HOW TO COUNSEL STUDENTS

A Manual of Techniques for Clinical Counselors

BY

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HOW TO
COUNSEL STUDENTS

The quality of the materials used in the manufacture of this book is governed by continued postwar shortages.

"There are many ways to study man psychologically. Yet to study him most fully is to take him as an individual. He is more than a bundle of habits; more than a nexus of abstract dimensions; more too than a representative of his species. He is more than a citizen of the state and more than a mere incident in the gigantic movements of mankind. He transcends them all. The individual, striving ever for his own integrity, has existed under many forms of social life—forms as varied as the nomadic, feudal and capitalistic. He struggles on even under oppression, always hoping and planning for a more perfect democracy where the dignity and growth of each personality will be prized above all else."

(From Gordon W. Allport, *Personality, A Psychological Interpretation*, pp. 565–566, Henry Holt & Company, 1937.)

To

DONALD G. PATERSON

whose numerous contributions to student personnel work
have materially increased the quality and effectiveness
of counseling techniques

PREFACE

When the author began graduate work in psychology under Professor D. G. Paterson in 1926, his interests in student personnel work centered around two problems: development of techniques of counseling high-school and college students, and evaluation of the efficacy of those techniques. The second problem, evaluation, has been the subject of a series of research studies now in the process of completion. The study of techniques is completed with the preparation of this comprehensive survey of techniques of diagnosing and counseling, to be used in a graduate clinic course designed to train counselors. The place of such a course in a comprehensive training program is discussed in Chap. II.

In 1926, current personnel literature was searched for reports of techniques useful in counseling students who requested assistance with educational, vocational, and personal problems. This search of the literature revealed meager discussions of techniques. In the succeeding twelve years, the author has counseled approximately ten thousand high school and college students. The present book constitutes a partial summary of these twelve years of clinical experience together with a review of the literature on this phase of personnel work.

This book does not attempt to cover the entire field of student personnel work. The functions of only one type of personnel worker are outlined. The term *clinical counselor* is used to denote this worker. In many places throughout the book the term *counselor* is used alone but always in the sense of a clinical counselor and never in the sense of an untrained counselor who uses what has been called the single-interview method of counseling. The fundamental purpose of this book is the adaptation of the principles, procedures, and techniques of clinical psychology to the adjustment problems of high school and college students. Other personnel workers may prefer to use the term *clinical psychologist* in place of *clinical counselor* to emphasize that this type of personnel work is a branch of the general profession of applied psychology. The author feels that the term *clinical psychologist* is undesirable at the present time in high schools and colleges because of its widespread association with mental deficiency and a younger clientele.

While this book is broken up into separate sections covering different types of student problems, such a literary differentiation

does not assume psychological distinctions. The student who comes to the counselor is a whole student; but, in describing that student, we must describe the parts *seriatim* unless we are to have a meaningless confusion of words. Moreover, the counselor cannot deal with all the student's problems; nor can he go forward on all fronts at the same time. Any indication of fragmentation in our discussions is, therefore, a literary necessity and not a true representation of the multidimensionality of a student's personality.

Since there are no techniques appropriate to the counseling of all students, merely reading this, or any other book, does not prepare a person to counsel students. The clinical counselor must also have practical internship experience and extensive knowledge of source material, in order to apply the principles discussed here and elsewhere. In fact, one cannot give directions for counseling John Jones unless he writes a book about John Jones. Not only individual students, but local conditions, vary so widely as to make impossible a text giving full directions for counseling a particular individual case.

The first chapter of this book attempts to outline the author's interpretation of the philosophy of personnel work and its role in education. Following this, general procedures of clinical counseling are described. In Chap. VI some important facts necessary to the counselor's understanding of students are summarized. Following these introductory chapters, various types of problems exhibited by students are outlined in as great detail as is consistent with the limitations of the method of written exposition and the restrictions of our inadequate knowledge.

Clinical experience and research studies are summarized in such a manner as to reveal to the counselor how he may be of assistance to a student exhibiting a problem. Some chapters include a discussion of one problem only; others include related problems. We have not yet reached the point where we may sharply delineate some problems from others. As a matter of fact, there are so many interrelationships of problems that one may well wonder whether some of our distinctions are not merely verbal.

The author has not been concerned in this book with quibbles over terminology carried on by the "philosophers" of the personnel movement. His more immediate concern has been *what to do* for the student who needs counseling. While clarity of concepts is necessary, other areas of personnel work also require professionalization. Personnel workers at the present time are too much preoccupied with sophistry, and as a result one can find little infor-

mation on *what to do* with a student who seeks counseling. Discussions of techniques would do more to advance the cause of personnel work than does all this semantic shadowboxing. Indeed, facts yielded by personnel research and clinical practice are necessary to the avoidance of sophistry.

In using this book as a text in classes and in clinics for graduate interns, the author suggests two supplementary procedures. First, trainees may be required to participate, as a group, in oral diagnosing of actual student cases. These may be cases not previously diagnosed and counseled or they may be cases given complete counseling assistance. In the latter type of case, the trainees should first orally present their own diagnosis and recommend counseling procedures; then the student's counselor should present his case report. The ensuing conflicts of opinion will prove efficacious to a more critical review of techniques. Second, the trainees may be required to make a case study of one of their own students and to report the results to the class or clinic. Again, the ensuing discussion will provide valuable training to the apprentice counselor. One or both of these teaching techniques should be used in connection with each chapter of this book dealing with types of students' problems.

In the preparation of this book the author drew heavily from the published writings of some personnel workers; acknowledgments are made in the proper place. In dedicating this manual of techniques to D. G. Paterson, the author acknowledges both personal and professional obligations for encouragement and assistance in the development of techniques of clinical counseling. The direct assistance of many other friends is gratefully acknowledged. President W. H. Cowley criticized the first six chapters and made many invaluable suggestions for improvement. Joseph Lepine gave unstintingly the editorial assistance needed with respect to the entire manuscript. Theodore R. Sarbin made helpful criticism of Chaps. I and VIII. S. R. Hathaway, F. S. Beers, Ralph Bedell, Margaret Bennett, Marcia Edwards, and Milton E. Hahn critically reviewed several of the chapters and made helpful suggestions.

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E. G. WILLIAMSON.

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INTRODUCTION

Most of the problems discussed in this book are found among both high-school and college students. Students' problems on these two educational levels, however, often differ in complexity and intensity. For example, the problem of scholastic failure is found on all educational levels but becomes more acute in college because of more rigid enforcement of rules and regulations. The techniques of counseling such a problem are, of course, modified in terms of the educational setting in which the student has his being. A more important modification is necessary in terms of the individuality of the particular student being counseled. In other words, differences among students are far more significant than differences among types of institutions. For this reason, it is not necessary to stress the differences in techniques used by high-school and college counselors. These two types of counselors have far more in common than has been contended in other discussions of techniques.

Experience in counseling college students reveals a large proportion of students who were inadequately counseled in high school and who come to the college counselor with problems growing out of inadequate ability for the type of curricula available in a university. Such students have been permitted *to guide themselves toward unachievable goals* and are subsequently given negative guidance by college teachers in terms of failing marks. Many of these students reach the counselor in such a state of morale that effective counseling is not possible.

Many other students come to the counselor in an emergency situation which demands immediate action. In such cases, it is not possible to devote months and years to assisting the student "to arrive at his own decision." Rightly or wrongly, the educational system demands that immediate action be taken. The non-counseling point of view proves to be totally inappropriate in such a situation, however effective it may be in other cases.

The counselor's function in such cases is not merely that of a passive listener and dispenser of information. To contend that the counselor should never give advice is to be guilty of hasty overgeneralization and of arbitrary and blanket prescription. We have

insisted that, to be effective, the teacher's instruction must be individualized, which means that it must be adapted to the needs of *each* unique personality. In like manner, *the counselor's techniques must be adapted to the individuality of the student.* Some students must be advised directly. Others are counseled indirectly. There is no standard technique of advising appropriate to *all* students.

While counseling techniques should not, and indeed cannot, be standardized, such is not the case with the tools of personnel work. These include tests, questionnaires, case records, and grades, the usefulness and validity of which depend, in part, upon the thoroughness of objective standardization on groups. It is the techniques of applying and interpreting these tools which must not be rigidly standardized. Not only do we know too little of the efficacy of techniques to standardize them, but we cannot ignore the fact that each student's problems demand flexibility and variation in our attempts at counseling. This need for variations in application must not be used, however, as an excuse for failure to experiment in the development of dependable techniques.

Throughout this text, differentiation is made between instructional and counseling techniques. The author recognizes that, ultimately, some phases of present-day counseling may become part of the curriculum and *some* of the individualized methods herein outlined will become the functions of instructors. When that educational Utopia is achieved, personnel workers may direct their efforts exclusively to types of adjustments and problems not amenable to assistance by means of group and instructional methods.

Another differentiation of counselors from teachers should be mentioned. The relationship between clinical counselors and remedial teachers is one of the phases of education where the present-day line of demarcation between personnel work and instruction is extremely tenuous. It might very well be contended that remedial instruction is a personnel specialty of the teacher, although more closely related to instruction than are the other types of personnel specialties. The special province of the clinical counselor embraces, among others, certain types of educational problems, such as the diagnosing of educational aptitudes and interests, remedial work with study skills, and scholastic motivation. The diagnosis and treatment of certain types of learning difficulties by means of diagnostic achievement tests and analysis of errors and correctional instruction is recognized as the special province of the remedial teacher. We have discussed and stressed in many of our chapters the supplementary relationship existing between the clinical coun-

selor and the remedial teacher—an emphasis which has heretofore been neglected in discussions of personnel work.

How to Counsel Students is based upon the principle that individualized methods of assisting students are a most essential part of student personnel work. But such an emphasis does not imply a derogatory attitude toward what is popularly called group guidance or toward others of the many phases of student personnel work. Although the author feels that group guidance is a contradiction in terms, yet there are types of students' adjustments which can be dealt with or brought about only through participation in groups. Such group activities, however, are not the concern of this book. For an excellent and comprehensive outline of all phases of student personnel work in colleges the reader is referred to *A Program of Student Personnel Work for Higher Education* by Esther McD. Lloyd-Jones and Margaret Ruth Smith, McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1938. Those readers who desire more information about the technical details of tests of aptitude, achievement, interest, and personality traits are referred to *Student Guidance Techniques* by D. G. Paterson, G. G. Schneidler, and E. G. Williamson, McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1938. The theory and general procedures of individual counseling with particular reference to educational and vocational guidance is outlined in *Student Personnel Work* by E. G. Williamson and J. G. Darley, McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1937. In this latter book the general procedures and techniques of clinical counseling are described. *How to Counsel Students* is an extended discussion of these clinical procedures.

The restriction of this book to a description of the clinical type of counseling does not imply that other types of personnel work are of less importance. The clinical type is needed to deal with the many complicated maladjustments and to prevent their occurrence. For other types of problems the effective teacher with a personnel point of view and the general counselor may provide adequate services. Other books should be written to describe the problems comprising the personnel functions of the teacher, of the group worker, and of the general counselor or adviser.

In addition to differentiating the functions of clinical counselors from those of other types of personnel workers, it is necessary to understand how the counselor's personnel functions are differentiated from his non-personnel functions, such as instruction. A counselor may, of course, also be a teacher, but this does not mean that instruction is a part of personnel work any more than the fact that some teachers also coach basketball teams means that coaching

is an integral part of teaching. To be sure, there are unique personnel functions which are best performed by teachers; these we have discussed in Chap. II. This does not imply, however, that all types of personnel work are identical with techniques for individualization of instruction. We have contended in Chap. I that the individualization movement in education was a forerunner of certain types of personnel work, and also constitutes, in part at least, the teacher's unique function in personnel work. This does not mean that all teachers, as teachers, can and should perform all of the many other types of personnel functions.

The clinical counselor, whose work is outlined in this book, should be well grounded in the literature of personnel research and preferably carry on research in order to remain critical and informed of new developments in techniques. The diagnostic phase of clinical work, however, must go beyond statistics in its application to particular students. In this sense clinical work is an art and not a science. It is not, however, non- or antiscientific. It is a task in logic, an interpretation of a mass of seemingly inconsistent and irrelevant data in a search for a consistent pattern of meaning. It is also a task in conjuring up suggestions for the student's actions and in inducing students to become eager and willing to cooperate in trying out actions which appear to be promising for the prevention or correction of maladjustments.

But effective counseling involves more than knowing the tools and how they may be used to diagnose, more than grasping the principles and techniques of synthesizing analytical information, and more than perceiving the general techniques a counselor may use in dealing with a student who has a particular type of problem. The written word does not permit description of the many *nonverbalized techniques* used by the counselor, some of which are more effective than the spoken ones. By means of quality, pitch, and inflection of voice, facial expressions and gestures, the counselor conveys meanings to the student and induces motivation. In like manner, behavior patterns exhibited by the student in the interview are subtle but vitally important diagnostic data for the counselor's understanding of that student. No printed or spoken words can describe such techniques. One can only insist that they are as important as are any tests or cumulative records.

It is regrettable that we have no words in our language which are sufficiently multidimensional to describe the complex and often confused interrelationships of students' problems and of relationships obtaining between students and counselors. While it is true

that in actual practice students are not and cannot be fragmented into separate problems, yet one can do little more with written words than to make such a statement.

In delineating types of student problems and the clinical counselor's techniques for dealing with them, there are three possible approaches. One way is to discuss each problem from the standpoint of the specialist who deals with this particular problem. For example, health problems could be discussed from the standpoint of the physician, and psychiatric problems could be discussed from the standpoint of the psychiatrist. The second method is to treat each problem from the standpoint of the general counselor who is not a specialist in any field and who is not professionally trained to deal with medical or psychiatric problems. Such a treatment would result in describing students' problems in terms of what knowledge the general counselor needs to possess in order to identify these problems and refer them to the specialist. The general counselor would need to know only enough of the specialty to be able to identify problems and to understand what the specialist can do. A third possible type of exposition is based upon the recognition that the clinical counselor is his own specialist in dealing with certain types of students' problems and a layman with regard to others. This third type of treatment is the one used in this book since it is more nearly representative of the actual practice of clinical counseling today.

Consistent with this conception the clinical counselor, in dealing with students' health problems for instance, needs to know: (1) how to identify them; (2) how to anticipate the outcomes of medical treatment; and (3) how to determine the relationship between health problems and social, educational, emotional, and vocational adjustments.

Similarly, with regard to placement services, he should distinguish between the functions of the clinical counselor and those of the placement counselor. Concerning reading disabilities, he should distinguish between the functions of the clinical counselor and the remedial specialist. And in handling personality problems, the work of the clinical counselor is differentiated from that of the psychiatrist.

There are, however, specialties other than those just mentioned which belong particularly to the clinical counselor. These include occupational diagnosis and orientation and the counseling of certain types of educational, social, and attitudinal problems. In these areas, the clinical counselor may be his own specialist, although he

will call upon other specialists for assistance with concomitant problems.

A further point should be made concerning the relationship of the clinical counselor and the specialist with regard to such problems as psychiatric disturbances, reading disabilities, graduate placement, and health problems, in which areas personnel specialists have already been established. For dealing with such problems, the clinical counselor has usually not been professionally trained, although certain individual counselors may have developed more than one specialty. It is our conception, however, that the usual clinical counselor is not professionally trained for dealing with the above types of problems. He has the same type of relationship to such specialists as the general counselor has to the clinical counselor. He identifies but does not diagnose; he refers the student to the specialist and reviews the findings of the specialists in regard to the students' other adjustments.

In reading the chapters on types of students' problems, the reader will note frequent references to the above allocation of functions and recognition of different specializations of personnel workers.

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