

THE COUNSELLOR AS TEACHER IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

School counsellors are moving away from models based on psychotherapy to teaching models based on the development of normal individuals in educational settings. They are engaging more and more in activities which may be described as instructional. The area of career development provides an illustration of the types of skills and values which counsellors "teach".

Résumé

Les conseillers délaissent les modèles basés sur la psychothérapie pour adopter des modèles d'éducation basés sur le développement d'individus normaux en milieu scolaire. Ils s'engagent de plus en plus dans des activités à caractère instructif. Le domaine du développement vocationnel illustre bien le genre de valeurs et de compétences que les conseillers enseignent.

Counsellors are moving from the periphery of the school to the very center of its life and activity. Increasingly, they are moving away from a mode of operation which is modeled on one-to-one psychotherapy and towards a mode of operation which is based on the needs and tasks of normal human development, a model which is essentially educational in nature and in intent.

Part of the impetus for this movement is due, no doubt to pressures exerted by fiscal restraint and the consequent demand for accountability. As school budgets shrink school counsellors feel the pressure to make their contributions to the school both visible and acceptable in terms of the core purposes of that school. The current trend, however, is not motivated solely by the accountability theme. It also has been fed, I believe, by a disillusionment with the more narcissistic aspects of the human potential movement of the 60's and early 70's. We are witnessing a repudiation of one of the more objectionable elements of that movement — the excessive preoccupation with the self, its growth and nurturance. The writer believes that counsellors are now giving more attention to helping people come to terms with social realities and with the social problems which affect them. More and more they are teaching courses and conducting workshops and seminars on topics which either relate to particular social problems or which promote certain life skills. Typical examples include the following:

1. School counsellors are now involved with various types of work experience programs; they are helping young people with the very real problems of obtaining and holding employment.

2. Counsellors are teaching courses in assertiveness, the object of which is to help people protect their rights and take control of their own lives.

3. Counsellors are teaching family life courses.

4. Counsellors are conducting courses and programs in the area of women's rights.

5. Counsellors are acting as trainers in specific structured programs such as the Vocational Exploration Group, the Life Career Development System, and Parent and Teacher Effectiveness Training.

6. High school counsellors are frequently involved in teaching courses in the areas of sociology, psychology, philosophy, and ethics. They are also active in various related programs such as helping children cope with death, divorce, and separation.

7. Counsellors are also involved in "teaching" to help each other. Various types of teacher-advisor or peer-counselling systems are currently gaining in popularity.

It is clear, then, that counsellors are focusing on the social needs and problems of young people. It is also clear that they are doing so in structured ways which directly increase the knowledge and skills of the student. The counselling relationship is still important, but it is no longer viewed as the sole component of counselling. Counselling now strives to combine growth facilitative relationships with the provision of solid "content".

To illustrate this point, let us turn to the topic of career counselling which exemplifies these characteristics in a clear manner.

The planning of career development programs usually begins with the counsellor asking three main questions: What *knowledge* does the student need? What *skills* should the student acquire? What *attitudes* should be stressed? For purposes of this paper, we will ignore the question of knowledge since the answer to that question is relative to the specific client population involved. We will, however, concern ourselves with two types of skills which form the focal point of many career development programs. We will also stress the *significance of dealing with attitudes and values*.

Skills of Choosing. One essential element in a career development program or course is the provision of opportunities for students to learn, practice, and become proficient in making choices and decisions. An incomplete list of some of the skills involved in decision making follows:

1. Students learn how to gather information about themselves and the world; they acquire skills in exploring, organizing, and interpreting this information.
2. Students acquire skill in evaluating the accuracy of information; they learn to exercise critical judgment in their own self-defense!
3. Students learn how to compare and evaluate alternatives; they generate and list alternatives appropriate to self-chosen criteria; they devise ways of weighing these alternatives against each other and against their criteria.
4. Students learn how to identify factors which influence rational decisions and choices. These factors are both personal (interests, needs, values, traits) and social (environmental, economic, or political barriers).
5. Students learn how to analyze various social roles; they identify, describe and evaluate various lifestyles which are available to them.

Coping Skills

While most career planning courses confine themselves to the skills of choosing, the set of skills which we may call *coping skills*, or *survival skills*, are also extremely important to the student. These skills are those which are used to cope with the problems, opportunities, and tasks encountered in the development of one's career over time. Examples of these skills include the following:

1. Students learn to work cooperatively with others. It is increasingly apparent that the ability to organize and to cope with organization will be one of the "basics" in the near future. The skills of working with others include the skill of resisting over-socialization — the ability to say "No!"
2. Students acquire skills in conflict resolution; they are introduced to ways of handling the

intrapersonal and interpersonal tensions which are so common in our society today; they learn ways of handling conflict which are neither of the "fight" or "flight" varieties, but which represent the best practice of democratic problem-solving.

3. Students learn how to plan and to overcome obstacles; they acquire such planning skills as setting concrete, behavioral objectives, devising courses of action based on realistic estimations of the probabilities of success and devising time-lines and schedules.

4. Students acquire the basic skills necessary to obtain, hold, and progress in an occupation. These skills are represented by the "3 R's", plus other, more specialized vocational skills.

Attitudes and Values

The teaching of skills alone is empty and inhuman. A focus on skills to the exclusion of the more basic and human questions of value reinforces one of the chief problems of today's schools and, indeed, of modern society itself. That is the problem of alienation, the condition which arises from the fact that the worker and the student has, typically, no control over his or her own work, workplace or work processes. It is a condition which is manifested in both workplace and school in such phenomena as feelings of powerlessness, conflicts with authority, hostility toward work, dissatisfaction, and depression. To focus exclusively on skills means leaving out the crucial dimension of the subjective experience of the student. It means being mechanistic and impersonal — "behavioral" at its demonic extreme.

Consequently counsellors emphasize, by living example and in experience — not simply by talking about them — the humanistic attitudes and values which stand out in opposition to the attitudes and values of technocracy. Such attitudes and values include the following:

1. Sensitivity to human beings and their human needs and aspirations.
2. Respect for free choice and the active liberation of people from those conditions which deny them freedom of choice.
3. Respect for the independence and autonomy of the individual.
4. A focus on the importance of doing something in the world which one considers real, purposeful, and meaningful; a focus, also, on creating opportunities for this type of experience to occur.
5. The importance of developing a sense of oneself as a person not only free to act, but responsible for those actions.
6. The valuing of tentativeness and a spirit of

exploration, as opposed to dogmatism or absolute certainty.

7. Finally, and most important, the valuing of that relationship between teacher and student which is based on a mutual and cooperative search for meaning, rather than on authoritarianism or control.

I believe that the foregoing presents some of the more important aspects of "teaching" career

development. At present, they characterize the work of the best counsellor/teachers, but I believe that, as time progresses, they will come to provide the basic core and focus of the whole school. The day is approaching which will see these skills and attitudes replace the current emphasis on traditional subject matter. The work of counsellors will be a very important agent in promoting this needed change.