COUNSELLING IN ENGLAND TODAY

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Abstract

This article is the result of interviews with school counsellors, teachers and teachers of counsellors, as well as a review of British literature on school counselling which the author did while spending a sabbatical year in Great Britain, centered in Oxford. It has the benefits and deficits of being written "on the scene" — some familiarity with the situation but perhaps a narrowness of view from the sample one happens to take.

It surveys the present status of school counselling in Great Britain, particularly the training of counsellors and finds that the British see themselves as "behind the Americans" since much of the expertise and experience comes from North America and in many ways some of the school problems that helped create the North American system of counselling are only beginning to penetrate Great Britain. Solutions for the future look rather gloomy because, despite an increase in interest in school counsellors, there are internal problems to be overcome before counselling can flourish in the schools — not the least of which are basic conservativism and economic difficulty facing the whole country.

Résumé

Cet article provient d'interviews avec des conseillers scolaires, des professeurs et des personnes responsables pour la formation de conseillers en Grande Bretagne. Il présente également un sommaire des publications sur la consultation scolaire dans ce pays, sommaire complété pendant un stage d'étude que l'auteur vient de terminer à Oxford. Il comporte donc les bienfaits et les désavantages d'être rédigé sur place — une certaine familiarité avec la situation mais peut-être une étroitesse dûe au petit échantillon utilisé.

Cet article passe en revue l'état actuel de la consultation scolaire en Grande Bretagne, et plus particulièrement, la formation des conseillers. Il semble que les Anglais croient être en retard des Américains vu qu'une bonne partie des connaissances et des expériences proviennent de l'Amérique de Nord. Egalement, plusieurs des problèmes qui ont contribué à l'établissement du système de consultation sur ce continent commencent seulement à surgir maintenant en Grande Bretagne. Des solutions pour l'avenir s'avèrent peu prometteuses malgré une augmentation dans l'intérêt manifesté pour les conseillers scolaires. En effet, on doit surmonter des problèmes internes avant que la consultation puisse prospérer dans les écoles, problèmes tels qu'un esprit conservateur et des difficultés économiques à travers tout le pays.

Two words seem to stand out when one looks at the state of counselling in Britain today. They are "pastoral" and "comprehensive". They are, it seems, words in contrast, two poles of a continuum, two ways of thinking, one of the past, the other of the future.

It is not so much that they describe two different schools of counselling in Britain as that they epitomize two educational settings and the kinds of pupil personnel services that belong within them.

To a Canadian visiting England, the way the word "pastoral" is used comes as a bit of a surprise. Conventionally we in North America have reserved the idea of "pastoral care" for the work done by clergy — a religious setting. Traditionally the British have done the same, since so many of their schools in the past have been Church sponsored. Guidance was in the hands of the religious and the clergy who ministered "pastoral care" to their flock. But in England the word "pastoral" has glided into modern

secular usage so that one may see job opportunity advertisements in educational newspapers for psychologists whose task it will be to give "pastoral care". Teachers are also given in-service training in "pastoral counselling".

The other term, "comprehensive", strikes one as a contrast to "pastoral" because it represents an entirely new and powerful trend in English education — a switch away from the private, and sometimes religious grammar schools to comprehensive schools such as we are more familiar with in North America. The advent, by government legislation, of the English comprehensive school, is having profound repercussions on counselling in England.

One gets the impression that counselling or "pastoral care" in the past has been somewhat haphazard and in the hands of those who were willing to spend extra time 'over and above' regular school duties in talking with students on personal and vocational matters. Counselling, in many cases, has been in the hands, not necessarily of the qualified but of the willing. In fact rivalry and suspicion still seem to characterize the attitude of teachers and Youth Employment officers toward those who do counselling as Vaughan (1970) points out. This is suspicion of the kind of person who chooses counselling and hostility toward those who do attain professional status. This attitude toward the professional counsellor is epitomized by Rosamunde Blackler, author of *Fifteen Plus, School Leavers and the Outside World* and founder of the Avondale Project, a young people's advisory service in inner London, which is dedicated to helping school leavers adjust to their new situation. "I do not care very much," she says, "for the word counsellor — it sounds too pompous and too condescending" (Blackler, 1970, p. 9). She wants "genuine friendship" instead and is disturbed by the academic approach to counselling. "The vast majority of us are not intellectuals — a point many of our leading educationalists seem to overlook when planning the future role of the counsellor. Many of them never had contact with the sorts of boys and girls who most need help and very few are able to establish the necessary rapport" (Blackler, 1970, p. 19).

But perhaps the most wrathful attack on counsellors and particularly on social workers is delivered by Maurice North (1972) in a book entitled *The Secular Priests*. It is a bitter, I think, confused book based on the premise that we live in a "Personal Service Society", a "Psychotherapeutic State". North reluctantly admits a place for counselling only since " . . . the psychotherapeutic ideology and the techniques associated with it in spite of their drawbacks offer the only way out of the mess that is our society" (North, 1972, p. 290). The dark message of this book is that psychotherapy, counselling and social work are dangerous value inculcators riddled with theories that confuse maturity with mere social adjustment and, since they are dominated by Freud, center upon sex. He sees the caseworkers as:

> . . . the ambiguous agent of the equivocal forces that dominate our society, an ambivalent creature stepping out of the opacity that is our society; he is opaque as our society is opaque; his mystique derives from the mystery that is the social world we inhabit. But he also claims to be a professional and like all aspirants to professional status . . . he must demonstrate a demand for his services . . . Part of the success achieved by the psychotherapeutic ideology lies in the excellent marketing campaign that the psychotherapists and social caseworkers have carried out on their own behalf (North, 1972, p. 92).

One could be more sympathetic to this particular British view that fears that psychotherapists will abuse their powers if, the book were not such a hodge-podge, peppered with confusing statements such as, ". . . All non-behaviorist and non-learning theory psychologies derive from Freud" (North, 1972, p. 48) and "non-directed psychotherapy of the depth or psychoanalytic form" (North, 1972, p. 63) and above all, if the book did not conclude on this bitterly savage note:

> The inestimable service that the psychotherapeutic ideology supplies is that it gives the individual the feeling that somebody cares — even if it is not true (North, 1972, p. 292).

Vaughan (1970) in his book, *Education and Vocational Guidance Today,* points out three main weaknesses in guidance in Britain:

1) The need is not covered adequately.
2) There is little cooperation between guidance agencies such as School Psychological Services and Youth Employment Services.
3) Distrust between agencies or between them and teachers (p. 88).

Let us look at each of these criticisms in turn.

Failure to Cover the Needs

Vaughan reports that the terms "guidance" and "counselling" have no clear-cut definitions or distinction in Britain, and he limits his book primarily to a discussion of vocational guidance, painting a rather gloomy picture of what he sees as confused, archaic and amateurish. He says that vocational guidance has been, in many cases, equated with "careers teaching" and that this is the traditional role of the headmaster in the school (Vaughan, 1970, p. 46). The distinction between counselling services and administration is far from clear. Vaughan reports a study done by Michael Carter in 1959 which investigated the schools' vocational guidance influence on 100 boys and 100 girls in the Sheffield area. Carter found that they had received little effective guidance and that the schools had not integrated with youth employment officers satisfactorily. Other research in the 60's, according to Vaughan, indicates haphazard, part-time, spare time career counselling with students, who have only hazy ideas of being helped in making vocational choices. In a Schools Counsel Enquiry conducted in 1968, which surveyed the provision of careers teachers in 111 secondary schools in England and Wales, it was discovered that 87% had one or more teachers who looked after careers teaching as part of their job but in over half the schools, these teachers had no special training for this guidance work and only 4% of the schools had teachers with more than two weeks training in guidance. But 49% of the school principals felt enough was already being done to prepare pupils for life after school and 58% felt the careers advice given was already sufficient.

Vaughan's first complaint that vocational guidance in the United Kingdom is not covered adequately is supported when one looks at the provisions made for training in vocational counselling in Great Britain. Vaughan (1970) describes training in vocational guidances as "rare" (p. 48) in colleges of education but does indicate that the Institutes of Education in Reading, Keele and Exeter, and Swansea have developed advanced diploma courses in guidance theory and practice. We will look later at the actual content of counsellor training courses in British institutions, but we can conclude our development of Vaughan's first complaint that vocational guidance is not covered adequately by looking at two general characteristics of psychology in Britain — conservativism and lack of original theory native to the British Isles.

James Hartley (1973) of the University of Keele studied the use of new approaches to the teaching of psychology in the United Kingdom by sending questionnaires about innovative methods of teaching and testing, to the departments of psychology in United Kingdom Universities. From the few replies he received, 25, he came to the conclusion that British departments of psychology are more conservative than their American counterparts. Vaughan (1970) after mentioning that the literature in English on counselling from continental Europe is very scarce, reports that out of 85 works forming general reading on guidance at a British University in 1975, 63 were first published in the United States.

Lack of Cooperation

The second and third weaknesses of guidance counselling in Britain that Vaughan lists — lack of cooperation and trust — are also evidenced by a report on the role of psychologists in the health services contained in the *Bulletin of the British Psychological Society*. In February of 1973 the Secretary to the Department of Health and Social Services subcommittee on the role of psychologists addressed a letter to the General Secretary of the British Psychological Society enclosing two questionnaires, one to all concerned organizations and individuals, the other to the Society itself regarding the role and organization of clinical psychology and educational psychology in the National Health Service. The replies contained descriptions of the work of psychologists in assessment, therapy and research. The training of clinical and educational psychologists was also discussed. It was on this latter point of training that clinical and educational psychologists parted company.

Educational psychologists disavowed the report of clinical psychologists that their training was concerned primarily with the needs of adults and that neither group was adequately trained to deal with the pre-school child. Educational psychologists regarded themselves as child psychologists who apply their knowledge largely, but not wholly, in the educational system. Their training, they claim, has always included a concern for pre-school children.

> Educational psychologists welcome the possibility of more informal and expeditious relationships between clinical services and themselves. It would however defeat this object if parallel services for children were set up without reference to the services already provided by the Local Education Auth-

ority (British Psychological Society, 1970, p. 84).

Vaughan reports on an experiment in Oxfordshire that shifts emphasis from enforcement of school attendance to guidance. Small teams of social workers have been appointed to a number of secondary schools with their contributory primary schools. But some principals have worked to keep matters within the school, or to refer directly to school psychologists Some teachers do not see social workers as professional equals. For these reasons the scheme has at least partially failed.

Vaughan (1970) asks: "Is this because of the blurred picture which many people have about social work, aggravated by the piecemeal development of this field, and the continued fragmentation of agencies and training plans? Perhaps a social worker must also be a trained teacher in order to gain acceptance by the teachers themselves" (p. 85).

Kenneth Roberts (1971) in his book, *From School to Work, a Study of the Youth Employment Service* describes a service unique to Britain that is intended to be of assistance to industry and young people. It helps firms select and recruit manpower and helps young people choose jobs. It makes job information available, and gives individual advice to school leavers. It operates an employment exchange service and reviews the progress of young employees during the initial stage of their career. The service is free to all employees and all young people up to 18 years of age, or over that age if the person is still in school.

However, research by Jahoda and Carter (1952) found that contact with YES consisted mainly in a general careers talk followed by a single individual interview. Roberts (1971) describes YES as an "untidy hotchpotch of administrative units and practices such as could not have evolved in any other society" (p. 16).

Summary of Criticisms

Vaughan's criticism of guidance in British schools can be summed up:

Guidance often depends on interested individuals rather than on regional planning; most careers teachers are untrained; guidance is usually allocated a minor curriculum position without an administrative structure to support it; the emphasis is strongly on "job" and sometimes on "course" guidance rather than on personal development of the individual; little is known of the effect of guidance on British pupils; there are suspicions and rivalries between areas of the educational profession; there is reluctance to pay counsellors salaries which might go to teachers and help lighten class loads. (This complaint can only be aggravated by the government plans for further cuts in educational spending proposed by Chancellor Healey in early 1976).

Progress

But all is not black in the guidance and counselling field in the United Kingdom. Vaughan (1970) says that: "The field is expanding — almost exploding — into recognition after many decades of stagnation (p. 10). Inevitably, comparisons are made with counselling in North America and the British see themselves at a stage similar to earlier American patterns.

Vaughan feels that counselling has thrived more in North America because of the predominance of comprehensive schools with their multiplicity of choices. This, he says, is coming to Britain. Counselling he claims was promoted in North America, too, by social factors such as inequalities in educational and vocational opportunities resulting from the presence of unassimilated ethnic and social groups. Britain has been spared this problem — until recently! Foreign immigration and internal migration into the cities is creating new problems and new challenges for counselling.

Those who are advocating an updating of the British system, look to North America as 'the only culture that has clarified and formalized the role of the counsellor'. Vaughan (1970) points out that bias towards experience and practice in the U.S. is unavoidable. The number of U.S. publications is prodigious compared to U.K. where there are no outstanding handbooks, no extensive history and philosophy of counselling.

The 1967 Schools Counsel Report on Counselling drew attention to the strength of North American ideas in Britain, pointing out that both Keele and Reading universities had called on distinguished American therapists and practitioners in initiating their courses.

Counsellor Education in the United Kingdom

The future of school counselling in Britain lies in counsellor training. The Department of Education at the University of Aston in Birmingham in 1971 began to offer a one-year full time postgraduate course in counselling in educational settings. It prepares students for both academic counselling and personal counselling. Courses included developmental psychology, abnormal

psychology, statistics, individual and group counselling theories, research, academic counselling, occupational counselling, behavioral counselling and the social context of counselling. Practicum experience is included as is group discussion. It endeavors to prepare counsellors from three approaches: Academic; Experiential and their own personal development. It is much like the counsellor training course proposed by C. Gilbert Wrenn (1962) in his *Counsellor in a Changing World* except, as North (1972) critically points out, omitting Wrenn's proposal for a course entitled "Introduction to problems of ethical relationships and legal responsibilities". The Universities of Reading, Exeter and Keele and Swansea, as well as the North East London Polytechnic which offers a diploma in counselling and pastoral care, give advanced courses in guidance and counselling. Candidates must be qualified teachers with 3 to 5 years minimum of teaching experience. They are screened above all for "flexibility" — ability to communicate with people in various subject areas. Even if he does not teach, the counsellor must be acceptable to teachers. The courses offered include: Theories of counselling; Guidance in relation to contemporary issues in British education; Educational Psychology, Developmental Psychology; Statistics; Psychometrics and practicum work in the form of role playing; supervised taping of interviews and attachment to hospitals and clinics. Part of the philosophy in some schools is to view crisis counselling as "undesirable".

At Edge Hill College in Lancashire an optional course in the second and third years of teacher training has been offered since 1965. It is not designed to produce specialists but to make a few teachers aware of the need for such specialists and their methods. The course includes practicum experience of visiting schools, places of employment, Youth Employment Offices and youth clubs.

Since 1967 a course in educational development has been aimed at encouraging counselling in primary schools. "Such courses are rare in other schools of education" (Vaughan, 1970, p. 145) but some short courses and workshops on counselling are held on a local basis for teachers.

Research in Vocational Guidance and Counselling is centered on the Vocational Guidance research units at Leeds and Manchester. Research goes on in other areas. For example, R. D. P. Griffith (1975) reports on his work on vocational guidance conducted with psychiatric patients. Again his complaint is that there is a paucity of research on guidance for psychiatric patients, and his work indicates the failure of many standard assessment techniques, but advocates the simulation of realistic working conditions under competent personnel in a hospital setting as being most helpful in giving vocational help to psychiatric patients.

Besides updating counsellor learning programs and broadening research in the area, some British writers are busy convincing educators, the public and money-short politicians of the need for counselling in the schools. Aleck Holden (1964) in his *Teachers as Counsellors* argues for the need of counselling because, he says, that the intellectual bias of schools sets pupils against schools and schools against pupils. He also feels that the declining moral influence of organized religion and changes in family structure show the need for school counsellors. He reflects the traditional British concern for "character formation" in the school.

But perhaps the most comprehensive plan for counselling in the schools of Great Britain is proposed by Hugh Lytton of the University of Exeter Institute of Education in his study *School Counselling and Counsellor Education in the United States.* After devoting 55 of his 78 pages to a detailed description of American School Counselling he concludes: "What strikes the observer of the American scene is the tremendous zest and enthusiasm for experiment and innovation, the willingness to try out new methods to achieve generally accepted goals" (Lytton, 1968, p. 56).

He then outlines some "Implications for British Pupil Personnel Services" noting that:

> The university courses for counsellors in Britain have been greatly influenced by American university ideas and have so far, by and large taken over the American model of counselling of four to ten years ago with all the deficiency it has been recognized to have. This is as sensible as taking a five to ten year old Buick with all its defects and expecting it to perform satisfactorily on British roads (Lytton, 1968, p. 57).

He suggests a much more radical approach; examining the peculiar British needs, comparing them with the American counsellor model and making independent decisions on what meets Britain's own needs.

What are these needs? Lytton did not believe at the time of writing (almost a decade ago) that the elective programme with its individual timetables which helped justify the existence of

high school counsellors in North America existed in Britain. Choices were fewer and choice points less frequent and, in the early stages, normally in the hands of teachers. "As selection recedes and choices widen in comprehensive schools, educational guidance becomes more necessary. No doubt it should be done more systematically and with greater attention to the educational *and vocational* needs and aims of the individual pupil." (Lytton, 1968, p. 58).

He feels that more achievement and aptitude testing should be done and its interpretation be in the hands of a vocational guidance expert. His influence should extend over the whole of secondary school life and even earlier. Because of the early specialization in British schools, the choice of university subjects has implications reaching all the way back to earlier educational choices.

Those who choose to enter the labor market (or the redundancy market at present rates of unemployment) at the school leaving age of 15 need guidance too, and Lytton agrees with the other authors cited that, at present, vocational guidance is carried out in a haphazard and amateurish fashion.

Regarding "personal" counselling, Lytton thinks the insights of psychology are moving English education away from a concentration on external "character" to that on which it depends — inner personality organization. Lytton believes that despite suspicions of teachers and despite a tradition of "pastoral care" being given spontaneously by teachers who know the student well, there is room for professional well trained counsellors, based on the American model.

Lytton does not propose the "combined service model" of the American counsellor, uniting educational, vocational and personal counselling in the school counsellor. He proposes instead that all Pupil Personnel Services serving the schools be seen as a whole uniting the efforts of the School Health Service, the Youth Employment Service, Child Guidance Clinic and Child Care Service. Social welfare work would be in the hands of Welfare Officers, Educational and vocational guidance should be combined and carried out by teachers given some additional training in assessment and at least minimal counselling or training. They would collaborate with Youth Employment Officers.

Personal counselling, Lytton concedes, raises the most thorny questions and he proposes a generalist "Pupil Personnel Worker" based inside the school who combines skills of the counsellor, social worker and psychologist. He would engage in individual and group counselling and act as consultant to teachers in their guidance work. Lytton foresees this specialist as needing at least two years of training beyond a teacher's normal preparation. Such a person would help avoid wasteful interdisciplinary overlap and conflict and be in close touch with the school.

More highly trained specialists, psychiatrists, educational psychologists and psychiatric social workers would be centrally based in a local authority "Family Service" Bureau.

Aligning all these services to avoid overlaps and gaps would, as Lytton concedes, involve more logistical problems, but he proposes his plan as "Utopian" for the special needs of counselling in Britain's future.

Conclusion

This article has centered around counselling in the traditional school setting. It would not be fair to the broader sense of counselling in Britain to ignore the work of institutions such as the Open University with its excellent course offerings for degrees on an "at home" basis and its counselling service to help students and prospective students update their education. Another type of counselling in the broad sense is the British "On the Move" program aimed at alleviating Britain's huge illiteracy problem. Bright, attractive, humorous T.V. programs of about 5 minutes duration and accompanying booklets give a little training in reading and above all motivate illiterate people to seek education by letting them know they are not alone, and that help is as close as a telephone call.

The overall impression one gets of educational counselling in the United Kingdom is that Britons are finding themselves caught in an antiquated, amateurish and confused system which is fast becoming even more out of date in an era of comprehensive schools. Some are aware of this and look diffidently to the North American system as being years ahead. However, that which is American is not to be accepted blindly. The British are aware of the shortcomings of counselling across the Atlantic and are determined to eliminate these and adapt counselling to their own needs.

Postscript

Journal articles, like wine, should be left to mature for a while. It is as I write this, June of 1976. When in March, while still in Oxford,

I finished describing my view of counselling, particularly school counselling in England, I was tempted, after drawing such a bleak picture to conclude with a literate note of hope that all will be well some day. "If April comes, can spring be far behind" or something like that.

But since then many things have happened to temper such optimism. The economy has continued to decline and a new prime minister can promise the British only further belt tightening, a "temporary" decline in their standard of living and continued cuts in government expenditure in education. There will be little money for school counsellors.

In late May students by the thousands in a large number of teacher training colleges in Great Britain took possession of their schools in a sit-in protest over the prospect that only a fraction of their graduates this year will get jobs in teaching. This may be only a passing phenomenon, but the economy and the declining birth rate are not and if teachers cannot find jobs, it seems less likely that counsellors will.

In the past few weeks, elections for local governments have swept the Labour party out of power in many places and replaced it with a Conservative government. The nation is at present watching the outcome in Tameside of a new local government's reversal of previous decisions to go ahead with establishing comprehensive schools.

Neville Bennett (1976) has published his research conducted in the primary schools of Lancashire, entitled *Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress* with statistics that indicate higher academic achievement among those children who are in formal, traditional classrooms, as opposed to informal, progressive classes. While the experts chew through the data, the popular press has headlined the idea that more rigid, authoritarian styles of teaching are better because they teach the three R's better. This popular wave rolls on even over Bennett's own protests which make important distinctions necessary to get the true meaning of his data. (Times Educational Supplement, 1976). Anything that sounds like "personal" development doesn't have much place in the school in many parents' eyes. Such a reactionary wave with its ridicule for the Plowden report which a few years ago encouraged progressive thinking in the schools, can, I think, encourage only the barest kinds of "career's teaching" as a substitute for professional counselling in the schools.

Couple with these facts, a kind of general air of despondency which one seems to meet on all corners in Britain, and one is tempted to conclude on a more negative (but still literary) note that now truly is the "Winter of our discontent."

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