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COUNSELOR EFFECTIVENESS: A CHANGING EMPHASIS

This review addresses itself to the topic "counselor effectiveness" and attempts to point out a major problem in the area—that of measuring or objectifying this concept which, for purposes of the review, has been called the criterion variable. It would appear logical that counselor effectiveness carries with it important implications in three areas: (a) selection of counselor candidates, (b) content emphasis of counselor educator programs, and (c) practice of counseling.

The extant literature indicates a rather energetic attempt at a solution to the problem of counselor effectiveness in terms of what it is and how it is measured. The present review makes no attempt to add to this particular area but confines itself to a description and careful delineation of problems inherent in research of this kind.

An attempt will be made to show that the traditional "trait-factor" approach of isolating personality variables to delineate counselor effectiveness has been equivocal. Polmancier (1966) having reviewed the literature in this field states: ". . . there is much yet to be known about the personal characteristics of counselors, as well as the significance of these characteristics for success in counseling (p. 95)."

It will be suggested that the emphasis should be changed from trait-factor personality studies—tolerance for ambiguity, nurturance, abasement and so forth—to researching the area of cognitive style, flexibility, perception and psychological openness as perhaps being more fruitful in advancing knowledge of the criterion variable.

Research and Evaluation

Counseling as a practice or profession in North America seems to have grown from a variety of causes including democratic ideals regarding the intrinsic worth of the individual coupled with a certain humanistic concern in our society for the welfare of others. The "helping professions" generally, are based, as tautological as it may sound, on the correct assumption that people require help at various stages during their life cycle. Counseling has grown steadily over the past several decades for a variety of reasons. There are those like Dressler (1951) who claim that this growth results from counseling being an interesting pursuit in and of itself. As he remarks: "The general public puts counseling into the same category as kissing insofar as there is any need for selection and training prior to practicing the art (p. 70)."

Like psychotherapy, counseling continues despite a paucity of research evidence of its effectiveness. While this may seem a harsh indictment, Astin

(1961), Eysenck (1952) and others have concluded that psychotherapy at least, continues primarily because of its inherent interest. Bergin (1967) draws much the same conclusion stating: "most controlled studies of psychotherapy reveal no significant effect of treatment (p. 206)."

This is not to intimate however, that research into counseling effectiveness should be abandoned. On the contrary, there are important reasons for increasing such research. First, good research is the only means we have of improving counselor effectiveness. Secondly, in Canada, where counseling is a rather new profession, it is incumbent upon us to attempt to provide evidence of counselor effectiveness in order to grow professionally and to secure the resources, financial and human, required to advance the profession. Third, research into counselor effectiveness can provide valuable insights into the counseling process itself.

One of the major problems in counseling research is that of defining the criterion or dependent variable—counselor effectiveness. The definition itself is clouded in many cases by the particular school to which the researcher belongs. In connection with this problem, Barry and Wolf (1962) have advocated the following necessary conditions in the design of evaluation studies:

- (a) Definitions of aims and objectives
- (b) Establishment of criteria against which progress toward objectives can be evaluated
- (c) Design of techniques or instruments by which the criteria can be measured
- (d) Rigorous collection of data
- (e) Judgments about the nature of progress toward achievement of objectives should be made against the criterion variable.

While these conditions do not appear extraordinary, they present difficulties to the researcher. First there appear to be no universally accepted goals or objectives for counseling and therefore by implication no acceptable yardstick for measuring the effectiveness of the counselor. The point is that while there are many stated goals for counseling and therefore implicit criteria for measuring counselor effectiveness, few if any of them are easy to quantify, objectify, or put into operational terms. If, for example, one chooses "self-actualization" as a goal in counseling, how does one define it in operational terms? As Whitely, Sprinthall, Mosher and Donaghy (1967) state:

A critical problem in selecting counselors for training is the identification of the components of counseling effectiveness. Before selection procedures can be used with confidence it is first necessary to gain an understanding of what contributes to success as a counselor (p. 226).

Blocher (1966) lists some 26 criteria of counseling effectiveness including social adjustment rated by "experts," congruence between self and ideal-self descriptions, changes on personality tests, client satisfaction, persistence in counseling, self-confidence, and optimism about the future. Looking at such diverse criteria, it becomes obvious that one cannot easily design research which could incorporate all of them. Rather, as Blocher (1966) points out, one must ask about effectiveness in terms of "effectiveness for what? with whom? under what conditions? (p. 224)" The point here is that one must review "counselor effectiveness" studies in terms of their particular

perspective. Studies initiated by different schools are not apt to arrive at identical conclusions regarding counselor effectiveness.

Another problem in researching counselor effectiveness is that of rating effectiveness. Pertinent questions include: (a) What characteristics are most important? and (b) Who is competent to do the rating? These questions raise important implications regarding the central problem of research in the area and relate directly to earlier statements in this review regarding the difficulty of ascertaining, in operational terms, the criterion variable, counselor effectiveness. Walton and Sweeney (1969) point out that ". . . researchers working in this area continue to wrestle with the problem of establishing a criterion of counselor success that will serve as a generally acceptable dependent variable (p. 33)."

Arbuckle (1968) summarizes a study done by Gonyea (1964) in which the latter found a negative relationship between the extent to which counselors developed "the ideal therapeutic relationship" and the degree to which their clients reported improvement. Brown and Cannaday (1969) however, report that in a study of counselor, counselee and supervisor ratings using the Counselor Evaluation Inventory (Linden, Chartyer, & Stone, 1965) counselor and counselee ratings were nonsignificant, but that counselee and supervisor ratings using Spearman rho correlated .81, significant at the .01 level. Whether or not client or counselor self-report is valid, the question of counselor effectiveness and its objective meaning for research purposes remain a thorny issue. Arbuckle (1968) states:

It would seem reasonable enough to conclude that a major issue today for counselors and the educators of counselors is the question of whether or not counseling does what it is supposed to do. If some of the evidence is correct, it would at least seem to be possible that counselor educators are educating student counselors in unverified ways so that they may have an unknown effect on clients (p. 250).

While this may be overstating the case, one cannot dismiss the above statement as irresponsible on the basis of findings of much of the literature. Much of the research has been devoted to isolating a particular personality characteristic and attempting to relate its significance to the complex variable of counselor effectiveness. As Hill (1961) maintains: "Significant research assessing the effectiveness of selection procedures must cope with the evaluation of the counselors' effectiveness. This poses problems of considerable complexity (p. 355)."

Hill continues, ". . . there appears to be no solidly validated procedure available to distinguish applicants who are well suited to counseling by virtue of their personalities from those who are not (p. 356)."

It is suggested here that the research into counselor effectiveness has been largely an attempt to isolate personality characteristics which correlate with counselor effectiveness and while it is true that counselor personality is a crucial variable, perhaps the emphasis has been misplaced. The typical study involves administration of standard tests such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, California Psychological Inventory, Edwards Personal Preference Schedule, and Strong Vocational Interest Blank and analyzing the results for characteristics which will separate good and poor counselors.

While research has been energetic, results have been largely inconclusive. Allen (1967) feels that, ". . . it might be better to abandon the

"trait-factor" approach characteristic of these studies to focus on higher-order variables drawn from a theoretical understanding of the demands of counseling (p. 35)." In this connection Tyler (1961) argues that there is no single personality type, or personality profile of traits which is uniquely well-suited to counseling. Polmantiér (1966) in discussing the personality of the counselor doubts the necessity of prescribing specific personality characteristics for counselors and questions the need for doing so. He does, however, conclude that: "Some personal characteristics afford real hope of being among those that, when brought together in a person, affect counseling and its outcomes . . . (p. 97)."

It is the contention of the authors that a more fruitful line of research is that of investigating what Allen (1967) refers to as "higher-order concepts" including psychological openness, cognitive flexibility, perceptual style and perceptual organization in determining counselor effectiveness. It can be argued that these areas are no more legitimate in researching effectiveness than the trait-factor approach. However, because research of this nature in related fields such as teacher effectiveness (Emlaw, Mosher, Sprinthall, & Whiteley, 1963) has proven fruitful, it should be given greater impetus and support in assessing counselor effectiveness.

The term psychological openness would appear to be applicable to counselor effectiveness. Allen refers to openness as a higher-order concept and a significant dimension of human personality.

The open person is one in whom there is a relatively high degree of self-communication. The closed person is one in whom there is a greater amount of isolation among the various levels and/or varieties of experience (p. 36).

Theoretically, the concept is close to Rogers' (1957) "necessary and sufficient condition of 'congruence'."

Allen (1967) reports the results of a study relating effectiveness and openness of 26 graduate students at Harvard School of Education. Using the Rorschach Index of Repressive Style and the Group Supervision Report scale to measure psychological openness and supervisor rating scales supplemented by the Responsiveness to Feeling Scale and the Response to Client Affect scale to measure effectiveness, Allen reports that: ". . . effectiveness in counseling is related to the counselor's openness to his own feelings concerning the process (p. 38)." This leads him to conclude that this particular variable may be of prime importance in assessing counselor effectiveness.

Cognitive style and flexibility were investigated by Whiteley, Sprinthall, Mosher, and Donaghy (1967). They define *cognitive flexibility* as:

An ability or capacity to think and act simultaneously and appropriately in a given situation. It refers to dimensions of open-mindedness, adaptability, and a resistance to premature closure in perception and cognition (p. 227).

The effective counselor could respond easily to both the content of what the client says and his feelings without threat or psychological confusion. In Whiteley's study, flexibility in counseling was predicted from the Rorschach, Thematic Apperception Test, Personal Differentiation Test, and case studies and simulated counseling situations. The sample was taken from a class of 25 M.Ed. guidance students at Harvard University. The major finding of the study was that cognitive flexibility—rigidity as predicted by

the projective tests correlated highly with supervisors' ratings on the same dimension.

This study is significant in that it has yielded similar results in rating teacher trainees (Emlaw, Mosher, Sprinthall, & Whiteley, 1963; Sprinthall, Whiteley, & Mosher, 1966). A second important question raised, and which will be referred to later, is whether or not cognitive flexibility is a fixed characteristic or is subject to change during counselor training.

An elaborate study by Gardner, Holzman, Klein, Linton, & Spence (1959) relates "cognitive style" and "cognitive control" to personality in terms of cognition and perception. According to Gardner et al.:

Cognitive controls are conceived of as slowly changing, developmentally stabilized structures: (a) they are relatively invariant over a given class of intentions and situations; (b) they are operative despite the shifts in situational and behavioral contexts typical of cognitive activity from moment to moment. Cognitive controls refer to a level of organization that is more general than the specific structural components underlying perception, recall and judgment (p. 5).

In addition, Gardner et al. have originated the term "cognitive style" as a superordinate construct within the personality which describes the coexistence of a number of combinations of cognitive controls.

Conklin and Zingle (1969) note that: "Because the concept of cognitive style involves the ability to articulate the stimulus field through an active searching for differentiation it seems an appropriate idea for counseling." In their study Conklin and Zingle (1969) hypothesized that "counselors with an 'analytic' cognitive style would score higher on tests measuring interpersonal sensitivity (p. 22)." Using 63 Alberta High School counselors as subjects and a battery of instruments, including the Hidden Figures (HFT) and the Cline Interpersonal Perception Films, they showed that analytic counselors (those scoring above the mean on HFT) were more adept in the area of interpersonal sensitivity. They also scored higher on the four individual measures tested: Behavior Postdiction, Adjective Check List, Opinion and Attitudes, and Physical and Behavioral Attitudes.

Rank (1966) reports a study showing the relationship between counselor perceptions and counselor effectiveness. Rank cites Feidler's (1950) research which showed that therapists viewed (the therapist's) ability to "participate completely in the client's communication" as being paramount. Rank states:

Whether termed perception, empathy, or sensitivity, the counselor's capability for observing client characteristics and understanding client communication is one of several relevant variables in the counseling process, and therefore offers promise in selection and training of counselors (p. 359).

While Rank's purpose was to develop an instrument to measure counselor effectiveness (The Film Test of Counselor Effectiveness) the study was undertaken with trainee perceptions as the focus. The results reported are promising in prediction using expert raters to evaluate the criterion available. In a recent study, Passons and Olsen (1969) investigated the relationship between five counselor characteristics and empathic sensitivity (the latter being the criterion measure of counselor effectiveness). Five characteristics:

- (a) open mindedness,
- (b) cognitive flexibility,

- (c) ability to sense feelings (ASF),
- (d) willingness to communicate in the realm of feelings (WCF), and
- (e) positive self-regard.

were chosen on the basis of their viability as measures of empathic sensitivity. Passons and Olsen cite a study by Sprinthall, Whiteley, and Mosher (1966) in which the latter view "cognitive flexibility as the determinant influence on the counselor's ability to respond to the various modes through which the client perceives himself (p. 440)." They also summarize the Whiteley et al. (1967) study referred to earlier in which the investigators found that predictive measures of cognitive flexibility were significantly related to the tendency to respond to feelings.

The major conclusions drawn by Passons and Olsen's rather elaborate study were with reference to the concurrent validity of peer ratings on counselor effectiveness, as peers were able to "reliably differentiate each other on the two variables ASF and WCF." Cognitive flexibility also correlated positively with empathic sensitivity offered to a filmed client.

Discussion and Implications

The studies reported in the preceding section demonstrate the fruitfulness of research in the area of cognition and perception especially as they relate to those counselor qualities (sensitivity, empathy, openness) which appear throughout the literature as being accepted criteria of counselor effectiveness. There seems little doubt that, as Combs and Soper (1963) point out,

Apparently what makes an effective professional worker is a question not of what methods he uses, but of how well he has learned to use his unique self as an instrument for working with other people . . . the self as instrument (p. 222)."

The crucial question remains of further validating and extending much of the research in this area. It would appear however, on the basis of what has been done to date and reported in the literature that significant relationships exist between the variables discussed and the criterion variable, counselor effectiveness. That the qualities of cognitive flexibility, perceptual style, and psychological openness relate directly to the counselor's ability to sense and communicate feelings, including self-communication appear to be a warranted assumption. In addition, to be aware of one's own feelings, the ability of self-communication and concomitant willingness to risk what Rogers (1957) has termed "congruence" appear to relate directly to the variables under discussion.

In the next few decades two major factors will mitigate against the luxury of producing ineffective counselors. The first is the rapid expansion of population which will see the population of schools increase accordingly. Concomitantly, the increasing velocity of technological change will inevitably result in increasing the educational levels of young people while at the same time creating greater vocational dislocations and de-personalization. Given these circumstances, the need for effective counselors becomes paramount. They will be in increasing demand regarding numbers and, in addition, they will be required to be effective in dealing with increasingly complex personal and vocational problems with counselees.

It will therefore be incumbent upon counselor training institutions to sharpen selection procedures, and constantly evaluate programs of training in terms of counselor effectiveness. In order for this to occur, institutions

will require more than the present selection procedures and will need to organize counselor training programs based on refining those human qualities which are most relevant to the criterion of counselor effectiveness. It is the authors' contention that the most promising research endeavors toward this end lie in the direction of cognition, perception and psychological openness as discussed in this paper, as opposed to "trait-factor" personality studies. As Combs and Soper (1963) point out: ". . . what we have failed to define objectively, we may be able to distinguish perceptually (p. 226)."

Research in the area discussed in this paper is in its infancy, having begun during the late 1950's. Obviously much is still required to be done. One of the first tasks is to validate many of the research designs in other settings in order to increase concurrent and construct validity of the variables. A second major task is that of researching the variables for their usefulness as predictors of counseling effectiveness; that is, sharpening their predictive ability.

A major area of further research, since the studies cited have been undertaken for the most part by people allied to client-centered therapy, would be that of cross-validation by people of other schools. In this area, the authors would hypothesize a high degree of agreement among experts from various schools. In this connection, Feidler's (1950) study, referred to earlier, showed a high degree of agreement among expert counselors on what constitutes an effective client-counselor relationship, regardless of school.

Another intriguing question arising from this research is whether the variables discussed are more closely related to actual client movement (and thus counselor effectiveness) or to "effectiveness" as rated by "experts." To test the hypothesis that the variables discussed are in fact related to effectiveness it would be interesting to admit to counselor education a number of students who score high on the variables discussed but who might be rejected on other grounds such as academic standing, teacher certification, etc., and let them take counselor education and be rated along with other trainees.

To the extent that further research in this area is valid and reliable it must be incorporated into counselor training institution selection procedures and training programs. As Walton and Sweeney (1969) point out:

The availability of counseling services that meet high standards and the continued growth and welfare of the counseling profession depend in large part upon the ability of counselor training institutions to produce effective counselors (p. 36).

On the basis of evidence to date, it would seem that the variables considered in this paper appear at present to be the most promising areas of research in determining counselor effectiveness.

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L'EFFICACITE DU CONSEILLER: UNE NOUVELLE ORIENTATION

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Les auteurs mettent en relief les difficultés inhérentes à l'expression "efficacité du counseling" du point de vue de son utilité comme concept scientifique. Ils mettent en doute la possibilité de poursuivre des recherches dans ce domaine en utilisant les approches traditionnelles basées sur la théorie des traits-et-facteurs. Ils estiment que l'étude de concepts d'un "ordre plus élevé" comme le style cognitif, la flexibilité cognitive et l'esprit ouvert permettrait davantage de définir ce qu'est un conseiller efficace. Ils discutent de ces problèmes en regard de leurs implications pour (a) la sélection des candidats à la profession de conseiller, (b) l'orientation du contenu des programmes de formation des conseillers et (c) la pratique du counseling.