

THE EFFECTS OF SPECIAL COUNSELING UPON TALENTED STUDENTS WITH INFERIOR GRADES

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Recent educational surveys indicate that a considerable proportion of human talent is being neglected and wasted. A study conducted by Educational Testing Service (7) revealed that thirty per cent of the students identified as capable of doing advanced study did not continue their formal education beyond high school. In the survey three factors were found to be associated with non-attendance in colleges. They were low educational level of parents, low financial status, and poor school marks.

Local investigations revealed similar conditions (2, 3, 4).

The objective of this study was to overcome the possible effects of the three factors cited above by a special program of counseling with talented students who had inferior school marks. Specifically, it was to inform the parents of educational and vocational opportunities and to help the students improve their school marks. If the latter could be accomplished students might qualify for scholarship aid, thereby overcoming the problem of financial need.

Procedures

The local investigations cited previously indicate that many academically talented students are performing at inferior levels in the classroom. The sample for this study was selected from this population. It consisted of ninth and tenth grade students in four high schools who scored in the upper 25% by local and national standards on a composite of five tests from the Iowa Tests of Educational Development, and performed below the median of their class on grade point averages.

Two equivalent groups of twenty-five students each were selected from this population; one was used as a control group, the other as an experimental group.

Counseling with the experimental group was of the social-casework type and included parents. It was the judgment of the investigator that this was desirable since background data revealed that parents had relatively weak educational backgrounds, and, as a result, were not aware of many opportunities available to students for higher education and occupational advancement.

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The counseling interviews typically consisted of one or two parent-student conferences, one with the parent alone and three with the student alone. The contacts also consisted of one sitting for special aptitude tests. The contacts typically followed this pattern:

1. Parents and students together were given an interpretation of the students' performance on the standardized examinations. The following points were emphasized: (a) The students were apparently learning at a high level, as determined by the standardized tests; (b) students of this type are qualified for higher education thru scholarships and various other means, and (c) the students' school record was below average and not representative of his level of learning.

Parents and students were then advised that the counselor would work with them during the semester in an effort to improve school performance of the student.

2. The second contact was with the student alone and its purpose was to obtain the student's explanation of the discrepancy between test and school performance.

3. The third contact was with parents alone and dealt with their explanation of the discrepancy.

4. All subsequent interviews were directed toward (a) comprising parent-student differences, (b) impressing upon the student the opportunities that would be available after high school, and (c) determining methods by which the student could improve his school performance. Steps a, b, and c generally consumed three conferences.

The control students received no treatment and were not aware of their status in the study.

The collected data consisted of case records of home visits, background information on parents and grade point averages before and after the treatment.

Results

The case history material revealed many conditions among the students that might have contributed to their poor school performance. In the first place the educational level of parents was comparatively low. More than half of the fathers had not completed high school and only one of the twenty-five students had a parent who graduated from college. Secondly, the most frequent occupation for fathers was in skilled labor, only one student having a parent in professional work. Ten of the twenty-five case histories revealed death or divorce and remarriage as having occurred in the students' families.

Interviews also revealed that the students had done little toward planning for careers or additional training after high school. Only eleven planned to attend college and seven expressed no plans for further education or training.

The verbal reactions of both parents and students to the counselor's efforts were somewhat depressing. Parents received the information about their childrens' talent rather passively and were not overly-impressed by the fact that they had capability for training in professional fields. In some instances parents tried to avoid contact with the counselor.

In general the aspirations of neither parents nor students approached the level expected from the measured ability of the students.

The statistical results were determined by comparing the proportions and extent of change in grade point average from beginning to end of treatment between experimentals and controls.

Table 1 is a summary of school performance for the experimental and control groups before and after the treatment period.

Table 1
Comparison of GPA Between E and C Groups
Before and After Treatment

Mean GPA	Experimental Group (N=25)	Control Group (N=25)	Diff.	t
First semester	2.01	1.95	.06	.04
Second semester	2.05	1.82	.23	1.35
Gain	.04	- .13		

The statistics reveal a slight gain for the counseled students and a decrement for the control group. However, the difference is not significant at the .05 level of confidence.

A summary of directions in change of GPA's following treatment reveals 11 gains, 10 decrements and 4 showing no change in the experimental group. In the control group 7 gains, 12 decrements and 6 with no change were recorded. Arrangement of these proportions in a contingency table and application of the chi square test shows no significant difference between control and experimental groups. The same test applied to average GPA in English, a course common to all students in the study, also resulted in no significant difference between controls and counseled students.

These results indicate that special counseling of the type described above was of no immediate benefit to the students in improving their grades. It is quite possible that other desirable effects could have resulted, but these were not the concern of this study.

To determine the possible effect of the counseling over an extended time period GPA's were secured for the first quarter of the school year succeeding the original study. For 19 pairs of students who were still enrolled in school GPA's before treatment and approximately six months after termination of treatment are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Comparison of GPA Between E and C Groups
Before and After Treatment
(Six Months After)

Mean GPA	Experimental Group (N=19)	Control Group (N=19)	Diff.	t
Pre-treatment	2.06	1.99	.07	.40
Post-treatment	2.39	2.27	.12	.70
Gain	+.33	+.28		

Again the results favor counseled students but the differences are not significant. When the results are forced into trichotomy of gain, loss and no change the results look somewhat better for experimental students. In this group there are 14 gains, 5 decrements and none with no change. The control group shows nine gains, nine decrements and one without change. A chi square test applied to this set of proportions is significant at the .05 level.

Conclusions

The results of this study followed the pattern of others reported recently in the literature which revealed a weakness in counseling efforts to improve school performance. A similar investigation by Ohlsen (5) *et al.* using group counseling resulted in a decided difference in favor of control students when grade point average was used as the criterion. Baymur (1) found that results were inconsistent under three types of counseling and Schoenhard (6) found that home counseling resulted in lower grades than did no treatment.

The study is continuing with a change in treatment during the present year. Counseling will center on intensive vocational analysis and planning in an effort to bring school work into closer relation with an occupational level.

References

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