

ON THE ACQUISITION OF LIFE MANAGEMENT SKILLS: A REACTION TO THE POSITION PAPER ON SCHOOL GUIDANCE SERVICES

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Abstract

This article is a personal response to the position paper of the Canadian School Trustees' Association (1981) on school guidance services. The author supports the notion that life management skills should be an important component of the school curriculum, with the addition of the practical competencies of change and adaptability.

Résumé

Cet article est une réponse personnelle au Conseil Canadien de l'Administration des Écoles (1981), concernant sa position à l'orientation professionnelle dans les écoles. L'auteur appuie la notion que l'administration technique de la vie doit être une partie intégrale et primordiale du programme des études scolaires, en tenant compte de la compétence pratique adaptée aux temps et lieux.

The acquisition of life management skills is proposed as one of the goals of the Canadian School Trustees' Association's (1981) position paper on school guidance services. One of the underlying assumptions of the C.S.T.A., as well as counsellors and the educational establishment, is the indication of a vital need for more efficient approaches in the Canadian educational system in assisting students in gaining insight and understanding of the complex world of work. One of the realities of the times is that society is becoming much more technically oriented, thus changing the face of work, and as a result people are having a difficult time adjusting. Gidney (1981) reports that almost half of those unemployed are under 25 years of age. Statistics Canada (Page, 1979) reports that 25 percent or more of the 1975 secondary graduates in Ontario were making less than what is considered the minimum recruitment salary in the Federal Government. In this regard, life management skills should become one of the most important components of a school curriculum. However, in addition to career education programmes that the position paper espouses, I would like to add the practical competencies of change and adaptability.

At the present time, the idea of change and adaptability as a concept to be taught seems difficult if not impossible for the educational establishment and those who develop school curriculums because the Canadian educational establishment is essentially backward looking. While mass education has raised literacy levels and filled the classrooms, its main feature has contributed to its

elitence. There has been much innovating, yet schools are still geared towards the rigid system of seating, grouping, marking, grading, and the authoritarian role of the teacher that has made mass education possible (Toffler, 1970). Another example of misplaced priorities is the way science courses are placed in the curriculum. While science courses are a major component of the pre-university curriculum, they do not meet the national or scientific needs of the community. Page (1979) reports that 95% of high school students will never take university science courses yet a significant number of students will go into technical related jobs. It appears that as school students advance through the system, they enter a society that is structured in jobs, roles, and organizations, like the school itself. As society focuses on the "here and now", the change reflects the evolution of the post-industrial society. However, society is changing so quickly that the educational system, as well as a large segment of the society, has been unable to keep up. It was reported recently at Camosun College that there was a three year waiting list for an auto mechanics course (Victoria Times-Colonist, 1981). Another indication is that some occupational skills are becoming obsolete. Manchester (1974) has reported that in the chemical industry, half of its business came from the sale of products that did not exist 10 years earlier. Thus, the focus of schools and education in general will have to be on the future. People will have to learn how to adapt and be prepared for change. Students must become more flexible in their plans and attitudes and be able to adapt to changing

conditions, including job hunting, coping with future changes in job content, and the anticipation of contingencies.

In a curriculum that focuses on change and adaptability, the emphasis would be on effective learning, while lecturing would have to be de-emphasized. A group leader would assist students in clarifying values and experiences. Students would have to be motivated to be actively involved in identifying, examining, and communicating their ideas and feelings. According to Eisenberg (1974), goals of a curriculum that emphasizes change and adaptability would have to help students (1) examine the feelings, views, and assumptions they have about the future; (2) become creative and imaginative so that they would be able to speculate and make conjectures about the kind of future they would like to bring forth, for themselves and society; (3) set personal goals for themselves and subsequently learn the general process for planning and decision-making; and (4) incorporate general problem solving strategies into their approach to their future.

The basic rationale for a programme like this would be to assist students to think about and plant their future. Futurologists like Toffler talk of two approaches in looking at the study of the future that can be utilized in planning a curriculum like this. One approach is based on the idea that the future can be anticipated. Once this is done, people can cope and adapt to the changes. The other approach is that there are many alternative futures, which may be negative or positive, but people must realize that they have the potential to create the kind of future they desire. All they have to do is to be imaginative, inventive, and unafraid of the unusual. In either approach the idea is that flexibility can be built into everyone's life if he/she plans wisely. Gysberg (1974) believes the students, and most importantly teachers, will have to realize that (1) collectively their future working lives will differ radically from past and present patterns; (2) they will change their jobs more often; (3) they will relocate more often; (4) updating of their training and education will occur more than once if they are to stay abreast of change; and (5) they will have to be more competitive within the job market.

Several methods have been suggested by Eisenberg (1974) on how learning change and

adaptability can be accomplished. Once such technique is called "brainstorming". Its purpose is to develop effectiveness in producing creativity and introspection. It can also help individuals clarify values. Another activity is "future windowing". This idea is based on the assumption that things the individual hopes will or will not come about. "Scenario writing" is another activity futurologists use. It is useful in facilitating divergent thinking, introspection, and stimulation of the imagination. Problem solving, decision making, and activities that assist in the understanding of the planning process are only a few of the techniques that can be utilized. The range is limitless.

With the incorporation of change and adaptability into the goals of a comprehensive guidance programme, the Canadian educational system can better contribute to the preparing of young people for employment. We need to develop a school guidance programme that synthesizes an individual's career aspirations along with a lifestyle development to optimize human potential. Like Procrustes, who stretched his guests or cut off their limbs to fit the bed size his inn offered, our schools have been trying to adjust children rather than adjust the curriculum. Instituting some of the curriculum changes that the Position Paper on School Guidance Services recommends is an important step towards making the school guidance services more relevant for all.

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