

THE ROVING

An Innovative Answer to School Guidance Needs

BY LENNARD A. JORGENSEN

As the 21st century approaches, specialists in public school counseling are calling for reform. However, Seventh-day Adventist school counseling specialists are merely calling for a commitment to maintain the limited counseling programs that do exist in our schools. The few existing SDA school counseling programs are often the first things eliminated when budgets are cut, which seems to indicate that school counseling has a low priority in many SDA schools.

In both public and private schools, the school counselor has traditionally been perceived as an appendage to the school program rather than as a team member. In light of Adventists' commitment to a wholistic world view, our school program should include counselors as well as academic and administrative personnel. Worzbyt and O'Rourke suggest that *[w]hile elementary school counseling programs are committed to and support the teaching of academic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, equally important they also support the contention that children need to acquire skills of self-understanding, values clarification, self-esteem enhancement, interacting with others, learning to perform within the context of a work environment, developing positive attitudes, and desiring*

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to participate in lifelong learning.¹

A professional identity for school counselors has been difficult to develop because of the evolution from "guidance" to "counseling" and the fact that professional organizations for counselors have changed names every decade or so. Schmidt noted that the failure of professionals to use consistent language in identifying who they are and what they do has contributed to role confusion.²

Without a clear mission, goal, or purpose, the school counselor's role has often been relegated to shuffling paper, managing schedules, and assigned yard duty. However, responsibility for their job description must ultimately lie with individual counselors, who often prefer dealing with routine schedules rather than the more complex daily psychological needs of students, faculty, and staff.

In SDA schools, many counselors teach Bible or serve as vice-principal half-time and counselor half-time. Often the non-counseling job compromises the counselor's effectiveness. One cannot counsel in the true sense of the word and concurrently be an authority figure, i.e., neutral counselor and vice-principal with responsibility for discipline.

Because of the many and varied

tasks typically assigned to school counselors, they often have difficulty focusing on the goals and needs of students. For example, Tugend found that high school juniors and seniors in the early 1980s tended to receive no more than 20 minutes of education and career counseling per year.³ In many schools, almost no personal therapeutic counseling takes place unless a traumatic event such as a suicide occurs. Preventive tasks may be left out altogether, although they are critical at both the elementary and high school level.

The Need for K-12 School Counselors

We live in a period of rapid social, economic, and political change. In fact, change occurs so rapidly that it is causing psychological overload. Emotional support and values come less and less from within the family and more and more from the school and other sources. Thompson states that:

In a period of rapid social change, single-parent families, dual-career households, chemical dependency,

international unrest, shifting achievement profiles, greater occupational diversity, and changing population demographics, school counselors have come to represent a reservoir of stability and congruency of information. The school, which once was to educate, now must accommodate and facilitate psychological growth of both students and their families.⁴

Dudley and Gillespie cite a study which concluded that SDA education is "central to the mission of the church and the salvation of its children."⁵ This means that a heavy socialization burden rests on SDA education. At least 20 percent, but maybe closer to 30 percent, of Adventist school children in the United States and Canada come from divorced homes.⁶ Dudley and Gillespie also found that 47 percent of SDA students in grades six to 12 reported feeling very sad or depressed during the past month.⁷ Jorgensen found that more than 17 percent (a figure higher than the public college sample) of female SDA college freshmen and sophomores indicated that they had

been sexually molested before the age of 14 years.⁹ Clearly, these few figures give us a hint of what an SDA school counselor's challenges might be.

A Solution for SDA Schools

SDA school counselors are needed at all educational levels—kindergarten through college. While some SDA schools have excellent counseling programs, many do not. Money seems to be the greatest factor. Therefore, one solution would be to create a “roving” counselor. This person would need to have different job descriptions at the elementary, high school, and college level, due to the different needs of the

cooperative effort must be done in such a way that:

*She or he works with, never on, people whom she or he considers subjects, not objects or incidences, of action. As one who is humble and critical, she or he cannot accept the ingenuity embodied in the “ready-made idea” generalized in such a way that the social worker appears as the “agent of change.”*¹⁰

To start the process of bringing a roving counselor into the school system, the initiating school or conference should utilize a team approach. Worzbyt and O'Rourke assert that [d]eveloping a team approach to ele-

teachers, nurses, school social workers, parents, and school board members, with the counselor as chairperson. The reason for such a broad group is that counselors' job descriptions must touch and/or overlap each of these representatives' areas in order for him or her to be truly effective. Having the school counselor as head of the committee should ensure commitment to the diverse resources necessary for setting up a comprehensive counseling program, as well as ongoing management and assessment of the program.

A separate committee will need to be set up in each school where the counselor works, due to the varying needs of different school communities. The school counseling committee at each location will set the direction for their school.

At the elementary level, prevention can and must take place, as social problems increasingly begin at an earlier age. Prevention has been a hallmark of the SDA corporate commitment to health. School counselors thus are fortunate to work in an environment with a mindset that is more likely to accept preventive programs.

What needs to be kept in mind when setting up a preventive counseling program? In his theory of multiple intelligence, Gardner included specific areas traditionally ignored in Western society, i.e., bodily-kinesesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal.¹¹ These intelligences of “intuition” are needed to develop a well-rounded individual. Interpersonal skills, for example, are extremely useful for people such as politicians, administrators, teachers, and pastors. Ellen White recommended tapping into all “intelligences” by observing:

For ages education has had to do chiefly with the memory. This faculty has been taxed to the utmost, while the other mental powers have not been correspondingly developed. Students have spent their time in laboriously crowding the mind with knowledge, very little of which could be utilized. The mind thus burdened with that which it cannot digest and assimilate

students, parents, teachers, and administrators at each level.

A potentially greater problem for the roving counselor than for his or her full-time equivalent is that of acceptance. It is important that the roving counselor be understood, accepted, and empowered by schools, the conference, and parents in order for the program to be truly effective.

Paulo Freire suggests that to be truly effective in meeting the needs of the community, the culture within which helping professionals operate must be part of the educational process. Freire declares that this

mentary school counseling is critical to the management process. When staff members are involved in the design and implementation of the elementary school counseling program, they are inclined to support it. The committee process, while time consuming, provides an excellent vehicle for promoting the role of the elementary school counselor and involving the entire school community in the delivery of services.¹⁰

For greatest effectiveness, this committee should consist of no more than 10 to 12 people, including conference and school administrators.

is weakened; it becomes incapable of vigorous, self-reliant effort, and is content to depend on the judgment and perception of others.¹²

White's statement implies that it is necessary to be aware of individual students' intelligences to avoid boredom or frustration, which could lead the person to behave in inappropriate ways.

The wholistic view of human intelligence described by Howard Gardner and Ellen White can be greatly enhanced by the work of a counselor. The elementary and high school counselor bridges the gap between academic activities and behavioral/emotional activities, such as development of attitudes and skills that will lead to success in adulthood. A school counselor can present learning modules on anger management, family violence, dealing with emotions such as depression, personal/social skills, drug abuse, human sexuality, race and culture, world peace and cooperation, environmental responsibility, sexually transmitted diseases, decision making, and so on. A counselor could also do in-service training for teachers, administrators, and parents, giving both information and ideas for how to deal with these issues.

Creating a positive physical and psychological environment on campus can often be easier for a counselor who is "neutral" rather than administrators and teachers, who may be perceived as having an agenda. The counselor can bridge the gap between the academic and the emotional well-being of everyone who touches the school system in some way.

The well-being of the adult clientele of schools is often neglected. A school counselor could, in addition to running small groups for students, run support groups for administrators and parents, teachers with difficult students, or administrators and teachers who need to resolve interpersonal problems.

The maximum number of schools in which one counselor can effectively work in at the elementary level would be three to four (ideally with no more

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than 500 students total). The counselor could spend one day a week in each school, with at least one day each week allotted for the counselor to gather materials, create lesson plans, consult, and attend to administrative duties. At the high school level, fewer schools (two to three) would use one counselor, due to typically higher enrollments at this level.

The future of our schools will be one of increasing change and complexity. School counselors form an integral part of our system's future, if only on a limited basis. The challenge for each school is to recognize the value of including a counselor on the team. The challenge for the counselor once on the team will be to set up a program that meets each school community's needs. A roving counselor will be pulled in different directions by having to work with several school communities. However, with the schools working cooperatively and supporting the counselor's proposed program, the rewards could be significant. ✍

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