THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL COUNSELLOR*

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The very great changes that have recently taken place in society have given rise to the need for new roles One such role that has arisen in the educational context is that of counsellor This role has become necessary because of the increased complexity of society and the lack of social controls Difficulties arise in defining the role of the counsellor which anyhow may differ from country to country All counselling must recognize that children are being educated for a world that will be vastly different from the one we know

There is a clear link between society and counselling It is a link that operates in both directions counselling has important implications for society, just as society has important obligations towards the counselling process The two-way relationship becomes clear when we consider it in the context of the relationship between personality and culture Persons form the culture, but the culture in turn forms the personality of its members In order to survive, a culture uses institutions both formal and informal, through which it processes its young members, so that, on the one hand it can assimilate them, and on the other they can identify with the society In this way societies preserve and perpetuate themselves

Today, we are living in a period of rapid and radical change Young adults now in university and those still at school are going to live out most of their lives in the twenty-first century They will be the parents of children who will be born into a new world, a world wholly different from ours, and about which we know very little indeed Perhaps our institutions, both formal and informal, have been doing too much to preserve and perpetuate the culture into which we were born, and neglecting the preparation of people for the radically changed culture which is coming about within the life time of many adults and certainly within the life time of today's youth A society which aims solely at preserving or perpetuating itself is already in decline, perhaps already dead There is no way known to man whereby a culture or a society can be preserved

intact while remaining a living thing Change is integral to the life of society as it is to the life of the human organism itself The rate of change may vary from one society to another, or from time to time within a given society, but change there must be if the society is to last One can of course put a culture into a museum or preserve it like classical antiquity in books or in the minds of scholars, but a society which is actually alive is undergoing change It sometimes seems that the young today are much more alive to this cultural change than are many of their guides

Moreover, we know that cultures form a living whole, a pattern, where each section dovetails into, gives meaning to, and derives its own meaning from the rest of the culture This is something which counselling as an agency of change has to take into account One cannot change one item in the culture and leave all the rest intact So perhaps the primary and most important social implication of the counselling role is that in the long run—perhaps in the short run—it will be effective in changing not just individuals but the whole way of life of nations

Among all the institutions of a society which are used for the formation of its members, the family and the school system are perhaps the most important It is interesting to reflect that while the school system has been changing very rapidly in many parts of the world in recent years, the school itself as an institution has changed but little in thousands of years It is only a hundred years after all since the principle of universal literacy was accepted even in the economically most advanced countries and it is only within a generation that it has been accepted on a world-wide basis, and that secondary education has become a cultural norm It is predictable that a third level education will become, not just a cultural norm, but necessary for survival in the culture of the twenty-first century It is towards this then that our thinking must be directed While the school system is, I believe, moving in that direction, the school as an institution has not on the whole changed very much By this I mean that its role structure, and indeed even its physical structure of classrooms, teaching, study periods, and recreational periods have remained substantially unchanged for millenia One could read about most of these things described by Quintilian almost two thousand years ago If one thinks of the school as a living agency of formation, then it seems to me that this living agency of formation is making demands on us, and one of these demands is clearly a new role structure

As an institution, the family has changed considerably in recent centuries It has changed from the 'extended family' (which takes care of its own handicapped, for example) into the nuclear family which tries

to hive off its dependants both at the handicapped level and at the advanced age level (3) This obviously increases the burdens on society

The changes which have occurred, and which continue to occur, in home, school and society generally all point to the need for new roles In the school the new role that has emerged is that of counsellor This role has become necessary, as Dr Tyler (3) has pointed out because of the increasing complexity of society on the one hand and the lack of social controls on the other There is an increase in the number of occupational roles in society, while at the same time there is greater flexibility in choice of role (e g , one's future occupation is not determined by one's status at birth as in a caste system) Furthermore, man now recognizes that he does not possess all the answers to important questions Margaret Mead (1, 2) has noted that in all societies hitherto known, there have always been individuals who were cast for the role of the wise man, not just the peer groups or the reference groups of society but individuals who were the wise men of the tribe—the guru, the philosopher, the saint—who were thought to have all the answers Even if they did not have all the answers, it was conceded that at least they had all the ultimate ones If they themselves recognized that they did not have all the answers, they were still cast for the role of the master who had mastered *omne scibile* Today there is no possibility of making such a claim, no society knows, or even claims to know, all the answers For the first time, the adult world is prepared to admit that it doesn't know the answers It is not suggested, of course, that the counsellor is going to become the guru or the philosopher or the power structure of the future Decision-making must remain in the province of professional administrators But unless somebody teaches them, the professional administrators may go on making decisions in terms of the values of an outworn culture and may not project far enough into the future, although the very children for whom they are making decisions will be the parents of the next generation

While the older generation is becoming a little more humble, and is prepared to admit that it does not have all the answers, the young are sometimes prepared to say that there are no answers anyway This is another extreme and has to be faced very clearly It is this insight, that leads to a concern which is rather unexpected in one sense, and yet almost inevitable in another, and that is the concern for values the value of the person, the value of autonomy, and the value of integrity and individuation of the growing person This concern for values is perhaps the primary concern of the young, who have seen something of the inadequacy of the transitory value system of the older generation Counsellors throughout the world will already have recognized this change It should be remembered that I speak primarily about Western cultures but something similar may be observed in other cultures The

transitory values of the adult generation have their roots deep in nine-teenth century thinking, and consist in idolizing such things as security, respectability, conformity, possessions, whereas the values of the younger generation seem much more to enhance ideas of liberty, exploration, insecurity, non-conformity, solidarity with one another, and honesty These different values are I think the true source of what we have wrongly called the 'generation gap' It might be much closer to reality to call it a cultural conflict because of the change in the value system whereby the new generation lives It does seem that this change has not yet been absorbed into the thinking of those who set up schools' curricula, educational policies and counselling services

There are many dangers as society changes from a relatively stratified, immobile structure, through high social mobility, towards a greater democratization within itself This greater democratization is itself a gain, a value, but as always happens when one makes a gain in one direction, something may be lost in another A potential loss may be illustrated in the case of the gifted child It does seem that societies which in the past were affluent enough or still are affluent enough to do so might take care of their gifted children, but the very process they may be using, i e the school as an unchanged agency, may lose the gifted, unless we build into it a counselling service part of whose role will be to discover both extremes, the handicapped and the gifted This is a problem which must be taken very seriously indeed If we lose the gifted, that is if we submit them to the same processes as all the rest, then we may be moving towards a democratization, but it is a democratization of mediocrity rather than a democratization in power structures and one based on ability This has extremely important implications from the point of view of policy-making

The changes in the values of society, it seems to me, provide the socio-psychological background which has generated the felt need for coun-selling services In a sense, the counsellor as we are now beginning to understand him, is an example of an informal role (there always have been counsellors in every society) which is rapidly becoming formalized I believe it is this change from the informal role to the formalized one, from an informal agency of society to a formal agency of society, which has caused considerable anxiety in trying to define the role of the coun-sellor In some cultures the role has clarified and become structured, particularly in North America It has not clarified or been accepted in the same way elsewhere It may not be necessary that it should Just as the school system in one country cannot be exported and planted without change in another, and as the teacher's role in one country is not the

same from country to country, so also the counsellor's role may have to vary, both spatially and temporally, from one culture to another

As a culture changes, the ability of the individual to adapt to the changing environment is a test of his maturity The immature feel insecure when their world changes We are all immature to some extent Neither are we wholly endowed to the limits of our capacity in terms of culture To some extent we can all be regarded as handicapped These limitations in themselves generate the need for help The immature will very often refuse such help On the other hand the mature person knows his strengths as well as his weaknesses, and it is the sign of maturity to be able to accept help when it is needed The proffering of help, the provision of a counselling service, must primarily of course be for the most deprived, for the people in greatest need, but it will also be necessary for survival for anybody living into the changed culture of the twenty-first century

The fact that the role of the counsellor is changing from an informal to a formal or structured one is partly the reason why there is a good deal of concern about the training of counsellors I do not suppose anybody yet knows how to train a school teacher Teacher training colleges are under fire in most parts of the world If after two thousand years of Western Europe, and six thousand years of cultural history in other parts of the world we still do not know how to train a teacher, I think we should not be too worried at not knowing yet how to train a counsellor properly

We have been considering counselling for the most part in developmental terms, as an aid to an ongoing continual growth process, but there is also a concept of counselling as a fire-brigade service, the life-crisis type of counselling This type of service will involve other professions, other roles, and other skills Counselling at that stage merges with or shades into psychotherapy and concern for the pathological Sometimes our concern for the pathologically-disturbed may over-shadow our thinking about counselling as a distinct tole The difference lies in the simple fact that however you define 'normality,' it will still be true that the psychopathologically-disturbed will only be a tiny minority It is often thought that counselling is for that tiny minority On the contrary, I would suggest that the role of the counsellor is for the vast majority who are immature, inadequate, to some extent deprived, and the special skills of the psychiatrist, the psychotherapist and the psychiatric social worker are for the more deeply disturbed people in our culture

Finally, it is well to recall again that the child now being counselled, will be the father of the children of the twenty-first century This is one of the major social implications of counselling If we could take up that

idea, and do some projections to try to discover what life is going to be like in the twenty-first century, there can be little doubt that our counselling would be more valuable, and more effective

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