

Counseling Vital to Education

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Counseling has become a major responsibility in modern schools. This article describes current theories of guidance and indicates the objectives of an effective counseling program.

FOR some years now guidance has been a prominent word in educational terminology. An increased awareness of the complex causes which determine the success or failure of our young people in school has made educators seek new means for helping students out of their confusion. Many types of objective testing devices have been developed to measure personality traits, vocational and mental aptitude, vocational interest and emotional adjustment. Innumerable organizational plans for school guidance programs have found their way into current publications and much has been done in schools to put these theories into practice.

An important phase of guidance programs is the relationship which develops between counselor and student, particularly when the situation demands special attention to personal problems of one kind or another. Some schools make use of specially trained personnel while others depend primarily upon members of the regular teaching staff. Schools usually try to work out a combination of these two procedures, using the specialist only for the more difficult situations.

This article will attempt to show

that by accepting a proper rationale, counseling programs are effective in their influence upon the lives of our young people. The counseling programs with which the writer has been associated have been instituted too recently to warrant objective conclusions and statements of success or failure. It would be a mistake, therefore, merely to list as evidence a few isolated cases in which these counseling programs have affected the students' lives. It is possible, however, through a process of deductive reasoning to focus our attention on the results expected of a counseling program which has as its philosophy and basic structure certain clearly defined principles. Naturally it is dangerous, even under the best of circumstances, to make predictions in the area of human behavior. It is possible, nevertheless, to gain confidence in a program if it has been developed according to a plan that can be supported on the basis of the philosophy and of the psychology which it represents.

The counselor's work is but one phase of the school guidance program. More accurately, any counseling situation, scheduled or otherwise, is an integral part of the total process we call education. I firmly believe, as do many other educators, that no phase of the school program can be justified unless it provides experiences which can be

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expected to contribute toward realization of the school's objectives. If a phase of the program is not instituted for the purpose of effecting changes in students in keeping with philosophies and objectives of the total program, it stands on indefensible grounds. Insofar as a counseling program does not meet this test, it can be classified as part of a patchwork curriculum which is aimless, time-consuming and expensive. The fruits of such a program would be unpredictable in terms of quality and frequency. It is discouraging enough when a course of study fails to bring about for students the behavioral changes which were expected and for which the course was carefully designed. It is even more inexcusable for a school, year after year, to continue practices or phases of a program which are aimless or are in actual conflict with the school's philosophy. The first question that must be answered, therefore, is whether or not harmony exists between the purpose of general education and the purpose of a counseling program.

Assistance in Adjustment

The true purpose of general education is to provide for the child significant experiences which will promote the growth and development of his potentialities including those which make him an effective participant in a democratic society. Such growth and development will be assisted by courses of study that challenge and interest the student. To enable him to become an effective participant in a democratic society, the school must offer the student experiences which produce a deep appreciation for democracy.

The counseling program has as its purpose helping the student to adjust more quickly to all phases of school life so that he may better achieve his educational aims. It is concerned with the student's emotional life and also serves to help him see more clearly his role in an educational and occupational world. The results hoped for are that students will arrive at a synthesis of their aspirations, potentialities and opportunities. Very definitely, a counseling program can be in agreement with the purposes of general education.

An effective counseling program must be related to the laws of human behavior. There have been times in our historical development when it would have been questionable to conduct a program of counseling for the purpose of helping the student make proper adjustment to life situations.

From the time of primitive man to the Middle Ages, it was assumed that behavior was controlled by forces outside the individual. Evil spirits had to be cast out to free the individual of his evil behavior and this was done by mysterious methods. The Puritan was of the opinion that all behavior was controllable, the will being the determining factor.

The exponent of the theory of heredity claimed that the individual had no responsibility since his behavioral pattern was predetermined through factors beyond his control. The environmentalist was concerned with controlling the environment rather than helping the individual gain insight into his problems. None of these theories of human behavior would serve to justify a modern counseling program.

Modern counseling programs generally accept the present theory which assumes that all people share common basic needs and drives. These urges pattern the individual's behavior as he attempts to satisfy them. He learns to meet these basic needs by developing certain mechanisms of adjustment. Some of these mechanisms are not socially acceptable and others lead the individual away from reality. Under these circumstances, it would be difficult for the student to achieve the basic objective of general education until such time as he begins to appreciate reality and to adopt socially acceptable habits. It is the role of the counseling program to try and help him face up to reality and make a socially acceptable adjustment.

Current Theories of Guidance

It seems reasonable to claim that any school accepting the tenets of present theories of human behavior can successfully use counseling programs, provided these are in harmony with the basic philosophy of general education in a democratic society.

What assurance is there that counseling is a desirable and effective device in a school concerned with helping the student develop to the utmost his potentialities for effective living in a democracy? To answer this question, it is necessary to learn from the expert counselor what he has discovered and which techniques of counseling have produced most effective results.

It should be made very clear at this point that one paragraph or two cannot do more than mention the various techniques which are widely accepted by counselors today. The reader is

urged to use the references listed at the end of this article for a fair and complete explanation of each technique.

Non-Directive Counseling

Non-directive counseling, which Carl R. Rogers has promulgated, can be and has been brought successfully into the school program. Five sequential steps are outlined by Rogers¹:

1. The counselee seeks the help of the counselor.
2. The counselee gives free expression to his emotionalized attitudes.
3. The counselee gains insight.
4. The counselee formulates plans.
5. The counselee terminates the counseling contact.

The counselor uses reflection and acceptance of expressed attitudes to help the counselee gain insight and enable him to formulate plans for the solution of his problem. At no time does the counselor become critical or suggestive in his relationship with the counselee. It is important to note that one element of this technique is the original contact by the counselee, indicating that routine counseling situations predetermined by the counselor in a school situation would not fit this type of program.

Clinical Method

Another major counseling method applicable to public school situations involves the clinical approach of which E. G. Williamson² is a leading expo-

¹ Carl R. Rogers and John L. Wallen. *Counseling with Returned Servicemen*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1946, p. 47.

² E. G. Williamson. *How to Counsel Students*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1939, p. 57.

ment. The first step in this approach requires gathering of pertinent information which will shed light on the problem as well as lead to its solution. These facts are synthesized into meaningful and related unity which, in application, help the counselor diagnose the problem much as the physician, skilled in his work, diagnoses after he seeks out symptoms of the illness. Logically, then, and with the help of his own experience, training and skill, the counselor helps the counselee to better appreciate his problem, discover the causes, and plan for the future.

The trained counselor is a necessary element of this program for only he will be able properly to find significant data and interpret it. The school is in a position to make such a technique possible since testing programs and knowledge of the home and environment from which the student comes are accessible to the counselor.

An Eclectic Approach

A third major concept deserves attention. There are those who believe, as do Shirley A. Hamrin and Blanche B. Paulson,³ that a purposeful selection of techniques from other types of counseling and proper application of techniques according to the problem of the individual constitute a sound approach. This eclectic point of view assumes that each individual possesses varying degrees of ability to carry full responsibility and that many students with problems are unable to solve these by increased insight or action. The eclectic believes that there are cases in which the problem is created by the

school program or some other extraneous factor not under control of the student. The non-directive assumption that each individual has the capacity to solve most of his problems through increased insight is also one of the bases of the eclectic rationale. A non-directive counseling situation is employed, therefore, for those cases in which the counselor feels it to be most applicable.

Each one of the previously mentioned concepts has abundant evidence to show that success has consistently been attained. These points of view have received wide recognition not because they fulfill the requirements of sound psychology, but because the individual through their use has experienced improved adjustment. Each has enabled the counselee to overcome maladjustment whether this be primarily emotional, educational or vocational in nature. Each has helped the counselee make a more effective contribution to our democratic society.

An Effective Instrument

Counseling, therefore, can be an effective instrument of the public school in its attempt to develop a program suitable for the attainment of the basic goals of general education. There is sufficient evidence to indicate that if the counselor has been trained in one of the three philosophies of counseling presented here, the results of his effort will be in keeping with the basic philosophy of the school. There exist unanimity of purpose, a defensible theory and suitable methodology.

Briefly, a sound counseling program will support the total school effort by helping the student attain the objec-

³Shirley A. Hamrin and Blanche B. Paulson, *Counseling Adolescents*, Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1950. p. 82-99.

tives of general education. This support will come in several ways:

1. The youngster facing disturbing problems will find release for his emotional tensions.

2. A clearer appraisal of his purpose in school will help the student maintain a more successful scholastic record.

3. Wiser curricular choices will result from a counseling relationship.

4. Vocational information and appraisal will give a student confidence and direction.

5. Basic human needs of security and adequacy can be satisfied.

6. Misunderstandings occurring among students and teachers can be resolved.

7. The student will become a more effective participant in a democratic society.

These conclusions are not mere platitudes. No technique will produce all of the desired results and counseling is no exception. We can be confident, nevertheless, that if we apply a reasonable rationale to such a program, boys and girls in school will respond.

SUGGESTED READINGS

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