

RECIPROCAL ROLE UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN
TEACHER AND COUNSELOR:
THE KEY TO COOPERATION

by 1264

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Dedication

To Lloyd, with whom the ancient vow--

For better, for worse;

For richer, for poorer;

In sickness and in health--

taken in apprehension and hope,

has become meaningful and joyful.

CHAPTER I

THE PURPOSE, DEFINITIONS, AND PROCEDURES

It is important in educational settings that various professional functions do not run at cross purposes to the detriment of pupil learning and development. Professional conflicts have developed in many school systems. Assuming professional interest in pupil development on the part of all concerned one might wonder why this is so. What can be done to increase the incidence of harmonious working relationships among professional educators for the benefit of teachers as well as students and the society of which they are all members.

I. PURPOSE

It was the purpose of this report to consider reciprocal role understanding of the teacher and the counselor. This understanding between teacher and counselor provides for a more effective working relationship than is possible where there is lack of clarity in the mind of each as to the role of the other. Reciprocal role understanding increases the effectiveness and the scope of the guidance services in the school. However, no one will conclude that reciprocal role

understanding will result in complete agreement as to role function.

II. DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this report the counselor was defined as a professional educator who had at least one year of graduate training in guidance and counseling and was certified as a guidance counselor in the state where he worked. The teacher was defined as one minimally educated at the bachelor's degree level and certified by the state in which he worked to instruct in all courses which he taught. The terms teacher and staff were used interchangeably. The functions of the counselor were taken from Moler's more complete definition and were stated in the section concerning a working definition of the counselor's role.¹ The report was written primarily with the secondary school setting in mind but many of the suggestions are applicable to lower as well as higher levels of education.

¹Donald Moler, "Forces Influencing the Counselor's Role," (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Educational Research Information Center, ED. 010886, 1960), 11.

III. PROCEDURES

The report was not original research. Major library sources were Educational Index, Psychological Abstracts, Educational Research Information Center, and the library card catalog at Kansas State University. The reciprocal understanding of the role of the teacher and the counselor were the focal point of the report. Causes of misunderstanding were explored as well as the results of joint efforts gained by reciprocal role understanding. A few minor suggestions for further researching of the topic were also made.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RESEARCH

Only three studies which were earnest attempts to research the subject of teacher attitudes toward public school guidance programs were reported in recent professional periodicals. Barker made the only attempt to develop a scale to measure teacher, parent, and pupil attitudes toward school guidance programs (see Appendix A).² His article is only a defense of the questionnaire resulting from his study. No study using the questionnaire was reported. Accurate measurement of attitudes is at best difficult, however Barker's scale is a starting point to help the counselor attain a feel for the attitudes of a school staff.

Gibson studied teacher opinions of high school guidance programs in 1965.³ He used questionnaires which dealt with general information, individual analysis, counseling,

²Donald G. Barker, "Development of a Scale of Attitudes toward School Guidance," Personnel and Guidance Journal, 44:1077-1083, June, 1966.

³Robert L. Gibson, "Teacher Opinions of High School Guidance Programs," Personnel and Guidance Journal, 44:416-422, December, 1965.

occupational and educational information, group activities, placement, follow-up, and teacher-pupil opinions of high school guidance programs where pupil responses were given in addition to teacher responses (see Appendix B). Gibson made inferences from his study which were quoted throughout this report.

Russell and Willis surveyed teacher opinions of guidance services.⁴ Their participants were given a list of eight statements to rate on a five point scale (see Appendix C). They reported the ratings of each of the eight statements. They found that teachers felt counselors overprotected students and that the guidance programs did not get support of a large majority of teachers. The implications from their study were also included.

⁴Jones C. Russell and A. Willis, "Survey of Teachers' Opinions of Guidance Services," Personnel and Guidance Journal, 42:707-709, November, 1964.

CHAPTER III

STAFF SUPPORT OF THE GUIDANCE SERVICES

I. NECESSITY OF STAFF SUPPORT

Staff support is absolutely necessary to an effective guidance program. Teachers carry out many guidance functions and, at the same time influence the opinions of the students. Teachers are the counselor's best source of information and referrals. Schwebel expressed the importance of a positive teacher-counselor relationship when he said,

In a very fundamental sense the success of a guidance program in an educational institution depends upon the support it receives from the faculty. The most vigorous program is that in which the professional guidance workers are not a group by themselves, set off from the line workers as on an organization chart, but one in which they are an integral part of the staff, serving by their own specialized skills to further the primary educational functions of the institution. Such a relationship among workers in any organization is a major objective of personnel practices.

Guidance workers introducing a new program to the school have sometimes neglected to consider the reaction of the faculty to this seemingly pretentious intruder. Authoritarian measures used to get teacher participation are ineffective. No administrator can compel a teacher to deal warmly with students, to observe objectively, or to counsel successfully. He can force the teacher to go through the motions, but

this action is worthless to the child and frequently generates hostility to the entire guidance program.⁵

II. HINDERENCES TO STAFF SUPPORT

Failure of counselors to communicate their role. This necessary staff support is impossible when counselor's do not clearly communicate their role. The teacher who does not understand the counselor's role is threatened by the counselor-student relationship and does not know how to use the teacher-counselor relationship. He does not know when to refer students, what to expect when he does refer them, or what to discuss with the counselor. Gibson found lack of counselor role communication a hinderence and concluded,

There seems to be an accumulation of evidence from both this study and the previously cited 'Pupil Opinion' study that counselors are not communicating well concerning the role and function of the school counselor and the guidance program. Teachers and counselors both seemed to feel that where indecisiveness existed regarding role and function and program leadership, the development of the school guidance program was found to be impeded.⁶

⁵Milton, Schwebel, "The Faculty and the Guidance Program," Personnel and Guidance Journal, 28:364, March, 1950.

⁶Gibson, op. cit., 420.

Leonard also stressed that teachers needed more information regarding the counselor's role when she said,

Like all human beings, we are reluctant to admit that we are not informed; so do not take us for granted. Acquaint us with your objectives, . . . ⁷

Difficulty of defining the counselor's role. Part of the problem of role communication is inadequate role definition. The counselor's role is difficult to define. Counselors see themselves as educators, clinicians, consultants, or therapists. Some feel allied with teachers and some with administrators. Students see counselors as confidants, authority symbols, traitors, busybodies, and friends. Parents believe counselors are experts on vocations and colleges, or sex education and teen-age marriage. Counselors have not defined guidance to the satisfaction of teachers. Yamamoto surveyed definitions of guidance among official documents of the American Personnel and Guidance Association and found none which satisfied him. He concluded, "Strangely, guidance seems to be something that everyone in the profession knows, but which no outsider can see."⁸

⁷Dorothy Leonard, "A Classroom Teacher Looks at Guidance," Education, 75:447, March, 1955.

⁸Kaoru Yamamoto, "Guidance: Education or Therapy--or What?" Educational Leadership, 30:309, January, 1967.

Moler tried to explain why the counselor's role is difficult to define. He summarized,

Defining the role of the counselor is a task which is complicated by the changing world, changing social structure, and the influence of government. The role is further complicated by the fact that counseling originated from a variety of disciplines, borrowing from the job of the teacher, administrator, the social worker, and the psychologist. . . . There is a need for greater cohesion between various counselor training programs even though they are designed to meet the needs of varying school needs and communities.⁹

III. WORKING DEFINITION OF THE COUNSELOR'S ROLE:

AN AID TO STAFF SUPPORT

Faculty support is necessary for an effective guidance program. Support is weakened by lack of clarity in communication. Communication is weakened by poor definition. For these reasons a working definition of the counselor's role is necessary. The first three items of Moler's more complete definition were used for the purposes of this report.

1. Assistant to students with educational vocational, personal and/or social problems;
2. Consultant to teachers and administrators referring students;
3. Interpreter of guidance practices to teachers, administrators, parents and other professions;
4. Researcher on matters pertinent to student

⁹Moler, op. cit., 11.

development, educational, vocational, personal and social; researcher in test development and validation; researcher in interviewing and counseling technique; researcher in counseling effectiveness;

5. Advisor to the student in matters within his sphere of competence;

6. Consultant to employers--government, industry, and community, in matters relevant to the employer.¹⁰

¹⁰Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

ASPECTS OF THE COUNSELOR'S ROLE TO BE
COMMUNICATED TO THE TEACHER

There was a time when faithful teachers were offered the job of counselor. They were permitted to sit down, had fewer papers to grade, and helped students choose classes for the following year. The counselor as defined in this report has more guidance training and experience. His role has not remained the same and he hopes to help others perceive it differently. Today counselors and teachers usually concur that testing, placement, follow-up and information service are functions of the counselor. Perhaps the best understood is that of the information service. However, there is no area of complete communication of the counselor's role. Gibson found regarding the information services that even in this service understanding is found wanting.

While there was the greatest concensus of agreement in response to questions regarding the information services, interviews showed little knowledge of even the existence of theories of vocational development and choice, much less their application to the planning of a program on information services.¹¹

¹¹Gibson, op. cit., 420.

I. THE COUNSELOR-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

More difficulty results, however, from lack of understanding on the part of the staff as to the nature and limits of the counseling process and the relationship of the counselor to the student.

Limits. The counselor certainly is responsible for making clear to the staff that his function is not to provide information, tell students what they should think and do, and take responsibility for their lives and decisions. These limits are not clear to many teachers. Gibson concluded that, "Many seem to feel that it was a 'telling' or 'directing' process which required more patience and understanding on the part of the counselor than formal training."¹²

The counselor must help the staff members comprehend that he tries to see problems as the student sees them and to ". . . help the student understand the disturbing forces within himself and his environment and to change himself in such a manner that he will be able to find his own solutions."¹³

¹²Gibson, op. cit., 423.

¹³Merle M. Ohlsen, Guidance Services in the Modern School, (Chicago, Illinois: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1964), 88.

It is important that the counselor make clear that behavior change through counseling is a process which is limited, at best, by the client's readiness for growth. The counselor must help the staff understand that his function is to help students express and cope with their feelings and attitudes. Sometimes the result will be different feelings and attitudes on the part of the student and thus different behavior.

Goals. The goals of the counseling relationship are a mystery to some staff members and especially to those who have never experienced having a counselor. The counselor tries to see the student's problems from the student's point of view. This is sometimes interpreted by the staff as a counselor-student alliance against a teacher. It is difficult to explain that to put oneself in the student's place, to see what he sees, and, in a manner of speaking, to experience what he experiences, does not imply agreement with or condonement of his point of view any more than it implies judgment. It simply means understanding which is the essence of the counseling relationship. This relationship is what the counselor must communicate to his staff.

The counselor must help the staff comprehend that he does not feel the function he performs is the only one valuable to the student. Counselor and teacher functions

are different. Both are very important. MacCarthy expressed the difference between classroom teaching and the interview when he said,

The classroom is more teacher-centered while the counseling interview is client-centered. A teacher can ill-afford to permit anyone to 'blow off steam' in class, nor can he empathize much, because he has the whole group to consider.¹⁴

Expecting and helping the student to exercise proper control of his feelings in the classroom is an important function of the teacher. Helping the student to express his feelings is an important and different function of the counselor. The counselor must communicate that he appreciates the value of the teacher's controlling function if he is to be successful with the staff.

Sometimes teachers believe that counselor's who do not discipline students are opposed to teacher discipline. The counselor must communicate that he is not opposed to discipline of students and/or punishment, simply that this is not his function. When this is not communicated it becomes an area of misunderstanding. Russell and Willis concluded,

¹⁴Anthony C. Riccio, "The Guidance Worker and Human Relations," The National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, 45:89-90, November, 1961.

First there is a significant difference of opinion among teachers as to the role of guidance concerning discipline. Many teachers feel counselors tend to overprotect students.¹⁵

The idea which the counselor must communicate is that because he remains non-judgmental toward the student does not imply condonement of disruptive behavior or judgment of the teacher for disciplining the student for such behavior.

Confidentiality. Confidentiality of the counselor-student relationship, if not handled with expertise, is sometimes insulting and threatening to teachers. Teachers fear that counselors and/or students do not trust them. They feel that their teaching situation is made more difficult because important information concerning a student is being withheld from them. Riccio expressed teacher feeling toward counselors regarding confidentiality when he said of counselors,

They expect teachers to refer students to them, but they do not inform teachers of the outcome of interviews, believing teachers to be too unsophisticated to handle the elicited information or believing that such information is to be regarded as sacrosanct.¹⁶

¹⁵Russell and Willis, op. cit., 708.

¹⁶Riccio, op. cit., 89-90.

Indeed the problem is a difficult one even when everyone involved is secure, well-intentioned, and professional. The counselor may have information he feels would be helpful to teachers but which students would not have divulged had they not felt their confidentiality protected. In this case the counselor may feel bound simply by the fact of his word. It is also true that when the counselor divulges information he is assuming some responsibility for how it will be used. The conscientious counselor has reason to be cautious.

Teachers justifiably expect a report on a referral. A good counselor who wished to encourage referrals would certainly reward the teacher with helpful information. However, a problem occurs when the counselor gains confidential information from a referred student. Teachers sometimes feel they have an inherent right to such information. Riccio supported this point when he said, "They fail to distinguish between information gained from a student who has been referred by a teacher and that information gained from a self-referred student."¹⁷ Counselors do not always agree with Riccio's implication that they can tell

¹⁷Ibid.

the teacher all information gained from a referred student.

Judgment is essential in this area. Some information which is not completely secret in nature can do great harm when used unwisely. Care must be taken that students do not feel betrayed and that teachers do not feel insulted. Flanagan and McGrew stressed the necessity for discretion and loyalty to the best interests of the student. They wrote,

Counselors should use discretion and good judgment in giving to other professional persons such information and data regarding the counselee as they are by virtue of their character, training, or competence capable of understanding and utilizing. . . for the best interests of the counselee.¹⁸

The problem definitely has not been solved. The counselor must make clear to teachers that when he has information he feels he must keep confidential it is not necessarily due to their incompetence or lack of good faith; rather it is due to the good faith he feels he must keep with the student. A partial solution that may be tried is to ask the student's permission to divulge certain information to teachers and to ask the student which information he particularly does not want divulged. All solutions to this problem

¹⁸Mary M. Flanagan and David McGrew, "A Suggested Code of Ethics for School Counselors," The School Counselor, 8:139, May, 1961.

are imperfect, and for this reason the counselor has responsibility to be clear and patient in communicating his position to teachers.

II. THE COUNSELOR-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP

Another area of conflict is sometimes the specified professional relationship of the counselor to the teacher. The relationship defined by the administration is usually a staff relationship and was assumed to be a staff relationship for the purposes of this report.

Goals. The teacher-counselor relationship is a peer relationship. Perhaps nothing offends teachers as easily as a counselor who sets himself up as the expert willing on occasion to bend down far enough to lend an ear to their comments and questions. The counselor is one of the trained educators in a school performing a special function to help students learn and develop. Most survey books and most of the professional literature define part of the counselor's role as a peer consultant to the teacher regarding personality and behavior of his students. This role of the counselor as peer consultant to the teacher must be carefully and consistently communicated because it is a major goal of

the counselor-teacher relationship. Ohlsen expressed this point of view when he outlined the counselor's role as follows:

The counselor is a specialist in counseling pupils and helping teachers understand their pupils. He should be able to help teachers appraise a pupil's school progress, intellectual potential and growth, social development, and emotional adjustment. It also would be desirable for him to be able to help teachers diagnose learning problems and make plans for appropriate remedial instruction.¹⁹

It is also important for the counselor to be approachable. Only when the counselor has communicated that he comprehends their problems will teachers feel free to talk with him. Ohlsen concluded his discussion of the counselor's consulting role with, "Teachers feel he understands the problems which they encounter and that he understands why they act and feel as they do in that setting."²⁰

Limits. The counselor and teacher must have a clear understanding that the counselor is not the teacher's personal counselor. There is misunderstanding regarding this point. Some teachers feel the counselor has a counseling responsibility

¹⁹Ohlsen, op. cit., 93.

²⁰Ibid.

to the faculty. Leonard, regarding the teacher-counselor relationship, went so far as to suggest that counselors be willing to advise teachers with personal problems "wisely and well" and that teachers would appreciate this help.²¹ The writer does not agree. The teacher-counselor relationship is complicated unnecessarily when the counselor counsels the teacher with personal problems. Unquestionably teachers have personal problems with which they on occasion seek help. The counselor should be willing, in a crisis situation, to serve as the teacher's counselor, and to help the teacher find a counselor. Some may question the wisdom of serving this function for the teacher even in a crisis situation, however, one could not in good professional faith refuse immediate, needed, and sought help.

Special areas of concern. Value systems open an area of possible concern in the teacher-counselor relationship. Even when the school philosophy and the counselor's philosophy are in basic agreement, it is doubtful that all the teachers will have similar values as the counselor. The counselor may be committed firmly to the student's right to

²¹Leonard, op. cit., 448.

choose against some things valued by society. The teacher may be more firmly committed to society's values. The teacher may be quite upset if the counselor does not encourage a bright student to choose higher education.

The counselor should be tolerant of varying points of view and have understanding of their origin. The counselor and the teacher, on occasion, work to serve students from different value systems. However, they can still work together for the student's welfare. From this the student has opportunity to learn the valuable lesson that different value systems have a place in society, that they may be working toward similar goals, and that co-existence and tolerance are possible and beneficial. The counselor must set an example of respect for different values.

The counselor's liaison function, as defined by Moler, is primarily interpretation of the guidance point of view to the community, teachers, administrators, and students. Practically speaking, if he is an approachable, nonjudgmental person he will frequently become a middle-man among administrators, students, parents, community, and sometimes other professional personnel. The counselor who is in this position can serve a valuable liaison function by facilitating