

W. R. ANDREWS,
*Faculty of Education,
Queen's University,
Kingston, Ontario.*

SHOULD COUNSELORS TEACH?

ABSTRACT: A position paper which considers an important aspect of the counselor's working conditions. The point was made that pre-requisite to a productive consideration of the question Should Counselors Teach? is agreement upon the role of the counselor to be discussed. Two typical roles were contrasted, and one was selected as the focus for discussion of the main question. Consistent with the selected role, 11 principles of school guidance and counseling which are satisfactory for the 1970's were stated. It was found that the question of part-time or full-time counseling is inseparable from the matters of role, preparation, selection, status, and accountability of counselors. Support was given to the proposition that only the full-time counselor can satisfactorily carry out the selected role.

To ask the question in school circles, "Should counselors teach?" is to invite a flood of jumbled ideas, clichés, arguments, and opinions. It is an important question, yet very little has been done over the years to demonstrate a conclusive answer. The present paper is an attempt to clarify the issues, and to arrive at an answer which will permit counselors to make their maximum possible contribution.

It is usually apparent when teachers, counselors, or administrators argue this question that understanding is impeded because each protagonist has in his own mind a meaning for the designation "counselor," and a conception of what the counselor does, which are quite different from the conceptions of the other parties to the discussion. If light is to be shed on the question at issue, there must be agreement upon exactly what is being discussed. The role of the counselor will now be considered, followed by a discussion of counseling principles which further define how the counselor will occupy himself. The question under discussion here, therefore, will be answered in terms of a particular kind of counselor or guidance officer who is trying to perform according to a selected set of principles. Should counseling of the sort which will be arbitrarily selected as most useful be a full- or part-time operation?

Sacrificing accuracy to brevity, two roughly representative counseling roles are distinguishable. The first will be designated the Institution-Serving Role, and the second the Person-Serving Role.

The Counselor in the Institution-Serving Role

... Special personal qualities: May have genuineness, accurate empathy, and non-possessive warmth, but these are not critical qualities. Usually of mature age. Strong organizational interest. Frequently has the goal of obtaining administrative position.

... Training: Teacher certification and successful experience in teaching are considered critical. Some training in guidance and counseling is seen as helpful but not essential.

... Relationship with students: Counselor initiative predominates. Typically, scheduled or routine interviews. Seldom is a particular student seen more than once or twice during a school year. Counselor relies heavily upon contacts made through teaching in the organized classroom for his own feeling of counseling helpfulness. Confidentiality is perceived in terms of what the counselor and the school think is in the best interests of the student.

... School status: Does both teaching and guidance work. Often represents the principal or interprets administration policy to both teachers and students and therefore is perceived as an authoritative teacher or a semi-official administrator. Shaw (1968) states: "Teachers frequently tend to identify guidance staff with administration and, if one examines the proportion of administrators who were first guidance specialists (Fisher, 1966) or looks at the tasks that guidance staffs often carry out, this is an entirely understandable position for teachers to take (p. 24)."

Tasks performed by counselors conforming to the institution-serving role, such as routine completing of, and decision-making concerning, individual student timetables, assistance with designing the schedule of courses and teacher-assignments for the year, the organization of instructional events like school-wide achievement testing, doing the paper work required when students transfer in or out, substituting for absent teachers, the carrying of messages and even work like the recording of marks when office clerks are busy, together constitute most of work-load of many counselors. Clearly, such tasks are important and must be done, but there are more straightforward methods of getting them done than calling them guidance and releasing teachers to do them. The tragedy is that when guidance and counseling are represented in a school in this guise, the person-oriented services which students really need are denied to them.

Most counselors in Canada who perform a variation of the role now being described do teaching as well. Many and varied are the reasons for the appointing principals to designate this part-time status. If a staff member can do two things, he fits more flexibly into the school program schedule than if he is limited to one. So long as he does some teaching, he can sometimes earn more grant money for the school than if he must be labelled support personnel. Since he does some teaching, he can more easily than otherwise be asked to perform as a teacher-substitute.

Perhaps the most important consideration, however, is that most principals are totally unfamiliar with the concept and the actuality of a distinctive role for the counselor. So long as the counselor is pre-

pared essentially as a teacher, and does the familiar teaching and administrative tasks, the principal is comfortable. Most school principals have only enough knowledge of the possibilities inherent in the employment full-time of especially trained guidance personnel performing unique functions in the school to make them uneasy and defensive. This is probably an inevitable response to an innovation as recent as the notion of the person-serving counselor. An important responsibility of all those in the counseling field today is the interpretation of counseling goals and methods so as to give both teachers and administrators a chance of responding cooperatively.

The recognition that something is wrong with school guidance is widespread in Canada, amongst students, parents, teachers, and administrators alike. Some confirmation of this hearsay evidence is available. In a recent (April, 1971) survey of degreed education students at Queen's University, almost half said either that there had been no appreciable guidance and counseling services at the Ontario high school they attended, or that they retained no clear impression about them. The remainder rated their Ontario high-school guidance and counseling services as follows: excellent-0; very good-2; good-7; fair-6; poor-11; very bad-10. Thus, where services substantial enough to be remembered were provided, three students rated them negatively to every one who rated them positively. When it is recalled that guidance invariably represents itself as a service to students, this result must be considered an astonishing condemnation of the prevailing mode of counseling.

A real difficulty in dealing with ramifications of counselor role in general terms is that particular counselors and schools will seldom be accurately described; they will fall somewhere in between the two models being used in this paper. The models are important when alternatives are being discussed, but the reality will be closer to a continuum than to two isolated poles. The intent of this paper has nothing to do with categorizing particular counselors or schools—each counselor can decide for himself where he falls along the continuum—rather it is to show the way to improvement by indicating hampering conditions.

Following is the second counselor role model:

The Counselor in the Person-Serving Role

... Special personal qualities: Genuineness, accurate empathy, non-possessive warmth are critical for success. More interested in counseling than in either teaching or administration. The extremes of youth and age, and teaching inexperience are not seen as insuperable handicaps.

... Training: Substantial undergraduate work in psychology, and graduate work to or near the master's degree level in guidance and counseling are essential. The counseling training must include at least a year of a supervised practicum course. Teacher certification and at least some classroom experience are required.

... Relationship with students: Student initiative is cultivated and responded to. Interviews are typically on a self-referral basis.

Extended therapy is possible for a few students, although this work would take a minor proportion of the counselor's time. Counselor relies for his effectiveness upon student expressions of need, his own personal and academic understanding of the young, and particular knowledge and techniques in the field of guidance and counseling. Confidentiality is a matter of professional ethics, according to which the student's wishes are usually primary.

... School status: The counselor does no teaching, no tasks which are clearly school administration, and no extended clerical work. He works to achieve recognition, on the part of other staff members and students alike, as a school person having a unique identity or role and offering needed services to students and the school. At the same time, he encourages and assists teachers to carry out those counseling functions which only they can do.

An attempt will now be made to show that the distinctive features of the person-serving counselor model, including the full-time factor, are essential to the implementation of a school guidance program which is satisfactory in the 1970's. Drawn from many sources, and having wide acceptance in the current literature, eleven principles are proposed as being basic to any satisfactory school guidance program.

1. *The counselor's emphasis must be on service designed to meet the needs of the individual student.*

Teachers often oppose the idea of full-time counseling because, they say, a counselor should maintain a knowledge of what goes on inside a classroom. This, ironically, illustrates another reason for counselors not continuing to teach. It is second nature, and proper, for teachers to focus upon the classroom as the essential educational arena, and for the administrator to give much thought to the school as a whole. The counselor, however, is responsible and trained for dealing with the student not as a student but as an individual, and to be effective he must perceive the development and the problems of this individual in terms of the currently critical area, and this is at least as likely to be the home or the community or simply the totality of relationships, as it is to be the classroom. It comes as a surprise to many teachers to learn that they have their distinctive occupational point of view, and few amongst those who are aware of it can switch it off and on when they try to shuttle back and forth between counseling and teaching.

It is never easy for those who need personal help to seek it, and many will never come if it means discussing their weaknesses with someone, however admired and respected, who must judge their achievement and who is in a position of authority over them. Someone in a school needs to become, in the minds of the students, clearly established in a role in which he is not associated with the disciplinary and evaluative structure of the school. The competent counselor will try to achieve this status, but he is licked if part of the time he is a teacher.

Practical considerations are against the combination of roles, too. What does the conscientious counselor do when the time for one of his daily classes arrives, and he is in the midst of a telephone conversation with a parent, or a student comes in and says he thinks he will quit school today? And when he finds that it is just too much for him to keep up to date in his knowledge in both mathematics teaching and counseling, and he cannot go to the meetings in both fields, which should he neglect?

2. The counselor is responsible for assisting all students in their educational, vocational, and emotional-social life areas.

Although listed as a separate point later, the training of the counselor is inescapably involved in this responsibility. It is time that school systems faced the fact that educational planning, vocational planning, and knowledge in the emotional-social areas are all today major areas of study. Is it realistic to suppose that people who spend the necessary years of study in these fields will permanently be content to spend only a portion of every working day in the area of their expertise? Is this an economic use of manpower? Or, on the other hand, will schools continue to waste in guidance offices daily portions of the time of competent English teachers who may be almost as ignorant in the area of, say, vocational planning, as the students who ask for their help?

When the matter is studied, therefore, it is seen to be not possible to separate the part-time issue from the training issue. Furthermore, if schools are to include in their role prescription for counselors work in these areas, it is clear that only one answer to the questions above is admissible.

3. The counselor must maintain a balance between positive and preventive work involving all students, on the one hand, and remedial and therapeutic work involving the few who falter, on the other hand.

A guidance department must first realize the necessity of this balance, and it is difficult to achieve. It is rarely achieved by departments composed of part-time, untrained counselors, who must dash in and out of the office, with minimal opportunity to interact with one another, and performing the job much as the spirit moves them. This balance is likely to be more closely approximated by a smaller group of full-time, trained counselors who can give guidance in the school their full attention.

4. The counselor must work from a developmental point of view.

What the teacher in the classroom can do by way of meeting the emotional and social needs of students is important, but it is sometimes limited by the group situation and the responsibility for the satisfaction of intellectual needs. Teachers should be able to confidently refer some students to counselors who have special competence and the time required both to work with the student and to consult with the teacher.

5. *The counselor must be specially selected to perform the basic functions of his role, and not for irrelevant reasons and for his ability to perform non-counseling tasks.*

Once it comes to be generally conceded that counseling positions should be filled by personnel having substantial training and working full-time in counseling, it will be too obvious an abuse for principals to continue to select counselors for some of the reasons which are too often considered applicable. These reasons support appointments to vice principals who cannot openly be given more administration time, appointment of teachers who are incompetent in the classroom, of veteran teachers who have earned a few easy periods as a reward, or who can no longer cope with a full day in the classroom, or appointment of good teachers who will make superior substitutes, or the appointment of teachers who will be willing and able to perform the administrative tasks which the principal wants help with.

6. *The counselor must be especially trained for his special job.*

Each variable in the counseling situation affects all the others. Thus, it will be important, for economic and professional reasons, for counselors who are trained approximately to the master's degree level, to be employed full-time in counseling. In addition, appropriate selection will be obviously important, and will be a function, at least partially, of the training institution.

7. *The counselor cannot function in isolation. He is the coordinating person in a counseling and guidance team comprising all school personnel. The work of this team should be integrated with the help offered the student at home and in the rest of the community.*

Full-time, trained counselors have both the special competencies and the open schedule necessary for productive and frequent consultation with teachers about students and student problems. Dannenmaier (1965) sums up the results of one of the rare empirical studies of the employment of counselors as follows:

The results of this study would tend to refute the hypothesis that counselors whose duties include the teaching of academic subjects have better professional relationships than do counselors who do not have academic responsibilities. The hypothesis that full-time counselors are more effective in counseling than are half-time counselors is supported by the study (p. 30).

8. *The counselor's work must be defensible when the school is under public economic scrutiny.*

This point is today crucial for many guidance departments across Canada. As implied in point 2, the employment of relatively numerous untrained, part-time teaching personnel to perform guidance and counseling duties is an exceedingly wasteful use of personnel who are trained to teach. Similarly wasteful is the use of especially trained counseling personnel to perform teaching duties which others not having and not being paid for the special training could do as well.

9. *The counselor is needed at both elementary and secondary school levels.*

The case for the employment of counselors in the elementary schools is a strong one, and secondary school counseling is now, in at least a primitive stage, well established.

The elementary school practice of having a single teacher responsible for a group of children all the time, or most of the time, has prevented the development of the part-time teacher-counselor pattern at the elementary school level. Although many elementary counselors serve more than one school, school systems have usually seen the logic of appointing the best trained people available to the full-time positions.

10. *The counselor's work must be integrated and kept permanently in a condition of development through continuing study of theory and through formal and informal evaluation.*

To expect that these obligations can be carried out by a relatively untrained group of counselors whose professional attention is divided between their guidance and their teaching tasks is unrealistic. Accordingly, few guidance departments in Canadian schools do show evidence of adequate attention to these activities.

11. *The counselor must provide adequate mechanisms to allow for direct and significant student influence upon all aspects of his work. Student responsibility for guidance should grow with student age.*

The breadth of perspective permitted to the counselor who is able to focus his full attention upon the student as individual as distinct from the boy or girl as student will enable the counselor to feel equally at home with the boys or girls of any age or type of program in his school. He will be particularly well suited, by reason of his training and of his relative dissociation from the typical school structures such as the formal classroom, to give leadership in the development of forms of schooling which provide satisfactorily for the growth of the student in his total maturity, rather than just in his intellect.

In summary, an attempt has been made to define a desirable counselor role, designated the person-serving role, to state the basic principles governing satisfactory guidance and counseling for the 1970's, and to show that the person-serving role is required if the stated principles are to be adhered to. Although the various features of the person-serving role were seen to be interdependent, a special point was made of the critical nature of the full-time feature.

RESUME: L'article constitue une prise de position concernant un aspect important des conditions de travail du conseiller. L'auteur estime que pour répondre de façon positive à la question "les conseillers devraient-ils enseigner?", on devrait discuter au préalable du rôle du conseiller. L'auteur a mis en contraste deux rôles, et un de ces deux rôles fut retenu comme point central de discussion de la question principale. Après avoir défini ce rôle, l'auteur énonce onze principes d'orientation et de counseling. Ces principes se veulent en accord avec les idées qui prévaudront dans les années 1970. L'auteur dégage que la question de l'engagement professionnel à temps partiel ou à plein temps est indissociable des aspects du rôle, de la préparation, de la sélection, des statuts et des responsabilités des conseillers. L'article tente de supporter la proposition que seul le conseiller à plein temps peut réaliser de façon satisfaisante le rôle choisi.

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