

Teachers Pool Information

VERONICA E. CASEY

This identification of problems in the Denver schools is given by Veronica E. Casey, coordinator of instruction at Smiley Junior High School, Denver, Colorado.

TEN YEARS AGO, when teachers at Smiley Junior High School were developing a core program, we discovered for ourselves that growth of the individual pupil in a democratic society was the chief goal of education. This discovery led us to search out better ways of knowing pupils as individuals and of measuring their growth.

We needed to use each other's information about the characteristics and needs of the children with whom we worked. We needed to make it plain to each other how pupils acted differently in different classes. In some, children entered whole-heartedly into activities of their group; in others, they rebelled or withdrew. Such variations needed study.

All the ideas of all the teachers who worked with these children during the day were needed to build an adequate picture of their behavior. Yet how could such sharing be brought about? How could teachers already busy every minute of the day sit down together for enough time to make a conference worth-while? And would the added insights help?

Strategic Time for Expert Service

At this time of uncertainty concerning the real value of purposes so difficult to attain, a psychiatrist was employed half time by the Denver schools. In a series of lectures, held after school

hours, he spoke about emotional and social characteristics of growth and of the effect various kinds of experiences have upon the growth and development of children and youth. Although attendance was voluntary, many teachers from Smiley School were there. As a result, they persuaded the whole faculty to arrange a few meetings in the form of conferences to consider the behavior of some of our upper grade students.

A Period of Trial and Error

Because we set up no criteria for judging children but simply plunged in to see if, through joint discussion, we could solve some problems of maladjusted pupils; these first meetings were rather crude attempts. That we were in the pioneer stage was evidenced by such contributions as "chews gum all the time," "interested in the boys," "just won't work," "won't stay in his seat and be quiet," "nice kid," "sweet girl," and "he does all right for *me*."

Teachers generally didn't see beyond the children's overt acts of misbehavior or their failure to hand in assignments. *Why* pupils behaved as they did was left out.

Discouragement followed a study of the accomplishments of these meetings. Convinced that we needed help, we invited the psychiatrist to attend one conference and offer suggestions for im-

provement. After he listened, he smiled and told us a story of his student days in Boston. He had been assigned to write a number of case histories. After his professor had read them to the bitter end he said, "Well, sir, you've told me a whole lot more about yourself than you have about your patients."

Many Methods for Growth

A combination of circumstances helped us to grow. Workshops came to our city (we've just completed our tenth); our principal had an unusually contagious interest in educational trends; we invited consultants in the field to work with us; and we developed a professional library. At the same time we pursued our conference idea, improved our techniques, and evaluated our procedures until we now feel that we hold conferences which are increasingly professional and helpful to all.

Curriculum-Guidance Partnership

To understand what our conferences are like, it is necessary to know how the guidance program of the school is organized. All pupils of the school are enrolled in a general education program which is based upon problems common to pupils in each general education class. This class is in session three hours out of a six-hour day in the seventh grade; two hours in the eighth; and one in the ninth. Each general education teacher is responsible for a group of approximately thirty-five pupils. This arrangement enables the teacher to become well acquainted with his pupils during their three years in the junior high school, and makes him the logical counseling teacher.

Six weeks after the beginning of each semester the general education teacher prepares a form sheet containing significant data for each pupil in his general education group. The school nurse, the head of the testing program, the boys' and girls' advisers, and the locale records are all consulted as sources of data to be recorded.

An All-Teacher Conference

A schedule of conferences is posted a week before the conferences are held, listing each teacher's name, hour, and grade level together with names of pupils in his group. All teachers of the pupils concerned attend the conference. The heaviest demands fall upon teachers of art, music, and physical education, who meet every child in school in their classes. In spite of the difficulty involved in attending so many conferences, these teachers, knowing that their contribution to the total picture is unique and significant, attend the extra meetings as frequently as possible. If a teacher is unable to be present, he sends in pertinent data.

The general education teacher takes the lead in presenting to teachers, advisers, and the principal significant test data on each pupil, physical handicaps, academic achievement, social and emotional adjustment, and special talents and interests. To this information the teachers of shop, music, physical education, mathematics, art, science, and home economics add other data, building up a picture of each pupil's total behavior and development. After the general education teacher has read the recorded data from his conference sheet, he gives it to the advisers who add comments made by the special subjects

teachers. Teachers, in turn, take notes on information which will enable them to work with the pupils more effectively.

Emphasis on the Positive

During the days immediately following the conference, boys' and girls' advisers call youngsters to their offices for individual counseling on the results of the joint faculty conference. The advisers have worked out such a psychologically sound approach to individual counseling that if a pupil is overlooked, he loses no time in telling them that he was not called in for conference.

Advisers usually begin by saying to each boy or girl that his teachers have been conferring on his progress and have agreed that growth has gone on in relation to certain objectives. The adviser then follows the favorable report by asking the pupil if he thinks any mention might have been made of areas for improvement. Usually a youngster is quick to respond with suggestions. These are supplemented by the adviser, and the plan for further development is a joint one. Since self-evaluation is the basis of growth, the foundation is laid for positive action.

Follow-Ups Indicate Values

After the advisers have conferred with all members of one teacher's group, this use is made of the data:

- ▶ The sheets containing all pertinent information are returned to the general education teacher who now has more comprehensive information with which to guide the pupil's development. The coordinator of instruction helps the general education teacher provide work commensurate with the pupil's ability so that he may progress according to his unique personality pattern. Teach-

ers and pupils both come to realize that being an individual, being different, doesn't mean being better or worse than anyone else. It means self-development in relation to one's capacities in order that one may function in a democratic society as an intelligent and responsible citizen.

- ▶ The advisers call parents to school for conferences, if necessary. The recorded data, previously obtained from teachers and pupils, is objective and is based on the judgment of many teachers rather than that of one teacher, thus giving a more complete presentation of the problem. The pupil's progress, or lack of it, over a period of time may be discussed in concrete detail because the conference sheets for each of the six semesters are kept in the advisers' files. Parents make decisions in view of the evidence, and teachers are seldom called out of class for information because of the careful study which they have made in gathering the conference data.
- ▶ The general education teacher records on the progress report card for parents significant material obtained from the conference, including a description of behavior which is retarding or promoting the progress of the pupil.
- ▶ The adviser is able to establish rapport with a pupil because the pupil feels that the adviser understands his problems and is trying to help him by setting up conditions through which he can solve his problems, to some extent, for himself.

Why Do We Do It?

Why do teachers on our faculty repeatedly and continuously agree to give extra hours before and after school to attend these conferences? It is because they see these ways in which the conferences serve the counseling program:

- ▶ Teachers, above all else, want comprehensive information in helping

- pupils to grow. They realize that the conference which draws out the combined growth information of all teachers provides a composite description that gives teachers greater security and confidence as they counsel pupils. The technique provides for gathering, presenting, and interpreting significant data which, at its best, reveals the whole personality of a pupil, not just his academic achievement or lack of it.
- ▶ Teachers often need the help of advisers in securing the cooperation of pupils and parents when data reveals that school and parents must work out some problem together. Since the advisers and principal attend every conference, they become familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of every pupil in the school. At the end of the pupil's three years in the school, he has been the center of six discussions based on significant facts pertaining to his total behavior pattern.
 - ▶ In reporting pupils' progress to the home, teachers are able to describe progress or lack of it with greater confidence and accuracy.
 - ▶ Teachers see a need for modifying or changing the curriculum in order better to meet individual needs and are anxious to plan units of work with the help of the coordinator of instruction which involve pupils' needs, concerns, and interests.
 - ▶ Teachers build in the minds of parents a more constructive attitude toward education of the whole child by means of objective data which reveals the social, emotional, and physical patterns they are developing.
 - ▶ Teachers are enlightened by advisers who reveal certain pertinent, personal data which throws light on otherwise obscure behavior conflicts of pupils.

Through these processes of working with children, parents, the coordinator of instruction, the advisers, and the principal, the general education teacher is having an opportunity to develop a professional attitude toward how and why children behave as they do.

Just Good Teaching

JOSEPHINE HINTGEN

Josephine Hintgen, director of guidance and curriculum in the public schools of La Crosse, Wisconsin, presents questions for conscientious teachers to ask themselves.

EACH ONE OF US, whether a teacher of kindergartners or of college seniors, should be guiding the students in our classes to a fuller and happier life. Frankly, if we are not trying to do that, we shouldn't be in the teaching profession.

That does not mean that each teacher sets himself up as a guidance specialist, nor does it mean that there would be

no need for specialists. It simply means that in every school where there is a sensitivity to human relationships and a sympathetic understanding of them, good teaching does guide child living.

Consider the Whole Child

Good teaching automatically takes into consideration the pupil's general physical condition, memory span, emo-

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