

R. C. HARRIS,
*Co-ordinator of Guidance,
Scarborough, Ontario; and Ontario
Institute for Studies in Education.*

A COUNSELOR LOOKS AT THE HALL-DENNIS REPORT

Living and Learning the report of The Provincial Committee on Aims and Objectives of Education in the Schools of Ontario, is a document that leaves a qualified counselor in a dilemma. As a counselor reads through the report he finds himself in general agreement with the basic premises of *Living and Learning*. Yet, when the conclusions regarding the role of counseling in our schools have been presented he finds himself in complete disagreement. This dichotomy of agreement with the premises and disagreement with the conclusion is likely a result of the speed at which professional school counselors have developed in recent years. It is highly probable that the members of the committee were not aware of the recent developments in counseling and more especially counseling in the public schools.

Guidance personnel are in the position of wanting to support the report (in fact, philosophically a counselor can hardly disagree with the report) yet concerned that severe damage may result to our children by the conclusions regarding the helping professions. As the classroom teacher becomes more highly qualified and knowledgeable, he becomes more aware of the needs of his pupils. Professional awareness creates a greater need for support personnel to assist the teacher in working with the children, normal and exceptional, at the times of stress in their lives. At some time in their lives all children need the help of a skilled and qualified counselor who, while expert in the education milieu, is able to work in a non-evaluative, non-judgemental, and truly accepting way. The pressure creating this need in all children is the result of the normal "hurly-burly" of life. Children, or significant adults in their lives, may react inappropriately to life situations due to many reasons ranging from lack of information to true emotional disturbance. If the need for help created by inappropriate behavior is met and handled adequately within the setting of the school, the situation remains "normal" and can be prevented from blocking the learning and growth of the child.

The professional school counselor is in general agreement with the philosophy of the report. He would, however, draw attention to the section "Early school years." "The most rapid period of growth in school achievement would appear to occur during the age span encompassed by nursery school, kindergarten, and the primary years (p. 42)."

It is just this period when the child leaves the constrained concrete world of the family to enter the larger, symbol using world of the community and school. (Learning to read, for example, is a major physical and emotional feat required at this time.) The same section of the report refers to Dr. Worth's study demonstrating "that children with scholastic difficulties in the early years of schooling tend to reach a plateau and that we may be reasonably pessimistic in expecting major changes at a later date (p. 44).

In the early grades, he seems to be having difficulty mastering reading, which magnifies all his academic difficulties as time goes on; he fails one or more grades, in spite of the fact that it is probable that his I.Q. is in the normal range or higher; communication with his teacher is poor; relations with classmates may be strained and tense . . . (p. 44).

These statements and the accompanying profile of a drop-out is a scream for the help of qualified school counselors in the public schools. These are the very problems that the school counselor is skilled in handling. Further, the school counselor is able to use effectively the skills of other helping professionals to the advantage of those children falling into exceptional ranges of behavior.

Secondary-school guidance, the much maligned third force in the schools, is also criticized. Not that guidance should not be criticized—the sad part of the story is that the criticism of guidance given in the report is really criticism of the untrained teacher-counselor recommended by the Hall-Dennis report. As the pupils so eloquently state (p. 97) not every teacher is a counselor. Guidance has been plagued by the lack of qualified personnel and by the sedimentary effect of having the capable guidance personnel rise to the top and float out of guidance in order to reach the highest levels of remuneration in education. Of the many Ontario personnel holding specialists certificates in guidance, the majority are not involved in guidance but are in administration. This is not bad for education in general but has been and is devastating in its effect on guidance and what is being done to children. Qualified counselors are appalled at many of the activities being called counseling in our schools. There is almost complete agreement between these qualified personnel and the children about guidance.

What is needed is no guidance or qualified guidance personnel adequately rewarded to encourage them to stay in the field of student services!

When one reads the discussion of counseling on pages 127-129, one realizes the problem of the report in the eyes of the counselor. The tune is the correct one, but the lyrics are confusing and improperly used. One wonders why counseling and advising are used synonymously. They are very different activities. The counselor has no quarrel with the introduction to this section. In fact, he wishes he had written it.

A complete counselling program based on the needs of the individual student is essential at all levels of public education. It is not a special service but a fundamental part of the education of all children. Such a program should include individual and group guidance with respect to opportunities in the overall school program; this is especially important in the diverse curriculum recommended in this Report. The other aspect of the program should be a counselling service that provides a one-to-one relationship for dealing with individual problems and goals, and leads to increased maturity in self-direction. It is the opinion of the Committee that, of the two, counselling should be the predominant service to students, and that some of the traditional aspects of guidance, *and in particular vocational guidance, should receive relatively less attention.*

The way of life today tends to widen the gap between many of our young people and their parents. Understanding and acceptance sometimes are lacking in both the home and the community. In his search for a sympathetic person, the youngster often turns to an understanding and compassionate person; in many cases this is a teacher. Similarly teachers and parents often seek assistance from each other in their desire to understand and help young people.

The accelerated tempo of change in society has created a greater need than ever for teachers with the qualities mentioned above. A perceptive teacher can no longer remain on the periphery of a child's world; he must be involved in it, if he is to be of service. The empathic teacher applies, consciously or unconsciously, the basic principles of counselling (p. 127).

But the conclusions stated in the report on page 128 are some of the very reasons for the pathetic drop-out rate and the well-earned criticism of guidance. The classroom teacher by definition of the very important professional role of teaching cannot be a counselor. Children have need of counseling because of communication breakdowns of varied origin. If the teacher is doing a good professional job, he has little time for communication break-downs of the intensity to require counseling. The teacher is communicating at a deep, concerned level with each individual in his class, a tremendous task for which teachers are inadequately prepared. When a pupil, for whatever reason, cannot respond adequately or appropriately, the teacher must call in help to have adequate counseling done *with* the child.

The report suggests that:

During the pupil's early years in school, *counselling* should be carried on by the professional who knows him best — his classroom teacher. At this stage, when the pupil's curriculum is related to his individual interests, the teacher may provide individual counselling as an informal and natural part of the general assistance and guidance given to each pupil. For this service to become effective, more attention to preparation for counselling must be given in teacher education in both the pre-service and in-service phases.

At the senior levels of learning, many aspects of the program, such as study habits, career planning, course selection and the like can be handled effectively in group situations by the *homeroom teacher*, or by a teacher who knows the student through teaching him in one of his subject areas. It is suggested that this same teacher be assigned to a group of students for more than one year, with provisions, of course, for re-arrangement where incompatibility may occur. He must have some background in guidance and counseling but need not be a specialist. In addition to the group procedures mentioned above, he might also handle individual counseling, except for difficult or complex problems.

To do this, all teachers would need training to the level presently required for an Ontario intermediate guidance certificate. But WE CAN NOT GET GUIDANCE PERSONNEL TRAINED TO THIS LEVEL (p. 128).

Guidance handled by the classroom or homeroom teacher is the very situation we are in today. It is the very thing that the pupils are complaining is so grossly inadequate. In the complex social environment in which modern man must live, skilled counselling is needed by all children—at times unique to each child. Skilled counseling does not preclude the *counsel* that adults and children afford one another. To suggest that this level of social *counsel* is adequate to the needs of youth, especially in the delightfully free learning environment proposed by the report, is a gross misunderstanding of what is involved in school counseling.

We need in our *school systems*, psychologists, social workers, and psychiatrists to handle difficult and complex problems. We need in our *schools*, counselors to work with all pupils in order that learning and growth may be maximal.

The statement *Good counseling can take place only when there is mutual respect between the student and the teacher* is an example of the semantic difficulties common to the report in the areas dealing with mental health and learning. *Good learning* takes place only when there is mutual respect between the student and the teacher. It must be stressed that *counseling*, *teaching*, and *advising* are not synonyms even though they are so used by the report.

If guidance were to revert to the level recommended in *Living and Learning*, a gross disservice would have been done to our pupils. If teaching could rise to the level recommended by the report, a great service would have been accomplished. If we could have the recommended level of teaching and an adequate guidance and counseling service in each school, we might well begin to cope with failures in our society as well as the problems of social and personal mental illness.

REFERENCES

- Hall, E. M. et al. *Living and learning: the report of the provincial committee on aims and objectives of education in the schools of Ontario*. Toronto: The Newton Publishing Company, 1968.
- Worth, W. H. et al. *Before 6: A report on the Alberta early childhood education study*. Edmonton: Alberta School Trustees Association, 1966.

"LIVING AND LEARNING"

R. C. HARRIS

N.B. Le rapport Hall-Dennis est à l'Ontario ce que le rapport Parent est au Québec.

Le Rapport Hall-Dennis traitant de l'éducation en Ontario est un document philosophique intéressant. Cependant, son peu de rigueur sémantique fait de l'enseignant, du conseiller scolaire et du spécialiste de l'orientation une seule et même personne. Il critique l'orientation donnée par les professeurs-conseillers et cependant il encourage l'établissement d'un système de professeurs-conseillers.

Un conseiller peut admettre les prémisses du rapport et cependant être consterné de ce qui y est écrit touchant le "counseling."

Nos écoles doivent favoriser le travail des professeurs dans un climat de saine liberté, tel que décrit dans le rapport. Elles ont aussi besoin de conseillers bien formés pour assurer le plein épanouissement de chaque enfant.