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STATUS OF ELEMENTARY COUNSELING IN THE PROVINCE OF ALBERTA

During the elementary years students are developing attitudes towards themselves, toward school, and toward the world around them. Assistance may be required by some students and must be available so that they may better integrate the forces impinging on them. Timely counseling during a child's early educational experience may be instrumental in preventing future difficulties, establishing a foundation for future achievement and personal happiness.

In recent years there has been a trend in the U.S. to expand counseling and guidance to the elementary school. This trend seems to be related to numerous writers stressing a need for "earlier identification of pupils' problems of understanding people."

An investigation (Van Hoose, & Vafakos, 1968)¹ of elementary school guidance and counseling in 48 states and the District of Columbia revealed a total of 3,837 elementary counselors (K-6). Seventy-three percent were employed full time, 18 percent were half time or more, while the remainder devoted 25-40 percent of their time to elementary school guidance.

A replication study (Van Hoose, & Sister Marie Kurtz, 1970)² of elementary school guidance and counseling in 50 states and the Virgin Islands revealed a total of 6,041 elementary counselors. Seventy percent were employed full time, 25 percent were employed half time or more, and the remaining 5 percent devoted less than half of their time to elementary school guidance. The two studies indicate a sizeable increase of elementary counselors; however, when one considers the elementary population of 30 million students (1968, K-6) the inadequate staffing can readily be seen.

The purpose of the present investigation was to determine the status of elementary counseling in the province of Alberta.

Problem

The present investigation attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How many elementary counselors were employed during the 1969-70 school year in the Province of Alberta?
2. What proportion of their time was devoted to elementary counseling—full time, half time, or part time.

¹The report was based on data from the 1966-67 school year.

²The report was based on the data of the 1968-69 school year.

3. How many people are working in a counseling type relationship with elementary children, however, are known by another title such as visiting teacher, consultant, etc.?

4. What proportion of their time is devoted to counseling in the elementary school?

5. What was the level of education of counselors and where did they receive their training?

6. What were the chief differences between elementary and secondary counselors' duties as viewed by the administrators of the schools?

7. What type of counseling training did administrators recommend at the elementary and secondary levels?

Procedures

During the first week in April (1970) the questionnaire and an accompanying letter explaining the nature of the study was sent to all superintendents in Alberta (N = 79 as listed in the 1969 ATA Handbook). Two follow-up letters were sent to non-respondents during the month of May and by the end of the first week of June, 72 superintendents had returned their questionnaires representing a 91% return.

Results

Findings to Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 are summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Demographic Data

| | |
|---|----------|
| Questionnaire Returns = 72 | |
| Number of elementary students in schools surveyed | 205, 671 |
| Number of elementary counselors | 10 |
| Number of visiting teachers, consultants, etc. | |
| Full time | 31 |
| Half time | 5 |
| Part time | 16 |
| Number of male counselors | 22 |
| Number of female counselors | 40 |
| Level of education | |
| Master's | 33 |
| Diploma | 13 |
| Bachelor's | 9 |
| Doctoral | 2 |
| Less than Bachelor's | 3 |
| Where educated | |
| American university | 26 |
| Alberta university | 29 |
| Other Canadian universities | 5 |
| Experience of counselor in counseling | |
| Less than one year | 8 |
| 1 - 4 years | 30 |
| 5 - 9 years | 10 |

Note: Incomplete information on returns accounted for variations of findings in the above table.

The survey indicated that there were 62 people employed in an elementary counseling capacity during the 1969-70 school term. Ten of these people were trained as elementary counselors and they were employed full

time. The remaining 52 people were mainly visiting teachers or consultants who were also serving in a counseling capacity. Thirty-one of this group were employed in a full time capacity in the elementary school.

Question 5

Of the 10 full time elementary counselors four had earned a Master's degree and the remaining six had received a Diploma in counseling. Twenty-nine of the other elementary specialists had their Master's degree. Twenty-six of the people had received all or part of their training in the U.S. while 29 were trained in Alberta.

Question 6

The duties of counselors at the elementary and secondary level are listed in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Duties of Elementary and Secondary Counselors as perceived by Administrators

| Percentages | Elementary Counselors |
|-------------|--|
| 23 | Consulting and working with teachers, i.e., concerns regarding the nature of teaching. |
| 17 | Consulting and working closely with parents. |
| 17 | Working with students who have learning difficulties, developmental problems. |
| 13 | Diagnostic testing methods of identifying problem areas. |
| 9 | Emotional problem counseling (one to one basis). |
| 7 | Preventive counseling. |
| 7 | Educational-vocational counseling. |
| 6 | Working with special problem students (gifted, slow, etc.). |
| 1 | Play therapy. |
| Percentages | Secondary Counselors |
| 54 | Educational-vocational counseling (transfer to world of work and education). |
| 22 | Personal (one to one) counseling (drugs, alcohol, etc.). |
| 7 | Diagnostic testing methods of identifying problem areas. |
| 5 | Consulting and working with parents. |
| 5 | Working with drop-out students. |
| 4 | Working with special remedial problem students. |
| 2 | Group counseling. |

Question 7

The recommended training of elementary and secondary counselors by administrators is listed in Table 3.

Discussion

Elementary counseling in Alberta is in its infancy stages and thus it is too early to predict the future. However, the recognition of the need for this service seems evident. If Canada once again follows a U.S. counseling trend, elementary counseling will grow in relation to the secondary program. The rapid growth of elementary counseling in the U.S. can be mainly attributed to the federal financial support allotted by Title V of National Defence Education Act. Without similar types of assistance students in Canada will find it a real hardship to acquire additional training in counseling for ele-

mentary schools. The ratio of counselors—visiting teachers, consultants, etc.,—to elementary students (205,671) in this survey seems awesome.

Hill (1967, p. 193) found that many labeled counselors at the elementary level were actually part of the pupil personnel team including psychologists, social workers or both. A variety of specialists at the elementary level were present in this survey, too. Van Hoose and Vafakas (1968) questioned the role of these specialists as elementary counselors by asking such questions as: Are these "specialists" prepared to engage in counseling with children? Do they have the competencies in guidance necessary for helping normal and healthy children succeed in the elementary school? Does their orientation shift when they become "counselors?"

In the present investigation superintendents perceived the elementary counselor's duties mainly consisting of a "consulting" role which would support the ACES-ASCA (1966) statement on elementary counseling. Their perception of secondary counselor duties suggest a heavy emphasis on vocational-educational counseling. This finding is in support of previous research involving counselor role (Grant, 1954; King & Matteson, 1959; Altman, 1969).

Suggested training of elementary counselors indicates that superintendents view diagnostic training as very essential. At the secondary level they emphasized a supervised practicum experience for secondary counselor training with 18% of the superintendents in favor of a course and experience in educational and vocational counseling.

TABLE 3
Recommended Training of Counselors by Administrators

| Percentages | Elementary Counselors |
|-------------|--|
| 35 | Diagnostic training (special learning problems involving gifted, handicapped children; reading, speech problems, etc.). Tests and measurement. |
| 14 | Course: Child psychology (developmental nature of the child). |
| 12 | Supervised counseling practicum, individual and group. |
| 10 | Experience in consulting and working with teachers and parents. |
| 9 | Course and experience: Educational-vocational counseling. |
| 7 | Community involvement and knowledge of community needs. |
| 5 | Knowledge of elementary curriculum. |
| 4 | Course: Counseling theories. |
| 2 | Course: Communication skills. |
| 2 | Course: Play therapy. |
| 2 | Teaching experience. |
| 1 | Research skills. |
| Percentages | Secondary Counselors |
| 25 | Supervised counseling practicum, individual and group. |
| 18 | Course and experience: Educational-vocational counseling. |
| 13 | Strong background in psychology, sociology. |
| 12 | Course: Testing and measurement. |
| 10 | Knowledge of techniques for improving communications with teachers, parents, and administrators. |
| 7 | Course: Social problems (drugs, alcohol, drop-outs, family living). |
| 6 | Knowledge of secondary curriculum. |
| 3 | Teaching experience. |
| 3 | Knowledge of referral procedures. |
| 2 | Course: Counseling theories. |
| 1 | Research skills. |

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L'ETAT DE L'ORIENTATION AU NIVEAU DE L'ECOLE PRIMAIRE DANS LA PROVINCE DE L'ALBERTA

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L'étude avait pour but de faire le point sur l'état du counselling au niveau de l'école primaire en Alberta. Les réponses à un questionnaire retourné par 91% des surintendants des écoles ont révélé qu'il y avait 62 personnes travaillant à titre de conseillers d'orientation au niveau primaire (la population à ce niveau se chiffre à 205,671 élèves), dont trente-et-une à plein temps. Seulement 10 de ces personnes avaient reçu une formation universitaire supérieure comme conseiller au niveau de l'école primaire. Vingt-neuf autres spécialistes détenaient un diplôme de maîtrise. Les surintendants estimaient que le rôle du conseiller d'orientation au niveau primaire se limitait principalement à donner des conseils. Ils considéraient comme essentiel que le conseiller reçoive une formation dans les méthodes du diagnostic. On a aussi discuté de la désirabilité d'employer un plus grand nombre de conseillers. On est finalement arrivé à la conclusion que l'orientation dans les écoles primaires en Alberta en est encore à l'état embryonnaire.

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