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THE ROLE OF COUNSELING IN THE PREVENTION OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

by

Kenneth Bergmann

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READING ROOM

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A cursory investigation into the problems of juvenile delinquency in our society has led me to believe that the most important area of attack on these problems is that of prevention of the development of the psychology that leads to juvenile crime. Certainly many good programs of rehabilitation exist and efforts should be made to develop new ones. Along with most experts, however, I feel that it is far more valuable to reach children before their first criminal act and try to eliminate the conditions likely to provoke it. This paper will examine the counselor's role in the drive to prevent delinquency before it starts.

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To begin, just what is the nature and extent of the juvenile delinquency problem? Delinquency rates today, as in the past, are highest in the cities, lower in the suburbs, and lowest of all in the rural areas. Where the youth lives is usually far more crucial than race, or ethnic group, whether a youth comes from a broken home, or whether the family is poor or socially deprived. At present, it is predicted that one out of every six boys will end up in court for other than a traffic offense sometime before his 18th birthday. Public concern has mounted along with the consistent rise in the delinquency rates. Many programs have been expensive failures; the fact that average average expenditures for each incarcerated youth are estimated at a little over \$5,000.00 shows

that new methods and techniques must be sought to stop delinquency. Guidance and vocational counseling has been emphasized as of central importance in most new programs.¹

Which children must be reached by programs to prevent delinquency? What are their particular needs? It has been mentioned that delinquency rates are highest in urban areas. According to Maccoby, Johnson and Church, "It is well-known, of course, that delinquency rates are highest where residents have low socioeconomic status."² Temptation to delinquency is most prevalent among children most affected by the problems of the severely disadvantaged environment. According to Passow this child lives in depressed areas and is severely hampered in his schooling by a complexity of conditions in the home, in the neighborhood, and in the classroom.³ He lacks a wide range of experiences. The home often will have failed to nurture emotional growth and will often lack order and organization. The delinquency-prone child's home may reflect cultural patterns different from or incompatible with those of the school, so that parental support of his adjustment to education is not forthcoming. School experiences may have been damaging. He is far behind national averages in reading and verbal ability. He may have a failing record in school. He may have a history of problems in learning to read, dif-

¹U.S. Department of Education, Delinquency today: a guide for Community action, Washington, D.C., 1971.

²Maccoby, E.E., Johnson, J.P. and Church, R.M. "Community integration and the social control of juvenile delinquency," Journal of Social Issues, 14:3 (1958), 38-51.

³Passow, A. H. (Ed.) Education in depressed areas, New York, 1963 3-4.

difficulty in paying attention, poor handwriting and organization. For most of these children long-range goals are meaningless. They lack future orientation because the home often fails to create expectation of future rewards for present activities. Many of these youngsters have so much trouble communicating with adults that they will either withdraw from or be openly hostile to them. According to Gowan and Demos many of these predelinquents "maintain a negative and unrealistic image of self. Their frustration usually leads to quick discouragement and early abandonment of tasks."⁴

In American society the public school is one of the principal socializing agencies. As Amos observed, "Schools have a unique opportunity to influence behavior and to mold the character of the youngster in their charge."⁵ The public school today teaches a greater percentage of the young population than ever before and more students are graduating than ever before. Increased demands are being made on the schools; besides teaching they may also feed, clothe, treat, transport, and counsel our children. As Amos suggested the school, because of its universality as well as its actual and potential resources is in a central position to mount an attack on juvenile delinquency.⁶

The counselor is one of the most important resources in the school; he should play a strategic role in programs aimed to

⁴Gowan, J. C. and Demos, G. D., The disadvantaged and potential dropouts, Springfield, Illinois, 1966, 6-7.

⁵Amos, W. E. and Wellford, C.F., Delinquency prevention, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1967, 134-135.

⁶(see Footnote 5), 135.

prevent and control juvenile delinquency. He can provide a bridge between the home and the school and help the alienated individual build a bridge between himself and the world. The counselor can be a crucial aid in the process of a youth's educational, social, and vocational development, leading him to make wise choices and adjustments. The counselor may be the only one who can help a youngster develop self-understanding and self-acceptance, to appraise the realities of the present and probable future socioeconomic environment, and the integration of these two factors.⁷

In the past too many of the juvenile delinquency prevention programs have been fragmented efforts that have had little impact on youngsters. New programs must be designed to be comprehensive. The counselor's role in these programs must aim at all of the following:

1. The development in the youngster of a new value system.
2. Improving the self-concept of the delinquency-prone child.
3. Programs to improve his employability.

Youngsters are pushed toward delinquent activities by deficits in all three of these areas; the counselor is uniquely situated to be of central help in changing them.

⁷(see Footnote 5), 136.

The Development of a New Value System

The delinquency-prone child has been shown to lack the values needed to motivate him in school and out. As noted he has little or no future orientation, and no long-range goals; he is alienated from school because of early failures and sees no importance in it. His home and neighborhood environments are the most likely primary causes of these attitudes, and these attitudes are central blocks to motivation.

In the face of a home and cultural situation that has failed to inculcate needed values and may actually discourage them the counselor, I believe, must take a role in presenting these values to the child and convincing him of their importance in enabling him to utilize his resources. As much as possible the discussion sessions should engage the student in groping toward a realization of the necessity of changing his attitudes, but when imperative the counselor must take the directive; he must present the new values to the student and transmit his enthusiasm for them. The counselor can transmit values by himself providing a model for imitation; particularly disadvantaged children often need an identification figure. Simply by showing his concern for the youngster and gaining his confidence the counselor can gain influence for the transmission of his values. The counselor, it has been suggested, could extend his services to the family to help parents better understand the values of the educational program and their own

children's behavior and achievement when the home culture differs from the value system of the school. Some have recommended and initiated guidance services scheduled for evening and summer hours to make them available to depressed area families. In this way the counselor can have a far more extensive effect on the student's environment and can help to change it.

The chief job in getting the student to adopt new values for the counselor is to overcome the alienation brought about by despair and doubt and to convince him that he has a genuine opportunity to succeed. So long as a boy feels totally on his own, isolated, rootless, and lost, values will have little meaning for him. The counselor must overcome these feelings of inadequacy, using all the techniques he possesses. One way he can do this is by directing the youngster to activities and experiences that will increase his range and enlarge his frame of reference. Many programs have proved successful in achieving this with children. For example, in one set of neighborhood center programs intensive group counseling accompanied by broadened social contacts and revised occupational frames of reference have resulted in significant changes in the level of aspiration and general values.⁸

In short this absence of a constructive set of values is a product of both culture and a personal sense of inadequacy. Both must be overcome if the counselor is to be successful.

⁸Cox, J.W. and Barnes, C. E., "A report on an experimental research project designed to test the effectiveness of an intensive group work in changing values of Negro boys from fatherless families," Project #017 (C1), Division of Program Research, Social Security Administration. Cleveland: Goodrich-Bell Neighborhood Center, August, 1963.

Improving the Self-Concept of the Delinquency-Prone Child

In the words of Amos: "The youth who has been exposed to the socialization process of the lower class develops in many instances a concept of himself as a person who is inadequate, has little chance of success and must fight for every gain. He may be so insecure and anxious that he reacts physically to any threatening situation. He lacks a strong self-concept that would offer insulation against delinquent behavior and provide internal strength by which he could benefit from whatever resources he has."⁹ As a result he fails early in school, and lacking any home reinforcement for the values of the school, abandons all efforts. The poor self-concept, observed by Kvaraceus, Aichhorn, and Wrenn, leads him to believe he is less intelligent and has little worth and little chance of success. Consequently he has less success.

Kvaraceus said the delinquent child is characterized by self-indulgence, low frustration-tolerance, and defective or weak superego.¹⁰ Aichhorn said forty years ago that delinquent children have regularly faulty and deficient superegos.¹¹ Wrenn advised that the school counselor should concentrate on (1) modifying other's perceptions of the individual in the direction of better understanding and (2) modifying the self-perception of the individual so that he may relate better to

⁹Amos (see Footnote 5)

¹⁰Kvaraceus, W.C. "The counselor's role in combating juvenile delinquency," Personnel and Guidance Journal, 36 (October, 1957), 99-105.

¹¹Aichhorn, A., Delinquency and child guidance, Fleishman, O., Kramer, P. and Ross, H. (eds.), New York, 1964, 81-82.

others and to know how to make better use of his resources.¹²

There are many ways the counselor can seek to change and improve students' self-concepts. By evidencing his concern for the welfare of the student as a human being whose future is important the counselor may give the student who has never before experienced it a sense of self-confidence and worth. He can provide the kind of discussion sessions that permit the student to verbalize and ventilate his doubts, fears, and frustrations and learn to deal with them and accept himself. He can make the student aware of his strengths and make him confident that he can put them to use. The counselor can guide the severely disadvantaged child to more experiences, suggesting or taking him on field trips, and suggesting ways of broadening the child's range. He might organize group sessions where disadvantaged youngsters can express and deal with their problems while assessing the unique aspects of their cultures. The counselor can also use behavioral reinforcement techniques to encourage statements of positive self-orientation.

The problem of poor self-concept is pervasive and will not be solved either quickly or by the counselor alone. To regain self-confidence the youngster must be given the feeling that he is starting to succeed somewhere in his life, ideally in the classroom. The counselor, though, can provide the psychological support to help the child begin to deal with himself and thus with his world.

¹²Wrenn, C. G. "The dropout and the school counselor," The School dropout, Schreiber, D. (ed.), Washington, D.C., 1964, 192-205.

Increasing Employability

The junior and senior high school age delinquent-prone child is in special need of vocational counseling. He has most likely done extremely poorly in school, probably is reading at an elementary level, and may be ready to drop out. He possesses no long-range goals and has little hope for the future. If he drops out with no guidance he may be faced with unemployment and the hopelessness and boredom that evokes delinquent behavior. The counselor's job here is to guide the student toward the job that will best meet his interests. If the student is still in an early-enough grade to turn around the pattern of failure in school of course the counselor will impress upon him the better and more fulfilling work he could obtain if he masters the necessary skills and will help him plan his school program. If he is ready to get a job the counselor can give him direction and support, helping him to choose a career and preparing him to obtain it.

An effective program for vocational counseling is described in "Vocational Counseling With Behavioral Techniques;"¹³ I feel it would be especially valuable to the alienated, directionless young person. Woody describes in this study how behavioral techniques can be used. The counselor might conduct a diagnostic interview, administer tests (e.g., aptitude and vocational interest tests) and then establish a counseling format in which he can re-

¹³Woody, R.H. "Vocational counseling with behavioral techniques," Vocational Guidance Quarterly, Vol. 17 (December, 1968), 97-103.

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inforce the client toward accepting the analysis and initiating this into career planning. The counselor would use social recognition and object rewards to selectively reinforce such desired behaviors as reading career pamphlets or talking to an adult employed in a position. Social modeling was recommended: for example, films describing a man in an occupation could be shown. Verbal reinforcement, praise or smiles when the student offered to actively seek occupational and/or educational goals, to read and consider materials relevant to career planning, would lead him eventually to be able to take initiative in making a vocational choice. Behavioral practice sessions, involving role-playing, assigned actual experiences, and other forms of real and imagined behavior that train the insecure disadvantaged youth to deal with job interviews and on the job problems are a useful tool of this counseling.

The best program I encountered for vocational counseling aimed at dropouts is called Comprehensive Vocationally-Oriented Psychotherapy, and was conducted through the schools.¹⁴ This guidance is, as the name implies, comprehensive. Within 24 hours after a boy has dropped out of school (intervention in the "crisis period") he is called by phone by a counselor who offers to help him find a job. Future help of the individual centers solely around the task of finding and adjusting to a job. A multitude of services are provided by this one person. Prior to contacting the boy the counselor spends a great deal of time exploring the employment

¹⁴Shore, M. F. and Massimo, J. L. , "The Alienated Adolescent: A Challenge to the Mental Health Professional," Adolescence, 10:13 (Spring, 1969), 19-33.

possibilities within the community and mobilizing community resources. Each job is selected with the boy's specific needs and interests in mind and the counselor consistently gives his support. Prior to meeting a boss, for example, the counselor might role-play a job interview to help the boy deal with the anxieties he might encounter in initial contacts with an authority figure. He might take the boy on a field trip to explore the possible openings and what is needed in order to obtain the wanted job. Usually he accompanies the boy to the first interview. If he is hired he is reassured. If he is not hired they are able to discuss and to work on frustrations resulting from not gaining certain things the boy might have wanted, thus reducing the chances of delinquent acting-out. As treatment progresses and the boy is on the job the need for remedial education and help with personal problems becomes more and more evident. Within the concrete situation of the job, individualized educational programs are set up. Thus the counselor plays the roles of teacher, vocational counselor and personal adjustment counselor. In a follow-up done three years after the initial program the ten treated subjects were all found to be continuing to improve in their jobs and personal situations, while the ten untreated control subjects had deteriorated markedly (one dishonorably discharged from the service, two in jail for adult crimes, and five unemployed). This program seems to have tremendous potential for helping dropouts avoid the pattern of failure that leads to boredom and delinquency.

There are many ways in which the counselor can give vocational guidance to predelinquents; there is not adequate space to discuss them all. It is important to note, however, that sometimes the counselor may be the only adult to evidence interest and offer advice for the career plans of such youths, and therefore his role is crucial. Perhaps the one most important guidance the counselor could give to a youngster is advising him to adopt vocational education itself; according to Dr. Sidney Marland, U.S. Commissioner of Education, 30 to 50 percent of students are in the general education course which, he claims, prepares them for nothing.¹⁵ Only 12% of students are enrolled in vocational education, he says, and his goal is to achieve the enrollment of 50% of students in vocational programs by the time he leaves office. "General education is a put-on," he remarked, "a watered-down program with nothing at the end of the line - neither college nor a job."¹⁵ Marland stressed that counselors must take a role in funneling students into vocational education so they can develop skills to help them get jobs.

Counselors must be in the front lines in the fight to stop the waste of lives revealed by current delinquency rates. One of their best tools, it should be noted, is early detection, tests that identify the predelinquent early when help can have the greatest effect (the Porteus Maze Test, the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, Behavior Cards: A Test for Delinquent Children, and the

¹⁶Marland, S., New York Times, August 8, 1971, p. 1.

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Glueck Prediction Tables). The self-concepts, the sets of values, the sense of possibilities, and the guidance needed in acquiring a good job are all areas of deep-seated and complex needs in delinquency-prone children. The counselor cannot provide a panacea to the psychology of delinquency on his own; a true program to save the potentials of these children must involve resources of the total community. The counselor, however, because he may establish the most personal relationship with the child, may have a better chance than any to help him. Surely at any rate counseling can play an important role in helping a youngster establish values, understand himself and accept himself, and direct himself toward the best possible career. The counselor, therefore, plays a central role indeed in the effort for prevention of juvenile delinquency.

Bergmann

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