KINDS OF COMMUNICATION USED BETWEEN COUNSELORS AND CLASSROOM TEACHERS

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the kinds of communication used between counselors and classroom teachers, those kinds most preferred, and the formality or informality of the communications systems.

The study was made by sending open-end questionnaires to seventy-six counselors in twenty-three Montana high schools. These schools are tax supported with enrollments equal to or in excess of five hundred students.

From this study the investigator has concluded that counselors use a system of communication with classroom teachers. Those counselors surveyed in the study were quite evenly divided in their preference of a formal or informal system. The study revealed that counselors most use and prefer those kinds of communication that allow the greatest personal contact with teachers.

Resulting from this study it is recommended that schools adopt a system of communication between counselors and classroom teachers allowing the counselor to communicate with the teacher on a personal basis. The investigator suggests a study based on more areas of communication in guidance counseling. These other areas would relate to communications between counselors and student, counselor and administration, and the counselor and community agencies. The investigator further suggests a study be made on the effect of counselor education given our graduating teachers in relationship to communication between guidance counselors and classroom teachers.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As a counselor, the investigator has long pondered the question of how to extend a maximum of his counseling services to those students in his charge. The student-counselor ratio in the larger Montana high schools does not favor effective counselor services in education. The investigator feels that some way must be found to involve as many faculty members as possible in the common cause of providing counsel for the students. Jones(10) stated, "Guidance is most effective when we unite in a common purpose to provide the best counsel possible for each individual student to the limit of our possibilities." Jones' call to "unite in a common purpose" would imply the need for a system of communication between counselors and classroom teachers to bring about the common unity of purpose. Berlo(2) substantiated the investigator's belief on communication when he stated, "Communication increases the likelihood of similarities among people, increases the chance that people can work together to accomplish a goal."

Another way of stating Jones' and Berlo's thoughts would be to say, "Communications between counselors and classroom teachers would unite them in the common cause of rendering better counseling services to the students."

The investigator believes that the student-counselor ratio in our schools requires the cooperation of the faculty in extending counseling services to a maximum of students. The investigator believes that the cooperation of the classroom teacher can be obtained only when adequate communications exist between the counselor and classroom teacher.

The purpose of this study was to determine the kinds of communication used between counselors and classroom teachers in twenty-three of Montana's larger high schools. The study was also done to discover those kinds of communication most preferred by counselors in those schools surveyed, to discover if those counselors considered their system of communication informal or formal, and reasons why.

Definition of Terms

Communication -- Communication as used in this paper refers to Webster's[16] definition as follows: 1) Intercourse by words, letters, or messages; interchange of thoughts or opinions. 2) A verbal or written message.

Informal -- Webster[16] "not in conventional or customary form. Unstructured, not planned."

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND

Berlo[2] has stated, "Communication increases the likelihood of similarities among people, increases the chance that people can work together to accomplish a common goal." This statement seems applicable to many of our problems dealing with human relationships extending from international problems to those of a domestic nature.

The business world expresses its need for better communications when Evans[4] says, "The major problem in business today is not primarily one of size but one of communication between people." Evans believed the problem obstructing better labor-management relationships and greater efficiency in business production stems from lack of a complete and workable communications system. Evans[4] stated, "The communication system within the organization must be so devised that everyone, from the top to the hourly rated employees, is well informed."

An article appearing in Ebony[6] magazine on the heated racial issues in our biracial cities had a title appropriate to the situation exclaiming, "Needed: More Human Communication". An article by Gillohm[6] summed up the problem in our racially torn cities in terms of a lack of human communications. The article indicated that while mechanically and electronically, communications is at a stage that even twenty years ago was considered impossible to most people, the problem that now exists is one of human communication. Gillohm indicated that we seem to have progressed only a year or two in human communication since the time of Christ.

The need for communication is no less acute in our growing school systems. The American school is becoming highly departmentalized, filled with educational specialists. Kowitz and Kowitz[11] in their book, Operating Guidance Services for the Modern School, stated,

> Communications are essential within and among organizational operations. Without them, separate activities, which need to be coordinated become separated activities, and the product that should emerge from their coordination fails to evolve.

Kowitz and Kowitz went on to indicate the need for communication when they stated, "A large organization consists of a number of components, and there must be communication among them."

One of the components of the school organization is the guidance service. If the guidance service is to be appreciated by other staff members and function adequately, communications must exist with many related organizations in the school and community. According to Hollis and Hollis,[8]

> Communication increases individual involvement in the guidance program by facilitating the individualized exchange of attitude, ideas, and feelings between members of the guidance staff and between them and administration, faculty members, auxiliary and other service staff members, students, parents, and other community members.

Hollis and Hollis suggest that counselors should discuss administrative philosophies about guidance with the administrators. They believe that good communications with administrations may change their concept of guidance, thereby facilitating growth and effectiveness of the guidance program. It is further suggested by Hollis and Hollis that many parents and interested community members have ideas that could prove beneficial

to the growth and effectiveness of guidance services. They realize the impossibility of communicating with all interested people and suggest the establishment of interest groups in the community for this type of communication.

The ratio of guidance workers to student population in our larger schools calls for involvement of other school staff members to provide adequate guidance services. Jones(10) stated, "Guidance can be completely successful only when we secure complete and continuous cooperation between home-room teachers, classroom teachers, and counselors."

Hollis and Hollis(8) felt that the guidance program should permeate every classroom. They hold that the basic guidance function is service and should be available to all students. In order to provide counseling services to all students, they suggested that the teacher be the first "echelon of guidance." Using the teacher as the first echelon according to these authors, would require a communication organization. Froelich(5) called the classroom teacher the "first line of defense." He stated that the continued contact of the teacher with the student allows the teacher to observe the student under a variety of circumstances. This allows the classroom teacher to be the eyes and ears of the counselor, which would permit the locating of students needing guidance services, if adequate communications exist.

Rothney(13) called counseling a "complex process, that requires the cooperation of everyone: counselor, child, parent, teacher, and administrator." This would surely require adequate communication between counselors and those people mentioned.

Strang[15] made a case for communication between counselors and classroom teachers when he stated that the counselor has the responsibility of making sure every student makes sound educational plans and progress in his education. Strang says that to accomplish this the counselor is wise to build a competent group of faculty advisors who will each work with a small group of students along developmental lines, referring to the counselor, the more difficult problems. The building of any such faculty group or referral system would call for adequate communications.

Smith[14] indicated the importance of the teacher's role in the guidance program by stating, "The teacher is in a position to provide occupational, educational, and other types of information through their classes." Smith further called for teacher's aid in counseling by placing responsibility of placement, developing personal inventories, and assisting in follow-up studies on the classroom teacher. Smith said that the place of the trained counselor is to promote "effective participation" of the classroom teacher. If the counselor were to promote this effective participation, a means of working communications must exist.

Arbuckle[1] summed up the need for counselor-teacher communication for the benefit of the student with this statement:

> When the actual problems and needs of the student are determined, the counselor must find ways and means by which the largest possible proportion of the school staff can in some way become involved in the guidance program.

Glanz[7] suggested another reason for communications with teachers and administrators when he stated that meaningful professional relations with teachers and administrators requires as a basic necessity, open

communication systems. Glanz stated that acceptance for the guidance program must be built through adequate communications; not demanded. Glanz further stated:

> When one examines the turnover of counselors in schools and colleges, one would have to conclude that some counselors never reach an effective level of communication with teachers.

Johnson, Peters, and Evraiff[9] suggested the need for counselors to have adequate communication to avoid a "no man's land." They indicated that the relationship between counselors and teachers often lies in this "no man's land." This, according to the authors, comes about when the counselor fails, through communication, to identify himself as serving some meaningful function in the school.

The lack of communications leads to misunderstanding on the part of the teachers as to the intended purpose of counseling services. Jones[10] stated the problem thus:

> Often programs of guidance are unsuccessful because the teacher opposes it as an added burden, or they do not understand what it is all about. Many who are actually supporting the program do harm because they don't understand it.

Cox[3] in her study of one hundred selected counselors in the secondary schools, indicated a need for communication when she spoke of "acceptance and cooperation" of the counselor by teachers. Here is her statement on counselor-teacher relationships:

> At least eighty percent of this group enjoys exceptionally fine relationships with teachers in their school. With one possible exception they must, for the sake of the pupil's best adjustment, constantly strive to achieve teacher acceptance and cooperation.

Hollis and Hollis[8] suggested the following techniques to accomplish what they referred to as "personalized communication":

> Guidance Committee. By holding regular meetings of the committee which is composed of teachers selected for their reporesentation of faculty viewpoints -- an organized means is provided for an exchange of ideas, feelings, and attitudes about the guidance functions between faculty, guidance staff, and possibly administrators.
>
> Guidance Staff Meetings. Regular meetings of the guidance staff will provide an organized means for the staff to communicate to each other information gathered about attitudes, feelings, concepts, and reactions of other individuals concerning the guidance program. This information can contribute to greater understanding.
>
> Scheduled Conferences. Planned conferences -- aimed at an exchange of attitudes, ideas, and feelings with persons in other service areas, administrators, teachers, students, parents, and others -- are an effective technique if the number of participants is kept small (four to ten) and the purposes are clearly understood ahead of time.
>
> Organizational Representation. Placing a guidance staff member as a representative in different school and community organizations can be a technique for regular communication with the other members in the organizations. The guidance staff employee communicates with members of the organization, generally on a one-to-one basis, and tries to help in the interpretation of guidance information as it personally applies to an individual. In return the guidance staff member is able to assess the perceptions of the other person about guidance information.
>
> Planned Home Visits. The counselor may make several home visits. The number of these will depend upon the school but probably will be more extensive at the elementary school level than in the secondary school. It these are planned properly with communication goals in mind, much can be accomplished in establishing positive attitudes.
>
> Classroom Work by Guidance Staff with Teachers. When the team relationship can be established so that teachers and counselors can work at particular times on specific topics within the teacher's classroom, an effective communications program can be organized. Such planning give the counselors the opportunity to work with students in a group setting.

Periodic Case Conferences. When case conferences are regularly scheduled for a specific time and place, teachers, administrators, and pupil personnel staff members can be brought together to gain better understanding of each other. In such an atmosphere much can be done to communicate with individuals about their feelings, attitudes, and concepts regarding the guidance services and activities.

Periodic Case Consultations. Case consultation can take place only among professional people who are specialists in their own right and who are qualified to help a particular child. An important aspect of periodic case consultation is the communication between the professional staff members in the school and specialists in the community.

Parents Night. The technique may be useful in the public relations program also; but it is particularly effective for presenting to parents, on an individualized basis, information related to their specific stage of attitude formation.

Periodic Contacts with Referral Agencies. Agencies accept referrals from the guidance staff and in some cases make reciprocal referrals. A planned program of regular contacts with the referral agencies may reveal unknown attitudes, for the viewpoints of these people will be influential in the effectiveness of the referral.

Regular Conferences with Representatives of Business and Industry. These persons often represent a group not otherwise contacted or involved in communications. Organizing regular conferences to exchange ideas, feelings, and attitudes regarding the guidance program may prove to be fundamental in obtaining information for program modifications.

The authors suggested that the decision concerning which techniques to use at any given time is a choice that must be made by the trained professional counselor.

Much has been said about the need for communication in guidance services. The need for these communications has been stated as necessary to provide adequate counseling services to the student and to establish

the program as serving a function of worth in the school systems.

Little, if any, research has been done to determine the kinds of communication used between counselors and classroom teachers. This study, described in detail in the chapters which follow, was made to determine the kinds of communications used between counselors and classroom teachers and those most preferred. This information was sought from seventy-six counselors in twenty-three of Montana's larger tax supported high schools.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURES

This chapter deals with population, collection and analysis of data, and the development of the questionnaire used in this survey.

Population

The investigator, presently employed in a secondary school with a population of over five hundred, was interested primarily in communications between counselors and classroom teachers in schools with enrollments equal to or in excess of five hundred. The population for this study was determined by consulting the 1967-1968 Montana Educational Directory issued by the Superintendent of Public Instruction to find school enrollments. The names of the counselors in those schools were found in the 1967-1968 Montana Guidance Personnel booklet issued by the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

The original population for this study consisted of seventy-six counselors selected from twenty-three tax supported Montana high schools having a student enrollment equal to or in excess of five hundred. The actual participants in the study consisted of forty-nine counselors in twenty schools responding to the survey.

Collection and Analysis of Data

Questionnaire Development. Before the final questionnaire for the survey was designed, a trial questionnaire was developed through interviews held with counselors representing seven Montana high schools. The seven counselors represented two smaller high schools with enrollments of one-

hundred to one-hundred fifty, and three with enrollments in excess of one-thousand.

During interviews the following questions were asked of the seven counselors:

1. Do you have a method of communication between counselors and classroom teachers in your school?

2. Which of those methods do you most prefer?

Five of those interviewed stated that they preferred the four methods of communication listed by the investigator on the questionnaire: referral slip, counselor-teacher conference, teacher-guidance committee, and faculty meetings.

The two counselors representing the smaller schools reported using no special method of communication. They stated there was no need for a particular system of communication because the small school allowed a great deal of personal contact between counselor and teacher.

After listing four kinds of communication, the questionnaire was open-ended to allow counselors the opportunity to report any other kinds of communication used with teachers. To clarify any kinds added the counselors were asked to explain how their systems worked. The counselors were asked to explain how their systems worked. The counselors were asked, if they did not use a formal system of communication, to explain why. This question was asked to determine whether those surveyed felt a system of communication had to be structured or formalized to be effective between counselors and teachers.

Administration of Questionnaire. With the first mailing a self-addressed stamped envelope was enclosed with the questionnaire. In the

event the respondent failed to write his name on the envelope or questionnaire, a number was assigned each questionnaire, and a corresponding number given that counselor in the 1967-1968 Montana Guidance Personnel booklet.

Within a two-week period, forty-one of the seventy-six counselors surveyed has responded. At the beginning of the third week after the first mailing a second questionnaire and self-addressed stamped envelope were mailed to the remaining thirty-five counselors. Also enclosed the second time was a letter urging the counselor to respond.

Analysis of Data. When the forty-nine questionnaires were returned to the investigator, a list was prepared from the information on the questionnaire. The list contained one-hundred forty-one kinds of communication used between counselors and teachers. The list, when studied, revealed a total of only thirteen separate kinds of communication. After the list was reduced to thirteen, a second listing was prepared with a check mark placed by each kind for every time it was repeated.

Upon completion of the lists, two tables were prepared to illustrate the results for the questions regarding kinds of communication used and those most preferred. The tables expressed the results in raw numbers and percentages. The third question pertaining to informality was not placed on a table.

The number of schools using an informal system was presented in percentage and a list or reasons for not using a formal system was presented.

The counselors responded to the questionnaire as individuals in all but two schools. These schools had a head counselor responding for all

five members including himself, and in the other school the head counselor responded for six members including himself. Since the counselors in only two of the twenty schools responding reported in this manner, the investigator treated the questionnaire from these schools as though they had been received from five and six individual counselors, respectively.

The information revealed differences between counselors within the same school in regard to the kinds of communication used. There were also differences between counselors within the same school regarding the kinds most preferred. When, however, the counselors were asked to report on the informality or formality of their systems, they responded as one. As a result of this discrepancy in responding to these three questions, a different approach was used in reporting the results of the three questions. The results of the questions asking for the kinds of communication used and kinds preferred were treated as reported by individual counselors. The results of the question regarding formality or informality were reported by schools.

Chapter IV deals with the results of the study. Tables expressing the results in percentages and raw numbers are used to indicate clearly the findings.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

In this chapter, tables are used to present results of two of the questions used in the study. Table I illustrates the kinds of communication, and number and percent of counselors using each. Table II illustrates the method of communication preferred, number and percent of counselors preferring each. The results from the third question in the study are not presented in table form. These results are expressed in a single percent followed by a listing of reasons.

The results of the study revealed thirteen kinds of communication, presented in Table I, used by the forty-nine counselors in the twenty

TABLE I

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF COUNSELORS WHO REPORTED USING EACH KIND OF COMMUNICATION

Kinds	Number of Times reported (N 49)	Percentage of times reported
Counselor teacher conference	47	95.91
Referral slip	36	73.47
Faculty meetings	26	53.06
Teacher guidance committee	10	20.40
Teacher orientation meeting with counselor	5	10.20
Daily or weekly bulletins circulated to classrooms	4	8.16
School intercommunication system	4	8.16
Coffee lounge conversation	3	6.12
Mimeographed information	2	4.08
Department head meetings	1	2.04
Homeroom sessions	1	2.04
Room visitation by counselor	1	2.04
Notices placed in teacher's mail boxes	1	2.04

schools responding to the survey. The counselor-teacher conference was reported as the most used method of communication between counselors and teachers with forty-seven of the forty-nine counselors reporting that they used this method. The referral slip was used by thirty-six and faculty meetings were reported as used by twenty-six. The fourth most used method of communication, the guidance committee, was reported by ten, while teacher orientation meetings with counselors were reported as used by only five. The daily or weekly bulletins circulated to classrooms, and the school intercommunication system were used by four of the forty-nine counselors. The coffee lounge conversation and mineographed information were used by three and two of the forty-nine counselors, respectively. Department head meetings, homeroom sessions, room visitations by counselors, and notices placed in teacher's mail boxes were all used by only one counselor out of the forty-nine reporting.

In terms of percentages the uses of the thirteen kinds of communications ranged from a high of 95.91 percent for the counselor teacher conference to a low of 2.04 percent for department head meetings, homeroom sessions, room visitations by counselors, and notices placed in teacher's mail boxes.

The investigator asked the counselors to check the kind of communication that they most preferred. Table II on page 17 shows the preferred methods of communication. Five of the thirteen methods of communication were reported as preferred by thirty-nine of the forty-nine counselors. Twenty-four counselors having a preference chose the counselor-teacher conference. Ten preferred the referral slip while

TABLE II

PREFERRED METHODS OF COMMUNICATION

	Number of Preferences	Percentage of Preferences
Counselor teacher conference	24	61.53
Referral slip	10	25.64
Faculty meetings	2	5.13
School intercommunication system	2	5.13
Teacher guidance committee	1	2.57
Total	39	100

two preferred the faculty meetings and two the school intercommunication system. Only one counselor out of the thirty-nine checked the teacher guidance committee as the preferred method.

It was asked on the questionnaire if the respondent considered his system of communication to be informal, and if so, to explain why. Eight of the twenty schools responding, or forty percent, reported their system of communication to be informal. These schools represent twenty-two of the forty-nine counselors responding, or forty-five percent.

The reasons given for using the informal system of communication were as follows:

1. The counselors using the informal system felt they were quite effective.
2. Previous attempts at formalizing or structuring were unsuccessful.
3. The faculty resented the red-tape of formal systems of communication.

4. Counselors felt that informal systems established better rapport with teachers.

5. Systems of communication often limit the amount of communication about any individual or situation.

6. It was felt by some that a formal system of communication would cost them the support of their faculties.

7. Some felt that the school was small enough not to require a formal system of communication.

It might be summarized that counselors favoring informal systems listed valid reasons for doing so, seeming to feel that under informal conditions they could work most effectively with their faculties.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study was conducted to discover types of communication used between guidance counselors and classroom teachers, those most preferred, the formal or informal nature of the communication, and an explanation of why they used the informal system.

The study was conducted by mailing open-ended questionnaires to seventy-six guidance counselors in the twenty-three tax supported high-schools with a student population equal to or in excess of five hundred from grade nine through grade twelve. The study lost some generalizability because not all counselors responded to the survey. The reader can only speculate how the others may have responded had they returned their questionnaire.

The results of the study indicate thirteen kinds of communication in use between guidance counselors and classroom teachers. Thirty-nine of those responding have a preferred method of communication between guidance counselors and classroom teachers. Eight of the twenty schools reporting consider their system of communication as informal, twelve did not respond to this item on the questionnaire.

The investigator found the open-end questionnaire difficult to word so that those surveyed would understand what information was desired. Personal interviews would be preferable for this type of study reducing the ambiguity of responses and questionnaire wording. Because of the wide area covered by the investigator, time and financial limitations made personal interviews impossible at the time of this study.

Conclusions

It is concluded from this study that:

1. Guidance counselors realize the need for a system of communication with their faculty.

2. All the schools reporting have systems of communication in use and do not rely on a hit or miss approach in communicating their approach with faculty.

3. The counselors in those schools surveyed prefer the personal kinds of communication with the faculty that put them in a direct person-to-person relationship in communication.

Recommendations

On the basis of this study it is recommended that school systems adopt a system of communication between guidance counselors and classroom teachers. The study indicates that these systems of communication would allow the counselor to communicate with the teachers on a personal basis.

The investigator suggests a study based on more areas of communidation in guidance counseling. The other areas would relate to communications between counselors and student, counselor and administration, the counselor and community agencies.

The investigator further suggests a study be made on the affect of counselor education given our graduating teachers in relationship to communication between guidance counselors and classroom teachers.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

POPULATION OF SCHOOLS SURVEYED

School	Population
1. Anaconda	576
2. Billings Senior . . . . . Combined	3661
3. Billings West	
4. Bozeman	897
5. Butte Public	2035
6. Columbia Falls	573
7. Cut Bank	513
8. Deer Lodge	558
9. Glasgow	734
10. Glendive	827
11. Great Falls Russell . . . . . Combined	3119
12. Great Falls Senior	
13. Hardin Junior High-High School	790
14. Havre	867
15. Helena	1398
16. Kalispell	1709
17. Laurel Junior High-High School	835
18. Lewistown	658
19. Libby	501
20. Miles City	858
21. Missoula Sentinel . . . . . Combined	3214
22. Missoula Hellgate	
23. Sidney Junior High-High School	835

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE USED IN SURVEY

Dear Counselors:

I NEED YOUR HELP!!

It has been my contention that a counselor is not aware of many needs and problems of those students in his charge. It would seem necessary that some type of formal communication with the faculty exist before the counselor can function effectively in reaching a maximum of those students needing his service.

I have enclosed a questionnaire that I hope is clearly written and convenient for you to use. I realize that personal interviews would be appropriate for this type of survey; however, time and financial limitations make them impossible at this time. The information obtained will be used in a study to fulfill the requirements for my Master's Degree Program at Montana State University. Would you please fill out the questionnaire and return it as soon as possible?

Respectfully,

David D. Kirkpatrick

Counselor
Park Senior High

The purpose of this questionnaire is to discover the kinds of communications used between the classroom teachers and your guidance counseling department; i.e. the kinds of communication with your faculty that make known to your students the many services you provide.

METHOD	MOST PREFERRED
_____ Referral Slip	_____
_____ Counselor Teacher Conference	_____
_____ Teacher Guidance Committee	_____
_____ Faculty Meetings	_____

Please list any others used:

Will you please explain how your system works?

If you do not utilize a formal system of communications, would you please explain why?

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