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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

PRE-ENTRY VOCATIONAL COUNSELLING FOR ADULT BASIC EDUCATION STUDENTS

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled

Pre-Entry Vocational Counselling for Adult Basic Education Students

submitted by John Robert Betton

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

Supervisor

Date 31 August 1978

DEDICATION

To Dianne - for the strength you have given me and all your love

ABSTRACT

An investigation of the benefits of pre-entry vocational counselling for students entering an Adult Basic Education (ABE) program was undertaken. A pool of subjects was drawn from a list of prospective ABE students at Alberta Vocational Centre, Edmonton (AVC). These students had no vocational goal and indicated a willingness to receive some vocational counselling. They were divided consecutively into two groups, one to receive extra counselling, the other to receive no additional counselling.

It was hypothesized that the counselled group would show greater gains academically, would drop out less frequently and would attend more regularly than the non-counselled group. In all cases the results showed no significant differences between the two groups.

These results were discussed considering the kind of counselling intervention attempted, the timing and comprehensiveness of that intervention and some problems presented by the clientele. Also discussed were the implications the results had for programs and agencies using similar vocational counselling approaches.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Adult Basic Education (ABE) is a relatively new phenomena. From among the various "wars on poverty" initiated in the 1960's, both in Canada and the United States, there developed increasing evidence that large numbers of adults were locked into the poverty cycle because of inadequate education. The evidence showed that in spite of universal, compulsory education a surprisingly large percentage of individuals over the age of 17 could read, write or do arithmetic at only a grade 8 level or less. In this age of advanced technology, where grade 10 skills are a minimum level for entry into the majority of trades, these individuals were distinctly handicapped. Moreover, these were not only the rural poor such as Canada's natives who may have had limited access to schools, but included significant numbers of individuals who had spent 8 to 12 years in urban, public schools. To function below a grade 8 level is to be functionally illiterate (Mezirow, Darkenwald and Knox 1975, p.2-3). To be so means frequently to be unemployed and often to be unemployable. These, then, are part of that group called the disadvantaged.

While recognizing the educational deficiencies, it was thought in many of the anti-poverty programs that these could be by-passed with direct application of specific occupational skills training. It was discovered, however, that the lack of basic academic skills interfered with the acquisition of occupational skills. Thus the programs turned increasingly to the teaching of basic reading, writing and arithmetic as an essential part of the attack on poverty. From these origins emerged the current ABE programs.

A "war on poverty" was a rather novel idea. Consequently, governments approached the issue on a tentative basis emphasizing the need for limited, short-term experimentation. In Canada the focus was placed on a program called Canada Newstart (D.R.E.E. 1973 a,b, 1974 a,b,c,d). This program was run in 6 hard-core, high unemployment areas of Canada, for periods of from 2 to 5 years, with a purpose to research and develop program and materials which would be effective in helping the disadvantaged. Other programs were of even shorter duration and were designed to deal only with a specific, local variant of the poverty problem. An example of this was Edmonton's Resource Mobilization for Employment Project, (Kupfer, 1970). The resulting conditions were varied; programs were housed in old warehouses, church basements or unused, old, city centre schools; funding and administration were frequently provided by non-educational agencies; follow-up information, particularly numerical data, was often inadequate or frequently failed totally to materialize.

In the last few years this scene has been changing. ABE programs appear to be becoming a permanent part of the educational system. In all provinces of Canada, technical schools, community colleges and public school systems are operating ABE programs. Financing for these programs comes in large part from the Federal government through Canada Manpower training programs. Since the Federal government is limited constitutionally to employment oriented programs the provinces must fill in the funding gaps, for instance where extended upgrading is required. Nevertheless, the programs remain occupationally oriented and, for the most part, are seen as preparatory courses for the vocational programs of the institution in which they are housed.

Alberta Vocational Centres

Among Canadian institutions providing ABE programs the Alberta Vocational Centres (AVC's), located in Edmonton, Calgary, Grouard, and Lac La Biche, appear to be different and, perhaps, unique. One difference is that each AVC has as the prime function of the whole institution the provision of educational service for disadvantaged adults. As such each is physically and administratively separate and independant from any other institution. According to an AVC Edmonton survey conducted in 1976 no Western Canadian province has a system of separate institutions serving only the disadvantaged. A limited sample of institutions in Ontario and the Maritimes suggests this to be true in those parts of the country also. Thus, programs for the disadvantaged, including ABE, BTSD (Basic Training for Skill Development - Manpower's title for ABE), and BJRT (Basic Job Readiness Training) are housed in and administered by such broadly based institutions as Red River Community College in Winnipeg, Wascana Institute in Regina and Vancouver Community College.

A second important difference occurs in the area of instructional emphasis. This difference occurs primarily at AVC's Edmonton and Calgary. ABE programs typically draw on three areas for instruction; upgrading of basic academic skills, training in specific occupational skills, and training in skills for living (human relations, self awareness, basic social functioning, etc.). Emphasis varies from program to program. Canada Newstart used all three but in different proportions in each of its centres. The AVC's in Grouard and Lac La Biche either use or have access to trades training programs to supplement upgrading. This also appears to be true in the community

colleges and technical institutes surveyed by AVC Edmonton in 1976. At the AVCs in Edmonton and Calgary the choice has been made to emphasize almost solely the academic upgrading aspect of ABE. Therefore, a student in upgrading at either of these AVCs faces somewhat of a traditional regimen of basic math, English and other necessary subjects. Such dependence on upgrading alone appears to be unique among Canadian ABE programs.

The Clientele

According to the Government of Alberta's Vocational Training Plan (AVT, 1976) a disadvantaged person is one who "does not have the normal prospect of becoming self-sufficient or of obtaining employment and who requires financial support during a period of academic upgrading or during a vocational training program" p.45. In any given year AVC (AVC will refer only to AVC Edmonton from this point on) enrolls about 1000 such people in academic upgrading with approximately one-half of these in ABE. Some recent statistics provide an overview of the clientele. At the time of application more than 75% of all applicants were unemployed (Romanko, 1975). About two-thirds of enrolled students were female, almost one-quarter of these single parents. About 20% had significant hearing or vision impairments previously undetected.

As well as these characteristics this group has many of the social-psychological characteristics traditionally ascribed to the poor (see Souch, Romaniuk and Field, 1969). They come from families that are unstable or broken, in which parenting has been inconsistent and authoritarian. They have experience with alcoholism, addictions and mental health problems. Among them there is a high incidence of poor

health, transitory living styles and frequent use of social agencies. Personally they lack self-esteem, have limited interpersonal skills and largely feel powerless in controlling their own lives. Their knowledge of the world of work is minimal, their failures there and in school are many. To say the least, they represent a challenge and yet, almost to a person, they arrive at AVC optimistically believing that more education will open the future to them.

Of the students enrolled in ABE at AVC almost half are sent (sponsored) by Canada Manpower. Manpower selects from among people who are looking for work, who have some work history and who have vocational goals requiring one year or less of upgrading and one year or less of actual skill training. Of the remaining students almost all are processed through AVC's intake counsellors. As prospective students they come because they have been refused sponsorship by Canada Manpower, from Social Assistance, off the street, at the urging of friends, out of prison, half-way houses, Life Skills programs and countless other avenues. If acceptable they are provided with sponsorship, including a living allowance, under the AVT plan.

Getting In

In order to gain admittance to AVC the prospective student must go through several steps. The first step is an interview with an intake counsellor. This interview is normally arranged by the individual wanting to enter AVC. Occasionally however, someone such as a social worker acting on behalf of the applicant arranges the interview. At this interview the application is taken. The applicant's work, personal and educational history are reviewed. Vocational goals are discussed, clarified if possible, alternatives posed, and time projections made. Finally eligibility is established.

Also in this interview, which normally lasts 30 to 60 minutes, other information about courses, finances, school regulations and so on are discussed. Those eligible are then given a date to appear for the second step.

Stage two involves AVC's placement tests which establish the individual's functioning level in English and math. These tests determine the level of upgrading at which the student will start. Next the prospective student is called in for what is termed a "final" interview with the registrar. The purpose of this interview is to take a financial declaration from the student and to determine his sponsorship and rate of assistance. Also at this time the results of the placement tests are reviewed and the vocational goal is checked to ensure correct course selection. In the final step the student is notified to appear for registration and the beginning of classes. Interestingly, of each 5 who begin this process only 1 arrives to sit in classes on the first day.

Gaining entry to AVC does not assure the student of success. Over the past few years drop-out rates for a given 5 month semester have ranged from 30 to 45% in the ABE program. Statistics from 1975 (Fahy, 1978) indicate over 90% of the ABE students remained 2 semesters (10 months) or less. Since the rate of gain is roughly one grade per semester and since a good many of the students were functioning below a grade 7 level to begin with, it is easy to assume a large number left AVC before reaching the minimal prerequisite (grade 9) for even the lower level trades courses. Given that this is a difficult population to deal with there are many questions that can be asked as to how to improve the process and how to increase the success rates.

The Question

Vocational counselling, as will be discussed, is held to be an important influence for many students. Students entering AVC are headed, presumably, in a direction leading to occupational training. Since they are making an investment in their own futures it would seem desirable that these students have made sound vocational choices or at least given some good thought to their choice. This, however, is not necessarily true. Certainly the soundness of decisions cannot be verified in as much as AVC is able to provide only 15 or 20 minutes of what can be called vocational counselling during the pre-entry period. It would be more consistant with the psychological and sociological characteristics of these students that they would not have given a great deal of thought to their decision; rather it would be a decision made out of failure, desperation, immediate economic necessity and dominated by hopes many of which have no basis in reality.

The question, then, that was asked in this study was what would be the benefit to entering AVC students if the amount of vocational counselling they received was increased?

CHAPTER II

Review of the Relevant Literature

ABE and the Disadvantaged

Since ABE is a relatively new area in education it is not surprising that the literature is limited. What does exist is dominated by curriculum concerns, demographic data, and prescriptive comments. Anderson and Niemi (1970), Brooke (1972), and Mezirow, Darkenwald and Knox (1975), representing the main collections of writings on ABE, exemplify this state of the literature. Research and outcome data are rare. Coolie Verner, writing in the foreword to Anderson and Niemi, comments on this shortcoming: "The most notable feature of the attached report is the scarcity of any fundamental research about the task of education adults" (p. ii). When one looks at the more restricted area of counselling the data is, if possible, even more scarce. Grabowski (1975), editor of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Education, claims that in the 10 years prior to his writing there had been "hardly any worthwhile documentation of a research nature about counselling adults in education" (p. 4).

Counselling in ABE

The small counselling literature is largely made up of prescriptive writing - what counsellors should do and how they should do it. Scraggs and Ulmer (1971), Kaple and Kaple (1972) and Jessee and Long (1973), are examples of this. All admonish programs to make greater and better use of counselling. These authors, and others, even provide some directions. Jessee and Long, for example, state that counsellors should be used in getting students "to set more realistic goals" (p. 30). Clague (1972) sees the need for counsellors to assist the student "in developing a learning plan for himself" (p. 27). This, however, is about as specific as any author has been.

Within the area of vocational counselling of ABE students, which is of main concern in this study, the treatment is much the same. There is, however, some disagreement in viewpoint. Clague points out that "an individual with a varied work pattern in semi-skilled jobs is rarely in a position to specify with any degree of certainty or even reality, a particular vocational goal" (p.27). Later Clague goes on to suggest that programs "should not force individuals to make premature vocational decisions" (p. 46). On the other hand counsellors should be used and have a contribution to make. Mezirow et al. (1975) claim not only that the use of counsellors to establish short term goals is important but also that "a vigorous program of vocational counselling and job placement will increase enrollments and reduce drop-out rates" (p.53).

Any claim that vocational counselling benefits disadvantaged students can only be supported by evidence drawn from multiple interventions. Salipente and Goodman (1976) report that counselling in combination with job training contributes to a higher rate of job retention among hard-core unemployed. The Edmonton Resource Mobilization Project (Kupfer, 1970) showed that a multi-faceted counselling, social-work and training intervention, with adults who were considered long term welfare cases, resulted in improvements in education (both upgrading and occupational training), employability and decreased dependence on social assistance. Grabowski (1975) finds similar evidence in a report of the Acadia Parish Pilot Study 1966-67: "Guidance and counselling assists the student; and there is more progress among counselled groups than the non-counselled groups in the area of educational, occupational and social categories." (p. 3)

Vocational Counselling: A Wider View

The main assumption in the literature is that students entering ABE programs will benefit from vocational counselling. The evidence to this point does not give direct support to such an assumption. In order to put this question into perspective then, it is necessary to turn to the wider vocational counselling literature and practice.

According to Ginzberg (1973), an assumption that underlies all vocational counselling, no matter the setting, is that the recipient will in some way, measurable or not, benefit from the intervention. The impact of this belief is apparent in a number of ways related to ABE programs. For instance AVT, the provincial Act governing ABE programs and funds in Alberta, states that one of the main purposes of the legislation is to "provide disadvantaged Albertans the opportunity to receive a high standard of vocational counselling and guidance" (AVT Regulations, 1976, p. 1). Agencies of the Alberta government referring students to AVC for upgrading provide them with some vocational counselling. These agencies include the Alberta Career Centres, Workers Compensation and, to some extent, Social Services. Students entering via Canada Manpower also receive varied amounts of vocational counselling. Among programs in the United States this also holds true. The Job Corps (1972) for instance, sees that "each corps member is helped to evaluate his aptitudes, experience and interests so as to develop a job objective" (p.42)

It can be seen that a great deal of activity has been generated as a result of the assumption that vocational counselling is beneficial However evidence supporting this contention remains inconclusive. Moreover the question of usefulness should be viewed with caution in

light of a point Ginzberg (1973) makes. He claims "there is little meaning to the question of whether guidance per se is effective or not" (p. 217). Ginzberg makes this statement after considering the multitude of factors that can affect one's career decision. However, after reviewing some of the main evaluative studies available, Ginzberg concludes, quoting another authority, Rothney, that what seems to be true is that "guidance is effective only with those who accept intervention" (p. 226). Breton (1972), in a study reviewing aspects of Canadian vocational guidance reaches conclusions that support Ginzberg's view.

Selection of Dependent Variables

The dependent variables selected as outcome measures for this study were achievement, attendance and drop-out rates. The reasons for choosing these variables lie within some of the earlier reported characteristics of AVC's ABE students; drop-out rates of 30 to 45%, multiple social and personal problems and minimal educational objectives not reached.

It can be argued that high drop-out rates and poor attendance are to be expected from this clientele and therefore need not be considered as significant or alterable. Brooke (1973) argues against this view claiming that high ABE drop-out rates are unwarranted and that measures should be taken to reduce these rates. According to Brooke students dropping out are worse off on a number of variables, especially in numbers of failures and proneness to failure, than students who complete programs. A recent survey of drop-outs at AVC (Oberle, 1978) indicates those students dropping out are also poor attenders. Thus, the two variables appear to be linked. Oberle's

study further links these two variables to vocational counselling. Results, although tentative, show 74% of completing students had retained their original goal choice while 64% of drop-outs had made goal changes at least once.

The use of achievement scores as the third variable is implicit in the reasons students have for enrolling in ABE; they must have more education, and this is measured in grades. An added factor for using such measures lies in the fact of many students dropping-out prematurely - before minimal academic goals are achieved. This emphasizes the need for interventions that will improve progress. Moreover, studies reported earlier, by Kupfer (1970) and Grabowski (1975) indicate gains attributable in part to counselling have been made by students in a number of areas, including academics.

Model

In the literature reviewed a range of suggestions have been made as to methods best suited for counselling ABE students. However, no specific model of vocational counselling has been advanced. Nor has it been intended in this study to be concerned with model building. Nevertheless there is value in looking at some possible directions.

The vocational counselling approach used in this study approximates the oldest model of vocational counselling - the trait and factor model. In this model the counsellor attempts to help the client match his abilities and interests to appropriate occupations and careers. In practice this sometimes tends to resemble what Crites (1974) much less charitably refers to as the "three interviews and a cloud of dust" technique. Crites is describing, in this phrase, a trend among some counsellors towards depersonalizing the vocational

counselling process by relying on testing and information giving rather than in-depth exploration of the clients needs, abilities and aspirations. Such a superficial approach has developed, at least in part, in response to the great demands on counsellors' time. The AVC intake counsellors verify this.

One direction away from this trend is towards a much more highly personalized or total person approach. Developments at the community college level which, with their open door admissions policies overlap somewhat with ABE programs, may provide a useful comparison. O'Banion (1972) promotes a model in which community college counsellors see students as whole people and not just those aspects of them as may be dictated by academic requirements. The counsellor, in such a model, becomes much more a part of the students development and education; not merely an advisor but a guider, not an agent of the institution and its rules and restraints but an agent, if necessary, of institutional change and adjustment to benefit the student. Such a model has far reaching implications.

The approach by Canada Newstart has established grounds for experimentation in ABE programs along lines suggested by O'Banion. The realization that disadvantaged adults were deficient in many ways other than education led Newstart to introduce Life Skills, Basic Job Readiness Training and training on the job, to supplement academic upgrading. The implication in Newstart's experiment is that perhaps there is a need, in dealing with disadvantaged adults, for vocational counsellors to move away from strict vocational counselling as it has been traditionally handled towards a wider range of involvement with students that may include such things as handling job interviews,

getting along on the job, use of leisure time, family relations, financial management and so on.

Summary and Hypothesis

In review then, the weight of the literature presented supports the assumption that counselling can be beneficial. In terms of the specific concern of vocational counselling with ABE students the writers tend also to support this assumption. In the end however, the evidence is inconclusive due to a lack of adequate data. It was intended, therefore, in this study to further test the assumption that vocational counselling is beneficial to ABE students.

Specifically, it was hypothesized that AVC students who received 3 to 5 hours of additional vocational counselling during the pre-entry period would show greater academic gains, would drop-out less frequently, and would attend classes more regularly than a group of similar students who did not receive the additional counselling.

CHAPTER III

Experimental Design and Methods

Subjects: Description and Selection

Subjects for the study were people who were applying to AVC for the first time and who had completed the final interview stage of the pre-entry procedure. Selection criteria used were: (a) that on their applications each prospective subject had indicated she/he had no vocational goal or was undecided about one; (b) that each had been placed in Basic Education English above the 0-3 level (roughly grade 4 to 9); and (c) that their reading scores were above grade 4 (reading scores varied, however, in part because of the use of different tests). Of 190 applicants 48 met these criteria but only 33 could be contacted. Final selection, which reduced the number of subjects to 26, will be discussed in the procedures section.

In the end 14 applicants were placed in the experimental group, which received the extra counselling. Twelve met the criteria for the non-counselled or control group. Of the 14 in the experimental group 4 were males, ranging in age from 17 to 21, and 10 were females, ages 17 to 41. The control group was made up of 6 males, ages 18 to 23 and 6 females, ages 17 to 37.

Because of the amount of time required for counselling the experimental group, it was decided to select for it first until it was completed and then to select for the control group. The researcher's goal was to have a minimum of 20 subjects in each group. The registrar's office began final interviews at the beginning of June 1976. Selection for the study followed immediately. Near the end of June over half (110) of the applicants had been screened and only 14 met the final

selection criteria. Thus, in order to preserve a pool from which to select the control group selection to the experimental group was stopped. During the first week of July 6 subjects were selected for the control group and during the first week of August (by which time virtually all final interviews were finished) 6 more were added.

Procedure: Experimental Group

After being identified as meeting the selection criteria subjects in the experimental group were then contacted by telephone by the researcher. The researcher identified himself by name and position (e.g., as a counsellor at AVC). The subject was then told that his application had been looked at and it was noted that he had indicated he had no vocational goal or was undecided about one. The researcher then stated that AVC was offering a short program of vocational counselling for such applicants prior to their entering school. This program would include aptitude testing and some discussion of the results and the applicants interests with the researcher. The subjects were then asked if they were interested in receiving this counselling. If the answer was yes a date for testing was given and the applicant became a subject in the experimental group. The students were given a brief description of the test, the time required for it and also the time involved in the counselling interviews. Finally any questions the subject had were answered.

Testing

To establish aptitude levels each experimental subject was given the General Aptitude Test Battery (GATB). In spite of the fact that a majority of the subjects had reading scores below grade 9 - the lower limit at which the GATB is normed - the GATB was used for two

reasons; to establish a minimal estimate of each subject's functioning level in the aptitude areas and, secondly, to gain access to the Canadian Classification and Dictionary of Occupations (CCDO). In short, the GATB was used only to facilitate discussion and not as a strict guide or limit to occupational choice.

Four GATB testing sessions were held, with groups varying in size from 2 to 5. At each session, in addition to following the GATB procedures, the subjects were given more specific information as to the vocational counselling they would receive. There would be 2 interviews, the first within a few days of the test (dates were given and appointments made) the second about one week after the first. At the first interview they would have a chance to discuss their interests, background, hopes etc. Then they would be presented with the test results in the form of some specific occupational choices. And finally these would be discussed with a purpose of establishing some choices for further, or deeper, exploration. The second interview would be less structured, aimed more at exploring the subjects' questions, concerns or ideas resulting from the first interview. Inevitably, the subjects had questions about what the test would measure, about how the results would affect their schooling and so on.

The first 8 participants in this group were given the Kuder Preference Record, intended as a source of additional information. These were to be completed at home and returned by mail. This was abandoned because 5 of the 8 returned were unusable due, at least in part, to the subjects inability to follow the directions.

Work-up

A work-up (or summary sheet) was developed for each subject based

on the GATB results. As the work-up was to be the basis for the vocational counselling discussions the selection of options was made as broad as possible. These options were at 2 levels of education attainment, grade 9-10 and partial to full high school completion. At each educational level a minimum of 5 different occupational areas were provided. These areas, as much as possible, were intended to include both manual and non-manual jobs (see Appendix A).

To obtain a workup-containing as many alternatives as possible it was necessary to "play a little loose" with some of the GATB cutting scores. In fact one subject scored below the minimum on all aptitudes. Taken literally this disqualified her from all occupations listed in CCDO. With this subject, as well as several others, it was necessary to look at strengths and to assume, particularly in those aptitudes closely related to school achievement, that gains would occur in the course of 1 or 2 semesters of upgrading. As a result it was possible to generate a work-up for each subject and to initiate discussions around these.

First Interview

In addition to the GATB results and work-up the counsellor entered the first interview with information about the subject obtained at the initial interview with an intake counsellor. Also available were the subjects' results in English and math from the placement tests. This information had already been looked at in preparing the work-up and would be useful in the first interview in terms of making time projections and looking realistically at some of the options.

The first 10 to 15 minutes of this interview were spent establishing a positive climate, obtaining background information from the

subject and in talking about his interests, hopes and aspirations. The counsellor also gave the subject the results of his placement tests describing to the subject where he would begin his upgrading and suggesting the length of time to get to particular grade levels. At this point the work-up was introduced. The subject was given a sheet which listed a number of occupations, the grade level required to enter training for each occupation, the length of training and where in Edmonton (or Alberta) this training could be taken. The list was then reviewed item by item with the counsellor describing occupations where necessary. The counsellor noted on a separate list those occupations which interested the subject. This list was used for more in-depth discussion including suggestions to the subject for obtaining more information (e.g. AVC's Library). A copy of this list was given to the subject, a date established for the follow up interview, questions answered, and the interview ended.

Second Interview

The second interview was intended to be an unstructured interview centering on the subjects' questions from, or reactions to, the first interview. Thus, these interviews ranged widely in format and content. Some subjects had actively taken the information provided in the first interview, had thought about it, had done some exploring and had more questions to be answered. Others were more passive, continuing to present themselves seemingly as wanting the counsellor to "tell them what to do". In these cases the counsellor would structure the interview around questions about the subjects reactions to the first interview and the alternatives it provided. Typically the subject would then reveal he had given little or no thought to it. This would then lead

into a brief exploration by the counsellor of some of the personal factors in the subject's life - past failures, lack of confidence, fears, indecision and so on. The counsellor would then attempt to bring this into a positive focus commenting on the subject's motivation in returning to school, the strengths that showed in the GATB results, and the options open to the subject.

In all cases these interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes. The subjects were then re-informed that this was the last interview but that if they wished to pursue the counselling any further other AVC counsellors would be available during the period before school started. They could also use AVC's library and of course after school started counselling would be available.

Control Group

The subjects for the control group were selected on the same criteria as the experimental group. As noted above they were selected after those for the experimental group, and thus their contacts with AVC occurred nearer to the beginning of the semester.

Treatment of this group was identical to that which the experimental group received up to the point of the phone conversation with the author. The conversation was handled in the same way with this exception. The subject was told that AVC was organizing a vocational counselling program for applicants without vocational goals to take place before the semester began. The subject was asked, "Are you willing to participate?" If the answer was yes, the subject was then told this was still in the planning stage and that if enough interest was shown it would take place. If it does "you will be contacted again before school starts." "If you do not hear from us but still want some

additional vocational counselling please feel free to make an appointment with one of the counsellors." The phone conversation was terminated at this point and the subject included in the control group. These subjects received no additional "special" attention except for the pre- and post-reading tests (to be discussed below). It was assumed they would receive treatment normal for all AVC Basic Education students.

Outcome Measures: Data Collection

In this study it was hypothesized that the experimental group would experience increased success as compared to the control group - success being measured in achievement, attendance and drop-out rates. The latter 2 measures were simple numerical comparisons; total days attended and total numbers of drop-outs.

Measuring achievement provided more difficulty. Because the Basic Education program has English as its major emphasis it was decided to use reading scores as the basis for achievement. This was to be done in terms of gains made in reading between the beginning and the end of the semester. During the period in which this study was taking place Basic Education English was in a transition state moving from the use of reading tests as purely diagnostic tools to use of them as measures of gain. As a result there was a confusion of tests (Nelson-Denny, CTBS, Schonell, etc.) and a confusion of scores, none representing a continuum of change. Thus, it was necessary in this study to use a totally separate instrument for the reading assessment. The reading and vocabulary scales of the Adult Basic Learning Exam (ABLE) were used. Level II (covering a grade range of 5 to 8) was chosen as most appropriate for this population. Form A was used as

the pre-test and was administered in the third week of September. Form B was used as the post-test and was administered in the third week of December.

The 2 groups along with a third group, which had been identified for a possible additional comparison in this study, were tested together. Testing was scheduled to coincide with English classes. Thus virtually all testing was done in one day with one morning group and one afternoon group. A third session was held for both pre- and post-test assessments to pick up absentees. As a cover story to avoid any subject identifying himself as receiving special treatment, subjects were told that the purpose of the testing was to help AVC rationalize its use of reading tests; that the tests presently in use had been created for children and AVC was now looking at tests intended for use with adults. They were told that they had been selected randomly to represent the various levels of Basic Education English. Also they were invited to visit the researcher to discuss the test results if they were interested.

The scores obtained from the ABLE, both pre- and post-test, provided another indication of the difficulty in dealing with disadvantaged adults. Grade scores ranged from 3.9 to 9.0. Unfortunately, over half of the subjects topped the test. More topped the reading comprehension than the vocabulary. Therefore only the vocabulary was retained as a measure of achievement.

CHAPTER IV

Results and Data Analysis

There were four dependent or outcome measures for this study. These measures were: number of students dropping out at two points; total days of attendance for all subjects completing the semester; and achievement scores - that is, net change in reading vocabulary between the beginning (pre-test) and the end (post-test) of the semester.

The first consideration is drop-outs. Table 1 contains a comparison of the number of subjects beginning the study and the number who reported for classes on the first day of the semester. Table 2 provides a comparison of subjects beginning the study and the numbers of subjects who completed the whole semester.

TABLE 1

DROP-OUTS FROM PRE-ENTRY PERIOD

	Subjects Who Began School	Subjects Who Failed to Report	N
Counselled	13	1	14
Not Counselled	8	4	12

$$\chi^2 = 1.42$$

$$df = 1$$

NOTE: χ^2 calculated in both Table 1 and 2 with Yates' correction for continuity (Ferguson, 1971)

TABLE 2

DROP-OUTS OVER WHOLE STUDY

	Subjects Who Completed Semester	Subjects Who Dropped-out	N
Counselled	9	5	14
Not Counselled	7	5	12

$$\chi^2 = .01$$

$$df = 1$$

The hypothesis predicted that the students not receiving counselling would drop-out at a greater rate than the counselled students. The data in Tables 1 and 2 are not significant. Thus, it must be concluded that the treatment was not effective.

The third outcome measure considered was attendance. This is reported in Table 3 in terms of the total days on which completing subjects attended classes.

TABLE 3

ATTENDANCE IN DAYS FOR STUDENTS COMPLETING SEMESTER

Counselled	Not Counselled.
89	90
96	90
77	98
88	72
94	86
83	98
99	81
95	
96	
N = 9 $\overline{X}$ = 90.78	N = 7 $\overline{X}$ = 87.86

t = .71

The value of t was not significant. Therefore it was concluded that there was no difference between the groups in attendance.

The final outcome measure considered was the net gain (change) in achievement as determined by the pre- and post-test reading scores. These results are presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4

ABLE GRADED VOCABULARY SCORES

OF STUDENTS COMPLETING SEMESTER

Counselled			Not Counselled		
Pre-test	Post-test	Change	Pre-test	Post-test	Change
5.9	5.7	-.2	9.0	9.0	0
9.0	9.0	0	3.9	6.4	2.5
5.0	6.0	1.0	9.0	9.0	0
6.6	7.0	.4	9.0	-	-
7.6	7.6	0	9.0	9.0	0
9.0	8.7	-.3	9.0	9.0	0
9.0	9.0	0	5.9	9.0	3.1
9.0	8.2	-.8	9.0	9.0	0

$N = 8$
$\overline{X} = .0.3$
$t = .77$

$N = 7$
$\overline{X} = .8$

Again the value of t was not significant. It was therefore concluded that there was no difference between the groups in achievement.

CHAPTER V

Discussion and Conclusions

Effectiveness

This study was based on the assumption that ABE students receiving vocational counselling would do better in their educational program than similar students who did not have such counselling. Specifically, it was hypothesized that students entering the ABE program at AVC, Edmonton, receiving counselling in the pre-entry period, would drop out less frequently, attend more regularly and make greater gains academically than similar non-counselled students. The results support none of these hypotheses. It must therefore be concluded that the counselling treatment, since it did not bring the desired results, was either ineffective or inappropriate.

As reported in Tables 1 and 2 for drop-outs and in Table 3 for attendance, there were no significant differences between the two groups. Dropping out, failure to attend, lateness - all appear to be a part of the life style typical to ABE students. Whether these traits are superficial symptoms of some greater problem or the problem itself is not known. What is expected however, and what has been supported by some of the literature, is that students who are succeeding attend regularly and do not drop out as frequently. It was assumed in this study that if a student could be provided with a better sense of vocational direction his chances of success would be increased. The results indicate this did not happen.

That these results did not occur does not necessarily disprove the assumption. The results show that for the particular kind of counselling intervention used, for the timing of that intervention

and for the clientele with whom it was used, the assumption was not true. In order for one to generalize these results to the broad range of vocational counselling with ABE clientele it will be necessary to experiment with other interventions, varying the intensity and comprehensiveness of the intervention as well as the timing. In view of the scarcity of ABE research such experimentation appears to be warranted.

The differences between the two groups in achievement, as recorded in Table 4, were also not significant. A special difficulty was encountered in this comparison in that the reading test (ABLE) used to measure achievement turned out to be at an inappropriate level of difficulty for most of the students. It was directed at a lower level of functioning than that of the students in this study and, as a result, was topped by a majority of the students on both the pre- and post-tests. Because of this failure the reading scores reported in Table 4 cannot be considered a true indication of the students' reading levels. Furthermore, it cannot be assumed no differences exist; the test may have hidden some differences.

At any rate, selection of tests to measure achievement for adults can be seen to present some special problems. Level II of ABLE was chosen because of the range of scores the students had earned on other reading tests - tests originally designed for children. That ABLE Level II was not appropriate points to the need for some trial testing. It also points to a need for tests that can encompass the scope and range of adults' highly varied reading experience and abilities. While AVC has moved to greater use of tests designed for adults, test development remains limited and, as a result, there continues

to be a high reliance on tests designed for children.

Implications for Counselling

The results of this study raise questions not only for AVC and similar ABE programs but also for referring agencies such as Canada Manpower. It is obvious that a great deal of money, in time and manpower, is being spent on counselling prospective and enrolled ABE students toward vocational decisions. Since the kind of vocational counselling used in this study is very similar to that used by AVC's intake counsellors as well as by referring agencies a reasonable basis for questioning how effective resources are being used has been provided. In view of the fact that this counselling treatment differed only in that it was increased in amount - and still produced no significant benefits - it appears current vocational counselling practices with ABE clientele are not making good use of the money being invested.

A second question raised by the results of this study has to do with the methods and techniques used. The kind of counselling intervention attempted followed a traditional information based format. It seems to have been ineffective. Given the multi-problem nature of the clientele and further given that the majority have dropped out from traditional school programs there is clearly a need to experiment with not only innovative counselling methods but also multiple interventions.

It cannot be concluded then that counselling is a waste and should be abandoned. The literature suggests that counselling can have a positive impact. What must be concluded then is that alternative and more potent counselling interventions need to be experimented with if the war on poverty is to be successful.

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APPENDIX A

Occupational work-up for Erna K.

CCDO Number	Occupation	Grade Prerequisite	Length of Training	Institution
	Grade 9 - 10 Level			
3135-110	Certified Nursing Aide	10	10 months	A.V.C
4135-	Various Clerical	10	7 months	A.V.C. Small Business Bookkeeping
4143-134	Key Punch Operator	10	6 months	Training-on-job
4173-122	Parcel Post Clerk	10	1-3 months	Post Office
6121-130	Short Order Cook	10	6-24 months	N.A.I.T.
6143-122	Electrologist	9-10	12 months	Cosmetology School of Canada
8541-150	Furniture Assembler	9	6-12 months	Training-on-job
8553-146	Seamstress-Womens Tailor	9-10	12 months	N.A.I.T.
	Grade 11 - 12 Level			
3139-	Day Care Worker	11-12	12-24 months	G.M.C.C.
3157-114	Dental Assistant	11	12 months	N.A.I.T.
4133-110	Bank Teller	12	12 months	N.A.I.T.
4135-110	General Insurance Clerk	11-12	12 months	Various Business Programs
4193-122	Travel Clerk	12	12-24 months	G.M.C.C.
6115-130	Correctional Officer	12	6 months	Correction Service
6120-	Supervisor-Dining Room Lounge,etc.	12	Usually by promotion	
6121-114	Master Chef	12	24-48 months	N.A.I.T.