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## The role of the counselor in developmental education

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## The role of the counselor in developmental education

### Abstract

Developmental education, a specialty of postsecondary education, is designed to promote educational opportunity, develop academic skills and increase efficiency, according to Boylan (1983). Developmental education also includes training in basic decision making, training in personal responsibilities, and encourages growth in interpersonal activities (Clowes, 1980). Using this definition, there appear to be a broad spectrum of programs across the country offering opportunities for students which fit into a developmental education perspective (Robbins, 1983). Developmental education settings are located in post secondary schools such as community colleges and vocational-technical schools. Most of these current programs which began during the second half of the twentieth century adopt the "holistic" approach. This approach has evolved through a trial and error process since the earliest developmental education programs.

THE ROLE OF THE COUNSELOR IN  
DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION

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by  
Joan Louise Mattson

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Developmental education, a specialty of post-secondary education, is designed to promote educational opportunity, develop academic skills and increase efficiency, according to Boylan (1983). Developmental education also includes training in basic decision making, training in personal responsibilities, and encourages growth in interpersonal activities (Clowes, 1980). Using this definition, there appear to be a broad spectrum of programs across the country offering opportunities for students which fit into a developmental education perspective (Robbins, 1983). Developmental education settings are located in post secondary schools such as community colleges and vocational-technical schools. Most of these current programs which began during the second half of the twentieth century adopt the "holistic" approach. This approach has evolved through a trial and error process since the earliest developmental education programs.

The holistic approach to academics and to growth of the whole person had very rudimentary beginnings. These earliest programs were once known as remedial programs for students with academic deficiencies; namely, in the areas of reading and writing. The first post high school remediation course was offered in 1894

at Wellesley College (Roueche & Snow, 1977). Many institutions over the years have recognized that some students are underprepared learners (Brier, 1984; Cross, 1981; Griffin, 1981). These students may lack basic skills and experience low motivation, low self-esteem, and difficulty in getting along with others (Boylan, 1980).

Authors surveyed appeared to agree that the early programs contributed to confusion and uncertainty among students because of the stigma attached to high school classes labeled "special", as opposed to "regular", high school classes. To avoid the stigma of "remedial" labels, program names were changed, and were given such titles as basic skills, transition classes, alternative classes, and learning assistance centers (Brier, 1984; Clowes, 1980). The focus of the programs was also changed to include personal needs as well as academic needs.

Greater acceptance of programmatic changes in name and focus led to the current holistic approach (Roueche & Snow, 1977). This approach promotes attention to the many factors that affect students in addition to academics, such as personal needs, methods of learning, and relationships with others. It seems

probable that a crucial factor in the success of holistic programming is the roles staff members play in program implementation.

The purpose of this study is to review and analyze the literature regarding the role of the counselor in developmental education. The focus of the study will be to determine the role of the counselor in developmental education.

The study will help make available a more accurate and complete understanding of the current status of the counselor's role within developmental education. It will also provide background data for further research.

The literature was reviewed on the basis of the objectives of customary post-secondary educational programs as contrasted to the objectives of developmental education programs in post-secondary settings. Specific focus was upon the role of counselors in customary post-secondary education programs in comparison with the more specialized role of post-secondary education counselors in developmental education programs.

Post-secondary institutions, specifically community colleges and vocational schools, receive

students with a variety of skills and abilities (Ruppel, 1984). Many of these students have been successfully prepared for further education and could be called "prepared learners." He suggested such students will proceed in the educational continuum with earlier established goals, information, and motivation for higher education. They may need assistance from general post-secondary counselors in general guidance areas; for example, human relations, testing, careers, and relationships with instructors.

The general counselor's role in community college programs has broad scope, according to Matson (1983), and includes services ranging from human relations to testing to careers. She divided the community college counselor's role into operational, relationship, and traditional roles. The operational role refers to the affective areas, which includes these various tasks: as consultant to community college staff, assessing needs in order to design the educational experiences, encouraging the surroundings that will maximize learning, and encouraging human development. Matson stated that the counselor's relationship role emphasizes the linkage needed for students between the institutional staff, administrators, and the community.



The traditional role varies widely in community colleges and needs to be flexible to meet local needs. It refers to the testing, interpretation of tests, and scheduling, as well as to some career guidance. Students seen by the general counselor customarily only need limited assistance in one area, or in minor parts of various areas.

A review of roles of developmental education program counselors revealed that many of this groups' emphases included parts of the three roles noted by Matson (1983) for general post-secondary counselors (Moore, 1983; Roueche & Kirk, 1973; Roueche & Snow, 1977; Schinoff, 1983). In addition, developmental education counselors provided more extensive programming in personal strength building, stress and anxiety reduction, test taking and study skills, goal setting and decision making, testing and interpretation, career planning, time management, orientation to the college, and others. These writers believed that the developmental counselor could provide significant one-to-one relationships with students, and possessed personal dynamics to encourage students in intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships.

Students who come to an institution with limited personal goals, limited academic preparation, and low motivation need more comprehensive help and are not able to obtain sufficient guidance from the general counselor according to the writings of Brier (1984) and of Miles (1984). Often, such students are under-prepared learners who have been encouraged to obtain further education but are unaware of their own abilities and goals. Cross (1976) stated that they may be sensitive about their lack of secondary preparation. They may also have attitudinal blockages to the learning process itself and need a new perception of it.

These under-prepared students will probably attend community colleges as long as the "open door" policies exist (Cross, 1981; Miles, 1984; Moore, 1983). An "open door" policy admits any person who graduated from high school or who is at least 18 years of age and will benefit from instruction (Roueche, et al, 1976).

This "open door" policy, however, has created problems for post-secondary institutions. For example, institutions lacking provision for developmental education have found that some students start regular

programs, but then drop out due to personal, academic, or skill-related deficit areas (Ruppel, 1984).

Martin and Swindling (1984), and Ruppel (1984), believed that post-secondary schools concerned with student retention rates should further study the impact of the developmental education model on entrance to community colleges as well as on the maintenance of students in the regular curriculum. On the other hand, Boylan (1983) suggested that students with deficit areas who attended developmental education programs may actually have improved the retention rate of some post-secondary programs.

Developmental education has also been hailed as a new approach to an academic preparation gap (Brier, 1984), a phenomenon which may be created by the traditional high school preparation programs. The gap demonstrates an attitude that sees students as gatherers of knowledge without adequate consideration for them as persons who need to grow in methods of learning, and in their interactions with others. This latter more humanistic approach to education is still under consideration by many post-secondary administrators who have been asked to allow creation of developmental education programs (Ruppel, 1984).

Developmental education's more humanistic approach is being tried on a limited basis in order to sample suggested methods and ideas (Roueche & Snow, 1977). As a result, developmental programs are still in their infancy, and comprehensive developmental education programs in the community college setting have only recently started in some areas of the country (Roueche & Snow, 1977; Ruppel, 1984). Therefore, many programs have not operated long enough to determine their effectiveness. Additionally, administrators have not totally supported developmental education, and so a number of programs or partial programs are being operated on trial bases (Miles, 1984; Ruppel, 1984).

Lack of support for developmental education programs may be due to lack of written materials and/or studies of such programs to document their effectiveness (Miles, 1984). What materials there are on effective programs include courses that encompass academic and personal student needs.

Roueche and Snow (1977) suggested that a developmental program must be holistic in order to deal with the real student "problems." This suggests that students have both academic and personal problems that need attention from a counselor. In Roueche and Snow's

view, affective areas of decision making, values clarification, personal assessment, mid-life changes and career planning, while not academic, are gaps that need to be addressed by the counselor for the student who has no clear picture of where he/she is going.

"The ideal developmental program nurtures students, helps them to grow, enhances their self-esteem, and puts them on the road to success in the world"

(Roueche & Mink, 1980, p. 49).

The holistic model utilizes the multiple components of the developmental education team, closely linking the cognitive and affective domains (Robbins, 1983). In such an approach, students no longer isolated in an academic framework as in the past, when students with learning deficiencies were sent for remediation or corrective instruction (Ruppel, 1984). Rather than this treatment, the holistic approach to developmental learning promotes academics and growth of the whole person as an ongoing process.

Often termed competency-based instruction, under developmental learning programs students are required to demonstrate in the classroom the kinds of skills, knowledge, and other abilities they are likely to need

in later courses, or at a job following graduation (Roueche, et al, 1976). Not only are facts learned, but so are methods of learning and the process of interaction with others. In this way, students have the tools to become successful learners outside of the classroom, as well as inside the classroom.

Developmental education may involve a team approach in which the community college counselor works cooperatively with academic instructors to reinforce the value of humanism and the growth of an individual (Dassance & Tulloch, 1983; Ruppel, 1984). The team approach also suggests a utilization of all community college resources to implement the goals for developmental education students. This is a kind of meshing or networking of all levels of expertise to meet students' needs (Robbins, 1982; Ruppel, 1984). Dassance and Tulloch (1983) suggested that all levels working together places great emphasis on the team approach in creating synergism.

The community college counselor was included in some parts of developmental/remedial programs reviewed (Roueche & Kirk, 1973; Ruppel, 1984). In Catching Up, Roueche and Kirk (1973) highlighted five community

junior college programs. In two programs, counselors were integrally involved in developmental studies programs. Three programs described no regular counseling assignments. Based on that information, they posited that one of the seven components of a successful developmental studies program was that of counseling. In addition to competent teaching, "successful learning experiences for high risk students can best be facilitated by providing an equally competent counseling staff" (Roueche & Kirk, 1973, p. 5). Such a team of counselors/teachers reinforces the value of cooperation, emphasizes human interdependence, and attempts to emphasize the necessity for integration of multiple facets of human growth.

The counselor's instruction in human relations areas may include various theories and ideas about human interaction and growth. Two sources placed emphasis on a basis in reality therapy for direction of the human relations component of the developmental education process (Roueche & Kirk, 1973; Westley & Peters, 1984). Glasser's (1965) Reality Therapy, a model stressing awareness of self and responsibility for self, attempts to ascertain specific needs and

behavior necessary to fulfill such needs. Westley and Peters (1984) pointed out that the reality therapy model was part of the personal strength-building course taught by developmental education counselors. Roueche and Snow (1977) also suggested that reality therapy takes the student from where he/she is and accepts that fact before trying to move him/her along in the learning continuum.

Due to a lack of published data, this writer interviewed Dave Westley, developmental education program counselor at Hawkeye Institute of Technology, (HIT), Waterloo, Iowa. HIT is a post-secondary school. This writer also talked with the program coordinator, Regina Peters (1984) and attended an overview presentation of the developmental education program. HIT's program is a model of developmental education and the only one of its kind in the State of Iowa. The HIT administration created the program and continues to support it (Ruppel, 1984).

HIT's developmental education program utilizes the team approach emphasizing the holistic view of the person with its basis in reality therapy. Westley and Peters (1984) stated that the team approach is



essential in the program, which is a model of staff support and aid to one another. Ruppel (1984) also described significant interfacing between developmental education staff and the regular community college instructors in an effort to help students prepare for the regular training programs. According to Ruppel, developmental education staff have influenced the way teachers of the regular vocational technical programs instruct.

For the HIT developmental education program, preliminary findings have been positive in showing retention of students in regular programs (Ruppel, 1984). However, a comprehensive description of the Hawkeye Tech program is still needed.

Utilizing Glasser's (1965) Reality Therapy as the model at Hawkeye Institute of Technology, the counselor teaches 1) that students are responsible for their own behavior; 2) that behavior occurs to fulfill one's needs; and 3) how the student can better understand himself/herself. Westley and Peters (1984) stated that in order for the program to work, it is necessary to utilize a team approach. The counselor's teaching modules are coordinated with the academic developmental teachers to point out key concepts being emphasized, so

that the academic instructors might utilize them whenever possible in their classes.

#### CONCLUSION

The review of literature has made clear the critical lack of information concerning the role of the counselor in developmental education. This study has been severely limited by the small number of published studies of developmental programs and of developmental education counselors.

The small amount of available information regarding the role of developmental education counselors provide evidence that currently the role lacks a sound theoretical framework (Miles, 1984). The resulting condition is that counselors function in isolation from each other, with wide differences existing between programs at both the philosophical and the implementation levels. The counselor's role in developmental education programs can best be viewed as that of a caring, person-oriented facilitator whose attention is directed to the person as a whole.

Another conclusion is that the acceptance of non-traditional, under-prepared, and low-motivated students into post-secondary institutions is a fact of higher education. Developmental education programs

have been created to respond to these students' academic and affective needs. The developmental counselor's role in regard to students appears to include: a. instruction in personal strength building; b. instruction in test taking skills; c. instruction in study habits; and d. individual counseling in academics, career choices, and personal needs. In regard to the developmental education staff, the counselor's role includes: a. coordination of his/her counseling instruction with the academic components of the developmental education program, and b. coordination of the remediation program for students returning to developmental education from the regular vocational/technical programs.

A final conclusion is that further research is needed to evaluate successful developmental education programs. Research is also needed of the developmental education programs to clarify the role of the counselor within such programs.

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