
CASE STUDIES of NORMAL ADOLESCENT GIRLS

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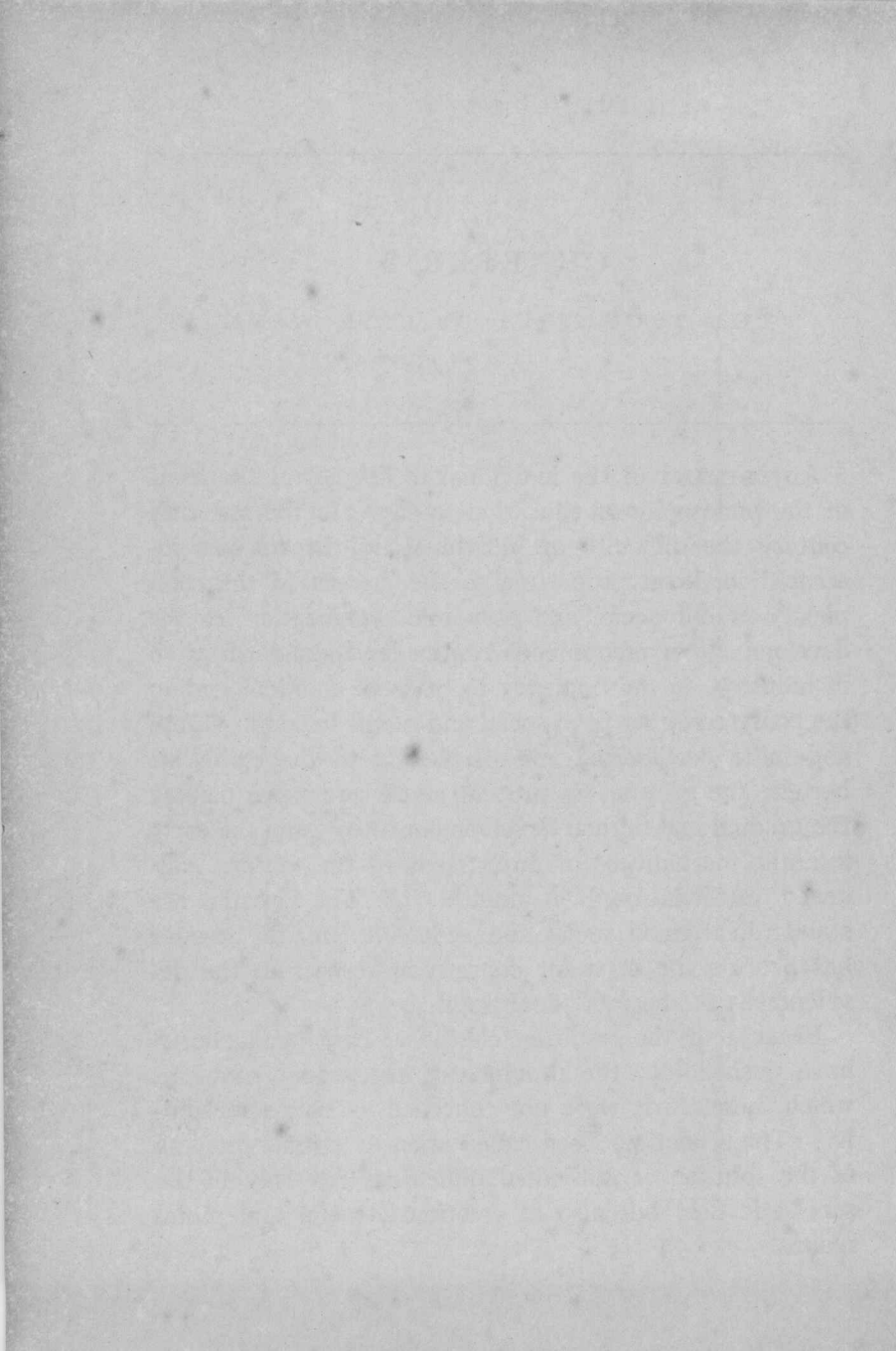


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CHAPTER I

THE TECHNIQUE OF CASE WORK

ADJUSTMENT of the individual to life lies at the basis of the philosophy of education to-day. In the last half century the difficulty of individual adjustment has increased in direct proportion to the growth of the complexity of our social and economic organization, to the development of monotonous routine and standardization in industry, to the tendency to mass production, and to the laxity resulting from social and moral freedom. More and more bewildering and perplexing to the child has become the growing-up process, more and more baffling the gradual and normal development away from the early infantile mechanisms of adjustment to the mature, balanced methods used in adulthood. The greater the standardization in social and economic life, the greater has become the need for concern in respect to the development of the individual pupil.

Because of the resulting confusion home and church have pushed into the province of the school problems which, heretofore, were not conceded as its responsibility. The school has been called upon to assume the task of the solution of individual difficulties not only in the scholastic field but also in emotional, social and moral realms.

Economic changes revolutionary in character have crowded the schools with vast enrollments and have brought under educational supervision a far greater variety of students. In consequence, the individual has been neglected. Not neglected, perhaps, in the teaching of subject matter, but certainly overlooked in the delicate and intimate adjustments of life.

In order to meet the various demands which have arisen and to satisfy the growing feeling that the school is one of the very best agencies to help the individual to solve his varied problems, educational thinking has broadened and expanded. Attention has been directed toward the scholastic problems of individual differences, to segregation of pupils according to ability, to extensive programs of extracurricular activities, to character education, and to vocational guidance.

As a result of this stimulation there have come into the school systems of this country all types of special guidance officers—the director of personnel, dean of girls, dean of boys, educational counselor, vocational counselor, visiting teacher, supervisor of health education, director of character education. The function of each of these officers is to give to each individual the specific guidance which he particularly needs to help him make the most satisfying and satisfactory adjustment to his environment.

Because of emergency situations, or community pressure, or the overenthusiastic zeal of administrators, many of these officers have been imposed, as it were, upon the established educational system without the adequate definition of duties or the proper demarcation of fields of work. Overlapping of function of these guidance officers

has been wasteful, confusing and irritating. In most school systems the personnel work has been successful only because the various members of the staff have happened to agree temperamentally. When they have not been compatible, the result has been internal conflict and friction.

In spite of overlapping, friction and petty jealousies, the school through these guidance officers has handled admirably certain phases of adjustment. Difficulties common to all pupils have been well taken care of through group conferences, various types of girls' and boys' clubs, Big Sister and Big Brother schemes, sponsor organizations and home room plans. But it is very rare that actual individual difficulties have been studied. It is granted that most children find their way through school according to expectation. Yet every educator, whether in a large or small school, knows that he is daily confronted with cases of serious scholastic failure, of emotional maladjustment, of physical disorder or of social inadequacy, types of maladjustment so fundamental that there is need of individual attention and necessity for scientific pedagogical case work.

The argument has been and in many communities still is that this type of work is too expensive both in time and money. School budgets are too small. Yet the argument should have little validity. Is it economic wisdom to provide funds only for the correction of the mischief which has already been done? Communities, states and the nation are all pouring out vast sums for the upkeep of juvenile courts, detention homes, reformatories, jails, penitentiaries, sanitariums and asylums. Yet appropriations for the study of individual difficulties in their

incipiency are denied. How long is preventive and corrective work in our schools to be considered educational waste?

There is little coöperative study of the individual with an expert in charge to see the individual as a whole. There is a crying need for the officer trained to gather materials, to weigh their values, to coördinate and correlate the findings, to pronounce a diagnosis, and to prescribe treatment for the pedagogical case problem. The difficulties of human relationship and adjustment are worthy of the same careful, scientific scrutiny and study as is being given physical adjustment to-day by the medical diagnostician.

To the later specialist, each patient is an individual case with certain hereditary susceptibilities, tendencies and definite individual reactions to exciting agencies. As a result the physical well-being of the patient is restored only by a thorough study of the patient from every possible angle.

In the same way the pedagogical case-worker, diagnostician in the educational field, must individualize his problems and by study of the pupil from every possible angle discover his peculiar susceptibilities, tendencies, reactions and fundamental disorders.

An enlightening analogy can be made to the work of the medical diagnostician and his relation to other experts in the same field. Although there are numerous specialists, such as X-ray and laboratory technicians, research workers, nurses, physicians of special organs, there is no serious overlapping of function. Each has his specific problem to investigate and the knowledge gained through the various contributory fields becomes the tool

of the correlator, the diagnostician. He takes the essential findings of each specialist, interprets the data contributed in the light of the individual patient and as a result of the correlation makes his final decision or diagnosis.

Just so the educational diagnostician or pedagogical case-worker becomes the correlator of the materials and findings of the experts in various educational fields.

The diagram on page 8 will illustrate the comparison.

WHAT TYPE OF PROBLEM IS THE PROPERTY OF THE PEDAGOGICAL CASE-WORKER?

Every administrator is aware of the fact that our schools have in their enrollment young adolescents in every degree of maladjustment. He has observed the quiet, retiring youngster who does class work well but who is seclusive, unhappy, burdened and moody; the mean, jealous person who constantly creates disturbance in the group; the egocentric, superior, supercilious pupil who makes himself obnoxious and unpopular; the compensator who lies, steals and plays truant; the pupil of low mentality who cannot accomplish nor find satisfaction in academic work; and the pupil who has ability but who has trouble with learning due to all sorts of emotional upsets or to lack of sufficient preparation. This seething mass of misfits, striving each in his own way to gain the feeling of equality and the happiness of security, provides a great many problems. The competent school now has to assume the responsibility of teaching them not only academic subjects but also instructing them in how to behave, how to mingle with their fellows, and how to

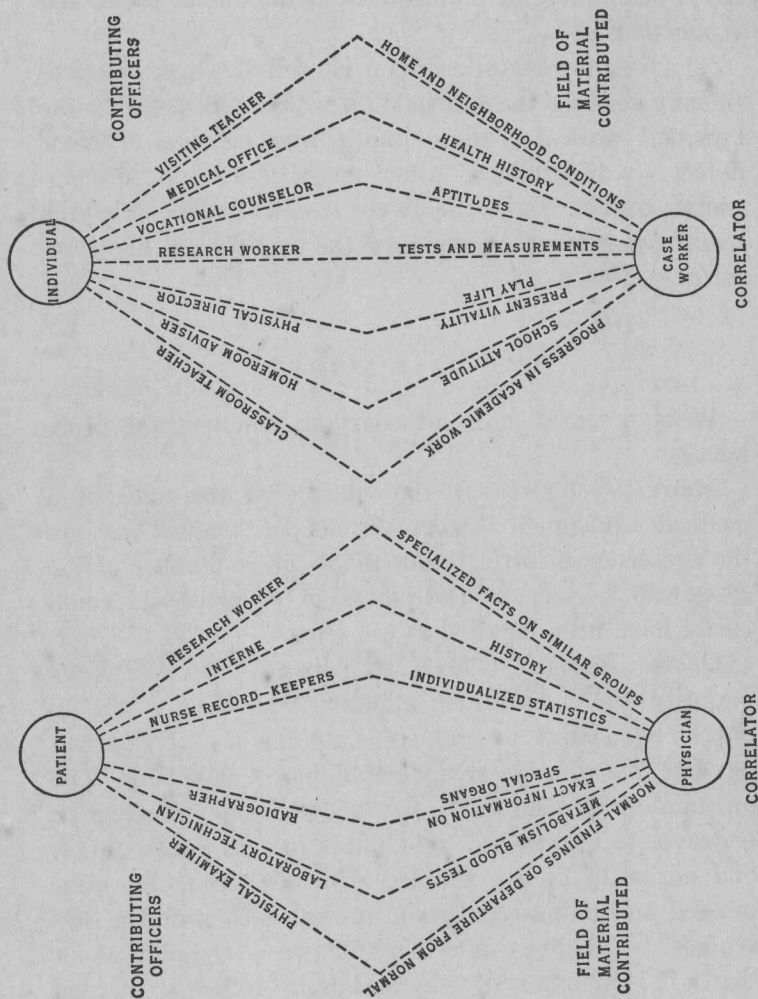


DIAGRAM OF ANALOGOUS FUNCTIONS OF MEDICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL DIAGNOSTICIAN

adapt themselves to the complex conditions of social and economic life.

The case-worker takes upon himself the task of scientifically seeking the information which will assist in the remedial work for those pupils who because of some defect or disturbance, either mental, physical or emotional, cannot study effectively, cannot make satisfying social contacts or cannot face the realities of life comfortably.

THE CASE-WORKER

What preparation is necessary to handle these problems?

Many psychiatrists to-day state that the tools of a medical adjustment worker are not so complex nor are the problems so intricate but that a great number of the cases which come to the offices of psychiatrists could easily have been handled in the school.

Doctor Bernard Glueck has stated: "In the large majority of maladjusted children who finally get to psychiatric clinics the problem is not one of psychopathology but that of a better understanding of the child. The outstanding element in the psychiatrist's equipment in an endeavor to understand the child is just an honest intent and desire to do so, coupled with a thoroughly open-minded and unbiased attitude toward each problem presented."¹ There is indeed nothing very complex about that. It is human sympathy and desire to help combined

¹ Bernard Glueck, *Some Extra-Curricular Problems of the Classroom*, Joint Committee on Methods of Preventing Delinquency, Publication No. 34 (50 East 42nd St., New York City).

with some scientific knowledge and some technical procedure of studying cases which is the whole equipment the case-worker needs.

First and foremost, the case-worker should be a teacher with good training and adequate experience in the principles and practices of teaching, with knowledge of the theory of education, and with some background in educational psychology. Inasmuch as the scientific study of an individual touches the whole horizon of human experience the work makes inroads into the contiguous territories of social service, medicine and psychiatry. The case-worker cannot, of course, be expected to be an expert in all these fields, but he should be aware of the problems and contributions of the specialists in them. The best preparation for the work will include special training and extensive reading relative to tests and measurement, nutrition work with children, mental and physical growth, principles of social work, medical and social psychiatry, and psychopathology.

Assuming that a case-worker has acquired the scientific and technical foundation and background required for effective diagnosing there are still certain characteristics which must be possessed to carry on pedagogical case work successfully:

1. The first requisite is common sense, that quality which gives balance in judgment of essentials and nonessentials and makes one realize when a case should go out from the jurisdiction of the school and be brought into contact with medical and psychiatric specialists.

2. One must like and understand people and must enjoy dealing with all types of individuals. Unless a worker has these qualities and can show them, case work will be but a cold, perfunctory and profitless procedure.

3. To evaluate the real character of another person and to discern what he may be trying to hide requires strong intuitive faculties.

4. Originality in questioning is most essential.

5. Keeness in detecting clues to a solution of the problem, alertness in following valid suggestions and accuracy in collecting data differentiate the expert from the novice.

6. One must be capable of not only compiling data but also of using and interpreting the compiled data intelligently.

7. A reasonably good memory is an asset for there will be need to carry accurately in one's mind the various details, clues and relationships of the different witnesses contributing to the investigation. Note-taking during a conference formalizes the procedure and is usually out of place.

8. The manner of speech and action of the worker should inspire confidence and create ease.

9. The worker must strive to be impersonal, unbiased and unemotional toward all facts and situations presented, as prejudice and undue sentimentality and emotion make the acquiring of information almost impossible and prove to be serious deterrents in interpreting the facts after they have been secured.

10. The art of being close-mouthed is the *sine qua non* of an efficient case-worker.

METHODS OF COLLECTING MATERIALS

1. *Individual Folder*

Adjustment in pupils is variable and inconstant because of the fluctuating reactions of an individual to his ever-changing environment. The pupil who is not a problem to-day may be poorly adjusted to-morrow. Adjustment is not static. Therefore, every case-worker should have easy of access a folder for each individual under his

charge, and bit by bit he should accumulate the significant evidences of the changes and growth taking place in the pupil. Tardiness, frequent absence, failure in courses, misbehavior and a score of other items may seem to be of little significance at the time but when studied in connection with other factors or when viewed each in the light of the other, they may be full of meaning. The importance of keeping detailed information on each pupil cannot be overemphasized.

2. *The Personal Interview*

In the collecting of material the guidance officer is dependent to a great extent upon the personal interview. Executives in business, psychiatrists, physicians and social workers have all proved that the interview is an absolute necessity. In guidance work one may have secured much valuable evidence in the results of tests of physical fitness, of mental alertness, of emotional balance and of educational achievement. These remain, however, bare skeletons unless vitalized by a personal interview with the pupil. So much is at stake in these personal contacts that the utmost care must be used in planning them. First, if files and folders are to be used they must be easily accessible. Unless the case-worker has in his mind the purpose of the interview, it is very apt to become merely a haphazard conversation, pointless and wasteful. The conciseness of statement, the clearness of purpose, the careful weighing of evidence by the better judges in the courts is in sharp contrast to the dawdling, evasive, long drawn out pseudo-interviews practiced by many personnel workers.

The human equation is one of the most vital factors in

the interview. Each individual is a dynamic personality who is the product of his heredity, his background and his life experiences, the things which appeal to him and those things which antagonize him. The personality of each individual plays upon the other. Until *rappport* has been established there is little chance to proceed with the collecting of materials. Laird says that the ideal attitude in establishing the right atmosphere seems to be one of quiet understanding with avoidance of emotional tone, but evidence of friendly interest. A feeling of comfortableness, security and trust must be present to warrant even the first steps toward discovering the basis of the real trouble.

The choice of the time and place of the interview is exceedingly important. Postponement, even indefinitely, is usually preferable to an attempt to adjust matters under unfavorable circumstances. Absolute privacy, some semblance of comfortableness and quiet are the requisites of the place. In selecting the time both the worker and the pupil must be considered. When will there be the least fatigue on the part of both? When will the attention of each be least absorbed in other tasks or pleasures? When will there be the least hurry, worry and nervous tension on the part of each? These are the elements which can make or break the interview.

The aim of the interview should be to find out what is working underneath, what is the real trouble, what is the pupil's own story? Usually the problem pupil has a surface and a buried story. To the ordinary observer he presents an exterior which is misleading and completely conceals the fundamental difficulty. The hidden story of the personal difficulty must be brought to the surface.

At intervals there will be clues of the inner story breaking through into the surface story. The case-worker should be alert to all these clues as they appear. Furthermore, there should be, at times, definite stimulation and the use of all sorts of incentives to reach the climax by presentation of facts which one knows will bring certain responses and further clues. The pupil must be permitted to talk himself out so that the hidden story may at last reach the surface one.

ADMONITIONS TO INTERVIEWERS

1. A cross-examination attitude gets nowhere. An interview which consists of prescribed questions and answers is obviously a crude affair and does not yield the hidden story which is ascertained indirectly rather than as a result of direct interrogation. Avoid "grilling."

2. One must be patient, painstaking and slow to advance for there is no short cut to results. Dr. Miriam Van Waters says: ² "Of all facts known to social workers about human life, facts which deal with changing human behavior yield up their secrets with the most reluctance."

3. Avoid sentimentality. The sympathetic attitude must not be carried so far as to distort the judgment of the worker or to make him incapable of getting at the facts of the case.

4. Helen Myrick says: "The person at all times during the interview must be looked upon as an individual. He is not an inanimate object who is to be worked upon by the expert. The interview should be a dialogue in its true sense, not a 'sales-talk monologue.'"

5. The mere passing over the threshold of an office often causes a pupil's behavior to be far from normal. This is particularly true if the interview tends to be of an inquisitorial

² *Youth in Conflict*, p. 178.

character. Reactions under such circumstances are seldom true indications of what might happen under more natural conditions.

6. In this interplay of human personalities the law of instinctive imitation is very active. The same emotion which is observed in the worker is very apt to be awakened within the pupil. If the former is angry, calm or cheerful the same quality is apt to come out in the interviewee.

7. Beware of prejudice. It is a well-known fact that previous associations of physical and mental characteristics definitely affect the impressions made by the pupil upon the case-worker. That is to say, the worker must be constantly on guard against the human tendency of association of some mannerism, some feature, certain type of posture or some external peculiarity in *another* person with the same mannerism in the *new* person being interviewed. This law, known as conditioned reactions, if not recognized will seriously affect the results of the interview.

8. The first and hardest lesson to learn about people is that one who needs help can be helped only if he wants to be helped. There is no such thing as making an adjustment for somebody else.

9. At no time should the pupil be labeled a problem.

3. *Witnesses*

In the complete investigation of any problem the worker must come in contact with agencies and individuals outside of the province of the school. This contact is fraught with difficulty and must be made with the utmost care and discretion. Because of the frailties of human nature the mere mention of any difficulty connected with an individual can cause flights of imagination, maligning scandal and pernicious gossip in many witnesses. This is particularly true if the case-worker carelessly throws out suggestions or resorts to leading questions. Evidence