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## SUPERINTENDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF COUNSELOR

Although the counselor's role has been theoretically delineated, to some degree his function has been, and still is, partly dependent on the administrator's view of that function. Part of the problem in the past has been attributable to the counselor's inability to provide a definition of his role. Additional difficulty involves the administrator's influence in determining functions of school staff.

In 1964 the American School Counselors' Association (ASCA) presented a statement of policy regarding the role of the counselor. The perspective used by ASCA was that of student needs which the counselor serves. Some of these needs involve direct services to students, while others are met by services provided by the school staff, parents and community. The primary role was stated as being counseling. The ASCA statement is commonly viewed as the guiding source in defining counselor duties.

Numerous studies have been concerned with variance of perceptions of school administrators and counselors regarding counselor role. Schmidt (1962), in obtaining perceptions of counselor role, found high correlations between school administrators and school counselors for both the actual and ideal role of most desirable and least desirable functions. Filbeck (1965) found that counselors and administrators agreed on characteristics indicative of counselor behavior such as warmth and concern for individual needs; however, differences in perceptions of function developed when individual students were in conflict with policies and practices of the school. Peters and Thomson's (1968) research suggests that superintendents felt too much emphasis was placed on the counselor's responsibility to the student at the expense of his responsibility to the school staff and administration. Herr (1969) found that state supervisors of guidance, while agreeing with the ASCA statement of counselor functions, felt "typical" counselors did not perform all functions, and that counselor education programs were preparing counselor candidates to perform only one-third of the functions listed by the ASCA policy. A more recent study in Alberta by Hengel (1970) indicated that school counselors and administrators displayed lack of agreement of the counselor role especially in personal-social counseling.

This study investigated the role of the counselor as perceived by superintendents. More specifically it was the purpose of the investigation to define actual duties performed by counselors in their school along with suggesting desired or improved duties of counselors.

## PROCEDURE

Questionnaires soliciting information regarding counselor role were mailed to each Superintendent of Schools in Alberta in April, 1970 (N=79 as listed in the 1969 Alberta Teachers' Association Handbook). A letter explaining the nature of the study was included with the questionnaire. A followup letter was sent to non-respondents in May and a second followup in early June. All but 7 superintendents replied which provided a 91% return\*. Superintendents were requested to:

- (1) rank the five major duties that were performed by counselors in their schools;
- (2) rank duties that they would like their counselors to perform if educational qualifications were no barrier.

## FINDINGS

The findings of the performed and desired duties of counselors as viewed by superintendents are listed in Table 1 and defined as follows:

TABLE I  
Actual and Desired Duties of Counselors  
as Perceived by Superintendents

<i>Duties of Counselors as Recommended in ASCA—Policy Statement</i>	<i>Actual Duties Performed</i>	<i>Desired or Improved</i>
Personal Counseling	51	19
Placement Services	46	11
Educational and vocational counseling	40	5
Staff Consultation	30	25
Appraisal and Interpretation	30	18
Parent Consultation	16	20
Special Services—Coordination and Liaison	16	14
Development of guidance program	13	17
Public Relations	7	6
Research	2	11

### *Personal Counseling*

The survey indicated that personal counseling is the major function of counselors as viewed by superintendents. Nineteen of the superintendents felt this service could be improved. Several suggestions were made for more and better use of group counseling.

### *Placement Service*

This area was rated second as an actual duty performed by counselors. General satisfaction was expressed with the placement service function.

### *Educational-Vocational Counseling*

Forty superintendents viewed educational-vocational counseling as an actual duty of their counselors and indicated more satisfaction with the quality of this service than any other.

### *Staff and Parent Consultation*

Although many counselors are presently involved actively in consultative functions, superintendents expressed a desire for additional and improved

\*The 7 non-respondents were from rural areas.

services for both parent and staff consultation. Superintendents stated that they perceived their counselors as integral members of the staff and as a result, counselors had to work in harmony with staff members in order to fulfill student needs. Superintendents felt this counselor duty must be greatly improved and suggestions supported more consultative work with parents. In consulting with parents regarding their children, counselors were asked to provide more assistance in developing realistic perceptions of children in relation to their potentialities.

#### *Appraisal and Interpretation*

Thirty superintendents viewed this service as an actual duty of the counselor; however, 18 superintendents felt this service had to be improved or instituted. Superintendents' suggestions for improvement had to do with better techniques for identifying students with special abilities and needs.

#### *Special Services—Coordination and Liaison*

Although 16 superintendents felt this duty was being performed by their counselors, almost as many indicated a desire for the service, or improvement of it. The major complaint of the superintendents in this area was that students and parents were not aware of the special services available and counselors had to do a better job of informing.

#### *Development of Guidance Program*

Thirteen superintendents considered this a duty of their counselors; however, seventeen felt a need for, or improvement of the service. Suggestions in this area implied that a guidance program will fail to develop if the counselor hides in his office. The *Public Relations* duty gained similar comments from superintendents.

#### *Research*

While only two superintendents felt research was an actual duty of the counselor, eleven indicated a desire for, or improvement of the service.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This survey indicated that Alberta superintendents were in general agreement with the ASCA statement concerning the role of the counselor. Superintendents felt that vocational and educational counseling is still one of the major functions of the secondary school counselor. The traditional form of vocational counseling is strongly evident and the findings support previous research by Grant (1954), King and Matteson (1959), Altmann (1969), and Hengel (1970). The authors of this study concur that for the sake of research "Personal Counseling" must be considered as a separate type of counseling as compared to educational-vocational counseling; however, the "degree of personal concern" is present in all types of difficulties and counselors must continually remind themselves of this fact.

Superintendents felt that the consultation service with parents and staff had to be improved. The ACES-ASCA statement (1966) on elementary counseling suggests consultation to be one of the major functions of the elementary counselor which should certainly also apply to the secondary school. Van Hoose (1968) states, "the teacher often seeks consultative assistance in understanding the various social and intellectual factors that influence the behavior of the pupil in the classroom. The counselor also consults with the teacher when he needs her help in understanding a counselee." The counselor must actively involve himself in consulting with parents, teachers and other

school and community personnel. A coordinated approach will lead to better understanding, thus advancing the academic and emotional development of children.

One of several reasons for appraisal is to allow the student to gain greater knowledge of himself and thereby enhance the decision-making process. Bordin (1968) states that our entire educational program is partially designed to expose the individual to those experiences which will enable him to become aware of his capacities and those aspects of his environment which provide him with opportunities for the fullest utilization and realization of these capacities. By coordinating the accumulation of materials concerning the student and interpreting this information to him in ways which are meaningful, opportunity is provided to develop self-understanding and self-acceptance. Superintendents' remarks indicated that better use be made of test information for serving students' abilities, interests and needs. They also indicated that counselors be required to have special training to better identify students with special abilities and needs.

An effective guidance program is developed from identification of student needs. To provide services for the fulfillment of those needs requires a comprehensive approach involving school staff, parents, and community. Arbuckle (1967), Pietrofesa (1970) and others stress a team approach and it is the counselor acting as a facilitator who makes the team a viable one. Counselor involvement in program planning, curriculum development and school policy formation based on needs of students will bring greater relevance to the learning situation. Superintendents expressed the desire that counselors develop the guidance program more effectively and assume greater leadership in making the objectives of the program known.

Due to lack of time and money the counselor is seldom involved in research. Although these factors seem like legitimate reasons, many times lack of involvement might be related to individual incompetence or lack of interest. Research involving experimental, descriptive and active types of research must be carried out in order to evaluate the effectiveness of a guidance program. A current investigation in Alberta (Truax) is attempting to evaluate the effectiveness of counseling in different educational settings.

The results of this study seem to indicate that superintendents view their counselors as performing duties congruent with ASCA policy. It is important to note, however, that they feel that many counselors' functions must be extended and improved. It would appear that Alberta counselors can function effectively within the existing administration but desirable changes are contingent upon counselor knowledge of his role and appropriate education to that role, and the development of a strong guidance program at the local level.

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## LES PERCEPTIONS DU RÔLE DU CONSEILLER PAR LES SURINTENDANTS

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Cette étude visait à établir le rôle des conseillers scolaires tel que perçu par leurs surintendants. On demanda à 79 surintendants de faire la liste des fonctions réelles accomplies par les conseillers. On leur demanda aussi de suggérer les fonctions qui leur semblaient désirables ou qui pourraient être améliorées si les qualifications éducatives ne constituaient pas une barrière.

Les résultats indiquèrent que les surintendants estimaient que les conseillers accomplissaient leurs rôles conformément à la définition qu'en donne l'A.S.C.A. (A.S.C.A. Statement of Policy). Toutefois, les surintendants estimaient que plusieurs des fonctions des conseillers devraient être élargies et améliorées pour mieux répondre aux besoins, aux habiletés et aux intérêts des étudiants.

