

The Vocational Guidance Magazine

Published for the Association by the BUREAU OF VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE, GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, HARVARD UNIVERSITY, Issued eight times a year, from October to May inclusive.

\$2.50 a year, 35 cents a copy.

Motive and Risk in Counseling

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At least three factors have aroused the present critical interest in vocational purpose and educational aim. I need engage your attention but briefly to recall them to mind. We are told with increasing frequency that our social structure is changing. Publicists generally make mention of industrial changes, of the urbanization of our people, and of the changes in methods of communication and transportation. The difference between modern agriculture, industry, commerce, and service, and these activities of half a century ago, are described for us with a wealth of detail. Coincident with these, institutional changes are also discussed at length. Writers argue pro and con over the loss of the external sanctions of earlier days. They cite as evidences increased lawlessness, disregard for parental control, and greater freedom in personal relations.

Among those associations which undertake to develop the character of our youth, emphasis shifts from older moral and religious sanctions to so-called areas of conflict and 'hot spots' in our social structure. Objectives of the leaders appear to center in efforts to sensitize our youth to these social problems and to activate them with respect to their rather immediate solutions. In education, as well as in these other institutions just mentioned, counseling as a vocation likewise undertakes to stimulate similar phenomena in individuals. These two processes, centering attention on conflicts in our social structure and on lack of adjustment in individuals, seem to constitute techniques and methods for those who would construct a new social order out of the present chaos.

Coincident with the social changes to which I have alluded, and perhaps re-

lated both as cause and effect to them, is the extraordinary specialization of modern economic and educational life. It would take us far beyond the limits of this paper, and certainly beyond the ability of the writer, to describe the rapid increase in the number of subdivisions in life's activities and the minute partitioning of subject matter in the curricula of our educational institutions. Suffice it to say, that today hundreds of vocations are available where previously no more than one or two existed. It is equally true that literally hundreds of courses are offered on many different subjects where only a few or none once appeared.

No merely human sense of values could possibly withstand the shock of such a transformation. For many people, the external sanctions previously offered by religion vanish, vocations become impossible to evaluate, and subjects of study are simply kaleidoscopic.

The third factor of significance in the problem of counseling is the development of the field of individual differences. In a broad way, individual differences constitute nothing new in the social structure. However, with the advent of experimentation and measurement in psychology the whole character of our attitude towards individual differences has changed. Individual differences are no longer merely matters of cursory observation and literary expression. Their discovery and exploitation are no longer quite entirely limited to expert observation by persons specially adapted to the task. There is, in other words, a definite body of knowledge to be drawn upon for training practical counselors and those who wish to do further research. To be sure, this body of exact knowledge is severely limited in its scope and often vague on precisely the point needed to be most clearly

defined. Its subject matter is often highly controversial, and relative to other disciplines we are in the most primitive stages of knowledge about human individuals. Among 'thin' courses, counseling is of the thinnest. Notwithstanding this paucity of accurate information, the new attitude towards individual differences is extremely potent in influencing counseling procedures. To it and its corollaries in educational and industrial personnel we may, though not necessarily with pride, trace the great increase in advisers of all sorts.

The ferment aroused by our awareness of the changing social structure, of the great variety of subject and occupational specialization, and by our new attitude towards individual differences, is the source out of which has arisen this new occupation. These factors have also stirred other than educators to a renewed interest in the processes of education. More people today are concerned with the educational program than ever before in our history. The older social institutions, the new ones, industry, business, and even philanthropy, are turning their attention to the products of our schools. All seek the causes of social ills in the educational system. The counselor may become the liaison officer between the educational factor throughout all of its levels, and the other factors in social life, if he has the vision. Thus, important questions arise regarding his possible significance as such an officer. It is to two or three of these questions that I wish to turn now.

One of the striking characteristics of the present social order is the increased risk that confronts every individual. The social structure no longer offers that close contact with the necessities of life it formerly did. Any stoppage in the present machinery at once reveals

a large number of individuals whose almost entire existence is dependent upon the continued operation of that machinery. These individuals have absolutely nothing but philanthropic relief between them and all the risks to which life is subject when the wheels of industry cease turning. Such a situation constitutes a human risk which probably never existed before in such acute form.

To avoid these evil consequences, we seek to reduce unemployment, to alleviate suffering, and to find means for preventing the stoppage of the machinery. Simultaneously, we discuss the desirability or undesirability of pensions, old age insurance, unemployment insurance, governmental interference, mutual benefit associations, and the like. In broad outline, it is such basic problems in the reduction of risk that the counselor is expected to solve by furthering the development and adjustment of individuals.

Increasingly, the counselor is expected to know those occupations wherein numbers are decreasing, wherein opportunities are closing, and wherein the conditions of work are injurious to human life. Furthermore, he is expected to know those groups of occupations which knit together in ways that will permit easy transition from one to another. By some means he is expected to reduce the risk involved in the high degree of specialization of occupation. He is expected to discover leaders who will in turn discover means to eliminate all future social risk. He is expected to analyze the maze of impulses, abilities, interests and ambitions of each individual and, with the correct analysis before him, to synthesize these and to focus the attention of the individual upon that part of the field of occupations which will guarantee the

greatest personal satisfaction and the greatest good to society.

Granted that this has been accepted as the central impulse which leads to counseling as an activity, it has always seemed to me that there is a deeper human risk involved in its acceptance as an immediate objective.

We may, I think, admit that adjustment with respect to these factors is a desirable consummation of the counselor's activity. If, however, we turn back to the individual, we must recognize that self-activity, self-control, and self-direction also constitute fundamental values in individual development. I admit that I cannot point you to experiment, nor to research, directed to the discovery of proof. I admit that thus far I have failed to convince a single counselor that he is running this risk. I admit, further, that I am always made to feel that I lack sympathy with the struggles of youth when I argue against the giving of advice. Worst of all, the language of individual choice and personal decision becomes easily the language of the practical adviser the moment that adviser is warned of the approach of this argument. Nevertheless, I still feel that self-direction, if and when attainable, is the greatest boon we can give to every individual.

Since it appears the matter cannot be successfully argued, we may for a moment be permitted to assume that retention on the part of the individual of his belief in, and his consciousness of, self-direction is an important element in all counseling. We have seen the temporary or permanent failure of many forms of external control. We have sought for what seem to us to be internal purposes driving men to success. No one has yet described an acceptable social conditioning process. It is enormously difficult to combine this

conception of self-direction into any sensible program of counseling in the light of these alternative theories of social structure to which I have just alluded; yet I think this is the task of the counselor.

To illustrate: one of the things which undoubtedly must be available for individual decision, external control, or social conditioning, is information. Your own professional magazines undertake to conserve information about life and to invent techniques by which such information may become available to individuals. Among the forms of conservation are custom, oral tradition, individual experience, and the written word. To all of these the counselor may turn when the individual clearly shows himself confused because of lack of information. Too often, it seems to me, the counselor, in his haste to settle the matter, issues an *ipse dixit* rather than directs the seeker to other sources of information. He too frequently finds it easier to suggest a course for the next semester, a different type of training for next year, or a specific job for next month, than to open up broad fields of activity and to leave decision for a later time.

More generally, perhaps, this can be stated as a failure to recognize the developmental processes through which each individual must go. No one denies that specific acts must be performed here and now, but if the sense of self-direction is to be retained, those specific acts must be performed in terms of future plans. The counselor will undoubtedly be concerned in the association of aptitudes, interests, and ambitions with broad fields of social activity in many individual cases. The unfolding of the individual in these respects calls for a parallel development of information, activity, and thought.

Like the prerequisites in our educational curricula, the requirements of an occupation are shrouded in mystery, though a few hardy investigators are seeking information. Some investigations tend to suggest that certain persons are so specifically limited in capacity that the problem itself becomes specific. For those who, in the light of our present knowledge, are highly gifted, the character of desirable information changes with growth. No one yet knows how specific aptitudes or abilities are. We do know that occupations are often finely subdivided. We know that frequently this fine subdivision is dependent for its very existence upon the discovery of individuals who can become highly skilled in a narrow range of operation. The problem of information is progressive.

You will doubtless recall an interesting form of solution proposed under the activity theory. Combined with the historical method this solution undertook to present to children the fundamental activities of life as our ancestors engaged in them, together with the methods by which those activities are now facilitated. The children were taught through observation and actual trial, wherever possible, all the steps in the process of weaving cloth and the historical sequence of techniques by which the present machine methods were attained. To what extent can or should each individual today go through the experiences of his ancestors? To what extent should each boy or girl, through the medium of his counselor, learn of all occupations? The illustration has to do with the transfer of information and its nature at different stages of growth. The problem is general. How may we best develop self-direction in the attainment of vocational

satisfaction and in the improvement of our social structure?

The risk just pointed out rests in the nature of those counseled. May I turn now to a danger to which I think all counseling is exposed, which resides more definitely in the counselors. Theoretically, counseling is an applied science. I am not willing to admit that it is merely an art; though I realize that it takes an artist to do counseling. I realize that it also takes an artist and a skilled one to be a surgeon; but I think that the counselor should be far more like the surgeon than like the artist. His task is based upon the sifting of an enormous amount of data, part of which science has given him and part of which science must prove valid before long. Only with scientifically validated data can the counselor's art be successfully pursued.

I appreciate the apparent fact that the spirit to do good to others which has recently been turned from foreign fields, and which is stirred in us by the obvious needs of our fellows, has been the impulse which urges us, as counselors, to meddle in other people's affairs. But I must insist that this altruistic spirit needs the curb which scientifically determined fact can put upon it.

Let us look for a moment at the way in which the physical sciences have found their applications in the industrial world. In the first place, they have offered in most cases thoroughly attested data. If such data were lacking, industry has sought to supply it. The industrial research department of a company often constitutes a considerable part of the overhead, set up simply to determine the applicability of a physical or chemical formula. But the research department must go even further. It must determine the commer-

cial practicability of its findings. Such applications as live through this sifting process are then put to the final test of profit to the industrial concern. Throughout this series of processes fairly definite criteria are constantly applied to determine the practicability of the scientific idea.

Social science and counseling in particular have used neither such techniques nor criteria as measures of validity. We have depended rather upon impulse or the fashion of the hour to direct our activity. I fear that as the pendulum swings to the limit of its arc and starts back, we shall move back with it. Education has been particularly criticized because of this tendency. Personnel work in industry has illustrated it in all essential and nonessential details. Moreover, there a partial criterion was available because of the association of industrial personnel with cost accounting and profit taking.

Have we soberly considered our motives? Perhaps our enthusiasm is but an expression of personal impulse. Perhaps it is merely evidence of a current fashion we blindly follow. Unless we can point to scientifically determined fact, to measured results, and to definite, objective effects in the social structure, I can discover no way to avoid the backward swing of the pendulum.

The situation can be put somewhat more concretely: how many of us are willing to make our counseling wait upon a test of our tools? A conference with a young person who comes to us voluntarily for vocational or educational advice, or for personal help, looks realistic. After he is gone we frequently feel that we have done something. Have we any measure which will determine whether that something done has been merely the satisfaction

of an impulse of our own; or whether an attitude of the person interviewed has actually changed and he himself goes forward to further reflection and to personal decisions? I admit that this is a difficult task. None of the social sciences as yet have criteria by which to measure results of social activity. I submit that the counselor is dangerously prone to be satisfied with the temporary resolution of emergencies and too likely to have no objective criteria for measuring degrees of success.

So far as I know there are but two solutions available: the one I have mentioned, the broad swing of the pendulum which carries us back and forth and offers the uncertain hope that we are also making progress. The other is scientifically controlled investigations which seek to discover criteria for measuring counseling at the same time that they seek to discover fundamental fact and method.

In 1922 I wrote out what then

seemed to me to be the principal lines of research essential to the field of counseling. I still feel they are valid problems. Questions relating to the analysis of human capacity and the characteristics of occupations including their manner of changing are still pertinent. The impression the so-called changing social order makes upon our senses tends to emphasize the third phase, the changes attributable to growth of the individual and stages in the process of adjustment.

My plea now does not alone concern these questions of theory. It is rather for some, almost any, sort of controlled results that can be associated with the current day's work. Above all, the critical attitude is needed to guide the counselor with some measure of safety. Suggestions respecting the nature of criteria for evaluating your operations should come from you who counsel. Some of you may even have opportunity to experiment.