

THE EDUCATION OF SCHOOL COUNSELLORS IN CANADA

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Abstract

The author differentiates between counsellor education and the education of school counsellors. He uses a 1978 study of school guidance services in Canada in which provincial guidance directors were interviewed to gain their perceptions of various guidance-related issues. The study indicated that departments of education prefer the term "guidance" to "counselling" and the terminology affects how guidance is practised in the schools and how school counsellors are trained. The study identified several discrepancies between the training given to and practice expected of school counsellors. It also found that national priorities were considered important neither to the training of counsellors nor to the practice of guidance in the schools. Unexpectedly, the study found that the responsibility for in-service training of school counsellors was seldom assumed by the training institutions.

Résumé

L'auteur différencie "formation des conseillants" et "formation des conseillants pédagogiques." Il utilise une étude entreprise en 1978 des services de l'orientation pédagogique au Canada. Pour cette étude, on interroge des directeurs provinciaux de l'orientation à découvrir leurs perceptions sur questions divers qui se rapportent à l'orientation. L'étude indique que les départements de l'éducation préfèrent l'appellation "orientation" à "consultation", et que l'appellation influence comment l'orientation est pratiquée aux écoles et comment les conseillants sont formés. L'étude constate quelque désaccords entre la formation donnée au et le pratique attendu du conseiller. Elle montre encore qu'on ne considère importantes les priorités nationales ni à la formation des conseillants ni à la pratique de l'orientation aux écoles. Une découverte imprévue est que les institutions de formation prennent rarement la responsabilité d'apprentissage au travail de conseillants pratiquants.

This article is not about counsellor education, but rather about the education of school counsellors. The difference is important. The education of school counsellors, I submit, is a specialized field within counsellor education. Counsellor education is concerned with the training of counsellors in all settings. School counsellors, like teachers, are hired by school boards to provide services that are spelled out, to a greater or lesser degree, in provincial legislation. This observation implies that departments of education know what services should be provided in their schools, have expectations of the person or persons who provide these services, and in the final analysis, have or could have control over the practice of those who provide the services. In some jurisdictions, departments of education certify counsellors, or at least those who wish to practise in the publicly supported schools.

This introduction is necessary as background to the remainder of this article which comments on some of the findings obtained in a study¹ entitled *Guidance services in Canadian schools: a comparative study of school guidance services in Canada*. Several of the results from this study have implications for those of us who are training school

counsellors. The findings were obtained by interviewing the department of education official identified as being most responsible for school guidance services in the province or territory concerned. The interviews took place early in 1978 and all 12 officials (usually provincial directors of guidance) were interviewed. In this article, those findings which relate to the training of school counsellors will be identified and commented on.

What's in a Name?

In this survey of provincial directors of guidance, the question was asked: "Which of the terms 'guidance' or 'counselling' (or some other) best describes the services you are responsible for in your province?" The majority of the respondents indicated that they preferred the terminology "guidance" or "guidance services." Interestingly, no director described the provincial services for which he or she was responsible by the single term "counselling," even though the practitioners are almost invariably referred to as "counsellors."

The directors were also asked whether their preferred terminology reflected the terminology in the counsellor training institutions in their prov-

ince. The majority indicated that the training institutions have either partly or wholly failed to reflect the "guidance" terminology preferred by those responsible for school guidance. This discrepancy in terminology would be understandable if the training institutions were primarily engaged in training counsellors for settings other than schools. (This may indeed be the case in some university settings, e.g., where the training programs are identified as "Counselling Psychology," or by similar terminology.)

Perhaps a more important question is how closely training programs themselves reflect the terminology used. For example, does a "counsellor education" program emphasize "counselling" rather than "guidance?" If so, graduates are probably not being prepared for most department of education expectations. If not, then the terminology used by the training institution would seem to need modification in order accurately to reflect the emphasis of the program.

Therefore, although the "counsellor" describes his or her work as "counselling," the department of education "guidance division" expects "guidance" to be the service provided in the schools. In training, the "counsellor educator" prepares "counsellors" for school "guidance" in a "counsellor education" or "counselling psychology" department. Could this terminology tangle have anything to do with how well we as counsellors communicate our role to the public?

It is interesting to note that the concern for terminology used was expressed recently in a report which examined the status of guidance and counselling in American schools. The report (Herr, 1979, p. 140) phrased the problem this way: "Does not the linking of guidance, a broad and programming term, with counselling, a specific technique, confuse the role of the school counselor at every education level? How can this question of terminology be most effectively resolved?"

As long as terminology differs between training and practice, we will continue to confuse our various publics. Furthermore, if certification and licensure of school counsellors is to proceed in Canada, we will have to sharpen our terminology.

Discrepancies Between Training and Practice

Serious discrepancies seemed to exist between what the trainers taught and what the departments of education expected of the graduates who practised in a school setting. The survey question which led to this conclusion was simply, "What influence has your department of education over the training of counsellors?" Not all Canadian provinces have training programs, but six of the nine who have admitted that their department of edu-

cation had very little, if any, influence over the training of school counsellors. At best their influence was described as informal. Under these conditions, it was not surprising to learn that there were discrepancies between the training of and the expectations held for counselors on the job.

What were some of the discrepancies noted? When asked what the general orientation of counsellor training programs was, the majority gave responses that referred to a counselling theory or to a psychological model. Yet in response to another question, the same respondents de-emphasized one-to-one counselling and the psycho-therapeutic approach in favour of a more general approach to guidance.

There seems, therefore, to be a dichotomy between the general orientation of training programs and the orientation of provincial school guidance programs. Also, these provincial directors wanted to see more attention given in training programs to career education, the consultative role, and group activities. If these perceptions are correct, provincial directors have expectations of their counsellors which are not being met. One of the ways of changing this situation would be for governments to have a greater influence over the training of these counsellors.

National Priorities and the School Counsellor

It has long been recognized that political, economic, and social forces have a considerable impact on what the school counsellor does. If this is so, then one might conclude that some national priorities would influence school guidance services. For example, if the reduction of unemployment among youth is a national objective, then guidance policies might be used to attempt to alleviate this problem. No support for meeting national priorities through school guidance programs could be found during the interviews with these officials. Interestingly enough, no mention was made of women's rights or bilingualism as being either national priorities or matters for which school counsellors might be expected to take some responsibility.

This apparent lack of concern for national priorities was re-emphasized in another finding of the report. Surprisingly, two provinces reported that American universities were offering training programs for counsellors in their respective provinces. In one case the explanation given was that the American university could provide courses that the local Canadian university was unable or unwilling to give. In the other province it seemed that the American universities could offer off-campus degree courses more economically than Canadian ones. In both cases, the American training of

counsellors was preferred, or at least considered equivalent to Canadian training. Admittedly, in all of these American operations in Canada it was mentioned that geographic convenience for students was a factor contributing to these developments.

It is difficult to draw conclusions about training based on these limited findings. It does seem, however, that neither provincial directors of guidance nor Canadian counsellor educators are overly concerned about political, economic, and social forces that underly the practice of school guidance. Otherwise, they would argue that there is a unique Canadian role for school guidance, and that Canadian universities should be in the best position to articulate this in their training programs for school counsellors.

The In-Service Training of School Counsellors

One might have anticipated that faculties giving training in guidance would also be involved in professional up-dating programs. Such does not seem the case, at least not in the information obtained in this cross-Canada study. According to the respondents, the responsibility for in-service training of counsellors is typically distributed between school boards, departments of education, and provincial counsellors' associations. It seems reasonable to assume that training institutions in Canada do not see being involved in the in-service training of school counsellors as part of their role.

On the other hand there is another interpretation, namely that counsellor education offerings are not relevant to the professional up-dating needs of school counsellors. Whatever the situation, it does seem reasonable that trainers should be more involved in in-service programs than appeared to be the case in 1978. This is particularly significant when one realizes the necessity for continued professional up-dating on the part of school counsellors.

Standardized Testing and the Training of School Counsellors

Standardized testing, according to these respondents, is in most provinces considered a task for the school counsellor. At the same time, this study showed that the directors considered that their counsellors were insufficiently trained to select, administer, and interpret such tests. Here again, a discrepancy appears between training and the expectations departments of education have for their school counsellors. This could be particularly unfortunate in view of the fact that career guidance, the current emphasis in guidance in Canada, involves the use of interest and aptitude tests. Furthermore, computerized systems for pro-

viding students with career information are increasingly using such tests as part of the career-search process.

Implications for the Educators of School Counsellors

The role of the school counsellor is different from that of the role of counsellors in other settings. It appears that this fact has not been fully taken into account by those who educate school counsellors. Greater communication between departments of education and trainers of counsellors would seem to be in order, so that the training may more closely match guidance needs as perceived by provincial directors. Failing this, it may be necessary for departments of education to exert more direct influence over both training in school guidance and its practice. In this connection, it behooves trainers to look into the question of why they are not providing more in-service training for school counsellors. Trainers should be in an excellent position to provide up-dating and similar courses.

The terminology associated with the occupation of school counsellor should be examined to determine whether the present terms are consistent with the services expected of practitioners. Once the terminology is set, it should thereafter be used consistently by practitioners, trainers, and departments of education. The present thrust toward licensure will probably force a decision in this matter.

Although national priorities are not presently perceived as being related to the training and practice of guidance, this view may change. Already there are indications that a change may be coming, particularly when one considers the socio-economic factors affecting Canadian youth. The acknowledgement of national priorities would seem to imply that trainers of guidance personnel would have to incorporate corresponding changes in their curricula. Eventually, only counsellors who had followed such curricula might be certified by departments of education.

It should be acknowledged at this point that the study referred to in this article has a major limitation: that is, it was the views of 12 individuals that provided the data. On the other hand, these directors of guidance, one for each province or territory, would seem to be in an excellent position to view the needs and practices in their respective jurisdictions. Perceptions, however, are not facts and this must be remembered in the interpretation of the findings.

Notes

1. This project was funded under contract by the Ministry of Education of Ontario. A report available from the Ontario Government Bookstore, 880 Bay Street, Toronto, Ontario, M7A 1L2.

References

- Herr, E.L. *Guidance and counselling in the schools: Perspectives on the past, present, and future*. Falls Church, Virginia: American Personnel and Guidance Association, 1979.