

Personnel Methods and the High School Student

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In a recent survey of Illinois high school positions, there are found several positions listed that are distinctly designed to study the individual student. Among these positions are: personnel director, deans of boys and deans of girls, vocational advisors, and visiting teachers. The fact that the number of such positions are on the increase shows a greater trend toward personnel work in the organization and administration of our high schools. Some of this work is carried on in many schools by home room advisors and principals.

In some schools no attempt has been made to organize work to include a careful and scientific study of the individual pupil, while in others, personnel work concerns itself with extreme problem cases. Some schools offer courses to acquaint the student with occupations. In all of our high schools there is some vocational advice given in connection with the student's choice of courses within the curriculum. As the objective of the modern high school is the development of a socialized individual ready to accept his responsibility as a citizen of a democracy, it is evident that every high school student would derive benefits from carefully planned personnel work. Increasing social interrelationships calls for a greater attention to personnel work in our high schools.

Modern psychology is developmental in its viewpoint, interested in the growth of the individual, physically, socially, mentally. Attention to standards of accomplishment in subject-matter is only one of the factors of modern education. A modern school program should be designed and organized so as to contribute to and to emphasize the development of social adjustment.

To accomplish its aim of leading adolescent youth to an understanding of himself and society, the personnel work of the high school must include the whole individual, his physical development, his intelligence level, his aptitudes and interests, his friendships, and his attainments in extra-curricular activities. Recent studies have revealed that these factors are more significant in some cases in predicting success than even scholarship. Personality has been defined as the sum total of our experiences, and we must reckon with personality, the result of all of the forces the environment contributes to the development of the individual. We have often failed to understand and correct misconduct of the adolescent because we have not taken into consideration his whole personality. If we hope to succeed in understanding our high school student, we must follow the case study method. Personnel work requires that information be gathered in some organized form that is a cumulative file of the student's background, including the physical and medical history of his family, a knowledge of the educational attainments of his parents and a progressive record of his own education achievements, and the emotional and social characteristics of his parents as well as of himself. The personnel worker must be a person who is sympathetic but not sentimental, one who is interested

in people, and elicits in others an attitude of confidence so that they will reveal to him their ambitions and interest. He must be acquainted with measurements and how to interpret them. The successful personnel worker believes in research work and scientific measurement and is not satisfied with mere opinion or guesswork.

The interview with the student should contribute a period of talking by the student and of listening by the interviewer, with just enough direction to bring out significant information. Training can help the teacher develop a professional attitude, an attitude that is based on a knowledge of human nature and on the possession of skill in using methods of acquiring significant facts concerning any individual.

It is an encouraging sign that our high schools are cognizant of the importance of making personnel work more efficient. Some high schools have begun to develop organized systems with trained personnel, and others are selecting staff members for this work and encouraging them to train themselves for the same.

In order to determine more specifically what type of personnel work the high schools in the territory served by Illinois State Normal University are doing, a group of 86 students representing various schools in this territory were asked for information concerning personnel work in their various high schools. Information was requested in regard to: biographical inventory, intelligence tests, survey achievement tests, adjustment or social adaptation tests, courses or group meetings on occupations and vocations, and vocational guidance or personal advice.

A general summary of the representatives' responses to this questionnaire, representing the small, the average, and the large high school, indicates types of personnel work accomplished in such schools as follows:

In high school A, with an enrollment of 49 students, most of the counseling was done by the teachers and the principal. No vocational guidance courses were reported.

In high school B, with an enrollment of 400 students, the dean of women was the main source of counseling. No inventories, intelligence or achievement tests or adjustment tests were reported.

In high school C, with an enrollment of 1,942 students, the counseling was taken care of by the principal, assistant principal, dean of men and dean of women. The tests given were not regarded of importance, as the students were not aware of their being used for a definite purpose. Of course the above represents the students' reactions and may not indicate accurately how the teachers use some of this personnel data gathered. However, we do know that often, too little use is made of personnel data, on file and available for use.

In conclusion, allow me to give an illustration of one of our smaller high schools that is attempting to meet the demands of our modern high school for more efficient personnel work. In this high school, attention to four criteria is indicated in their records. These records include a biographical survey, a social adaptation rating, intelligence levels, and scholarship standings.

The biographical survey includes five parts: (1) An account of family and home environment; (2) physical record; (3) school life and activities; (4) social and outside activities; and (5) future plans. The social adaptation rating is determined on the basis of scores on the Bell Adjustment Inventory, which provides four separate measures of personnel and social adjustment, namely: Home adjustment, health adjustment, social adjustment and emotional adjustment. The validity of the Bell Adjustment Inventory was determined through correlations with four other well known personality

scales. Terman's Group Test of Mentality served as a basis of obtaining the mental levels, and the scholastic record was established through the Sones-Harry Achievement Test.

The principal of this high school advised me that these data were used to an excellent advantage in making adjustments at the beginning of the school year. This small high school has made an excellent beginning, which in time will undoubtedly contribute much in directing the development of the individual in this school, so that he may become an efficient member of our democratic society. More consistent and unified programs of personnel work should be one of the aims of major concern in organizing and in directing the learning activities of the modern high school.