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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GUIDANCE

Today, we constantly hear of the changes taking place—radio to television, manual labor to automation, adding machines to I.B.M., the paddle-powered river boat of the early 1900's to the hovercraft. These advances and others have caused man's knowledge to be doubled in the past ten years. But how is the school dealing with this change? When I look around me, I see the majority of schools placing emphasis on meeting the technological demands of a changing society by stressing to the student the need to stay in school, to get an education, to be skilled: "The longer you remain in school, the more money you will earn and the more successful you will be; the more money you make, the happier you will become."

What of man himself? Man is changing his society, but is not this new society also changing man? Is there not an interrelated change going on here? And is this not perhaps what youth is trying to tell us?

The old values which held for a former society no longer relate to the world in which today's youth finds himself and so he questions, and when he does he often gets himself into trouble. But to set up values for today's world would be just as incongruous, for today's society is changing even more rapidly than yesterday's.

It would seem to me that the role of education is to develop discriminating and discerning individuals who are able thoughtfully to question the world in which they find themselves and who then are able to formulate values and make realistic decisions. To do this we must equip youth with an understanding of himself, and an understanding of the only thing in this world which can be a certainty—and that is change. It is evident all around us that the adults and youth of today are not so equipped. The increase in suicides in the teenage and young adult populations, the anger, confusion, and frustration of youth depicted in the increase in delinquency illustrate this only too tragically. Within this framework then, the role of guidance seems to be very clear: to aid the child who is finding difficulty in adapting to his world.

A few years ago I began working for a school system in which there were five elementary schools and one high school. I was assigned to work full time with another counsellor in the high school, and my dismay grew as, over the first weeks, I found myself more and more involved in administrative chores, rather than doing the work for which I was trained. By November I managed to be relieved of these tasks, and, with additional though limited time available, I began to set up the framework for a guidance program in four of the five elementary schools, where assistance had been requested by the principals.

The first step in setting up this program was to meet individuals within the elementary school administration to try to clear up any misconceptions they might have concerning guidance and the role of the counsellor, and also

to give them a picture of results which might realistically be expected. In the latter area we were especially concerned that there be an understanding of the complexity of behavior problem and learning problem difficulties in a child. We were concerned because these problems take time to be worked through, and this would require understanding by the staff. Indeed, there might well be children for whom we could do nothing, and this, too, needed to be clear to the school personnel.

In these initial conversations we also outlined the ways in which the program would be approached: counselling (which would probably receive the greatest emphasis), referral, play therapy, testing and case conferences, and special education.

By way of an introduction to the actual program and what happened, I should say that during our discussion with the principals it was suggested that the success or failure of the program rested in large measure on how we communicated with the teacher. If the teacher had misconceptions of what our role was, then the program could not work. It was also vital to be able to communicate fully with the teachers, independent of the administration, although at all times principals would be kept well informed.

This was therefore the first step in setting up the program—to establish an understanding with the school personnel as to what constitutes a guidance service and what they could expect from such a service.

The second step was to establish a more personal and individual contact with the teachers. Some of this was done by simply dropping in at the school during recess time or after classes and chatting with teachers informally over coffee. In talking with the teachers our aim was to establish rapport in which the teachers would feel free to ask for help. My role here, as I saw it, was to offer interpretation of behaviour, and support for the teacher in his search for a solution to difficult problems in the classroom. In other words, the atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding between counsellor and classroom teacher had to be earned—not decreed or demanded by virtue of authority.

During a two-week period set aside for this second step, we also began circulating a sheet describing various kinds of behaviour which teachers might look for in students having learning difficulties. Some of the behaviour descriptions were excessive daydreaming, short concentration span, and hyperactivity. Such guidelines served us well, both in our work with the youngster and in assisting the teacher in working with him.

Less than a month after our meetings with the administrators we began working in earnest with students. By this time each school had a list of what were considered to be their "ten most serious problems." Perhaps the best way to describe how we proceeded would be to return to the five parts of the program mentioned earlier.

COUNSELLING

Of the five parts, counselling demanded and received the most time, as might be expected. It was also the most successful in terms of positive changes in behaviour and learning. Each counselling session was tape recorded—the tape recorder, in fact, served as a means of establishing the initial rapport with the students. They were delighted with the machine and seemed to be natural and at ease almost immediately, usually within 10

minutes of the first 35-minute period we were counselling. Few children seemed to be aware of it in subsequent sessions, although the recorder was always in full view.

As time progressed, the demands in terms of the numbers of children referred were so great that we decided to try group counselling. This proved to be quite successful with the upper elementary grades, the 9- to 11-year-olds. We did not attempt to work in groups below grade 4 level for we felt that the younger children needed more individual attention. The groups worked well from the point of view of quantity: administrators and teachers were happy, for "something was being done" with these children, even though changes in behaviour were longer in coming about.

TESTING AND REFERRAL

Although care had been taken to establish the principle that the counsellor had the sole responsibility of deciding what approach was appropriate for each student, it is of interest, I think, to note that in the beginning a much larger percentage of requests from administrators and teachers involved testing. The attitude seemed to be, "if he's dumb then we don't have to worry about him," or "I know he is stupid and I want the parents to know—so they'll get off my back." But during the course of the first year only about 15 to 20 students were tested. In fact, requests for testing diminished rapidly after tests were administered to the first eight students. These first tests showed the majority of children to be of average or normal intelligence—often higher than that estimated by both administrators and teachers—and led to the gradual realization that the causes of "dumbness" and "stupidity" were often not intellectual ones. Few referrals were necessary; those which were necessary were for audio or visual-motor problems.

As referrals were made, we encouraged those who were working with the child outside the school to report on his progress to the counsellor. In the beginning, many school personnel complained about the unrealistic demands made on the school system by outside agencies, and, conversely, the guidance counsellors noted the unrealistic expectations school personnel had in regard to what the outside agencies could do for the child. We attempted to alleviate some of these misunderstandings through case conferences.

PLAY THERAPY

Play therapy for the most part was reserved for those children recommended for counselling who seemed to find it difficult to talk, and who also needed more activity than just sitting in a chair or pacing the floor. Due to the lack of space it was only possible to have this kind of activity in one of the four schools and it only got underway towards the latter stage of the first year. The type of play therapy used is not to be confused with "clinical" play therapy. For the most part, "play therapy" consisted of the child becoming involved with play material—water, brushes used on the black boards, crayons, chalk, coloured paper, scissors, paste, puzzles of various degrees of difficulty, plasticine and play dough, puppets and dolls. These materials were always available to the child during his time with the counsellor. As the child worked with one or all of these materials he talked. For the 6- to 8-year-old, puppets seemed to be the most effective in that they enabled the child to "act out" what he felt and what was of concern to him.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

In the late spring of the second year the administration of the school system decided there might be a sufficient number of students who were mentally retarded to justify two special classes at the elementary level. I was requested to do a survey of the elementary population with the assistance of all elementary-school administrators.

Some rather interesting results were forthcoming. To choose the candidates for these classes the administration asked teachers to submit to the principal the names of any children they felt were retarded. The administration in turn would submit the names of these children to me, along with scholastic records, test results, and any other pertinent information, such as whether or not English was the mother tongue. My job would be to test each of these children with the Wisc and then to recommend those who would probably benefit most from this special kind of education. At the initial meeting with the supervisor of the System and the elementary principals, it was felt by the latter that in each school there would be no more than 10 children who might fall into this retarded category. This would mean that at the most there would be 50 possible candidates, ranging in age from 7 to 14 years of age.

A few weeks later I was swamped with a total list of 165 names. I recognized many of them from my visits to the schools. None, as I recalled, had exhibited any characteristics of the "retarded youngster;" they were, however, considered to be behaviour problems.

It began to occur to me that perhaps the real reason why school personnel wished to establish these special classes was to isolate the "discipline problems" and that, for some reason or other, poor behaviour was considered synonymous with retardation. Subsequent meetings seemed to indicate that this was the case. As one principal finally put it, "maybe they aren't getting anything out of the regular classroom and they will receive more individual attention in the special class." In the end, of the 165 students who were recommended for assessment and possible placement in a retarded class, we frankly were hard put to find 12 children, the number necessary for establishing one class. We did find 12, but of these, 6 had not even been recommended by their schools, but rather had been recalled as candidates by guidance personnel. School officials indicated that these 6 had not been recommended because they were not causing any trouble in class. Of the 165 recommended for the special class of retarded children, several tested out at the superior range of intelligence, and one had an I.Q. in the mid 140's.

Since we only had enough children assessed as retarded to fill one of the two classes, it was suggested that the remaining class could be made available for the "mildly disturbed" child, the child who was upset enough for this to interfere with his learning and sometimes the learning of others in his class. A large proportion of the 165 students appeared to fall into this category. This suggestion, however, was turned down for two reasons:

1. The provincial grant would not cover this type of class.
2. There seemed to be a reluctance to accept the fact that a high percentage of the elementary-school population was exhibiting emotional difficulties.

Although I was no longer with the system the following year, I under-

stand two classes for "retarded children" were established. A few months ago I met a teacher of one of these classes and, from her description, it seems reasonably safe to say that several levels of abilities are represented, including some children of superior intelligence. Yet the curriculum and approach used are designed for the retarded child. One can only imagine what anger and frustration, with resulting apathy, are being experienced by those children who have been so erroneously misplaced. Such a waste of human potential!

In conclusion, here are some general observations based on my two-year period in elementary guidance.

1) Although my presentation has at times been hard on the administrator, my impression is that in the majority of cases the principal is simply doing the job as he sees it. He needs support and encouragement to try out new ideas. If he gets them, our educational system will change for the better. If he does not, he is likely to perpetuate the bureaucracy at the expense of the child, because his attitude will be formed by expediency.

2) If guidance personnel are to be of genuine assistance to administration at elementary or secondary levels, it is important that the "counsellor" be allowed to function independently of administrative pressure.

3) Teachers need—and indeed plead for (in their individual ways)—a "*closer working relationship*" with the counsellor. For a teacher to initiate a referral and receive, 6 weeks later, only an itemized sheet containing a description of behaviour traits and an I.Q. score is *worse* than useless. The teacher in all probability was only too aware of these things and that was the reason for the referral in the first place!

   What the teacher is really asking for is (1) help in interpreting the *behaviour* of the child and (2) some practical suggestions as to how to deal with the "behaviour" and help the child.

4) I found myself in an almost constant state of amazement at the lack of knowledge educators have concerning children. There is no questioning their knowledge of subject matter, be it reading, arithmetic, or geography; but the most vital subject about which teachers must know, if they are to create an atmosphere in which learning can take place, is the child, and to most he seemed an enigma.

I am convinced that this knowledge of each child as an individual in his own right is the area of guidance for which counsellors must prepare themselves the most thoroughly, and in which they must deeply involve themselves with their colleagues in the classroom. This is where the challenge is to be found, and where they will find their work cut out for them; for it is only when we understand the child that we are free to let the child discover and understand himself.

SERVICE D'ORIENTATION DANS LES ECOLES PRIMAIRES

NANCY TOWNSEND

Comme résultat de ses expériences dans le service d'orientation des écoles primaires, Mlle. Townsend a décidé que les éducateurs manquent de connaissance d'enfants, et qu'ils ont besoin d'aide pour interpréter la signification de la conduite de l'enfant et pour améliorer cette conduite. Le programme qu'elle a developpé consiste en cinq services principaux:

1. Services de consultation—qui occupe la plupart du temps et qui réussit le mieux à corriger les façons d'agir et d'apprendre.
2. Tests de capacité intelectuelle—moins important.
3. Jeux thérapeutiques—pour les enfants les plus jeunes qui ne savent pas formuler et exprimer leurs pensées.
4. Classes spéciales—pour les enfants attardés. Souvent ces enfants sont plutôt des problèmes de discipline.
5. Conférences pour tous ceux qui travaillent avec l'individu.