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THE WAVE OF STUDENT UNREST AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SECONDARY-SCHOOL COUNSELOR

ABSTRACT: In this article the writer states that student unrest is not peculiar to the present century, but that the changed conditions of modern life and the rapid increase in population have given it a new dynamic form. There is great hope for mutual understanding between age and youth; the emergence of counseling as a profession and the continued dependence of youth on their elders are the two avenues to happy collaboration.

The current problems of drug addiction, sex and loss of faith are considered and there are references for those who would read more on these topics. The importance of group counseling and group activities is stressed but these will not replace the need for individual counseling.

It is the adult who must remove the inconsistencies from his life if he wants to earn and keep the confidence of the young.

Contemporary society is full of problems. These range from large-scale international conflicts through civil strife and economic upheavals and petty quarrels in urban and rural communities, to tensions within the family. It is with the adolescent, a universal family and social problem, that this paper is concerned.

In the title the term "Student" refers to the adolescent pupil in the post-primary stage of his education from age eleven plus. "Unrest": English and English (1958) define unrest as a state characterized by a feeling of uneasiness and a tendency to acts that have no particular relation to comprehensive goals (p. 572).

This paper attempts a consideration of the nature of student unrest, the sources of student unrest, and the implications for the school counselor.

The Nature and Scope of Student Unrest

It is within the context of the wider problem of a population explosion that restless young people are beginning to threaten their elders

by sheer force of numbers and youthful exuberance. In advanced countries the protracted education, the theoretical continence required of our most gifted and favored young men (Musgrove, 1969) and the economic dependence on their parents that must continue to the end of the school career, often act as irritants to teenagers. The world of work and the state of independence seem a long way off. If, in the hurry to arrive at these goals the student drops out, he creates a further problem for himself, possible unemployment; the students who stay on soon regard education as a device for prolonging their dependence and inducing immaturity. And — to add disaster to disaster — "academic success is thought to indicate promise in spheres where it is wholly irrelevant (Musgrove, 1969, p. 23)." The school administration, the examination system, teaching methods, and the content of classroom instruction come under their critical scrutiny.

The factors that affect adolescents in the classroom today are social, moral, economic, and educational. The large majority, however, seem unaware of the existence of such pressures, or perhaps are unable to identify them or to be articulate about them; on the other hand, do they perhaps recognize them and are satisfied to tolerate them as short-term nuisances? The small minority who proclaim their awareness may be divided into two broad categories:

1. The educationally and/or socially disadvantaged who cannot keep the pace in academic work and in the daily life of the school.

2. The socially over-privileged whose families provide them with every material and educational benefit (Keniston, 1965).

Within the school situation these two groups may function separately at first, but the latter group, influential by virtue of superior intelligence, persuasive speech, and association with revolutionary-minded friends attending institutions of higher learning, soon attract the malcontents and together set the wave of unrest in motion.

There is often no clear idea or unanimous opinion as to what they want or what their values or aspirations are — they simply adopt a negativistic attitude to school rules and to the establishment as a whole, boycott extra-curricular activities, and vacillate between aggression and withdrawal. In schools where the wearing of a uniform is compulsory, the students "forget" to put on the school badge or tie, or turn up for classes in shoes not allowed by school regulations. The uniform is hardly ever discarded but there have been cases of boys who wore shirts of an adult revolutionary group under the school shirt. Other manifestations of hostility are unusual hairstyles, withdrawal from religious services and a cessation of religious practices, participation in protest marches, faked illness and absence from school, indifferent attention to classwork, and accusations against teachers of incompetence and hypocrisy. There may also be experimentation in sex and drugs.

It may be emphasized here that these pupils who can be very disturbing to the school system cannot be classified delinquent; they

do not feel that they are violating any moral code and in most cases their transgressions cannot be brought to the attention of a juvenile court. These young activists feel that by registering their disapproval of inappropriate school rules they can bring about improved conditions for the greater good of the school population.

It would appear, then, that the nature of student unrest has its origin in loopholes provided by a too-traditional adult society.

The Sources of Student Unrest

The main sources today may be found under three headings —
1. The Family
2. Emotional Maladjustment
3. Television

Perhaps the main single factor to produce unrest-prone students is the breakdown of family life (Keniston, 1965). The mind runs immediately on the high rates of divorce and the consequent emotional disturbance for the children; equally dangerous forces are the softness of living, inadequate parents, over-indulgence and spoiling. Restless students from whatever socioeconomic level have often been brought up in undisciplined homes by parents unsure of their own values and standards; these young people in turn direct their insecurity and frustration against the older generation and all that it stands for.

Entrance into a secondary school and progression **through it** give rise to a whole host of new stresses both internal and external, which may lead to emotional maladjustment. Holt (1964, cited in Torrance, 1969) maintains that fear of failure is a constant and ever present force even in the kindest and gentlest school. Fear of failure may be a prolonged mild stress that causes emotional disturbance and failure to learn. Schonfeld (1964, cited in Torrance, 1969) has cited evidence to indicate that the stresses arising from internal changes during adolescence cause much emotional conflict and turmoil which in turn cause academic failure. In the face of the resultant unhappiness and awkwardness the student usually gives up any attempt to adjust or to behave constructively. The situation is more intolerable for children who live in poverty and other types of deprivation. Maladjustment is aggravated by the possibility of having to drop out and of not being able to find suitable employment on leaving school.

It is Margaret Mead's (1969) position that television, more than anything else, has brought about the confrontation between the generations. She proposed that myths and half-truths which are firmly believed and taught by parents and teachers are destroyed by the actuality which television brings into the home. According to Mead this basically unedited actuality gives youth a view of the world and an orientation very different from that of their parents and other adults whose thinking is grounded in the edited views of writers and film makers. Hayakawa (1969) also believes that television is primarily responsible for today's generation of youthful activists. TV has been with these people since birth and has made them more aware than previous generations of the problems and short-comings of society.

Hayakawa also claims that television shows only the "show business" side of the democratic process and not its tedious, time-consuming inner workings, hence the impatience of youth for quick, dramatic television-like solutions to their problems.

Further, the adolescent is egocentric. He believes that others are occupied with his appearance and behavior. The adolescent is then being continually an actor to his audience, whether the audience is real or imaginary. And TV is an important audience. It demonstrates to the adolescent that the camera is indeed preoccupied with his appearance and behavior if they are suitably dramatic and out of the ordinary (Elkind, 1969).

The *New York Times* of October 22, 1969, quoted S. Agnew as saying: "There is a direct relationship between the popularity of confrontation with young people and the fact that they were brought up on television, not books. They're conditioned to action, and emotion, not words. This is a perfectly natural thing — every day they see action, violence, confrontation on television and they are naturally more conditioned to action than logic."

The question arises, is there any hope, then, for mutual understanding between logic-oriented counselors and action-oriented youth?

Implications for the School Counselor

The answer to the question in the paragraph above is an unqualified "Yes." The young, in spite of all their ostentation and display of independence, lean heavily on the opinion of adults and do not altogether disregard their views. In fact Keniston points out that many dissenting young people are living on their parents' values in practice and may be closer to their parents than non-activists. The counselor, therefore, as an adult specially trained to meet youth and its problems is in a particularly interesting position today.

Carl Rogers (1969) in his article on a humanistic concept of man, affirms that given an adequate human climate, man chooses to develop in ways that are both personally and socially enhancing, that move him in directions constructive for himself and for others. This is as true of the adolescent as of the adult, and almost parallels the underlying motives of student unrest. Client-centered therapy with its emphasis on the importance of the individual implies that the counselor who has faith in the goodness of human nature can channel the energies of youth in the right direction whatever his counseling technique.

Schreiber (1967) warns that counselors' goals have sometimes been misdirected and are inherently dangerous because they are geared to helping the individual adjust to his environment even when the environment contains many elements destructive to his best interests. This warning is of particular significance for the school counselor in a rapidly changing society with the norms of which modern youth is disenchanted; the counselor has the staggering responsibility to initiate such change as may be necessary for the better functioning of a school or of the mind of one pupil.

Another essential for the school counselor is an understanding of modern mass media, particularly the television, without which knowledge the understanding of today's teenager is almost impossible. McLuhan (1964) states that the adult is print-oriented with the linear surface approach and future-time orientation; the television-raised and -oriented adolescent is seeking tactile depth experience and immediate involvement.

But what are the realities that the counselor encounters in the face to face interview with his young clients? Mention has already been made of their turning away from established forms of behavior in school and from religious practices, a rejection of authority sometimes as a result of disintegration in home conditions, emotional upset because of low grades in class and the possibility of failure with consequent lowering of vocational opportunities, and often enough a feeling of guilt and despair over an experiment with drugs and/or sex. The unrest that comes with deviant behavior or that is part of it is on the increase; the practices take place within group situations, usually small groups.

This should be a cue for the starting counselor. By arrangement with the administration his work should begin with group counseling sessions, small manageable units with a common interest. Groups are particularly useful for providing the developmental and preventive type of counseling that should be the major concern in school counseling programs. Since adolescents want to be treated like responsible persons, then they should be allowed and encouraged to join in guided discussions on conscience, ethics, judgement, reward and punishment, among other topics. They should also decide as a group whether they are to be held morally accountable for their actions (Ausubel, 1966).

Other group activities like school camps also provide excellent opportunities for getting together and sharing the experiences of daily living. Other advantages are that they help the maladjusted to find membership in some peer group. Within this friendly and informal setting the counselor has the opportunity to develop greater sensitivity to his group members (Warters, 1960).

If such group programs are to be successful and to play an effective part in the counselor's developmental-preventive-remedial activities, there must be collaboration with the rest of the staff. To ensure this school administrators must be made aware of the need for adaptability and flexibility in planning so that teachers can be given greater freedom to use their initiative and imagination in handling their pupils.

Although the role of class teachers is of vital importance, that of the parents must not be underestimated if the attempts made at school are to receive positive reinforcement at home. Contact with parents might be difficult for the counselor who has to work with large numbers of students but a solution can always be found. Parental attitudes play a prominent part in determining adolescent reactions to counseling, especially if deviant behavior has begun.

In addition, the work of the counselor is enriched and extended when he helps parents to understand the psychological needs of their adolescent children, to recognize their abilities and their limitations, and so set realistic goals for them. Feelings of mutual trust and understanding grow between parent and child and there is greater security within the family.

When the school administration, the staff, the parents, and the students themselves appreciate the role of the counselor, individual counseling assumes a new dimension. It is used not merely as a problem-solving interview but as a situation "to assist the adolescent to learn effective ways of identifying and then achieving desired and desirable goals, often in spite of certain obstacles to learning (Williamson, 1950)."

It may be of interest to record some of the observations and recommendations made by researchers and thinkers in the areas of most common concern in dealing with adolescents today. Vocational choice, sex, drugs, and loss of faith in organized religion.

The secondary-school pupil is likely to have a sinking feeling as he or she draws near to the end of a school career, especially if he has not secured admission to an institution of higher education. It is one of the most critical moments for him as he sees himself about to leave the unit of the class. The pressure to identify a vocational goal is on the student; as much as the modern adolescent believes in the here and now, this is one future event that is every hour present to him. The confused choices of childhood and very early adolescence now seem unreal to him. Erikson (1950) classifies this stage as a struggle for identity against the self-diffusion of earlier years.

It is an important moment for the counselor too. His task has been developmental and this point should be one of smooth transition, not of crisis. With his knowledge of the psychology of vocational choice, the use of occupational literature, monographs, etc., the progressive building up of vocational information through the school program, he and his client can settle down to decision-making. It may be necessary to administer suitable tests to refine a multiple choice of vocations.

According to Gilbert Wrenn (1963), the counselor must help students to choose a vocation, not merely an occupation. Vocation means commitment, a sense of purpose for the total activity of one's life.

Attitudes of a counselor on sex will depend largely on his own philosophy and on the accepted mores of the society to which his clients belong. Kirkendall and Calderwood (1965) write that it involves public and social as well as personal and private matters. For the adolescent it should be tied up with the question of human values. Honesty and responsibility pertain to all human relationships. All situations, simple or complex, social or sexual, require individual integrity (Ginott, 1969).

Johnson and Westman (1968), writing on the teenager and drug abuse, listed these factors as the reasons why they are tried by the young:

1. Pleasure and thrill seeking involve flirting with danger, death and destruction.
2. Gaining status with peers through demonstrating bravado and sophistication and "keeping up with the crowd."
3. The defiance of authority is an important aspect of the use of drugs.
4. Sensual stimulation is particularly evident in the smoking of marijuana and glue sniffing.
5. Low frustration tolerance is frequently found in those who look to drugs as a way of obliterating anxiety.
6. Escapism, "killing time," and alleviation of boredom through "blowing the mind" are provided by the drug.
7. The sense of alienation experienced by many adolescents today leads them to seek chemical stimulation as an organizing experience that gives temporary meaning and significance to life. The temporary "breakthrough" appears to satisfy wishes for intimacy and emotional involvement with others (pp. 420-21).

Ginott (1969) gives some practical recommendations on the matter of drugs in respect of teenagers:

> The specific solution to drug dependency cannot be divorced from the general problem of personality development. The more we learn how to meet our children's legitimate needs, the less they will have to resort to illegal gratifications. The more self-dependence, the less drug-dependence. The more self-direction, the less chemical escape. The best guards against drug abuse are attitudes and skills that allow us to remain human and helpful even when we make demands, set limits, and insist on values (p. 214).

When the adolescent turns his back on the religious creed of his parents, he is really proclaiming his loss of faith in an institution which he regards as human. He looks at his church, temple, mosque, synagogue or what have you, as a symbol of the tradition that has failed to provide him with the inner resources and the spiritual fulfilment of which he has need.

Too many churchmen must admit that they have been so concerned with the things of heaven that they have forgotten those of earth.

The counselor will remember that one of the developmental tasks of the adolescent is to arrive at his own philosophy of life. Today's adolescent lives in a world that recognizes religious diversity because of the ecumenical movement. To quote Cantwell Smith (1965):

> One of the fundamental problems arising from a recognition of religious diversity is — that what used to be unconscious premises become, rather, scrutinized intellectualizations. At this level the believer himself begins to wonder if he really believes, in this new sense (and often enough finds that he actually does not) (p. 56).

The counselor will allow his client to grow through his doubts; he will turn him from the human to the deeply spiritual aspect of religious belief. The counselor and other adults working with him resolve the conflict between their theology and their ethics. Still drawing on Smith, we will give more attention to the moral dimension of faith and consider more closely the actual facts of our modern situation.

Conclusion

Since the writings of Aristotle, every age has had its literature on the problems of its adolescent population. The emergence of counseling as a profession has provided a new medium of dialogue between youth and age. The adolescent will always be with us, "the living symbol of man's unfolding possibilities — of the human potential actively engaged in the process of self-realization (Otto & Otto, 1967)."

RESUME: L'auteur soutient que l'agitation étudiante n'est pas un phénomène propre à ce siècle, mais que les conditions de la vie moderne et l'augmentation rapide de la population lui ont donné une impulsion nouvelle. On a de bonnes raisons d'espérer que les jeunes et les adultes parviendront à une compréhension mutuelle. L'émergence du counseling en tant que profession et la dépendance continuelle des jeunes sur les adultes sont les deux voies vers une collaboration heureuse.

L'auteur s'attarde aux problèmes de la drogue, de la sexualité et de la religion. Le lecteur pourra trouver dans la bibliographie des ouvrages susceptibles de l'aider à documenter sa réflexion.

L'auteur souligne que si les activités et le counseling de groupe sont importants, ils ne sauraient toutefois remplacer le besoin d'un counseling individuel.

Il revient à l'adulte d'éliminer les contradictions de sa propre vie s'il souhaite gagner et conserver la confiance des jeunes.

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