

COPING WITH DIFFICULT CLIENTS
THROUGH INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP COUNSELING

by

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A MASTER'S REPORT

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requirements for the degree

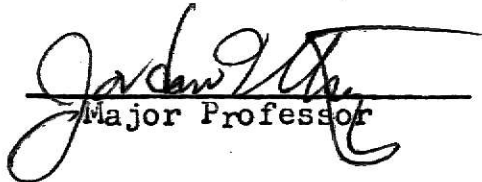
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Problem and Definition of Terms Used

According to Ohlsen, "counseling is an accepting, trusting, and safe relationship between a counselor and one or more clients. Within this relationship clients learn to face, express, and cope with their most disturbing feelings and thoughts. They also develop the courage and self-confidence to apply what they have learned in changing their behavior. When their behaviors do not seem to work, they feel sufficiently secure within the counseling relationship to appraise them to determine why they did not work, to modify them, or to identify other approaches to try."¹

Specifically, this was a study to answer the question: What should a beginning counselor do to cope with difficult clients through individual and group counseling in the secondary school?

A beginning counselor must try to understand why it is so difficult for him to work with certain clients. He must decide whom he can help best and under what circumstances. These decisions must be made by focusing on the client's needs. To focus on needs demands an assessment of the feelings, attitude, and actions of both the counselor and the client.

¹

Merle M. Ohlsen, Group Counseling (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970) , p. 1.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was to determine how a beginning counselor may respond effectively to difficult clients. A difficult client was perceived as one whose behavior in counseling sessions interfered with his own or another's growth. All counselors are responsible for the interpretation of a client's behavior and for helping the client recognize, accept, and understand what he needs to do to change his behavior. The unfulfilled needs and treatment goals for the difficult client place an ever increasing burden on the beginning counselor to answer such questions as: (1) How does the client make me feel? (2) What is his impact upon me? (3) What is unique about him?

Importance of the Study

Former teachers and principals in the process of retooling to function as school counselors were not always aware of their attitudes and feelings toward difficult clients. As they attempted to cope with a client's resisting, submissive, or hostile feelings, it became necessary for counselors to determine how they could empathize with the client without experiencing emotional reactions which were harmful to the counseling relationship.

II. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report was to provide the reader with a description of the researcher's experiences as he counseled high school students individually and in groups during the

III. PROCEDURE

For the purposes of this study information about the sample population was sought through observation and certain other appropriate tools of inquiry and investigation. The tools included an interview-questionnaire and a check-list. Moreover, this chapter includes the justification for the use of such tools in or study of this nature.

Sources of Data

At the beginning of the practicum period, the writer observed the unrest of some students. Some of the disadvantaged students expressed the desire to leave school and find jobs. Several habitual truants came to the writer's attention along with students who cut some classes but attended others. Among the thirty students designated by the practicum supervisor and principal as the ones needing counseling help were slow-learners, underachievers, and students with unacceptable social behavior. The writer likewise observed that the local public welfare department and other community agencies were constantly alerting the school counselor about students affected by home situations which were in conflict with expectations of the school.

Collection of Data

The observations described above led to the type of inquiry which the writer deemed essential to counseling the thirty subjects. A copy of the interview questionnaire ap-

pears in the appendix. Through the interview-questionnaire, the students provided data utilized in this study. At the end of the practicum period, the writer's investigation enabled him to identify not merely the unusual behavior patterns of the thirty subjects, but also to accept the challenge of working effectively with difficult clients.

Notes made on students' responses in the counseling interviews and the writer's reaction to them were responses examined for likenesses and differences according to a check-list which the writer used to rate his personal qualifications and professional training for working with difficult clients. A copy of this check-list appears in the appendix.

IV. LIMITATION OF STUDY

This study was limited to a small number of selected students in high school. The observation began on the first day of a nine week practicum experience, continuing to the end. The study suffered also because too little was known about the students who comprised the sample. For example after limited contact with the students, the writer categorized them according to Merle M. Ohlsen's label on the basis of only the writer's impression.

V. THE SAMPLE

The sample for this study consisted of about thirty subjects, eighteen males and twelve female students. Their ages ranged from sixteen to nineteen years. They were juniors and seniors in high school.

VI. DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

Certain terms critical to the study are defined as follows:

Counselor - Viewed as one who is involved in a human relationship with the client

Client - a student for whom counseling services are available if he needs them

Difficult Client - a student whose needs problems are deep enough and complex enough to warrant more than a simple presentation of information, educational, vocational, or personal

Coping - Counseling with some degree of success with the apparent needs and problems of difficult clients

Group Counseling - a process for helping each client discuss his own personal or private problems and to solve them in his own way

Individual Counseling - a session in which a client in a face-to-face interview talks about his problems with a counselor, safeguarded by privacy and confidentiality

Acceptance - a willingness to allow individuals to differ from one another in all sorts of ways; a realization that every person is a complete pattern of striving, thinking and feeling

Understanding - a perceptual task through which the counselor grasp clearly and completely the meaning the client is trying to convey

Communication - the main skill a counselor must develop, that is, putting feelings into words

Ohlsen² identified twelve typical clients who had been difficult for beginning counselors to work in both individual and group counseling sessions.

² Ibid.

The clients briefly described below are not distinct, discreet types, but beginning counselors usually do react to such characteristics differently from experienced counselors in face-to-face relationships.

The Resister - a client who does not face his problems openly in dealing with them

The Silent and/or Withdrawn One - a client that becomes deeply involved in interacting with others with a minimum of talking

The Dependent One - a client that feels relatively inadequate in most situations

The Anxious One - a client that is worried, fearful, apprehensive or upset

The Griever - a client that experiences loneliness and hopelessness for the future

The Socializer - a client that wants to extend the counseling relationship into social relations outside the group

The Submissive and/or Other-Controlled One - a client that needs assurance of others approval

The Scapegoat - a client that derives pleasure from being insulted, offended, or mistreated

The Acting-Out Client - a client who uses a form of activity which unconsciously discharges repressed, warded-off impulses and thereby relieves inner tensions

The Advice-Giver - a client who fulfills some important unrest and perhaps unconscious need by giving advice

The Hostile Client - a client that has been hurt, let down or abandoned by someone whose love and acceptance he needs

The Monopolist - a client who wants to prove that he is superior to everyone

Organization of the Study

The remainder of this report was organized as follows: Chapter II, A review of related literature; Chapter III, description of observations, inquiry, and investigation; Chapter IV, Analyses and interpretation of data and findings; and Chapter V, Summary, conclusions, and recommendations.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Within recent years, many studies have been conducted and much was written on the merits of individual and group counseling for difficult clients. This chapter reviews literature related to counseling services for older adolescents at the junior and senior level in high school.

"It is important to understand that counseling and guidance are not synonymous. Guidance is the overall framework of pupil personnel services, according to Arbuckle."³

Albert H. Krueger, on the other hand, presented a dire warning of the disastrous results of the counselor's placing stress on such terms as "relationship" and "acceptance," and warned that these did not relate to the "earthy" needs of the student. For him, the most sensible approach to counseling in secondary schools was still the clinical, somewhat structured approach.⁴

Leo Goldman saw the preferred role of the counselor as one with the function of helping clients utilize, explore, and possibly change their self-concept and prevalent modes of behavior.⁵

³ Dugald S. Arbuckle, Counseling: An Introduction (Rockleigh, New Jersey: Allyn and Bacon Company, 1961), P. 46

⁴ Albert H. Krueger, "Letters and Comments," Personnel and Guidance Journal, 45:1033-1034, June, 1967.

⁵ Leo Goldman, "Information and Counseling: A Dilemma," Personnel and Guidance Journal, 46:44-46, September, 1967.

According to Fred McKinney's studies, there was a relation-
between counseling and discipline which was quite unclear to
many counselors, administrators and teachers.⁶

No problem is more important to guidance counselors than
dealing with disadvantaged youth. It is a problem that is be-
coming more urgent every day. All too often among the youth
enrolled in today's high school are those characterized by bad
housing, high population density, low and uncertain incomes.
Some of these youth may be on public welfare roles. Most of
these youth have limited vocational and economic competence and
low social and economic expectancy, according to a recent re-
port of the New Orleans public schools.⁷

Arbuckle stated that a counselor must have a genuine,
sincere interest in each client as he is now. Such an interest
is communicated to the client in many ways: by sensitivity to
doubts and misgivings the client may express, by posture and
facial expression, as well as by verbal response to what the
client says.⁸

⁶ Fred McKinney, Counseling for Personal Adjustment (Boston:
Houghton Mifflin Company, 1955), pp. 507-520.

⁷Public Affairs Research Council "Community Involvement"
Research Council Information Center on School Desegregation,
Baton Rouge, Louisiana Vol. 1, No. 8.

⁸Arbuckle, Op. Cit., p. 63.

The client must be able to have confidence in the counselor and to feel safe with him. It is this requirement that makes what is called "confidentiality" so important. There is no simple technique for winning or communicating confidentiality or trustworthiness. It is rather an ongoing process of demonstrating by what one says, what one does, and what one refrains from doing that the counselor becomes one in whom confidence can be placed.⁹

Counseling can be distinguished from many other varieties of psychological treatment by the way in which information of many varieties is used. Under the broad term, "information," background facts are included about the client's school and work experiences, test results, educational plans, family, friends, as well as a multitude of other specific things that may come up in connection with specific problems.¹⁰

Robert R. Carkhuff and Bernard G. Berensen referred to counseling as:

An approach that emphasizes a process culminating in a moment-to-moment, fully sharing process---a process born not only of the deepest and broadest understanding of existing knowledge, and complimented by anything that will work for the client.¹¹

⁹Arbuckle "Counselors, Admission Officers, Information," *The School Counselor*, 3:161, January, 1969.

¹⁰Leona E. Tyler, *The Work of the Counselor* (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1961), p. 183.

¹¹Robert R. Carkhuff and Bernard G. Berensen, *Beyond Counselling and Psychotherapy* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967). p. 233

William M. Cooper asserted that "It is dangerous oversimplification to apply the ancient idea that simple choices which an individual can make through his own volition will eliminate the need for counseling."¹²

Counseling is ineffective if the counselor orders, threatens, exhorts or offers solutions to the problems which difficult clients seem to have. The solution to one's problems is based on the sound psychological principle of self-discovery.

To understand the root of the client's self-concept, his problems, his needs, and his behavior, the counselor must have both data and a classification scheme such as the descriptions of difficult clients provided by Ohlsen.¹³

¹²William M. Cooper, 1964. "Training the Hard-core Unemployed." Cooperative Research Monograph #13, OE 13027, Washington, D. C.: U. S. Office of Education.

¹³Ibid., pp. 116-129.

THE RESISTER

Resistance is the blocking of growth during counseling interviews. Fritz Redl defines resistance as "an unavoidable reaction to change."¹⁴ He indicated that the part of the client's personality that counseling was designed to change tried to maintain itself. Examples of a client's resistance in individual counseling were missing appointments, arriving late, postponing appointments, terminating the relationship, questioning whether or not he could be helped by the treatment, dwelling on his case history, growing preoccupied with side issues or symptoms, being unable to think of anything to talk about, and acting anxious or confused in order to distract the counselor.

Thea Bry added ways in which resistance is exhibited. "The resister in a group does a great deal of protective talking," stated Bry, "or he may prefer selective silence or withdrawal from the interaction taking place in a group."¹⁵

G. R. Bach stated that resisters may fall into the pattern of advice-giving and monopolizing.¹⁶

¹⁴Fritz Redl, "Resistance in Therapy Groups", Human Relations, 1948, 1:307.

¹⁵Thea Bry, "Varieties of Resistance in Group Psychotherapy", International Journal of Groups Psychotherapy, 1951, 1:106.

¹⁶G. R. Bach, Intensive Group Psychotherapy (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1954), p. 25

THE SILENT AND/OR WITHDRAWN CLIENT

"Desiring to become meaningfully involved in solving his own problems, the silent and withdrawn subjects react abnormally," observed G. W. Allport, and the silent client remains quiet because the relationship or the situation will not allow him to express how he feels. He does not participate fully because he distrusts the counselor."¹⁷

Ohlsen, however, reported that:

Some clients have learned to become deeply involved in interacting with others with a minimum of talking. When others express their feelings or deal with their problems, they convey empathy and support; they experience feelings with others, learn from others, and adapt what they learn to solve their own problems. Others serve as their mouthpiece. Usually these silent ones openly reveal their problems early, so they are not looked upon with suspicion. Some clients who fall in this category recognize that their school performance or their proficiency at work is underrated. Hence, even though they can be helped within their counseling group with minimum verbal participation, they recognize that they must improve their verbal-interaction skills in order to gain the recognition they deserve.¹⁸

THE DEPENDENT CLIENT

Bach reported that most dependent clients felt relatively inadequate. Some felt inadequate in most situations, others in only a few. Within these situations they lacked the con-

¹⁷G. W. Allport, The Psychology of Participation, Psychological Review, 1945, 52:117-132.

¹⁸Ohlsen, op, cit., p. 170

fidence both to make decisions and to act upon them. Dependent clients have had their behavior re-inforced by persons who did not bother to teach them, during the normal process of growing up, how to behave independently. Hence these clients required opportunities to learn and practice independent behavior. They also needed the understanding and support that a group of peers can provide when they approached independent action and retreat from it, and when they tried, seem to fail, and must re-evaluate what they tried before they can develop the courage to try again.

On the other hand, dependent clients are not easily helped. They have learned many effective ways of manipulating others into doing things for them: for example, (1) by appearing so helpless that they convince other clients and the counselor that at least for the present some specific advice or assistance is essential; (2) by getting themselves into situations in which they seem to lack any coping resources; (3) by appealing to the strength, wisdom, and maturity of others and thereby leading others into taking responsibility for them.¹⁹

THE ANXIOUS CLIENT

Ohlsen described the anxious client by saying that he is worried, fearful, apprehensive, or upset. He shows his anxiety

¹⁹

Bach, op. cit., pp. 167-168.

in a counseling group when he tries to discuss some painful experience, or when he tries to cope with some difficult situation in which he fears failure or other unhappy consequences."²⁰

Careful selection of clients can minimize this difficulty. When a counselor selects only those clients whom he believes that he can help in a group, he can react to an anxious client with greater confidence. Fellow anxious clients are considered good treatment risks for each other. They can respond more spontaneously to each other. They help each other express their feelings; this provides genuine mutual support. When one weeps, others try to empathize with him and to understand him. When one becomes somewhat disorganized, they help him clarify what he feels, expect him to try to express himself clearly, and expect him to learn new ways of coping with his problems.

THE GRIEVER

Clients seem to grieve for a number of reasons. Most experience loneliness and hopelessness for the future. Many feels helpless, after a long illness of a loved one. The response to death may be relief, followed by feelings of guilt.

²⁰

Ohlsen, op. cit., pp. 170-171.

Many also feel guilt and self condemnation because they wish that they had treated the deceased better or differently, or because they wonder whether everything possible had been done to save his life. Some counselors and therapists believe that the principle feeling is one of self-pity.

E. Lindermann studied psychoneurotic patients who lost relatives during treatment. He found that the reaction to grief could be delayed, and that grief reactions represented distortion of normal grief. These distorted reactions included (a) over activity, (b) acquisition of symptoms of the deceased, (c) recognized medical disease, and (d) alternation in relationship to friends and relatives. The patient became irritable, did not want to be bothered, and gradually isolated himself. Lindemann also found that group counseling provided opportunities for many to grieve who did not seek counseling for that purpose.²¹

THE SOCIALIZER

The socializer is one who wants to extend the counseling relationship into social relationships outside the counseling group. He wants his fellow clients and the counselor to be his best friends. He so thoroughly enjoys the quality of his relationships with the members of his counseling group that he may wish to substitute these relationships for those with his friends, parents, and others.²²

²¹E. Lindemann, "Symptomatology and Management of Acute Grief", American Journal of Psychiatry, 101:141, 1944

²²Ibid., pp. 114-115.

Rather than allowing this to happen, the members of his counseling group should help him perceive the counseling group for what it is - - a temporary relationship in which he learns to cope with his problems in order that he can build new relationships with others outside his counseling group. Failure to deal openly with this problem often leads high school students to resist termination of their counseling group. It also encourages clients to socialize with fellow clients during counseling.

Some counselors question the extent to which a counselor can or should control the socializing of members outside of the counseling group. As a consequence of his experiences in treating the more disturbed clients, Bach encouraged his clients to socialize. He felt that it relieved some of the tensions that built up during group sessions and enabled clients to discover that in spite of their problems they could relate effectively to one another socially. Furthermore, he believed that they revealed things about themselves in a relaxed social atmosphere that they did not reveal in the treatment group. He also expected his clients to bring back into their group the new material revealed during socializing. He believed that their custom of sharing and communicating all interpersonal interaction that occurred during the socializing tended to prevent misuse of acting out.

Nevertheless, there are at least four reasons for discouraging socializing: (1) it tends to increase acting out; (2) it increases chances for confidences to be broken; (3) it

encourages clients to become dependent upon fellow clients for meaningful relationships, when instead they should learn to relate to their significant others; and (4) it enables them to escape their responsibility for coping with resistance within their treatment sessions. Furthermore, socializing seems to increase drainage - - the revelation of private material in social sessions rather than in counseling sessions.

THE SUBMISSIVE AND/OR OTHER CONTROLLED CLIENT

The submissive client treasures others' approval so much that he discusses whatever others seem to like, or he tries to do what others want him to do. Consequently, he is often used by others. He resents it but is afraid to express the resentment because he questions his own worth ---doubts that he can win others' love and acceptance except by letting them use him.²³

In order to help the submissive client, the counselor must convey that his own task is to listen and to help the client reveal those problems with which he wants help. The counselor must focus on the client's feelings and openly en-

²³H. A. Grater, "When Counseling Success is Failure", Personnel and Guidance Journal, 37:233-235, 1958.

list assistance in group counseling or watch for chances to help the client deal with his feelings in individual counseling.

To give other-controlled clients non-verbal or verbal clues about topics, the counselor would like to have them discuss would corrupt the approach to helping these clients learn and practice new relationship skills.²⁴

THE SCAPEGOAT

The scapegoat is the focus of displaced aggression. Some clients derive pleasure from being insulted, offended or mistreated. Others permit it in order to have relationships with others. They doubt their ability to be genuinely loved and accepted, and they would rather be a scapegoat than have no relationship at all.

When a counselor observes that a client is being used as a scapegoat, he should reflect the feelings that he thinks the scapegoat is experiencing. Such a reflection enables the hurt one to express how he feels and rallies support and understanding from others. In group counseling members of the group should expect and assist both the scapegoat and the hurter to learn new ways of relating to others. Structuring and relating discussions can be used to distinguish between sadistic hurting and helping one another deal with hurtful material during the course of getting help.

²⁴Ohlsen, op. cit., pp. 179-180.

THE ACTING-OUT CLIENT

A client may inappropriately express toward a group member feelings that he has for some important person. Acting out also may be resistance -- a substitute for remembering and coping with the problem in counseling sessions. Acting out is almost always destructive and irrational; however, it maybe a dramatic means of discovering persistent problems and also discovering the means to deal with them.

The counsel must not only cope with the acting-out client, but he also must possess the skill to stimulate the client's understanding of his motivation and inappropriate behavior. "Acting-out behavior is blind, driving and usually destructive," stated O. Fenichel, "and nothing is gained by permitting it to continue." ²⁵

THE ADVICE-GIVER

Bach reported that giving advice fulfills some important unmet and perhaps unconscious needs for the advice-giver. Other reasons for advice-giving may be to direct attention away from one's own problems, to exhibit superiority, or to conceal contempt and hostility for the one seeking assistance.²⁶

²⁵O. Fenichel, The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1945), pp. 93-94.

²⁶Bach, op. cit., pp. 165-166.

This explanation of advice-giving has relevance for the beginning counselor who has recently left the classroom in which he was the expert. Prior experience as evaluator and disciplinarian coupled with limited counseling skills tempts to advise clients. Beginning counselors may be inclined to interpret the problems of their clients, and then follow-through by moralizing, rationalizing, and questioning. This places the client in a position where he has to defend himself. The role of the counselor is to try to understand and help the client to deal with his feelings or the reasons behind his advice-giving.

THE HOSTILE CLIENT

The hostile client is one who has been hurt or abandoned by someone whose love and acceptance he needs. When he no longer expects to be accepted or loved, he tends to be demanding, brutal, sullen, and defiant. It is difficult for a counselor to prove to him that he wants to try to understand him. Counselors must try to distinguish between the acting-out-client, who behaves in a hostile manner in order to avoid discussion of his problem, the one who is really hostile.

When adolescents are pressured into counseling against their will, they appear to be hostile and will find it difficult to accept counseling. Even when they seem to cooperate, they often feel resentful because they think that they do not need help themselves and that the important others who pushed them into counseling need it more than they do.

These so-called hostile clients tend to be especially threatening to beginning counselors who were formerly teachers. Teachers and administrators are not used to allowing their students to express hostility, however, this must be done before problems that they really accept as their own can be dealt with successfully.

THE MONOPOLIST

The monopolist is a self-centered recognition-seeker who tries to maintain a place for himself in the center of the stage. As others enter the limelight, he tries to upstage them. Some believe that he wants to prove that he is superior to everyone. He is certainly skilled in capturing and holding the speaker's role. Hence, he is able to focus discussion on his preferred topics and to divert attention from the topics he dislikes.

The monopolist becomes highly threatened whenever anyone moves in to compete with him for the limelight, but the group counseling session is the best place to help him. Florence B. Powdermaker and J. D. Frank found that ignoring, rebuffing, and questioning the monopolist were not effective. The best way the monopolist can be helped; they said, "is to assign him to a group whom he admires and who are strong enough to give him honest feedback when he tries to monopolize the discussion."²⁷

²⁷Florence B. Powdermaker and J. D. Frank, Group Psychotherapy (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), P.55.

CHAPTER III

ANALYSES AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA AND FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

Chapter III presents the analyses of the students' responses to the interview-questionnaire. It includes 20 items to which thirty students gave "yes" or "no" answers as shown in Table I. More specifically, the students' responses pointed up their state of unrest while the study was in progress.

Following the assessment of the students' attitudes and needs is the analysis of a beginning counselor's reaction to the attitudes and needs of these students. In addition, an analysis of the Counselor Check-list may also be found in this chapter.

Students followed the instructions for completing the questionnaire. About half, mostly the female clients, preferred to answer questions in an individual counseling interview with the writer. Others responded to the questionnaire in group sessions. When the responses of the 25 questions were summarized, there were 545 "yes" answers, representing 73% of the total responses. Only 203 "no" answers were recorded. Two students recorded responses as "uncertain."

TABLE I
STUDENT THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, AND BEHAVIOR

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE SUMMARY

Directions: After thinking carefully about each question, answer with "Yes" or "No" whichever answer is accurate for you.

Questions	Yes	No	%
1. Do you recognize any problem you have with which you want help?	6	24	100
2. Have you been helped by the counselor?	30		100
3. Do you consider the counseling service important?	30		100
4. Do you trust counselors and feel that they are really interested in helping you?	6	24	100
5. Are you accepted and well liked by some of your classmates?	30		100
6. Do you want to be understood better by the counselor, teachers, and the principal?	30		100
7. Do you have problems with your subjects?	30		100
8. Have others made a special effort to learn about your special abilities and interests?	28	1	100
9. Do you get along well with your teacher?	26	4	100
10. Do you plan to finish high school?	29	1	100
11. Do you plan to go to college?	6	24	100
12. Do you plan to take a trade after graduation?	22	7	100
13. Have you found it difficult to make friends?	16	14	100
14. Do you have money problems?	30		100
15. Is your basic motivation to get a job?	30		100

TABLE I (continued)

Questions		Yes	No	%
16.	Do you feel that the counselor is honest and fair with you?	6	24	100
17.	Has the counselor ever referred you to someone else for help with a problem you have?	25	5	100
18.	Do you usually have a voice in situations where you have to be punished for misbehavior?	6	24	100
19.	Do you sometimes get the feeling that your teachers and parents have their own mind "sets" about the way you should do everything, and wish that they would learn how to vary their approach in helping you, that is, stop pulling or pushing you?	30		100
20.	Do you know how to listen to others?	19	11	100
21.	Does any one ever listen carefully to what you have to say?	6	24	100
22.	Have you ever thought that if the counselor understood the social setting from which you came that he would be able to help you through some areas of conflict?			
23.	Have you been hurt, let down or left alone by someone whose love and acceptance you need?	30		100
24.	Do you find that you have to talk more than is necessary in order to be recognized?	20	10	100
25.	Are you worried, fearful, apprehensive or upset about the future?	30		100

Table I represents the varied reactions from students in face-to-face situations.

Since 66% of the subjects failed to recognize their need for help with any problem, the interpretation then centered on responses to items which tended to place students in the various difficult client categories. For example, 80% of the students, item 4, did not feel that counselors were really interested in helping them. The same number were apprehensive about the future, especially in reference to college and jobs; items 11, 14, and 15. Items 13, 21, and 23 were related to the subjects' feeling of loneliness and hopelessness for the future. More than half, item 13, of the respondents found it difficult to make friends. About 80%, item 21, felt that others didn't listen carefully to what they had to say. All, item 23, reported that they had been hurt, let down, or left alone by significant other persons in their lives.

Subjects, who seemed to want to extend the counseling session relationship beyond the group, expressed this in their responses to items 5, 6, 9, 22, and 24. On each of these items the responses showed that a majority of the subjects wanted the counselor and others to become more aware of the social setting from which they came, thus suggesting the importance of more socializing outside of the classroom and counseling settings.

The only responses suggestive of dependent clients were to items 7 and 8. Indications here were that the subjects felt relatively inadequate in their school work, item 7, or

that others should make special effort to learn of their special abilities and interests.

Finally in Table I, the responses to items 11 and 14 revealed that the clients have not minimized the difficulty of choosing the next steps after graduating from high school. So-called Silent and/or Withdrawn clients frequently made the statements quoted below:

I am not sure what I will do after graduation
I want to go to college but I don't have the money
I plan to go to college if I can get a job and make
some money I don't have any help to go to college;
I lost my father I will go to college if my parents
want me to go.

This study attempted to outline some of the unique personal and professional characteristics on a check-list for beginning counselors. Table II presented the characteristics in three parts, namely: Personal Qualification, Professional preparation, and Counseling Procedures.

TABLE II

BEGINNING COUNSELOR CHECK-LIST

Part 1 - Personal Qualifications

- ___ One who has had successful classroom teaching experience
- ___ One whom children, teachers and parents find it easy to talk to
- ___ One who speaks easily on the level of the child or parent
- ___ One who can be trusted not to violate the confidence of others
- ___ One who understands himself and feels personally secure from within
- ___ One who is able to remain "shockproof" and can accept others without trying to impose his own value system on them
- ___ One who has an inexhaustible supply of patience
- ___ One who possesses true humility
- ___ One who can identify with the character and experience of the other person

TABLE II (continued)

Part 2 - Professional Preparation of Counselor

- ___ Counselor's philosophy should be in harmony with the school and community
- ___ Counselor should be sensitive to the needs of others
- ___ Counselor should be able to realistically evaluate the program and all that affects it
- ___ Counselor should be one in whom others have confidence
- ___ Counselor should be professionally prepared to carry out his function
- ___ Counselor's conduct should conform to the ethics of counselors
- ___ Counselor should continue to read, study and stay abreast of current trends
- ___ Counselor should be emotionally and socially mature

TABLE II (continued)

Part 3 - Counseling Procedures

- ___ Counselor should respond to the client with empathy, respect and concreteness
- ___ Counselor should help client explore his problem
- ___ Counselor should help client understand himself
- ___ Counselor should help client act upon his understanding
- ___ Counselor should realize that the different goals of helping are related to each other

COUNSELOR'S REACTION TO CLIENT NEEDS

When the writer was in the presence of silent and withdrawn clients, he felt the need for patience, but his usual anxiety about the stubbornness of some of the students seemed to go away. This need for a feeling of patience was interpreted as a desire for growth on the part of the writer. The writer was moderately successful in trying to empathize or feel as the client felt. This was possible because of his own need at times during the practicum period to talk about something to someone and could not do so.

There were other times when the writer could almost feel the lack of trust in him on the part of some of the subjects. Especially was this true in individual conferences when the client was urged to share with the counselor anything of a confidential nature. A sadness was felt when the beginning counselor sensed that he may not be accepted as trustworthy.

At other times the writer felt helpless in counseling the so-called griever and anxious clients. Working side by side with an experienced counselor seemed to highlight the writer's inability to achieve the success he desired. The writer learned through this project that he should get a better understanding of the personal qualifications, professional preparation, and counseling procedures for success in counseling. When a client appeared upset, worried, or lonely, the writer wanted to be able to help that client, but not succeed in doing so. Privately the writer condemned himself, perhaps hated himself for not being able to do as much as the experienced coun-

selor could do.

In dealing with this feeling of helplessness, the writer was never irritable and tried to face reality. The writer learned that when clients interacted verbally with him, he had to fight the tendency to treat them as he would do in the classroom. He also learned that effective counseling consisted of providing the client the practice that he needed in expressing how he felt and what he needed to do to face his problems.

Next to the feeling of helplessness was perhaps the writer's fear of reactions. The writer became increasingly aware of his fears, but he was unable to express this awareness to his supervisor. The first great test of this writer's relief from fear came when he could speak freely of his own inadequacies near the end of the practicum experience. Gradually the writer spoke of the comparison between the quality of his counseling skills and those of his supervisor. The crucial point of the difference in counseling skills seemed to be centered in the beginning counselor's inability to help a difficult client understand himself and to act upon his understanding.

EFFORTS TO HELP THE STUDENTS

After interpreting the data collected on the questionnaire and checklist, the counselor attempted to help each student with problems which had been identified. The coun-

selor's on-going efforts are described below:

1. Using students records to help clarify some points of information about the clients not readily available through observation and the questionnaire.
2. Becoming more interested and concerned about the importance of the items that received either a very high or a very low percentage of "yes" and "no" answers.
3. Permitting students to talk freely about their concerns in reference to the 25 items on questionnaire.
4. Interpreting the students' feelings as objectively as possible, that is, accepting rather than rejecting the apparent attitude.
5. Trying to understand better why some students behave as they do through further reading and on-the-spot study of students' actions.
6. Checking a personal impulse to categorize a student's behavior too soon.
7. Confronting the student with the reality of the situation in order to help him think more objectively, even though the tendency to think and act like peers was obvious at all times.
8. Discussing with supervisor what appeared to the writer to be the most difficult clients.
9. Accepting the fact that, according to questionnaire, these clients had as many educational and vocational problems as personal and social problems.
10. Becoming more responsive to the existing handicaps and limitations within the school and community environment.

The central point of emphasis was the careful analysis and change in the way the clients made the counselor feel. At times the counselor functioned as the advice-giver. This suggested to him that he was still unprepared for his responsibility to help a difficult client take the necessary steps for changing his behavior.

Mention must also be made of further efforts to work individually with the 30 subjects in a more favorable setting for counseling. The writer always tried to remember in such settings to listen carefully, understand clearly, and interpret carefully the client's expressions. Also in such settings, additional cues were picked up. Some clients tended to have a more negative self-image than others. Help for these clients had to begin in a climate of genuine acceptance.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Beginning counselors can profit markedly through supervised first-hand experiences in counseling. A beginning counselor needs knowledge and understanding, gained from the literature as well as from the supervision of a seasoned supervisor, to help him discover those clients who are likely to pose a serious problem in the process of relating and changing behavior. Careful analysis of recorded counseling sessions and/or the notes made following a counseling session enabled the counselor to discover the impact that difficult clients have on him, his impact upon them, as well as more effective techniques for working with such clients.

Conclusions

The writer concluded that much of the understanding and improvement in counseling comes through both individual and group efforts. For example, follow-through with the subjects in this study made it crystal clear that where group efforts fail, work with the individual may succeed. However, when the counselor alone could not respond to the unique feelings of a client, he worked with others, including peers, practicum supervisor, teachers, and parents. This study revealed that many of the clients who profited best also applied the interpersonal skills learned in their daily living.

Recommendations

The study as described in this report led the writer to recommend that:

1. A counselor should be able at all times to define his role and the quality of his relationship with difficult clients.
2. A counselor should be free to accept or reject clients of his of whom he is reasonably certain he can help as an individual or in groups.
3. A counselor should be free to accept or reject a counseling technique, depending on its effectiveness.
4. A counselor needs certain theoretical information on the interpretive and predictive factors in human behavior.

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APPENDIX

STUDENT THOUGHTS, FEELING AND BEHAVIOR

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE SUMMARY

Directions: After thinking carefully about each question, answer with "Yes" or "No" whichever answer is accurate for you.

Questions	Yes	No	%
1. Do you recognize any problem you have with which you want help?	:	:	:
2. Have you been helped by the counselor?	:	:	:
3. Do you consider the counseling service important?	:	:	:
4. Do you trust counselors and feel that they are really interested in helping you?	:	:	:
5. Are you accepted and well liked by some of your classmates?	:	:	:
6. Do you want to be understood better by the counselor, teachers, and the principal?	:	:	:
7. Do you have problems with your subjects?	:	:	:
8. Have others made a special effort to learn about your special abilities and interests?	:	:	:
9. Do you get along well with your teacher?	:	:	:
10. Do you plan to finish high school?	:	:	:
11. Do you plan to go to college?	:	:	:
12. Do you plan to take a trade after graduation?	:	:	:
13. Have you found it difficult to make friends?	:	:	:
14. Do you have money problems?	:	:	:

Questions	Yes	No	%
15. Is your basic motivation to get a job?	:	:	:
16. Do you feel that the counselor is honest and fair with you?	:	:	:
17. Has the counselor ever referred you to someone else for help with a problem you have?	:	:	:
18. Do you usually have a voice in situations where you have to be punished for misbehavior?	:	:	:
19. Do you sometimes get the feeling that your teachers and parents have their own mind "set" about the way you should do everything, and wish that they would learn how to vary their approach in helping you, that is, stop pulling or pushing you?	:	:	:
20. Do you know how to listen to others?	:	:	:
21. Does any one ever listen carefully to what you have to say?	:	:	:
22. Have you ever thought that if the counselor understood the social setting from which you came that he would be able to help you through some areas of conflict?	:	:	:
23. Have you been hurt, let down or left alone by someone whose love and acceptance you need?	:	:	:
24. Do you find that you have to talk more than is necessary in order to be recognized?	:	:	:
25. Are you worried, fearful, apprehensive or upset about the future?	:	:	:

BEGINNING COUNSELOR CHECK-LIST

Personal Qualifications

- _____ One who has had successful classroom teaching experience
- _____ One whom children, teachers and parents find it easy to talk to
- _____ One who speaks easily on the level of the child or parent
- _____ One who can be trusted not to violate the confidence of others
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- _____ One who is able to remain "shockproof" and can accept others without trying to impose his own value system on them
- _____ One who has an inexhaustable supply of patience
- _____ One who possessess true humility
- _____ One who can identify with the character and experience of the other person

Professional Preparation of Counselor

- _____ Counselor's philosophy should be in harmony with the school and community
- _____ Counselor should be sensitive to the needs of others
- _____ Counselor should be able to realistically evaluate the program and all that affects it
- _____ Counselor should be one in whom others have confidence
- _____ Counselor should be professionally prepared to carry out his function
- _____ Counselor's conduct should conform to the ethics of counselors

- _____ Counselor should continue to read, study, and stay abreast of current trends
- _____ Counselor should be emotionally and socially mature

Counseling Procedures

- _____ Counselor should respond to the client with empathy, respect and concreteness
- _____ Counselor should help client explore his problem
- _____ Counselor should help client understand himself
- _____ Counselor should help client act upon his understanding
- _____ Counselor should realize that the different goals of helping are related to each other

COPING WITH DIFFICULT CLIENTS
THROUGH INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP COUNSELING

by

CLAUDE SIMS

M. Ed., Southern University, 1962

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Manhattan, Kansas

1972

This study is the outgrowth of the efforts of a beginning counselor to help difficult clients.

The purpose of this study was to collect data related to the writer's experiences as he counseled high school students individually and in groups during a nine-week practicum experience. The report reveals the writer's reaction to: (1) the needs of the students; (2) how students made him feel; and (3) the steps taken to change the behavior of students designated as difficult clients.

Specific methods and procedures employed to conduct this study took into account all face-to-face individual or group contacts within the school setting. Included were: (1) observations, (2) a simple twenty-five item questionnaire, and (3) a Counselor Check-list. The questionnaire was designed to survey the feelings, attitudes, and needs of students. Additional information was gathered through verbal exchange between the counselor and the subjects. Responses were identified and subsequently described. The Counselor Check-list was used to determine the quality of the counselor's responses to the feelings and needs of the clients. Group activities of varied types provided a laboratory for an exchange of ideas and an assessment of feelings. Group activities were followed by scheduled counseling sessions with individuals as needed.

The findings of this study clarified the writer's

feelings and attitudes toward the responses students made on the questionnaire and also their behavior in the school setting. The writer's feelings were described as patient, empathetic, and trustworthy; as well as helpless, fearful and sad. In follow-through counseling contacts, the writer included twelve steps, reported in the study, for changing the behavior of his clients. The most important of these steps included (1) acting hastily in categorizing the student's behavior, (2) working with him as if he were a difficult client, and (3) the writer's sensitivity to his own limitations as a counselor.

In summary, this report attempted to describe how the divergent behavior of students, and the reaction of a counselor to such behavior, supports the assumption that individuals needing acceptance from significant other persons in their lives, and in failing to receive it, can become difficult clients in counseling situations. It further reveals that a counselor himself is susceptible to falling into a category with the label "ineffective" attached to his services.