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## THE SCHOOL COUNSELLOR AND COMMUNITY LIAISON

The roles and functions of the school counsellor, and indeed of counsellors in other settings, have undergone significant changes in the last few years. So rapid have been the changes that those of us who took our training a decade or more ago may be out of step with current trends unless we have kept pace through involvement in research, additional training, or extensive reading. Deeply involved with student problems of adjustment to the learning process and of educational choice, concerned with providing information related to vocational planning, and bound up with the social implications of the school life of the student, many counsellors may not be aware of the degree of their self-imposed isolation from the broad community in which they work.

If we accept the premise that one of the primary roles of the counsellor is to help students make the best preparation for the future, we cannot ignore the community; we must explore all avenues of assistance, not only to grow professionally as counsellors by developing a deeper understanding of the forces at work in the broad community, but also to enlist the aid of individuals, agencies, and institutions in providing assistance to those we seek to help.

In *The Counselor in a Changing World* (1962a), Gilbert Wrenn brought us face to face with many of the cultural and social changes with which counsellors must become acquainted if they are to understand youth and the world they are about to enter. Today, in spite of the fact that we have the best educational opportunities in history, that the material needs of the western world have been met to a high degree, that we have experienced a fantastic knowledge explosion, and that we have highly refined communications media—in spite of this, we have more anxiety, more “opting out” of society, and a greater erosion of social standards than many previous generations experienced in total. The counsellor can't cope with these problems alone—he needs to involve all possible resources.

The mobility of population has brought a mixture of cultures and traditions in many communities. The resulting milieu has created marked changes in attitudes, in social standards, and in the relationship between today's youth and the adult generation. We recognize that youth looks at the traditional work ethic from a different point of view, that they tend to espouse moralistic causes with extreme fervour. Marshall McLuhan has been reported as saying that the rebelliousness of youth stems from the need to become involved. But involved in what way? Deeply? Productively? Protestingly? Or is it a type of involvement which is really non-involvement? We often decry the activities, the styles, the tastes, and the values displayed by youth. Yet this is their world and seldom are we a part of it. If we hope to help, to understand, to motivate, perhaps to modify, we must get to know

this world and meet youth on mutually agreeable terms. To do this we must reach out, develop liaison with the community in the large sense. What are the gaps in this liaison? How can we bridge them? How can we strengthen working relationships with community services for information, added help, added support? How can we integrate our work with other forces in the community and integrate the sustaining resources with our activities? These are questions for which we must find answers and the search will not be fruitful if we remain behind the desk in the counselling office.

In the time available we might confine ourselves to three main areas of liaison. The first area is the world of work. Many times we have heard about, and have seen, the changes wrought by automation and cybernetics in business and industry. But do we really know what this means to the worker? Do we understand what it is like to work in a continuing kaleidoscope of job status, retraining procedures, and a constant restructuring of production processes? Big business today is becoming alarmed at its "loss of image." At a recent meeting between executives from a number of large businesses and guidance personnel in the Toronto area, real concern was expressed at the lack of interest on the part of university graduates in entering the business world. The executives did not say outright that counsellors were to blame, but there were the implied questions: "Are you counsellors really telling young people about opportunities in business today?" "Do you know enough to be able to counsel about working conditions?" The fact remains that we need to move out to see the work situation, to experience the effects of change, to have dialogues with employers, personnel managers, and workers, to keep lines of communication open, to initiate more exchanges of information. We need to concern ourselves with more than an emphasis on the entry job for the beginning worker. Oh yes, we can use career days, career expositions, plant visits, career speakers, career seminars, and other devices in our work, but it is the ongoing two-way communication that will provide us with the competency we need.

The second area is in the field of continuing education. Authorities in institutions of higher learning are concerned at the number of students who are failing to realize the potential with which they arrived, at the number who demonstrate emotional distress, at the number who apparently made an unwise choice of course. There are a number of forces at work here but questions are being aimed at guidance personnel. "Do you counsellors really know what campus life is like today?" "How much do you know about the educational life of the institution beyond the rather sterile course prescriptions contained in the calendar?" We need to be more than purveyors of admission requirements. We need to help our counselees understand the meaning which an educational environment will have for them and the educational and social pressures which they will face. As counsellors, we need to maintain a liaison with these institutions and keep up-to-date regarding conditions on campus. We need to move out and become re-acquainted with an environment which many of us profess to know, having experienced it *once upon a time*. Similarly we need to help youth look at the alternatives in educational planning. We should be as concerned with the non-college bound as with the college bound. We need to motivate students to look beyond superficial selection and help them to experience a degree of self-actualization in the selection process. To do this we need to know, to be aware, to see things

from their experience, not just our own. You are familiar with university nights, campus visits, college speakers, open houses, liaison conferences, liaison committees, and other methods. But unless we become personally involved in these affairs, and become familiar with the myriad changes in admission requirements and course offerings, we may be "found wanting." This is a tall order but the professional role of the counsellor demands this competency.

The third area of community liaison is the relationship with the helping agencies—the social agencies, the mental health clinics, community groups of various kinds—resources which can be tapped to provide guidance and possibly treatment in a variety of situations. No counsellor can hope to be all things to all students. He must be prepared to involve both in-school and out-of-school resources in the total guidance function. The school cannot hope to provide all the guidance which youth should and does receive. The school, the home, the church, *and* the community all play a part. But because formal guidance is an integral function of the educational program, the school plays a major role in the guidance process. Many of the problems experienced by pre-adolescents and adolescents as they struggle to adapt to the learning process and the social pressures of the school environment can and should be handled by resources within the school. But some problems are best handled by referral to other professional workers or social agencies. Methods and procedures will vary from community to community but referral may take over a case completely or result in a shared responsibility with the counsellor.

Sarason (1966) points up that there will never be enough specialized professional help to handle all the problems of behaviour, adjustment, and emotional disturbance that occur in the school. Counsellors and teachers must accept more responsibility in the handling of problem situations. The school, hence the counsellor, has primary responsibility for identifying those who need special help. The second phase is that of deciding whether referral should be made. In many cases when a referral is made, counsellors tend to abdicate from the case or, as Sarason describes it, practise a "hands off" policy. A very important function of the counsellor is that of consultation during treatment and of the follow-up and follow-through procedures with the child, his parents, and his teachers after referral has been made. As counsellors, we need to know how referral agents perform their tasks and what we can expect from them. Referral agents need to know what we as counsellors are prepared to do, what we can contribute.

Part of the difficulty in this business of referral is that counsellors often fail to learn how various agencies function, the type of clientele accepted, and the conditions of acceptance. To what degree are parents involved? What is the counsellor's role here? What and how much information should be shared? Professional workers in some agencies feel that school counsellors cannot be considered as colleagues in the helping process. Because we do not understand how the agency operates, we may attempt to refer unacceptable cases. Some agencies feel, with good reason, that school personnel are aloof and unaware. Counsellors need to take some initiative in developing a working relationship with referral agencies. We should be familiar with the operation of juvenile and family courts, know the probation officers in our area, the free legal aid clinics, and many others. We may have to re-open doors

closed by well meaning but *inept* colleagues. Let us avoid the epitaph on our gravestones "He Meant Well!"

Counsellors may find themselves in a setting where few agencies for referral exist. As professional people we should take some initiative in enlisting the support of interested groups in establishing better resources. Many communities have an organization known as a Social Planning Council or its equivalent. These groups have been instrumental in bringing pressure to bear on the community to establish services in order to meet the needs which exist.

The American Personnel and Guidance Association has given considerable stress lately in the area of family counselling—a social agency emphasis. Can we learn how to develop this skill? We have had quite a theoretical approach in our training. We have been "Freuded," "Frommed," "Ericksoned," "Rogered," maybe "Sullivaned." We need to add other dimensions to the counselling relationship in school guidance. In this we have much to learn from the community agencies.

The counsellor is often described as an agent of change. Alfred Stiller (1967) raises the question as to whether the counsellor is an agent *for* or *against* change. Dr. Esther Westervelt (1965) claims that counsellors (male or female) are not equipped to practise vocational counselling with girls in today's society. Wrenn (1962b) talks about the "cultural encapsulation" of the counsellor which prevents him from seeing change, experiencing it, and thus being less able to convey the implications of change to others. Herbert Stern (1967) describes the "Social Currents of the 60's and the Implications for Counsellors." He discusses the following issues of change:

1. The acceptance of change as a synthesizing construct
2. The changing roles of men and women in society
3. The Ethic of Work and the changing attitudes toward it
4. Civil Rights Movements
5. Problems of Urban Concentration
6. The End of the Physical Frontier
7. The Extension of the Human Life Span
8. Condensation of Time-Space Concepts
9. Population Mobility
10. Effects of Technology and Science

These are the forces at work in the broad community and they are impinging on today's youth. To understand these forces and to work effectively with students, the counsellor must move beyond the confines of his own cultural experience and try to understand what life is like for students whose lives are different from his own.

To do this it is imperative that the counsellor should re-define his approach to community liaison; he must become active in the social process. As Williamson (1966) puts it, the counsellor cannot be neutral—he must become involved. To become involved is to know, to feel, to share, to understand. If he is to grow professionally the counsellor must reach out and know his community. Only as he develops an effective liaison with it, will he become truly professional, truly involved.

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## LE CONSEILLER ET LE PUBLIC

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Le conseiller a souvent essayé de traiter du développement pédagogique et professionnel de l'étudiant dans son bureau, sans employer les ressources de la société. Il a négligé le monde actuel de la jeunesse—monde qu'il doit connaître pour comprendre ses clients.

On cite trois points importants:

1. le monde du travail, qui change de jour en jour
2. l'éducation et la société nouvelle qui posent de nouveaux problèmes
3. la liaison avec les agences de la communauté qui aident le conseiller.