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SOME PRAGMATICS FOR RESEARCH IN COUNSELLING

The custom is to make a ceremonial bow to research and then hurry to work ruled by feeling and habit. Some research achieves a degree of popularity because the findings fit social biases, special interests or institutional arrangements. More often, research contributes to the author's degree or to his promotion but has little effect on counselling (even the author's counselling). Researcher and practitioner become estranged, sometimes to a point of mutual contempt one for another.

Alleviation of these shortcomings is important enough to elicit attention from both field workers and researchers who are, in the main, university faculty and graduate students. A system must be deemed unsatisfactory if scholarship does not bias performance and if theses and journals are produced to be briefly admired but rarely read.

Social scientists covet the empiricism and objectivity of the natural sciences. They have a preference for reductionist theories and for arbitrary rules which cast out variables that are not mechanical and operational. If these rules become absolute, the researcher may retain an aura of scientism but he is unable to deal with truly human characteristics such as curiosity, imagination and values. Research then, is restricted to those attributes in which humans are most nearly like objects and lower animals. The focus is on eye movements more than reading or memorization of nonsense syllables more than the development of meaning. Such studies have limited applications but if the practitioner extrapolates to real life he is called superficial or anthropomorphic. His guilt is little relieved by the fact that his colleagues, in research, continue to anthropomorphize the functions of computers and to animalize explanations of human behavior.

A companion piece to mechanistic philosophy is an obsession with research methodology. No one denies the importance of skilled data treatment but a problem arises when unimpeachable treatment is given to garbage data and important questions are excluded because they do not conform to the system. Lewin pointed out that empiricism concentrates on repetitive consistencies in response and, therefore, arrives at historic explanations of

behavior with consequent neglect of contemporary insight and productive thinking. The mechanistic method also leads to the belief that human nature is nothing more than the common elements found in the norm or average. This bias leads away from clinical, educational and counseling questions.

Almost equally destructive is the ungenerous, rigid and impersonal style with limited interpersonal and clinical competence which is sometimes cultivated in the name of objectivity. These characteristics produce two faults. Such persons are unable to participate in social or clinical settings where a full display of human responses might be found. They work, instead, out of contact with subjects and are restricted to actuarial and test data. Since only the humane elicits what is human, they fail to uncover what is unique and central to behavior. The second fault is that hard and restrictive personalities think defectively about humans. Common experience supports the observation that we might often predict findings and recommendations as much by knowing the author as by examining the data. In short, they fail to get the data because they treat subjects like objects and they fail to handle the data because they insist that they themselves are not in the equation.

Counseling studies have been dominated by surveys and correlational analyses which are useful to elaborate contemporary conditions but weak in giving thrust or change to understanding. The studies suffer also from fragmentation and scatter because most are done by part-time students who have not been able to join in on-going projects or relate to enduring questions being explored by faculty and colleagues.

Graduate programs in counselling are not just research nor preparation for research but they can be influential in reducing the gap between research and practice. This is particularly significant at the doctoral level. *First*, there is a need to face the complexity of human affairs. The subject of study is no passive respondent but one who engages the environment for his own purposes. His behavior is not characteristically simple, reactive or testable. It follows that significant studies may be filled with inconveniences and some of the most useful will be deep studies of one, especially studies of that case which confirms or contradicts the norm.

Many of the productive studies will be ecological in character for one variable is not simply related to another or to a constellation of others but, instead, is given impact by the person being studied. Most studies will be enhanced if the individual project is part of some larger or continuing interest and toward this end, departments might cooperate with other departments and, hopefully, in the long run acquire the support and equipment which accelerates interchange and assures continuity.

Second, a suitable doctoral program must develop judgmental and philosophic scholarship. Students must learn that meaning is constructed and not simply discovered; and must learn, too, that findings are shaped by hypotheses, by modes of research and by the personality of the scholar. The scholar must see beyond the method to the question.

Third, what has been said here in no way deprecates the role of statistics and science. The issue is blind method or intelligent method. Meaning exceeds facts and exceeds the interrelation between facts but it takes facts into account.

Fourth, graduate programs must either select or develop the clinical

artistry and personal maturity which are essential to counselling studies. Research skills alone may lead to some title "psychologist" but they do not lead to the title "clinical," "educational," or "counselling" psychologist.

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GROUP LEARNING AND THE VOLUNTEER

In recent years there has been a rapid growth of Volunteer Bureaus in the United States and Canada. This indicates the extension of welfare services in the community through the use of volunteers. Such a development poses a challenge, as well as creating an opportunity, for professionals such as Social Workers, teachers, doctors and nurses to collaborate with and ensure more creative and productive use of these public-spirited citizens.

In the United States, training programmes for a wide range of service fields have been established for the better deployment of volunteer workers. In Canada a similar trend is gaining momentum. On the Canadian university scene, courses for the training of volunteers engaged in direct service to individuals, families or groups are a new development.

It may be of interest to share my own experience in providing such courses for volunteers over the past few years, through the McGill University Centre for Continuing Education, and in collaboration with the Volunteer Bureau of Montreal.

A lecture-and-discussion group meets for ten weekly periods. The group is limited to 15 members, to permit active participation and interaction. The heterogeneous composition of the group, ranging from 22 to 60 years of age, male and female, with widely varying backgrounds, socially, economically, ethnically, is at first somewhat disconcerting to the instructor or leader. As well, these volunteers represent a wide variety of hospitals, schools and social agencies. Around the table are, among others, a teen-age club leader, a "golden-age" friendly visitor, a lady working with ex-Mental Hospital patients, a big-brother tutor, a driver for "meals-on-wheels", a director of a used clothing depot, a volunteer librarian, and a representative of an anti-poverty group. The one factor common to all, and which provides the necessary group cohesion, is their interest in freely giving help to others, and the desire to improve the quality of that help.

These very differences enable the instructor/leader to engage the class in a richer, livelier process of sharing experiences, raising questions, challenging or accepting each other's ways of working. Thus, the process of "problem-swapping" and problem-solving in the helping process gets under way.

Each class member presents a current problem situation, facing him or her in the role of volunteer. This is analyzed by the group and by the leader. Group support and encouragement, as well as criticism and suggestions, even offers of new resources, come from all directions.