Taking Issue

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Issue cover

A whole-school approach to guidance

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This chapter considers guidance as a whole-school feature of British secondary schools. Rationales for guidance within an overarching whole-school view of students' personal-social development are offered. Arguments for a comprehensive, developmental and distributed approach are emphasised. No single organisational model is offered, although curriculum and coordination concerns are briefly discussed.

Background

A consideration of guidance as a "whole-school feature" of the secondary school immediately indicates a focus on organisational aspects. Why should this be? In part the answer is that guidance in a school should contribute to what is known about the effectiveness of the school as an organisation in achieving a wide range of outcomes for

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students. Here I will mention two dimensions of effective schools before returning to consider guidance.

The degree of teacher collaboration in a school is linked to academic results. Schools with greater teacher collaboration get better results (Rosenholtz, 1987). Such schools are also characterised by co-operation among students and inter-racial harmony (Metz, 1986). Further, there is an impact on teachers' beliefs and perceptions: "In collaborative schools, teachers increasingly come to believe that student learning is possible with even the most difficult students and that they have access to the knowledge and skills to reach such students" (Rosenholtz, 1985). Moreover, in more collaborative schools teachers see themselves as learners, whereas in less collaborative schools teachers tend to believe that they had learned all they need to know about teaching within the first few years after entering the profession.

The health of the school as an organisation is also related to its effectiveness. A healthy school is one in which responsibility is well distributed, different members are clear about their contributions to the whole and there is adequate open communication and mutual respect between members of the system. Schools with collective responsibility for learning also get better achievement (Lee and Smith, 1996).

The implications for guidance are that it should also contribute to the development of effectiveness on these dimensions: collaboration and organisational health. In this way guidance can contribute towards an organisation which is effective for academic achievement and for wider personal-social achievements. Note that these two broad outcomes of school cannot be sensibly separated: they are both important and they inter-relate in complex ways.

However, given the way that secondary schools are designed and managed, it is not easy for guidance to make such a contribution. Guidance is often at risk of becoming marginalised, so that it is seen as a low-status or optional element with little relevance for the whole of school life or for the school curriculum. It is often fragmented, so that small elements of guidance in one area are unrelated to small elements of guidance in other

areas. The forces which create this state of affairs are strong, both inside and outside the school, and will be analysed in the final sections of this chapter. They include long-standing features, such as the organisational culture of the secondary school, together with more recent pressures, such as those associated with "reforms" in education.

These introductory points serve to accentuate the importance of collaborative shared practice in school. The challenge for guidance is the same as the challenge for the effective school: to build connected practice across the organisation. It is a challenge which guidance specialists will not meet on their own. The forces which encourage fragmentation and marginalisation of guidance reflect the whole organisation and need to be addressed by all of its members.

A whole-school approach to guidance

In this chapter I aim to emphasise key characteristics of any whole-school approach, and do not aim to propose a single model of school guidance. This is for two reasons. First, a variety of forms is possible and indeed present in the school system now. Within this variety different schools may operate different models equally effectively. To believe that there is a single effective model is to treat the school like a machine. We often do this, thinking of inputs and outputs, with all the machinery well oiled. This metaphor leads to describing the jobs as interlocking parts, each playing a clearly separated function, talk of "line managers", monitoring performance, organisational charts and so on. It has given us the view that a "good" organisation is an efficient organisation, and is ingrained in our everyday conceptions of organisation and order, particularly in the minds of policy makers. But it is by no means the whole picture: high quality is related to a wider range of considerations than just the organisational structure of guidance (Watkins, 1997). Second, the particular model of guidance which a school operates should properly reflect local conditions of the organisation and its environment. This gives recognition to the school as an organism, living and developing. It helps us to highlight how healthy the school is, how the various parts of the organism relate and connect, their needs for

growth and development. It may also highlight the importance of beliefs which prevail in the school, including those about guidance.

I will take the term guidance to mean any planned process which helps a student learn more about herself, about life opportunities and their optimisation. In school-based guidance, the need has always been to develop an approach which is:

- comprehensive in its clientele,
- developmental in its mission, and
- distributed in its mode of operation.

When these characteristics are in evidence, it can be called a whole-school approach, whatever its organisational form.

Comprehensive

A comprehensive approach emphasises guidance for all. It sees the need for guidance as normal rather than pathological, so that all students will need planned occasions to learn about themselves and their opportunities. Guidance is seen as part of education for all. It may state that all students have a right to guidance, and may try to develop clear statements of this entitlement. Rather than wait for difficulties to arise, a comprehensive approach aims to be proactive towards all students, and thereby prevent difficulties.

This approach contrasts with one which emphasises a range of marginal categories such as the deprived, disadvantaged, deviant, disturbed, and so on. Although such special groups are attractive to those who think guidance will rescue them, we must not over-estimate the power of school or of school-based guidance in ameliorating such difficulties. Services set up on these lines may be dealing with the difficulties which attract most attention rather than those which carry most need. Further, we must recognise the disadvantages of creating special client groups when many adolescent difficulties may be both transient and widespread. In almost any organisation, the helping services can all too easily set themselves up to deal with the difficulties, but in so doing they may present themselves as omnipotent, or as an antidote to the rest of the

organisation, or as a cosy corner. This is largely what happened to school counsellors trained in England and Wales during the 1970s - they became marginalised, burned out, and disappeared from the scene. More widely, they found themselves excluded from school change: as one commentator (Aubrey, 1985) put it:

> "Counsellors share a responsibility for their exclusion from school reforms: [they] have not been vocal or political enough to insist on their place in the school, tending to take on too much work and complain too little; [they] have chosen not to be in the mainstream of education by dealing primarily with personal knowledge, with individual students, tending to isolate themselves and not align closely with teachers…. Because many counsellors were trained in older theories they are often limited by the one-to-one therapy model, which has limited application to a school setting"

A comprehensive approach has logistical implications as responsibility is shared across the school. It requires us to move away from a sole focus on students working individually with a guidance professional, toward other aspects of guidance which are more embedded in the daily life of the organisation and the core activities of school, managed by teachers whose perspective is not specialist guidance. In this way major ingredients for all students are brought into focus:

- Personal tutoring. Here students meet with a teacher who has ongoing personal contact with them, and who knows the profile of their overall performance. The tutoring may sometimes be on a one-to-one basis, and include reviewing achievement, considering progress, devising strategies on a range of issues.
- Group guidance. This includes group tutoring, specially focused guidance lessons and also all lessons. Therefore we need to consider teaching and the extent to which its process and content relate to guidance principles: learning about self, about life opportunities and their optimisation.

- Wider experience outside the classroom. Residential experience, work experience, access to information resources and computer-based guidance would be included. This opportunity structure of experiences is less directly controlled by the school staff, but can be very important in extending the student's experience and may be linked to direct guidance at some other time.

Figure 1 attempts to display some of the elements which need to be considered in a comprehensive approach to guidance, listing direct and indirect elements which are available to all. It also emphasises the point that such provision needs to be planned and evaluated, so that the evidence of "guidance for all" is available, and the phrase does not degenerate into an empty slogan.
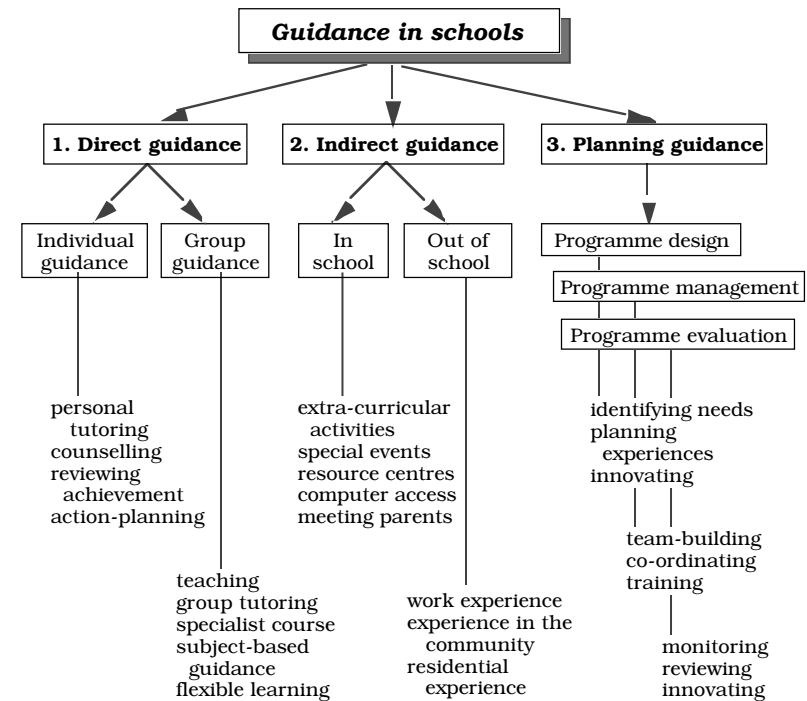

Figure 1: Elements in a comprehensive approach to guidance

This is not a new idea: essentially it updates the idea of the school as a guidance community (Rowe, 1975). Nor is it peculiar to UK: recent research in Canada (Levi and Ziegler, 1991) has shown that 'good guidance is total school guidance', meaning that it receives strong support, contributes to the atmosphere, permeates the curriculum, and includes a proactive developmental programme, collaboratively planned and delivered. In Hong Kong, efforts are being made to move away from crisis-orientation in highly pressurised schools, towards a 'whole school approach to guidance' (Hong Kong Education Department, 1990) which emphasises holistic growth of pupils (Hui, 1994). In USA a number of states have also been adopting and developing comprehensive programmes and moving away from a counsellor-clinical services approach (Gysbers, 1990, Gysbers and Henderson, 1994). In Scotland approaches to guidance have been identified as an aspect contributing to the effectiveness of the whole school (HMI/SED, 1988), and policy statements have defined guidance as a whole-school responsibility, clarifying both the role of first line guidance teacher and of promoted posts in guidance (HMI/SOEID, 1996, Scottish Central Committee on Guidance, 1986).

Developmental

Guidance which has a developmental mission is best suited to the context of an educational organisation. In order to make best connections with the overall goals of the school, guidance needs to describe its mission as contributing to students' development and learning. The culture of schools is more welcoming towards prevention rather than intervention.

This is not to say that school personnel do not sometimes make a significant contribution to helping with life crises (Wagner, 1995, Yule and Gold, 1993), However, broad areas of guidance such as health education and careers education regularly find themselves driven by the latest panic or the latest set of published resources or political fashion, and I have sometimes described specialist guidance programmes in some schools as "the sex and drugs and litter curriculum". This phrase is immediately recognised by many

teachers, including from different countries. It highlights the way in which a guidance focus can be dominated by adults' anxieties rather than young people's needs. Teachers' underlying motivation is to make a positive contribution to students' development at an important life stage, but they need support to achieve this, and to avoid the pitfall of guidance provision being modelled on their views alone.

A developmental approach needs a framework which makes interconnections between the various areas which guidance specialisms may have separated (health, careers, and so on), and is more genuinely a whole-person view. It needs to describe developmental themes which have been recognised over decades. I have been promoting the following framework of headings:

 ❉ bodily self
 ❉ sexual self
 ❉ social self
 ❉ vocational self
 ❉ moral/political self
 ❉ self as a learner
 ❉ self in the organisation
 (Watkins, 1985, 1992, 1995)

The framework seems to have the following benefits. The overall set of inter-connected headings creates a whole-student view rather than a fragmented view. The repeated use of the term 'self' can help teachers focus on the student perspective and needs in a more person-centred way. It can also help them recognise other influences in a student's development, including cultural and gender issues, and then adopt a role in helping students to reflect on their development and on the influences. For the school it helps develop a distributed approach (to be discussed below), in which the contribution of each planned element may be considered using these headings. Even teachers who are

described as hostile to guidance readily explain how their subject teaching makes a contribution to student development under these headings.

The content of the framework is similar to the findings of surveys of adolescent needs (Gallagher, et al., 1992, Poole and Evans, 1988), and probably the most creative use of the framework is to promote the identification of students' own guidance needs. This set of headings, suitably adapted in detail and language, can help students communicate the areas in which they would want to be more competent. Such a practice is worryingly rare in the secondary school.

Currently the heading "self as a learner" is increasingly important. Given the rapid expansion in society's knowledge base, the increased focus on information access and handling, and the collapse of jobs for life in favour of jobs which add value through learning, people need to learn in an increasing range of contexts, not just the compulsory ones (Watkins, et al., 1996). Thus school plays a role in helping young people understand and extend their learning repertoire, as a springboard for many different parts of their future lives.

A developmental and person-centred view has implications for the view of learning which is appropriate in guidance. Adolescents adopt an experimental approach to their development, trying out new strategies in order to seek feedback, develop their understanding and become more competent. The activities used in guidance mirror this approach by using an action learning cycle as characterised in Figure 2.
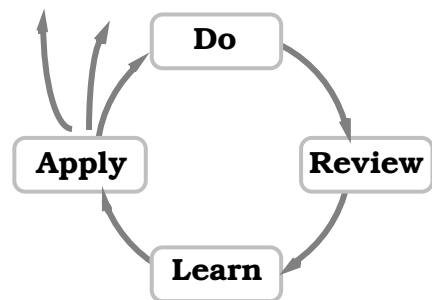

Figure 2. An action learning cycle

The "Do" phase might be an activity in the classroom: a case study, a simulation, a learning activity, or it might be some experience outside the classroom. The "Review" phase is a structured way of looking at the important points in the experience of that activity. The "Learn" phase is where students learn from different experiences, identifying new strategies and effective approaches. They may also identify what more they wish to learn. The "Apply" phase helps them to transfer their learning to situations they know, to plan some action and to set goals. The role of the teacher is to provide the necessary structures for students to progress through this process. Action learning at its best, whether with individuals or with groups, is a highly structured but still open-ended process.

Distributed

A distributed approach to guidance recognises that a range of school-linked experiences contribute to the student's development of understanding and action. It is based on the view that guidance is the responsibility of all teachers, but that they do not all have exactly the same responsibility. It aims to clarify how various experiences and roles can best play a part in the whole picture. Thus it contrasts both with an approach which claims that only some people or some experiences are likely to help, and also with one which suggest that all experiences are useful but fails to specify in what way.

Using for example the broad elements of comprehensive guidance, a distributed approach will need to deal with contributions at three levels:

Organisational level	✠ the ethos and messages of the school
	✠ the range of non-classroom opportunities offered
Classroom level	✠ all subject lessons
	✠ specialist guidance lessons
	✠ group tutoring
Individual level	✠ tutor guidance

✠ specialist staff guidance

✠ other adult guidance

A coherent distributed view of guidance first needs a common language for describing the content of various contributions: the framework of the seven selves in the previous section is one. It then becomes possible to clarify which aspects of the overall learning offer should be addressed in each element. This approach might therefore clarify some of the similarities and differences between, for example, subject tutoring and personal tutoring (Watkins and Thacker, 1993).

For example, if we consider the tutorial occasion, distinctive features are that:

- the tutor's contact with members of the group is a cumulative one
- the tutor has a cross-subject view of the student
- the tutor group has a "core" function amongst the various teaching groups
- the tutor has contact with parents and their view of the student

Thus the following areas of guidance may be salient:

- social and group relations, and any other issues which arise from the tutor's close knowledge of the group (i.e. a *responsive* curriculum)
- overall achievement, recording a wide range of achievements, approaches to study. learning about learning across subjects
- how students are making best use of the school
- decisions where parents' views are influential (e.g. option choice, career choice)

Similarly, if we clarify some of the distinctive features of subject lessons, we see that

- different subject lessons offer different approaches to learning
- students may perceive their own achievements in subject terms
- students' are often motivated specifically through subjects

So the areas of guidance which may be salient include:

- the learning goals and processes in this particular subject
- reviewing strategies for achievement in the subject
- understanding how uses of this subject may inform life-styles and work-styles

Thus we may develop what may be termed 'the classroom as a guidance community'. (HMI, 1992) in which one of the characteristics of good guidance in the context of the curriculum is that schemes of work contain references, as appropriate, to guidance.

Again, the specialist course, often labelled personal-social education, has a specific role to play in the overall picture. Its distinctive features include:

- it is planned and supported by a team including staff with specialist training in guidance
- it uses learning approaches which engage the personal-social dimension
- it addresses areas of priority which would not be sufficiently developed elsewhere

For these reasons, some aspects of guidance are more effective through PSE than through subjects: for example preventive education on smoking (Eiser et al., 1988) and alcohol education (Balding and Bish, 1992).

A distributed approach can reduce conflict and competition between elements - these contests oversimplify issues and do not exploit the different offering of each. It can also reduce the loading of some elements with inappropriate demands: "something on AIDS - do it in the tutor group". It also helps old divides be bridged, such as the divide between "pastoral" and "academic". As an HMI survey concluded:

Some schools in the survey had begun to explore ways of integrating more closely curricular with pastoral approaches, and it seems as if the way ahead may well lie in this direction. Schools need to consider how teaching and learning procedures can most appropriately benefit from and promote the care and overall development of pupils. Approaches will doubtless need to vary from school to school. Nevertheless the more schools are able to promote pastoral care through the curriculum, the more efficient and effective they are likely to be. Of course, if this

is so, there will be no place for teachers who claim they are only interested in

subjects, not young people, or vice-versa. (HMI, 1989)

In a distributed approach, the specialists in guidance are key players in developing the

practice of other staff. In that sense they become coordinators who are worthy of the

title, with clear support from senior managers, a clear budget, and a key position in the

overall structure (Whalley and Watkins, 1991). Their role is to inform support, review

and evaluate the whole-school picture, rather than do it all themselves

Note, however, that the main focus of a distributed approach is the planned work

undertaken by teachers. An omission here is the increasing role played by students in

school guidance. Provision such as peer counselling and peer tutoring is known, but not

always practised, in most schools. Its development in recent years may be a reflection of

increased pressure on teachers, but it has sometimes moved schools on from an over-

paternalistic view of guidance. It conveys a very important message about young people's

skills and the value of peer networks. When it is prevalent in schools, a distributed

approach will need to accommodate pupils' contributions.

Forces helping and hindering a whole-school approach

There are a range of features which will work for and against a comprehensive,

developmental and distributed approach, some of which have been indicated already.

The range is quite large since schools' practice is influenced from many angles. As a

recent study of guidance practice in Scotland showed, in six "illustrative" schools biased

towards good practice, teachers were hostile to their role in first-level guidance, despite a

strong national policy context which favoured this position (Howieson and Semple, 1996).

Whatever the policy statements say, key practices and perspectives inside the school can

have major impact on whether the approaches described in this chapter are realised.

Forces may be briefly considered at a number of levels, from large scale to small scale.

Forces helping a whole-school approach	Forces hindering a whole school approach
Wider context, including national policy	
school are seen in context of wider systems and influences	school are seen as either scapegoat or saviour for public concerns
schools are seen as helping young people learn	schools are seen as helping young people perform
a strong view of overall curriculum is put forward	curriculum is dominated by subjects and divisions
schools are encouraged to learn from each other	schools are encouraged to compete with each other on performance
Aspects of the school	
school goals are broad and explicitly include guidance	school goals are narrowed to assessed outcomes
senior management and school policy support a whole-school view	guidance is managed as a low-status add-on
planning and review is done collaboratively	planning is hierarchical, review is rare
posts of responsibility are for coordination, support to teams	posts of responsibility are for casework or referral
a developmental framework is used and student needs are identified	the major focus is on teacher provision
Teachers' points of view	
feel a responsibility to contribute to guidance	guidance is the province of specialists to whom cases are referred
feel supported and wish to contribute to overall student development	feel isolated and don't want extra responsibility
teaching as supporting learning	teaching as "delivery"
Guidance specialists' point of view	
leader, coordinator and supporter of others' curriculum and casework	someone who is skilled at helping individual students in difficulty

Future Trends?

In England the marketisation reforms of education, including National Curriculum, school

performance tables, and the rhetoric of standards have had a generally divisive impact

on schools and a negative impact on guidance provision. The vast majority of secondary

schools have crystallised even more strongly a subject-based view of the curriculum, careers education has been squeezed from the timetable (NACGT and ICG, 1993), and health education increasingly marginalised (Health Education Authority, 1993). Since the change of government in 1997, the overall picture has changed little, and a new set of pressures regarding numeracy and literacy targets has emerged, continuing the utilitarian mechanical view. A major review of the National Curriculum (School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 1997) with its focus on purposes, lifelong learning and flexibility, may well be side-lined, and not fulfil its potential to rejoin guidance and curriculum.

Overall, the balance between the various forces for and against a whole-school approach differs markedly from school to school, as schools become increasingly different. This variability is not in the long-term interest of students in the country at large, who will all lead lives characterised by increasingly rapid change. For them and for the community, better connectedness of experience is needed, promoting skills of learning and collaboration.

Unless the negative impact of present forces is recognised, and a more modern view of the role and process of schools emerges, there may be reduced role for the secondary school of the future (Dalin and Rust, 1996). The implications for guidance in this scenario would be severe: an instrumental performance view could squeeze out even more of the broad personal themes. In schools which are characterised by fragmentation and division, the guidance not only becomes marginalised, it also can become biased towards teachers' needs for survival.

At the very time that it is needed most, policy-makers in education seem to have given up on the school's role in identity development: instead they focus on a performance view with a dubious rationale of economic competitiveness. The students deserve better, as do the staff of schools if they are to maintain healthy functioning as human institutions. The alternative scenario for the future is one in which up-to-date understandings of learning and of the health of schools emerge. Then guidance processes could become more of a

core function in the everyday working practice, and a whole-school picture which really relates to students' lives could emerge. Future trends are always difficult to predict.

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