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CHARACTERISTICS OF TRAINEES PREPARING FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING WORK WITH DEAF PERSONS

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Studying the characteristics of trainees preparing for work with deaf persons, the effects of training upon them, and the correlates of success can lead to more effective selection and training of personnel (Levine, 1977; Milone et al, 1981).

A new focus in professional training for personnel working with deaf persons is the combined role of counselor with teacher as an independent living skills specialist. This training has been funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) since 1980 in the form of an experimental and innovative training grant to San Francisco State University. Most of the trainees are in the Special Education Department and the Rehabilitation Counselor Training Program. While all of the trainees have completed a bachelor's degree, a few are not yet enrolled in other professional training.

Studying this group of trainees provides an opportunity to compare persons from two fields, counseling and teaching, who are preparing for work with deaf adults who have minimal language skills and minimal independent living skills.

The demographic and psychological characteristics of counselors and psychological service providers and correlates with success in training and service provision have been the focus of a few researchers (Milone et al, 1981; Spragins et al, 1981). These data allow faculty to select students more appropriately and provide training that has the most positive relationship to future success. Milone et al (1981) found that among a group of counselor trainees, entry level males were higher than females on characteristics of tendermindedness, apprehension, and group dependence. They also found that hearing impaired students were higher than normally hearing students on humility, soberness, suspicion, and practicality. Spragins et al (1981) found that there were substantial differences between individuals working full-time with

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hearing impaired students and those working part-time or on a consulting basis with these students. Full-time workers had greater proficiency in sign language and were more likely to have had an educational focus on deafness; they were more involved in deafness-related community activities.

The current study was concerned with issues that had begun to be addressed by the aforementioned studies. However, the primary concern was the relationship between personality and demographic characteristics and the trainee's ability to function effectively with minimum language skill adults. The study asked the following questions: 1) are there relationships between effectiveness in communication and personality? 2) Are there differences that are related to the amount of experience or exposure to hearing impaired or deaf adults? 3) Are students who are in rehabilitation counseling training programs different from those in special education or non-matriculated areas with regard to their skills or personality characteristics? 4) Are there any major personality and demographic differences between the best students and the poorest students in a training program for counselor-teacher preparation? It appeared that answers to these questions would facilitate selection and training of effective practitioners.

SETTING

Trainees enroll for twelve units of credit in the Independent Living Skills Language Laboratory and receive a special university certificate upon completion. Students are oriented to the deaf population that has minimal language skills and minimal independent living skills. They are trained in areas of planning and communication and learn assessment, intervention, and evaluation skills for working with this population. Part of their training involves direct work with deaf adults, functioning as classroom aides

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in the field, and counseling and tutoring individual clients in the laboratory under the supervision of the primary laboratory instructor.

PARTICIPANTS

At the time of evaluation, there had been 39 students in the program, including summer students. The following report is based upon data gathered on 27 of these students. Students who were taking only one unit for inservice training were not included in the study. Only complete data were used in the analysis and some students did not complete all the forms, hence the number of students in the data analysis is less than the total number enrolled.

Of the twenty-seven students, six were male and twenty-one were female. The average age of the women was 30.7 and the average age for the men was 25.8 years. In part because of their age, the women had significantly more work experience than the men. Three women classified themselves as deaf; one classified herself as hard of hearing; one man classified himself as deaf; the rest of the students classified themselves as hearing. The men were much more willing to rate their sign skills as very good both in ASL and in Signed English. Interestingly, Corbett and Jensema (1981) found that males rate themselves as more proficient in expressive and receptive aspects of sign language and fingerspelling. Corbett and Jensema (1981) report that 13.5% of teachers of the hearing impaired had hearing impairments themselves which compares with 22.6% in this sample. Most of the students in this study learned their sign skills between the ages of 20 and 30 and most professed that their reasons for learning sign were to perform better in their ability to work with deaf clients. However, two women and two men said that they needed to learn sign skills in order to communicate with family members.

Eight respondents had deaf relatives. Of these two of five hearing impaired students had at least one hearing impaired relative and six of 20 normally hearing students had at least one hearing impaired relative. Quite clearly this data can be used to draw the same conclusions as Corbett and Jensema (1981); a significant percentage of students who enter programs to work with deaf clients have deaf relatives.

Ten of the students were rehabilitation counseling students, four were special education students, seven were special education graduates,

already teachers of the deaf, and the remainder were non-matriculated students with an assortment of training and experience which does not fit into the above categories. The rehabilitation counseling students were slightly younger than the others, but were considerably different from the others in terms of their work experience and the number of hours per week that they used sign language. The rehabilitation counseling students used sign language roughly half the time that the other students used it. Moreover, they had significantly less past work experience in general and less past work experience with the hearing impaired population.

MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENTS AND EVALUATION PROCEDURES

Three instruments were used to study and evaluate the students. Demographic data, including items relating to deafness and utilization of sign language, is gathered on a demographic data questionnaire form soon after the student begins the program. After students have been in the program for approximately four months during the regular academic year, or four weeks for summer session-only students, they take the *California Psychological Inventory* (Gough, 1954) and participate in videotaped role plays.

The role-plays were acted by the same person for any single group of students, but over the years there have been two different persons playing the role of the client and the referring counselor. The students were given written instructions five minutes prior to the videotape session. The instructions stated that "the task is to establish rapport with the client, make an initial evaluation of his language level, and communicate to him that you will travel-train him to come from his house to the Laboratory. You may use signs, gestures, pictures, and drawings to communicate with him." On the table are paper, felt tip pens and a box of vocabulary cards. A blackboard and chalk were also available. After seven minutes the scenario changed and the client became "Ted", the deaf rehabilitation counselor for the deaf (RCD). "Ted" communicated with signs without voice and asked questions about the client.

Initially, three raters evaluated the videotapes on a structured rating form called the *Videotape Interview Rating Sheet*. Two of these raters did not know the students. Because the

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inter-rater agreement was so high, the rater who knew the student was dropped and the other two raters continued.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlational analysis, and contrasts between means.

Relationship between personality and service effectiveness

It was initially hypothesized that flexibility would be very important for persons working with clients who had little formal language. It seemed to these investigators that the need to adapt to clients who used home signs and gestures called for a high degree of flexibility. Accordingly, the presence of the flexibility scale was an important factor in the selection of the *California Psychological Inventory* to assess personality characteristics. Contrasts were made between the most flexible and least flexible students in the program based upon their raw scores on the *California Psychological Inventory*. Generally, the most flexible students were not different in performance from the least flexible. However, the most flexible students were significantly more psychologically minded on the CPI, and they utilized sign language more frequently at home than the least flexible students. Those who were lower in flexibility were higher in dominance on the CPI. They were more overbearing and rigid.

Our hypothesis that there would be a significant correlation between high flexibility on the CPI and a high rating on the videotape, particularly in the area of flexibility, was not borne out. However, of all the CPI scales, the flexibility scale is considered the least reliable (Megargee, 1972). This may mean that the lack of significant findings in this area is at least partially a function of the scale.

OUTCOMES

As previously mentioned, there were several significant differences between the rehabilitation counseling students and non-rehabilitation counseling students. The rehabilitation counseling students spend nineteen hours a week using sign language as compared to thirty-six hours a week for the other students. The non-rehabilitation students were more experienced workers with 5,187 hours of total work experience

as compared with 1,554 for the rehabilitation students.

The non-rehabilitation students rated higher on rapport in the role-played vignettes and rated higher in changing styles to facilitate understanding. They were also rated higher on their description of clients' language levels and on their descriptions of their expectations of clients. They were more willing to work with clients and their total scores for communicating with the clients were higher. These findings are consistent with their having more past and current work experience with deaf persons.

The above differences seem to be an accurate reflection of the training levels of the two groups of students. Four of the non-rehabilitation students entered the Laboratory during the latter part of their training; seven were already teachers of the deaf. They were a small percentage of students in the Education of the Deaf part of the Special Education Department or were graduates who had sought out this program out of particular interest. The rehabilitation counseling students entered the program at the beginning of their training. Therefore, the Special Education students were more experienced in work in general and in working with deaf persons in particular. They had already made a major commitment to deafness work, whereas the rehabilitation counseling students, in some cases, had a primary commitment to rehabilitation counseling. Some of the rehabilitation students were more interested in counseling higher functioning deaf clients than the lower functioning clients who are the focus of the Language Laboratory's attention, but entered the Language Laboratory because they knew sign language and it was the department's only available special option in deafness.

HIGH SCORES VERSUS LOW SCORES

Contrasts were made between the students based upon their total scores on the interview rating sheets. The five students with the highest total scores were contrasted with the five students who had the lowest total scores. There were several interesting findings. First, the students with the highest scores were significantly different from those with the lowest scores in two personality scales on the CPI, the Self Acceptance and the Social Presence scales. Hence, they were more expressive and more satisfied

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with what they knew about themselves. Interestingly, in a correlational analysis, Social Presence on the CPI correlated significantly with all four components of the interview ratings: rapport, communication skill with the client, communication skill with the RCD, and the students' communication about the client with the RCD. Self Acceptance on the CPI correlated with two of the four components of the total interview rating scores: communication skill with the RCD and student's communication about the client.

However, in looking at the groups of students, the major difference was in the number of hours per week a student used sign skills. The low scoring students had a mean of 12.4 hours per week and the high scoring students had a mean of 35 hours per week.

The above findings have considerable implication for selection and training. They tell us that students with greater social presence and self acceptance are likely to be rated as more effective in their roles as counselor-teachers or independent living skills specialists for deaf persons.

CONCLUSIONS

In response to the initial question asked in this study the following conclusions are provided.

1. There does not seem to be any strong relationship between communication effectiveness and personality characteristics, although greater social presence and self acceptance characterize the most effective students.
2. Communication effectiveness is definitely related to the amount of previous experience students had in working with hearing impaired or deaf adults.
3. Rehabilitation Counseling students are not significantly different from those in Special Education or non-matriculated program with regard to their personality characteristics. Rehabilitation Counseling students had less previous experience than the others and their lower skill ratings are related to their more limited experience.
4. The best students had the greatest amount of previous experience. They were higher in social presence and self acceptance than the poorest students.

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