School counselling is not a clearly delineated professional field, largely because it lacks a basic academic discipline to which its theory and practice can be related. Since the *social* development of youth is paramount during secondary levels of education, it is suggested that high school counsellors should view themselves as *social educators* or *applied social psychologists*. This role-reorientation is in keeping with on-going changes in formal education which are gradually providing more socially relevant experiences for adolescents in their long period of social and economic dependency.

# THE SCHOOL COUNSELLOR: A PRACTITIONER IN SEARCH OF A PROFESSION

JOSEPH G. WOODSWORTH

School "counselling" is no longer a typically North American phenomenon but is now established practice in most Western European nations. Why have such services become part of the educational scene and what role behaviors might reasonably be expected of a professional group called "school counsellors"? The two questions are related, of course, since the social pressures which have produced these services should determine what the practitioner is supposed to do. The following attempt to deal with these questions arises from the author's conviction that the role of the counsellor is not clearly delineated and that this both inhibits healthy role identification by the practitioner and weakens support from the tax-paying public. A clarification of function is timely not only because of the current close scrutiny of educational institutions but also because of on-going social changes which are affecting schooling processes in which counsellors play a part.

For purposes of this paper, school counselling will be dealt with only in relation to secondary levels of education. The rationale for elementary school counselling is quite different and must be developed within the context of pre-pubescent child psychology. In particular, it is with the *social* orientation of youth that this paper is concerned, for this is seen as the focal point of guidance activities in the adolescent period of development.

## *Social Needs as a Basis for Counselling Services*

As social institutions, schools are obviously closely tied to the needs and purposes of the societies in which they exist. It is therefore not surprising that counselling services first became well established in North America, where the complexity of vocational life in the affluent and technologically

Professor Woodsworth was educated at the University of Alberta and Stanford University. He has long been associated with the Department of Educational Psychology at The University of Calgary.

advanced nations of Canada and the United States soon became reflected in both the diversity and duration of schooling for their youth. Such diversity invited "guidance" and created a demand for personnel who had the knowledge and skills to help students find their way through a maze of educational and vocational choices. More recently, burgeoning technologies and the introduction of comprehensive-type schools have produced similar pressures for counselling services in other free-choice countries.

If curricular diversification is as much a reflection of social needs as it is a response to the educator's plea for a recognition of individual differences, then socially complex nations have imbedded in their secondary school systems long-term — perhaps permanent — needs for the facilitation of wise educational and vocational decisions by students. Of course, not all students require help with such decision-making, any more than all students require specific instructional help in mastering assigned subject-matter. Nevertheless, as in the case of classroom teaching, someone "in attendance" is often needed when educational and vocational problems become too difficult or too complex for individual students. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the person who provides this educational and vocational guidance must possess not only personal attributes appropriate to the counselling process but also an intimate knowledge of his society and its developing trends.

Another social factor in the growth of counselling services in schools has been urbanization and the attendant problems of social friction induced by crowded living space and the weakening of primary social units such as the family. Because the child links home and school, it is only natural that school systems have shown concern about home circumstances which interfere with institutional objectives. Traditionally, "personal" counselling has been the outcome of this concern, and many school counsellors have shown considerable willingness to involve themselves in both diagnostic and therapeutic aspects of "case studies." Often, the origins of these problm cases lie in early childhood and stem from deep-rooted family maladjustments, faulty social organization, or economic inequities — all of which lie outside the school's area of social responsibility. Nevertheless, many school systems consider that the counsellor must "do something" about such problem cases and he is deemed to have failed in his job if he does not do so.

More recently, as the school has taken on social functions which an earlier era would have considered parental prerogatives, "personal" counselling has been re-interpreted to include the type of help which most children need in growing up — so-called "normal growth" guidance. At secondary school levels, the focus of such guidance is often on the acquisition of knowledge and skills which are considered important for adequate social functioning: good inter-personal relationships, socially constructive attitudes, accurate self-insights, and the like. In this parental-surrogate role, the counsellor is obviously more of an educator than a clinician! Once again, it could be argued that not all youth need the counsellor's help in such social learning, since agencies other than the school also account for a child's level of social

competence. Nevertheless, it is patently obvious in present day societies that adolescents frequently look for guidance outside the home; and unless the family unit can re-assert its influence over its teenagers, it would appear that the pervasive school society will become increasingly involved in those responsibilities for adolescent development which the family will not or cannot assume.

*The Changing Nature of Formal Education*

It is difficult to take seriously Illich's proposal[1] about "deschooling" society, especially when he later suggests a naive, Rousseauian alternative to formal education.[2] Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the increasing expression of feeling — particularly in North America — that institutionalized education is occupying too much of young people's time. As Coleman has noted, "With every decade, the length of schooling has increased, until a thoughtful person must ask whether society can conceive of no other way for youth to come into adulthood",[3] an observation echoed by Hutchins who stated that "The political community should be required to justify the prolonged detention of its citizens in an educational system."[4] In a somewhat different vein, Berg has protested that educational requirements for jobs are constantly rising and often bear little or no relationship to the work to be done — a phenomenon which he labelled "The Great Training Robbery."[5] Such warning signals about prolonged academic schooling also come to us directly from youth themselves, in a variety of protesting ways, and their message is quite clear: the largely vicarious experiences of formal education lack meaning (relevance) without a social context.

It would appear, then, that we have been isolating adolescents too long from the larger society in which their formal schooling is imbedded. We have long justified lengthening institutional education on at least two grounds: (1) that our knowledge base is becoming increasingly broad and therefore the rising generation has more to learn, and (2) that our increasingly automated societies do not need the young on labor markets. These adult perceptions, logical as they may be, have obviously not taken adequate account of the earlier physiological maturing of today's adolescents, the changing sexual mores, the loosening of family ties, and the way in which these factors have accumulatively contributed to the drives of young people toward more mature social roles. It seems that exclusively formal education during later adolescence and early adulthood is now running into a law of diminishing motivational returns — at least for all but the most scholarly-

[1]Ivan Illich, "The Alternative to Schooling," *Saturday Review,* June 19, 1970.

[2]Ivan Illich, After Deschooling What? *Social Policy,* September/October, 1971.

[3]James Coleman, as chairman of the Panel on Youth of the President's Science Advisory Committee, quoted in *Time* (August 27, 1973), p. 52.

[4]Robert M. Hutchins, as chairman of the Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions, quoted in the *Daily Telegraph* (London) (September 6, 1973), p. 15.

[5]Ivan Berg, *Education and Jobs: The Great Training Robbery* (New York: Prager Publishers, 1970.)

minded in this age-range. Intensive verbal education apparently pays great cognitive dividends in the early years of schooling;[6] however, the growing social awareness of near-adults seems to require a type of socially-oriented learning that cannot be acquired solely in the classrooms of our schools.

It would be a mistake to interpret the above criticisms of institutionalized education as a sign that social forces should be set in motion to reduce general levels of education. If post-industrial society is to be an "information" society,[7] then such a move would be quite incongruous. Fortunately, the increasing acceptance of learning as a life-long process is beginning to remove some of the social pressures on youth to complete their formal education in one long, unbroken period of time, and this may promote close cooperation among *all* educative agencies (formal and informal) to produce an earlier and more gradual orientation of youth to the adult society of which they must become a part. It is within such a system of shared socio-academic education that the modern secondary school counsellor must find his role.

*The Emerging Profession of School Counselling*

Some role diffusion is inevitable and desirable in all the helping professions. However, a particular professional group cannot be defined in terms of what it holds in *common* with other professions (e.g., the use of empathic responses) but, rather, in terms of what *distinctive* knowledge it bases its practice upon. Teaching must be based upon something to be taught, law upon legal knowledge, and medicine upon an understanding of the bio-chemical functioning of the human body. Does the secondary school counsellor have a basic "discipline", or, is he simply a generalist whose field is defined by the tasks which school administrators assign to him? Answers to such queries must be forthcoming if the counsellor is to acquire professional identity in his community. They are also necessary for the proper formulation of professional programs which prepare counsellors for their duties.

As implied earlier, the counsellor (through the school) is perforce involved both in educational and vocational guidance and in certain parental-surrogate functions which many urbanized families no longer seem able to handle — at least, not alone. Since the social settings of individual behavior are becoming salient in the adolescent period, it might not be considered inappropriate to consider secondary school counsellors as a professional group mainly concerned with the *social development* of adolescents. Some time ago, Dysinger stated that "The guidance movement needs a word, parallel to the word 'socialization' in social development, to express the vocational implications of maturation."[8] Current use of the term "career" guidance, linked with the concept of "vocational maturity" may have

[6]Jerome S. Bruner, *The Relevance of Education* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1973).

[7]Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

[8]W.S. Dysinger, Maturation and Vocational Guidance. *Occupations,* 1950, *29,* p. 200.

solved Dysinger's problem.[9] However, it is perhaps time to accept "socialization" as a more generic term than "career" guidance (broad as that term now seems to be) and to apply it to the basic process underlying both educational and vocational guidance *and* the normal-growth type of "personal" counselling which secondary school counsellors might be expected to do. As a coordinator of school and community efforts to broaden the social insights of adolescents, the secondary school counsellor could then think of himself as a *social educator* or an *applied social psychologist* (depending on his professional training). He would be a generalist only in the sense that he would have broad enough insights into human behavior to recognize when certain young people needed to be referred to other specialists or agencies.

Social psychology is defined by a technical dictionary as "the study of the behavior of individuals and of groups in a social environment, especially as that behavior is affected by the presence or influence of other individuals."[10] The suggestion that the secondary school counsellor should make this particular division of the social or behavioral sciences his central concern does not preclude his using knowledge about individual differences, psychometrics, or any other fields of enquiry to help adolescents to acquire skills and insights necessary to their adequate social functioning. It does, however, give emphasis to the fact that educational and vocational planning is a process of making *social* decisions, and it also provides a framework for "personal" counselling which differentiates between an educative and helping relationship, on the one hand, and the diagnostic and therapeutic interviews of the clinical psychologist, on the other. Finally, it has the effect of assigning to a universal agency — the school — at least partial responsibility for dealing with the long-standing problem of the adolescent's social irrelevance in modern societies.

*Some Role Re-Orientations*

As has been suggested above, a clearer sense of social function must characterize school counselling in the future than has been the case in the past. The following suggestions for role re-orientations are consistent with the foregoing rationale but are often as much a description of on-going changes in the counsellor's role as they are attempts to point the way to new role behaviors. Changes in social function are rarely abrupt but, rather, involve shifts in emphasis. It is important, nevertheless, that such shifts be noted so that one does not blindly climb on band-wagons — a tendency all too common in the semi-sciences of human behavior.

1. *Informing.* The non-directive movement in counselling and psychotherapy has made counsellors overly cautious about using factual informa-

[9]Donald E. Super and Martin J. Bohn, Jr., *Occupational Psychology,* Behavioral Science in Industry Series, Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co. Inc., 1970.

[10]H.B. English and A.V. English, *A Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychological and Psychonalytical Terms* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1958).

tion to "guide" students — a sort of didactic-phobia or fear of being directive. In societies of great informational complexity, well-organized, up-to-date information must surely be an essential resource in any realistic counselling situation. If, as has already been suggested, the counsellor avoids accepting psychotherapeutic roles, he need not be embarrassed by the thought that he is essentially an educator and that information is one of his basic "tools."

Counsellors usually associate informational aspects of guidance with educational and vocational counselling, and they shy away from these fields not only because the amount of data is overwhelming but because information-gathering often involves rather prosaic, clerical-type activities. Fortunately, computer-assisted educational/vocational programs may soon present an alternative to voluminous, often out-dated printed materials and provide the counsellee with an interesting means of exploring personally relevant information sources. In the meantime, educational/vocational guidance need not be viewed narrowly as involving merely verbal knowledge: a variety of multi-media information outlets abound in any technical society, and exploratory experiences (to be discussed later) must also be thought of as "informative." Moreover, information need not be restricted to educational and vocational opportunities but may include factual and interpretive materials relating to adolescent legal rights, the identification and prevention of venereal disease, the misuse of drugs, marriage preparation, and a host of other socially relevant topics not adequately handled today by home or school and about which numerous young people continue to be either grossly ignorant or misinformed.

A shift toward a more pedagogical role for the counsellor does not mean that he will become merely a prescriber or advice-giver. It does mean, however, that he will be expected to be *knowledgeable,* not simply to relate well to others. Such knowledge must go beyond the usual preparation in the behavioral sciences (valuable as that may be) to include "an intimate knowledge of society and its developing trends" (above, p.30) — and, like any other professional, the counsellor should be expected to keep abreast of all information that relates to his job of guiding or orientating those whom he counsels. Obviously, good counsellors already to this, but (as noted earlier) non-directive, therapeutic emphases in counselling and counsellor-education have for too long inhibited a stronger emphasis on social knowledgeability which the non-clinical role of the modern school counsellor demands.

2. *Group Counselling.* Many people consider that the juxtaposing of the terms "group" and "counselling" produces a conceptual contradiction, since they think of counselling as a highly individualized relationship. Regardless of past interpretations of these terms, the fact now is that school counsellors are increasingly using knowledge about group dynamics and peer-culture relationships to produce those insights in adolescents which are difficult to attain in the adult-youth relationships of the individual interview. Often, such social settings are the occasion for acquiring the factual information mentioned above; but more often the experienced counsellor

uses these sessions to provide for a peer-exchange of attitudes and value judgements. The skills required of the counsellor in such group approaches to counselling may be quite different from those required in one-to-one interview situations, so that both special personal qualities and special training may be necessary for successful use of this guidance technique.

The trend toward wider use of small groups for counselling purposes does not mean that the individual interview is being phased out. Quite the contrary: such group counselling often increases self-referrals of students whose experiences in groups often make them more willing to seek individual guidance. The greater use of group work by counsellors does, however, reinforce the growing image of the counsellor as a social educator or applied social psychologist. Also, the wide-ranging discussions which usually occur in group session further underline the importance of the counsellor's being knowledgeable about most of the social issues which concern adolescents.

3. *Providing Exploratory Experiences.* If threats about de-schooling sociey and complaints concerning the school's excessive monopolizing of young people's time are to be viewed as legitimate and widely supported criticisms of formal education, then solutions must be sought for what is apparently an unsatisfactory state of affairs in one of society's major social agencies. At the secondary levels of education (which is the concern of this paper), the problem seems to center around Coleman's complaint about the length of schooling and the delay this creates in bringing youth into adulthood. In North America, this problem of prolonged social adolescence has been with us for some time and has resulted from the expectancy (sometimes enforced by law) that most adolescents will remain continuously in school until the end of high school (grade 12) — often beyond.

The problem of earlier assimilation of the adolescent into the larger and wider adult society is already being acknowledged and tackled by several school systems in both North America and Western Europe where course credits are allowed for actual work experience that is related to a student's approved program of studies. Similarily, volunteer activities and organized field trips — sometimes involving considerable travel — are often arranged or supervised by school authorities. Moreover, as noted earlier, the acceptance of education as a life-long process is gradually inducing social acceptance of discontinuity in formal education, so that "drop-outs" need not nedessarily be "stay-outs." In short, schools have already started to abandon many of their lock-step programs in favor of a blend of formal and informal education.

The gradual acceptance by the school of the need for earlier socialization of youth will have to be matched by willingness on the part of non-school agencies to cooperate in a wider, more flexible concept of education. Can business and industry provide orientating work experiences for large numbers of high school students? What kinds of volunteer activities can be arranged and who will supervise them? Can older adolescents live more independent, more adult-like lives apart from their parents and, if so, how will

they be supported financially? Will widespread educative travel be too expensive for society or for individual families? Will municipal, regional, and national governments supply funds for a large variety of local initiative projects? Obviously, there must be positive answers to at least some of these questions before there is even a modest degree of "de-schooling" at secondary levels of education.

Adolescents are clearly impatient to break down many of the barriers which separate them from the "real" world, and it would be illogical for societies which have expressed so much concern about our artificially produced "teen-age culture" to continue to deny young people experiences which might foster increased social responsibility. It would not be surprising, therefore, to find more effort being expended in the future to make exploratory-type experiences available to an increasing number of youth at both secondary and post-secondary levels of education. Accordingly, it is doubtful that "career" guidance will remain much longer merely a series of verbal encounters between a counsellor and a counsellee. In his transition from student to citizen, the adolescent needs more vivid, more concrete social stimuli than those provided in the counselling interview; his self-insights are not securely acquired by introspective exercises but rather through self-testing in the world of actual experience.

4. *Cooperating with Non-School Agencies.* If the trend toward more concrete experiences for youth is sustained by public support, then the school counsellor must become more an *arranger of events* than a listener/talker. Such arranging will call for close cooperation between the school and the community-at-large, necessitating yet another shift in the role behaviours of counsellors — especially those whose counselling duties have remained almost exclusively intra-mural. Once again, the nature of the "shift" is in the direction of more *social* involvement, and counsellors will need not only considerable skill in dealing with adult personnel outside the school but also an intimate knowledge of the nature of services offered by cooperating non-school agencies.

5. *Specializing.* Just as the non-directive movement may have made counsellors overly cautious about being didactic, so "organismic" emphases in developmental psychology (the "whole" child!) may be inhibiting the acceptance of specialization in counselling. Yet, any mature profession develops "specialists" as its knowledge base broadens, and school counselling can hardly be considered an exception if it is to become a truly professional area of practice. Of course, such specialization can take place only in larger schools where several counsellors can work together as a team; in single-counsellor schools, the practitioner must of necessity be a generalist.

Areas of expertise in counselling often include testing, group counselling, sex eduation, vocational guidance, liaison with business and industry (work experiences), referral of students to other agencies, etc. Frequently, a counsellor gains his special competence simply by professional reading and on-

the-job experience, but sometimes further professional training is necessary or desirable. Such specialization must surely increase the overall efficiency of guidance services in schools; fears about "fractionating the whole child" are valid only in cases where the counsellor does not have an adequate basic professional background!

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The foregoing discussion of role re-orientations in school counselling has delineated certain changes that are taking place in a professional field that is searching for a more secure identity. The "trends" are suggestive rather than exhaustive and are intended to draw the reader's attention to the nature of changing competencies that may be required as this new identity is acquired. The following, final section of this paper turns to the general nature of a professional program which will suitably prepare future counsellors for their changing role.

*The Professional Preparation of School Counsellors*

Hilgard and Bower have warned that the steps between basic research in psychology and the advocacy of new methods and procedures are both complicated and long.[11] Yet, many counsellor-education programs encourage counsellor-trainees to make instantaneous conversions of theories of counselling into practice. This treatment of theory as though it were empirically-tailored fact has made counselling a field of practice which is highly prone to band-wagon climbing: T-groups, transactional analysis, Gestalt therapy, etc., etc. This is not to disparage theory-making and theory-testing in counselling but only to question the prevalence in an applied field of practices that are based *directly* on theory — often very current, marginally-tested theory. Obviously, the counsellor needs to study points of view related to interview techniques. However, interviewing is only part of the school counsellor's job, and divergent and often contradictory theoretical positions with respect to this function can hardly constitute the *core* of his professional program (as is often the case). Since it has already been suggested that counsellors should move away from psychotherapeutic emphases, it may well be that this particular theory-to-practice concern will disappear as school counselling seeks new bases for its practices.

Bruner suggests that the special task of psychologists concerned with the field of pedagogy is "to convert skills and knowledge to forms and exercises that fit growing minds . . ." He adds, however, that "Left to their own devices, psychologists tend to construct models of a man who is neither a victim of history, a target of economic forces, nor even a working member of society." On the other hand, he notes that when psychology is joined with other disciplines (e.g., biology, anthropology, sociology, and the health sciences) it often makes lasting contributions to knowledge, and he suggests

[11]Ernest R. Hilgard and Gordon H. Bower, *Theories of Learning, 3rd Edition* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966).

that an alignment called the "growth sciences" ("Any field of inquiry devoted to assisting the growth of effective human beings . . . .") needs to be promoted "if we are to achieve the effectiveness of which we as human beings are capable . . . ."[12] The import of these remarks for school counselling — imbedded as it is in the pedagogical process — seems to be that it should base its functions on interdisciplinary knowledge related to areas in which "guidance" takes place. This is consonant with the position taken in this paper, namely, that counsellors need an intimate knowledge of the society in which adolescents are developing and that this background knowledge should be structured by relevant theoretical and empirical formulations of the behavioral and social sciences. In particular, it was suggested that the skills and knowledge that counsellors should fit-to-growing-minds should be mainly *social* in nature, since social education is a needed area of development in modern urbanized societies.

Is it possible to create a professional field out of the alignment of psychology with such diverse knowledge areas as economic trends, educational and vocational opportunities, social issues of particular importance to adolescents, and similar developmental concerns? If, as Bruner has suggested, psychology is most useful when juxtaposed with other fields of knowledge (obviously because of the multi-variables involved in complex human behavior), then there should be no problem in perceiving an alignment of any knowledge fields that bear on specific aspects of human behavior. As previously suggested, social psychology might well become a sort of "basic" discipline in professional programs for secondary school counsellors, replacing counselling psychology as the "core" of such programs. This seeming paradox arises because of the traditionally close association of counselling psychology with psycho-therapy and the position taken in this paper is that counsellors in educational settings must be perceived as growth-expediters rather than diagnosticians, prognosticators, and therapists.

Given this shift in emphasis from clinical to social psychology, programs for school counsellors could be organized in a great variety of ways to accommodate varying academic backgrounds of student-counsellors. A good background in the behavioral or social sciences is obviously desirable, as is a thorough knowledge of developmental (particularly adolescent) psychology. However, it is not the purpose of this paper to make specific recommendations about the course content of professional programs, other than to point out that counselling practicums would have to reflect the changing role-orientations that have been discussed. Also, the need of the counsellor for practical skills and for realistic knowledge about his society would indicate that practicums should constitute a major part of any professional program.

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The formal education of adolescents has become so lengthy and continuous that institutionalized arrangements for youth's education now need to be

[12]Bruner, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67.

modified so as to allow for their earlier entry into at least some aspects of the adult society. Many Western nations have, somewhat incongruously, lowered certain legal age limits (e.g., voting age) without providing socially relevant roles for their new "adults." In an era of great social complexity, lengthy education seems to be required, so that it would seem that educational institutions are strategically situated to introduce youth to socially maturing experiences *during* periods of formal education. This paper has taken the position that secondary school counsellors have a unique role to play in the "socialization" of youth and that the centrality of this role in *school* counselling can be used to provide a professional focus for counsellors at secondary levels of education.

While socially maturing experiences can range all the way from discussions with a peer-group to volunteer work in a hospital, it has been emphasized that counsellors need to reduce largely verbal approaches to youth-guidance, often typified by over reliance on tests, inventories, and the personal interview. Social insights and social skills are best attained by *experiencing,* rather than by merely intellectualizing and introspecting. Hence, if counsellors accept the role of social educator or applied social psychologist, a major part of their professional job will be to select and organize those developmental tasks[13] which can appropriately be supervised by the school-in-the community.

[13]R.J. Havinghurst, *Human Development and Education* (New York: David McKay Co., 1953).