

# Evaluation of Counselor Effectiveness

by Ronald C. Riggs

*This literature review summarizes research in the general area of the evaluation of counselor effectiveness. Research into the role of the counselor continues, and is typically done in reference to a specific setting. The state of the art is such, however, that the evaluation of the counseling process continues to focus primarily on the presence or absence of the core facilitative conditions; program evaluation, conversely, is becoming more sophisticated. Counselor educators have focused on means of presenting counseling experiences and of providing feedback regarding trainee performance and evaluating that performance; much of this work has been directed toward the counseling practicum. The implications of the movement toward certification or licensure are discussed with reference to both practitioners and counselor educators.*

In the past ten years, the evaluation of counselor effectiveness has become a primary concern. The consumer movement and the response to it of the counseling field, as seen in the emphasis on increased professionalization, are major factors in the current efforts in the areas of accountability and program evaluation. These efforts affect both practicing counselors and counselor educators. A review of the literature summarizes research concerning counselors and counselor educators and suggests implications for both groups.

## Issues and Trends: Practitioners

### *The Role of the Counselor*

The effort to define the role of the counselor continues; attention has been directed toward various settings, for example, colleges (Avis & Stewart, 1976; Watson & Noble, 1971), community colleges (DeVolder, 1969), secondary schools (Betz, 1970; Hopper & Schroder, 1974; Knox, Pratto, & Callahan, 1974), elementary schools (Dean & Humann, 1968), and rehabilitation (Ayer, Wright, & Butler, 1968; Richardson & Rubin, 1973), in an effort to move beyond a statement regarding counseling in its most general sense.

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In the community college setting, the role of the counselor is viewed as one dealing with vocational or academic concerns, or both, rather than with adjustment problems (DeVolder, 1969). The pattern in secondary schools is similar (Betz, 1970; Knox, Pratto, & Callahan, 1974; Weinrach, 1974), including information giving (Hopper & Schroder, 1974). Also, rehabilitation counseling as a specialty is characterized by an exchange of information (Richardson & Rubin, 1973).

In colleges and universities, however, the pattern may be just the opposite, with priority given to adjustment problems rather than to academic and/or vocational concerns (Watson & Noble, 1971), although students may prefer to discuss some subjects with paraprofessionals (Zwibelman, 1977). At the elementary level, the most successful approaches emphasize personal concerns (Dean & Humann, 1968). Finally, the influence of career education on the role of the counselor (Watts, 1973) would seem to indicate that role delineation may be in a constant state of flux.

### *Certification and Licensure*

The movement toward counselor certification has far-reaching implications. Nationally, rehabilitation counselors have made the greatest strides in this direction; however, real implications are felt only when individual states adopt such requirements, and to date, only a few have done so.

The nature and purpose of counselor certification with particular reference to rehabilitation counselors has been discussed (McAlees & Schumacker, 1975). A more general statement of the advantages and the importance of certification or licensure is also available (Sweeney & Vogel, 1973).

At least four methods of certification exist (Dragan, 1971). Yet it should

not be assumed that the movement toward certification is without problems, that certification necessarily guarantees competence (Dragan, 1971), or that re-certification is without complication (Miller & Engin, 1976).

### *Evaluation and Accountability*

**Program Evaluation.** The application of the accountability concept to the field of counseling has been discussed (Hector & Yager, 1972), and the need for evaluation guidelines has been recognized (Ferris, 1971); an earlier review of the literature concerning accountability in guidance has been prepared (Galant & Moncrieff, 1974). Complicating this relatively new field of endeavor is the finding that the theoretical orientation of the rater influences the evaluation of effectiveness (Ward, 1974).

An article relevant to those not familiar with program evaluation differentiates between research and evaluation, defines key terms, and presents a five-step evaluation process (Burck & Peterson, 1975). There are a good number of articles on program evaluation (Leviton, 1977; Miller, Gum, & Bender, 1972), counselor evaluation (Ludwig, 1971; Pulvino, 1976; Siegel, 1969a, 1969b; Stewart, 1971; Weinrach, 1976) and program components (Carey, 1976; Ohio School Counselors Association, 1971). Various evaluation systems, such as case study methods (Pulvino, 1976), outcome research (Weinrach, 1976), and the social-learning-systems approach (Perez & Taylor, 1974) are examined. Several publications present models for the evaluation of elementary guidance (Miller, Gum, & Bender, 1972), school guidance (Leviton, 1977; Percival, 1974), community college guidance (Kinnebrew & Day, 1973), school psychology (Humes, 1974), and specific programs such as a one-person service in four rural schools (Muro, 1970). Other authors present

evaluation instruments, such as the Counseling Services Assessment Blank (Davidshofer, Borman, & Weigel, 1977), the Pennsylvania Elementary Guidance Evaluation Instrument (May, 1976), the Counselor Utilization Index (Biggers, 1971), and the Guidance Counselors Test (Humphry, 1973). A performance-based appraisal package is also available (Penn-Harris-Madison School Corporation, 1973). Of particular interest are articles presenting administrators' views in the evaluation of counselors (Ludwig, 1971; Stewart, 1974) and considerations in the evaluation of service agency counselors (Lipsett, 1971).

As might be expected, this area is not problem free, as may be seen in an analysis of the difficulties involved in evaluating a high school program (Colangelo & Zoffran, 1976). Additionally, the counselors themselves often believe they have reason not to conduct and not to cooperate in the evaluation of themselves and their peers (King, 1975; Van Atta, 1975).

**Personality and Effectiveness.** Efforts continue in the attempt to identify counselor personality variables that correlate with successful counseling outcomes. The use of a single traditional instrument, such as the 16 PF or the Personal Orientation Inventory, continues to show weak to moderate predictive ability (Penn & Bolding, 1970; Weinrach, 1972); the use of multiple instruments improves predictive ability somewhat (Robertson, Ward, & Royle, 1977). More creatively, the evaluation of teachers' responses has been used to produce a profile of "personality skill" (O'Connor, 1976).

Male and female school counselors displaying characteristics consistent with traditional sexual stereotypes tend to be more effective (Shelton, 1973). The same is true of effective students and effective paraprofessionals (Wittmer & Wehr, 1972). Four counselor characteristics—lack of knowledge and skills, imposition of perceptions and goals, lack of objectivity, and personality conflict between counselor and client—have been found to be more related to problems in rehabilitation counseling (Thoreson, Smits, Butler, & Wright, 1968).

**Counselor Self-Evaluation.** The concept that professional improvement can best be accomplished by self-evaluation has been advanced (Bowditch, diStefano, Payne, Peets, & Wallace, 1973). Two articles address the self-evaluation of the core facilitative conditions (Martin & Gazda, 1970; Martin, 1968). Three methods by which school counselors might evaluate themselves

and others have been presented (Dunlop, 1971); additionally, self-evaluation instruments have been generated (Bowditch, diStefano, Payne, Peets, & Wallace, 1973; Hardy, 1973; Kelly, 1976).

**Process Evaluation.** Research continues regarding core facilitative conditions (Lee & Nevison, 1971; McWhirter, 1973; Tien-Teh, 1973). However, because students can discriminate "high" from "moderate to low" levels but not "moderate" from "low" levels, it has been suggested that analyzing overall core conditions may not be meaningful (Lee & Nevison, 1971) even though experienced counselors can make such discriminations in themselves and others (Leitner, 1972). In groups, self-disclosing leaders are seen as more helpful (Dies, 1973; May & Thompson, 1973), although it has been noted that the use of profanity is seen as decreasing effectiveness (Heubusch & Horan, 1977).

Additional approaches to the evaluation of counseling interactions have been suggested (Mitchell & Cangemi, 1977). A recently developed instrument is the Interpersonal Maturity Level Typology (Gamboa & Koltveit, 1973), which systematically examines counselor, client, and counseling strategies for maximizing effectiveness. Another is the Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) procedure (Chase, 1973; Kagan & Krathwohl, 1967), which assists counselors in examining the interpersonal dynamics of the counseling process. Additionally, the Recorded Couselee Narratives collect counselor responses on the telephone, and the Counselor Preference Survey evaluates such responses; these instruments are seen as useful in evaluating both lay and telephone counselors as well as evaluating applicants to graduate counseling programs (Dilley & Bowers, 1973).

**Client/Consumer Evaluations.** An alternative to "expert" rating of counseling is client satisfaction ratings. Several reports of such ratings are available (Baker, 1972; Brown, 1969; Glazer, 1969), including one from Australia (Cherry, 1974). Self-reports of change rather than of satisfaction may also be used to assess a counseling service (Rosen & Zytowski, 1977). It should be noted that clients have been reported to rate naive counselors higher than sophisticated counselors (Gump, 1969).

Instrumentation developed for such purposes includes a semantic differential for student evaluations of community college counseling (Hecht & Henry, 1976) and a forced-choice rating scale for student evaluations of residence hall counselors (Duncan, 1968)

## Issues and Trends: Counselor Education

### *Interview Skills*

A continuing concern of counselor educators is that trainees demonstrate the core facilitative conditions in the interview situation. Studies have examined empathy, warmth, and genuineness in the initial interview (Altman, 1973) and posited that clients terminate early as a result of "poor" relationships (Dupre, 1970). Intensive prepracticum training has been found to improve interview behavior (Miller & Shields, 1971); additionally, the use of training manuals (Santoro, 1969) and of computers (Pepyne, 1970) has been investigated and found effective.

### *The Practicum*

Much attention has been focused on the counseling practicum. It has been suggested that evaluations be educational rather than judgmental (Gruen & Ball, 1974), a suggestion that could apply as well to other kinds of evaluation.

Of frequent concern is the effect of taping on the interview behavior of both the client and the counselor. It has been found that both audio and video recording inhibits practicum clients (Gelso, 1972). Although such deleterious effects have also been reported in regard to counselors, some contradictory evidence also exists (Heran, Herr, & Warner, 1973). A final note on recording is that audio recording has been found to be of higher teaching value than either video or audio-video recording alone (English & Jelenevsky, 1971).

The use of coached clients is a matter for debate. The advantages of using such clients, as well as comments on their selection and training, have been discussed (Skymko & Weiser, 1973). It is reported that coached clients' ratings agree with counselor educators' ratings and do not have the bias of "real" or noncoached clients (McIlvaine, 1972); there is a positive correlation between client and expert ratings, but client ratings tend to be higher (Eckstein, 1974).

Various methods and aids to practicum supervision are reported (Eckstein, 1974; Hewer, 1974), including a method using the Helping Relationship Inventory (Henderson, 1974). Much attention has been focused on core facilitative conditions. There is an indication that "technique-type" supervision is superior to "counseling-type" supervision in facilitating empathic responding (Payne, Winter, & Bell, 1970).

A continuing topic of concern is the

determination of the most effective means of feedback. Direct, immediate supervisor feedback has been found to be equivalent to supervisor-present monitoring-modeling feedback, although the monitoring-modeling method facilitates a more rapid rate of trainee growth (Quinn & Silverman, n.d.; Silverman & Quinn, 1972). The use of an earphone to provide the trainee with feedback during the interview has been found to be equivalent to the more traditional feedback and instruction method in increasing both verbal empathy (Carlson, 1969) and trainee effectiveness, as measured by the Counselor Evaluation Rating Scale (Tentoni, 1977).

A significant correlation between counselor self-ratings on the Counseling Evaluation Inventory and supervisor ratings on the same instrument exists (Bishop, 1971), suggesting the possibility of teaching self-evaluation skills as part of the supervisory process. Although peer ratings have been found to be valid (Jansen, Robb, & Bonk, 1972), peer evaluations on the Rating Scale of Counselor Effectiveness are consistently higher than supervisor evaluations (Friesen & Dunning, 1973). Additionally, supervisor ratings of competence correlate more highly with the Guilford-Zimmerman Temperament Survey than do peer ratings (Bonk & Jansen, 1974).

Such discrepant findings are perhaps partially attributable to the lack of a practical model of counselor supervision. A five-step model, moving from preceptorship, apprenticeship, mentorship, and sponsorship to peership, with specific reference to marriage counseling, has been developed (Ard, 1973); a similar concept is needed with reference to practicum.

A major instrument for use in the evaluation of a counselor-in-training is the Counselor Evaluation Rating Scale (Myrick & Kelly, 1971). Differences between self-ratings, supervisor ratings, and practicum assistant ratings have been found for nine of 27 items (Borman & Ramirez, 1975). A factor analysis indicates that this scale achieves the purposes intended by its authors (Loesch & Rucker, 1977).

### Program Evaluation

If counseling service delivery systems are to be accountable, counselor education programs are also accountable. The status of a state's counselor education programs in reference to both certification and ACES standards is the subject of one report (Hogan & Markwardt,

1969), and the evaluation of a rehabilitation counselor training program of another (Geist, Hershenson, & Hafer, 1972). Another report related the self-assessment of a counselor training program and viable change strategies (Trong, 1976). As more states regulate certification or licensure of counselors, more counselor education programs will by necessity undergo this kind of evaluation.

## Implications

Because there is no precisely defined counselor role, practitioners will probably have some latitude in defining their own roles, at least in the near future. Given the continuance of the current economic picture and funding priorities, however, it seems probable that in the majority of settings, and particularly in the public schools, the counselor will be expected to deal with vocational concerns; the counselor's role as job placement specialist will become increasingly important. This may result in the inclusion of more business courses in counselor training programs, and may have an impact on the kind of student admitted to graduate counseling programs.

The majority of states undoubtedly will adopt counselor certification legislation. Such legislation will likely relate to academic coursework and/or to actual counseling experience rather than to competency-based requirements. Certainly there will be variation among states concerning such issues as private practice and third-party payments. Additionally, it is virtually certain that certification maintenance will include provisos for continuing education to be offered through professional organizations or university-based programs.

Program evaluation is beginning to reach a level of sophistication where it may be useful in planning and refining service delivery systems. It will become increasingly important for counselors to overcome their fears of program evaluation. Counselors may console themselves with the knowledge that they are offering a useful, worthwhile service and that program evaluation can help them improve the service. In addition, counselors should expect input from the population they serve.

Certainly there will be continued emphasis on the presence of the core facilitative conditions in the counseling process. It is reasonable to expect, however, that this core will be expanded to accommodate the more action-oriented elements of the counseling process. Counselor education programs may provide the impetus for this expansion.

That the practicum has been the focus of much research may indicate the concern of counselor educators with actual service delivery. One might expect that this concern would mark the beginning of a trend away from traditional academic training toward mastery learning and competency-based education. Because of the additional expense of such programs and the paucity of outside funding, this will probably be a lengthy development process.

Another major change in counselor education programs will be their movement toward compliance with ACES standards and the certification regulations of their home states. Some likely outcomes include extension of basic programs to two-year programs and a greater range of course offerings, including various specialized courses. Additionally, some courses will be offered in "workshop" format to enable practitioners to attend and to earn continuing education credit for certification maintenance.

## Summary

Although the role of the counselor has not been and may never be clearly delineated, efforts continue in the areas of identifying "ideal" counselor personality characteristics as well as credentialing of the counselor through certification or licensure. Program evaluation seems to be gaining in sophistication; however, evaluation of the counseling process itself continues to focus primarily on the presence or absence of the core facilitative conditions.

Means of presenting counseling experiences, of providing feedback regarding trainee performance, and of evaluating that performance are concerns of counselor educators. Both self- and peer evaluations in this context are in developmental stages. Finally, counselor education programs are likely to be evaluated with reference to both state counselor certification requirements and ACES standards with increasing frequency.

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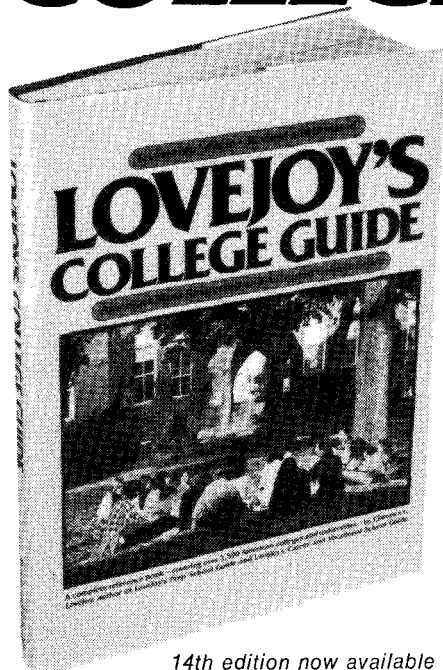
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