

Group Counselling, Role Perceptions, and Career Plans

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Young women enrolled in teacher education and about to enter their first teaching positions generally face a number of questions concerning their roles as teachers and their commitments to the profession. As they approach applying for their first positions, they are likely to wonder about their self-confidence and teaching skills, become dubious of their preparedness, and ponder the importance of the profession to them as persons and as women.

With this as background, researchers in the McGill Faculty of Education invited selected students in their second year of the two-year Diploma program to participate in group counselling sessions to discuss their present interests and concerns as well as their plans for the future. Late in 1968, counsellors attempted to help experimental subjects in small groups develop an atmosphere that would encourage them to think about and discuss their interests, concerns and aspirations.

The project had two objectives. The first was to discover the major topics of interest and concern expressed by these women students in counselling groups. The second objective was to evaluate the effects of the group counselling in terms of the participants' changes in their concepts of the role of the teacher and in terms of their plans for employment and/or education after completing the program.

Method

The subjects were the top twenty-five per cent of 195 second-year female students in the Class II Diploma program in teacher preparation at McGill University. They were selected for the study

on the basis of academic grades plus professional performance in teaching methods courses and in practice teaching. Those included were all volunteers.

The program in which they were enrolled is designed to meet requisites for the Class II teaching diploma in the Province of Quebec. The admission requirement is a Quebec Junior High School Leaving Certificate (Grade XI) or its equivalent. The two-year curriculum offers six academic subjects, and courses in educational psychology, history of education, general approaches to teaching, special courses in curriculum and instruction, and student teaching experiences.

Forty-seven subjects were randomly assigned to counselling groups or to non-counselled groups in a Solomon four-group design.¹

RO ₁	X	O ₂	(N=17)
RO ₃		O ₄	(N=10)
R	X	O ₅	(N=10)
R		O ₆	(N=10)

This design allows for statistical analyses of the main effects of the treatment (X), the effects of testing (O), with pre-test and post-test measures, and the interaction of testing and the treatment.

The subjects receiving the counselling treatment were assigned to groups of five or six persons. A qualified counsellor worked with each group. The treatment involved one session per week and covered a period of six weeks in February and March 1969.

The participants in the groups were told that the counselling experience would afford them an opportunity to discuss their roles as future teachers, their future educational and career plans and any other matters of personal concern to them. These students were at a "decision point," a period of time when the press of potential discontinuities must be considered. Employment, for example, was likely to present them with many questions about their own capabilities, and about the educational systems they were entering. As persons who had performed well compared to their peers, they had increased motivation to examine their commitment to professional careers in education and to consider alternative educational or employment opportunities.

The Major Topics of the Group Counselling Sessions

Each counselling session was recorded on audio-tape. The recordings were subsequently reviewed to determine the major expressed concerns and interests of these selected teachers-to-be. The following six common themes were evident from the reviews of the recordings:

1. "Sometimes I feel that I am a second class citizen!"

Many of the group sessions opened with this topic and it recurred in every session in some way. From the data provided by the group discussions, diploma students feel less than first class, in their status at the college they attend, in the schools where they did their practice teaching, and in the occupation of teaching. It seemed to them that students in degree programs were given preference over them.

2. "I really doubt that I can cope with older children!"

These students felt confident in dealing with primary age children, but were threatened by the tasks involved in teaching above grade three. This threat was generally expressed as doubts of adequate knowledge in subject matter and a worry of being "stumped" and not knowing the answers to pupils' questions.

3. "I would like to have a broader preparation for becoming a teacher."

The students felt that their program placed adequate emphasis upon teaching methods, but that they were deficient in areas such as psychology, sociology, and in academic subjects that they might be expected to teach. This topic, of course, is closely related to the lack of confidence in dealing with older children, and the less than adequate feelings about themselves.

4. "I'd like more opportunities for self-expression and experimentation."

Members of the groups felt that seldom did they have the opportunity or expectation to experiment in their methods of teaching and to implement their learnings in their own way. Student teaching is a beneficial experience, they seemed to say, but they thought that they were being impelled to become stereotype performers, often like their assisting teachers. While methods courses did provide many suggestions, there seemed little opportunity to incorporate the ideas and plans experienced in the practice teaching into their own personality framework.

5. "What possibilities are there for further education and specialization?"

Each of the counselling groups discussed this topic and group members exchanged information and ideas about the opportunities and desirability of furthering their education or thinking about specialization in the field of education. They generally felt uninformed about these matters.

6. "How committed should I be to the teaching profession?"

At the onset of counselling, many of the participants viewed teaching as a two or three year venture. However, the students' discussion showed an increasingly positive consideration for remaining longer in the teaching profession, and showed some recognition that teaching can be compatible with marriage and raising a family. These were attitudes openly expressed in the group discussions, and they corresponded to responses made later in a follow-up questionnaire regarding future plans. The questionnaire findings are discussed below in this report.

The analysis of audio recordings of group counselling sessions is only one of several ways of determining and studying the concerns of a particular group of students. However, the six topics reflect interests and concerns that have a logical and rational relationship to the nature of the group. The topics are similar in tone to Rogers' description of the counselling process. In the present study, the topics first dwell upon the shortcomings of the system (in this case, the subjects' own college curriculum), shift to their own feelings of inadequacy and lack of confidence, and then carry a slightly more positive tone about the future in terms of their own aspirations and commitments to teaching.

Effects of the Counselling Treatment

Two instruments were selected to evaluate the effects of the group counselling. One was a nine-item questionnaire concerning the educational and occupational plans of the experimental and control subjects. The items centred upon the students' plans after graduation and for the future. Four dealt directly with future educational plans (whether the subjects planned upon further education on a full or part-time basis, enter a B.Ed. program, or change to another

field); five dealt with occupational and career decisions (relative to immediate employment and longer range commitments to education as a professional career).

The questionnaire was given on a pre- and post-test basis to seventeen counselled subjects and to ten non-counselled subjects. Scores on each questionnaire were determined by the degree of difference (change over counselling period) between pre- and post-test responses. For each item there were three possible responses — “yes,” “undecided,” and “no.” A shift of two places was scored with a three, for example a “yes” to a “no,” or vice versa. A shift over one place was scored with a two, and no shift was scored as one. Scores were summed for the four educational items and also for the five career items, resulting in two scores from each questionnaire.

Table I shows the mean scores of counselled and non-counselled subjects for changes in educational plans and in career plans. The scores were analyzed by the *T* test for differences between means. Inspection of the table shows that the experimental subjects showed greater change in educational plans and in career plans over the counselling period than did the non-counselled students. The difference in career plans is higher than could be expected by chance, according to the *T* test.

TABLE I

COMPARISON OF MEAN CHANGE SCORES FOR EDUCATIONAL PLANS
AND CAREER PLANS OF COUNSELLED AND NON-COUNSELLED
SUBJECTS

	<i>Counselled N=17</i>		<i>Non-Counselled N=10</i>		<i>T</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	
Educational Plans	5.65	1.23	4.80	1.06	.17
Career Plans	7.71	3.03	5.90	1.51	2.26*

*Significant at .05 level

The second instrument used to evaluate the effects of the treatment was the “Teacher Role Description Questionnaire,” Form I (Horowitz).³ This was selected to measure attitudes towards teaching and the system in which employment was to be obtained. The instrument provides scores for the three scales labelled *nomethetic*, *ideographic*, and *transactional*. The student at this stage of her

training with a high nomethetic score tends to conform to the requirements of the institution at the expense of her individual personality and need satisfaction. A high ideographic score indicates she would place individual requirements before her occupational requirements. A high transactional score indicates the student could reconcile the conflicts between the requirements of the system and her own personal needs.

The "Teacher Role Description Questionnaire" was given to all subjects according to the plan of the Solomon design. An analysis of variance was used to determine whether differences between group means were attributable to the experimental variables. Table II shows the *F* value of differences between means according to the three scales, according to groups which had the pre-test or no pre-test, and that were counselled or not counselled. The results indicate that differences in mean scores between the groups are attributable only to chance and to the effects of pre-testing on the nomethetic and ideographic scales of the instrument. The group counselling did not have a significant effect upon the scores of the experimental subjects.

TABLE II

F VALUES OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEAN SCORES FOR ROLE VARIABLES ACCORDING TO EFFECTS OF TREATMENT, TESTING AND INTERACTION

	<i>Nomethetic</i>	<i>Ideographic</i>	<i>Transactional</i>
A. Counsellled vs. Non-Counsellled	.19	1.29	2.32
B. Pre-test vs. Post-test	8.24*	14.21*	1.96
A x B Interaction	2.50	.60	.29

*Significant at .01 level

Summary Discussion

The major topics of the group counselling sessions indicate some of the concerns that high-achieving women in a two-year teacher education program have about themselves, their preparation and their selected profession. They suggest issues that will interest those involved with revision of curricula in teacher education.

The major positive effect of the limited counselling experience was the subjects' tendency to become more committed to the teaching profession and to be aware that the profession can be pursued within the context of a broader commitment to marriage and family rearing.

References

1. Donald T. Campbell and Julian C. Stanley, *Experimental and Quasi Experimental Designs for Research*, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1968, pp. 24-25.
2. Carl R. Rogers, *Client Centered Therapy*, Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1961, pp. 132-136.
3. Myer Horowitz, *Teacher Role Description Questionnaire, Form I*, 1965.



Beginning teachers are sometimes advised by older colleagues to forget all they learned in training because it is "theoretical" and does not work. The impression that there is a gap between teacher training and what happens in the classroom is often confirmed by the teacher's own experience.

Much of what is done in the training of teachers is lost because of misunderstanding as to how the training is to be applied. There will certainly be a "gap" if people go out into the schools expecting their lecture notes to describe the conditions which they will encounter, and to give instructions as to how to proceed. This interpretation is analogous to taking the history notes from your university lectures as lesson notes for your first form.

Margaret Mackie, *Educative Teaching*,
Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1968, pp. 280-281.