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THE PERSONALITY OF THE COUNSELLOR — A GUIDE TO TRAINING

INTRODUCTION

I intend to make a general comment at the beginning, to look at what the applied meaning of personality may be and to outline some personality characteristics desired of counsellors. I shall then try to examine the problem of attempting to produce guidance counsellors with this desirable personality. Further, I shall offer some suggestions which may improve practicing counsellors and inform administrators of desirable counsellor characteristics.

When we consider that the education of the counsellor is significant and we realize that there is a need for counsellors, at least in New Brunswick and the Maritimes, and I am sure in other provinces as well, then we have to conclude that there is a critical problem in our ability to fill the need. We can institute emergency short courses to train people for the "job" of counselling, but I am certain that we would not be able to turn out the counsellor with the type of personality that is best suited for the task. It should be noted that it is not possible to train every counsellor to possess the personality qualities needed for the role the counsellor has to perform. I believe we must recruit the person who appears to display the qualities of personality considered below and then give him training and opportunity to exercise his gifts.

In support of this thesis, therefore, reference should be made to the last two line of Auld and Stein, *The Guidance Worker* (1965) which states clearly, that, ". . . personnel selection becomes crucial in guidance. No amount of training will compensate for an unsuitable personality or lack of insight (p. 317)."

Let me turn to the general comment that the critics of the guidance and counselling movement are prone to make. Some say that the teacher is the type of counsellor we need and there is no need for a school counsellor, teacher counsellor, or guidance counsellor. What is being said here is that the teacher has the personality for counselling and even the know-how of counselling. While I believe that most teachers possess certain qualities which can help in the counselling process, I cannot entertain the idea that teachers are necessarily good counsellors. Since the counsellor is the agent in the school who co-ordinates all tasks of counselling, it would be more appropriate to say that the counsellor should possess most of the desirable personality qualities of teachers in any school, as far as this is possible.

PERSONALITY: AN IMPACT

Before considering the personality dimensions the counsellor should possess, let us look at the meaning we may attribute to personality. Broadly, we may say that personality consists of what, in the final analysis, is most typical and deeply characteristic of the individual. It is the impact the in-

dividual (counsellor) makes upon others (clients, etc.) with whom he comes into contact (staff, parents, community). The desirable personality is characterized by naturalness and can be observed by the ease and facility with which the individual can elicit positive reactions from a variety of persons in different circumstances. It may be better, therefore, to speak of personal characteristics.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Research carried out by Combs and Super (1963) to distinguish good from poor counsellor educators, they found that good counsellors differed significantly from poor counsellors in all twelve areas of personal organization studied.

The first desirable quality is that the counsellor perceives from an internal rather than an external frame of reference and in terms of people rather than things. The second quality is that the counsellor perceives of other people as able, dependable, friendly, and worthy, rather than in negative manner. The third quality is that the counsellor perceives himself as identified with people, quite satisfied and self-revealing. The fourth quality is that the counsellor sees his purpose with depth of feeling, with being altruistic and with concern for larger meaning.

With these four areas as a guiding frame of reference a more detailed scrutiny can be made of the personality of the counsellor in various situations.

- (1) The counsellor must enjoy working with individuals and this must be based, not upon the need for ego-involvement, but on his desire to help people. The counsellor's personal needs must be kept to a minimum in this regard.
- (2) The counsellor must admire people in general and be appealing to them. Personal and social acceptability and a sense of ease and confidence are important characteristics. The counsellor must enjoy contacts and out to relate well with everyone he meets, irrespective of status. If the counsellor cannot relate warmly to any particular client, he should make a referral to another counsellor. He must be broad-minded and flexible.
- (3) The counsellor must be sensitive to the needs of his clients; sympathy or feeling sorry for feeling sorry for should give way to empathy, or feeling along with.
- (4) The counsellor should have a capacity for insight and analytical thinking that is above average. His powers of observation must be sharp and his imagination must be keen. A higher than average intelligence and/or divergent thinking abilities should be demanded if he is to be effective. He must have the capacity to cope with a variety and range of ability groups.
- (5) The counsellor should be well-adjusted so that negative attitudes may be tolerated without threat or hurt to his inner security. In this way the counsellor would be in a better position to deal with problems for the benefit of the client. In short, a sound mental health or positive attitude towards life and work is a significant factor for success in the field.

- (6) The counsellor ought to be a mature and well-rounded person. He should possess wide experience which will help him in understanding a wide range of human concerns and problems. And this experience should make him more acceptable to those who seek his guidance.
- (7) The counsellor must develop an understanding of human behavior and motivation. This means that he must be prepared to contribute to the store of knowledge in the field. And to do this he must be a consistent student and a perpetual learner. Above all, he should possess an inquiring and open mind and be aware that many ideas in the field of guidance are relative and not absolute truths. The counsellor must be adaptable and critical in this respect.

Before entering the field of counselling, the individual should possess a certain amount of dedication, a high toleration level and an interest in people in general. He must be able to understand people as well as himself. It would be desirable if he is able to possess the facility to allow the unique individual the fullest opportunity to become. This is a very difficult citation, one that is mastered by only a few counsellors. Many counsellors because of lack of some of these qualities and of training have failed. The unfortunate part is that they are not aware of their weaknesses and inadequacies. I wonder whether such people should be engaged in the service of counselling.

Utilizing the combined judgments of a committee of experts, the A.P. G.A. Committee (1958) listed the following basic qualities which are worth serious consideration:

1. Belief in the worth inherent in each individual, in his capacity for change, and in his ability to develop under conditions that are favourable to him.
2. Commitment to human values.
3. Alertness to the world.
4. Open-mindedness.
5. Talent to communicate.

RESEARCH REVEALS RESTRICTIONS

There have been studies designed to explore the relationships between personal qualities of counsellors and performance in the counselling relationship. Brown, Arbuckle, and Steffire investigated this area with some success making use of certain personality tests (Moser & Moser, 1963). Some tests employed were the Ohio State University Psychological Examination (OSPE), the Edwards Personal Preference Scale (EPPS), the Guilford-Zimmerman Temperament Survey (GZTS), the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), the Strong Vocational Interest Blank (SVIB), the Index of Adjustment and Values (IAV), the California Psychological Inventory (CPI) and the Taylor Manifest Anxiety Scale (MAS). While the use of instruments has met with some success, it must be pointed out that difficulties are involved in research of this nature. Two cases will show that caution must be taken in the future selection of counsellors and also in evaluation of personal characteristics that are feasible. First, in one research study (Brown, 1960), no relationship was found between person-

ality characteristics measured by most of the tests previously mentioned and performance, with the exception of two scales on the MMPI (social introversion and hypomania) and four scales on the GZTS (general activity, ascendance, sociability and thoughtfulness). However, the criterion in this study, i.e., Performance Rating, created a variety of problems (Moore, 1963). A second study revealed that counsellor educators failed to rate counsellor potential relative to personality characteristics with any degree of reliability.

Now, given the personality characteristics of the counsellor and the knowledge of tests that can be used in a selection or research process, the problem of predictive validation and reliability still remains.

THE PROBLEM OF SELECTION

This is the problem of selecting the individual with the right kind of personality for the tasks of counselling. It is difficult merely to look at observable behavior during the training period and issue certificates on that basis. Yet, in many instances, at various institutions a certificate as a counsellor is issued mainly (or solely) on an academic basis. Little or no consideration is given to the personality of the graduate. This has been the cause in the fifties in a few provinces for the weaknesses in counselling services in the schools. Even in these days one meets more often than expected the perceptive and brilliant student at universities across the country who bitterly eschews the counsellor for his direct attempts at academic and vocational-misdirection. It is true that one's personality does affect the counselling atmosphere in the school for better or worse. Looked at negatively, there should be some method of approach by which the individual counsellor could detect what may be called counsellor-personality deficiency. And as a result of this he should use careful self-judgment either to correct obvious pitfalls or to redirect himself into some other more fruitful channel.

CONCLUSIONS

That the personality of the counsellor is important is no contention. It is useful to list and talk about personal qualities, but the crucial factor is the application of these qualities in the actual practical setting. Problems arise in matching the desirable personality with the type of performance expected. Research cautions that it does not follow necessarily that the choice of a desirable personality is the choice of a counsellor good in performance. This problem of prediction is a challenge to us now and ought to be carefully investigated.

The following suggestions are offered for consideration.

1. A first certificate or diploma in guidance issued after two years teaching or counselling experience gives the recipient the opportunity to decide while working as a teacher-counsellor, whether or not he has the interest or the qualities to continue in the field.
2. A letter of recommendation is required for the award of a certificate at some universities. This hopefully is designed to gain a picture of the personality from an outside observer. This has some merit but more weakness. Therefore, rating scales to more than one referee may possibly give a better indication of personal qualities.

3. Care must be exercised at this period of time even with the training of counsellors to fill the need. There is a tendency of many to wait to see what happens as the candidate develops. Therefore, during the training periods, it would be wise to discuss and consider the problem of personal suitability consciously with trainees.
4. Courses taken for a full certificate or Masters or Ph.D. in counselling intended to qualify fully trained counsellors should be accompanied by intense practical work in the school or institution. This should be implemented in addition by the period of internship necessary for an all-round training. This would give the candidate a chance to assess his capabilities and qualities. Each of the following courses should have an associated practicum:
 1. Counselling
 2. Group Work
 3. Individual Assessment
 4. Research in Guidance
 5. Organization and Administration of Guidance
 6. Behavioral Disorders
 7. School Psychology
5. Consideration should be given the use that could be made of personality measurements and instruments for the counselling of prospective candidates and for selection purposes. There is need for research in the selection of prospective counsellors.
6. In order to assist in the attempt to fill the need for counsellors with candidates who possess desirable personal qualities, it would be wise if practising school counsellors, psychologists, and administrators make use of their talents of careful observation by the identification of promising people in the teaching field or in colleges and encouraging them into guidance and counselling if they possess the interest, ability, and inclination for counselling services.
7. In no case should individuals be allowed to counsel if they do not have any formal training in counselling. The idea of catching up on the job or of being apprenticed is not adequate. It is dangerous and disastrous to the child or client. Professional training must follow careful identification. It calls for rigid screening and investigation of all prospective counsellors. Probably it may be necessary to make a review of practising counsellors likewise. This may be revealing. Actually, it seems to me that a greater degree of professionalism is needed among counsellors. In fact, counselling is a misunderstood concept in this nation and before we are able to select the qualities that are desirable, we need to define quite clearly "who" or "what" is a counsellor. This is a dreaded drawback.

In conclusion, we must ensure that the most suitable person is selected for the career of counsellor. We must not wait for the personality to evolve out of training.

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Il y a grand besoin de conseillers au Canada et encore plus dans les provinces de l'Atlantique. On pourrait combler cette demande quant au nombre de conseillers à l'aide de cours intensifs mais notre objectif vise non la quantité mais la qualité. On peut comprendre que certains voudraient résoudre le problème à l'aide de cours intensifs, de cours rapides, de cours condensés pour apporter une solution à court terme. Pour eux, ce serait mieux que rien. Et justement, l'auteur s'oppose à la chose. Si le but était d'installer dans les écoles des systèmes ou des agences de service social pour appliquer des recettes ou des trucs tout faits, on pourrait accepter le genre d'études qu'offrent certains institutions. Si, d'autre part, le but est de former de véritables conseillers, il ne suffit plus alors d'un simple vernis mais bien que la personnalité et les qualités individuelles du sujet soient prises en sérieuse considération.

Attendu que le conseiller doit comprendre les gens et se comprendre lui-même, attendu qu'il doit donner l'occasion à chacun de s'épanouir, il doit donc de première nécessité être un personnage humain, compréhensif,

qui contrôle et ses préjugés mesquins et ses peurs folles et ses partis-pris étroits.

Ces caractéristiques ne peuvent être acquises par des conseillers qui viennent à la profession par le hasard des circonstances ou par accident. C'est trop souvent le cas. D'ailleurs, plusieurs étudiants universitaires que ont rencontré de tels conseillers en subissent les conséquences néfastes. Quand on prend pour acquis que l'élément de formation humaine va de soi dans l'éducation d'un conseiller, les résultats en perte de potentiel humain s'avèrent désastreux. La preuve éloquent peut en être faite à l'examen des rapports et des actes de certains diplômés.

Bien sûr que ce n'est pas là un problème facile mais nous nous devons de le solutionner. Ainsi, quelques réponses pourraient nous être données ou moyen de recherches portant sur l'évaluation de la personnalité des candidats, même si dans ce domaine on peut apporter de sérieuses mises en garde.

Une suggestion fort valable serait d'imposer des stages pratiques en parallèle avec les études théoriques. Ce qui nous semble le plus important serait d'observer les professeurs dans leurs classes pour ensuite les inviter à poursuivre leurs études en counselling s'ils ont les aptitudes nécessaires et s'ils sont vraiment intéressés. A nous de trouver les gens qui ont les talents de la profession. Remettons-nous en ensuite aux spécialistes habilités à les former.