and administrators than there were between counsellors and clients or administrators and clients. CGCA members had twice as many differences of opinion with their clients as they did with their administrators, and counsellor-client differences were judged, on the basis of criteria established by the researcher, to be of a more serious nature.

In almost all cases of counsellor-administrator differences, administrators indicated that they felt the counsellors should perform various functions and responsibilities more frequently than the counsellors did. These functions clustered in the areas of counselling for financial and employment problems, record keeping, interviewing clients' relatives, instructors or employers (with client permission), providing educational-vocational information to clients, and referral of clients to other professionals.

Inspection of counsellor-client differences indicated that there are important differences in the way in which the two groups view counsellor role. CGCA members favored the provision of counselling for clients with moral and religious problems, and the holding of group counselling sessions for clients with similar problems, more so than did their clients. The counsellors favored using results of tests which had been administered by others, whereas clients preferred more active counsellor involvement.

Clients were more adamantly opposed to the use of counselling interview notes outside the counsellor's office, than were the CGCA members themselves. Clients favored provision of educational-vocational information to clients more so than CGCA members did.

Clients favored referral to other professionals such as psychologists, speech therapists, and psychiatrists, but not to other counsellors and community helping agencies. Apparently, having made their own choice of counsellor and agency, they expected to be helped, not referred.

Finally, there was high consensus within each group on less than 15% of the CRQ items, indicating that individual CGCA members, clients, and administrators hold differing expectations for counsellor role.

*Areas of Agreement Among CGCA Members, Administrators, and Counselees Regarding Counsellor Role*

The three groups agreed on only half as many items as they disagreed, and in areas of consensus which would probably be judged traditional by most counselling authorities.

The areas of agreement included provision of counselling for clients who have educational-vocational and personal-psychological problems, and providing information to clients regarding interpersonal relationships. Recording notes of counselling interviews for the counsellor's own future reference was a generally accepted practice, even though some CGCA members expressed fear of legal complications.

Counsellors were generally expected to consult, when appropriate, with counsellors in other settings, members of other helping professions, and community helping agencies.

Follow-up, especially when the counsellor had cause to be concerned for the safety of the client, was an accepted procedure.

In conclusion, there were a fairly large number (18) of CRQ items on which the respondents neither strongly agreed, nor clearly disagreed.

## DISCUSSION

The following comments are offered with full awareness of two important limitations of the study: that the instruments were not translated into French, resulting in a low response from Francophone CGCA members; and that at the time of the study the total CGCA membership represented only one-fifth of the known counsellor population of Canada, hence may not be representative of all.

The findings on characteristics of the Canadian counsellor represent both good and bad news. The fact that the counsellors were youthful and enthusiastic about learning (65% with a master's degree or better) is encouraging, however, the unequal sex distribution is disturbing, as are the findings that only half of the counsellors had full-time counselling appointments, the fact that 16% had no exposure to a supervised practicum, and that only 22% had experienced a counselling internship.

The desirability of teacher training and experience for school counsellors has engendered considerable debate, with some counselling authorities opposing such involvement (Arbuckle, 1967), and others supporting the desirability of such involvement (Kell, 1961; Paterson, 1970a; Rosecrance & Hayden, 1960).

This study, and the one conducted by Merchant (1973) indicate that the bulk of Canadian counsellors, for better or worse, have teacher experience and/or training.

The primary involvements of counsellors emerging from this study coincide with those identified in a recent national study by the Canadian Education Association (1973) viz., to assist students in educational planning, with personal problems, and to give information regarding fu-

ture employment. However, while counsellors appear to be in "the same ballpark" as administrators, clients and the general public in accepting the general areas of role set down above, there are important areas of potential role conflict. For example, administrators felt that counsellors should have more frequent contact with employers, and should counsel more often for employment problems. Both counselees and administrators placed more emphasis on provision of educational and vocational information. Counsellors, take note.

While psychological testing may at one time have been a frequent counsellor involvement, it no longer is, and the most prevalent reasons given were lack of demand and time. Publishers, take note.

Counsellors expressed frustration with lack of involvement in group methods, promoted by some authorities as a time-saving technique, ironically not used because of lack of time.

As reported in Brown (1974b), counsellors were not satisfied with their level of research involvement, and cited lack of time as the major reason. In view of this consistent finding, CGCA is to be commended for instituting research awards.

Counsellors seem to be caught in a vicious circle in which, because they are rushed, they do not engage in public relations activities, deemed essential by many counselling authorities (Fobert, 1973; Harvey, 1971; Knicely, 1971; Nicols, 1971; Paterson, 1970b; Zingle, Paterson, & Masciuch, Note 1), and are not involved in research and data gathering, which could provide the ammunition for good public relations, for the same reason. However, unless counsellors can institute effective public relations programs, based on solid evidence supporting their needs, they are not likely to convince their administrators and the public that reduced client-counsellor ratios, and other interventions designed to reduce the counsellors' work load, are justified. Hopefully, this unproductive cycle can be broken through collective involvement in professional associations with the resources and expertise to build a more powerful and effective case for decreased workload than any individual practitioner can present alone.

The discrepancy between counsellor and client expectations for counsellor role, and the seriousness of these differences, presents a dilemma which is also related to the need for public relations involvement. The complex interface between counsellors and those who use and administer their services is a two-way phenomenon in which the counsellor must be responsive to the expectations which others have of his/her role, must take responsibility for identifying and articulating

his/her own conceptions of role, and further attempt to reconcile the two viewpoints in a manner acceptable to all parties concerned. The present study suggests that many of us cannot honestly answer "yes" when we ask the question "Am I truly serving the needs of my counselees, while remaining true to myself?"

The fact that both clients and administrators placed more emphasis on educational and vocational information services than did counsellors, mentioned above, is but one specific example of an instance in which we must effectively balance our role performance with the stated expectations of others. The astute counsellor will try to remain sensitive to these areas of potential role conflict, and attempt equitable reconciliation.

We are still laboring under myriad frustrations, and burdened with clerical and other tasks, which mental health authorities for some time now have suggested are not in our domain (Blair, 1969). Again, the need for more public relations work is underlined.

Further research into counsellor role is needed, particularly studies aimed at better identifying the counsellor population of Canada, and role studies of various types of counsellors, in diverse work settings. There also appears to be a need for research into the effects which variables such as geographic location, training, experience, and work setting have on expectations for counsellor role. In view of the role conflict identified by this study, and by Hassard and Costar (1977), research aimed at investigating role conflict, and methods of resolving such conflict, are needed.

In conclusion, lack of role consensus continues to plague us, (Hassard & Costar, 1977; Merchant, 1973; Merchant & Zingle, 1977) and the need for counsellor role definition and a position statement of same proposed initially by Dr. Stanley Perkins in a resolution passed at the 1969 CGCA Edmonton Conference, and subsequently reinforced by Clemens (1970) and Brown (1974a, b, c, d; Brown, Note 2) is further accented by the findings reported herein.

In the final analysis, any emerging profession must look to its own practitioners for leadership in defining functions and responsibilities, hence role. If we do not maintain leadership within our own profession, we can be assured that others will, and counsellors and their clients will be the ultimate losers.

#### Reference Notes

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