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LE CONSEILLER  
ET L'ART DE  
COMMUNIQUER

THE COUNSELOR AS COMMUNICATOR

Que vaut la théorie  
dans les relations?  
Produit-elle des  
fruits?

For a very long time the counseling interview has been considered the heart of the counseling process. The interview is the vehicle used by the counselor to bring knowledge about the counselee into focus; to explore perceptions, feelings and attitudes; to gather information about the client's ability and personality characteristics; to observe the client's interactions with himself and the immediate environment. In the early literature on interviewing much was written about specific interview techniques and how these techniques were related to the theoretical training of the counselor. The interviewer was often encouraged to be directive or non-directive, Freudian or Adlerian, interpretive or didactic; each emphasis was contingent on the theoretical orientation of the training program. The interview was described as deep or shallow; as probing or clarifying. Counselors were told of the various types of relationships which would develop between themselves and their client and were coached on procedures for managing these relationships. Often they supposedly learned how to link such relationships to counseling outcomes. Heavy emphasis was placed on the content of the interview, that is on *what* was said during the interview and on techniques designed to influence and direct interview content.

Et l'expérience:  
variable de valeur?

In the 1950's various studies began to cast serious doubt upon the importance of a counselor's theoretical beliefs. Content studies proved to be somewhat disappointing. Uncertain results also followed from studies of counseling and psychotherapy outcomes as related to interviewer techniques. Investigations by Fiedler (1950a, 1950b) and Strupp (1955, 1960) led to the general conclusion that what happens in an interview is more a function of experience than of theoretical learnings on the part of the interviewer. Further doubt was cast on the particular value of any given school of therapy as a result of Eysenck's (1952) classic survey and conclusion that the data available at that time failed "to support the hypothesis that psychotherapy facilitates recovery from neurotic disorder (p. 324)."

One alternative to examining the content of the interview and the ideological preferences of the interviewer is to examine *how* the counsellor talks and to look at the effect his talking style has on the interviewee. This shifts the interview focus from content to form and permits a reconceptualization of the interview as a communication process. Thus the effectiveness of the counselor as a communicator assumes primary importance rather than his basic beliefs as a Rogerian, Adlerian, eclectic, and so on.

Support for this view has grown steadily in recent years. Tyler (1961) lists communication as the *basic* skill of the counselor. Schofield (1964) has written that sensitive communication skills are shared by all gifted counselors, psychotherapists, and other adept conversationalists regardless of ideological allegiance. According to Blocher (1966), "the interview must provide maximum communication between counselor and client . . . (p. 166)." Matarazzo (1965), together with colleagues, has carried out a program of research into contentless interview variables for more than a decade and contends that when attention is given to *how* people say things in an interview, "the interview, either alone or . . . in series, is amenable to fruitful investigative work (p. 210)."

At least five modes of communication have been identified as being relevant to human interaction: *speech*, communicating through patterns of learned vocal response; *tactile*, communicating through touch; *kinesic*, communicating through body movement; *proxemic*, communicating through use of space; and *paralinguistic*, communicating through non-linguistic aspects of speech such as voice quality, inflection, and pitch. Most interviewers are at least vaguely aware of these modes although little conscious attention is given to them in many interview settings. Touching behavior has strong emotional meaning but has not received much attention. Frank (1957) surveyed the literature and pointed up the importance of further study into touching. More recently, Jourard (1966) studied who touches whom and under what circumstances. Counselors have varied opinions on the propriety of touching although most engage in ritualistic handshaking. Touching exercises have been introduced into sensitivity training procedures but are probably not used widely at present.

The use of space to communicate (Hall, 1966) should be well-known to counselors. Considerable care is usually taken to arrange the furniture in an

Quelle importance  
attacher à la com-  
munication sensible?

La communication  
est tout un art!

Les moyens de  
communication.

Le touche est  
un moyen de  
communication.

L'espace fait  
son oeuvre.

office so as to achieve a spacing of client and counselor which is most comfortable to the counselor. Some people stand in order to "look down" on others. There is the curious convention that in some circumstances certain persons must stand while others sit. Counselors are at times admonished by their supervisors to "keep your distance." Such manoeuvres are designed to communicate superior status, protect dignity, and send other subtle messages. Some interesting experimental study has been made of the use of space. For example, Burns (1964) reports a study which shows that social separation between men in an office setting can be determined by observing certain key movements within an office space. Although many of the details are presently unknown, it is well established that people use space to communicate with one another.

La façon de  
s'exprimer.

Kinesic communication, or movement, has powerful meaning under some circumstances. Recent work by Eckman (1964) shows that both trained and untrained observers pick up valid cues through observing head and whole body movements of others. He concludes that both body position and facial expression "have specific communicative value related to the verbal behavior (p. 301)." Thompson and Meltzer (1964) found that subjects were able to effectively communicate emotional states through facial expression at a rate far above chance. Love, happiness, and fear were all communicated about seventy-five percent of the time. There are other important non-linguistic cues such as gaze, style of talking, and the various physical qualities of speech utterances. Gaze is used to signal intimacy, reproach, puzzlement, and other messages. Joos (1962) has distinguished four speaking styles: casual-personal, social-consultative, formal, and frozen. While this has not been studied to my knowledge, I would guess that counselors use the first two when they are attempting to establish and maintain communication and use the latter two when attempting to thwart or terminate communication.

Le hasard  
les relations  
à l'amiable  
la stricte politesse  
la rigidité.

Certainly the most extensively studied form of human communication is speech. Research has pretty well established that one person's speech style has a pronounced effect on another's speech productions. Matarazzo (1968) in summarizing a decade of research describes three important speech variables: duration of speech utterance, interruption of speech utterance, and reaction time latency. In an interview

when the counselor utterance frequency goes up, so does that of the client. As the counselor increases his interruptions of the client, the client output either stops or noticeably increases. The counselor can effectively reduce client talk by increasing the time lapse between the end of client response and the initiation of his own utterance. In the same vein, rapid speech apparently signals anxiety (Mahl and Schultze, 1964) and quite likely has an inhibiting effect upon client verbal output.

Other communicative signals which have well-known effects upon client talk are the verbal reinforcers such as "mm-mmm," "yes," and the non-verbal reinforcers such as head-nodding, smiling and encouraging hand gestures. These cues seem simple enough at first glance but often take on complicated secondary meanings. A good example of this was demonstrated by a female interviewer in a recent study which I conducted. The study was designed to show that the use of verbal reinforcers could be modified through a brief training procedure. In addition to speech analyses, the interviewers in the study also were being rated for warmth by the clients. The first three clients interviewed by the young woman in question all rated her quite "cold." We reviewed the audio tapes and discovered that she was using a double reinforcer, "mmm-hmm," mmm-hmm." Under examination this automatic response was interpreted by each client as "you are not listening to me," "you are just hurrying me through the interview." Interestingly enough, when this was brought to the trainee's attention she was able to eliminate the double reinforcers, which resulted in an increased rating of warmth by subsequent clients.

Another variable which has importance in facilitating communication in an interview is the questioning skill of the counselor. Questions have a gating effect on response alternatives. Specific questions focus attention on details and open-ended questions permit the respondent a wider range of communicative alternatives. This phenomenon has been investigated by Pope and Siegman (1965) who demonstrated that client output was governed by specificity of questioning. A more recent study (Peavy 1968) showed that questioning skill could be effectively modified in a brief, intensive training procedure and confirmed the finding that client output is strongly affected by question specificity.

In conclusion, I have briefly tried to show that in

La façon de s'exprimer incite le client à se confier.

"mmm-hmm  
mmm-hmm"  
le froid?

mm-mmm  
le chaud?

Question pour ouvrir ou fermer la barrier.

addition to viewing the counseling interview as a content transaction with emphasis on *what* is said, it is also possible to see the interview as a communication process. In this process *how* messages are communicated receives primary attention. Thus the counselor might well be encouraged to develop a natural counseling style (McGowan, 1962, p. 371). To become aware of one's impact as a communicator on others promotes changes in communication style. To improve and extend one's own sensitivities rather than adopting a technique derived from a particular therapeutic school may lead to better counseling outcomes.

Sommies-nous  
capables de  
comprendre  
le message?

Man, it has been said, is the only creature who can talk himself into trouble. As counselors, if we pay more attention to *how* things are said and open our own communication receivers to the silent languages of space, body movement and paralanguage we may greatly increase our capacity to "get the message."

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