

## GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR AND SPECIAL COUNSELLOR

W.R. ANDREWS  
*Queen's University*

### Abstract

Various solutions to the role problems of the Canadian counsellor suggest trimming the role either by lopping off psychological counselling on the one hand or vocational or other guidance activities on the other. If one role cannot in practice perform all the traditional counsellor activities, an added role may be needed. This paper advocates a model which would supplement the role of the guidance counsellor with the role of a special counsellor who would work with the troubled student.

### Résumé

Diverses solutions aux problèmes posés par la fonction du conseiller canadien suggèrent qu'on devrait réduire son rôle soit en éliminant la consultation psychologique d'une part, ou l'orientation professionnelle et toute autre activité d'orientation d'autre part. Si, en réalité, un rôle particulier ne peut comprendre toutes les activités traditionnelles du conseiller, un autre rôle serait peut-être nécessaire. Cet article propose un modèle qui ajouterait au rôle du conseiller en orientation, le rôle d'un conseiller spécialiste qui travaillerait avec l'étudiant troublé.

In the midst of the writer's preparation of this paper a publisher's brochure arrived in the mail which featured, in a large colored circle, this claim: "Fully 90% of the by-lined articles are written by working counsellors, just like you. There is nothing from the Ivory Tower!" (Brochure on *The Guidance Clinic*). If the implied meanings of this advertisement are at all correct, the writer, being a counsellor educator and a denizen of the Ivory Tower, may be speaking to a somewhat less than eagerly receptive audience when he speaks to guidance counsellors. Especially when the subject is the counsellors' own role!

Whether or not the effusions of university personnel are worthy of the attention of the "working counsellor", counsellor educators *should* be able to talk about counsellor role with some realism, and they *should* even be able to shed a little light. They do, after all, provide the major formal training input for the performance of the guidance counsellor role. This constitutes a real participation in the careers of guidance counsellors and in the shaping of their role expectations. The fact that they do have some influence on how the guidance counsellor functions establishes the right of counsellor educators to speak about counsellor role; it does not demonstrate that they will say anything worthwhile. Having established his or her right to speak, each speaker or writer should, as someone said, phone or get out of the booth.

Concerning guidance counsellor role, worthwhile contributions from whatever source

are badly needed. Although some people have become tired of the topic, no satisfactory resolution of the major problems which enmesh the guidance counsellor as he or she struggles in the schools has yet been arrived at. Many attempts are being made to clarify guidance counsellor role, and these testify both to the widespread dissatisfaction with the current state of counsellor role, and also to the existence of an optimistic, problem-solving spirit.

Dr. C.M. Christensen and colleagues (Christensen, Bloch, Briedis, Elsie, Heath & Shannon, 1974; Christensen, 1976) at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education have been developing theory, procedures, and materials to enable the counsellor to work in an instructional mode to help students acquire interpersonal coping skills. The lines of counselling assistance being developed seem to have applicability both to groups in order to help students improve their performance of developmental tasks, and also to more crisis-oriented individual or group counselling situations (Christensen, et al., 1974, p. 5).

Although including a similar call for the counsellor to become active in mediating life skills to students through group activity, a position paper (Bedal, Forbert, Griffin, & Manuel, 1974) places special stress on the counsellor's career education activities (Bedal, et al., p. 4). The paper would also have the counsellor's role shaped in accord with the following statement (Bedal, et al.).

There are now available to many students such things as drug and alcohol counselling services.

planned parenthood agencies, abortion referral services, and an abundance of community drop-in centres and 24-hour crisis phone services. Therefore, it seems that a shift away from in-depth psychoper-sonal counselling for the few can allow for educational and career counselling and activities for the many. (p. 3)

The suggestion made in this quotation is perhaps too easy a way out from an obligation which many counsellors have been uneasy about. Two difficulties appear. Firstly, "in-depth psychoper-sonal counselling" has been performed so rarely by the *Canadian guidance counsellor* that shifting away from it is likely to produce extremely little additional time for educational and career counselling. Secondly, the view expressed here of the abundance of facilities for the young with specialized needs must be challenged. Two contrary opinions follow.

Workers from the Children's Mental Health Services Branch, Ontario, (Finlay & Randall, 1975) write:

The key words which must guide where we go from here are: *inadequate . . . inappropriate . . . and nonexistent*. We must accept the fact, once and for all, that our current delivery system with respect to mental health services for teenage youth is essentially inadequate or unsuited to their very special needs and we have no alternative now but to devise new methods to meet the problem. (p. 4)

A background paper prepared by the Committee on Continuing and Community Education of the British Columbia Department of Education (1976) comments:

There is no systematic approach to the provision of program counselling services. Many people who need personal or career counselling have difficulty in obtaining it. (p. 8)

Other positions taken with reference to improving the guidance counsellor role are mentioned in articles by Mattie Clark, Head of Counselling, Monarch Park Secondary School (Clark, 1975, pp. 3-6); Blowers and Paterson from the University of Alberta (1976, pp. 13-16); and an earlier excursion of the writer's into this topic (Andrews, 1972, pp. 50-57). A project involving the development in the high school of a mental health team is of importance (Couchman, Freel, & Golombek, 1976, pp. 31-37). Other re-definitions of counsellor role, some described in the literature and a great many being tried out but unpublicized, will likely spring to the mind of the reader.

A recent Editorial in the *Canadian Counsellor*, written by Van Hesteren and Zingle (1977), presents a useful historical outline of the way guidance has been viewed in Canada and a humane rationale for its continued existence. Although separate teacher and counsellor roles should continue, they see the goal of guidance to be essentially that of the total educational

endeavor, to help students to live better lives.

While explicitly rejecting tendencies to drop role functions concerned with vocational guidance and personal-adjustment counselling (p. 110), they state:

We would suggest that the guidance function become more closely tied to helping individuals to develop positive identities and the life skills required to cope with the demands and complexities of modern society. (p. 109)

The traditional comprehensive counsellor role of working with educational, vocational, and personal concerns of students is thus up-dated and augmented. The main problem with the comprehensive role of the counsellor is that it takes care of the range of needs in the schools for counsellors, but it has never attained widespread implementation because in practice the role is too big for most counsellors to fulfill. The comprehensive role tends to splinter when it is subjected to the stresses and strains of school practice, with counsellors in this school becoming career guidance persons, in that school becoming teacher-administrators, and in a few schools becoming therapists.

What must now be developed is a modified role model which can function successfully in practice to achieve the objectives enunciated by Van Hesteren and Zingle (1977). The attempt of this paper to formulate such a model centres in two main theses.

First, the role of guidance counsellor is too broad. It must be narrowed.

Second, however, the role of guidance counsellor is narrowed, the school must not repudiate any of its major, and especially its humane, responsibilities. Given the problem of how to narrow counsellor role without disclaiming proper responsibilities of the school, the only logical answer is to develop a new role to supplement that of guidance counsellor. The new role, it is proposed, will provide help to the troubled student.

A few things need to be said in a general way about this proposal. Roles must have limits, otherwise positions could not be described and different roles distinguished. The limits of the guidance counsellor role, however, have always been vague. This vagueness has made for many difficulties, and permitted development of the role to proceed in an unplanned and unrestrained fashion. The limits, in the writer's view, have now moved out too far, to the point where the counsellor role has become a residual role, with new tasks not clearly consigned to other personnel becoming the responsibility of the counsellor, along with some which have in the past been consigned to others.

During the fifteen years since the writer first became a school counsellor, he has seen an oscillation of emphasis among counsellors and organizations, between guidance tasks on the one hand and the counselling task on the other. First, the pendulum swung away from a vocational emphasis in guidance and toward personal counselling; then we swung away from that because we knew we had rarely done it well and because our conscience began to bother us about the vocational work we were neglecting along with all the other guidance tasks. One may guess that our preventive, developmental work may show less clearcut results than enthusiastic proponents promise, and we will begin to worry again about those students who clearly need more than the self-actualizing help that we are giving to the mass of students, and there will be another flurry of concern about personal counselling and the troubled student.

A recent exchange of views on counsellor role between Dugald Arbuckle and Allen Ivey in *The Personnel and Guidance Journal* (1976) leaves the protagonists disagreeing without quite knowing why. Arbuckle says:

When working with couples in a therapeutic relationship, I often find that a very common issue is the fact that they do not hear and/or understand each other. I think that Ivey and I may be somewhat like this, especially when we are talking about 'counselling'. (p. 434)

Their dilemma may be the one which so many other counsellors share: neither can bring himself to say that the tasks which the other emphasizes can be eliminated, yet both know instinctively that the same counsellors cannot do both. Arbuckle and Ivey would both have the counsellor performing the whole spectrum of helping tasks — teaching, consulting, changing social structures, and counselling — although emphasizing different tasks. Neither faces the reality that such a huge role exists only in the literature, that in practice Arbuckle's counsellors become therapists, performing little developmental or instructional-group work, and Ivey's become school activists, performing little remedial work; and both groups of counsellors suffer a perpetual uneasy conscience.

A common feature of the Canadian studies of counsellor role considered earlier, with the two exceptions of the Editorial of Van Hesteren and Zingle and of the writer's article (which he is now repudiating), is that they all directly or in effect advocate important shrinkage in the guidance counsellor role.

Details could now be given of the proposal for a narrowing of the guidance counsellor role and the development of a new kind of personnel in the schools to work along with guidance counsellors. However, since a case has now been made for the reduction of counsellor role, this case could

simply strengthen an already existing tendency to solve the problem by having the schools drop the task of working with the troubled student. Such a position could lead to disastrous consequences both for this ever-present and ever-changing group of students, and also for the humanitarian claims of the school. It is important that the case be developed for the school to continue to accept responsibility for the troubled student, and further, to show that the school must discharge this responsibility more effectively than it has done in the past. Building this case will concurrently lay the foundation for the particular nature of the role change proposals to follow.

Although counsellors and the schools have usually accepted a conventional responsibility for the troubled student and for personal counselling, an examination of most Canadian secondary schools will show an inadequate coping with these responsibilities. Because counsellors are stretched over so many task areas, the existence of a minority group of troubled students may come to be accepted as merely evidence of the unfortunate but inevitable imperfectibility of life. Like the poor, they are always with us. Yet pessimistic acceptance is not necessary, for a large proportion of students having emotional-social problems can today be effectively helped, (Cf., for example, Meltzoff & Kornreich, 1971, pp. 57-61) and it would be economically feasible to provide the effective help.

Although a minority group within the school, the group of troubled students is a very significant minority. Its size is deceptively small. Because many of its members are different students this month from those who will be in the group next month, over the years a very large portion of the student body will have at one time or another been part of that group of troubled students who could have benefited from assistance. Under present conditions, furthermore, the serious problems of many students never become observable and known in the school.

Few schools gather statistics on this minority, but in every school alert personnel are aware of such problems as anxieties and phobias related to school performance, general chronic anxiety, extremely low self-esteem, chronic depression, suicide, unnecessary dropout, addiction to alcohol and other drugs, vandalism and other anti-social behaviour, lack of interpersonal skills, vocational immaturity, and so on. National statistics of relevance to this consideration are also inadequate, but a view just of the tip of the iceberg is seen in data concerning those aspects of the total problem which become matters of legal concern. The number of juveniles charged with offences in Canada increased from 31,913 in 1962 to 63,140 in 1970 (*Perspective Canada*, 1974, p. 294), and the total convictions of juvenile delinquents increased

from 28,388 in 1970 to 42,183 in 1972 (*Canada Year Book*, 1974, p. 61).

Clearly, some members of this minority group should be referred to agencies outside the school for institutional care, and Regional Centres for children and youth are being established by health authorities in some provinces to improve the care of young people who have reached the stage where the school environment can no longer contain them (Finlay & Randall, 1975). This is a desirable development. The concern of the present article, however, is the much larger portion of the troubled minority who do not need to be referred, indeed who can be most promisingly treated within the confines of the "normal" environment of the school.

Consistent with the current omnibus nature of the guidance counsellor role, school guidance personnel are generally presented as the school's agency to cope with the troubled minority. The inescapable fact is, however, that many school principals consider their counsellors to be both too busy and unsuitably trained for professional level work in this area, and few provide their counsellors with the time and other institutional facilitation necessary to make competent work with the troubled student effective. It must be acknowledged that many counsellors do have contact with students who have emotional-social problems. In some cases personal counselling of a quality and length which produce alleviation of suffering and changed behaviour ensues. These cases, however, are very much the exception rather than the rule, as usually such contacts do not proceed beyond the level of providing brief, supportive interviewing.

If it may be granted after the discussion above that a serious problem exists for a minority of secondary school students, and that adequate measures have not been taken to solve it, the question can now be directly addressed concerning the responsibility of the school system to provide the indicated treatment. In affirming the school's responsibility, at least seven reasons appear to point to the educational system as the agency which should take major responsibility and which should perform treatment on its premises.

1. The secondary school building attended by a student is probably the most convenient treatment site for him or her, and therefore (a) he is likely to find it easiest to seek treatment there, and, (b) treatment provided there will result in the least possible disruption of his normal schooling.

2. The initial apprehension and the stigma attached to a student attending any facility located within the school building is or can be made to be less than the stigma attached to his attending most non-school facilities, especially if they are medically oriented.

3. Treatment personnel working for a school system and on its premises can, through their training and their experience, specialize in working with students, and through their very close liaison with other professional personnel in the school building, they can rally behind their own treatment the assistance of the whole school facility.

4. All public school systems in this country have accepted, today, the philosophy that the school must work with the whole child, and not merely with some abstract intellectual segment of the child. Furthermore, all public school systems accept the responsibility of doing the best they can for minority groups of students, and not only for the majority. The philosophy of Canadian public education obligates it to be concerned about the minority of troubled students, as well as about other types of minority groups.

5. It may also be argued that the educational system should take direct responsibilities in this area because the school situation is always one element in the etiology of emotional difficulties, and sometimes it is the major element. Once the school faces its share of the responsibility for student emotional problems, as it must when it is directly involved in treatment, it is likely to realize the importance of providing a healthful emotional climate in the schools.

6. In whatever place the treatment of the adolescent is undertaken, a major arena for the working through of treatment plans will be the school situation. The immediacy and familiarity made possible when both client and counsellor spend hours in the same building each day, provide an immense advantage in any therapeutic program.

Because the school works with the child for a large portion of every day during most of the child's developing years, no other agency has a comparable opportunity to integrate the overcoming of the occasional crisis into a long-term constructive pattern of development in living. The developmental, preventive approach to student emotional well-being is one which commands intuitive support in the schools, and they are in a unique position to implement it. Utopian notions sometimes contaminate the developmental counselling concept by implying that since students are learning to prevent unmanageable crises, crisis intervention is no longer needed. This is comparable to advocating that hospitals be closed because health education and preventive medicine make them redundant. In its well thought-out forms, however, the developmental approach includes a remedial emphasis and function, for the proper remediation of today's crisis is the prevention of similar crises tomorrow, and remediation allows development to proceed constructively.

7. The high incidence of emotional disturbance in the population is obviously a function of the condition of society as a whole. Education is one of the most influential elements of our society, and although it cannot solve society's problems alone, neither can the other agents of society solve this problem without the active participation of education. Each component of society must be expected to perform those tasks to which it is best suited.

In the emotionally and socially troubled minority of secondary school students, public education has a problem concerning which it probably bears a primary responsibility, and about which it is taking too little action. What can education do to more effectively discharge this important responsibility?

It has long been the expectation of concerned educators that with improved counsellor education programs providing more and better training to greater numbers of counsellors, counsellors would begin to apply their new competence to work with the troubled student, as well as to other problems. It is now apparent that although they are performing many tasks with improved effectiveness, guidance counsellors are not moving in any significant way to the succor of the troubled student.

Two reasons for this failure which have already been elaborated, an unrealistic role expectation and a lack of institutional facilitation, may be added factors related to counsellor attitude and professional status as teachers, and the emergence of new possibilities which may enhance a role which does not include intensive counselling involvement.

It is readily observable that students embarked upon the early stages of counsellor training programs aspire to two different kinds of career. The members of one group, and these are in the overwhelming majority, wish permanently to combine the teaching of some subject with the duties of a guidance counsellor. They are interested in the improvement and development of guidance activities and in doing some personal interviewing. They balk at the suggestion that they should prepare themselves adequately to perform an intensive personal counselling process. The members of the second group tend to have a major undergraduate background in psychology and social science, they are not eager to teach in a subject area, and they are very interested in developing therapeutic skills. Thus, among the majority of those preparing to become guidance counsellors, there is already a bias in favor of a role which does not include intensive counselling. The two types of students, the writer believes, are represented also among working counsellors, and in similar proportions. For the working counsellor

there is the added factor of strong pressure to be identified above all as a teacher, and hence an inclination not to stray too far from that professional fold with its orientation toward the ordinary student, the classroom-sized group, and a relatively directive stance.

Added to everything else, new and exciting possibilities have opened up which, when developed, will make it quite clear even to former doubters that the guidance role can be an extremely valuable one apart altogether from personal counselling. These are the developments, of course, in the group-instructional mediation of interpersonal coping skills (Christensen, et al., 1974), new approaches to career education (Bedal, et al., 1974), problem-solving skills, and self-control procedures (Andrews & Marshall, 1975).

If, however, a sense of euphoria coming from the advent of the new helping procedures results in a continuation of indifference toward the plight of the minority group of troubled students in our high schools, this will testify only to a low sense of human values in Canadian education. The writer believes that the sense of human value is high enough in Canadian education that this temptation will be resisted. Indeed, a move forward on the one front of developmental guidance will strengthen the whole guidance and counselling movement.

Following is a proposal for an attempt to centre a therapeutic service in the high school. This is my answer, although admittedly a partial one, to the question posed earlier of what education can do to more effectively discharge its responsibility to the emotionally and socially troubled student.

Although they formed no part in the development of the writer's thinking he has recently read some comments of C.H. Patterson (1971, p. 203) which describe a division of counsellor role that is essentially similar to the present proposal. This reference gives the model some theoretical status; essential to any real credibility will be, of course, a practical trial of the model. Although the term "special counsellor" has occasionally been used in Canada, one writer has not so far found an operational program which shares the main features of this proposal.

It should be made clear that the comments and proposals of this paper are made with the secondary school situation alone in mind. Although related problems exist in the elementary school, and there is also good reason for urgent attention being turned toward them, for both institutional and developmental reasons quite different provisions must be applied from the ones which are called for in the secondary situation.

In the interest of clarity, only the essential details of the plan will be indicated, and only the more fundamental of the proposal's many

ramifications. Point form will be used.

1. The plan purposes that the currently prevalent role of guidance counsellor in the secondary schools should become two roles. One of the two types of personnel would continue to be designated as guidance counsellors; the other would be designated as special counsellors.

2. The counsellor would continue to perform much as he or she does today in progressive schools, that is in the educational, vocational, and personal areas, but with some growth of the developmental group-instructional role. With a slight decrease in guidance time in a school, guidance counsellors would continue to be needed in roughly the numbers that are employed at present. It is to be emphasized that guidance counsellors would continue with the important type of personal counselling which they typically perform at present. Indeed there would be no explicit restrictions upon the type of work the guidance counsellor might perform within the educational, vocational, and personal areas apart from his or her own competence and the pressure of other duties.

3. The special counsellor would do counselling, or therapy, in the personal, educational, and vocational areas. Typically there would be one special counsellor in a high school. His or her work might be differentiated from that of the guidance counsellors in terms of an emphasis on the use of therapeutic, long-term, intensive procedures with students presenting the more difficult problems, and his non-involvement in a range of guidance tasks such as course selection and changes, vocational information-giving, and assistance with university and community college registration. Besides individual therapeutic work, the special counsellor would do consulting within the school and with parents, group work, diagnostic and referral work. Work in diagnosis, referral, placement and liaison would still be carried on largely by itinerant school psychologists. Clients would be obtained through student self-referral, and referral by guidance counsellors, administrators, teachers, and parents.

4. The special counsellor would be very thoroughly trained, specializing in counselling psychology, and very carefully selected. Although an extensive orientation in the field of education would be required, it is an open question whether a teaching certificate would or would not be essential.

5. Administration of the special counselling service would be carried out jointly by the official in charge of the system-centered school psychologists and by the building principal. The hiring of special counsellors, establishment of role and general working policies, and psychological supervision and support would be the primary

responsibility of the school system official; the day-to-day implementation of the service would be the primary responsibility of the principal. A cooperative, or staff relationship would exist between the special counsellor and guidance department head, both working as part of a student services team. Clearly, administrative arrangements would have to be adjusted according to the existing structures of a school system. Two features considered essential to the success of the plan, however, are that (a) the fundamental control of the nature of the special counsellor role and of its long-term performance would be in the hands of an official who is psychologically trained and whose upper-echelon role places him over the psychological services to students of the system, and that (b) the special counsellor should work cooperatively with but not under the direction of the head of the guidance department.

6. The special counsellor would have an office located in the guidance area, he/she would use the services of the guidance department secretary, he/she would follow certain necessary guidance department procedures, he/she would receive referrals from the guidance counsellors and would refer some students to guidance counsellors, he/she would consult with the guidance counsellors, and he would in general cooperate very closely with the guidance department. Formally, he/she would not be a member of that department.

7. This plan would rely for its economic feasibility upon some concomitant reduction in the time allotted to guidance personnel in the school, and some reduction also in the strength of the system-centered psychological staff. The special counsellor would perform a number of tasks formerly carried out by school psychologists. A similar justification could not be cited for the reduction in the school guidance time, however, because the special counsellor would not be taking over many tasks previously performed by guidance personnel. A direct appeal must be made to the school and especially to the guidance department that it be willing to sacrifice some guidance time in the interest of an improved achieving of the overall humanitarian objectives of guidance toward which most guidance departments have always worked. It must in any case be obvious that this plan will rarely if ever be implemented if it increases the over-all cost of student services within a school system.

8. Some changes to reflect the advent of the new service would have to be made in the conceptualization and public representation of student services in the high school and the school system.

9. The narrower and clearer focus of the guidance counsellor role would permit suitable changes to be made in counsellor training

programs. Further modifications in existing training programs for counsellors could usually be made so that they would provide suitable preparation for special counsellors as well.

In conclusion, this plan for the improved provision to high school students of the best developmental and remedial assistance that is known through dividing the role of guidance counsellors into a guidance counsellor role and a special counsellor role, is not presented as a final, polished blueprint for action. Rather it is intended to initiate discussion leading to experimentation.

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