

The Influence of Training on Counselor Responses in Actual and Role-Playing Interviews

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A basic assumption underlying all counselor education is that individuals can be educated to be effective counselors. However, the paucity of research related to the outcomes of counselor education, coupled with growing demands for counselors, has led to increased concern about the efficacy of counselor education (Bernos, 1966; Mills, 1965). The overall intent of this study was to provide data concerning: (a) the difference between responses made by counselor candidates in role-playing interviews and in actual interviews, and (b) the difference in types of responses made by trained and untrained counseling students.

The specific questions investigated were:

1. To what extent and in what manner are counselor responses influenced by:
 - (a) classroom teaching in guidance and counseling?
 - (b) supervised practice in counseling?
2. To what extent and in what manner do counselor responses vary between role-playing and actual counseling situations?

Method

The foregoing questions were investigated by obtaining counseling responses from 60 students (30 males and 30 females) in guidance and counseling courses at the University of Arizona. Their mean age was 34 years, and their mean graduate grade-point average was 1.68 (4-point scale, 1=A). They were selected in the following manner:

All students enrolled in Foundations of Guidance during the 1965-66 fall semester were asked to participate. This class was chosen because it is the first course in the guidance and counseling series, and because only students who intend to become counselors are admitted to it.

All students enrolled in Counseling Process (techniques), exclusive of rehabilitation counseling majors, during the 1964-65 spring semester

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and all the students in the 1965-66 fall semester were asked to participate.

All students enrolled in Supervised Practice in Counseling in the 1964-65 spring semester and in the 1965-66 fall semester were asked to participate. Students with previous practicum experience were excluded from this study, and rehabilitation students were excluded from the 1964-65 spring semester sample.

Rehabilitation majors were excluded only from the samples specifically indicated. Their exclusion was on the assumption that their preparation and counseling activities to that point differed sufficiently from those of guidance and counseling majors to make their inclusion questionable.

Sixty of the 70 students asked to participate submitted usable tape recordings or typescripts. In all cases where feasible each person who did not participate was contacted at least three times and asked to participate.

All counseling responses were obtained verbatim from typescripts of tape-recorded interviews. Due to the nature of counseling interviews it was impossible to obtain an equal number of responses from each counselor or interviews of exactly the same length. Those counselors role-playing were instructed to role-play for approximately 15 minutes, and these instructions were generally well followed. Fifteen-minute segments of the actual interviews, starting at the beginning of the interviews, were scored. In a few instances, recording problems made it impossible to score the very first remarks, but in no case was it necessary to deviate markedly from this procedure. However, the counselor-client talk ratio varied considerably, so that the actual number of counselor responses available to score also varied, even between interviews of the same length. The range of scorable response units, as defined by Bales (1950), was from 15 to 198 per interview. The mean number of scorable units was 69. The median number was 61. Five typescripts contained 25 or less scorable units, and 20 contained 100 or more.

Without exception, all responses, exclusive of opening remarks such as, "Close the door," or "Have a seat," were scored. If the entire interview was utilized, closing remarks such as, "The secretary can make another appointment" were not scored. Structuring remarks peculiar to a given setting and which would ordinarily have not been part of an interview were also excluded. These exclusions were made to restrict the remarks scored to those made in the interview proper, and to avoid discrepancies in scores due to differences in setting.

In role playing the counselor was instructed to approach the session as if it were an actual interview. The client (advanced counseling student, usually a doctoral student) was instructed to present the counselor with a problem for which he was seeking help. Clients for the actual interviews were almost all secondary students. Initial interviews or interviews early in a series were chosen. Most interviews could be classified as initial interviews, although in some instances the counselor had previous contact with the student. A total of 104 interviews were obtained.

This design using actual counseling responses was selected because it was felt that by utilizing responses made in counseling interviews, inferences about counselor on-the-job performance could be made more validly.

The analysis of the typescripts was made using the Bales (1950) system of interaction process analysis. Key factors which led to its selection were: first, successful discrimination between varying approaches to counseling has been demonstrated in previous studies (Bales, 1950; Strupp, 1955; Wrenn, 1960); second, the system could be expected to adequately categorize the responses of the untrained subjects, since it was designed to categorize any form of human interaction.

Two judges, the writer and another doctoral-level counselor, scored the typescripts. The method suggested by Bales (1950) for the training of judges was followed. The typescripts were scored simultaneously but independently by each judge. Differences between the categorization of the judges were then reconciled so that only one score remained for each typescript. Bales' rules were strictly adhered to in both the scoring and the reconciling of the scores. Thus, the final score for each typescript represents the combined judgment of the two persons as to the proper categorization of each response. The agreement between judges on the categorization of responses before reconciliation was 85 per cent.

Results

The null hypotheses proposed, corresponding to the preceding questions, were rejected at the .001 level of significance using a chi square test for the homogeneity of parallel samples (Rao, 1952). Testing for the significance of the difference between percentages (Garrett, 1958) in each Bales category also revealed significant differences in some Bales categories for all comparisons made.

Response profiles from role-playing interviews compared with profiles from actual interviews conducted during supervised practice revealed significant differences. The chi square value for the comparison of actual and role-playing interviews at the beginning of supervised practice was 63.1 ($p < .001$), and at the end it was 46.6 ($p < .001$).

Table 1 data indicate that while the subjects tended to respond in approximately the same manner in both types of interviews, it appears that the counselors took a more active part in the role-playing interviews. In this regard, the increase in Category 3 responses during actual interviews is particularly noteworthy.

TABLE 1
Comparison by Bales Response Categories of Role-Playing
and Actual Interviews in Supervised Practice
(N=interviews (one interview per subject), n=responses)

BALES CATEGORIES	BEGINNING			ENDING		
	Role- Playing (N=16) (n=925)	Actual (N=17) (n=1518)	†	Role- Playing (N=8) (n=371)	Actual (N=13) (n=946)	†
	%	%		%	%	
1 Reassurance	2.5	2.5	.03	2.2	1.6	.71
2 Tension Release	.2	.2	.10	.5	.2	.97
3 Agrees	5.4	13.0	6.06**	9.2	19.5	4.52**
4 Gives Suggestion	4.3	1.9	3.49**	2.2	3.0	.80
5 Interpretation	18.5	17.7	.48	30.4	24.6	2.16
6 Reflection	42.2	33.3	4.43**	43.4	35.9	2.51
7 Factual Questioning	13.7	17.3	2.35	5.9	8.4	1.49
8 Exploration of Feeling	11.5	12.0	.39	2.7	6.2	2.59*
9 Asks for Suggestions	.3	.1	1.02	.3	.0	1.60
10 Disagrees	.2	.3	.23	2.4	.4	3.31**
11 Shows Tension	.8	.4	1.19	.8	.2	1.59
12 Shows Antagonism	.4	1.3	2.03	.0	.0	0.00

*Significant at .01 level of significance.

**Significant at .001 level of significance.

Also the differences noted in these two comparisons are of approximately the same magnitude and are in the same direction. The occurrence of the same type of differences at two different training levels tends to indicate that these are true differences and that they can be expected under varying conditions.

Overall, it can be seen that the most significant differences revealed by a comparison of the percentage of responses in each Bales category were in Categories 3 and 6.

Comparison of Bales response profiles made by students prior to any instruction in guidance and counseling, beginning Foundations of Guidance, and at the end of Counseling Process (techniques), yielded a chi square value of 279.0 ($p < .001$). The differences between the percentages in each Bales category are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2
Comparison by Bales Response Categories of Role-Playing
Interviews at the Beginning of Foundations of Guidance
and at the End of Counseling Process
(N=interviews, n=responses)

BALES CATEGORIES	Foundations of Guidance (N=13)		Counseling Process (N=39)		t
	n	%	n	%	
1 Reassurance	56	4.9	53	2.1	4.67**
2 Tension Release	0	.0	10	.4	2.11
3 Agrees	28	2.5	161	6.3	4.85**
4 Gives Suggestion	145	12.8	137	5.3	7.86**
5 Interpretation	256	22.5	694	27.0	2.89*
6 Reflection	202	17.8	944	36.8	11.53**
7 Factual Questioning	201	17.7	266	10.4	6.20**
8 Exploration of Feeling	188	16.5	215	8.4	7.37**
9 Asks for Suggestions	4	.4	3	.1	1.52
10 Disagrees	39	3.4	39	1.5	3.74**
11 Shows Tension	8	.7	37	1.4	1.89
12 Shows Antagonism	9	.8	8	.3	2.00

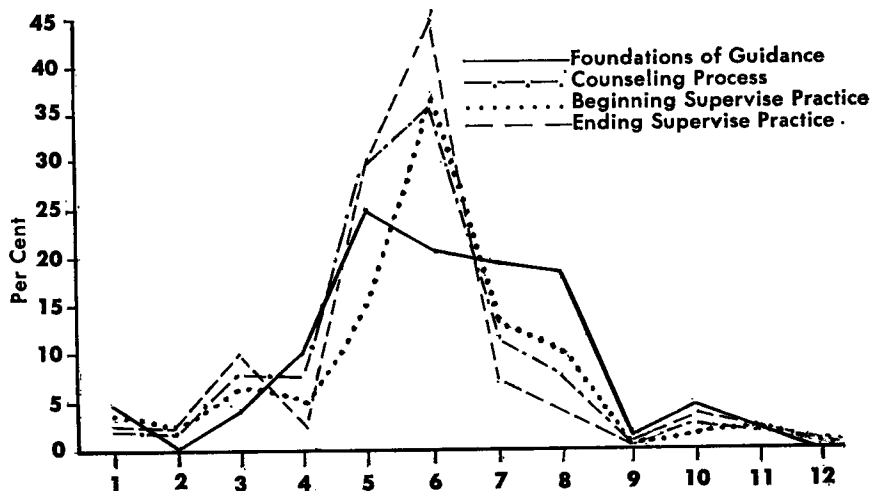
*Significant at .01 level.

**Significant at .001 level.

The comparison between *actual* interviews conducted at the beginning and at the end of supervised practice yielded a chi square value of 96.1 ($p < .001$). A comparison of *role-playing* interviews conducted at the beginning and at the end of supervised practice yielded a chi square of 67.4 ($p < .001$).

A graphic comparison of the role-playing interviews at each training level is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Profiles of role-playing interviews conducted during Foundations of Guidance N=13, n=1136; Counseling Process N=39, n=2567; and Supervised Practice, Beginning N=16, n=925; Ending N=8, n=371. (N=interviews, n=response)



Examination of Figure 1 clearly shows the changes toward *more* response in Categories 3 (Passive Acceptance) and 6 (Reflection); and toward *less* response in Categories 4 (Gives Suggestion), 7 (Factual Questioning), and 8 (Exploration of Feeling) with increased training.

During the scoring of the typescripts it became apparent that the subjects' responses varied considerably in length. The number of Bales score (response) units per counselor response, i.e., how many Bales units were scored each time a counselor responded, was chosen as a measure relatively independent of interview length and differences in counselees. Comparison of the mean number of Bales units per counselor response, with the interviews classified by training level, yielded an overall F of 5.55 ($p < .01$). The mean for Foundations of Guidance (2.90) differed from all other groups at the .001 level of significance. The mean number of units declined steadily as training increased to 1.40 at the end of Supervised Practice, although the difference between the other training levels was not significant. This decrease in "wordiness" is consistent with the findings of Barrington (1958).

Discussion and Conclusions

The results and conclusions of this study should be considered in light of the following observations.

First, the counselees and counseling situations were somewhat diverse. It is improbable that the results were biased in any manner, since the differences in counselees and situations can probably be assumed to have been randomly distributed among the comparison groups; however, the variability of the responses may have thereby been increased.

Second, the lack of distinction in the Bales system between information giving and reflections tended to obscure the differences between interviews. This was a factor in only a small number of cases, but it may have led to an overall underestimation of the difference between training levels.

Third, the Bales system provides no measure of the quality of a response. For example, many subjects made inferential statements which, more than anything else, showed their misunderstanding of the counselee but which nevertheless received the same score as a skillful interpretation.

The preceding observations may indicate that the results underestimated the differences between training levels. Also, a measure of the intensity of the relationship might have revealed additional differences. With these considerations in mind the following conclusions were made.

1. There is a difference in response patterns between role-playing interviews and actual interviews; however the differences are not of the type or magnitude that the use of role-playing is contraindicated in training or research.
2. Training in counseling and guidance changes the nature of counselor interview responses. This change is more pronounced in the early stages of training than during supervised practice.
3. Training tends to make counselor responses more concise. These results may be considered an indication of the ability of counselor education to modify counselor responses in counseling. Also, the importance of all stages of preparation is emphasized by the changes in counseling responses before practicum. These results may not, however, be considered direct evidence of the efficacy of counselor education, since there was no actual measure of increased counselor effectiveness. They do underscore the counselor educator's responsibility to assure that changes brought about in preparation programs lead to increased counselor effectiveness.

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