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ABSTRACT

This report discusses one of the consistent problems in school counseling and guidance-that of furnishing concrete evidence concerning the effects of counseling and guidance activities on the development of children. The following causal factors are discussed: (1) the difficulty of pinning down abstractly stated goals in an operational manner at evaluation time; and (2) the history of the guidance movement in schools. Guidance is viewed as a program, and not merely as a set of services. The use of specific activities, with specific goals, simplifies the task of evaluation. A "Career Visit" form, with examples of actual student reactions, and a parent conference guide form are included. (Author/JLL)

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EVALUATING GUIDANCE ACTIVITIES

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One of the consistent problems in school counseling and guidance has been the problem of furnishing to ourselves and to our colleagues, patrons, and employers concrete evidence concerning the effects of counseling and guidance activities on the development of children in school. Part of this problem has perhaps been due to the fact that general counseling and guidance goals are often so abstractly stated as to be difficult to pin down operationally at evaluation time. Such terms as "maximum development," "wise decision-making," or "self-actualization," which appear frequently in goal statements, do not lend themselves well to the formulation of criteria which can be used to determine how well children attain guidance goals. General guidance goals are usually concerned with total individual development and do not emphasize growth in one specific area (Lee and Pallone, 1966, p. 79-80). While other aspects of the school curriculum may be examined by tracing children's development in terms of highly specific skills, understandings or competencies, the guidance program has been concerned with growth which may seem less easy to specify. We may be able to agree, for example, on the elements of a sound decision-making process, and to measure somehow the extent to which children can use the process; but it is another thing to determine whether decisions they arrive at by such processes are "wise" or "realistic." At this latter point values usually come into play and agreement on satisfactory outcome criteria becomes difficult to achieve.

Another part of the problem, I think, is related to the history of the guidance movement in schools. Although a few local systems had developed guidance programs as early as the pre-depression years, the vast majority did not get counselors until after the National Defense Education Act of 1958, when a "crash program" was implemented to draw school persons into the counseling and guidance field, train them, and get guidance programs started on a wide scale. At the time of the Wisconsin Counseling Study, for example, (Rothney, 1958) it was relatively easy to locate a group of secondary schools in the state which had no counselors employed. Thus an experimental program involving "counseled" and "uncounseled" students could be done. Currently one would be hard put to do such a study, since virtually all secondary schools have counselors.

Guidance departments which developed in early years of the movement usually grew from within local systems and were the results of local

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school leadership. Such programs were often highly structured and involved a number of programmed activities developed by the guidance staff and systematically delivered to students. Even today they often retain this characteristic.

Guidance departments which have developed since 1957, however, have more often been the result of "outside" influences. State or national education agency leadership, financial incentives, and legal or regional association requirements have been the major impetus behind employment of counselors in many systems. Where this is the case there may have been very little clear thinking in the system about what counselors would be expected to accomplish and what processes would be implemented to attain guidance goals. Oftentimes in such systems guidance appears to be regarded more as a set of services than as a structured program. For reasons which I hope will become clear below, these latter situations are much more difficult to evaluate than are the former.

It is now true that in Wisconsin, as in many states, local school systems are required to have counselors and to provide "guidance and counseling" for all grade levels. This is true whether or not there is any local agreement on what school counselors are supposed to accomplish. At policy-making levels, then, guidance is still receiving very good support. Unfortunately that support seems to have furnished us with very little incentive to show what we are accomplishing with youngsters. Although growth and development of pupils is systematically assessed in other curricular areas, it is almost never assessed in guidance areas. We have established very few benchmarks to show how children progress on the dimensions guidance people profess to be interested in.

Where, in a very general way, should children be in their vocational development at, say, the end of grade three? What activities have we implemented which are designed to help them get there? How do we learn which children have attained the expected level of development? How do we learn which activities are most productive in terms of the children's vocational development during early school years?

Where should children be at the end of grade six? Grade nine? Grade twelve? These general questions, based on our general thoughts about what we try to do in schools, must be asked in relation to the personal, social, vocational, and educational development areas which guidance people claim as their areas of expertise. If one asks these questions seriously and makes a serious effort to answer even a few of them satisfactorily, one becomes impressed with the monumental task which lies ahead for many school counselors. It is a task of planning, delivering, and evaluating a coherent program of guidance activities. Ideally this program will be based on some theory or set of beliefs about how children develop, about what the school's responsibility is in their development, and about what school-organized experiences may help them

develop in the areas of concern to guidance.

It should be obvious by this time that I view guidance as a program and not merely as a set of services. It is a program which we organize and deliver. Although some features of the guidance program may appear to be services which we provide for those who want or need them, the primary thrust of guidance cannot be achieved unless we develop our programs as a part of the curriculum, with ordered experiences for all children, aimed at specific learning objectives, and subject to assessment that reveals not only what happened to specific individuals but also how well groups of children progress toward goals.

It is obvious that many teachers, administrators, and counselors view guidance and counseling as a remedial activity. Only when some problem develops do they think about the counselor as a possible resource person. Many children view it this way too. They hesitate to show up in the guidance office lest their classmates think something is wrong. I once heard a prominent and successful school superintendent in Wisconsin say, "We don't have elementary counselors in our schools. I can't see what they would do that is not already being done by school psychologists and social workers." This statement probably makes good sense to anyone who views guidance and counseling as a crisis intervention service. It does not make sense to those who believe guidance is a developmental program.

Some people talk about <u>prevention</u> as a major thrust of counseling and guidance. It is inevitably disconcerting to such persons to ask, "Prevent what?" When I hear guidance talked about as preventive, I am reminded of an old gag about a man who often visited the north Chicago home of a friend. Upon taking leave of the friend he always said, "May the Lord keep tigers off your doorstep." After this invocation had been repeated on a number of occasions, the friend finally asked, "Why do you say that every time you leave here?"

"To keep tigers away from your door," said the man.

"Well, said the friend, "do you think that ritual makes any difference?"

"It must," smiled the man. "You haven't been having trouble with any tigers, have you?"

It is said that one cannot argue with success, but when some preventive ritual is evaluated using the above reasoning, some persons might take exception. How do you evaluate guidance activities in terms of things that <u>don't</u> happen? Do we have anything like the Salk vaccine which can be evaluated in such terms? I think not.

Guidance people are not in schools to prevent things from happening. Nor are they in schools to wait for things to happen. They are there to make things happen. Hopefully, if they do their work well, fewer problems will develop in situations where problems develop unnecessarily, or people will handle problems more effectively when they do arise. But problems should not be the primary point of contact for counselors. So long as they are, counselors have little or no control over the nature of their impact on students. Counselors need to organize and deliver learning experiences aimed at positive development of students. This is the only aspect of guidance work that is subject to control by guidance people. As such it is the only proper focus. All other things are incidental.

Once this principle has been clearly understood, the task of evaluation is greatly simplified. Once we have said what we want to try to accomplish, we can set specific activities in motion to try to accomplish it. Then all that remains is to determine whether the results are satisfactory to us and our colleagues. We devise specific activities with specific goals in mind, and we look for evidence that specific kinds of things have or have not been achieved.

A simple example or two may help illustrate how evaluation data are extracted from the activity itself, and how the material we use for evaluation may serve originally as a learning exercise for students.

Suppose we have implemented a program to help children discover facts about vocations by visiting with people actually engaged in those vocations. We get a list of persons in the community who represent a wide variety of career fields, and we secure their cooperation in the program. Then we systematically discover from students what their current career interests are, so that we can refer them to appropriate community resource persons.

We then schedule time with these persons for student visits or interviews. Quite a number of students take part in the program, either by interviewing a resource person or by spending one or more days "shadowing" the person on the job. We would like to know whether this program is helpful to students in learning things they need to know about careers.

As a simple followup activity we ask students to give us their reactions to the visits. These reactions may be written or oral, and the assignment may be highly structured, semi-structured, or unstructured, but reactions should be expected and obtained from every student who participates. The assignment serves three purposes: (1) it requires the student to organize and report his/her thoughts about what was learned; (2) it furnishes evaluation data; and (3) it provides implications for followup activities or program changes.

Below is one simple assignment devised to follow career visits, and several examples of actual student reactions:

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
Research and Guidance Laboratory

CAREER VISIT

Name Bernard W. Date October 19, 1967

Name of professor Mr. Jones

Office address 3321 Sterling

Professional field Physics

In what specific area of this field are you most interested?

Nuclear physics

Please comment on your impressions of the visit:

No. 1:

"The visit and interview I had with Mr. Jones was interesting and informative as to the Physics field which he represented. Mr. Jones first made a general outline as to the specific classes that a Physics student would be required to take during the four years of undergraduate work. He explained the type of work and education that you would encounter during the four years of study. It gave me an idea as to what to expect if I go into that field of study. What Mr. Jones said was encouraging and answered some of the questions of doubts I had about a course in Physics. I now have a good idea as to what to expect as far as classes and work are in this line.

"Mr. Jones was open to any questions I would ask and answered them very completely. When I had run out of questions and he didn't have anything more, he took me through the Physics building and provided me with an interesting account as to what was taking place in each department. The tour was very much to my liking and gave me a chance to observe the work being done as well as the equipment used."

No. 2:

"The interview was one of the most informative half-hours I have spent. I learned that the law profession isn't nearly as crowded as I had heard. He explained that the number of law graduates today is about the same as 10 years ago and that they are spread over a wide variety of fields.

"I also learned that an early decision about going into law isn't necessary. I was urged to get a broad, liberal arts education and not to worry about a final decision. English and Social Studies are most important.

"The interview was valuable to me because it helped me to crystallize some ideas I had been developing."

No. 3:

"I was favorably impressed by my interview with Mrs. C. I felt that she knew her field very well and gave me some of the answers I sought.

"She had graduated from Miami University in Ohio and told me about its program in Social Work. She felt that, there as almost everywhere, the first step to becoming a Social Worker was the acquiring of a B.A. in sociology but that to get good jobs and be proficient a master's in Social Work was required.

"She also outlined some of the things she had done, such as working with the Urban League in Chicago and as a case worker. She told me which she liked best and why, and the things I might be expected to do in the various branches of Social Work."

No. 4:

"The interview itself was interesting yet not that informing. The doctor seemed either pressed for time or not very interested in relating his knowledge of the medical field. I asked questions and he answered them reasonably well with little or no elaboration. I didn't have many questions, so the interview didn't last very long. I enjoyed it yet I don't know that it was that beneficial to me."

No. 5:

"After freezing while walking to Van Vleck Hall, I had to clear 'security' before my professor could be reached. Finally, I entered his office and spent most of the ten minutes discussing college math courses.

"Comment on the discussion--valuable, but the professor was unprepared to meet me."

It can be seen from the above illustrations that a wide variety of experiences may result from the same procedure. On the basis of large numbers of reactions such as the above we may determine that:

1. Students and/or resource persons may need some pre-interview preparation regarding the kinds of questions to deal with in a career interview.

2. Some resource persons, even though they say they are interested, should be deleted from the list to whom we refer students.

3. In some situations we need to allow time or make advance preparations in such things as security clearance.

4. In general, the procedure is worth doing.

Thus the reaction assignment serves as a small thought problem for the student concerning how he/she profited from the visit, and at the same time it furnishes us with evidence of what happens because we carry on the program. In later years we may determine if actual career choice is related to the program, since all basic data we need to discover this is now recorded.

Another example is drawn from the attempts of the Research and Guidance Laboratory counselors to systematize parent contacts. After considerable experience in working with parents, the following guide to parent conferences was devised (see next page).

The left side of the form is completed at the time the counselor is working with the student. This may be done solely by the counselor, or it may be done jointly with the student. When completed, it becomes a basic guide to use when conducting the conference.

The right side is completed at the time of the conference. Any topics which the parents bring up, but which were not originally on the guide are recorded also. Parents' reactions, points of view, and stated intentions regarding any of the topics are recorded briefly immediately following the conference.

Student #_____

Name of student_____ School_____ Grade_____

Date of student interview_____ Date of parent interview_____

Student counselor_____ Parent interviewer_____

Attended parent conference: Mother only ( ) Father only ( ) Both ( ) Other ( )

If other than parents, explain:_____

The following topics are often covered in parent interviews. Any one may or may not be considered at any session, and others may be added:

1. Work and study habits
2. Choice of subjects
3. School activities
4. Community and church activities
5. Use of leisure time
6. Occupational choice
7. Choice of post-high school education
8. Financing college
9. Reading practices
10. Test interpretation
11. Nature of the guidance program
12. Part-time employment

Counselor's recommendation for discussion with parents.	Parents' remarks and reactions.
1.	1. Was topic discussed? ( ) Yes ( ) No
2.	2. Was topic discussed? ( ) Yes ( ) No
3.	3. Was topic discussed? ( ) Yes ( ) No

Later, by checking back with parents, their children, or others it is possible to determine whether any action was taken as a result of the conference. Research on the effects of parent conferences where this form was used have led to implications for how counselors should approach parents on topics where parental action is desired (Camp and Rothney, 1970; Henjum and Rothney, 1969; Jessell and Rothney, 1965).

Almost any guidance activity can be evaluated by simple means such as those shown above. It is not necessary to design highly scientific and tightly controlled experiments. Our needs are fairly practical, and our approaches to evaluation can be quite pragmatic. We need to say what we want to try to accomplish. We need to document the things we do to try to accomplish it. Then we need to find out what effects our procedures had on attitudes, concepts, skills, plans, or actions which were of interest. Professional journals contain a number of other examples of this type of evaluation which has been demonstrated at the Research and Guidance Laboratory, University of Wisconsin (e.g., Sanborn and Niemiec, 1971; Smaby and Sanborn, 1971; Davis and Sanborn, 1973; Koeppe and Rothney, 1963).

If we do this job activity by activity, we have all we need to use in reporting on our entire program. And we have the information we need to improve what we do. Furthermore, because all those involved in the program have been regularly furnishing the information, we have fewer folks asking penetrating questions about how we earn our salt, and we enjoy better understanding of others regarding how they can function in helping children achieve guidance goals.

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