

POSITION PAPER ON SCHOOL GUIDANCE SERVICES¹

Canadian School Trustees' Association, 1980

Abstract

The problems currently faced by school guidance counsellors are defined and relevant recommendations for a meaningful role for guidance services in the school are articulated. Ways in which students can acquire knowledge of self, knowledge of the world, and life management skills are outlined. The roles of the counsellor, the teacher, the administrator, the school board, the parents, the community, and the Department of Education are stated and 12 recommendations for the improvement of guidance services are put forth.

Résumé

On présente la prise de position de l'Association canadienne des Conseillers d'Écoles sur les services scolaires en orientation. La présentation tente d'identifier les problèmes courants qu'envisagent les conseillers en orientation, de faire des suggestions correspondantes et de proposer un rôle significatif pour les services en orientation dans les écoles. On discute de la raison-d'être, de l'objectif et des buts de l'orientation et on précise les moyens qui peuvent prendre le conseiller, l'enseignant, l'administrateur, la commission scolaire, les parents, la communauté et le Ministère de l'Éducation pour réaliser les services en orientation. On énumère douze propositions pour l'amélioration des services d'orientation au Canada.

School trustees in Canada are concerned about high levels of youth unemployment. The late 60's saw relative prosperity in Canada. The demand for workers matched, and in some instances, outstripped the supply. For many Canadian students a university degree became equated with life long prosperity in a satisfying occupation. Today the supply of workers clearly exceeds the demand, particularly in white collar occupations. Rising inflation, a stagnant economy, and a youth unemployment rate which prevents the necessary social and economic integration of the young into the labour market is forcing schools to re-think the focus of their guidance services.

Trustees are also aware of widespread public dissatisfaction with the manner in which schools prepare young people for jobs. Faced with a buyers' market employers can, and do, demand higher academic qualifications, more job experience, better work preparedness, and a commitment to the work ethic.

Although the education system cannot be held accountable for unemployment it can, with the help of industry, labour and government, make a significant contribution in preparing youth for employment. A concern for the ultimate fate of their graduates in the job market is leading schools to give a higher priority to Career Education.

For the purpose of this paper the terms Career and Career Education are defined in their broadest sense. A *career* is considered to be the total series of roles and work experience a person occupies throughout life. It includes schooling, continuing education, employment, volunteer work home-making and retirement. *Career education* is a systematic program of activities and experiences designed to increase knowledge of self, occupations, training paths, life styles, job search skills, and decision-making strategies. It includes the integration of work, family, leisure and community roles.

Due to the accelerating rate of technological advancement youth can expect to change occupations a number of times in their working lives. Career choice, therefore, is not a single event, but a life long process in which individuals integrate all aspects of their lives.

Parents and the community are and will remain a primary source of advice and support for young people in their development of occupational expectations and initial selection of training paths and careers. Parents and students have made it clear that in today's complicated and changing world they want and need more informed and extensive help from the school than they are presently receiving.

Many young people are basing their decisions on inadequate information and unrealistic expectations. As they determine who they are, where they are going, and what they want to be, the school guidance counsellor can play a vital role.

1. Permission has been granted by the Canadian School Trustees' Association, 30 Metcalfe Street, Suite 507, Ottawa, Ontario, to present this version of their position paper on school guidance services.

If the school system is to contribute to the employability of youth, it must ensure that Career Education guidelines with clearly stated objectives are available for K-12/13. Trained personnel must be given the clear responsibility of delivering effective Career Education programs. To do this they must be provided with program materials and resources as well as the support of the school system.

Although this has implications for the training of all teachers, and for the course content of the subjects they teach, Career Education will have its most significant effect on the role of school guidance counsellors, the nature of the services they provide, and the support which guidance receives in the school system. Some guidance counsellors do give Career Education high priority but to be effective they require a new and more specific job description, different professional training, and a degree of support in their role by both school administrators and trustees which they have not previously received.

The need for career education is providing a new focus for guidance services but it must be recognized that the counsellor will continue to provide some social and personal support and act as a referral agency for students to social workers, child care officers, psychologists, public health nurses, and doctors.

In a time of economic restraint, declining enrollment, and an increasing demand for accountability, a lack of a clear job description accepted by school staffs, administration, and trustees has resulted in cutbacks in guidance services. This paper attempts to identify the problems currently faced by school guidance counsellors, offer relevant recommendations, and suggest a meaningful role for guidance services in the school.

The Problem

Generally stated, some aspects of the guidance program are provided by inadequately trained personnel or not provided at all. Sources of this problem are disagreement on the goals of school guidance and the role of the counsellor placement, lack of certification requirements for guidance counsellors, lack of appropriate counsellor training programs, organizational support, and guidance counsellor priorities.

Disagreement on the Goals of School Guidance and the Role of the Counsellor

Counsellor Educators have, to a large extent, trained school guidance counsellors on a psycho-therapeutic model. The result has been a generation of counsellors who view guidance as an

arena for persona-social counselling and feel less comfortable in the role of career educator. Communication of this concern has resulted in no positive change in the training of school counsellors.

Departments of Education generally wish career education to be an important aspect of the school program but frequently fail to provide the direction and support to ensure its delivery.

School administrators have often cast the counsellor in the role of executive assistant. As a result most of their time is spent in clerical and administrative functions rather than guidance.

Other professional staff feel no responsibility to integrate career education into subject matter and few help resolve student problems.

Parents and employers feel that students should be well prepared for entering a competitive job market. Help with personal problems is not a priority for most parents.

School guidance counsellors are confused about their role. They feel pulled in all directions by the differing expectations of the Department of Education, school administrators, other school staff, parents and employers. In seeking to please all, they succeed in pleasing none.

Placement

There is general agreement that placement services should be available to students about to leave school. There is, however, considerable disagreement as to the jurisdictional responsibility for providing these services (i.e., how and where it should be done.)

Lack of Certification Requirements for Guidance Counsellors

Although provincial jurisdictions require teachers of some specialities (i.e., French as a second language) to gain specific certification prior to being allowed to teach, this is not generally required of guidance counsellors. With no set standards to be met and no agreed-upon role to fulfill, the appointment of school guidance counsellors has been haphazard.

Lack of Appropriate Counsellor Training Programs

Few Canadian universities provide counsellor training programs which include mandatory courses in career education, organization and administration of guidance services, administration and interpretation of interest and aptitude tests, labour market information, sociology of work, vocational development theory, or group techniques. Thus, there are few opportunities for suitable initial counsellor preparation or continuing professional upgrading.

Organizational Support

Almost every provincial department of education has recently declared career education a priority. Having done so, there seems to be very little of the support one would expect as the natural outcome of such declarations.

Few provinces have provided curriculum outlines, stated learner outcomes, or provided lists of approved materials, all of which are essential to the delivery of an important educational program. Seldom has the support for Career Education been communicated to those in positions to ensure its delivery in a school system.

Guidance Counsellor Priorities

Although many problems must be resolved at higher levels, counsellors have, in general, failed to recognize their responsibility to provide Career Education.

Rationale

Planning a career is a demanding process, requiring the integration of work, family, leisure and community roles. This process has been made more difficult by the phenomenal advances in science and technology which have characterized the 20th century and resulted in drastic changes in our daily lives.

The nature of modern life has exerted tremendous pressure on the traditional institutions of marriage, church, and school. The roles of men and women in the family and in society have been challenged and changed. The populace is more specialized, more urban, more mobile, and more fragmented than ever before. Political, economic, and environmental issues are more complex and require more complex solutions. Increased educational and career opportunities have made the task of deciding more difficult. Earlier retirement and increased longevity have introduced a new concern for the elderly and a shortened work week has created concerns in dealing with leisure time. In the face of all this, traditionally held beliefs, values, and attitudes are being challenged. These changes have resulted in confusing and conflicting influences on individuals and their social and working relationships.

In an environment where *what is* does not necessarily predict *what will be* students must make important decisions about their lives. They cannot do so unless they are able to integrate the demands of the world into a personal perspective which enables them to deal with current challenges and meet the future with confidence in themselves and their abilities.

Public education must assume a leadership role in providing youth with educational experiences which will lead to productive and rewarding lives.

Aim

Guidance is an educational program of services designed to assist students develop a better understanding of themselves, the career opportunities available to them, and their social responsibilities.

Goals

Guidance is for all students and its goals are to foster the development of a knowledge of self, knowledge of the world, and the acquisition of life management skills. These goals can be achieved through the many activities and experiences available to students throughout their school lives.

Knowledge of Self

Students require a knowledge of themselves in order to make wise decisions about their future. Guidance provides opportunities for students to consider their interests, aptitudes, abilities, values, beliefs, and attitudes. Ways in which students begin to acquire this knowledge include (a) assessment and evaluation activities (i.e., interest inventories, aptitude tests and informal checklists); (b) interpretation of test results, and follow-up counselling; (c) classroom activities and special programs (i.e., clarifying values, building self-esteem and developing positive attitudes); and (d) interaction with other students and school staff in both academic and extra-curricular settings.

Knowledge of the World

School provides the opportunity for students to acquire knowledge about the world and the tasks which will face them in adult life. They learn about careers, explore areas that interest them, acquire experiences, and make commitments that will influence their future lifestyles. They also begin to learn society's expectations of them as workers, parents, and citizens. Ways in which students can acquire this knowledge include (a) curriculum activities contributing to career awareness (i.e., relating subject matter and skills to careers); (b) information (i.e., educational and career opportunities, community and social services, leisure activities, economic and environmental issues); (c) special programs (i.e., courses, seminars, workshops, career fairs, career weeks, special speakers and assemblies); and (d) community involvement (i.e., visiting speakers, advisory committees, cooperative education, work experience, job shadowing, and field trips).

Acquisition of Life Management Skills

Students need to learn the communication, planning, and decision-making skills necessary to function effectively and to integrate what they have learned about themselves and work. Ways in which students can acquire life management skills include (a) career education programs (i.e., educa-

tional planning, job seeking and job keeping skills, vocational planning, financial management, creative use of leisure time and roles and responsibilities of family members); (b) existing courses (i.e., Home Economics, Business Education, English, Mathematics and Physical Education); (c) special units to develop specific skills (i.e., problem-solving, study skills and good work habits); and (d) community involvement (i.e., specialized services and resources that are not available in the school system).

Delivery of Services

The guidance program does not just happen. It is a result of a conscious commitment to a course of action based on the recognition that student needs vary according to stages of growth. A master plan for guidance offers the maximum number of services to the maximum number of students with the minimum number of specialists.

The personally committed and professionally prepared counsellor orchestrates the guidance program and is at the focal point in assessing needs, initiating planning, coordinating activities, and evaluating services.

Periodic surveys to determine the needs of students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the community at large should be carried out to ensure that a successful program of comprehensive guidance services for all students K—12/13 is offered.

Communication of guidance priorities to the school staff and an invitation to participate as vital members of the guidance team should be initiated at the beginning of each school year. Activities which can easily be infused into the existing curriculum can then be identified and teachers trained to provide them. Other activities based on available community resources (i.e., guest speakers, field trips, job shadowing) can be planned. When these have been scheduled, the counsellor has isolated those activities which must be delivered personally.

Wherever possible group techniques should be employed (i.e., class instruction, specific skill units, counselling groups) to maximize the effective use of the counsellor's time and skills and to ensure the availability of guidance to all students. There are services, however, such as diagnostic testing, crisis counselling, and consultation with specialists, which must be carried out on an individual basis. To meet the needs of school and students, guidance programs must be constantly monitored and evaluated.

The Counsellor

In addition to assessing needs, initiating plans, coordinating activities, and evaluating the pro-

gram, the counsellor provides additional services directly to students, parents, staff, and community agencies. These services include (a) group and individual counselling of a personal/social, educational, and occupational nature; (b) group and individual testing of interests, aptitudes, abilities and achievement; (c) consulting with parents, teachers, and community agencies; (d) liaising with feeder schools and post secondary training institutions; (e) securing, maintaining, and distributing current information of an educational, occupational, personal, and social nature; (f) sharing professional expertise with staff, parents, and community; and (g) engaging in research and follow-up activities relevant to the school program.

The Teacher

The classroom teacher is the primary contact with the student and, as such, is a valuable participant in the guidance program. The teacher who is sensitive to the developmental needs of the students will (a) adapt instructional methods to learning styles; (b) serve as a listener (if not a counsellor) to the troubled; (c) observe, identify, and refer students with special needs; (d) consult with the counsellor and parents to understand students and their behavior; (e) incorporate Career Education activities into the subject matter; and (f) participate in the orientation of students.

The Administrator

The administrator's support for and involvement in the guidance program is essential to the provision of an effective guidance program. To set the tone and establish the atmosphere for successful guidance the administrator will (a) outline the counsellor's job description; (b) establish, with the counsellor, long and short term goals for guidance; (c) evaluate the guidance program's outcomes; and (d) provide for the delivery of the guidance program.

The School Board

School boards, when fully informed of the nature and extent of the guidance program being offered can (a) determine local policy within provincial guidelines; (b) influence the establishment of local goals and priorities; (c) cooperate with other agencies in establishing a Career Education resource centre; (d) establish and serve on advisory committees; (e) sponsor teacher/counsellor internships in business and industry; (f) encourage the establishment of work experience/cooperative education programs; (g) provide industry sponsored in-services for guidance counsellors, to focus on local business and industry and their needs; and (h) encourage the development of local initiatives in guidance programs.

The Parents

Parents do have a direct involvement in the guidance program. They can (a) communicate with school personnel on a regular basis, (b) participate as guest speakers, (c) serve on advisory committees, (d) participate in career days, (e) serve as models for job shadowing, and (f) provide feedback on the effectiveness of the guidance program.

The Community

Community participation is an essential part of the guidance program. Business, industry, and social agencies can (a) provide locations for field trips, job shadowing, work experience, and cooperative education; (b) serve as guest speakers; (c) provide informational materials; (d) participate in career days or career fairs; (e) serve on advisory committees; and (f) provide direct services through mental health clinics, service clubs, social and family services, corrections, probation and parole matters, recreation, health services, and Boards of Trade and Chambers of Commerce.

Department of Education

Departments of Education formulate policy statements and develop broad provincial guidelines which can be adapted to specific needs at the local level. They can (a) set certification requirements for counsellors (in most jurisdictions), (b) consult with universities about the nature and content of counsellor training, (c) provide leadership in identifying provincial priorities, (d) initiate new guidance programs and courses, (e) organize and provide ongoing in-service programs for counsellors, (f) introduce and provide new guidance materials, (g) monitor the effectiveness of existing services, and (h) encourage counsellors to develop personalized programs based on local needs.

Recommendations

The Canadian School Trustees' Association puts forth the following recommendations.

- (1) That Departments of Education, Provincial Trustee Associations and local School Boards issue a strong statement on the importance of career education for all students.
- (2) That Departments of Education provide the resources and the leadership for the devel-

opment of suitable materials and curriculum guidelines for Career Education in provinces where these do not already exist.

- (3) That there be greater interprovincial sharing of information and materials with respect to Career Education possibly through the Council of Ministers of Education.
- (4) That local school boards ensure that each student has access to comprehensive Career Education programs from K-12/13 which clearly outlines desired learner outcomes.
- (5) (a) That Canadian universities put greater emphasis on the following in their counsellor training programs—Career Education, interest and aptitude testing, the consultative role, group techniques, labour market information, sociology of work, and vocational development theory.
 - (b) That these courses be offered at times and places which meet the needs of those presently employed as guidance counsellors.
- (6) (a) That requirements for certification of counsellors be established.
 - (b) That these requirements ensure counsellors are qualified to deliver effective Career Education.
- (7) That school boards ensure that job descriptions for their guidance counsellors are developed.
- (8) That counsellors and their immediate supervisors be required to establish and evaluate school guidance objectives on an annual basis.
- (9) That a cooperative approach, which addresses and resolves jurisdictional conflicts, be developed to meet the placement needs of students about to leave school.
- (10) That school boards arrange teacher/counsellor internships in business, industry, and employment centres.
- (11) That school boards establish community based advisory committees on Career Education.
- (12) That guidance counsellors make every effort to ensure that parents, teachers, and students understand the guidance services available.