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A Survey of the Types of Student Cases Studied by the Bellevue Elementary School Guidance Teams between the Years 1961 - 1966

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A SURVEY OF THE TYPES OF STUDENT CASES STUDIED BY
THE BELLEVUE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GUIDANCE TEAMS
BETWEEN THE YEARS 1961-1966

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty
Central Washington State College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education

by
Raymond R. Bergman
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APPROVED FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

William G. Gaskell, COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Roy F. Ruebel

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

In the past the cognitive, intellectual development of children in elementary schools has been the emphasis in the learning environment. The social, emotional and personal growth of the child was considered to be the responsibility of the home and church. In recent years the curriculum has been changing to include guidance services in the elementary schools. The teacher because of his unique position in the classroom has been encouraged to observe and record the behavior of children who were not adjusting to the school setting. The children who were observed were often referred by the classroom teacher to the guidance team. These student referrals reflected the considered opinion of the teacher about the problems the child experienced in the classroom. To date, the reasons as stated by teachers for referral of children to the guidance teams has not been researched.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. The Bellevue School District Guidance Personnel indicated a need for a follow-up study. This was accomplished by means of: (1) a review of the operating procedures used by the elementary school guidance teams, and (2) a review of the types of cases studied by the

elementary school guidance teams as stated on the teacher referral form.

Importance of the study. The primary responsibility for the identification of students with problems and the referral of these children has been delegated to the classroom teacher. The early identification of students who have had unique problems in the learning environment has been considered an important contribution to the district guidance program. The reasons for referrals should be tabulated to provide data for the evaluation of this important part of the elementary school guidance program.

Limitations of the study. The latitude of this research was limited to Bellevue Elementary School students in grades 4, 5, and 6. Only the initial teacher referral forms from 1961-1966 were used in the study. The major purpose of the research was to provide data for use by the guidance personnel of the district.

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Academic difficulties. Academic difficulties was interpreted as meaning the inability of a student to function in the academic areas, reading problems, and performance below expectations for the child (2:65).

Behavior difficulties. Behavior difficulties have been defined as overt acts on the part of the learner such

as acting out and aggression or defiance of rules and regulations.

Emotional difficulties. This term implied that a child had a dislike or fear of school. An uncontrollable temper, soiling or wetting at school, and daydreaming were symptoms of emotional difficulties (8:303).

Physical difficulties. Symptoms such as chronic fatigue, poor motor performance, hearing and speech disorders have been identified as signifying physical difficulties (2:65).

Social difficulties. The child's inability to deal with peers in a positive manner. The rejection of the child by other children.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The topic of teacher referrals has not received the full attention of authors of guidance books. A brief resume of the teacher's responsibility in the referral process was written as a part of chapters which dealt with the role of school personnel in elementary school guidance. However, the researcher was unable to locate studies designed to provide statistical data on the reasons for student referrals in any journals or books. A summary of the operating procedures of the elementary school guidance teams in Bellevue and the role of the teacher in referral practices has been outlined in this chapter.

I. REVIEW OF THE OPERATING PROCEDURES OF THE BELLEVUE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GUIDANCE TEAMS

The guidance team concept was accepted in Bellevue as a means to provide for the proper diagnosis and treatment of children with learning problems. The team was composed of the following personnel: the principal, nurse, teacher, counselor, reading teacher, psychologist and speech therapist. These people met each week to consider referrals made by teachers and to review the disposition of current case studies. The talents of each team member were believed to be

valuable to the proper handling of students' problems. Aigner, in his review of the current procedures for the functioning of the guidance team, stated the following steps as the approved format which became the procedures for the operation of the guidance team:

Step 1. The teacher observed and identified students with learning problems.

Step 2. The teacher discussed the existing situation with the principal and counselor. At this time a course of action was considered. The teacher made an anecdotal record of the pupil's classroom and playground behavior. The school nurse made a home visit and obtained a health history of the child. She also gained insight into the home environment. A thorough examination was then made of the pupil's cumulative folder. The teacher interviewed the child's previous teachers and then made a referral to the counselor which described the child's problems.

Step 3. The counselor assembled the above information and held a conference with the principal, teacher, and public health nurse. They determined if the available data indicated a need for a parent, teacher, principal, and counselor's conference, a referral for individual

intelligence or psychological testing, or a longer period of observation.

Step 4. If a pre-testing conference was indicated, the principal scheduled the conference at a time when both parents could be in attendance. The conference was led by the principal and proceeded in the following manner: the principal introduced all the participants; the purpose of the conference was established and information known about the pupil was exchanged; the teacher and the parents were asked to draw a word picture of the child, as he was observed at school and in the home. All members of the team participated in the determination of an acceptable course of action. These conferences usually resulted in a referral being made to an outside agency such as East Side Mental Health Center or the clinic for child study at the University of Washington. The parents were informed of the purpose of the agency and how the case might be handled.

Step 5. If a pre-testing conference was not indicated from the data available, a referral was made to the district psychometric personnel. After the testing procedures have been completed, the

procedure outlined in Step 4 was repeated.

The psychometrist reported the results of the test administered to the child. Jointly, the members of the conference diagnosed and prescribed actions that tended to alleviate the situation (1:3).

The above stated procedures have been used in Bellevue and were recognized as the guidelines for operation of all the elementary school guidance teams.

Two articles read during the course of the study wrote about the guidance team concept.

Hunter endorsed the concept of the team approach to guidance of students in the elementary school. She stated that the problems brought to the guidance team were sometimes severe and complex. They required the attention and skill of a team composed of the principal, school counselor, school nurse, school physician, the classroom teacher, and a social worker to analyze the symptoms of behavior. They prescribed corrective measures to solve the problem (8:304).

Wilson conducted a survey to discover what elementary school administrators were doing about guidance for children who experienced difficulty in the classroom. She found that many supported the guidance team approach (13:186).

II. LITERATURE ON THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN REFERRAL PRACTICES

Some specific statements were written about the teacher's role as a referral agent. These statements accompanied by theoretical thoughts were presented in this section of the paper.

Torgerson contended that children failed to learn for reasons that were or were not apparent. Students who were aggressive and labeled discipline problems were easily recognized by teachers. To assume that pupils not in these two categories were normal and did not require special attention was a grave traditional error. Teachers had to admit that physical, emotional, social, scholastic, and adjustment problems have existed in their own classroom (14:44).

Herman stated that because a child spent more time with his teacher than any other person in the school setting, the teacher has been in a position to have observed any unusual changes in the child's behavior. A guidance conscious teacher who has studied her students provided valuable information to the staff and parents of the child (10:40).

Dowing reported that the teacher assumed an important role in the identification of students who have developed problems. Problems of an emotional, psychological, or sociological nature needed the assistance beyond that provided by

the typical classroom. The proper program of guidance for the child who has been referred was the major criterion upon which decisions for actions were based (4:49).

Peters contributed these thoughts on the teacher's role in guidance. He stated that the teacher's central though not exclusive responsibility in the classroom was to impart knowledge, skills, concepts and facilitate learning. His day to day contacts with students, however, have placed him in a valuable position and he has complimented the guidance program (10:219).

Ohlsen reported that ideally the teacher treated each pupil as an individual and dealt with him in terms of what was best for his personal growth. The teacher maintained a unique position that afforded him the information he needed to refer the child to the proper specialist (9:4-15).

Shertzer and Pruett assigned guidance responsibilities to the elementary teacher. The elementary teacher observed educational progress, diagnosed instructional difficulties, attempted to do remedial work, and when necessary referred children to the counselor, guidance committee, or principal.

Significant information on students was based upon anecdotal records. The teacher participated in conferences with guidance staff members whenever deemed necessary (10:219). This information was consistent with all the references used in this study.

Gibson commented on the role of the teacher in guidance. He inferred that the average classroom teacher is limited in his preparation for counseling pupils. He suggested that it was inevitable that the teacher has had face to face encounters with his students and he did do some counseling. These relationships in the classroom gave the teacher the opportunity to have played an important part as a referral agent. He held a key position. He identified pupils with counseling needs, prepared them for referral, and actually referred them to the school counselor (6:30).

The review of literature included brief statements from authors on the subject of the teacher's role in the guidance program. Most of the contemporary authors agreed in theory and principle on the teacher's function as a referral agent and a key member of the guidance program.

The next chapter dealt with the actual act of referring students. The types of cases were categorized according to the established definitions written in the Definitions of Terms Used.

CHAPTER III

THE MATERIALS AND METHODS USED TO CATEGORIZE THE REASONS FOR STUDENT REFERRALS

The methods used to categorize the types of students referred to the guidance teams were designed by the writer to fit the stated needs of the guidance personnel of the Bellevue School District for such a study. The source of the data was approved by the district research committee, and the materials were made available for the study.

Source of the data. The data compiled in this study came from the confidential files of the Bellevue School District. The district research committee reviewed the thesis proposal and granted their permission for the researcher to use the student case folders, housed in that file. The folders contained the initial referral forms supplied by the teacher and other pertinent data gathered during the case study by the guidance teams.

Method of procedure. There were 100 case folders sampled. These folders complied with the criteria decided upon for the study. The criteria were as follows: The initial referral form made out by a teacher must have accompanied the folder, only student referral forms dated between the years 1961-1966 were acceptable, and the students

referred had to be in grades 4, 5, and 6, at the time of referral. The referral form had a short explanation of the problem in addition to the reason for referral that was checked at the top of the page.

Sampling process. The sampling process was consistent with these guidelines. The researcher started the sampling at the beginning of the alphabet. The first folder was checked for the criteria as stated and then every eighth folder thereafter was sampled. If the eighth folder did not meet the criteria, the next one was checked. The files housed approximately three thousand folders.

CHAPTER IV

THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The comments written on the referral forms by teachers were analyzed and the student's problem was categorized under one of the five broad terms designed for this study. These terms are academic difficulties, behavior difficulties, emotional difficulties, physical difficulties, and social difficulties. The tables interpret the total number of cases categorized under each term.

Treatment of the findings. Table I represents the total number of students referred for each reason. It shows the greatest number of referrals were made for academic difficulties. Emotional and behavior difficulties had the same number of referrals. Students referred for social difficulties is low in order of frequency.

TABLE I

MENTIONED REASONS FOR REFERRALS IN RANK ORDER
OF FREQUENCY IN GRADES 4, 5, AND 6, IN THE
BELLEVUE SCHOOL DISTRICT 1961-1966

Reasons for Referral	Frequency
Academic difficulties	44
Emotional difficulties	20
Behavior difficulties	20
Social difficulties	9
Physical difficulties	7
Total	100

The data in Table II reflects the teachers' reasons for the referral of boys. It is noted that boys are referred for academic difficulties more than any other reason. The number of referrals for behavior and emotional difficulties seems significant. The reason stated more than any other by teachers for under academic difficulties is poor reading performance. This was the child's inability to read at grade level.

TABLE II
MENTIONED REASON FOR REFERRAL IN RANK ORDER OF
FREQUENCY FOR BOYS IN GRADES 4, 5, 6,
IN THE BELLEVUE SCHOOL DISTRICT
1961-1966

Reason for Referral	Frequency
Academic difficulties	31
Behavior difficulties	16
Emotional difficulties	12
Social difficulties	8
Physical difficulties	7
Total	74

The data in Table III shows that girls were referred for academic difficulties more than any other reason. Girls were referred for general academic difficulties not for specific reasons such as reading and mathematics. No girls were referred for physical difficulties. The total number

of girls referred for case study was considerably lower than for boys.

TABLE III
MENTIONED REASONS FOR REFERRAL IN RANK ORDER
OF FREQUENCY FOR GIRLS IN GRADES 4, 5, 6,
IN THE BELLEVUE SCHOOL DISTRICT
1961-1966

Reason for Referral	Frequency
Academic difficulties	13
Emotional difficulties	8
Behavior difficulties	4
Social difficulties	1
Physical difficulties	--
Total	26

The number of cases researched and categorized for each year selected for the study indicates a tendency to have more cases referred in recent years. The year that had the greatest number of referrals was 1965. Table IV shows the number of referrals made during each year.

The early identification of students with problems in elementary grades is important to the implementation of a proper program of guidance for the child. The data in Table V indicated a tendency on the part of teachers to refer students early in the intermediate grades. The proportion of students referred for guidance in grade four was

much higher than for grades five and six. This means that the teachers had the foresight to observe and refer students with learning problems as early as possible.

TABLE IV
TOTAL NUMBER OF REFERRALS MADE IN RANK ORDER
OF FREQUENCY DURING EACH YEAR 1961-1966

Year of Referral	Frequency
1965	33
1966	24
1964	17
1963	14
1962	9
1961	3
Total	100

TABLE V
NUMBER OF STUDENT REFERRALS IN RANK ORDER OF FREQUENCY
IN GRADES 4, 5, 6, IN THE BELLEVUE SCHOOL DISTRICT
1961-1966

Grade Level	Frequency
Fourth	48
Sixth	29
Fifth	23
Total	100

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary of the study. The Bellevue Elementary School Guidance Teams have well defined procedures for the case study of students referred to them by teachers. These procedures have been formulated and approved by the guidance department of the district. The team effort is stressed as a comprehensive way to deal with these students by using the talents of the school nurse, the guidance counselor, the principal, the teacher, the school psychologist, and the speech therapist. This focus of attention enhanced the possibility of evaluating the child's problem and of providing a program of guidance for him. The concept of elementary school guidance teams seems to be a new one. Not much data has been published on this subject. The information available does, however, indicate a trend toward this approach.

The classroom teacher is the primary referral agent for the district guidance personnel. His position in the classroom makes it possible for him to observe and record any deviant behavior of his students. These observations lead to the actual referral of students to the guidance team. Researching the reasons that teachers use for referral was the objective of this paper. The value judgments of

teachers whose referral forms were used for this study indicated some tendencies in referral practices.

Conclusions. The actual referral of students to the guidance teams by teachers showed these tendencies.

1. Boys accounted for more than three-fourths of all referrals.
2. Girls accounted for less than one-fourth of all referrals.
3. More students were referred for academic difficulties than for any other reason.
4. More boys were referred for behavior difficulties than girls.
5. There were few referrals of students for social difficulties.
6. There were no referrals of girls for physical difficulties.
7. More boys were referred for academic difficulties than girls. These boys were referred for reading problems more than any other reason for this category.
8. The data seemed to indicate the tendency for teachers to make more student referrals in recent years.
9. More fourth grade students were referred for case study than fifth or sixth graders.

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