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CHANGING CONCERNS IN EDUCATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL COUNSELING

ABSTRACT: Technologically advanced nations have moved far enough into the post-industrial era so that they are now experiencing strong social pressures for greater flexibility in the formal education and career planning of both youth and adults. Such flexibility must take into account the life-long nature of educational processes and the changing nature of work. Accordingly, the vocational psychologist will need to re-examine his past pre-occupations in order to ascertain whether or not his models and empirical data are any longer relevant to the solution of problems which are now arising in these rapidly changing societies.

Are social changes affecting the psychological milieu within which educational and vocational counseling have traditionally taken place? This paper takes the position that they are and that technologically advanced nations are currently experiencing strong pressures for new orientations in the guidance of both youth and adults. Accordingly, the counselor may need to re-examine some of his assumptions in order to assess whether or not they are any longer relevant to educational/vocational decision-making in the 1970's and 1980's.

Blocher (1973) has noted that:

Human behavior is very much a social product. People exercise selective perceptions, organize their experiences, attach meaning to events, and build expectations about the future on the basis of social learning (p. 44).

What changes are occurring today which may be producing new perceptions of how career planning should be carried out (and, hence, how the career counselor should function in his role)? The discussion which follows attempts to delineate two broad areas of change and to identify, briefly, the accommodations which will probably need to be made in our counseling perspectives if relevant guidance is to be maintained in the so-called "transition period" between industrial and post-industrial societies.

The Changing Nature of Formal Education

For some time now we have had warning signals in secondary and post-secondary education that pressures to keep youth in school longer and longer were producing too great strains. We knew that adolescents were becoming physiologically mature earlier and earlier, and we suspected that this might presage earlier social maturity. We knew that urbanized society was loosening family ties and that the changing sexual mores were exacerbating the drive of adolescents toward economic independence and more mature social roles. Yet so strong was our belief that there was a linear relationship between Gross National Product and average level of education that we were, for a time, able to convince most of our young people that their best interests lay in remaining continuously in school for at least 12 years, and preferably longer. Berg (1970) has referred to this period as "The Great Training Robbery," pointing out that much of our formal education was irrelevant to required job behaviors and that, indeed, in some occupations, workers with less education and more experience were able to perform their duties better than those with more years of schooling but less experience.

The acceptance of education as a life-long process, and the accompanying proliferation of accommodating curricula and media, has now removed some of the pressures on youth for completing their formal education in one lengthy, continuous period. "Drop-outs" need not necessarily be "stay-outs" but may "drop-in" again and again. In short, we are now witnessing the beginning of social acceptance of discontinuity in formal education — at least at the senior secondary and the post-secondary levels of education. Current problems with unemployment may have a temporary inhibiting effect on wide acceptance of this new point of view, but there can hardly be any doubt that we are moving in this direction as a corrective to an overly narrow conception of "education" as being synonymous with "formal education." We have been faced with the fact that the largely vicarious experiences of formal education are no longer acceptable to an earlier maturing generation whose new social perceptions are calling into question so many value systems of their parents' generation.

If youth and young adults are typically going to be in-and-out-of school, in-and-out-of work, and in-and-out-of other maturing experiences such as travel and volunteer activities, what new emphases may we expect in educational/vocational counseling? Let us examine two likely changes of perspective:

1. *Information.* Your author has pointed out elsewhere (Woodworth, 1972) that counselors are faced with informational complexity concerning educational/vocational choice which cannot readily be handled without the storage and retrieval facilities of computers, and that

... if programs are to be professionally sound, if they are to guide rather than prescribe, the counselor must participate in the *selecting* of information which is appropriate, in *categorizing* it so as to reduce

its bewildering complexity, and in *storing* it in such a manner that it may be readily *retrieved* by counselees who may need the information to clarify their thinking in the process of making decisions. (p. 27).

It is being suggested, therefore, that we must reinstate information-giving (or, at least, information accessibility) as an important part of the counseling process. An accusation that this is a neo-Parsonian stance is hardly appropriate, given the societal and technological changes that have taken place since the days of the "father of vocational guidance." In a more flexible society, where the boundaries between education, work, and leisure are blurred, we may find that immediately accessible, up-to-date information is much more "guiding" than were informational resources in the past. Moreover, if computer-assisted vocational guidance programs continue to show promise, it is likely that information-searching as an aspect of educational/vocational decision-making will be more readily available to more people than individual counseling.

2. *Exploratory experiences.* Almost a decade ago, Holland (1964) pointed out the limitations of the counseling interview in providing vocational guidance. Not only was he critical of the relative inaccessibility of individual counseling (see above), but he was also skeptical about the influence that counselors had on vocational decisions: the verbal interventions of the interview were poor substitutes for real-life experiences. Others (Thorndike and Hagen, 1959) have criticized the "tools" of the educational/vocational counselor — his standardized tests — pointing out that they are inaccurate predictors of vocational success, especially in the case of long-range vocational counseling.

It may be that multitudinous factors affecting vocational decisions and satisfactions and the hazards of using normative psychometrics for ipsative purposes have combined to defeat many of the good intentions of the counselor. Are we now entering an era where the means are available to use "try-out" experiences as correctives to what may have been a premature faith in the vicarious learnings of the interview and the power of stochastic predictions? If so, then the counselor will need to attenuate (not abandon) this faith so as to take into account the less tidy, but probably more realistic, processes of maturation-by-experience.

The Changing Nature of Work

There are already well-defined trends toward making work more meaningful and less routine or mechanical. Automation is only one factor in effecting this change; the most important other factor is the increasing demand of "participants" (from university students to factory workers) for a voice not only in determining their specific working conditions but also in making decisions about over-all organizational policy. While there may be political overtones to these demands, employers often support them since such "participation" frequently pays off in terms of heightened morale and increased productivity (U.S. Health, Education, and Welfare Department, 1973). In

this connection, Daniel Bell (1973) notes that "The post-industrial society is a 'game between persons' that requires increasing amounts of coordination (p. 51)," and that this coordination (along with information and time) must be calculated as one of the new "costs" in a new economy.

To the above picture of a changing work-complex one can add the increasing trend toward flexible work schedules (a type of flexibility which has also appeared in academic scheduling). It would appear that most service, skilled, and semi-skilled workers (i.e., the majority of the work force) may soon be laboring 3 or 4 days out of 7, or arranging an even more flexible schedule over a period of a month (i.e., putting in a requisite number of hours *ad lib*). The phenomenon we call "work" may soon come to occupy a half or less or one's daily time! In this eventuality, one is tempted to speculate that a large majority of workers may soon discharge "work duties" as a social obligation, rather than as an integral and major part of their "self-actualization." At best, as Super and Bachrach (1957) have already noted, vocational choice might represent a compromise between the implementation of one's self-concept and the requirements of the socio-economic system.

What do these developments presage for counseling theory and practice? Once again, let us examine a few possible implications:

1. *The decreasing importance of work in "self-actualization."* Vocational psychology has consistently paid more attention to those in professional or highly skilled occupations than it has to the vast majority of workers whose duties are less exacting and whose work-skills are less identifiable. Self-actualization theory has always been suspect when used to account for the "careers" of people in this latter group.

In a highly technological society, most jobs are likely to contribute to social maintenance rather than production. The current trend toward the devolution of professional duties (i.e., the acceptance of many levels of para-professionalism) seems to indicate that an increasing number of "service" jobs will be at only intermediate levels of complexity. In the absence of positive indications that interests, aptitudes, and motivational patterns have much significance at these or lower levels, one is driven to the conclusion that constructs such as "self-fulfillment" and "self-actualization" will become more imprecise in meaning as applied to a greater and greater proportion of the working population. The trend toward shorter and more flexible work periods (with consequent increases in time spent on non-work activities) adds further to the conviction that such theory will become decreasingly relevant to the vocational guidance of a large majority of workers or potential workers.

2. *New theory or non-theory?* As a corollary to #1, one might suggest that we need to develop different theories of occupational choice for different levels of work. Or, it is possible that vocational psychology and occupational counseling do not need psychological theories at this stage of their development, especially when so many

non-psychological variables (e.g., social structure and economics) are involved in career guidance.

3. *The increasing importance of human relations in work.* If jobs are to become more "humanized" (in an effort to ward off boredom and loss of morale), it would appear that employers will soon be placing greater emphasis on interpersonal skills. The pressures of urbanization will undoubtedly accentuate this emphasis. Under these circumstances, social aptitudes may become of increasing interest to the vocational counselor, and a psychology of human similarities may become as important as a psychology of individual differences. The trend toward group counseling is indicative of a need both to make counseling more available to more people and to place it in a social context.

The foregoing does not constitute a disparagement of past and current attempts to locate vocational guidance more firmly within the boundaries of the behavioral sciences. Rather, an effort has been made to indicate what new problems are arising that require the behavioral scientist's attention. It may be that solutions to new problems will require new techniques and new points of view.

RESUME: Les nations techniquement développées sont à ce point avancées dans la période post-industrielle qu'elles éprouvent maintenant de fortes pressions sociales vers une plus grande souplesse dans l'éducation et la formation professionnelle des jeunes et des adultes. Ce changement doit tenir compte de la permanence du processus d'éducation et de la nature changeante du travail. Par conséquent, le psychologue qui s'occupe de formation professionnelle doit reconsidérer ses positions antérieures et s'assurer que les modèles et les données sur lesquelles reposent son action sont toujours adéquats et peuvent fournir une solution aux problèmes qui surgissent dans notre société en évolution.

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