2013 International Congress on Clinical and Counselling Psychology (CPSYC)

The need for guidance and counselling training for teachers

Susanna Wai Ching LAI-YEUNG*

The Open University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong.

Abstract

Teachers have multiple roles to perform nowadays. To fulfil their roles professionally, teachers need to be competent in their responsibilities towards their students inside and outside the classroom. One important teacher role inside and outside the classroom is to provide guidance and counselling to students. This paper has two aims. First, it discusses the importance of guidance and counselling training for teachers. The second aim of this paper is to investigate guidance and counselling training needs for teachers through students taking an innovative guidance and counselling component in a pre-service undergraduate teacher preparation program. This course component has been tried out with four cohorts of English Language Studies and English Language Teaching double-honours degree students. Using qualitative analysis of students' responses in a personal reflection activity in the latest cohort, the present study found that students have various training needs, and perceived strengths and impeding issues in relation to carrying out the guidance and counselling role at school. The paper ends with discussions on directions for future teacher training and research.

1. Introduction

Apart from subject teaching, teachers are entrusted with many responsibilities nowadays. Guidance and counseling are some of their major duties. In the guidance and counseling literature, these two words generally take on different meanings. The former refers to helping students' whole-person development, while the latter is frequently targeted at helping students with problems. In other words, guidance work is preventive and developmental in nature whereas counseling is more of supportive, remedial work. The global trend seems to

* Corresponding author. Tel.: 852-2768 5811; fax: 852-2395 4235.
E-mail address: swclai@ouhk.edu.hk

have moved from a casework and remedial approach to a preventive, developmental approach in providing guidance and counselling (Gysbers & Henderson, 1994; Yuen, 2002).

In Hong Kong, guidance and counselling work in schools have undergone many changes. In line with the global trend, Hong Kong has adopted a preventive approach to guidance since 1986 (Hong Kong Education Department, 2001). In its official guide "Guidance Work in Secondary Schools – A Suggested Guide for Principals and Teachers", the Hong Kong Education Department provided guidelines for guidance teachers, who are full-time teaching staff, to deliver student guidance at school on top of their teaching duties. The document also discussed the importance of a cooperative, teamwork approach in the delivery of student guidance. This laid the groundwork for a whole school approach to guidance, which was implemented in the 1990s with the recommendation of the Education Commission report No.4 (Hong Kong Education Commission, 1990). This approach emphasizes the involvement of all school personnel to create a caring and inviting environment for students to grow and realize their potentials for whole-person development (Hong Kong Education Commission, 1990). The whole-school approach is further explained and promoted through subsequent guidelines and resources provided by the government (Hong Kong Education Department, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1996, 2001). In 2002, the government has further extended the whole school approach to encourage comprehensive student guidance service as an integral part of education. This means that schools have to integrate their various sub-systems and all staff members need to work collaboratively at schools and with parents and the community at large to help students achieve all-round development and life-long learning (Hong Kong Education Department, 2012). The government has stepped up resources to promote comprehensive student guidance service in recent years. This includes improving guidance personnel in primary schools starting from 2006, and provision of an additional top-up student guidance service grant to primary schools from 2012 onwards (Hong Kong Education Department, 2012).

Since all teachers are involved in student guidance and counselling at school to varying degrees, there is a definite and important need for guidance and counselling training for all teachers. Some guidance teachers have indeed demanded such training for all teachers. They even thought this was "the basic requirement of a teacher" (Yuen, 2002, p.175). However, a search in the literature about teachers' training needs in guidance and counselling showed a scarcity of research in this topic. Most studies focused on peripheral topics such as qualifications and mode of training for guidance personnel (McCarthy, 2001), or the training needs of career guidance personnel (Patton & Burton, 1997; Patton, 2000).

Against this background, the present study seeks to investigate the following questions:

- Do teachers perceive a need for training in carrying out their guidance and counselling responsibilities at school?
- If they do perceive such a need, what are their training needs specifically?
- Do they perceive any personal issues that might impede their guidance and counselling role?
- Do they perceive any personal strengths or resources that that might facilitate their guidance and counselling role?

2. Method and Findings

2.1 Background of the study

An innovative guidance and counselling component was included in a compulsory core course in Professional Issues for School Teachers in an undergraduate English Language Studies and English Language Teaching double honours degree programme offered by the School of Education and Languages at the Open University of Hong Kong. It aimed to give learners a brief introduction of the theories and issues related to student guidance

and counselling, particularly in the Hong Kong context. The component has been introduced to four cohorts of students. Students enrolled in this course were pre-service student teachers in their final year of study.

2.2 Method

The present study was carried out in its latest presentation in the 2012/13 academic year. Thirty-one students participated in the study. All students were Chinese aged 21 – 25, with mean age being 22.8. In this sample, 64.5% of these students were females. These students completed a personal reflection activity at the beginning of the course. They were asked to indicate their views to three questions which asked about their training needs, impeding issues and facilitating personal strengths or resources in relation to performing their guidance and counselling role at school. Boyatzis' (1998) and Graneheim and Lundaman's (2004) procedures were followed in doing qualitative analysis of students' responses. The author and a second coder familiar with counselling theories and research analysis independently read through the data thoroughly. Then, each attempted to derive categories and possible sub-categories for the data, followed by discussion to decide on the categories and sub-categories and response examples for data analysis. Both observed the mutually agreed principles for coding and no student response would be double coded. Then the author and the second coder independently categorised students' responses and compared results. Afterwards, necessary coding adjustments were made. These steps were repeated till both agreed on the coding of the responses to ensure inter-rater reliability.

2.3 Results

The analysis yielded 10 categories for training needs, 7 categories for impeding issues, and 6 categories for personal strengths or resources which could facilitate their guidance and counselling work.

2.3.1 Training needs

All participants considered that there was a need for training. The number of training needs identified by each participant ranged from 1 to 9, with the mean number of training needs being 3.9. Twenty-seven students (87.1%) mentioned 1 to 5 training needs.

In terms of their perceived needs for training, participants saw the need for training in communication skills, counselling skills, skills in handling cases, interpersonal skills, knowledge related to guidance and counselling, and ways to deal with their own issues as most important (See Table 1). Here are some examples:

Communication skills:

"Communication skills with different students (different students with different background.)"
(Subject number 4)

Counselling skills

"Strategies for responding to students so as not to discourage them and stimulate students' emotion."
(Subject number 1)

Skills in handling cases

"To learn how to act professionally to deal with students' problems." (Subject number 9)

"How to deal with different kinds of problems, e.g. family, personal problems." (Subject number 20)

Interpersonal skills

"How to develop good relationship with students." (Subject number 20)

"Interpersonal skills" (Subject numbers 10, 15, 18, 28)

Table 1. Training needs

Rank	Area of training needs	Total no. of responses
1	Communication skills	23
2	Counselling skills (e.g. questioning skills)	17
3	Case studies/ skills in handling cases	13
3	Interpersonal skills	13
4	Knowledge related to guidance and counseling (e.g. therapy theories)	11
5	Ways to deal with own issues (e.g. time management, emotional intelligence, to be more objective)	9
6	Role of teacher	8
7	Knowledge about practical issues (e.g. school policy)	5
8	Collaboration skills (e.g. with stakeholders)	4
9	Others	5

2.3.2 Impeding issues

Twenty-nine participants (93.5%) cited 1 to 3 issues perceived to impede their guidance and counseling work at school. Among these issues, their personal qualities, prejudgment or bias against students, lack of experience, and workload and time pressures were the top concerns raised (see Table 2). The following are some examples of students' responses in these categories:

Personal qualities

"My being quiet might lead to weaknesses in self expression." (Subject number 10)

Prejudgment or bias against students

"Prejudgment or bias of some students – students from wealthy families may be spoiled." (Subject number 14)

Lack of experience

"Not experienced in providing guidance and couselling; not sure my suggestions are really good for the students." (Subject number 20)

Workload or time pressures

"Time is also a problem for me; too busy, not enough time to use." (Subject number 7)

"Heavy work load means no time to talk to students." (Subject number 8)

Table 2. Impeding issues

Rank	Area of impeding issues	Total no. of responses
1	Personal qualities	20
2	Prejudgment or bias against students	11
3	Lack of experience	8
4	Workload or time pressures	7
5	Lack of knowledge	5
6	School policies	3
7	Others	4

2.3.3 Facilitating personal strengths or resources

In terms of personal strengths or resources which students perceived that could facilitate their guidance and counseling, twenty-eight students (90.3%) could name 1 to 3 categories of such factors. Among these facilitating categories, work at school, students' personal qualities, social networks, their skills or abilities and working experience were most frequently mentioned (see Table 3). Some examples of their responses are listed below:

Personal qualities

"I'm patient and I'm a listener. I respect others' privacy." (Subject number 5)

"I'm myself an optimistic person and I hope I can guide my counselees to think more positively when I talk to them." (Subject number 11)

Social networks

"I have a broad social network, which makes it easier for me to get different resources of information from my friends." (Subject number 14)

Skills or abilities

"Skills: good communication skills enable me to talk to students easily and make them understand." (Subject number 13)

Working experience
 "I have a part-time job since I was 17. I've met many different people, and have learnt from their stories." (Subject number 20)

Table 3. Facilitating personal strengths or resources

Rank	Area of strengths or resources	Total no. of responses
1	Personal qualities	19
2	Social networks	14
3	Skills or abilities	12
4	Working experience	8
5	Knowledge	5
5	Others	5

3. Discussion and conclusion

3.1 Implications for training

Respondents were found to unanimously indicate a clear need for training. Their perceived training needs included not only knowledge and skills related to guidance and counseling, but also life skills. They demanded training in communication skills, interpersonal skills and ways to deal with their own issues. This information is important because if training programmes are to be a satisfying experience, the training contents should match trainees' needs. Day (2002) argued that teacher development programmes which do not match teachers' needs were unlikely to arouse their motivation. In Law's (2000) in-depth interviews with teachers about their views towards guidance training, five out of eight interviewees gave negative comments about the training courses offered by the government. They criticized the training as being too general, imparting only fundamental guidance knowledge and could not arouse their interest.

Besides training needs, results from the present study also found several areas and issues which participants considered could impede their guidance and counseling work. These should be taken into consideration in designing training programmes so that the effects of such barriers could be minimized. For example, training programmes can include experiential, reflective exercises and in-class discussions for trainees to examine and work on issues of personal qualities and prejudgment which they consider most hindering. These strategies have found some support in the literature. One such example can be seen in Heppner and O'Brien's (1994) work. In evaluating a multicultural counseling course, they found that an increased awareness and interpersonal exchanges in class were most helpful in facilitating change.

One should also note that respondents in the present study also identified several perceived personal strengths and resources. These should be taken into consideration when designing training programmes so as to motivate and engage participants in the training process.

3.2 Limitations

The present study has limitations. First, it is a small sample of pre-service undergraduates in a teacher education programme. Results obtained may not be generalized to other populations, such as in-service teachers or teachers in postgraduate teacher education programmes. As Fok, Chan, Sin, Ng and Yeung (2005) have suggested, teachers at different stages of professional development, or with different competencies might have

different training needs. Second, the study was qualitative in nature. Though every caution was used to ensure the reliability and accuracy in coding the data, the author recognizes the interpretive nature of all qualitative analyses.

3.3 Conclusion and recommendations

The present study has yielded useful information to enrich the literature on the guidance and counseling training needs for teachers. It sheds light on topics and issues to consider for designing teacher training or education programmes. Training approaches which are experiential, reflective and interactive are recommended to match teachers' training needs and enhance trainees' motivation and interest in training. More research using larger samples of teachers with different backgrounds to study teacher training needs in guidance and counseling are also recommended. Future research can also investigate training needs in terms of their different roles and experience in guidance and counselling service, and their level of competencies. Another line of research is to examine the effectiveness of various training programmes and their relationship with participants' training needs.

Acknowledgements

References

Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Day, C. (2002). The challenge to be the best: Reckless curiosity and mischievous motivation. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 8, 421 – 434.

Fok, S.C., Chan, K.W., Sin, K.F., Ng, A.H.S. & Yeung, A.S. (2005). In-service teacher training needs in Hong Kong. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education, Sydney, Australia.

Graneheim, U. H., & Lundman, B. (2004). Qualitative content analysis in nursing research: concepts, procedures and measures to achieve trustworthiness. *Nurse Education Today*, 24, 105 – 112.

Gysbers, N.C., & Henderson, P. (1994). *Developing and managing your school guidance program*. Alexandria, V. A.: American Counselling Association.

Heppner, M. J., & O'Brien, K.M. (1994). Multicultural counselor training: Students' perceptions of helpful and hindering events. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 34 (1), 4 – 18.

Hong Kong Education Commission (1990). *Education commission report no. 4*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government Printer.

Hong Kong Education Department (1986). Guidance work in secondary schools: A suggested guide for principals and teachers. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government Printer.

Hong Kong Education Department (1991). *Guidance - A resource book containing handy and easy-to-follow guidance materials and worksheets on basic guidance skills*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Education Department.

Hong Kong Education Department (1993). *Guidelines on whole school approach to guidance (for secondary schools), part 1*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Education Department.

Hong Kong Education Department (1995). *Guidelines on whole school approach to guidance (for secondary schools), part 2*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Education Department Services Division.

Hong Kong Education Department (1996). *A video tape on How Some Schools Organize Their Guidance Work*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Education Department

Hong Kong Education Department (2001). *Guidance work in secondary schools*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Education Department.

Hong Kong Education Department (2012). *Student guidance service: Implementation of Comprehensive Student Guidance Service*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Education Department.

Law, L.M.T.(2000). *Guidance training needs and support*. Unpublished master's thesis. Hong Kong: the University of Hong Kong.

McCarthy, J. (2001). The skills, training and qualification of guidance workers.
Retrieved from http://www.OECD.org on 3 February, 2013.

Patton,W., & Burton, T. (1997). Training needs of career guidance personnel in Australia and Hong Kong: A comparative study. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 19, 361 – 372.

Patton, W. (2000). Perceptions of training needs of career guidance personnel before and after a university program, *Journal of Career Development*, 26, 175 -190.

Yuen, M. (2002). Exploring Hong Kong Chinese guidance teachers' positive beliefs: A focus group study. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling,* 24, 169 – 182.