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THE TEACHER--COUNSELOR

Ralph A. Benton
Southern Illinois University

There seems to be an increasing agreement among teachers and professional personnel workers that not only can teachers function as personnel workers in the classroom, but that if they are to do an effective and positive job of teaching, they must function as personnel workers. There are still some guidance counselors, however, who feel that personnel work is a complicated and involved process, and that only those professional individuals who have been trained in the field of guidance and personnel are capable of performing any sort of personnel work. While it is true that there are obviously certain kinds of personnel work that require the attention of skilled professionals, such as doctors, nurses, dentists, etc., it is also true that the greater part of the personnel work and guidance that must be done with children will be done by the classroom teacher, or will not be done at all (1).

Although most of today's school administrators are in general agreement that a trained counselor is a desirable person to have on the school faculty, only the larger schools have one. The smaller high schools are of the opinion that they cannot afford a full-time trained counselor, nor do they have enough students to justify one. Most teachers in such systems are assigned to teach in more than one subject matter field and a well-trained counselor does not prefer to work in such circumstances. This means that if any guidance or counseling is done at all, it will have to be by the teachers or the principal, or by both. This state of affairs was borne out in a study by Benton (2) involving forth high schools in Southern Illinois.

The inadequacy of counseling at the secondary level was again brought to light in a study by Gann (3) of 189 drop-outs from the Southern Illinois University School of Agriculture over a four year period. Of this group, only twelve percent reported having had available the services of a full-time guidance counselor while in high school. Fifty-three percent had some guidance largely through classroom teachers, while the remaining 35 percent reportedly received no guidance at all.

The real question which any school faces in planning its counseling program, therefore, is not, shall teachers participate in the work? Teachers do and always will participate anyway. Rather, the question is how their contribution in counseling can be made more valuable and properly coordinated with the efforts of other counselors (4).

The extent to which one believes that the teacher should be a member of the personnel services team is obviously affected by his concept of the functions of the teacher. Certainly if one were to accept the more traditional concept of the teacher as an individual who has amassed a good deal of knowledge in a certain area and whose function it is to pass this information on to the next generation, then there would be little debate on the differences between teachers and counselors. This concept is probably accepted hardly at all by elementary school teachers, but to some extent by secondary school teachers, and almost completely by most college professors (5).

Arbuckle (6) says there are at least three viewpoints as to who should perform counseling services in schools:

1. The professional point of view: This view holds that counseling is an intricate and involved process, and for the welfare of the child should be performed only by specialists who have been trained in the field. In the hands of an unskilled teacher who has become "personnel minded" by reading a book or listening to a lecture, it is believed that counseling is a dangerous weapon and may result in much more harm than good.

2. The "semi-professional" point of view: Here it is believed that counseling will be performed by certain teachers who have shown that they are interested in counseling and who have had some professional training in the field.

3. The "non-professional" point of view: Those who accept this point of view believe that counseling should be performed by all teachers. This viewpoint is the hoped-for ideal, but when it does become an actuality, there will be no need of using the term "non-professional," since all teachers will be persons with training in the field of human development and adjustment.

The teacher-counselor role at the college level is essentially no different from that in secondary schools. With some exceptions,

most college students are adolescents in various stages of maturing, and even in an environment where they are understood and accepted, for almost every student there will be occasions when he will be in need of assistance. Very often in the college environment, which for many beginning students is strange and confusing, the student may feel that he is not understood, that he is not accepted, and that sometimes he is even being treated in a hostile manner. When every faculty member in every institution of higher learning has accepted the student-personnel point of view so that it has become a part of his philosophy of living, and when he has the understanding and skills to work effectively with people, then the need for organized personnel services will be greatly decreased. The student coming to college, however, will soon find that many of his professors are much more concerned with research than they are with him; he will find that some of them make quite clear their complete lack of concern over his well-being; and he will find in college the highest point of poor teaching, since the greater proportion of college teachers, whose full-time job is teaching, have had little or no preparation for that task.

Arbuckle (7) defines counseling as an interaction between two people that enables the disturbed individual to come to the point where he can make choices and decisions that are rational and logical; it is an interaction that is basically verbal, and is emotional in nature. The complexity of the emotional disturbance requiring counseling must be such that it can be relieved only through the development of greater insight on the part of the client, and this insight is the result of the interaction between the counselor and the client.

The term "general counselor" is sometimes used in referring to all college personnel who may sometimes be placed in a situation where they must function as a counselor, although their basic task may not be counseling. Faculty advising is an essential part of the counseling services offered in any institution. If at all possible, only those faculty members who wish to act as advisors should be allowed to do so. A faculty member acting as an unwilling adviser may do more harm than good. Even those faculty members who are interested, however, frequently have little understanding or skill, and an inservice training program is essential.

In describing the creating of an effective faculty-adviser training program at Kansas State University, Gordon (8) concludes by saying: "We feel that the use of the knowledge of small group dynamics in creating and operating a large-scale training program for advisers is practical and successful, and that it can be applied effectively in other institutions. We believe such a program rests upon the extension of the application of personnel techniques by the counselor to the faculty. If the counselor respects his faculty colleagues, works with them in a democratic fashion, and attempts to meet their needs, he can secure faculty cooperation and participation in advising and training."

In conclusion, something should be said concerning the difficulties facing the teacher attempting to function as a counselor. In some colleges and universities a system is used whereby the teaching staff is directly involved in academic advisement. For some, this may be a minor assignment, but nevertheless the teacher has a number of students assigned to him and it is his responsibility to advise them in academic affairs. The question always comes to mind-- "Are all these instructors interested and qualified to do this job?" It is the experience of this writer with several years serving as an adviser, that many students come in with personal problems beyond those related to strictly academic work. How far then, should an academic adviser get involved with a student's problems beyond things academic?

The following are commonly recognized difficulties which a teacher who is attempting to function as a counselor must face and resolve:

1. The responsibility of the teachers as compared with that of the school counselor. Is his major responsibility toward society, or is it toward the individual student?
2. The question of responsibility and confidentiality. It poses an ethical and legal question for all counselors.
3. The function of the counselor as compared with the function of the teacher. The counselor's task is basically one of listening and clarifying in a quiet, unobtrusive, and accepting way. A teacher may be accustomed to dominating his classroom, is aggressive and talks constantly.
4. Some counselors say that teachers cannot be counselors because they are too rigid and unbending, and that they find it difficult to be acceptant.
5. If the good teacher is always friendly, and if the good counselor is one who does not establish too friendly a relationship with the client, then how can the good teacher be an effective counselor?
6. Another oft-heard complaint is that many teachers do not have enough professional training to make them effective as teachers, so how can they be effective as counselors?
7. Some will say that the teacher cannot function as a counselor since, as a teacher, he must teach subject matter, and therefore has no time to become involved with the problems of students.
8. Still another reason given is that teachers as a whole cannot function as counselors because they are too unstable a group.

In spite of the fact that one or more of the above stated difficulties may be characteristic of many teachers, nevertheless students

do come to teachers with whom they have established rapport for advice and counseling on many personal problems other than academic. Teachers must take this responsibility seriously because as stated at the beginning of this paper, the greater part of the personnel work and guidance that must be done with students at the elementary, secondary, and college level will be done by the classroom teacher or will not be done at all.

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