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## THE EMERGING COUNSELLOR IN CANADA\*

I trust you will forgive me if I take a few moments of your time today to talk about the Alberta government's view of human resources development and about the role the school counselor can play in this whole process.

Two years ago, the government tabled a "white paper" on human resources development.

This white paper outlined a conceptual model and philosophy of people-oriented government.

Its basic premise was that we need to humanize and liberate our society—that within the constraints imposed by a free society, we need to re-orient the activities of both government and private agencies to the end of developing the full potential of the citizen, regardless of his age, ethnic identity, national origin or whatever. The orientation of the white paper was on the ultimate importance of the individual as a human being, as a person.

I think we can all see that the development of such a society is some years off, but we must begin today.

And surely there is no way we can cross the many obstacles in the path of such a society without the assistance of a variety of specialists in human behavior and human development, certainly one of the most important of which is the counselor in the schools.

The counselor, I feel, is the key member of the pupil personnel team and is indeed crucial to the proper utilization of community mental health resources. School counselors are in the front line of our defences against mental illness among young people. Just as important, they are a vital factor in humanizing our school system, and in keeping our school system more closely in touch with the needs of our economy. We look to counselors to identify mental health problems in our student population and then to bring all our community mental health resources to bear on the problem.

We must look to the counseling profession for leadership in meeting many of the current social problems that post a disruptive influence to our educational system. Except for the home, there is no other institution which has a longer or more important contact with the youth of our nation than the school. School counselors are, therefore, in a unique position to influence the nation's youth and to ensure their continuing development.

We in the Alberta government are now in the course of studying a very comprehensive and thoughtful report on mental health care programs, written by Dr. W. R. N. Blair of the University of Calgary.

The Blair Report strongly underlined the continuing need for counseling and guidance personnel in our schools. It very bluntly underlined the impor-

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tance of counsellors as a constituent of the mental health team. The report said:

There should be a shift in emphasis from methods of cure to methods of early discovery, diagnosis and prevention.

It is here that the school has its primary responsibilities and its most effective role.

During the past 40 years pupil personnel services elsewhere have progressed through three stages: remedial, preventive and developmental. Services in Alberta are mainly in the remedial stage.

Very little time, if any, is devoted to preventive services, mainly because crucial problems of pupils require immediate attention.

The report goes on to decry the lack of trained personnel in pupil personnel services and strongly recommends that training programs be further developed in Alberta's universities to allow for the training of a pupil personnel work force.

Indications are that our universities are moving rapidly in this direction.

As important as the counselor's role in mental health care is, I am prepared to suggest that he has an equally if not more important role in the humanization of the school system itself.

It is becoming obvious to people involved in public education—and especially to the young people themselves—that our school system is not organized in a way which allows individuals to freely grow and creatively relate to one another.

Instead, the school system has taken on many of the characteristics of largeness, bureaucracy, and impersonality that have come to characterize many of our other major social institutions.

Too many pupils are finding our schools cold, sterile, impersonal places in which they are unable to relate to their teachers, their principals, and sometimes even their fellow students as human beings.

In a day past, this might have been of no social consequence; pupils had little inclination to protest, to agitate or to organize for improved conditions.

Today, things have changed.

We have tried to teach our young people the value of independent thought, the value of questioning and drawing their own conclusions. Now, however, they are being independent, they are questioning and they are drawing their own conclusions, and many older people find these conclusions distasteful. The young have examined the institutions we have created and have found them to be wanting.

I hope that we will not be defensive and hostile in the face of these criticisms, but that we will listen to them with great care and concern. They often have the ring of truth.

What I am leading up to is this: I want to suggest that counselors who are genuinely interested in relating to young people as persons have an obligation to take a lead, in developing better lines of communication between the hierarchies of their schools and the young people who are seeking involvement.

Only through a meaningful dialogue will we be able to benefit from their examination of society; only through meaningful discussion can we temper their enthusiasms with the wisdom of experience; and avoid the frustration which our better young people feel because of their inability to

be heard or to influence the decisions that affect their lives.

In many of our schools, the school counselor is the only adult person in authority who attempts to relate to the pupil as a person. Counselors therefore have a unique opportunity to "tune in" to what the young are saying, and to both pass those views along to people in authority and to help legitimize what is defensible in our school system.

The old authoritarian model of the school system is no longer acceptable. We must aim at building in our schools a sense of community, so that teachers, pupils, administrators and parents, alike, will feel they are all partners in the quest for truth, and not warring factions with nothing more than their own ends in mind.

We need to ponder, all of us, the same truth of a statement by the sociologist, John Seeley:

What educational institutions now do, in a rough outline, is to take the child, warm living flesh and spirit in the kindergarten and nursery school—and turn him into sinew, skeleton, scar tissue at the high school, college or graduate school exit. He comes full of life and leaves full of schemes. He comes open and leaves closed. He comes in sensitive of self-awareness and goes out clad in clanking armour. He comes singing, skipping, and dancing, and leaves carrying himself, presenting himself, using himself, posing and posturing. He comes to give and receive: he leaves to trade at the door of life. Not out of some inherent necessity of "growing up"—indeed this is growing down—but out of the very structure and content of education designed to that end. And rightly so, for what we have needed hitherto were not human beings but skilled ants, and the institutions appropriate to their production, our schools and colleges, have been and are, mostly, anthills.

I will make no comments on that statement but it is worth serious pondering.

I have described a service the counselor can provide to the public: *defence against mental illness.*

I have described a function the counselor could provide for the school: *its humanization.*

And of course there is no denying the valuable function the counselor can render to the industrial system, in the whole field of *vocational counseling.*

I want to describe finally, a service the counselor can provide to the individual student and the community at large.

As Gilbert Wrenn (1968) pointed out in a recent article in the *Canadian Counsellor*, probably the greatest challenge people in a helping relationship have to meet is preparing rural and urban students alike to accept and cope with an increasingly urban society.

Canada is progressing towards an urban society as rapidly as any nation in the world. Projections say that by 1980 three out of five Canadians will live in one of three cities—Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver. We all know too well the pressures and anxieties that go with urban life in large metropolitan centres. We also know that in these centres we are going to face increasing difficulty in defining our identity as individuals, because this process of definition grows out of meaningful inter-personal relationships which develop between adults and young people in today's society.

Counselors can assist young people in their process of self-definition. The counselor cannot be, in most cases, a surrogate parent; but there

is very much that can be done short of that role. With the breakdown of the tightly knit family that we have known, educators and particularly counselors are being looked to by young people as models and examples.

The counselor will not only help the individual to formulate his personal value system; he will also in many cases spell the differences between interest and apathy on the part of the individual school student.

Education is the key to the full utilization of this country's human resources. But education must have direction for the individual; the choice of a vocation is probably one of the most important personal decisions our young people will make. The responsibility for ensuring proper vocational choice among our youth is a weighty one and one which falls on the shoulders of our nation's school counselors.

We in Alberta are studying carefully the general orientation of the Hall-Dennis Report (1968) and I think one paragraph in that report has particular importance for counseling personnel:

The lock-step structure of past times must give way to a system in which the child will progress from year to year throughout the school system without the hazards and frustrations of failure. His natural curiosity and initiative must be recognized and developed. New methods of assessment and promotion must be devised. Counselling by competent persons should be an integral part of the educational process.

That counseling and guidance personnel are being called upon to serve a real need in the development of our young people is self-evident.

Although the increase in Canadian Guidance and Counseling membership in Alberta does not reflect a totally accurate picture of counseling positions in this province, it is instructive to note that Alberta's membership in this Association climbed from nine in May 1967 to approximately 200 in May 1969.

That we have a long way to go fulfilling the counseling needs of Canadian students, however, is indicated in the study undertaken in 1965-66 by The Department of Manpower and Immigration (Breton & McDonald, 1967). This study pointed out that 62.6% of the Canadian teaching staff and 79.5% of the Canadian school administrators involved in guidance think that the number of guidance personnel in their school is insufficient (p. 166).

Although I deeply appreciate the difficult role counselors are attempting to fill, in closing I would like to make a plea for counselors in our schools to take some time out from their duties to develop lines of communication and good working relationships with others in their community who are involved in helping relationships with students. I am speaking here of community social workers, provincial guidance personnel, medical doctors, and the like.

Similarly I would strongly suggest closer working relationships with other school specialists such as speech therapists, reading specialists and curriculum remedial specialists.

Only when everyone involved in the field of mental health and human development is cognizant of one another's strengths and limitations will the field be able to provide co-ordinate services operating at peak efficiency.

## REFERENCES

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## LE CONSEILLER EN PLEIN ESSOR

R. C. CLARK

Dans son discours d'ouverture à Edmonton, l'honorable R. C. Clark présente sa philosophie d'un gouvernement au service de la population et du rôle dévolu au conseiller quand il s'agit de libérer et d'humaniser notre société. Il affirme que le conseiller est dans une position de première valeur pour prévenir les maladies mentales, pour regrouper nos ressources dans le domaine de la santé mentale, enfin pour favoriser le dialogue avec la jeunesse qui doit s'adapter dans une société urbaine en pleine croissance.

Il insiste aussi sur le rôle vital du conseiller en ce qui a trait à l'aspect humain de nos écoles et aux relations plus étroites entre celles-ci et l'économie du pays. Il affirme que notre jeunesse se sent de plus en plus frustrée de toute notre bureaucratie et qu'elle a besoin de quelqu'un qui l'écoute et la comprend.

Au total, il croit que nous sommes plutôt en retard, au Canada, du côté des services personnels.

Pendant que d'autres services ont suivi les stages suivants—correctifs, préventifs et progressifs—il avance que l'Alberta, tout au moins, en est demeuré au stage correctif. Il fait porter le blâme de cette situation sur le manque de personnel bien formé et demande instamment aux universités d'y apporter une rapide correction par des programmes conçus en ce sens.

