R. C. CONKLIN,
The University of Calgary;
MAURICE NAKONESHNY,
Calgary Separate School Board.

THE INFLUENCE OF COUNSELOR EMPATHY, STUDENT SEX, AND GRADE LEVEL ON PERCEIVED COUNSELOR ROLE

ABSTRACT: This research project, using Truax's Scale for the Measurement of Accurate Empathy and an adapted version of Warman's Counseling Appropriateness Check-List, attempted to investigate the relationship between counselor empathy and student perception of counslor role.

Results of the study indicated that counselors rated "high" in empathy were considered to be significantly more appropriate persons to consult for advice for personal-social problems than counselors rated "low." No significant differences were obtained for educational-vocational problems. Female students in contrast to males considered the counselor to be significantly more appropriate for discussion of both problem areas. Grade 9 students considered the counselor to be significantly more appropriate for discussion of educational-vocational concerns than did grade 7 or grade 8 students.

The results of this study and their implications were briefly discussed.

PROBLEM

In recent years counseling and guidance services have been given increased recognition as an important aspect of the total educational system. If the counselor is to function effectively, his role must be clearly defined particularly insofar as the students are concerned. One of the major areas of study in this area has had to do with analysing student, teacher, parent, and administrator perceptions of counselor role. (Altmann, 1969; Bailey & Robertson, 1964; Ford and Koziey, 1969; Grant, 1954; Jenson, 1955; King & Matteson, 1959; Sagehorn, 1960; Storey, McCormick, & Loken, 1969; Warman, 1960; Welcove & Sharp, 1971). Results of these studies do not reflect altogether favorably on the status of the counselor as a source of counseling help. Generally, students favored counselor help for educational and vocational concerns but not for problems of a personal social nature. Apparently students turn to parents and friends for help in these areas (West & Zingle, 1969).

Although these studies have no doubt been useful in establishing or modifying guidance programs, none have attempted to examine the reasons for the perception that students and others have of counselors. If the reasons for the students' reluctance to use the counselor as a source of personal help were known, it might prove helpful as feedback to the counselor.

Another direction of study in the counseling area has recently demonstrated that certain facilitative conditions are important for successful outcome. These have most recently been termed core conditions by researchers. The greatest emphasis regarding the importance of empathy in counseling has come from the client-centered theory of Carl Rogers (1957). According to Rogers, and more recently Truax and Carkhuff (1967), the communication of empathy together with certain other conditions are absolutely necessary for therapeutic change to occur. It has been argued that empathy constitutes a major part of not only client-centered theory, but learning-theory approaches, psychoanalytic approaches, eclectic theory and others. A positive relationship between counselor empathy and client improvement has been shown in many studies. A major assumption of practitioners who believe in the importance of empathy is the idea that it must be communicated to and perceived by the client. It is possible that the counselor can communicate empathy to prospective clients in a school setting as well as clients in the counseling interview. Since empathy is one facet of a counselor personality structure it no doubt would be evident in his daily behavior and interpersonal communication outside the counseling interview. Perception of the counselor as possessing this trait may therefore directly influence a student's decision to take a problem to the counselor for discussion. It may also influence what kind of problem the student is willing to discuss with the counselor. The major purpose of the present study was to investigate the influence of empathy on students' perception of the counselor role. In addition the influence of grade level and sex were explored.

METHOD

Sample

The counselors in the present study were chosen by rating tape recorded segments of their counseling for the condition of empathy. From the tape-recorded segments three high-level counselors were selected whose mean empathy rating was 4.6; in addition three low-level counselors were selected whose mean rating was 1.2. An attempt was made to control for other variables such as years of teaching and counseling experience and the number of students enrolled in each school; the mean number of years of teaching and counseling experience of the high group was 6.6, and for the low group 7.0. Student enrolment in the schools selected ranged from 290 students to 430 students.

Seventy-five students from each of the six schools, 25 from each of grades 7, 8, and 9 served as subjects in this study. All subjects were randomly selected from a class list of the total junior-high enrolment of each school. Of the 450 students originally selected to participate in this study, 440 completed the questionnaire. From the 440 returned questionnaires, 2 were illegible leaving a total sample of 438 subjects.

Instruments

The Accurate Empathy Scale. Truax's (1961) scale for the measurement of accurate empathy was used to obtain a measure of empathy for each of the six counselors. Although these scales were originally designed for use with live observations or tape recordings of individual counseling sessions, Truax notes that it has also proven reliable with typescripts. This scale has been employed extensively in counseling and psychotherapy research. Truax and Mitchell (1971) note that the reliability of the scale with a variety of patients and counselors in 41 different research studies has generally reached .75 or higher. Validity, however, has been more difficult to express. Truax and Carkhuff (1967) state that in research employed in this scale empathy was significantly related to a variety of positive outcomes.

Warman's Counseling Appropriateness Check List. Students involved in the study were asked to indicate on a 5 point scale the extent to which they felt each of the 72 items was appropriate for discussion with their counselor. Warman (1960) constructed and validated his 100-item instrument to study the perceptions of counselor role at a large American University. He factor analysed the resultant data and found three specific factors which he named vocational choice, college routine, and adjustment to self and others. Warman (1961) administered a revised 66-item version of this checklist to 21 college and university counselors in the United States. He found the same three factors as in the original study. Counselors considered vocational-choice problems most appropriate for discussion while adjustment to self and others and college routine problems placed second and third respectively. A replication of Warman's study by Ogston, Altmann, & Conklin (1969) using 21 Canadian colleges and university counseling centers yielded nearly identical results. Although the same three factors were found, Canadian counselors considered problems of adjustment to self and others and college routine to be equally appropriate for discussion. The vocational choice category was considered most appropriate for counselor involvement. A factor analysis of Warman's checklist by Ford and Koziey (1969) yielded four distinct factors: educational, vocational, personal, and social. Welcove and Sharp (1971) found the same three factors as Warman. Conklin, Altmann & Hengel (1971) found an adjustment to self and others factor identical to the first factor of Warman's and an educational-vocational factor similar to Warman's vocational choice and college routine factor, and a new factor they called love, religion and morality.

A 72-item version of Warman's instrument was used in the present study. In all studies two categories seemed to be consistent. These were categories which might be called Personal and Social, and Educational and Vocational. As a result it was decided to separate items into these two categories for the purposes of this study.

RESULTS

The major purpose of this study was to determine the influence of high and low levels of empathy on the manner in which students per-

ceived the counselor's role. Tables 1 and 2 indicate the results of two separate 3-way analyses of variance. For the junior-high-school sample as a whole, a higher preference for Personal-Social counseling was indicated by those students in schools where "high" counselors were present $F = 7.33$, $df = 1,426$, $p < .01$). In the case of the Educational Vocational category, there was no over all difference ($F = 1.10$).

Grade Level

By grade, students in Grade 7 and 9 perceived the counselor as more appropriate for discussing Personal-Social problems in schools with "high" counselors. Students in Grade 8 perceived no difference on this category in schools rated "high." On the Educational-Vocational category only students in Grade 7 perceived a difference. Those in schools

TABLE 1

Analysis of Scores on Personal-Social Category

Source of Variation	df	MS	F
A (high *vs* low counsellors)	1	7581.0938	7.3301**
B (sex)	1	14739.1523	14.2413**
C (grade)	2	1280.3147	1.2379
AB	1	2135.5916	2.0649
AC	2	3312.7426	3.2031*
BC	2	881.9531	0.8528
ABC	2	1762.0522	1.7037
Error	426	1034.2415	
TOTAL	437		

** $p < .01$.
* $p < .05$.

TABLE 2

Analysis of Scores on Educational-Vocational Category

Source of Variation	df	MS	F
A (high *vs* low counsellors)	1	342.7244	1.1072
B (sex)	1	2281.2603	7.3696**
C (grade)	2	3229.2031	26.5844*
AB	1	99.9600	0.3229
AC	2	840.0779	2.7139
BC	2	602.5544	1.9466
ABC	2	373.7534	1.2074
Error	426	309.5415	
TOTAL	437		

** $p < .01$.
* $p < .001$.

rated "high" saw the counselors as being more appropriate for the discussion of this type of problem. The difference here did not lead to an overall difference as indicated earlier in the results.

Sex

In the case of "high" schools, females perceived the discussion of Personal-Social problems significantly more appropriate than males in all grade levels. In addition, grade-8 females in the "low" schools perceived this category as more appropriate than males in the same grade.

DISCUSSION

The major purpose of the study was to investigate the differing perceptions of students in schools with high facilitative counselors as opposed to those in schools where low facilitative counselors were functioning. The results indicate that for the more sensitive area of personal problems junior-high-school students regard counselors high in empathy as more appropriate targets then those low in empathy. Many factors have been studied which lead to the establishment of counselor role, but it would appear that levels of empathy possessed by the counselor may be a large contributing factor to counselor role. The fact that no differences were found with regard to the Educational-Vocational area seems to indicate that students regard this area as more of an information-providing process with little or no self-exploration. To a large extent the traditional view of educational-vocational counseling has been closely tied to counselor-training programs. The fact that students perceive the counselor's role in this manner does not justify maintaining only a testing and information-giving service as vocational counselling.

The differences by grade are interesting in that the Grade-7 students who are in the first year of a new environment feel that they would prefer to take both personal-social and educational-vocational problems to a high functioning counselor. It seems then that the facilitative skills may be crucial in such grades as 1, 7 and 10 at which time the student may be somewhat insecure, cautiously approaching his new responsibilities. This may be the time for greater understanding, at least, on the part of the counselor. The implication may be that careful selection of counselors working with Grade-7 students should be made with regard to the criteria of relationship skills. Another interesting result is the fact that with the personal-social problem area students in both high and low schools tend to see this area as less appropriate as they proceed from Grade 7 through Grade 9; whereas with the educational-vocational area students perceive the counselor as more appropriate with succeeding grades. On the one hand, if students do not receive empathy and the other facilitative conditions in Grade 7 they are less likely to return to the counselor in later grades. Indications are that counselors in the field are generally lower in empathy than the levels recommended by experts. The chances of a Grade-7 youngster encountering a low-level counselor in Grade 7 are probably

quite high. On the other hand, with educational-vocational concerns much more work and planning is done at the Grade-9 level. Students may have come to the conclusion that at this grade level the counselor, whether "high" or "low," is necessary for helping in planning their futures. In many schools Grade-9 students are required to go through some form of educational and vocational assessment which they may have come to perceive as the only and legitimate role for the Grade-9 counselor.

The facts tend to throw some new light on the role of the counselor. As far as students' perceptions are concerned, counselors are necessary in the earlier grades for personal-social problems but in later grades the emphasis is on educational-vocational concerns. It would be interesting to see if the trend continues in grades 10 to 12. It may be that as the students get older they find other more suitable targets for the discussion of their personal problems — *and these targets do not usually include the school counselor.*

With regard to difference between sexes, girls saw the counselors as a more appropriate target for both categories of problems in the high and low schools. The differences were especially marked with the personal-social area in which girls perceived the counselor as much more appropriate. The results are somewhat in keeping with other research which indicates girls are more able to discuss their personal problems at an earlier age than are boys.

The conclusions that can be drawn from this study are important for pupil personnel services. It appears that we must devote considerably more attention to the level of skills offered by counselors. We must also be aware of the more traditional sex roles and development stages which young persons experience at the junior-high-school level.

RESUME: Dans ce projet de recherche, on a utilisé l'échelle d'empathie de Truax ("Measurement of Accurate Empathy") et une version adaptée du "Warman's Counselling Appropriateness Check-List", pour étudier la relation entre l'empathie du conseiller et la perception qu'a l'étudiant du rôle du conseiller.
Les résultats ont montré que les conseillers ayant obtenu une cote d'empathie élevée étaient perçus comme étant des personnes significativement plus adéquates pour la consultation relative à des problèmes d'adaptation personnelle et sociale que les conseillers ayant obtenu une cote faible. On a observé aucune différence significative dans le cas des problèmes d'orientation. Les étudiantes, contrairement aux étudiants, considèrent le conseiller comme étant plus approprié pour discuter des problèmes relatifs aux deux domaines. Les étudiants de 9e année considèrent le conseiller comme étant significativement plus approprié pour la discussion de questions touchant les domaines d'éducation et d'orientation que les étudiants de 7e et 8e années. On discute aussi brièvement des résultats de cette étude et de leurs implications.

REFERENCES

Altmann, H. A. Changing perceptions of University of Calgary students over a one-year period. *Canadian Counsellor,* 1969, 3, 38-41.

Bailey, J. A., & Robertson, R. V. Students' and teachers' perceptions of student problems. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 1964, **43**, 171-173.

Conklin, R. C., Altmann, H. A., & Hengel, A. Appropriateness of problems for discussion with counselors. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 1971, **17**, 43-48.

Ford, R., & Koziey, P. W. Differential perceptions of the school counselor's role. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 1969, **25**, 245-253.

Grant, C. W. The counselor's role. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 1954, **32**, 386-388.

Jenson, R. E. Student feeling about counseling help. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 1955, **33**, 498-503.

King, P. T., & Matteson, R. W. Student perception of counseling center services. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 1959, **37**, 358-364.

Ogston, D. G., Altmann, H. A., & Conklin, R. C. Problems appropriate for discussion in university counseling centers: A replication. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1969, **16**, 361-364.

Rogers, C. R. The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 1957, **21**, 95-103.

Sagehorn, H. Adolescent reactions to guidance. *Education*, 1960, **81**, 221-224.

Storey, A. G., McCormick, W., & Loken, J. The counselor's role as perceived by counselor, teacher, and counselee. *Canadian Counsellor*, 1969, **3** (3), 49-53.

Truax, C. B. A scale for the measurement of accurate empathy. *Psychiatric Institute Bulletin*, University of Wisconsin, 1961, **1**, 12.

Truax, C. B., & Carkhuff, R. R. *Toward effective counseling and psychotherapy: Training and practice.* Chicago: Aldine, 1967.

Truax, C. B., & Mitchell, K. M. Research on certain therapist interpersonal skills in relation to process and outcome. In A. E. Bergin & S. L. Garfield (Eds.) *Handbook of psychotherapy and behavior change.* New York: Wiley, 1971.

Warman, R. E. Differential perceptions of counseling role. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1960, **7**, 269-274.

Warman, R. E. The counseling role of college and university counseling centers. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1961, **8**, 231-238.

Welcove, G., & Sharp, H. W. Differential perception of a college counseling center. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1971, **18**, 60-63.

West, L. W., & Zingle, H. W. A self-disclosure inventory for adolescents. *Psychological Reports*, 1969, **24**, 439-445.

Numéro spécial du

Canadian Counsellor/Conseiller Canadien

juin 1974 sur

Les services de counseling dans le collège communautaire.

Ceux qui seraient intéressés à soumettre des articles devraient les faire parvenir au rédacteur avant le 15 janvier 1974.