

POSITION PAPER ON SCHOOL GUIDANCE SERVICES: A REACTION

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Abstract

This paper is a reaction to the position taken by the Canadian School Trustees' Association (1981) regarding school counselling services. The reaction investigates the reasons provided by the CSTA for this position. Included are an examination of the definition of Career Education, the concern for youth unemployment, and the orientation of counselling services suggested by the trustees. An implicit theme of the paper is recognized and used as a basis for recommending futuristically-oriented programs in schools.

Résumé

Ce papier est une réaction à la position prise par la "Canadian School Trustees' Association" (1981) en ce qui concerne les services conseillers scolaires. La réaction examine les raisons données par la CSTA pour cette prise de position. Un examen de la définition de "Career Education", le souci pour l'emploi des jeunes, et l'orientation des services conseillers suggérée par l'administration sont inclus. Un thème implicite du papier est reconnu et sert de base pour la recommandation des programmes d'orientation futuristique dans les écoles.

In reviewing the Canadian School Trustees' Association (1981) position paper on "School Guidance Services", the authors note a number of issues which deserve examination. The following response attempts to analyze the content as well as the implicit message of the paper. The intent of this reaction is to provide further insights and recommendations for counselling services within the Canadian school setting.

The position proposed by the CSTA for school guidance services for the 1980's appears to have historical precedents. In the 1940's and 1950's, for instance, the primary purpose of school guidance programs was the distribution of occupational and vocational information to students. An outcry from parents, teachers, administrators, and students, in the 1960's and 1970's, resulted in a shift to psychotherapeutic approaches to student counselling. This reaction against traditional guidance services was realized in the training of counsellors "who viewed guidance as an arena for personal-social counselling." It would seem that the CSTA is suggesting, at least conceptually, that school guidance return to the earlier orientation, although it is recognized that "some social and personal support" be provided. This position, for the most part, reveals the function of the Canadian School Trustees' Association. School trustees, as politically-elected officials, reflect public consciousness and thus, the social ethos, in this case, the current problem of youth unemployment.

The trustees' underlying concern is "about high levels of youth unemployment," and the basic belief is that this problem will be resolved with the implementation of K-12 Career Education. Our contention is that acceptance of this position at this time could be detrimental to school guidance. Given a rapidly changing society, new concerns and issues of importance to today's youth may become visible. Thus, in the 1990's another shift in guidance services may be required that differs significantly from those provided by Career Education. This "ping-pong" approach to school guidance programs would further enhance the belief that "counsellors are confused about their role." What is required is a broader conceptual framework that could accommodate anticipated and unforeseen changes. Prior to examining this aspect, however, some important aspects of the position paper are reviewed.

In the paper Career Education is defined in an all-encompassing manner and seemingly attempts to resolve a long-standing issue regarding the function of the educational process: socialization and individualization. Socialization is viewed, in the definition, in terms of a vocational orientation and includes knowledge of "occupations, training paths and job search skills" while, individualization is perceived as knowledge of "self, life-styles and decision-making strategies." Accordingly, school counselling services are meant to meet manpower needs of society and individual explora-

tion. In its attempt to subsume everything, the trustees' definition of Career Education loses specificity, focus, and power. Although on the surface this appears to be the case, upon close inspection of the paper, a definite orientation emerges.

Theoretical writers in the field suggest that the primary focus of Career Education is to develop in the student a sense of career-maturity, understanding and an awareness of self and careers, providing a basis for decision-making. The term "preparing," as it is used in the paper, however, strongly suggests the training of students for a specific vocation, in particular, industrial and technological occupations. The need for mechanical and technological experts in the future is emphasized by the CSTA since "the supply of workers clearly exceeds the demands, especially in the white-collar occupations." The intent appears to be then that Career Education would result in more interest in blue-collar occupations in the future. Although this may eventually be the case, Career Education was never intended for this purpose.

According to the CSTA position, another reason for implementing Career Education in the schools is that the "rising youth unemployment rate" needs to be curtailed. What is not clear, however, is what the increasing rate of unemployment among young people really means. The rate of unemployment may be due to seasonally adjusted factors, the desire of greater numbers of students to work, and rising inflation. It may reflect disillusionment with education and premature school leaving. At any rate, career development theory suggests more career exploration in these years with potential periods of unemployment between exploratory jobs. The fact that students are both maturing and entering the work force earlier and/or the simple presence of more youth in the general population may be other reasons for this predicament. Whatever the reasons for rising unemployment, there is little or no evidence to support the contention that Career Education will resolve this issue. Moreover, how many of the young people who are currently unemployed attended school to Grade 12? Would they have benefited from the proposed program even if it had been implemented? Finally, with declining birth rates the trend of increasing youth unemployment may reverse itself without any help from Career Education programs. In short, unemployment rates would seem to be more a function of general social and economic forces than of school guidance programs.

An interesting dilemma results if one considers the possibility that student unemployment may continue to rise in the next decade. If indeed this should happen, then, Career Education would be perceived as having failed. Arriving at this conclu-

sion, however, would be, for the most part, inappropriate. The purported causal relationship between Career Education and reduced unemployment is equally tenuous.

Further examination of the position paper reveals an implicit but apparently unrecognized theme: the need for the development of an individual's future consciousness. The statement that students must "integrate the demands of the world into a personal perspective which enables them to deal with current challenges and meet the future with confidence in themselves and their abilities" reflects this concern. Throughout the paper reference is made to pursuing an awareness of "accelerating rate of technological advancement"; "making wise decisions about the future"; "the influence of future life-styles"; and, "the phenomenal advances in science and technology." It would be reasonable to conclude that a conscious awareness of the future is deemed to be an important facet of Career Education.

Futurists would agree that students need to be aware of the impact of rapid socio-political-economic change upon themselves and the environment. Support would also be obtained for the trustees' view that "a knowledge of self, the world and life management skills" are essential ingredients for effective functioning in the future. Educational models, curricula and school programs have been proposed which will enhance the individual's future consciousness. Little difference is found between the position advocated by the futurists and the rationale of the CSTA for implementing Career Education in the schools. Both positions emphasize the effective use of "leisure time" and the importance of "cooperative activities."

The paper clearly prescribes that an individual's future perspectives can be obtained through Career Education. The presumption is, of course, that the counsellor possess an awareness of the future. On the contrary, however, the paper does not include a rational heightening of one's future consciousness as an important facet in a counsellor's training. Furthermore, the paper fails to suggest that this aspect become the counsellor's responsibility. The assumption that the trustees are in fact equating Career Education and future consciousness then must be false.

Career Education may indeed be one avenue for developing an individual's understanding and awareness of the future. Improving the students' "cope-ability" may go beyond the boundaries of a program that, however broad its scope, is limited by its very name. The development of coping strategies and mechanisms for successful living in a changing society is a concern for all areas of education, not just one program. Clearly, then the goals of Career Education must be subsumed by a

more inclusive approach to personal realization built around a broader, futuristically designed guidance program.

The CSTA must be commended for their concern that "public education must assume a leadership role in providing youth with educational experience which will lead to productive and rewarding lives." What is required, however, is a re-thinking of the rationale for the implementation of Career Education. The argument of the spectre of unemployment should be abandoned in favor of greater attention to the personal and collective benefits inherent in a program of Career Education, broadly defined. More importantly, incorporating a futuristic thrust in the conceptual framework would assist in the integration of the "socialization" and "individualization" components underlying the trustees' view of Career Education.

In summary, the CSTA's view of the importance of school guidance services is reassuring.

The major focus being Career Education, however, could be interpreted as placing "all the eggs in one basket." The paper takes the position that the proposed program is the answer to all questions pertaining to school guidance services. Counsellors will find that this "cure-all" approach has drastic limitations when dealing with certain instances of maladjustment and pathology. Finally, the paper states that "people are basing their decisions on inadequate information and unrealistic expectations." This statement perhaps best describes the position by the Canadian School Trustees Association on school guidance services. This reaction has attempted to provide further information, leading to realistic expectations.

References

- Canadian School Trustees' Association. Position paper on school guidance services. *Canadian Counsellor*, 1981, 3, 139-143.