

Myrne B. Nevison

Counselling in the Canadian Scene

At a time when our society is making almost shattering shifts in life styles, work, values and institutions it is vital that those of us who work with people get perspective on what we're doing, where we've been and where we may be heading. This is especially true for counsellors, whose basic concern is the meaning of life, to take stock and to discover our alternatives.

As we review the development of counselling services in Canada it becomes obvious that we've been reacting to events instead of planning. But in the general sweep of developments we have moved through three main stages: giving educational guidance, bandaiding personal problems and groping toward preventative procedures and competence. We're now trying to grasp the intricacies of developing human potential — and we sometimes feel it's a race with social breakdown.

counsellors as guides

Counsellors were added to school staffs when large numbers of young people enrolled in high school and needed more information on educational opportunities than their parents were able to give them. In Canada this trend started in the late 1920's and 1930's.

At the turn of the century few boys and girls went beyond elementary school. In 1911 only 51.6% of the young men (ages 25-34) in the labour force had actually completed elementary school and only 7.1% finished high school! It was not until the 1930's that a third of our 15-19 year olds were enrolled in school. It is of interest to compare the attendance

of Canadian boys with those of the United States where the push for industrialization and the need for trained workers triggered early development of vocational counselling services. The table below illustrates this comparison.

Males Enrolled in School as a Percentage of the Total Male Population (ages 15-19), Canada 1921-1961 and United States 1920-1960.³

CANADA		UNITED STATES	
Year	Per Cent	Year	Per Cent
1921	22.86	1920	37.51
1931	32.47	1930	50.24
1941	33.86	1940	56.91
1951	40.89	1950	62.08
1961	61.47	1960	71.83

These first counsellors were teachers who were asked to assume responsibility for educational guidance — and they became the models for those who followed. The prime requirement for the work was a teaching certificate and experience as a teacher; training as a counsellor was not demanded. Their first priority was to ensure that students on academic programs met graduation requirements and to this purpose helped them plan their courses each year. An added — and discouraging — priority was to help non-academic young people find areas of potential vocational strength.

Inevitably counsellors became aware of the lack of educational alternatives for the non-academic child. There were pressures from the world of work to keep all young people in school and off the labour force but the community never worked with the schools to develop viable alternatives. The academically-oriented child continued to find a path to maturity through success in school but the non-academic and the slower developer found failure and discouragement in the academic route.

Even now the effects of competitive school grading practices continue to haunt us. One-third to one-half of the young people now entering their adult years face life's major choices with a feeling of inadequacy. Dominion Bureau of Statistics figures of those years show that one-half of the boys growing up in the maritime provinces or in Quebec were over-age (had been failed at least once) by the time they reached grade nine. In Ontario, it was one-third; in the western provinces, it was

thirty-eight per cent. Such public designation as a failure becomes a burden and a discouragement to anyone facing a competitive job situation. Opting out — whether by drugs, crime or irresponsibility — becomes an attractive choice.

Some counsellors picked up this challenge and influenced curriculum developments, including work-study programs. They became interested in the use of tests to identify aptitudes and accumulated vocational files. Provincial Departments of Education started summer, in-service programs to assist.

Some of the counsellors in their responsibility to guide in course planning assumed administrative powers. They thus became people to be manipulated — to be given “snow jobs” — by students wanting course changes. Many of them actually did move into administrative jobs and gave the impression that the road to administration started with a counselling position.

bandaiding personal problems

Then, in the 1950's, the effects of the disintegrating home life began to intrude into the school and these educational guides were asked to help with personal problems. For some it was a natural extension of their concern for young people; for others, it implied conflict in roles. As teachers they had restricted themselves to the four walls of the school, as counsellors they now must become specialists in the mental health areas and work more closely with the home and community resources. Questions of ethics, working relationships with other professionals and confidentiality all became important. There was an impetus to define counselling as a profession separate from teaching.

Although it is difficult to document the incidence of social and emotional problems, from our perspective now we can identify the patterns indicating social disintegration or the inevitable difficulties in breaking up a set of social imperatives in order to bring in new values and priorities. Throughout the ages there undoubtedly have been problems within the family but with the introduction of economic security (through welfare provisions) and with the lessening of religious holds, individual members of the family have become freer to opt out. The welfare rolls now contain many wives left with the children but in the past two or three years another definite pattern has started — the wives are opting out leaving the hus-

band to cope with the children. And the children leave, too. In cities across the country municipal and provincial authorities agonize over the decision to supply monies to children under eighteen.

The extent of this problem has not been documented but there are some clues. If we compare increase in the rates for marriage dissolutions against economic inflation as in the Consumer Price Index, the monetary increase between 1961 and 1966 was from an index of 100 to 111.4; in rates for marriage dissolution, from 100 to 141.7³ — and the new divorce laws did not come in until 1968. Schools now are finding that many of the children come from one-parent homes. (As many as one-third in some urban areas; much higher in the primary classes in high-rise districts).

If admission rates to psychiatric hospitals are also an indication of our inability to solve the problems of living, then it is sobering to note the inflation in this, too. In 1968 the rate of inflation was 185.7 compared to a base of 100 in 1961.⁴ In the early 1950's it was estimated that one in twenty of us would be hospitalized at some time for a mental illness; in 1968 the Dominion Bureau of Statistics stated the probability was one in eight; today psychiatrists estimate it as one in five or six. Crimes of violence are increasing. Between 1965 and 1970, there was a 53% increase in Canada.⁵ The CELDIC report on handicapped children (including the mentally and emotionally handicapped) estimates that there are a million children in Canada requiring special help.⁶

Our inability to solve our problems of living has had many implications for school counsellors. They started bandaiding by rescuing those in difficulty or giving advice. The counsellors that were seen as helpful soon became overwhelmed. More and more sought training but increased competence brought increased requests. By the 1960's the questions of counsellor competence and preventative measures took front stage.

preventive procedures and competence

The 1960's brought into focus both the explosion of knowledge and the need for action as well as knowledge on the counselling process, on learning disabilities, on preventative work with children and action on training programs and professional competence.

The guidance worker, the crisis bandaider, became in-

terested in the differences between teaching and counselling and gained glimpses of professional competence as a counsellor. For many, a door was opening to new knowledge and skills and unexpected insights.

The awareness of the counselling process crystallized into debate and supporters of the various theoretical positions became vocal. First to come into prominence was the question of directive or non-directive theoretical procedures and the issues then fading in the United States were freshly debated. Students became aware that some counsellors were interested in vocational choice; others appeared non-committal, reflective, concerned with feelings and acceptance. Soon, however, the vocational people were utilizing reflection and clarification techniques to bring the problem into focus before exploring alternatives. The client-centered advocates became interested in more active participation, in the I-thou relationship, in sensory awareness and in confrontation.

Then a variety of cognitively-oriented hypotheses or theories began to interest other counsellors. Behaviorism, reality therapy, Adlerian theory, and rational-emotive psychotherapy became popular with action people who wanted tangible results. These theories also led the directive, vocational group into a concern with therapy.

The awareness of the prevalence of personal problems brought with it not only an interest in treatment but also a concern for prevention and counsellors started to work with children in the elementary schools. At first it was an attempt to coordinate community services for children with serious problems (essentially still the bandaid approach) but soon counsellors began experimenting with procedures to prevent the development of problems. Work as a consultant with teachers and parents became important in order to alleviate some of the pressures and to build a more constructive situation for each child. Generally counsellors worked with a population of two to three thousand children. Only very recently have some been appointed full-time to only one school.

The question of professional competence and training became very important in the 1960's. Most provinces introduced certification qualifications based on graduate training at a university in addition to qualifications as a teacher. In most cases this was a master's degree or equivalent, often obtained by part-time study. Quebec decided otherwise and started to require a qualifying program of two or three years of full-time study, requiring, in many cases (particularly on the

French side) no teaching certificate, and led the way to the recognition of counselling as a separate profession. In 1971, Ontario put its support behind training at a university and discontinued its summer Department of Education programs.

In 1965 the Conger report from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration reviewed the provision of counselling and guidance for educational and vocational development and concluded that training for a fully qualified counsellor should extend over two full years of postgraduate study.⁷ The report recognized the possibilities of both paraprofessionals with less training and counselling psychologists with a doctorate degree. This was the first and only statement at a national level.

This concern for professional competence did not mean that all schools were staffed by trained people. The emphasis on having a teacher attempt to offer a part-time service still remained. In 1967, 67.3 per cent of the counsellors in Canadian high schools had no certificate, diploma or degree. Eighty per cent counselled five hours a week or less; half of them had only one to three years experience⁸. It is unrealistic to expect untrained people with primary responsibility for teaching to offer an adequate counselling service and Canadian youth are still not getting the help they need.

counselling in the 1970's

The 1970's are shaping up as an exciting yet challenging time for counsellors. In a very short period of time we have recognized the need for educational and vocational guidance, we have survived our bandaiding approach, and we're now recognizing we must plan and not just react to events. We must anticipate the new directions and discover our alternatives.

Whither now? The main sweep of the 1970's swings us from an acceptance of various life styles, from an emphasis on individuality of doing one's own thing, to a recognition that the individual is part of a society, that his freedoms are not absolute, that everyone has a contribution to make to the quality of life of others.

During this past decade many counsellors saw their primary function as that of helping an individual meet his own goals, regardless of what the goals were. The balance had swung from group standards to individual freedom but had gone too far in many cases. Individuals, in seeking their rights, were

allowed to ignore the rights of others and indeed to impinge on their freedoms. Our society found it was not affluent enough to support many who chose to be non-contributors; it found it must be productive to support good health care, care for the crippled, recreational needs and cultural pursuits. Counsellors had to help an individual choose goals that satisfied him but also made him a vital part of the larger community.

The counsellor must help the individual understand his life style and his particular patterns of behavior that facilitate or impede his reaching his goals. The client must gain a more accurate awareness of truth and reality — the probable consequences of each choice he may take. The counsellor will put new emphasis on maturity and the maturation process and help the client to understand his next step forward. He must do it in such a way that the client wishes to understand and to grow.

The counsellor will also work as part of a larger team with paraprofessionals and with community resources. He will enlarge his impact by helping parents and teachers; he will use his skills to help institutions evaluate their effectiveness and to change. He will feel comfortable in working with people in many settings, such as schools and colleges, community centres, prisons, manpower offices, or wherever people congregate.

It is easy to write of what he will do or where he will work; it is less easy to answer the crucial question: how will he become this professional himself? Basically, we will need people possessing two broad, general qualities: individuals with the wisdom and experience gained by living and those who have enthusiasm, energy and openness to experience that living so often negates. The training process must make them insightful, tolerant and perceptive. It will be necessary to help the counsellor-trainee gain the understanding and wisdom of the mature person as well as the counselling skills. In essence, the counsellor-in-training will have to leap over the experiences of years to move from the third or fourth of Maslow's hierarchy of needs to the self-actualization stage in order to have the perspective necessary in the new roles.

At this time in Canada, when jobs are scarce for young people, when the middle-aged so often feel over the hill, when all ages opt out the drug route, when the numbers needing a boost are so overwhelming, it is tempting for a counsellor to try to insulate himself in his office. He becomes weary, if not

discouraged. He vaguely realizes that more of the same policies, more patchwork, won't help.

It is a transition, a passing scene, and the counsellor can play a key role in the development of a new society. I believe that no where else in the world is the future so bright, the opportunities so intriguing. It will be a challenging world — not a place for the timid. It will require people of courage, competence and compassion and it will be our delight to encourage them to grow, to move forward confidently.

references

1. G. W. Bertram, *The Contribution of Education to Economic Growth*, Ottawa: Economic Council of Canada, Staff Study No. 12, 1966, p. 18.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
3. M. B. Nevison, "There's Another Kind of Inflation — and the Costs Are High," *Canadian Counsellor*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Oct. 1969), p. 52.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
5. *House of Common Debates*, Vol. 115, (Nov. 8, 1971), p. 9402.
6. Commission on emotional and learning disorders in children, *One Million Children*, Toronto: Leonard Crainfor, 1969.
7. D. S. Conger *et al*, *Counselling and Guidance for Educational and Vocational Development*, Ottawa: Department of Citizenship and Immigration, 1965, p. 28.
8. R. Breton and J. C. McDonald, *Career Decisions of Canadian Youth*, Ottawa: Department of Manpower and Immigration, 1967, p. 163-164.