EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD SCHOOL COUNSELING AND STUDENT PERSONNEL SERVICES: A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract — This study was designed to survey and compare attitudes and perceptions toward school counseling and student personnel programs as held by educators in the Caribbean. The subjects in the study comprised 275 teachers and administrators employed in public and private junior and senior high schools in Nassau, Bahamas. The statistical tests used to analyze the data were the Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance and the Friedman two-way analysis for repeated measures. The findings indicate that administrators at all levels expressed significantly more favorable attitudes and perceptions toward counseling and student personnel programs in the schools than teachers. Teachers in the study expressed the following: (a) serious concern regarding the competency of practicing counselors in their schools; (b) a need for clarification of their role and function in the guidance process and a clarification of the counselor's role; and (c) minimum acceptable standards should be established for school counseling positions.

Prior to the early 1970s, the American phenomenon of school personnel programs and counseling was virtually unknown in the public and private school systems in the Bahamas. During this period, the educational system in the Caribbean and in particular in the Bahamas was basically structured on the British system of education, which primarily focused on the academic needs of students but seriously neglected social, personal, career, and developmental concerns.

Shertzer and Jackson (1969) described the form of school personnel and counseling services provided for students in the traditional British schools:

Pastoral care (personal guidance) is provided by form masters. Often the school staff and students are allocated to one of four or six houses named after some celebrated local or national figure. This house-system is used to stimulate competition in the academic and athletic spheres. Heading each house is a senior member of the...
teaching staff, the house-master. He tends to be more of a disciplinarian than a counselor; nevertheless, he can be approached by a student, teacher, or a parent on any matter affecting a child's school work and his behavior. (p. 145).

The introduction of school counselors in Bahamian schools during the 1970s coincided with the overall changes that were being made in the educational system at that time. The restructuring of the school system included gradually phasing out the British-oriented grammar schools and replacing them with a comprehensive secondary school structure similar to the American system of education. With this change from emphasis on an academic (grammar school) curriculum to a technical or general (comprehensive school) concept, the need emerged for trained specialists within the schools to facilitate the academic as well as nonacademic needs of the school population.

Needless to say, the restructuring of the educational system brought about philosophical and theoretical differences among prominent Bahamian educators. Those who supported the changes in the system held the view that one of the basic purposes of Bahamian education should be to direct a 'cultural change' that would gain support and provide manpower for economic diversification. The advocates of educational change perceived the role of school counselors and the need for them in the schools as being extremely important in this new educational process. On the other hand, there were those educators who espoused the status-conflict theory of education, which provides an alternative explanation for the role of counselors in formal education. This theory originates with Weber's (1947) conflict theory of stratification. It advances the idea that schools are designed to preserve and strengthen the elite group's position in society. Educators with this view did not see the need for specialized personnel within the school system such as counselors. These two contrasting viewpoints of the purpose of Bahamian education held by Bahamian educators placed the role of the counselor and the importance of guidance services in Bahamian schools in a dilemma with regard to differing expectations, perceptions, and attitudes as held by administrators and teachers.

The need for an underlying theoretical structure in researching the role and function of the school counselor has been well documented in the counseling literature (Ivey and Robin, 1963; Bentley, 1965; Haettenschwiller, 1970; Shertzer and Stone, 1980). Ivey and Robin (1963) suggested that role theory and its accompanying conceptions, such as role conflict, are very important theoretical bases for the study of a counselor's role and function in the schools.

Most of the available research on the perceptions and attitudes of teachers and administrators toward the role of the school counselor has been con-