

## MARKETING COUNSELLING SKILLS: IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLOR EDUCATION

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### *Abstract*

This article examines some of the differences between a counsellor's role as it is professionally defined and as it may be experienced in a school setting. In order to reduce these differences, the author suggests a model for marketing a professional counselling role. Steps for implementing the model are outlined along with the skills needed to successfully complete each step. Finally, counsellor educators are challenged to consider the need for teaching such social change models within their programmes.

### *Résumé*

Cet article étudie certaines des différences entre le rôle du conseiller selon la définition professionnelle et selon l'expérience dans un milieu scolaire. Afin de réduire l'écart de ces différences, l'auteur propose un modèle pour la mise en marché du rôle du conseiller professionnel. Les grandes lignes des étapes pour l'implantation du modèle ainsi que les compétences requises pour la réussite de chaque étape sont présentées. En dernier lieu, on lance le défi aux éducateurs conseillers de penser au besoin d'enseigner de tels modèles de changement social dans leurs programmes.

In the 1970's school counsellors were challenged to provide an accountable and credible service (Sweeney, 1979) in the face of rapidly accelerating societal change (Nevison, 1969). One of the results of these challenges has been a continued interest in defining counsellor functions, and the skills needed to effectively perform these functions (Jevne, 1981). A topic which seems equally important but which has not received as much attention relates to the extent to which counsellors are actually able to use their counselling skills within school environments. It is the purpose of this article to examine the difference between role definition as suggested and practised in terms of implications for counselling education departments.

### *The Professional Role*

A survey conducted by Jevne (1981) suggests the following characteristics/competencies (in decreasing order of importance) which are important for an effective counsellor: Self awareness, personal characteristics, counselling skills and techniques, theoretical background, professional ethical conduct, consulting and coordination, measurement techniques, information services, evaluation and research abilities. The survey also outlined counsellor functions. Two primary functions listed were personal/social counselling and career/vocational/educational counselling. Others "in descending order of importance included: psy-

chological education/group guidance, crisis counselling, family counselling, providing personally relevant information, consulting with staff, family and friends of clients, programme development and evaluation, staff development, and conducting research studies" (p. 16). The survey would seem to challenge counsellor education departments to evaluate the training that they provide in terms of these skill and role issues.

### *The Role Experienced*

For many school counsellors there is another set of factors which influence their functioning. Comments made in a survey of counsellors attending the 1979 British Columbia School Counsellors' Association conference along with statements made in workshops held in rural and urban settings of British Columbia point to some of these.

"There simply isn't enough time to do all that we might do."

"... confusion over role-used as administrator, teacher, clerk, disciplinarian ..."

"... teaching/counselling role conflict ..."

"... school staff not aware of what a counsellor's role is ... used for many non-counselling functions ..."

"... too much clerical work ..."

"... struggling against lack of interest/support..."

"... counsellor must be all things to all people..."

These role clarification and justification issues seem on a different level from those presented in the Jevne study. Perhaps those cited in the Jevne survey address ways in which counsellors can be prepared for a professional counselling role, while the others point to the need to provide prospective counsellors with the skills needed to market a professional role.

#### *Marketing Counselling Skills*

A method which may be helpful in addressing the differences evident in the two surveys incorporates basic counselling skills (Egan, 1975), developmental consultation techniques (Borgen & Young, 1979), and social change strategies (Hutchison & Stadler, 1975). Basic counselling skills are necessary in that they provide an orientation towards: (a) understanding another person's point of view, (b) helping that person examine alternate points of view, and (c) assisting in the development of action plans. Developmental consultation techniques are useful in marketing counselling skills in that they recognize that a counsellor may be involved in influencing a school environment to facilitate the emotional and intellectual growth of students. Social change strategies represent a valuable addition to the basic counselling and consultation activities in that they: (a) focus directly on the school environment, and (b) suggest activities for assessing and impacting institutional systems.

Counsellors who may wish to integrate a social change perspective with counselling and consultation approaches in marketing a counselling service face two major challenges. They are required to use a basic counselling orientation with themselves in: (a) recognizing their own professional strengths and weaknesses, (b) understanding the point of view of others regarding counselling services, and (c) developing professionally relevant action plans. Secondly, counsellors are required to use a consultation orientation with the goal of achieving a more favorable interchange between themselves and the school environment.

The procedures which follow combine counselling, consultation, and social change approaches into a model for marketing a counselling service. They are presented from the point of view of their place within counsellor education.

#### *Determining the Need*

The first step in implementation typically involves the counsellor in conducting a needs assessment within his/her own work setting. The as-

essment evolves through: (a) *observation* of interactions between and among students, staff, and parents, (b) *listening* to concerns expressed by students, staff, parents, and community groups (e.g., employers, police, social agencies), (c) *consolidation of information* into themes that imply areas in which work might be started. The skills required by the counsellor in conducting the assessment could be generally classified within the observation, attending and reflection techniques typically taught in counsellor education departments.

#### *Self-Assessment*

Once the information is consolidated according to type of service required, target populations, and resources needed for implementation (e.g., counselling time, referral sources, etc.), it becomes the task of the counsellor to decide upon what part he/she can play. In focus here are the counselling, consultation, and coordination skills (Amundson, 1979) which may be brought to bear in addressing specific needs. The implication is that the counsellor is able to distinguish with some degree of accuracy among the types of services which he/she can provide, those which he/she could provide as part of a school team, and those which should be referred to other school specialists or to outside agencies. Sorting out the needs using these parameters helps the counsellor to set personal priorities and allows him/her to focus energy on services which he/she can *effectively* implement. Counsellor skills required in this phase would include an ability to accurately understand his/her own expertise within the context of a professional counselling service.

#### *Assessing the System*

To this point the counsellor has been exploring counselling related needs and himself/herself in relation to these needs. The reflective and exploration skills needed are very similar to those suggested in Stage I of a client-centred counselling model suggested by Egan (1975). The result of this "self-exploration" should be a clear understanding of what is needed and what he/she can offer. All of this, however, represents a synthesis of data which reflects the counsellor's point of view. It now becomes the task of the counsellor to seek out and challenge his/her own perceptions with other points of view (Egan, Stage II). He/she obtains these points of view through the use of a series of steps such as those suggested by Hutchinson and Stadler (1975):

- (a) Know your situation (obtained from needs assessment).
- (b) Be aware of potential allies and opposition.
- (c) Learn the line of authority in the system.
- (d) Consult with colleagues who face similar situations to see if they can be of any assistance.

The consequence of following these steps may be increased awareness of the level of acceptance of the service which the counsellor may want to offer. The procedure can also identify the person or persons who are important to talk with in proposing an offer of service.

The skills required to carry out these activities include basic attending behaviours and an ability to synthesize data observed. The goal is for the counsellor to clearly understand his/her organization's operation and point of view. This view may or may not coincide with that of the counsellor, but it does provide the information necessary for the counsellor to frame his/her offer of service in such a way that it has a greater chance of being accepted. The approach places the organization in the role of "client", and it is the goal of the counsellor to start from where the "client is at" in making an offer of service.

#### *Making an Offer of Service*

The goal of the counsellor in this phase is to market a service which appears to be valid and which he/she has the skills to implement. This process involves consulting with people who: (a) could provide permission for the implementation of the service, (b) may participate in offering it, and (c) may participate as consumers (clients).

*Orienting staff members.* Orienting fellow workers involves the use of developmental consultation strategies (Borgen & Young, 1979) and typically follows the line of authority identified in the previous stage (supervisors, principals, teachers). Activities here include speaking at staff meetings, participating in informal discussions, providing documentation as to the need (from observation in needs assessment phase and from other settings), listening to positive and negative reactions, and being open to making revisions in the offer. The aim of all of these activities is to present an offer of service in terms of the general goals of the counsellor's organization and in terms of the specific needs identified in the *Needs Assessment* phase. Once support within the organization has been obtained it is important for the counsellor to advertise the service outside the immediate work setting. This would involve consultation with those who are well acquainted with potential consumers (school nurse, social workers, local clergy, etc.). Interaction with these people could serve two purposes. Firstly, it could provide a means of obtaining another reaction to the proposed service activities from people acquainted with potential clientele. Secondly, it could acquaint these potential referral sources with the counsellor's place within the fabric of community services offered.

*Orienting potential consumers.* The work which is done in terms of consulting with staff members

and significant others indirectly offers the counselling service to people who may benefit from it. However, more direct approaches are also necessary. These may involve: (a) making class presentations, (b) making and distributing literature describing the service, and (c) making and distributing posters.

The communication with fellow workers, significant others, and potential consumers helps to ensure that all of these groups have a clear understanding of what the service can and cannot accomplish. As well, it provides an opportunity for all the groups to interact with and evaluate the most important factor in the counselling services' success — the counsellor.

#### *Evaluation*

the result of an effective offer of service should be a counselling programme with clearly specified and accepted objectives. The challenge to the counsellor at this juncture is to be sure to keep staff and significant others regularly informed regarding progress made in reaching those objectives. This activity serves three purposes: (a) it helps those who accepted the offer of service confirm that their decision was a good one, (b) it enhances the credibility of the counsellor in that not only is he/she performing a function deemed valuable by the organization, but it is also apparent that he/she is performing it, and (c) it provides a source of reinforcement to the counsellor regarding the progress being made towards valued goals.

#### *The Challenge for Counsellor Education*

Figure 1 outlines a comparison between basic counselling/communication skills commonly taught in counsellor education programmes and those required to bring about an effective delivery of those skills in a "natural" setting. The comparison would tend to indicate that counsellor trainees leave programmes equipped with most of the generic skills needed to market their services. Why, then the counsellor comments related to role ambiguities, powerlessness and lack of support? Many suggested answers may be plausible. However, one which would seem to hold a lot of credence is one which speaks to the lack of similarity between the training and "natural" environments. Behavioural theories suggest that a response generalizes to situations with enough cues similar to those found in the situation which first produced the response. Relating this postulate to counsellor trainees a couple of explanations seem plausible: (a) the lack of acceptance of a professional counselling role within a school setting makes it difficult for counsellors to see the applicability of their training, and (b) counsellor trainees have focused the use of their basic communication skills on

Basic Counselling Activities

Marketing Activities

Sample Skills Required

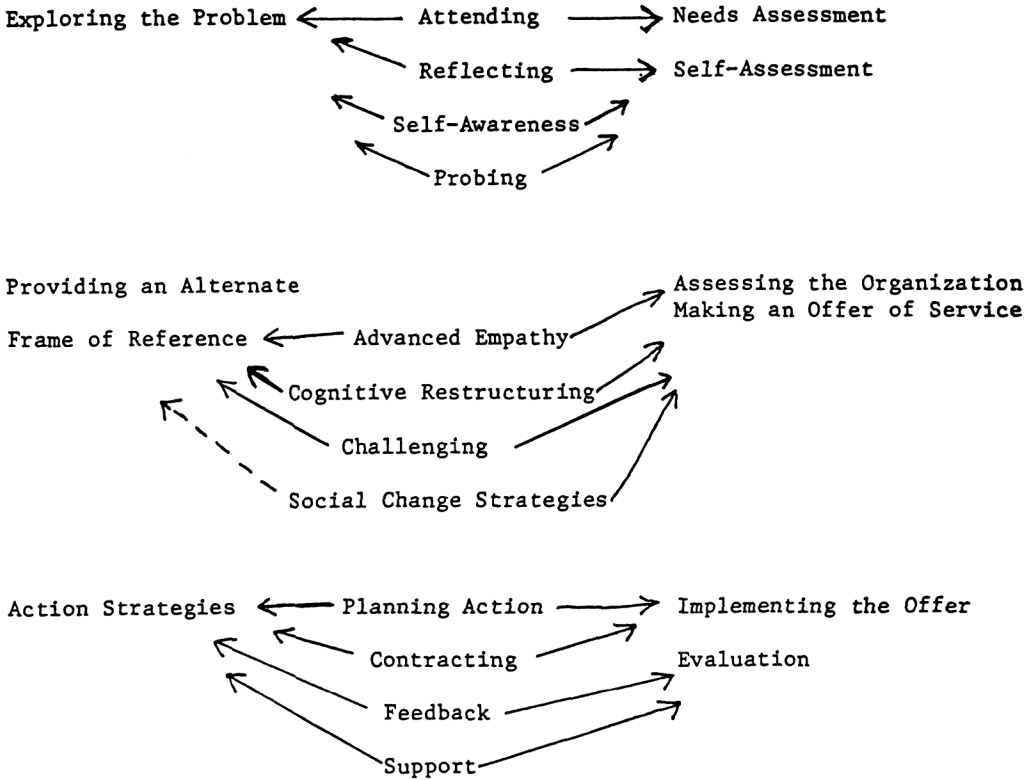


Figure 1

Comparison of skills needed in client/counselor interaction with those required to effectively market counselling skills.

client-counsellor interaction rather than viewing their utility within a wide range of consultative situations. Both of these explanations imply challenges to counsellor education departments which might be usefully put as a series of questions:

Is it appropriate for counsellor educators to play a social change agent role in influencing acceptance of professional counselling within schools? Is it appropriate for counsellor educators to teach their students social change skills? Is there a place in a counsellor education programme for a course on using basic communication skills as marketing tools?

Posing these questions would suggest additions to the Jevne survey, additions which would gauge not just what is required, but the extent to which what is required can be delivered.

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