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Course SK21

A SUGGESTED PROGRAM OF GUIDANCE
FOR SIR GEORGE WILLIAMS COLLEGE

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Introduction:

Sir George Williams College (the Y.M.C.A. Schools of Montreal) is a system of five schools organized and operated as one unit. A large proportion of the students are in the three evening schools, viz., the Grammar School, the High School and the Commercial School. The day schools are the Hoscothe, which is a college preparatory school, and the Business College. The teaching staff of the system is chiefly part-time and largely composed of men who are engaged in the teaching profession. There are, however, two full-time teachers. The administrative staff consists of a Principal, a Vice-Principal and a Student Counselor.

It is desired to introduce a practical program of guidance into these schools. This is to be under the direction of the Student Counselor who is responsible to the Principal. This scheme of guidance must be, for the present at least, within the time and ability limitations of the present staff and, it would seem, should take into account the following facts:

1. The part-time nature of most of the students. The theory behind this work is very much the same as that expressed by Dr. Keller (10)* in reference to the continuation school. "It brings about social adjustments," he says, "because it extends to working boys and girls privileges heretofore reserved to those who were able through favorable home conditions to remain in full-time school."

2. That the majority of the courses are coeducational.

* Numbers in parentheses refer to the bibliography.

3. That the equipment at present is wholly inadequate. There are no shops. The laboratory facilities are meagre and the library does not meet the needs. Some progress has been made in enriching the curriculum by the use of the cooperative plan with the International Correspondence Schools.

4. The wide range of ages in the courses. Last year the youngest student was 13, the oldest was 42 and the median age was 17.5 years.

5. The wide range of mental ability. A study (19) made last year indicates that the mental ability of the student does not follow a normal distribution but tends to "spread" at both ends. In other words, there are large numbers of students both below and above the normal group in the College as a whole.

6. The general school situation in the city. The Province of Quebec has no compulsory school attendance law. Many students leave school at an early age and, perhaps regretting the fact later, come to evening schools to try to gain their neglected school experience. Also the public schools of the city have practically nothing which may truly be called educational or vocational guidance.

7. That many students come from other cities and countries.

8. That the staff is largely part-time.

9. That the schools are rapidly growing. The student body has increased at a rate of nearly two hundred students each year for the past two years. Last year there were 808 students in the schools.

10. The fact that most of the evening students are engaged in clerical occupations.

The following plan is arbitrarily divided into three sections -- group guidance, individual guidance and guidance through curriculum. It is, by no means, meant that these divisions are mutually exclusive. A policy of guidance must regard the field as a whole and, in practice at least, must deal with situations in their totality and not as problems requiring one or another single kind of guidance "medecine". Thus the headings mentioned are merely convenient classifications for the specific processes which appear to be necessary for a complete system of guidance in these schools.

The interdependence of the different phases of a guidance program might also be mentioned. Proctor (16) says that ability grouping which does not take into account actual instruction is a "snare and a delusion". Is this not true of many of the factors of guidance? Testing, for example, without making a definite use of test results in some constructive way, is a waste of both pupils' and advisers' time. Counselors have been known to urge boys to make a decision regarding, and to prepare for, a life work without enabling them to gain information regarding that part of the world's work which may be open to them. Such procedure is comparable to that of the quack physician who prescribes medicine without any real knowledge of the patient's nature or ailments. This does not mean that a guidance program is like a house of cards which will fall if one small unit is changed or removed. For it is conceivable that a guidance program as a static inflexible thing might become as vicious, from an educational point of view, as the most rigid mediaeval formalism. It does mean, however, that all phases of the school's work must be taken into account, that individual guidance must go hand in hand with curriculum adjustments,

that individuals cannot be dealt with apart from groups and that groups cannot be guided without an understanding of the individuals who compose them.

Group guidance.

One of the problems of any educational system is the proper grading, grouping or classification of the students. This is particularly acute in schools such as ours. As mentioned above, students come with a wide diversity of educational and social backgrounds. It has been the policy of the school for some years for members of the administrative staff to interview each student at the time of registration. This is true, if superficial, educational guidance and the policy should be continued.

It is next proposed to conduct at the beginning of the school year a survey of the classes as temporarily organized. Dr. R.D. Allen of the Providence Public Schools has developed a plan which adds greatly to the efficiency of the system. Dr. Reavis (17, p. 84) describes the "initial appraisal" plan of the University of Chicago High School. This plan includes a series of 22 tests. The scheme proposed is, by no means, as elaborate as this. It is felt however, that the inventory should include a series of a few tests including a group test of mental ability (either Otis or Terman) and objective tests in the fundamentals. The results of these tests will give facts to help in the next step-- that of grading or grouping.

In a situation such as that of our schools it is believed that only one definite rule can be laid down as a basis for grouping, viz., to take account of all available facts in the process. By

using some such device as the Providence Personnel Chart, we shall be able to see the relationships of students as to chronological age, mental age and I.Q. Grading can then be carried out with reference to these factors plus educational and social backgrounds, proven ability, as indicated by the inventory tests and that more elusive, but nevertheless real, variable called personality. We must also remember that the classification must be a live, and not a dead, one. As conditions change, as new facts come to light to show us previous mistakes, we may reclassify and transfer as occasion demands. However, after the initial grading, no individual transfers should take place without conference between the teachers concerned, the student and the counselor.

Individual guidance.

The value of the initial appraisal or inventory is not limited to an attempt to obtain homogeneity in the classes. Its primary value would be to gain information regarding students who are misfitted or misplaced without the necessity of the wasteful trial and error method. Glaring cases of obvious misplacement and mal-adjustment are easy to see as the year progresses. They force themselves on our attention at the end of the term in the form of drop-outs, dissatisfied or "failed" students. It is one of the functions of the guidance process to discover and adjust these cases at the outset. The inventory will undoubtedly help discover some of these cases. The next step is adjustment. Students with low, or very high, I.Q.'s should be retested with a Binet test or, at least, with another group test. All such should be interviewed. Some might profitably be transferred to other classes. Some should

have their courses enriched, lightened or changed as the case may be. Others might even be advised to go to other schools in which their needs can be more efficiently met.

The above, however, does not constitute as complete a guidance process as might be undertaken by a student counselor. Many students, particularly those in the evening schools, have definite vocational or other adjustment problems. These people have probably not had the experience of even an elementary school program with the guidance point of view. Their needs cannot be met by an evening school course perhaps only in one subject. Therefore, it seems that a more complete guidance plan should be undertaken. The question may be asked as to what proportion of the students should receive this process. Dr. Payne (15) states that in the average school about fifty per cent of the students need no specific individual process of guidance, about forty per cent need only superficial guidance such as interviews, readjustment in classes, etc., and the remaining ten per cent need a complete process of individual guidance. Dr. Reavis (17, p. 124) in reporting the results of a four years' experiment in the University of Chicago High School, states that, out of 913 pupils admitted, 132 (or 14.4%) were regarded as problem cases. If we accept these figures as roughly applying to our schools, it would mean that between 100 and 150 students should be dealt with by the counselor. If this number is too great, the outstanding cases will necessarily have preference.

It should be pointed out here that there is no intention to submit students to any process against their wills or, in any sense, to make the process a routine or mechanical one. True guidance is

a cooperative thing and must, by its very nature, always be so. It has been found by experience, however, that many students and prospective students are eager to find out more about their abilities and possible vocations and are anxious to get sympathetic help regarding their personal problems.

This guidance process should include certain definite steps (15 & 11). It is not expected that all or any students should, for example, take all the tests or pass through all the stages mentioned. They should, however, all be kept in mind by the counselor and may be summarized as follows:

1. Tests. Binet (12,20,21) and the Kent-Rosanoff Association Test (14,21). Some of the following ability tests may also be used as the case demands: O'Connor's test of mechanical aptitude, finger dexterity and number sense test (6,8,14,21), Thurstone clerical test, Seashore's test of musical talent (18) and the Providence Drawing Test.

2. Records and questionnaires. The general history blank, as now used (copy attached) gives family, educational and employment record. In some cases a personality questionnaire (copy attached), which is an adaptation of the U.S. Army reestablishment blank (15) may be helpful in discovering personality abnormalities. Dr. Brewer's vocational interest and information questionnaires would also be used in many cases.

3. Reference to other advisers for vocational information, etc., to a physician, an oculist or a psychiatrist should be undertaken in certain cases.

4. Readings, reports and consultations with people engaged in occupations of interest are sources of occupational information and help which should not be overlooked (16).

5. Advisement. While the counselor should summarize his findings and may give the student advice, it should be carefully noted that any real decision should be that of the student. The counselor must not be a dictator. His function is to counsel, to help or to guide and not to issue prescriptions, declarations or ultimatums.

6. Placement, vocational and educational. Much help can be rendered to some students by enabling them to obtain positions, either permanently or as try-outs, in the field of their interest. Educational placement should not be overlooked. Perhaps the student has hitherto been entirely mistaken as to the course best suited to his needs and learns at great cost that Latin verbs do not help him to be a better bookkeeper or to gain promotion as a salesman or window-dresser. The theory of formal discipline is, in our city at least, firmly entrenched in the public mind.

7. Follow-up. Guidance cannot be done "once and for all". It is a continuous process. A definite appointment with the student for some date weeks ahead and a post-card reminder a few days before that date have been found effective. In this phase of the work the personality of the counselor and the actual help he has rendered the student are big factors. If the student feels that he has a helper in the counselor the follow-up will be simplified. Some of the previous steps may be gone over again. Perhaps a try-out has been unsuccessful; perhaps the decision has been unwise; perhaps the counselor (a fallible being) has overstepped his prerogative and given a bit of unwise advice; perhaps new circumstances have arisen to alter the situation. These possibilities and many more must be taken into account.

Guidance through curriculum.

In the curriculum and those who administer it, the teachers, lie the core and heart of true guidance. The counselor, be he ever so efficient, may work for years with individual guidance but his accomplishments would be limited almost to the point of negligibility if the teachers do not do the greater part and the curriculum be not evolved and adjusted with the guidance viewpoint. The counselor is only one but the teachers are many. He can deal with only a few students fully or with many but superficially. The teacher's influence, however, is continuous. Also, as the teacher's influence is greater, his personal knowledge of the student may be wider. Test results, records and the answers to questionnaires are useful data. These data, however, may be small beside that gained by the efficient teacher in his constant watching of the students at work.

Guidance through curriculum, though it involves definite skills, is not so much a definable program as a point of view-- a practical philosophy of education. A new teacher came to the Principal and asked for the "limits" of a course in English composition he was to teach. When told that there were no limits, that the course was not to be taught from the point of view of certain assignments to be covered but rather to guide and help students in language usage, using books only as he choose to do so, he complained that it was a queer school which did not set definite textbook work to be covered. He is not to be blamed, however, as he was merely the victim of a system which seems to care more about "limits" than it does about students.

While keeping in mind the fact that guidance through curriculum cannot be mechanical and is chiefly a matter of attitudes, knowledge and skills on the part of the teachers, I have endeavored to suggest a few changes which might help to bring about a more satisfactory condition. These suggestions follow:

1. That a systematic attempt be made to interest teachers in the guidance point of view. This might be accomplished by a teachers' conference with an outside speaker and discussions. A teachers' group might grow out of this, in which teachers would meet to discuss educational problems related to their own work.

2. That the results of the inventory, discussed above, be carefully studied with the individual teachers concerned. This would undoubtedly give teachers a clearer understanding early in the season of the ability and present accomplishments of their students.

3. That the first years in the general and the college preparatory courses of the Evening High School be combined to form a vestibule year. The curriculum of this year would necessarily be worked out with the main objectives of the vestibule in mind, viz., to provide educational and occupational information and try-outs. "Occupations" should certainly be included in this curriculum, perhaps using Gowin, Wheatley and Brewer's "Occupations" (7) and the Providence "Outline" (3) as guides.

This should give many students who at present start, but never finish the college preparatory course (with little value to themselves) a better orientation to the world around them. Also some students who are passing through the orientation process would, no doubt, come to the counselor for further guidance in their own particular problems. Incidentally, this would allow a better grade

classification as there would be more students doing the same type of work. For the students who continue the college preparatory course the vestibule would provide, in addition to its other values, training in the fundamentals which are necessary to proceed with college preparatory work and which most of them lack upon entering.

4. That a study of occupations be introduced into the current events class of the General High School course to give needed information to those who do not pass through the vestibule year.

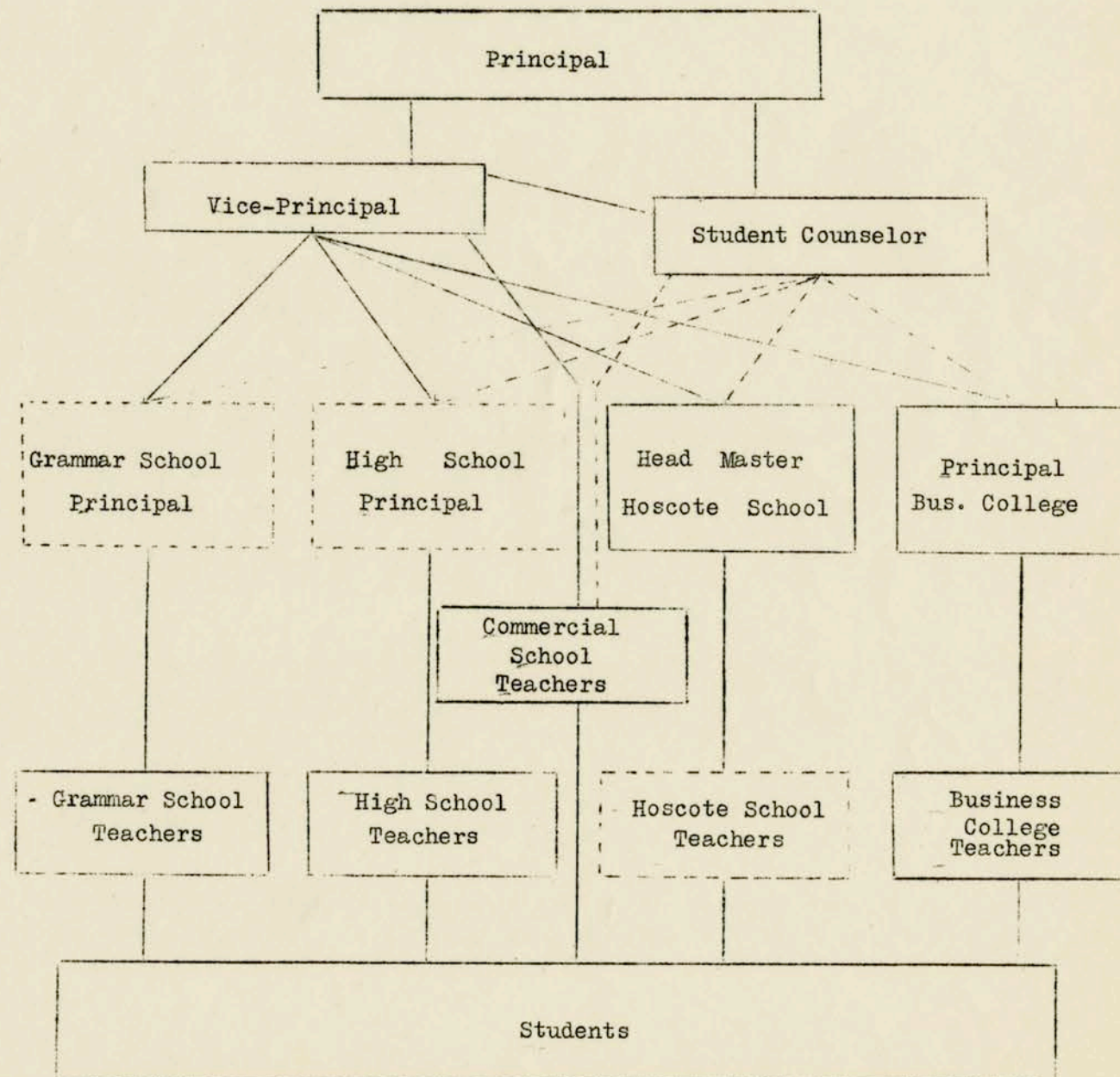
5. That personal conferences be held with the teachers regarding emphasis of occupational and other guidance values of their subjects.

6. That in English composition an opportunity be given for the use of occupational interests as topics for papers, essays, talks by students or debates.

It is not to be supposed that this whole suggested program, with all the detail which is implied if not expressed, should be adopted at once and in toto. The principal thing to keep in view is the main objective of guidance, that educational systems exist for the good of the students. Not losing sight of the chief objective we must advance in education, as in everything else, by a series of limited objectives.

Sir George Williams College

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