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CHILDREN — THE LAST MINORITY GROUP*

ABSTRACT: During the past decade, guidance counselors at all educational levels have pledged themselves to providing assistance to a diverse number of minority groups, ranging from the disadvantaged to the status of women. What we have perhaps neglected in our zeal to assist the less fortunate are the large number of "normal" children who daily file through the classrooms of our nation. Lacking the eloquent spokesmen of other movements, children are still being treated in many public schools as they were during the Industrial Revolution. What is desperately needed in public education is the development of increased numbers of spokesmen who will speak for this last great minority group. Numbered among these spokesmen should be the school counselor.

The counselor can speak for and work toward the creation of schools where individual freedom and human dignity replace the shopworn curriculum as the key component of the educational process. In this context the counselor must become an active, doing individual who worries less about his personal "role" and more about how children develop into healthy adults. He sheds the mantle of the isolated clinician, is active in the classroom, and uses his counseling skills to focus on assets rather than inadequacies. He views parents as partners in the educational scene, rather than as misdirected adults who badly need therapy. He is and must be a strong political force, for it is only through enlightened legislation that the last minority group will be served.

NOTE: To preserve the flavor of Dr. Muro's presentation, we have not "edited out" his opening remarks. For the same reason we have not held to the usual style for citations. A selected list of references follows the article.

Good morning. I'd first like to state that I consider it a distinct pleasure and honor to be with you today in this most beautiful city. I discovered in going over my activities for the past eight years that I have now made 21 separate visits into Maritime Canada. I feel that I at least qualify for landed immigrant status! In fact, one of my proudest possessions is my honorary life-time membership in the New Brunswick Guidance Association. In addition to the professional visits, I'm always pleased to be able to come to your friendly cities

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and towns to chat with Canadian counselors and teachers. Since Watergate, I find it especially pleasurable to be here since I am now able for the first time to make a phone call from my room and not talk to whatever CIA agent happens to be "bugging" the line. Also since President Nixon has been so tough on amnesty, a trip to Canada gives me a superb chance to visit our American boys overseas. I read in the paper a few weeks ago that Premier Trudeau was concerned that there might be American spies in Canada. I have no reason to doubt him, but I assure you I am not numbered among these. I do, however, have several ancestors who were spies for both sides of my nationality background — the Polish and the Italians. This explains, in part, the tremendous successes enjoyed by the Polish and Italian armies.

I must confess that when Jerry invited me up here to meet with you that I struggled with this presentation. What could I add that in any way would be new and different for you with all your insights into schools and children. Should I attempt to be some sort of expert (one who blows in, blows off, and blows out) or just what direction should I take?

I decided after some soul searching to try and build a case for the counselor as spokesman for the last minority group — the children of this great nation. A few years ago, we as a profession promised that if only we had more money and if only the superintendent would hire us we could indeed make a frontal attack on the ills that plague education. We promised prevention, development, sweeping change, upgrading of teachers, and cures for everything from drug addiction to the heartbreak of psoriasis. In our zeal to be the vanguards of the educational reform movement, we first sought out the gifted, for God forbid that the Russians beat us to the moon. Next we turned our attention to the disadvantaged and acted as if the various minorities — the blacks, the Indians, the Chicanos, and the poor — had only recently become part of our lives. Most recently, we have come full circle and elevated the ghost of Parsons so that career education is the chief grist for the counselor's mill. All of these are noble and worthwhile ventures in that they called to our attention the fact that alienation, poor self-esteem, and lack of trust were human characteristics that we had somehow neglected. The fact remains, however, that all of the descriptive terms and labels so frequently utilized to describe the minorities are equally appropriate as descriptions of large numbers of children who daily board the buses from Florida to the Yukon and from Vancouver to New York. Unfortunately, though each of these children has been sentenced to from 12 to 16 years of the second class citizenship called public education, they have not enjoyed the benefits of a Martin Luther King to present their plight to the public. To be certain, John Holt and others have called our attention to this last of the great minority groups, but since five-year-olds and teen-agers make poor marchers and placard holders, the school has remained essentially the same as it was during the industrial revolution. Oh, we feed them better, beat them less, but the beatings in some cases have merely been replaced

with more sophisticated psychological controls to insure that each child fits the system. A year or so ago I heard Ralph Nader advance the concept of the full-time citizen or the individual who would blow the whistle on those who develop unsafe automobiles or pollute our streams. I would ask of you today that we in guidance assume a greater role of full-time citizenship on behalf of those we are pledged to serve. I would hope that in the next 50 years those of us who call ourselves counselors, educators, or therapists become in our own unique ways the Martin Luther Kings for the oppressed minority, the children in our schools. With your permission, I'd like to discuss several matters that deserve attention.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

My primary interest lies in the process of guidance and counseling in the elementary school. I do not advocate the demise of all secondary counselors since we so desperately need help with youth of all ages. On the contrary, if anything, we need to increase our numbers to the extent that every child who wants or needs a counselor has the opportunity to work with one. I cannot hide, however, the firm and ever-growing conviction that many of the nagging persistent problems of adolescence and many of the crowded, understaffed mental institutions would be better met if we as a group sponsored, encouraged, defended, and fought for more and better help for younger children. I totally reject Ginzberg's recent contention that the counselor's job is mainly that of helping individuals find the "right job." I further reject his views that guidance in the elementary school is a misdirected effort. I would suggest in turn to Dr. Ginzberg that perhaps we as counselors should be aware that vocational guidance, valuable as it may be, is at least in part an attempt to fit children into a society already overburdened by a technology that demands we sort out people and make them fit into dull stereotyped molds. As Arbuckle notes, those individuals who so eloquently maintain that there is dignity in collecting garbage probably wouldn't be caught dead doing that kind of work.

It seems that in today's world the schools more and more function as the primary selection of the winners and losers in our society. Though we give lip service to the concept that education is a process with high and noble purposes, we perpetuate those activities that force children to fit the existing system. As Illich notes, we do not say much about it, but we practice the hidden curriculum in which we impress upon every student the idea that unless he puts in the hours at a recognized institution under the supervision of a teacher with the correct credentials, he cannot gain an education. We have forgotten that much of what we learn is gathered outside of school. As John Holt reminds us, schools go bad because in a large sense they have very little to do with education. For one thing they are given political purposes. They are supposed to produce good citizens. They also exercise a police function since staying out of school is against the law. Perhaps we need separation of school and state as

much as we need the separation of church and state. We in guidance need to guard against moving post-haste into those areas and activities that are predetermined for us by some large federal funding agency or book company that decides in complete absentia that this and that is good for children. If we have lost ground recently, if our numbers have diminished a little, we can blame ourselves for marching to the sound of first this drummer and then that. Like the classic story of Phillip Nolan, the man without a country, we have operated in the larger worlds of education and psychology without a firm philosophical base. As a result, those unenlightened administrators find it particularly easy to dispense with the "frill" of a counselor. Of course, while we cut the "frills," some 18,000 children are shuffling or racing through the wards and corridors of public mental health hospitals. As we put men on the moon, we are still putting children in snake pits.

The counselor then is the only school person who knows, as Tolstoy suggested, that the role of education is equality — that a good teacher makes the student equal to himself and, therefore, free of him. The counselor must be the man who serves as a constant reminder to teachers that the inner world of the child is equally as important as the imports and exports of Peru or the number of cars that General Motors produces. He is the resident expert in affective education or the educator of the feelings and emotions; he strives to make the elementary school situation less abstract and deductive and more experimental and inductive. Learning to him is an organismic experience rather than a cerebral exercise. He knows that children are fundamentally social beings whose humanity needs to be nurtured and enhanced and that we provide them with very little help with impersonal, computer type learning.

In this context, the counselor is an active, becoming individual. He sheds the mantle of the isolated clinician in that his office is the playground, gym, corridors, and, if need be, the lavatories. He is the coordinator and initiator of that which is new in education in the sense that new things serve to personalize and humanize the process. At times he may be, as Glines has suggested, a vice-president for heresy in that he studies and questions the assumption that we continue to do things in school simply because they have always been done that way. He could, for example, point out to worried school boards and principals J. B. Priestly's suggestion that it isn't the boys who grow long hair, beards, and loaf around picking guitars that we should worry about, but the ones who wear crew cuts, get high marks, never give their parents any trouble, and major in bacteriological warfare when they get to graduate school. Life is really learning, but learning dies when it is constrained in a certain place, provided only for a certain group, conveyed only through certain people and media, confined to outmoded categories of thought, chopped up in courses, periods, units, lessons, and lectures measured by individuals and credentials. It is to this end that the counselor is dedicated; it is to this objective that he becomes the most eloquent spokesman possible for the last minority group.

If one can accept this view of education, then it sets the tone for the newest of our pupil-personnel children, that of elementary-school guidance. The counselor among others is charged with creating better worlds for children, and this lofty goal must be translated into specific kinds of acts and behaviors that through time, via process, will help us move toward our objectives. There are many avenues I could explore, but I'd like to address myself to a few of the crucial things I see necessary for the modern counselor.

1. *The Book Burning*: For over 15 years we have been engaged in an endless and useless debate about the role and function of the counselor. We have become so narrow, so specialized, that we can no longer function in a way that really helps children. If we could place all the hot air that was generated by this debate, we would not have an energy crisis in North America for another 15 years. We have carefully stated what we can and can't do, but if we're honest we know that guidance at all levels, though it had some roots in self-theory, humanism, career education, and other areas, has no unified, coherent, theoretical guidelines of its own. We have grown to a large extent because our existence has been contingent upon filling the voids and gaps in schools that no one else seemed to be meeting. Instead of denying this, let's use it to our advantage. With all due respect to the book writers and speech makers, we should no longer insist on a role. Rather we should ask — "Where do we best fit? How do we best serve the needs of that minority group so that we become at least as essential as the little boy's room or the hot-lunch program." Let us renew our efforts to meet children's needs when and where they occur. Let's look at our university preparation programs and urge that they provide competencies, not courses; that they stress humanism, not academic abstractions. I suspect many counselors go through graduate school, but far too little of graduate school goes through them. Let's define our role from where the kids are now and worry later about whether or not it fits someone's predetermined mode of where we should be.

2. *From Exodus to Immigration*. Secondly, in line with this thinking, we need desperately to return to the mainstream of the educational process, the classroom itself. While we may always need our private offices, the real world of the elementary and secondary school child is in the classroom, in the gym, and on the playground. We need to find new and better ways to use our skills, our knowledge, and to demonstrate what we know to teachers and children *before* they become hollow shells of people who can't function without uppers, downers, or booze. We've too long been like the father who, in an interview in 1968, told the United Press that he couldn't understand his son's behavior. "I told him and told him, and I always whipped him when he did wrong." And the boy in the death cell couldn't understand his behavior either. We cannot afford to retain our Dear Abby stance, casting pearls of psychological wisdom to less learned colleagues. We must put ourselves on the line by demonstrating, acting, even at the risk of failing miserably. With teachers we must

come on as less of an expert, less all powerful, and more as a co-professional who in no way replaces a teacher, but rather adds a new dimension to the class. We need to capitalize on some new and exciting classroom approaches to guidance to include Glasserian Classroom Meetings, DUSO, Making It Strange, the Self-Enhancing Education Program of Randolph and Howe, the Moods and Emotions Series, and the Dimensions of Personality Series. All of these are designed to bring affect to life, to make it an integral part of public education. These and other programs, however, cannot be used in sterile isolation. They are only successful when we join efforts with those teachers and administrators who are as upset as we are with the status quo. In addition, we need to develop new and innovative approaches to the intervention into the *high-school classes*. We must do all that we can to help the child in the context of the total school. Working with him in morbid, problem-centered isolation should be our last resort.

3. *Counseling as a Positive Force*: For years we have lived, nurtured, and borrowed from our sister discipline of psychology with its morbid, problem-centered view of children. We know so much about pathology and the "sick" that volumes are filled with oral weaknesses, anal weaknesses, neuroses, psychosis, and nausea. What we don't seem to know or can find little written on is the normal child. One is almost forced to infer normality from the descriptions of abnormality, and while all psychology departments have an abnormal psychology course, few list a course in "normal" psychology.

Since the vast majority of those with whom we work are normal, are capable of succeeding in schools, and will not end up in some state hospital, let's get back to the business of school counseling. Let's shift our emphasis from one wherein we approach the child as a problem to one that expands his world, opens him up, and moves him along an inch or two at a time toward eventual adulthood. Counseling children must be a supportive, largely ego-enhancing process, wherein any and all matters of a child's world make appropriate grist for the counseling mill. We need to help children make plans and focus on what they do well. No child wants to be considered a problem and no child should be labeled as one. I would also urge you to consider Jay Haley's reflection on counseling children wherein he stated:

Be passive
 Be reflective
 Be silent
 Beware

Childhood is an active time in which doing is more important than long critical sessions of self-analysis. Counseling children is a spiral that has many twists and turns. Your help with John's concern today may well mean he'll return on the morrow. We must remember

that life itself is process, and children in elementary schools and even in high schools are at the very inception of this process. The members of the last minority group don't need a discussion of their inadequacies nearly as much as they need a little help in breaking out!

4. *The Demise of the Isolated Clinician*: Related to the concept of positive counseling is the notion that the counselor ought to be at least as visible to the children as the teachers, janitors, and little boy's room. It's difficult for most of us to give up the security and womb-like privacy of the secluded office. As Glasser notes, the neurotic likes to discuss his symptoms and depressions, after all he worked hard to get crazy, and he's not about to give it up too quickly. We, too, worked hard for those offices and our phones, and we're not about to give them up. Yet if we so desire, children will flock to us in droves if we behave in ways that show the openness and mutual acceptance we profess so eloquently. What about the possibility of a desk in the hall, or jumping a little rope, or playing a little kickball on the playground? If the children know we're more than crossed voo-doo masks and the benevolent brothers of the Binet-WISC, they'll learn to use us in ways that promote growth rather than retard it. I'm worried that as we become more sophisticated, more knowledgeable, and more abstract, we'll lose the essence and spirit of childhood. Childhood is fantasy and play and joy and tears. Childhood is a peanut butter sandwich and a lost mitten. Childhood is very much now and not next week or even tomorrow. The counselor, therefore, must be a "now" individual. He must circulate with the children in the rapidly shifting kaleidoscope of events that make up the day-to-day activities of a human, "no neck" ball of energy. Perhaps the best and most effective counselors are those who themselves have never completely escaped the world of childhood. We still need to be able to marvel at Pinocchio and Gippetto, at Scooby-Doo and Winnie the Pooh. I advocate, not a complete return to fantasy life, but that a few patches on the knees of the double knits and a lollipop stuffed in the back pocket wouldn't be bad trademarks of our profession.

5. *Parental Partners*: As I review the guidance literature in the course of my work, I am amazed to discover the number of references that are entitled "How to Work with Parents," "Group Counseling with Parents," and "Modifying Parental Attitudes." I feel certain that the neophyte counselor who enters the university and reads this material must feel the Bonnies and Clydes of the guidance world must be teachers and parents. I submit to you today that we have not been nearly as effective as we could and should be in using parents in ways that will benefit and not hinder the last minority group. Instead of developing strategies to consult parents, counsel them, behavior mod them, de-vermin them or what have you, I suggest that we welcome them as counselors. In the past we have conceptualized the parent as essentially negative, and we work with them mostly when the child is in trouble. While this in fact may be necessary at times, I propose that we rethink our roles to include large numbers of parents as counselors. The work of Carkhuff, Truax,

and others points out that a lay person *can be* and *is* an effective counselor, and if we need to educate parents, why not use the skills and knowledge each of us has to extend the arm of guidance to greater numbers of children who would not otherwise receive the benefits of a helping relationship. In addition, the phenomenon of the helper being helped, as with some of our older volunteers, is not a casual benefit. Do we want support for guidance; are we willing to get rid of the Jehovah complex and admit that counseling is a social and not a medical or even intellectual function? No matter how many of us leave the universities with zeal and vigor, we shall never be able to meet the needs of all that want and need help. Medicare, psychology, and even dentistry have lowered the rigid barriers that kept one human being from helping another. I would submit that it is now past time for us to get started.

6. *The Move to Group*: As you know, the past five years has seen a remarkable increase in discussions related to the use of groups in school counseling. Much of what has been written makes good sense — a lot more of it is more appropriately labeled nonsense. As the group has potential for great good, it also has the unbridled potential for great harm. The metropolitan area from Washington, D.C., to Boston is replete with individuals who are long on enthusiasm, short on expertise, and committed to creating volatile, hurtful situations that may be appropriate on the back wards or in the outpatient clinics but has little or no place in public-school settings.

With that caution in mind, the use of group work can be an excellent counselor's tool for promoting normal growth. In spite of individualization, the group is still a way of life for most elementary school children. They eat, play, and learn in groups, and, moreover, our research in Maine has proved that the number-one cause for our self-referrals is the desire to make more friends or the inability to get along with peers. The emphasis, as in individual counseling, however, must be on strengths, potentials, and problem solving, rather than on hard-core encounter. Groups must be carefully balanced to insure benefit for each child, and to this end simulation and structured activities have proved most beneficial. The fact that we can see more children in groups pleases the administrators, but the impact of group work and its potential go far beyond the concept of economy.

7. *New Gladiators in the Political Arena*: Distasteful as it may seem to some, the time has come to let those who control the destinies of the last minority group become aware of who we are and what we are about. During the 1960's, we enjoyed rather rapid expansion because we were new and our freshness was appealing to harrassed administrators. Now that the bloom of the honeymoon has faded, we are being asked with increasing frequency to "show that guidance works." While I resent the notion that we must prove our worth when some of the practices of school administration are taken for granted, a defensive posture will do us little good.

We must, as have other professions, take our message to those who make the laws and provide the funds that allow us to do the work so vital to the future of our countries. We must band together, we must form large and active task forces, and we must become eloquent spokesman for the needs of youngsters. While there are many good reasons for guidance, our essence must be prevention and development rather than remediation and cure. We must show, for example, that it would be possible to hire two counselors for a full year for what it costs to put one child in a reform school for nine to twelve months. We must reach out to the mental-health associations, psychiatrists, doctors, and all others who know that we must work with the young if we are to have a society where violence, hatred, prejudice, and war are of interest for historical reasons instead of tomorrow's headlines. If we die as a profession, it will be a slow strangulation caused by our own hesitancy. This cannot and should not happen. Quality in any walk of life always had and always will attract a following. In spite of our weaknesses, guidance is a quality idea. We need to go on and get better. The last minority group needs us.

I'd like to close with this note. A message from a child:

Can you look me in the eye and
say I care —
Can you honestly perceive the
way I feel.

Can you with all your knowledge
now decide —
What secret old frustrations
that I hide.

Can you look me in the eye and
say I know
For I have been that way before.

Or do you sit in judgment
just because
You have a fancy title on your
door!!!

RESUME: Durant la dernière décade, les conseillers à tous les niveaux éducatifs se sont engagés à procurer de l'aide à divers groupes minoritaires, qu'il s'agisse des groupes désavantagés ou de la femme souffrant d'inégalités sociales. Ceux que nous avons peut-être négligés dans notre zèle à aider les moins fortunés sont les nombreux enfants "normaux" qui fréquentent quotidiennement les classes de la nation. Ne disposant pas des porte-parole éloquentes des autres groupes, les enfants sont encore

traités dans plusieurs écoles publiques comme ils l'étaient au moment de la révolution industrielle. Ce dont on a grandement besoin dans le secteur de l'instruction publique est l'accroissement du nombre de ceux qui pourraient représenter cet important groupe minoritaire. On devrait compter les conseillers scolaires parmi ces porte-parole.

Le conseiller peut parler en faveur et travailler à la création d'écoles où la liberté individuelle et la dignité humaine remplaceraient des programmes scolaires désuets en tant qu'ingrédients principaux du processus éducatif. Dans ce contexte, le conseiller scolaire doit devenir un individu actif et engagé se préoccupant moins de son "rôle" personnel que de l'épanouissement de l'enfant. Il se dépouille de son armure de clinicien isolé, il est actif dans la classe et il utilise ses habiletés de conseiller pour favoriser le développement plutôt que d'identifier les inadéquacités. Il considère les parents comme des partenaires de la scène éducative, plutôt que comme des adultes mal orientés qui ont gravement besoin de thérapie. Il est et doit constitué une force politique importante, car c'est seulement au moyen de législations éclairées qu'on répondra aux besoins du dernier groupe minoritaire.

SELF-AWARENESS GAMES AND APPROACHES

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