

THE CANADIAN COUNSELOR

Myrne B. Nevison

It seems particularly appropriate in our centennial year as we gain a new awareness of the transition of our frontier land to a complex nation and as we catch the excitement of the concepts implied in Expo to reflect on the transition of our amorphous grouping of guidance workers into the professional dimensions for The Canadian Counselor. We are moving - from training relevant to clinical psychology or education, from jobs involving trouble-shooting or administrative control to preparation involving a new awareness of our society (Porter's Vertical Mosaic) and of the possibilities of human development and to professional competence in helping all people to a more satisfying life.

But this new vision of our professional development needs to be implemented in the many details of our day-to-day work - wishing is not enough. It may be helpful to discuss some of the areas demanding immediate attention if we are to meet the challenge of competence in an age of automation.

One of our major areas is implied by the recent Department of Labour report on vocational development in its policy statement that counseling is the right of all Canadians of all ages. To implement this policy there are many programs of personnel services that we must expand or develop. Such programs have been developed by our American friends who have now removed most of the early bugs so that our more cautious institutions may now adopt them. To designate these as new causes a degree of embarrassment which I try to rationalize as canny cautiousness, but which I fear may be otherwise described.

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In the elementary schools we should have counselors to discover those children with perceptual difficulties, cerebral dysfunctioning and retarded development who are not ready to tackle the tasks of reading and writing, to diagnose learning difficulties, to identify talents, to initiate help for the emotionally damaged - instead we expect teachers with a year or two of university or Normal school and responsible for thirty or forty children to perform such complex functions. In the secondary schools we should have people trained in personality functions. In the secondary schools we should have people trained in personality development, testing, and the world of work to assist students to understand themselves, their world, and their alternatives of action - instead we allow untrained teacher-counselors to function as a trouble-shooting adjunct of administration to quell academic crises, to give advice to university bound students, and to imply no real interest in potential drop-outs. In our employment agencies we should have specialists who can help an individual evaluate his vocation potential - instead we have clerks who shuffle applications and job vacancies. The neglect of such personnel programs results in undeveloped potential, inadequate vocational progress, and crippling emotional problems - a price we can no longer afford.

It may be that the difficulty we actually face in the implementation of such counseling services is the acceptance by us of a responsibility to place before the public and the political bodies the information on the need for such help, the possibilities of action, and the relative costs of prevention vs attempts at rehabilitation. The assumption of such responsibilities of professional leadership, of public education, and of political lobbying appear relatively obvious - but why have we not done it? Does our evident reluctance imply that those of us who have chosen counseling as a profession may be afraid to leave the security of our office to enter the public scene, to battle for improvements? If so, how do we solve this? Do we train some people in a combination of administrative competence public relations effectiveness, and counselor sensitivity to meet this need and leave the counselor in his office gathering statistics for the battle?

The development of effective programs is hindered not only by

our tendency to sit back and work with individuals but also by the paucity of our communication with other professional workers, by our habit of working in isolation instead of as a team. In an age of increasing specialization, we must actively plan to coordinate our work with that done in other agencies or institutions so that we may share professional insights and avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts. It is all too easy to allow the myriad of detail and crises to prevent us from effective personal communication. Institutional coordination must also be sought to define for each agency or school its prime area of responsibility. It may be insufficient for a school counselor to work with a child in the school setting and ignore a devastating home situation but contact should be made with an appropriate agency to follow through with family consultation rather than the school person to attempt to counsel the whole family. It may be that school facilities should be used by other agencies, especially mental health ones, so that a child may receive such specialized help in a familiar, non-threatening setting. Surely we can plan for the effective sharing of responsibilities to utilize the resources of each institution and each professional worker?

We also must develop computer services to alert us to possibilities of professional consultation. Often a counselor is hampered in working with an individual by not knowing that others are also involved with him - maybe even at cross purposes. Sometimes unnecessary duplication of effort results. If we have a central office where we might file in a computer the names of all individuals for whom we are concerned, then it would be relatively easy to find out if others were also involved. Where we thought such contact desirable, we would then be free to consult within the bounds of ethical limits.

Computers must also be used to supply current educational and vocational information. Past educational records for individual students are often needed in planning courses for people transferring from distant schools; the transmission of scores from standardized tests as well as areas of courses would certainly assist in planning for the best program. Information on the great variety of educational opportunities together with their admission requirements, costs, and projected usefulness would be most welcome. Analysis of job trends and occupational information that is current would also be another

needed computer function. Since our society appears unmindful of the use of such computer help in non-profit institutions, we might need to seek methods of demonstrating or even dramatizing the costs of neglecting the development of these technical aids. It seems sad that in so much of our work inefficiency is so easily masked and monetary advantages uncounted or unidentified.

I would like to turn now to some of the minor things that are hampering counselor effectiveness - problems I hesitate to mention since they must appear ludicrous in the eyes of efficient businessmen, yet problems that become extremely important.

With the new educational opportunities and with the proliferation of strange occupations, it is becoming necessary to discuss vocational and educational plans with both the student and his parents - yet most counselors do not have an office large enough to hold four chairs. Much of these discussions should have a degree of privacy - yet many counselors operate in cubbyholes without soundproof walls, (and employment counselors usually do not even have the visual privacy).

With schools facing many problems in enrolling a greater variety of students, we find administrators faced with additional clerical and academic leadership tasks. To escape some of their added burdens principals have unloaded some of them on the ever-present counselor who has ambitions in the administrative line and this practice very effectively limits counseling time and opportunities. With increasing need for the counselor to keep up with his areas of speciality in personal development, in the world of work, in the identification of individual strengths and weaknesses and to visit industries and his colleagues in community agencies, we find teachers, threatened with the possibility that a troubled student may talk about them, insisting that the counselor be first of all a teacher (so that he will represent them rather than encourage student confidences). This tendency inevitably puts such a teacher-counselor in such a difficult position that swamped with duties and study in all the areas he tends to neglect the less clearly defined counseling responsibilities. Also he is all too apt to be regarded by the students as the representative of authority, the antagonist of lower class youths, and an arbiter of job possibilities by his writing letters of recommendation. It is a strange thing that most schools, in fact, most school counselors,

do not recognize that the power they wield if they write the letters of recommendation inhibits confidential discussion of problems and encourages image building. With counseling becoming more complicated and guidelines for young people fewer, we resist paying for the necessary advanced training for the work and maintain that anyone with the "right" personality can counsel - or give the "right advice". With leaders in business, government, and education all stressing the importance of counseling, we make effective work almost impossible in schools. Such practices appal me.

Training practices provide us with another area to tackle. The universities have long upheld their monopoly on the training for the professions and have based the selection of students on formal academic barriers - requirements more oriented to meeting superficial prestige demands of the institution than to evaluating individual competence. In the name of a liberalizing education, admission to professional programs is usually based on formal, undergraduate academic courses and anyone who has not trod the cloistered paths is usually considered unfit to enter one of the service professions. In counseling we have limited our trainees to people with either a teaching major or a major in psychology and such admission requirements have prevented many mature, intelligent people with a breadth of understanding of the larger community from being prepared for counseling in employment bureaus, penitentiaries, community centres, and even schools. I fully recognize that any university department that suggests its program at a graduate level can be tackled without undergraduate courses in the speciality is open to derisive comments by the academic purists of lowering standards; but surely the advocates of the liberalizing disciplines should not be permitted to hinder the development of more adequate counselor training programs -- programs with different but equally demanding criteria of competence.

Training programs should be geared to an urban society when long summer vacations for tending the crops are a quaint relic of earlier days. Counselor education demands the resources of a University but should be planned to utilize all available time to efficiently develop the sophisticated practitioner. Full-time study and immersion in a program to allow for new insights into the deceptively familiar is essential - but it should not be interrupted by long vacation periods

which allow the becoming counselor to lapse back into inadequate habits.

University departments involved in the training of counselors must break down yet another ivory tower - the attitude of internal specialization - and recognize that sociology, economics, commerce, medicine, and social work as well as psychology and education are all involved. In addition, students preparing for work in specialities where they must form a team should meet in some core courses to stress a common vocabulary, to facilitate communication, and to develop acceptance of and respect for the unique skills and contributions to be made by each profession. Such a start at working relations may facilitate the later difficulty in cutting the red tape of agency and institutional line relationships to provide more direct and profitable contact and coordination of services.

From the more obviously practical areas, I would now like to explore counseling as a process rather than counseling as a service to people. Although this is a large, extremely important but rather complicated area, I shall just sketch it briefly. It is concerned with the techniques counselors use and the basic assumptions underlying them of personality development, motivating factors, and patterns of learning.

A survey of the literature on the counseling process and on counseling effectiveness is discouraging - we seem to have no definitive answers. Evidence appears both contradictory and inclusive; constructs flourish and fade. Our early belief in our power to match men and jobs through testing and personal knowledge has been considerably shaken by the self-concept advocates. We since have learned to be fairly comfortable with Rogerian concepts of inherent growth forces and individual uniqueness - especially when we see no feasible answers ourself and grasp the hope of self-determination. We are now facing, somewhat uneasily, the implications from some writers that no man has limited choice and therefore cannot be held wholly accountable for his actions since responsibility must be based on the freedom to choose from alternatives. If he is indeed the product of his inherited potential and his environmental pressures, he then acts in the only way that maintains a sufficient feeling of adequacy. Such a

belief is especially hard for school counselors where colleagues tend to demand results in the form of more tractable students, where control functions mesh uneasily with catalytic, growth-inducing concerns.

The emphasis of some existentialists on the requirement that each individual accept responsibility for his actions and that such actions must recognize and honor the rights and freedoms of others seems to offer a measure of hope - but our tendencies toward respectability make us cautious with a philosophy with beatnik adherents.

The reinforcement emphases of the behaviorists reassures us for it represents our teaching practices but its resemblance to Big Brother societies makes us hesitate. The emerging emphasis of reality therapy with the counselor representing society's reactions, especially reactions indicating disapproval for delinquency, appeals to our authoritarian tendencies but finds a balance with humanitarian philosophies difficult. This seeming inability of theorists to produce conclusive answers is allowing us to drift toward the comfortable belief that the thing that really matters is our relationship with the individual - that by just being ourselves with all our attitudes and beliefs we can trigger positive growth.

Yet a lurking concern for theoretical principles remains. Surely there is an integrated whole to this elephant that our diverse theorists have been exploring almost blindly - or at least with blinders. We must press on in the search for underlying principles that would govern such a relationship, principles that can be isolated, tested, and taught. Is it not time that some Canadians pushed beyond the task of developing programs to this theoretical frontier; is it not time for research teams to be gathered, funds secured, and momentum triggered?

My last area, is, to me, a most vital one. Traditionally counselors have centered their attention on helping individuals to solve their immediate problems, to make the most satisfying choice of the available possibilities. But this has implied an acceptance of the possibilities, an acceptance of society's blundering progress to provide better alternatives in living. If the counselor is indeed a specialist in human development and in the world at large, has he not

then an obligation to act as an agent for desirable change so that his client will have better choices?

In recent years the rapid technological and industrial changes have forced us to modify our traditional laissez-faire economic practices in favour of discreet government nudging to maintain productive equilibrium. Yet, in an era of dramatic changes in our societal structures and values, there has been no similar leadership to plan for satisfying developments. Such planning has too many connotations of the Big Brother society, of a lack of freedom, of regimentation in the name of adjustment. But, by allowing change in these areas to come by trial and error, a process too slow for the current momentum in the transition between two different kinds of worlds, we have allowed the guide lines for youth to be almost obliterated leaving them with problems often beyond their experience and judgment, with choices that all too often limit the development of their potentialities. Examples abound. A society that removes the traditional jobs for the early school drop-outs yet fails to provide satisfying educational or work experiences leading to desirable adulthood is not freeing but frustrating them. A society that surrounds its youth with sexual pressures but fails to provide acceptable alternatives for unmarried mothers is not facilitating self-actualization but deep scars. A society that needs the full development of individual potential and people with a measure of confidence in their ability to face the changing life patterns yet maintains educational institutions centered on screening out the non-verbal just discourages most of its youth.

As we assess this area, we find goals and trends emerging to develop people at ease with change and able to live comfortably in large cities. We are finding a grouping of services to facilitate their use and efficiency - shopping centres, community centres, educational centres, fine arts centres. We find the development of health spas and private recreational facilities - in sports clubs, in apartment buildings. We see the use of a small primary school in England to provide a child care and advice for parents in an area of a few blocks.

We find, too, indications that we must develop communities based on small enough units to counteract the apparent isolation of many

city people and the ease with which children and adolescents slip into unsupervised anonymity. It would seem that counselors must accept responsibility to work with community leaders and other specialists in planning such communities centered around educational, recreational, and counseling services. It would seem that within such centres counselors could work profitably with staff of other institutions in furthering human development through the use of recreational and educational facilities and programs. Our current isolation in various buildings and our fragmentation as we attempt alone to meet a variety of needs rather reminds me of the small corner grocery store waiting with inadequate supplies for emergency use.

As counselors we must assume leadership in planning for a society where there are good alternatives from which youth may choose, where the anxieties of job and nuclear possibilities are controllable, where learning is encouraged and guided, where the goals are insight and confidence. As counselors we must use our knowledge to help society modify its institutions, develop more appropriate values, respect its members and their rights. We must confer with our colleagues in other disciplines and plan together for fruitful action. The implications of authority in planned social change may frighten us - but the opposite choice is not freedom but anarchy. We must broaden the alternatives that our young people face - to be an agent for change both with the individual and for the individual within society.

As an association, we must implement this new awareness of both our training and functions of the professional counselor by defining criteria for their university preparation, by developing an ethical code, and to determine our legal position.

As Expo excites us with a vision of a delightful, intriguing yet urban environment to match the dimensions of an age of automation and leisure, we see our part as counselors to help individuals develop their human potentiality - a vital challenge for The Canadian Counselor.

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1. Porter, John. The Vertical Mosaic. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965.
 2. Technical & Vocational Training Branch, Department of Labour. Counseling and Guidance for Vocational Development, 1965.

Notre centenaire donne au conseiller la bonne occasion pour juger les progrès de sa profession et pour gagner une perspective sur les possibilités futures. L'esprit de la nouvelle époque démontré par l'Expo exige de nouvelles idées et dimensions. Les universités devraient élargir les conditions d'accès aux programmes de formation professionnelle et en même temps utiliser toutes les disciplines pour fournir la meilleure instruction possible. Pour mieux aider ses clients, le conseiller devrait dépasser l'emphase actuel sur le choix de matière, les fonctions administratives, et la préoccupation avec les étudiants qui se trouvent dans l'embarras. Il a la responsabilité pour aider tous ses clients pendant qu'ils essaient de réaliser leur potentiel. Il faut des recherches sur la nature exacte de ce qui se passe pendant une entrevue. Il faut aussi travailler pour donner à chaque client plus de choix et plus de liberté d'action. Enfin, il faut développer une éthique et préciser la position légale du conseiller.