

ACCOMPANYING GULLIVER PERSONAL COUNSELING IN SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION*

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This is a review of the contents and methodology of personal counseling for adolescents in secondary education. The approach advocates personal growth as a main goal, and empowerment as a strategy for intervention. At the beginning the framework and the relevant characteristics of the adolescent personality are defined. Later, several issues related to adaptation on the personal level (self-esteem, reasoning, values, etc.) and the social level (communication, assertiveness, group management, etc.) are separately examined. Throughout the text, appropriate literary readings are suggested as counseling complements.

El presente artículo ofrece una revisión de los contenidos y la metodología de la orientación personal en la educación secundaria, adoptando una perspectiva desde la cual el objetivo global es el crecimiento personal y la estrategia de intervención es la potenciación personal. Tras presentar el marco general y describir someramente las características de la personalidad adolescente, se examinan detalladamente diferentes aspectos de la adaptación personal (autoestima, razonamiento, toma de decisiones, valores,...) y social (comunicación, asertividad, manejo de grupos) que pueden ser objeto de la orientación personal. A lo largo del texto se sugieren diversas lecturas literarias como complementos a la acción orientadora.

THE MAIN GOALS OF SCHOOL COUNSELING

As an important dimension of the formal education process, school counseling is intended to make a qualitative difference in school-life and, thus, to advance and enrich the overall goal of education: the whole formation of the individual. Such a goal aspires to enable the individual to lead a balanced and successful life.

From this general concept, three primary areas define the task of counseling in the Spanish secondary school system: 1) intervention to improve the quality of education; 2) personal empowerment of the students; and 3) orientation to focus them towards their future. This holistic approach is usually articulated by three main empowerment strategies (MEC, 1992):

- a. To empower students to learn efficiently and independently. This means not only to develop a certain ability to reason but also to build a positive academic self-concept and give the students the opportunity to interiorize appropriate learning strategies.
- b. To empower students to make their own decisions in

relation to their future with as much information and advice as possible.

- c. To empower students to integrate themselves successfully in society.

Traditionally, the first of these strategies is considered the task of academic or school counseling; the second is governed more by the interests of professional or vocational orientation counseling; and the third entails personal skills counseling. Although this triple distinction must be respected, the area of personal counseling will inevitably need to take into consideration some aspects of the individual's development in the other two areas: academic and vocational development.

EXPERIENCES THAT HELP US GROW

While the purpose of any educational action is to provide experiences that contribute to the student's growth and enrichment, it is probably in the area of personal counseling that this goal can be most freely realized, since it is neither limited by the requirements of teaching a certain academic content (as are other areas of formal education), nor limited by immediate pragmatic demands (as are school and vocational orientation, usually). What limits us in developing effective personal empowerment strategies is the difficulty of their evaluation and assessment. Even if

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we could assess their progression, effects, and possible successes or failures, these strategies are clearly not easy to judge by any conventional evaluation procedures, primarily because their results occur throughout the life-span of the individual.

It is also obvious that the experiences that help us grow do not only come from personal counseling programs. Each person's life is made up of unique and unrepeatable experiences of many kinds: family and social events; impressions made by influential people in the family or society as a whole, such as teachers and acquaintances; opportunities to study; inclusion in certain activities; and even vicarious experiences mediated by film and narrative literature. The experiences that help us grow are neither uniform in themselves nor do they consistently provide the same results in the life of each individual. The trajectory of each person's life is different. It would be mindless and hardly ethical to homogenize the development process of adolescents -but also, fortunately, impossible, considering the resources available to counseling departments in secondary schools.

As we understand personal counseling, the main task and goal consists in supplementing these vital experiences rather than directing or replacing them. At the same time we try to minimize the impact of those other experiences that have negative consequences; to take maximum advantage of those with a positive value; and to provide other experiences that, while being necessary or convenient, would not take place without a specific intervention. Therefore, we completely discard the possibility of understanding personal counseling as a closed set of predetermined concepts and activities, independent of the everyday experiences of those students for whom it is provided. The task of counseling does not consist in replacing those experiences nor in providing new ones, unrelated to their own. It also follows that the personal counseling proposals outlined here should not be considered at all obligatory in the school curriculum.

For our part, we shall present a series of ideas that touch on the practice of counseling in the field of personal advising. Wherever it is possible, we have used as a reference those proposals that have involved populations from Spanish secondary schools. Some of these proposals contain formal-type activities and some use specific techniques where the guidance of counselors, or teachers, is evident. In other cases the proposals contain suggestions and ideas designed for more informal intervention situations. Yet, these more informal type proposals endeavor, above all, to create opportunities for secondary school students to have access to some specific and valuable types of experiences.

GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT PERSONAL COUNSELING FOR ADOLESCENTS

Taking into account the above considerations, we can now analyze some general questions about the contents and methodology of personal counseling, which the counseling department of a secondary school education center should include in its program. Due to the fact that we are dealing with personal development during adolescence, and in order to better approach those general questions, we shall begin by outlining the main points characterizing the development of the adolescent personality (Coleman, 1982; Hopkins, 1987; Fierro, 1990a; Aguirre, 1994).

About the adolescent personality

The only thing I want to underline is how vulnerable you can be at 14 years old. You are no longer a child, but not yet an adult; you are stumbling forward and backwards, you are halfway between what you were and what you are about to be. In my case, I was still young enough to believe that I had a real chance to play in the major leagues, but at the same time I was old enough to question myself about the existence of God. I had read the Communist Manifesto, but I still enjoyed watching cartoons on Saturday mornings. Every time I looked at myself in the mirror it seemed I was looking at another person.

-Paul Auster, "Why Do I Write?"

The above quotation from Auster serves as an introduction to this section, because it clearly expresses the predominant feature of the adolescent personality: the sensation of going through a moment of transition in which the individual does not feel at ease with his/her former identity. S/he still preserves certain earlier habits and characteristics while at the same time remaining keenly aware of the distance that separates him/her from the adult world.

Following Hopkins' extensive and exemplary work (1987) and Fierro's brief and useful one (1990a), the evolution of the adolescent personality is characterized as a period of transition between childhood and adulthood. This transition entails a recapitulation of childhood-a reelaboration and definite overcoming of a partially assumed yet clearly abandoned past -and a preparation for a future, planned from the awareness of possessing certain recently-discovered potentials that are as yet unexplored and unexploited.

The cultural representations of this transition are initia-

tion rites (Hopkins, 1987; Badillo León, 1994). In our society, there is no unique common rite that places this transition in a precise moment, socially recognizable as such. The biological changes associated with the start of puberty -and the access to previously banned knowledge and behavior- usually mark the start of the period of initiation. Certain social, working, or sexual experiences also form part of a constellation of initiation rites. Peer groups usually regulate most of these practices, generally with little knowledge or control on the part of adults (Rodríguez Gutiérrez, 1994).

The transitional character of the adolescent period is clearly manifested when defined as a period of delay, a characteristic closely related to the ambiguous social role of the adolescent. The adolescent is known and considered to be mature enough (s/he is no longer considered a child) and, consequently, is expected to assume certain obligations and responsibilities. Yet, at the same time, s/he is considered too immature for other rights and responsibilities: s/he is considered biologically mature yet socially immature. This means that the adolescent is the object of often contradictory social expectations. For example, s/he is considered to be sexually mature, but s/he is considered to be too socially immature to have sexual relations. Adolescent sexuality -and the exercise of some other new capabilities- are publicly subject to a moratorium that leads to clandestine, unsafe and, at times, guilty practices.

The identity is crystallized during adolescence in the attempt to define oneself as a unique and original being. This crystallization emerges from a previous confusion: the confusion of someone who is aware of waiting, of someone who can distance him/herself from his/her childhood, or from other people's opinions of him/her, but still lacks a known identity to all who surround him/her. This identity -the self- is integral to intrasubjective processes that determine the well-being of the individual, such as: the coherent integration of the individual's self-representation; the organization of psychological defenses in the face of external threats; the elaboration of strategies that help him/her successfully adjust to reality and transform that reality to accommodate his/her own aspirations; the elaboration of a coherent autobiographical memory; and the possibility of projecting a satisfactory future. However, this crystallization of identity is not always achieved.

In certain cases, the external pressure from parents and peer groups can lead to a mortgaged identity, a non-authentic identity, with which the individual feels ill at ease. It can also lead to a situation of permanent delay or

blockage of the identity crisis, because the most essential conflicts are not resolved: the casting off of childhood, the taking on of new roles, the struggle for autonomy. In cases where these conflicts are not faced, we can find the vague identities recognizable in individuals who enter youth in a state of indecision with respect to who they are and how they imagine their future.

Identity thus understood includes an important component of self-knowledge. The fundamental introspective experience ("who am I, for myself?") merges with two other equally important subjective experiences: the physical experience ("I am my body"), which results in a self-image ("I am tall, dark, with freckles..."); and the social experience ("I am somebody and people are aware of it"), which results in a social identity ("my name is..., I am the son of..., I look like... I live..."). The subjective product of these three experiences is the self-concept, the axis on which the personality pivots.

The self-concept of a person is stronger when the stable and positive emotional links are maintained with the relevant people in his/her environment; when the individual has frequent opportunities to exhibit his/her singularity as an individual (i.e. to express opinions, to demonstrate abilities); when s/he experiences sensations of control and efficiency (his/her behavior has an influence on the events that affect him/her); and when s/he has role models that give him/her an incentive to emulate, as well as examples that help to define his/her own values. Those individuals lacking these experiences develop a weak (a false, delayed, or vague) identity and personality.

The self-concept is never emotionally neutral because we cannot be indifferent to ourselves. Self-esteem is made up of the emotions associated with our self-concept, with what we feel towards ourselves. It is easily understood when our self-concept is positive -we feel beautiful, we like who we are, our social identity is strong; then self-esteem is high. In these conditions, the individual experiences security and self-confidence; therefore, his/her personal and social behavior is usually well-adjusted. On the contrary, when our self-concept is negative -we do not like ourselves, we have a weak identity- then self-esteem is low and we feel unhappy and miserable. In these conditions, the individual experiences such insecurity and lack of self-confidence that any situation generates anxiety. In these cases, the adolescent's personal and social conduct tends to become unbalanced, be it against him/herself, for example with anorexia or depression, or against his/her social environment, for example with hostile and violent behavior, misanthropy, and/or social isolation.

Academic self-concept refers to our academic competence, that is, that which we know, think, and believe about our past, present, and future academic performance. Academic self-concept is closely related to school achievement, because as an individual performs successfully in school, his/her academic self-concept and general self-esteem rises. This causes the individual to be better prepared to face new academic challenges with confidence, enthusiasm, and persistence -bringing about further successes that continue to reinforce his/her academic self-concept. The same spiral can function negatively with disastrous results that are easily imagined.

Preponderant self-esteem and excessive self-confidence can give rise to abusive social behavior and a lack of respect for others. However, on the opposite extreme, a fragile identity and slender self-esteem usually accompany individuals who are inhibited by social situations. This unfortunate correspondence sets off a deluge of problems. Social inhibition and the insecurity of a weak self-concept as well as negative feelings towards oneself generate uncontrollable anxiety for the individual. This anxiety makes his/her behavior and performance in the social environment even more difficult. When these circumstances coincide in major or minor measure -and they coincide often enough- then conflict is inevitable. Very likely it will manifest itself as failure to adjust in school, which is the prelude to failure to adjust socially and, not infrequently, to social marginalization.

Physical changes that occur during adolescence can unbalance the self-image (e.g. the personal drama of anorexic adolescents) in the same way as the experience of failure at school damages the academic self-concept and destroys the self-esteem of an individual with a weak identity. Any of these changes can negatively affect academic performance. For this reason, and because of a growing capacity during adolescence for reflection and abstract and hypothetical thought, this is perhaps the moment when the psychological well-being of the individual is most at stake. Consequently, this is the most opportune time for personal counseling, and specifically for counseling that focuses on academic self-concept -because we know too well that failure at school precedes social failure with disturbing regularity.

Considering what we have just outlined, those responsible for counseling in the education system are asked to do everything possible to prevent adolescents from following the path leading to social marginalization. But what can be done -taking into account that most patterns of adolescent behavior are outside the school environ-

ment, that is, outside the purview of counselors, and that the powerful influence of several social agents (such as the mass media, social models, etc.) escapes our control and responsibility?

Given that the school life in secondary education implies the last collective academic experience for all adolescents, it is important to ensure, as far as possible, that they will have access to those experiences that will help them grow and build a positive self-concept. For this reason, the school experience should include social and personal adjustment strategies that will enable the most needy students to take advantage of them. But these strategies will hardly have the desired influence if those in charge of implementing them lack an attitude of appreciation, respect, and acceptance. These three qualities are the basic ingredients of all interventions that seek to strengthen the identity of students; to improve their self-concept; to increase their self-esteem; to reduce their anxiety; to help them lose their inhibited social performance; and to improve their ability to adjust. Therefore, appreciation, respect, and acceptance are the starting points for interventions that demand this kind of extra effort. Because improving oneself is probably the only way to achieve success (both academic and personal) and the experience of success is essential in reconstructing a positive self-concept and a high self-esteem. In addition, when counseling is not an isolated act but a constant basic attitude in the school experience, guiding the actions of the teaching staff, then it is likely that students will encounter a satisfactory, and even agreeable, school environment. We are not talking about a utopian dream: in many secondary schools this is already a reality.

Although later we will talk extensively about the methodology used in personal counseling, at this point we want to put forward some ground rules suitable for the teaching staff and aimed at improving the self-concept and self-esteem of students:

- do not over-challenge students in such a way that could lead to failure;
- give explicit approval to work well-done and to appropriate and proper behavior;
- ignore slightly disturbing behavior from students incapable of improving their behavior patterns;
- carefully correct mistakes without humiliating those who commit them;
- propose academic and leisure cooperative activities;
- do not hesitate to show affection to students and respect for their attitudes even though they might not coincide with ours;

- and try to motivate students with incentives rather than with the fear of punishment. (Figure1)

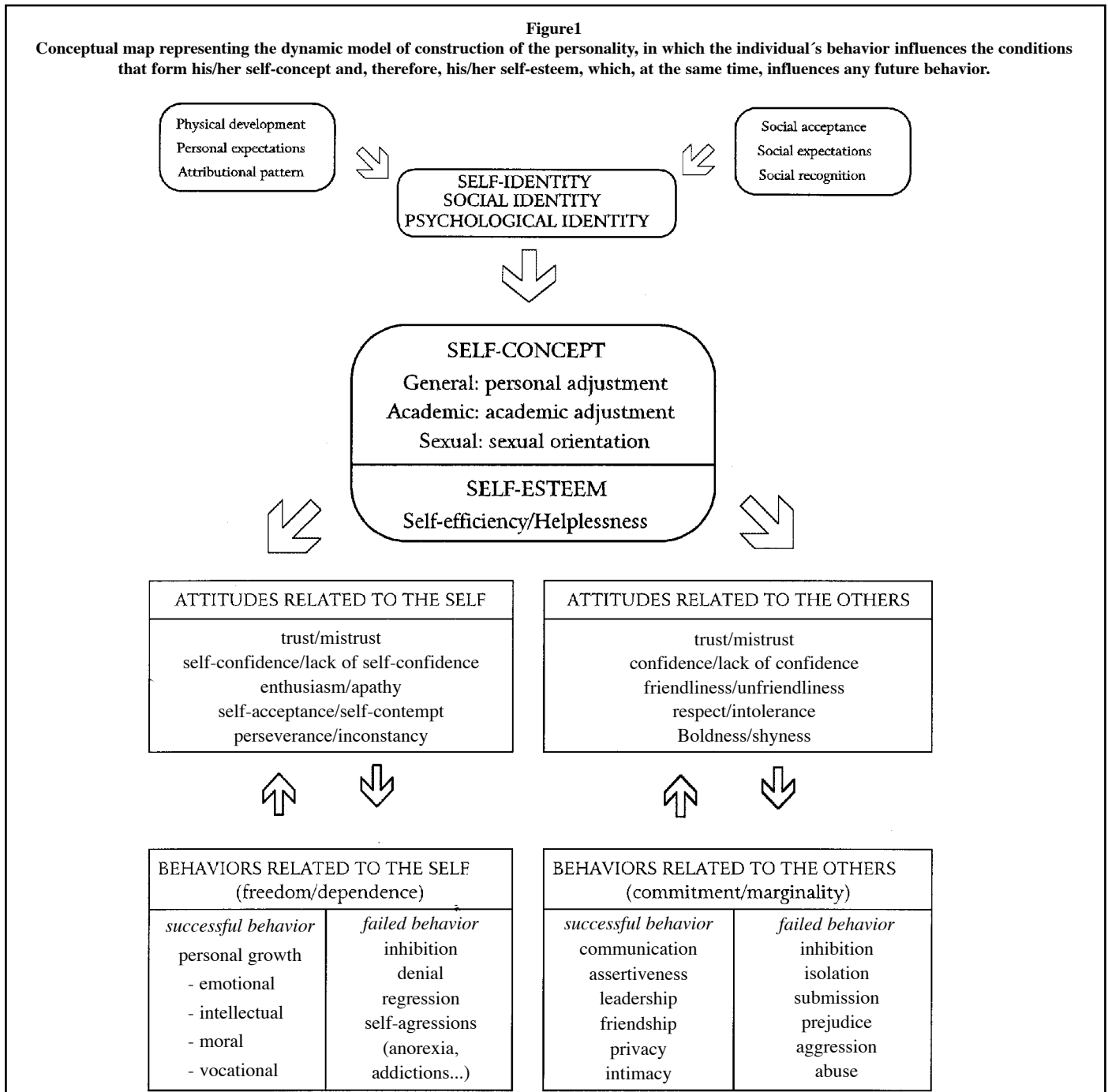
About the contents of personal counseling with adolescents: looking for socio-personal adjustment

Personal development during adolescence is a process that determines the individual's originality and singularity. For this reason, at this age those attitudes and behavior that demonstrate independence and the break from

the psychological dependence of childhood are very significant. Personal freedom becomes one of the major issues of adolescence. However, at the same time, the adolescent is in the process of discovering new social worlds, learning new ways to relate to others, not only by sharing intimate experiences, or by falling in love, but also when s/he sets altruistic goals inspired by certain moral values-which is also a new development at this age. Therefore, interpersonal commitment becomes

Figure1

Conceptual map representing the dynamic model of construction of the personality, in which the individual's behavior influences the conditions that form his/her self-concept and, therefore, his/her self-esteem, which, at the same time, influences any future behavior.



the other major issue of adolescence, the counterpoint of personal freedom. Consequently, it is not surprising that the competing demands of freedom and commitment generate most of the conflicts requiring counseling at this age. Resolving these conflicts is an important part of the processes of personal and social adjustment.

The conceptual map on the previous page presents the relationships between the concepts that make up these contents. Intervention in the area of the socio-personal adjustment needs to be organized around two basic skills that ensure this adjustment: (1) awareness and (2) control of the processes of personal and social adjustment. Becoming aware of the processes through which the personality is built facilitates self-knowledge and its future control, provided that, in addition to this information, adequate behavioral and thought strategies are also imparted - strategies that allow us to take control of the process of our own evolution.

Although these contents have been studied in depth in psychology and are presented in a technical manner, it is best to avoid presenting them in this way to the students destined to be counseled. The experiential presentation style is, apparently, the most successful one -and better still if accompanied by some literary support of the type known as "self-help literature".²

In the end, in relation to the contents of counseling, we must remember that personal counseling is not an isolated factor, but another piece of the counseling effort linked to school counseling (on academic self-concept, school adjustment, and the mastering of learning strategies) and vocational/professional orientation (for the mastering of strategies of decision-making). We must also remember that personal counseling, as a part of education, addresses the formation of students in all aspects, through self-knowledge, personal and social adjustment, and conscious decision-making.

About the intervention methodology: suggestions for a general style and some strategies

The first inevitable consideration is that personal counseling, as an element of the general counseling intervention strategy, must be included within the counseling department's program and be a shared responsibility between the counseling specialist and the tutorial staff (Luque Lozano et al, 1995). This means that it can then be better coordinated and developed in accordance with the contents of the general counseling and tutoring efforts of that particular school. Usually, it will be a complex model, which, once needs have been evaluated, will include proposals for intervention through program

implementation, and ways to find solutions to requests that may arise. This model must harmonize the collective action of the group with individual attention.

In terms of planned intervention, personal counseling can be implemented in two different ways: (1) by including its contents in the general curriculum and thus taking advantage of the development of a "transversal approach" (the inclusion of traditional school contents inside new, broader frames, such as environmental or intercultural education), and (2) by tutoring. Generally, a Tutorial Action Plan, incorporating the necessary materials, resources, and coordination, also includes personal counseling contents, such as the construction and self-awareness of personal and social identity, the gaining of self-control, reattributorial training, and training in social skills, etc. (See, for example, the numerous proposals by Bautista et al, 1992).

The other vehicle for personal counseling is the special counseling session, set at a preestablished hour, requested at the student's own initiative -individually or in small groups- or at the initiative of the tutor, the teaching staff, the parents, or by agreement between the teaching staff and the students (e.g. by making this decision in an evaluation session). To carry out the special counseling sessions, we suggest adopting a guidance methodology rather than a therapeutic focus. For this, Dyer's (1980) numerous practical suggestions could prove very useful to the counselor.

The general style of intervention in the area of personal counseling (although not only in this area) must focus on developing a sensitive and qualitative analysis of individual differences in the affective and the cognitive -privileging the processes of change, the developmentalist approach -and of the complex interrelation between the various elements to be considered, the systemic approach. The intervention enables the individual (Gonzalez Garza, 1987) to gain awareness and understanding of his/her own processes and to contemplate his/her whole development, conceived systemically as the interrelationship of the affective, cognitive, behavioral, and social areas. The intervention is also oriented towards self-awareness, empowerment, self-control, and autonomy as a result of mastering the corresponding strategies. And, finally, the intervention aspires to optimize personal and social adjustment by supplementing, and not substituting, the actual experiences of the individuals concerned.

As an intervention strategy, empowerment is the most consistent with the above premises (Holzman and Polk, 1988; Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995; James, 1996). Empowerment strategy has been used in recent years

with interesting results in the field of community work, although it is rarely employed under this name in the field of education. Empowerment is a method of intervention that addresses the problems and real experiences present in the life of the adolescent: emotional and sentimental difficulties related to self-acceptance, to acceptance by others or by peer groups; conflicts derived from the initiation into adult sexuality; addictions (smoking, alcoholism, etc); conflicts with teachers and parents, etc. Empowerment confronts the individual with the problem and makes him/her responsible for its solution. That is, it places the individual in a position where s/he must assume the role of protagonist in his/her own life-story, providing, as well, the needed support (counseling). This support comes from the empowerment of the person working actively not only to improve social skills but also to achieve an emotional balance and mastery of metacognitive strategies that facilitate self-awareness and self-control -cognitive restructuring techniques in the causal attribution pattern. Empowerment involves the individual's community environment -in this case, the family and school environment -in positive actions that lead to transformations in that environment. For example, empowerment involves the organization of the school only in so far as its aims and values enter in conflict with the personal development needs of the adolescents in such aspects as their freedom of action, freedom of association, or participation in decision-making. Finally, empowerment implies that the individual, through his/her actions, actually transforms the conditions which have generated the problem.

Diverse personal counseling techniques can be employed for adolescents because, in general, they have a significant capacity for comprehending ideas and situations. Thus the counseling staff can select the most appropriate technique for each particular case and goal. Most of the techniques are direct interventions, having been conceived for secondary school students, but some of them are indirect interventions, that is, designed to work just with the teaching staff. The basic techniques for the development of self-awareness are designed to stimulate introspection (through questionnaires, in most cases) and dialogue (through interviews, meeting groups, etc.). Techniques for the development of self-control are generally designed to stimulate a change in the thinking process (through programs of metacognitive instruction, reattributional training) or a change in social behavior (through guided practice and role-playing, training programs in social skills, techniques for group and institutional dynamization and emotional

encouragement, organizational skills for negotiation and analysis, etc.).

To conclude this section on the methodology of intervention, it is important to mention the obstacles that may hinder or block the experiences fostered by personal counseling. First of all, the time schedule, which may cause the student to miss classes or the counselor or tutor to work extra hours. Secondly, prejudices on the part of students or the teaching staff for dealing openly with some topics -topics that in some cases are general social prejudices like sexism, homophobia, etc. The personality of the counselor strongly determines the number of counseling demands: whether s/he is approachable, warm, and able to conduct the meeting. Also, difficulties arise because of the shyness or resistance of some students to taking the initiative to consult the counselor. Often students delegate a friend, go as a group, wander around in circles before actually dealing with the problem at hand; or they do not take seriously the activities proposed by the tutor. In other cases, the difficulties may be derived from limitations in the counseling model adopted (e.g. program-based counseling models leave little room for individual consultation; models strongly oriented towards special educational needs could ignore or place in the background other equally important elements, like personal counseling; or the counselor's preference for a clinical approach which is unsuited to the preventative focus of personal counseling). (Figure 2)

PERSONAL COUNSELING IN THE REALM OF PERSONAL ADJUSTMENT

Self-concept, self-esteem, and behavior related to the self

To explain to the teaching staff the dynamics of the processes related to self-concept and self-esteem, it would be useful to resort to clear and easy-to-understand information, like the article by González Torres (1994) and other works published in the same issue of the journal "*Comunidad Educativa*".

First of all, the contents related to identity and self-esteem can be integrated into the subjects of the normal curriculum- Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Physical Education, Art, Grammar- in the manner described by the counseling program *Enseñar a ser persona (How to be a person)* (MEC, 1992).

To work with adolescents during tutoring hours on self-concept and self-esteem we recommend the type of activities proposed by Brunet Gutiérrez and Negro Failde (1982). These include activities with a collective game format such as Sharing Qualities, The Magic Mirror,

Figure 2
Methodology proposed for personal counseling in
Secondary School Education

1. **Intervention model** (according to the program of the Counseling Dept.)
 - 1.1. Planned intervention
 - 1.1.1. Formal activities
 - By means of the general curriculum
 - By means of the transversal contents
 - By means of programs included in the Tutorial Action Plan
 - 1.1.2. Informal activities
 - By means of the school organization
 - By means of readings, films, extra school activities
 - 1.2. Special counseling requests sessions:
 - 1.2.1. Formal activities:
 - By means of direct consultation
 - By means of meeting groups
 - 1.2.2. Informal activities:
 - By means of informative material
2. **Style of intervention** (approach options in counseling)
 - Sensitive approach to the qualitative dimensions of human development
 - Developmental approach, focusing on the processes of change
 - Systemic approach, focusing on the dynamic interplay between elements
 - Holistic approach, focusing on the individual and his/her whole development
 - Positive approach, focusing on optimizing personal and social adjustment
3. **Intervention strategy:** empowerment
 - 3.1. Stems from problems and real life experiences
 - 3.2. Confronts the individual with the problem and makes him/her responsible for the solution
 - 3.3. Focuses actively on empowerment towards self-awareness and self-control
 - 3.4. Involves the community environment in taking positive actions
 - 3.5. The individual actively transforms the conditions which have generated his/her problem
4. **Intervention methodology:**
 - 4.1. For development of self-awareness
 - promotes introspection (questionnaires, guided reading...)
 - promotes dialogue (interviews, meeting groups, games, etc...)
 - 4.2. For development of self-control:
 - change of thinking process (metacognitive, reattributional instruction...)
 - change of social behaviour (practical guidance, social skills...)

Sodisac (adapted from Howe and Howe, 1979) and, especially, the so-called My Johari Window (see Figure 3). All of these are appropriate for adolescents, as they not only offer the opportunity to recognize and become aware of one's self-concept by means of guided introspection and dialogue with others, but are also designed to favor a positive change.

When difficulties or problems related to self-esteem are detected, we can resort to the practical manual by Pope, McHale, and Craighead (1988), which includes as an appendix a questionnaire to evaluate self-esteem using the adolescent's responses to 60 statements, organized into five categories: global, academic, physical, family and social. It also provides numerous proposals for activities that facilitate intervention in self-image, self-concept, self-esteem and self-control. These last techniques are supported, above all, by the evaluation and alteration of the students' causal attributional pattern. Similarly practical, easy-to-understand, and helpful in dealing with the area of self-esteem is the short manual by Clemens, Bean and Clark (1988).

Actually, certain features of the students' causal attributional pattern are closely related to a loss of self-confidence. Manassero et al. (Manassero Mas and Vázquez Alonso, 1994; Manassero Mas, Vázquez Alonso et al., 1995) have carried out a series of interesting intervention experiences inspired by the concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) and designed to change attributional patterns. Manassero Mas, et al evaluate the attributional pattern of the students by taking as a reference the dimensions included in the simplified theoretical model shown in Figure 4. They prove the profound demotivating effect of self-attributing incompetence in the process of learning and performing academically as well as the determining

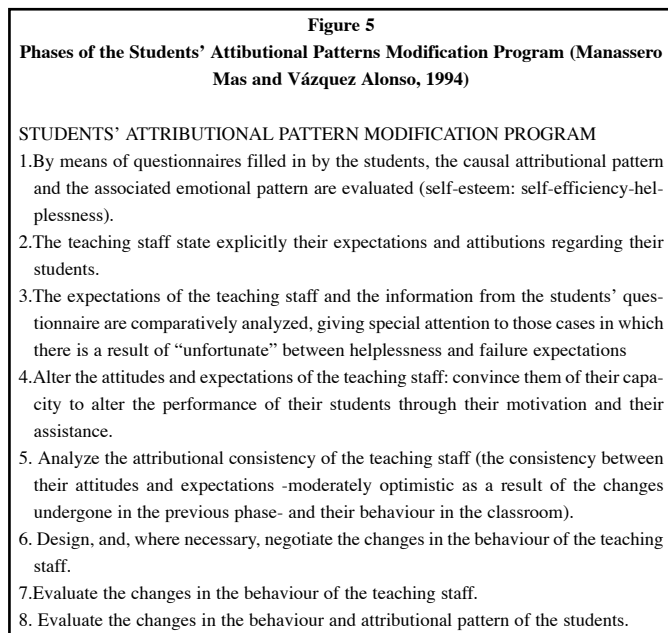
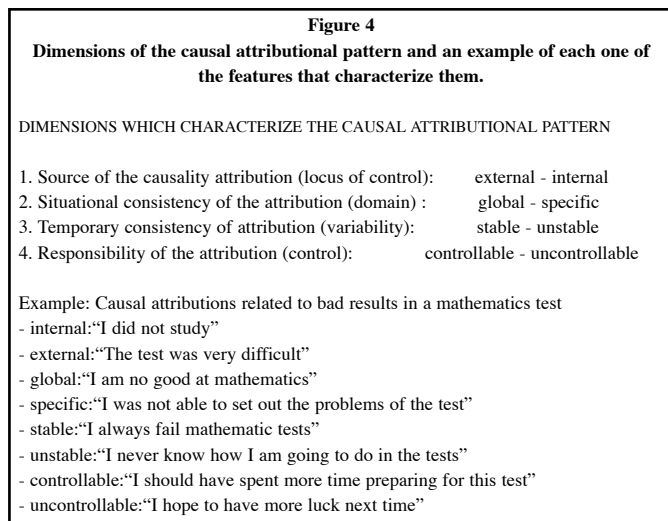
Figure 3
Model of description of the dynamics of the personality in interpersonal relations known as Johari's Window (J. Luft and H. Iman, in Luft, 1976, according to the presentation by Brunet and Negro, 1982). This model, inspired by psychoanalysis, could be very useful to stimulate introspection and interpersonal communication

	MYSELF	
	WHAT I KNOW ABOUT MYSELF	WHAT I DON'T KNOW ABOUT MYSELF
THE OTHERS	WHAT PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT ME THE OPEN SELF (the public self) - External features of identity - Social habits and activities - Ideas/feelings that we communicate to others	THE BLIND SELF (the denied self) - The impression we create on others without realizing it - Complexes and feelings that influence behaviour
	WHAT PEOPLE DON'T KNOW ABOUT ME THE HIDDEN SELF (the private self) - Feelings, likes, opinions, we don't make public	THE UNKNOWN SELF (the unconscious) - That which remains hidden and forgotten to us and to others - Private experiences we keep to ourselves

influence of teachers' expectations and attitudes on these self-attributions. The self-efficacy pattern -associated with academic success and characterized by its internal, stable, and controllable nature- is juxtaposed with the helplessness pattern -associated with failure and lack of academic motivation and characterized by its external, global, stable, and uncontrollable nature.

Manassero Mas et al (1994,1995) propose a reattribu-tional training program based upon the teachers' indirect intervention with the students' causal attribution pat-terns. Figure 5 sums up the phases of this program.

A factor not to be forgotten within these contents is the promotion of healthy behavior: a healthy, balanced diet, physical exercise, personal hygiene, prevention of addictions (alcoholism, smoking, and others), sexuality,



artistic activities (plastic, musical, and dramatic), etc. In particular, regarding addictions, it is generally conside-red that a combination of sufficient information and the promotion of the adolescent's participation in any kind of healthy group activities (sports, music, environmental awareness, volunteer work) is the best preventative action. In this area it is easy to obtain support and resources because there are a myriad of substantial pro-grams sponsored by both public and private organiza-tions aimed at combating juvenile addictions.

As we shall mention later, most of the programs desig-ned for the training and improvement of social skills in adolescents also include contents related to self-concept and self-esteem. Apart from the various programs avai-lable, some reading material can help us stimulate stu-dents to reflect on their own identity. For example, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, or *Boy*, by Roald Dahl, deal in an introspective way with the definition of identity at the end of childhood. The fear to abandon childhood and the ambivalence of sexual identity permeate *The Catcher in the Rye*, by J.D. Salinger.

Learning to reason

Although the syllabus of the different subjects covered by the secondary school education requires the use of a range of specific intellectual skills, they all demand from the students the control of abstract, formal, and complex thought in order to be able to resolve complex problems; to achieve a critical and reasoned comprehension of the contents; and to elaborate theoretical and mental models. Some people do not need intentional and syste-matic teaching to enable them to achieve that capacity of formal reasoning, but rather it comes as a natural result of their own learning process and the reflexive exercise of their intellectual skills. Nevertheless, not all adoles-cents and young people have effortlessly acquired this capacity, often taken for granted by the school system, to assimilate academic contents -either those of an obliga-tory secondary school education, or the inevitably more demanding academic contents of the university. Probably this is the reason why acquiring learning and thinking skills has become one of the contents of school counseling most preferred by secondary school teaching staff and by the students themselves.

Secondary school students should supposedly acquire formal, abstract thinking and learning skills easily, as another content of the various subjects covered, because these strategies form part of the intended aims of each subject. As it happens, the presence of these aims and contents is often not sufficient, but the learning of these

skills is so important, as well as complex, that a number of students will need some kind of reinforcement or support to assimilate them. A good preventive measure is to anticipate that need and offer -eg. through tutors -supplementary activities that, one, make learning easier, and two, reinforce it. Fortunately, some instructional programs suitable for adolescents are available for the teaching of reasoning skills (see, e.g., Pizarro's, 1986).

It is very important as a precaution to avoid assuming that once students have been exposed to counseling programs that teach thinking and reasoning skills, they will be able to automatically transfer these generally-acquired skills to the various subjects covered in the curriculum. It is necessary to stress this point because generic thinking and reasoning skills cannot be mechanically transferred to particular subject-areas -each area requires these skills to be adapted and refined to allow for the nuances of different kinds of problems, languages, or concepts. This diversity makes these skills much richer and more functional. To facilitate the transfer between learning skills, it is extremely important that the counselor coordinates with the teaching staff of different subject-areas their working simultaneously, or consecutively, with the same skills.

Traditionally, learning and reasoning skills have been defined nearly exclusively as study techniques. Study techniques are usually presented as a set of recommendations that correspond to the habits of students (how to organize time or study area, contingent rewards); the gaining of a certain expertise or dexterity in the handling of texts (note-taking, reading, underlining, summing-up...); and memorizing techniques (mnemonic techniques). Although these habits and dexterities are important to elaborate learning strategies, we now know that they are far more complex and flexible as practices than they were considered to be, and require the individual's full metacognitive capacity (Nisbet and Shucksmith, 1986; Nickerson, Perkins and Smith, 1987; McCombs, 1993; Presseisen, 1993). Also, it is becoming a general conviction that the efficient acquisition of the above skills must be done through their implementation in the study of the different subjects in the curriculum (MEC, 1992).

But the emphasis on the academic aspects of intelligence (and, consequently, on the academic effects of experiences aimed at improving it), should not make us forget that, apart from the academic intelligence, there exists an extra-academic rationality, useful and necessary to confront and resolve everyday problems (Lave, 1988). This is at least as important as academic and personal success. Sternberg is probably the author who has

developed the most original practical intelligence theory (Sternberg, 1986, 1990, 1993). When reading material is necessary to be recommended, or clarifications made, to secondary school teachers, we can refer to his work, which goes well beyond traditional models of factorial intelligence, incorporating for example such attractively suggestive concepts as creativity and wisdom.

Learning to make decisions

One of the clear aims of counseling is to guide and advise students in their decision-making, not only in regard to academic courses, but also in terms of their integration into the working world. This is usually one of the main goals of school and vocational counseling. However, in the course of our lives, we make many other important decisions that are beyond the purely vocational and demand the independent exercise of a general capacity for decision-making.

With regard to the teaching of conscious decision-making skills, the role of the counselor is to advise how to obtain, recognize, and choose the necessary information, and then to guide the decision-making by providing procedures to handle this information. Throughout these procedures, the individual should be able to imaginatively review the various options available and strategically choose the most advantageous one.

Most of the vocational counseling programs have a similar outline to the above (see for example, Díez de Ulzurum and Masegosa's, 1995, which includes an abundance of material such as questionnaires). The field of personal counseling has been concerned with generalizing these procedures so that they can be applied to any decision-making situation.

In the first place, what kind of information is necessary to make a rational decision? The first piece of information that needs to be clarified is the purpose, the goal (not the cause or the "why", but the "what for"). Reflecting on the individual's personal expectations about a decision helps to define this first step. Then it is necessary to have information about the situation in which the decision-making takes place: What options are there? What other options are available or negotiable? What are the necessary requirements for each of them? Which of these requirements depends on the individual and which on other factors? What are the consequences derived from each of the possible options?, etc. The third type of information needed is concerned with one's own potential to satisfy the requirements demanded by the different options. The handling and objectifying of this information requires an introspective capa-

city of reflection and self-analysis that adolescents generally possess. The tutor or counselor can better guide these reflections with questions than with models.

The second step is to find the optimum accord between one's personal expectations, the options available, and the possibilities after simultaneously considering all the information. In this accord lies the means to select the option that is ambitious (regarding the expectations) as well as realistic (regarding personal possibilities) and prudent (that is, feasible), but also satisfactory (gratifying), risky (decision-making implies a change for the better), and possible (decision-making must be based on a minimum guarantee of obtaining the desired consequences with a successful result). Envisioning the adjustment between the present and future situation of the person who is making a decision is like a complex form of hypothetical reasoning.

The most successful decisions are hardly ever rash or guided by impulse (by a "feeling" or "instinct"). On the contrary, success usually accompanies decisions that are the result of thoughtful consideration-either brief or prolonged, depending on the personality of the individual who makes the decision-about each one of the possible options. This reflection requires not only serenity and equilibrium on the part of the individual who makes the decision, but also respect and objectivity from his/her personal environment. The result of this reflection is almost never simple-like the kind of decision made by tossing a coin, the kind in which an individual feels only slightly committed (because "fate" decides)- but is usually a carefully thought-out strategy, which often takes the individual farther than that particular decision, because it often includes or touches upon other personal goals with a high level of personal commitment.

When one has relatively little vital experience and is not perhaps accustomed to orderly and impartial thinking, it is easy to lose oneself in a sea of information, to give in to external influences and make a hurried decision. This is perhaps because an understanding of the real differences between the options has not been reached. It is then when the counselor or tutor must intervene to offer an expert model of reflective thought and give the student guidance -not to lead the student towards a specific goal, but to guide his/her thinking through the difficulties involved in the new challenge of decision-making.

It is clear that everybody must make momentous decisions of a greater or lesser magnitude during their lifetime; so far, we have only referred to those decisions with significant and prolonged consequences in people's

lives. Nevertheless, in everyday life many small decisions must be made, which though not momentous, have some relevance from a practical point of view. Just as there are people who make important decisions on the spur of the moment, there are also many hesitant people incapable of making a quick decision on even relatively unimportant matters. In this case, an immediate resolution is usually more effective (which does not imply a random decision, but a brief reflection). An essential part of the process of decision-making counseling is to teach the adolescents to recognize which choices should be carefully considered and those which should not, because of their irreversibility and the consequences they could have on themselves and others.

The construction of moral values

Traditional studies of the development of moral judgment identify adolescence as the moment in which the individual acquires a more independent set of moral values. Essentially, because of a greater decentration capacity and more wide-ranging experiences with peer groups, moral rules emerge from the adolescent's reciprocal and cooperative relations with peers. It is a post-conventional moral code, ruled by principles that are, at first, the result of an awareness of the rights of others, that is, by principles which legitimize themselves through mutual agreement. Later these principles are substituted by others inspired by universal, abstract, ethical ideas, so that individual ethics become legitimized in relation to those universal principles (Fierro 1990b; Vicente Castro, 1994).

One of the results of this evolution of moral values is the appearance of altruistic attitudes and behavior. The image of the generous, utopian adolescent is as stereotyped and inaccurate as that of the antagonistic and maladjusted one. This stereotype reflects, in an incomplete and simplified way, attitudes which, although quite frequent, are far from universal in adolescence. However, some adolescents with a greater altruistic sense assume at this age certain ethical commitments that frequently signify their initiation in the participatory activities of the adult social world.

What becomes clear is that the formation and definition of moral values is an aspect of the freedom-commitment conflict articulated above that emerges in adolescent personality. On the one hand, the desire and necessity for a freedom of moral principles is a way of asserting individual identity. But also, a compromise with the dominant moral values of a specific group -either majority or minority- entails a personal commitment to the contents of morals s/he assumes.

The moral uneasiness of the adolescent has been typically associated with a crisis of values or even with a religious crisis. The latter is inspired above all by a need to find a momentous sense to their lives. These possible crises, together with a growing need to build a successful identity and a desire to commit, may lead some adolescents to join a sect whose sinister practices -as has been explained by Carmona, Marco, Paz and Sánchez (1989)- undermine and finally annul the process of formation of the adolescent personality through social isolation and identity manipulation.

The counseling action does not intend to protect the students from the wide range of religious congregations, communities, and sects which try to take advantage of the vulnerability of the adolescent in order to "arouse vocations" or attract followers with promises of transcendency. Therefore, the only possibility of intervention from the schools is preventative -helping adolescents to see their own anxieties as profound individual and individualizing experiences, common in human nature. The counselor must link this experience to a long philosophic and intellectual tradition, essentially atheist, of the search for truth and human authenticity, as is clear in classic works of thought, such as Herman Hesse's *Siddartha* or *My Belief* (for those who prefer lighter reading), Bertrand Russell's *The Conquest of Happiness*, Freidrich Nietzsche's *The Origin of Moral Feelings* or *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (for those who are not afraid of heavy reading), or, for the lover of Spanish moral classics, the splendid and witty, if somewhat difficult, Baltasar Gracián's *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*. With a similar goal of stimulating introspection, novels are also of value; many of Pio Baroja's are good examples of introspective novels, e.g. *La Sensualidad Pervertida*. Among recent texts, it is worth foregrounding Fernando Savater's *Amador: In Which a Father Addresses His Son on Questions of Ethics* -not only for its brilliant style but also and especially because it was written specifically for adolescents, openly questioning the central dilemmas of adolescence: freedom vs. responsibility.

The recommendation to read and reflect on what is read can be a suitable means of raising the question of moral values, but it will be much more effective if they have the opportunity to be able to act coherently in accordance with their own values. Insofar as secondary schools are a part of the world which adolescents feel is their own, the organization of these schools should be sensitive to the values of this group, offering them opportunities to exercise their values through the active and co-responsible participation in the management of the everyday life of the school.

The scope of the future: their own place in the world

Success in personal adjustment lies to a great extent in the capacity of each individual to draw up a coherent account of his/her own existence, a narrative that links the past to the present and, in some way, anticipates the future. Elkind (1978) describes two fantasies that often accompany the adolescent's account of the formation of his/her personal identity: the personal fable and the imaginary audience. The personal fable is a partially or wholly fictitious fragment of an autobiographical story, which endows the adolescent with absolutely desirable qualities, and which the adolescent repeats to him/herself and to others over and over until it becomes real. In a certain sense, we could say that the personal fable is a kind of prosthesis placed in an autobiography to make it more interesting. A literary example of this can be found in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. In addition, Elkind reminds us that the adolescent account requires an audience; thus, if one is not present, it is imagined. This imaginary audience -the others, or even, the world- is always one that regards the events of our life expectantly and with feeling. A famous literary example of an imaginary audience would be Tom Sawyer's fantasies about how his home town would attend his own funeral.

The phenomena of the personal fable and the imaginary audience reveal the adolescent's increased interest in defining his/her place in the world -a place, as mentioned previously, full of potential rather than realities. As a result, there is an enormous curiosity on the part of the adolescent to press beyond the world of his/her immediate reality, to understand the world in its complexity (s/he now recognizes the world as more complex than the world of childhood). The adolescent shapes his/her vision and understanding of the world in accordance with the intellectual influences s/he receives. It must also be noted that academic influences may be neither the most powerful nor the most influential.

Extreme pessimism, epitomized by the slogan "no future", has had a profound effect on a large sector of adolescents. This attitude is usually a pseudo-explanation, for a lack of vital horizons in the previous generation and has proliferated to the extent that it could almost be considered an ideology. For those adolescents who copy this attitude, the world appears to be a chaotic and incomprehensible place where things -politics, economy, ecology, violence- go from bad to worse, nothing seems to be worthwhile, and thus all efforts seem useless. Although the present stream of hegemonic post-modern thought seems to endorse these beliefs and atti-

tudes -discouraging any other influences- we rely on the strategy of empowerment as a means of challenging this ideology of “no future”.

In other cases the yearning for knowledge combined with the moral uneasiness we described earlier explains the fact that adolescents are one of the main clients in the market of the esoteric and fantastic. The offer in this sector is, unfortunately, very extensive. Running the gamut from simple horoscopes to complex alien mythologies, it includes false self-help books, the popular press tabloids, television serials like “Beverly Hills 90210, Sensation of Living”, and the marketing of several kinds of lottery. This is the broad cosmos of what -in somewhat dated terminology are often called “alienating ideologies”. They are alienating in a double sense: because they present a distorted image of reality and because they encourage attributional patterns characterized by helplessness (“real life is what others live”, “changes depend on a stroke of luck”, etc.).

Insofar as those responsible for counseling are convinced of the fact that the better accommodated the adolescent is to an understanding of reality, the better his/her present and future integration into society will be, we recommend that counseling includes an effort by the secondary school teaching staff to present a view of the complexity and diversity of humanity. There is a lot of reading material with historical, anthropological, sociological, and psychological content which can help form this view. For example, the book by the anthropologist, Marvin Harris, *Our Kind: Who We Are, Where We Came From, and Where We Are Going* (1989), offers complete and accessible information about “who we are” and “why we act the way we do”. Complementary reading to this, basic for the understanding of the complexity and interdependence of the world and the co-responsibility of our actions in all global solutions is *Our Common Future* (1987), published by the World Commission for Environment and Development. *The Papalagies* by the Samoan, Tuiavii de Tiavea, describing the white man’s world in an ironic and amusing way, free of eurocentric prejudices, also invites reflection. Generalizing this comprehensive reading strategy, the counselor can recommend books that demonstrate an adult capacity to think and understand the world -e.g. the entertaining and systematic novel by Jostein Gaarder, *Sophie’s World*, or the more subjective *World As I See It*, by Albert Einstein. In other cases, we can recommend the reading of stimulating, introspective stories which help reflect on our place in the world -e.g. Simone Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, or the more enthralling *Memoirs*, by Pablo Neruda.

But comprehension of the world is not only based on more or less scientific or philosophical knowledge. We have started this section by referring to two common adolescent fantasies -the personal fable and the imaginary audience- that indicate the strength of his/her desire to refashion his/her personal identity. We need to remember how important a role fantasy plays in the comprehension of the world and in the formulation of our personal projects. If childhood fantasy consists in imagining that which does not exist in the world we see, adult fantasy consists in imagining that which could exist in the world we cannot see (Bruner, 1994). Much literary fiction -more or less inspired by real facts- can be useful source of knowledge about the world and can efficiently stimulate the adolescent to reflect on his/her own future. Novels with a biographical structure like *Infinite Plan: A Novel*, by Isabel Allende, or openly introspective ones like *Youth and Egotry*, by Pio Baroja, or *Niebla*, by Miguel de Unamuno, can be useful for that purpose, as well as most of the literature aimed at young people (nevertheless, it is important to take into account the age range appropriate for each book, e.g. to really enjoy Jules Verne’s *Captain at 15* there is an age limit of 14 years). So-called children’s literature is a special case: with its perspectives and puns that are more appropriate for adults, it helps adolescents to distance themselves from childhood naivete, as is the case with Roald Dahl’s *Revolting Rhymes*.

The weaker the personality of the adolescent, the more sensitive s/he is to external ideological (political or religious) influences on his/her perception and expectations about his/her place in the world. A strong self-concept and feeling of self-efficacy usually correspond to more optimistic perceptions and expectations with respect to their place in the world. The reason for this is that they can perceive themselves as having more potential, and capacity to use it for their personal growth, that is, to be free to become the protagonists of their own future.

The whole personality: personal growth

Traditional myths are sometimes useful in presenting challenging ideas in counseling. In the areas pertinent to adolescence, there are two quite suggestive and complementary myths: metamorphosis and initiation, both with broad and suitable literary expression.

The myth of metamorphosis has taken many different literary forms, two of which have perhaps brought it to its most extreme expression: the optimism of *The Ugly Duckling* and the pessimism of Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*. Both stories deal with growth, with the

way it feels to be an object of transformation, and with the way that others react to the changes undergone by the individual. Because many adolescents like to talk about themselves and how they feel -later on we shall address relevant communication skills- it may be a good idea to propose a discussion on personal growth, with all the attending physical, physiological and psychological transformations. These metamorphoses do not always affect our external appearance; in fact, the most decisive ones are internal, experienced as growth or lack of it. Another story, *Jonathan Livingstone Seagull* by Richard Bach, illustrates -with the metaphor of the freedom to fly- the adolescent challenge of internal growth, the need to look for new challenges that boost personal development.

The myth of the initiation voyage through which wisdom is achieved -the "path of perfection" in mystic literature- is also recounted obsessively in literature as diverse as Homer's *Odyssey* to the most recent adventure novels³. A significant part of the literature of all times (not limited to, but often especially written for young people) has dealt with the theme of voyage, during which the character must surmount hardships and tests in order to become in the end wiser and more accomplished, that is, closer to perfection, and to finally realize his/her proper place in the world. The myth of the transformational voyage remotely recalls initiation rites and overtly endorses personal growth, indeed, the formation of the person as a whole, as a positive goal -in all possible dimensions, affective, intellectual, moral, and social, etc. Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*, although a work of inferior literary quality, is still a very accessible book for adolescents. In it the voyage of initiation and the internal search is made more explicit and, therefore, easier to comprehend.

One of the literary voyages that contains the most suggestive images and symbolic content for our purposes is that of Gulliver in the brilliant work by Jonathan Swift. Admittedly, *Gulliver's Travels* allows for very different, often conflicting, literary interpretations, and has therefore received significant critical attention. However, one of the most outstanding ways of understanding that voyage -and unprecedented as far as I know- is as an evolutionary transition experience whose symbolic content accords well with the adolescence experience (this interpretation confers on the text a metaphorical sense probably far from the author's intention). As the reader undoubtedly remembers, Gulliver must leave the comfortable familiar world of his childhood and take the risk of uncertain and dangerous travel, which will become a

series of voyages with numerous incidents, repeated shipwrecks, and with an unexpectedly happy ending. In his first voyage, after being shipwrecked, he awakes to find himself in a world of capricious and stupid dwarfs, ruled by illogical laws. In this world he sees himself as a giant among the Lilliputians. He is constantly involved in conflicts and disputes for meaningless reasons; their games do not interest him; and he soon tires of them. Leaving Lilliput and the comfort of his gigantic size, he then goes to the opposite extreme: a country of giants in which he is a relative midget, treated as a curious and clownish little animal, and constantly forced to show his qualities and merits to be granted respect. Subsequent journeys take him to worlds where he discovers rules for scientific knowledge, history, and politics -all very absurd in the ironic portrait Swift offers. His last voyage takes him to the country where the *houyhnhnms*, intelligent horses that organize a virtuous society, need to control the *yahoos*, hominids dominated by their instincts. This is the only place where, paradoxically, Gulliver feels happy, because he has finally arrived in a society organized in accordance with firm moral principles.

As described above, Gulliver's voyage is the way the adolescent travels through the different stages of this transition period. S/he will first become aware, almost suddenly, of no longer being a child, of feeling quite distinct from the tribe of Lilliputians in which s/he finds himself, and whom s/he observes with a certain superiority and disdain. Leaving Lilliput, s/he renounces the comfortable security of being dominant in the world of childhood and is unexpectedly led to the opposite pole: to being an outsider, a small, helpless, and newly-arrived individual in the larger adult world. Here s/he is not recognized as an equal and, during this delay period, s/he must undergo a series of tests -which could be considered a kind of initiation- that gain him/her a recognized identity and a place from which s/he can, later on, enter into the world of knowledge and morals. Gulliver's travels come to be, in a way, a paradigm of the odyssey and metamorphosis of the adolescent during the transition from childhood to the adult world.

PERSONAL COUNSELING IN THE REALM OF SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT

The acquisition of communication skills

Almost every counseling program, including those for group meetings, includes exercises to improve communication skills, e.g. that of Muñoz Sánchez, Trianes

Torres, and Jiménez Hernández (1994). Perhaps this near unanimity is due to a basic supposition not always made explicit: the ability to communicate efficiently with others is not an elementary skill, fully and definitely acquired during infancy, but a complex ability in continuous development, essential for social performance and generally still poorly developed by the end of childhood. Also, it is usually assumed that everybody already has a certain communication repertoire -therefore, the idea is to focus on the "improvement" of these communication skills. This improvement is both quantitative and qualitative. That is, the aim is usually to broaden the communication repertoire and make it more efficient.

The two basic communication skills are comprehension and expression. Comprehension is concerned, above all, with listening and reading. Learning to listen and to understand implies an exercise in cognitive decentration and emotional empathy. Expression is concerned, above all, with speaking and with writing. Learning to speak, to talk about certain topics does not come easily and naturally -as well shown in the excellent book by Maria Cardinal, *Las palabras para decirlo (The words to say it)*. In most of the programs, improving communication skills and empowering individuals with broader repertoires and more sophisticated communication resources is only one part of broader and more ambitious intervention proposals, which also consider goals related to self-esteem, social relation skills, etc. This is the case, for example, in the activities proposed by Brunet and Negro (1982), or in the program by Goldstein et al. (1989). As an illustration of the above, see the instructional aims of the program by Pope et al. (1988) in the area of communication skills (see Figure 6).

Although all programs directed towards adolescents include sections on interpersonal communication skills, they lamentably only cover mastery of basic conversational resources. To go beyond this point, it is necessary

to consult specialized manuals on rhetoric, a minority discipline nowadays, although at one time considered the pivot for teaching adolescents. Restoring rhetoric is also compatible with a need to fit adolescents with skills in another equally relevant and more contemporary field: computer communications.

To stimulate self-awareness about the importance of learning to be able to communicate adequately and to facilitate the mastery of communication skills, it would be useful to read and comment on any of the reading suggestions we have mentioned or any other literary work. Many of them will reflect the difficulties of the adolescent to express and communicate their experiences; other books present narrative models of the adolescent experience. The *Diary of Anne Frank* and J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* fall into these categories.

Following on from the above, we must remember that, although literary texts are considered to be, to a certain extent, a good source of knowledge for linguistic expressive resources, the peer group is the real stage where adolescents perform their communication skills, and therefore, the context in which these skills are truly used and acquired (Rodríguez Gutiérrez,1994). Frequently, communication problems in everyday life situations are not the result of a deficit in the communication repertoire, but rather a lack of confidence among the potential speakers. Pennebaker (1980) recommends the exercise of writing as a procedure to achieve self-confidence and win confidence in others.

The acquisition of social relations skills

Programs for improving social skills, together with those for improving intelligence (i.e. the teaching-to-think programs mentioned earlier), form probably the largest and most developed group. However, unlike intelligence programs whose theoretical foundations are as diverse as the different models for development of the mind, programs for training social skills are generally quite similar; see, as examples, those by Caballo (1987), Goldstein et al., (1989), Kelly (1992), Monjas Casares (1996), or Muñoz Sánchez, Trianes Torres, and Jiménez Hernández (1994).

These programs consist of a series of activities designed for group work, e.g., *The Program for Structured Learning of Social Skills* by Goldstein et al. (1989) is based on three methodological principles: imitation of models, role-playing, and dynamics and organization of the structured learning group.

Figures 7 and 8 illustrate the kind of aims envisaged in

Figure 6
Communication skills (from Pope et al., 1988, p.114)

- a) To listen: to pay attention, not interrupt, to sympathize, to show interest...
- b) To ask questions
- c) To share, to offer, to offer (personal)..
- d) To cooperate in group activities
- e) To borrow
- f) To compliment
- g) To be complimented
- h) To cordially join group activities
- i) To cordially leave or finish group interactions or activities
- j) To maintain a conversation and develop the appropriate conversational content

social skills programs by presenting the areas and aims of the *Programa de Enseñanza de Habilidades de Interacción Social (The program for teaching social interaction skills)* by Monjas Casares (Figure 7) and *The Program for Structured Learning of Social Skills* by Goldstein et al. (1989) (Figure 8). As can be seen and as previously noted, both programs envisage some aims related to the acquisition of basic communication skills.

Apart from these programs, designed for implementation in specific interventions, the content of the curricula of secondary school education includes enough elements related to the development of social skills that it allows for these elements to be programmed and inserted within the school's traditional subject-disciplines; see for example, the program *Aprender a convivir* (MEC, 1992) (*Learning to live together*). In any case, it seems to be more effective to provide students with opportunities to put their social skills into practice in real contexts.

Programs to improve social skills in adolescence, as seen in previous examples, usually do not distinguish between different domains of interpersonal relations -all is subsumed into a supposed useful general repertoire of competence. However, we feel it would be beneficial to clarify the different domains of social behavior to be learned. The first area is assertiveness, learning to behave positively in social settings; then, the individual's relationship with groups and community; and finally, the specific abilities for creating and enjoying privacy and intimacy.

Assertiveness. Whatever its name, almost all programs to do with social skills take into consideration the acquisition of skills relating to the assertion of individuality in the group. One example is the workshop proposed by

Figure 8
Aims of The Program for Structured Learning of Social Skills by Goldstein et al. (1989)

- Group I: First social skills**
- 1. To listen
- 2. To start a conversation
- 3. To maintain a conversation
- 4. To ask a question
- 5. To give thanks
- 6. To introduce yourself
- 7. To introduce others
- 8. To pay a compliment
- Group II: Advanced social skills**
- 9. To ask for help
- 10. To participate
- 11. To give instructions
- 12. To follow instructions
- 13. To excuse yourself
- 14. To convince others
- Group III: Skills related to feelings**
- 15. To recognize your own feelings
- 16. To express your own feelings
- 17. To understand others' feelings
- 18. To confront others' anger
- 19. To express anger
- 20. To face fear
- 21. To reward yourself
- Group IV: Alternative skills to aggression**
- 22. To ask for permission
- 23. To share something
- 24. To help others
- 25. To negotiate
- 26. To initiate self-control
- 27. To defend your own rights
- 28. To react to a joke
- 29. To avoid problems with others
- 30. Not to get into fights
- Group V: Skills to cope with stress**
- 31. To make a complaint
- 32. To respond to a complaint
- 33. To be sporting after a game
- 34. To overcome shame
- 35. To be able to cope if left out
- 36. To defend a friend
- 37. To face up to persuasion
- 38. To face up to failure
- 39. To cope with contradictory messages
- 40. To face up to an accusation
- 41. To prepare yourself for a difficult conversation
- 42. To face up to group pressure
- Grupo VI: Planning skills**
- 43. To take the initiative
- 44. To be discerning about the cause of a problem
- 45. To establish a goal
- 46. To self-assess your skills
- 47. To gather information
- 48. To resolve problems according to their importance
- 49. To make decisions
- 50. To concentrate on the task

Figure 7
Areas and aims of the Programa de Enseñanza de Habilidades de Interacción Social, (Social Interaction Abilities Learning Program) by Monjas Casares (1996)

Area 1: Basic skills for social interaction

- 1.1 To smile and to laugh
- 1.2 To greet
- 1.3 Introductions
- 1.4 Favours
- 1.5 Courtesy and kindness

Area 2: Skills for making friends

- 2.1 Reinforcing the others
- 2.2 Social initiations
- 2.3 To join in games with others
- 2.4 To help
- 2.5 To cooperate and to share

Area 3: Conversation skills

- 3.1 To start conversations
- 3.2 To maintain conversations
- 3.3 To terminate conversations
- 3.4 To join in conversation with others
- 3.5 Group conversations

Area 4: Skills related to feelings, emotions and opinions

- 4.1 Positive self-assertions
- 4.2 To express emotions
- 4.3 To accept emotions
- 4.4 To defend your own rights
- 4.5 To defend your own opinions

Area 5: Skills to solve interpersonal problems

- 5.1 To identify interpersonal problems
- 5.2 To look for solutions
- 5.3 To anticipate consequences
- 5.4 To select a solution
- 5.5 To test the solution

Area 6: Skills for the relation with adults

- 6.1 Courtesy with adults
- 6.2 Reinforcing the adult
- 6.3 To converse with adults
- 6.4 To request from adults
- 6.5 To solve problems with adults

Cabra and Sarasíbar (1995), which focuses on the acquisition of assertiveness techniques (“worn-out gramophone record”, “negative assertion”, “feasibility commitment”, “self-revelation”, “smokescreen”, and “negative interrogation”). The exercise of assertiveness can sometimes rouse conflicts, but the aim of counseling is not to avoid these conflicts but to teach students how to present them in order to resolve them. If the work of personal counseling intends to be coherent, the encouragement of assertiveness will be closely tied to activities aimed at defining self-concept, improving self-esteem and attributional pattern, as well as to those decisions about organizing school teaching and school life that tend to bring about a broader and more responsible participation on the part of the students.

The individual in the group. Another important issue is the handling of group dynamics, not only as a mere participant who cooperates, but also in the role of leader. In the first place, the group, especially the informal group, is the environment where gratifying links are established and where, when necessary, self-concept will be supported. On the other hand, the exercise of leadership is an interesting self-assertive experience, in line with that of empowerment. Efficient and intelligent leadership implies the mastering of a relatively specialized strategic repertoire. An adequate appreciation of the functional operativity of student representatives in tasks concerned with school-wide administration could be an effective invitation to students to start leadership experiences. As a complement to the above, most handbooks on group psychology include ideas for activities to work out these contents, as well as useful exercises to learn to handle group dynamics and communication. Often, there may arise interpersonal conflicts and frictions within groups with a close communication and co-dependence. Some programs, like that by Pope et al. (1988), include activities to learn to handle and resolve these kinds of conflicts.

The individual in the community. The integration of adolescents and young people in the social life of the community occurs as their behavior becomes gradually more adult-like. This is why the first stages of counseling focus on those specific behavioral repertoires. When the curriculum permits the possibility of introducing new contents, this is an opportunity to include those concerning sexual, ethnic, and cultural equality (affirmative actions, intercultural experiences); commitments for peace, justice, and solidarity; responsible and informed sexuality, fatherhood / motherhood, consumerism, etc. An especially sensitive domain is the

prevention of substance abuse -see, for example, Botvin (1995). From a global perspective, we have already mentioned that one of the worries of the adolescent is about defining a place in the world. The chances for this are very limited at the beginning but they can be widely developed in, for example, social movements. By participating in these organizations, many adolescents and young people can act within complex social systems, and have access to coordination and information networks that widen enormously the previous limits of their experience and introduce them into the adult social world. The success of this integration depends to a great extent on the more or less receptive attitude of the social environment, as well as on the individual who desires to have access to the social activities. An individual with sufficient self-esteem who also has a sufficient social skills repertoire is usually more capable of ‘winning’ acceptance into the social circle s/he enters. There is reading material available to orient this intervention: Fernando Savater’s *Amador: a father talks to his son about happiness, freedom and love*, presents, in a fairly comprehensible way, the complexity involved in understanding the function of social life. He sets out two central political dilemmas: between order and freedom and between individual and collective happiness. Other reading that can attract the adolescent’s interest in *res publica* (apart from the presence of daily papers in the classroom from the start of elementary school) are *Animal Farm*, by George Orwell, or *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, by Elizabeth Burgos.

Intimacy, love, happiness, and future. The final issue to look at is that of emotional education. The capacity to be successful in love, and in the search for happiness, determines in many cases (not to say nearly all cases) the future of the individual. Argyle (1987) analyzes the sources of happiness perceived by people, offering a set of suggestions on how to increase happiness. Of course, we are not talking about a manual, but a set of reflections and information that can be useful to those who wish to improve their personal well-being. Requena Santos (1994) maintains that the best strategy for improving social adjustment and personal well-being is one that combines an abundant number of friends who have relatively casual connections to one another with a few intimate relationships of stronger and closer bonds. In relation to the above, we must point out that the main source of emotional uneasiness in adolescence and youth is usually love relations. Those who work, or share everyday family life with adolescents, know very well that the main source of emotional education comes

from the peer group, which, in turn, is fed by experiences from contexts very different from the adult world, such as the more or less romantic, or poetic, contents of song lyrics that are current among adolescents -and sometimes awful from the adults' viewpoint. We do not have many resources to compensate these influences. Sternberg (1988) provides us with an original and convincing conceptual framework to analyze and understand love relations: a triangular conception linking intimacy, passion, and commitment. This scientific and rational approach can be satisfactorily balanced with some of the countless literary works on this matter (despite what many adults seem to think, adolescents enjoy reading, especially if they share it with the peer group), from the quite emotional and conservative essay *Four Loves*, by C.S. Lewis, to the singular and totally unprejudiced initiation novel, *In Praise of Older Women: The Amorous Recollections of Andras Vajda*, by Stephen Vizinczey, as well as the baroque and postmodern vision of Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, the amusing and lucid *Essay on Love*, by Alain de Botton, and many other novels, dramas and poems that treat this subject with greater delicacy and success than psychology handbooks. A very different problem, often partly caused by a deficient emotional education, is teenage pregnancy (caused also by a lack of sexual education and information on contraceptives). Perhaps the only preventative action which can be taken in schools to avoid teenage pregnancy is the systematic introduction of sexuality and contraception means (and AIDS prevention) in counseling and tutorial programs. These, in any case, should adopt a positive view of sexuality, that clearly distinguishes between responsibility and games, without intimidating or prudish attitudes.

Personal counseling, as presented throughout this article, aims to provide the means to achieve the most from the experiences which usually occur during the period from childhood to adulthood -the experiences that help us grow. As suggested by the title, the idea is to accompany Gulliver, not to save him the journey, the shipwrecks, or the amazement, not to direct his itinerary or pre-fix the port of arrival, but to ensure that he sails off with confidence, hope and curiosity into the worlds that await him, and that he enjoys his travels.

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