

**ABSENT FROM SCHOOL:
THE ROLE OF THE COUNSELOR**



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ABSENT FROM SCHOOL: THE ROLE OF THE COUNSELOR

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Research Paper written by Valinda Murphy entitled "Absent from School: The Role of the Counselor." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in psychology.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

"Tardy," "cut," "absent," "suspended," and "dropped" are common words in school systems today. All indicate some form of student non-attendance. All are part of the same problem--estrangement of the student from the school system or the school system from the student. Attendance problems are as old as compulsory education laws, but one can only speculate concerning reasons for increasing attention to the problem:

1. The schools' resources are often based upon average daily attendance (Birman & Natriello, 1978).
2. High absenteeism threatens the school's legitimacy as an institution (Birman & Natriello, 1978).
3. Poor attendance is one of the first signs of the decay of a school and a school system (Jett & Platt, 1979).
4. Truancy serves as a reminder of the inadequacies of the school and of its inability to capture the interest of many students (Nielsen & Gerber, 1979).
5. Many school administrators are genuinely

concerned about the future of young people and their responsibilities for meeting these young people's needs (Birman & Natriello, 1978).

Regardless of the reason, poor attendance presents problems for the student, the school, and the society at large (Birman & Natriello, 1978).

Evidence of increasing attention to the problem can be found in the frequency of publications on the subjects. A study of the National Education Association's (NEA) summary of research shows 148 articles were published on school dropouts between 1949 and 1966. There were 5 articles published in 1949, 6 between 1950 and 1954, 17 between 1955 and 1959, 70 from 1960-1964, and 50 in 1965 and 1966 alone (Yudin, Ring, Nowakiwska, & Heinemann, 1973). Researchers have reviewed records and literature, interviewed chronically absent students, talked with concerned educators and parents, and obtained opinions from principals. Despite the remarkable amount of investigation into school attendance problems, few results have led to counseling strategies and interventions (Brooks, 1974; Morgan, 1975).

Much of the research on student school absenteeism has dealt on a small scale with different aspects of the same problem and resulted in data too fragmentary and inadequate to permit understanding of the total individual

and the total problem. For example, in some of the articles reviewed researchers studied "student failure" (the chronically absent student is often failing); in others the "dropout" has been the subject of study (the dropout has often been chronically absent); and in still others the "truant" (one who is likely to fail and/or dropout) has been the focus (Neel & DeBruler, 1979; Nielsen & Gerber, 1979; Yudin et al., 1973). Only by studying the complete student and school situation can proper remediation for attendance problems be identified.

The purpose of this study is to review the research on truancy in order to provide insight into the person, his or her world, and interventions which may be helpful or not helpful. Terms such as "absentee," "truant," and "dropout" will be used interchangeably to identify the same person. The characteristics of the truant, reasons for truancy, solutions to the truancy problem, recommendations to the counselor, and recommendations for further study will be included.

Chapter 2

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TRUANT

"Children Out of School in America," a report published by the Children's Defense Fund of the Washington Research Project, serves as a source document for many current studies of truancy. According to this report, the child who is out of school in America today is not white, or is white but not middle class. He or she does not speak English, needs special help with seeing, hearing, walking, reading, learning, adjusting, or growing-up. The child is not smart enough or is too smart. The truant is usually married and/or pregnant at age 15. These out-of-school children have a common characteristic of being different by virtue of race, income, physical, mental, or emotional handicap, or age (Children's Defense Fund, 1974). Dropouts are usually ill-disciplined and have no basic skills. They may have been hurt and want to strike back. They tend to be extremely parochial, limited in experience of the world, gullible, and suspicious of anything beyond their experience. Generally, they are inconveniently aware of their own sexuality and inconveniently skilled at bringing it to the attention of others (Schreiber, 1967).

In an effort to describe the psychosocial context in

which truancy occurs and the student's experience of truancy, Nielsen and Gerber (1979) personally interviewed 33 truants in grades six through eight. Nearly one-half of the truants were older than their classmates because they had repeated grades. One-third of the sample had repeated one of the first four grades. A positive correlation between repetition of a grade and number of days truant during the year was reported in this study ($r(32) = .56$; $p < .001$). Of 50 dropouts studied by Yudin et al. (1973), 36% repeated one grade, 30% repeated two grades, and 8% repeated three grades.

Nielsen and Gerber (1979) found many truants exhibit symptoms of depression or anger. Four in 33 had attempted suicide and one had homicidal thoughts. When asked to think of someone they would like to grow up to be like, 61% could not give a reply.

A frequent complaint of truants was that teachers provided inadequate personal attention and help with school work. The majority of the truants (70%) viewed the school environment as the major cause of their truancy. They said their most negative experiences at school were difficulties they encountered with school adults. When asked if there was anyone they admired at school, 85% said there was no one. When asked if there was someone they would go to for help with their school work or social

problems, 73% replied that there was no one. Only 12% of the truants met with school adults in after-school activities. Only 21% had positive feelings about teachers. Virtually all (94%) had cut class; 81% were told frequently that they disrupted class. Antisocial acts included: disrupting class, 81%; fighting, 67%; stealing, 55%; running away, 31%; firesetting, 22%; non-school vandalism, 17%; school vandalism, 7%; cruelty to animals, 7%; drug use was common (Nielsen & Gerber, 1979). What the truant disliked about teachers was alleged unfriendliness, authoritarianism, and unresponsiveness to the students' learning needs. Many disagreements between students and teachers tended to fester for months after the problems had been referred out-of-class to the assistant principal or other school personnel for resolution.

Truants usually described themselves as skipping rather than truanting, which suggests an activity without significant forethought. This attitude also serves to neutralize feelings which might stop the deviant act; however, many expressed shame about their truancy (Nielsen & Gerber, 1979).

Fogelman (1978) conducted a longitudinal study utilizing data available in the National Child Development Study. The sample was composed of all children born in England, Scotland, and Wales from March third to March

ninth 1958. Fogelman studied information and computed statistics on over 7000 children. He found significant relationships between attendance and reading and math scores. This relationship was not as significant in children 7 years of age as in children 15 years of age. Children with high attendance levels obtained higher scores on tests of reading comprehension and mathematics and were less often indicated by their teachers as showing deviant behavior (Fogelman, 1978).

Yudin et al. (1973) compared records of random samples of 50 high school dropouts and 50 college bound students. The academic average was slightly higher than an "E" or failing for the dropouts during their last full year of school. Behavior grades averaged C- for dropouts compared to E+ for college-bound students.

The truants' families were similar in many characteristics. Brothers and sisters in most cases were truant also. The families were subject to numerous stresses. Seventy-six percent experienced three or more of the following stresses concurrently: divorce or separation, single parent families, relocation within the past two years, unemployment, serious illness, parental discord, or alcoholism. Only 35% ate regularly with their families or reported spending time with their families on vacation. In 62% of the families the occupational level was below

the educational level, indicating that education did not pay off for these parents (Nielsen & Gerber, 1979).

Fogelman factored out several social factors found to be related to student attendance. Attendance rates decline for children of both sexes in relation to social class. Social class was measured by the father's occupation when the child was age 16. "No male head of household" was a separate category. Students in this category had the greatest number of absences. They also had the slowest rate of improvement in reading and mathematics as their attendance increased. Indications are that fatherless families may experience more severe problems than those families with fathers present in the home. However, students living in overcrowded homes also have a greater absentee rate according to Fogelman (1978).

Nielsen and Gerber (1979) found that most parents were concerned about their children's school work and did not encourage their truancy. Most truants subscribed with their families to a belief in the importance of formal education (Nielsen & Gerber, 1979).

In summary, a great many characteristics common to truant students have been identified. These characteristics include such problems as personality disorders, social deviances, physical handicaps, low scholastic abilities, poor living conditions, and difficult family

situations. Whatever the problem, one can be sure it is greater than the simple label "truant" implies.

Chapter 3

REASONS FOR TRUANCY

Birman and Natriello (1978) outline three broad categories which include all explanations or reasons for student absenteeism. They use the terms "student level," "school level," and "societal level" to describe these categories.

The student level focuses on the reasons for certain students being chronically absent from school. This concern is common among school counselors, psychologists, and truant officers. These professionals view absenteeism as a problem in which each student must be dealt with separately. The student level explanation includes the psychodynamic approach which explains absenteeism as an expression of nonconformist behavior, rebellion against authority figures, and poor superego controls. Other factors within the student's personality may contribute to school truancy; however, perhaps the most straightforward student level explanation for absenteeism was expressed by Suprina (1979). He states that chronic truants skip classes, not certain subjects or particular teachers, suggesting that the problem lies within the student, not the school situation.

The authority defying truants described by Nielsen

and Gerber (1979) could also be included in this category. Authority defying truants are identified by their participation in delinquent behaviors. They have more delinquent friends, more negative feelings about teachers, and a greater frequency of repeating early grades.

A second category used by Birman and Natriello (1978) to describe reasons for truancy is called the "school level." Persons and research that subscribe to this view of student absenteeism question why certain schools have higher rates of absenteeism than other schools. Literature that focuses on peer group subcultures and student body attitudes is characteristic.

Peer phobic students described by Nielsen and Gerber (1979) fall into the school level category. Peer phobic students have few close peer relationships. They experience anxiety and embarrassment in encounters with peers. They are picked on, laughed at, and singled-out for shyness or other peculiar behaviors. These students are satisfied with school work and teachers and rarely engage in delinquent activity. Motivational and emotional influences, especially difficult pupil-teacher and peer group relationships, seem to be the most important factors contributing to the truancy of the students according to Nielsen and Gerber (1979).

Beyond peer group influences, structural or organizational arrangements in the school may explain high rates

of absenteeism (Birman & Natriello, 1978). First and second hour classes and classes after lunch had the worst attendance according to results reported by Suprina (1979). The number one reason for a student cutting class was the existence of a substitute teacher in place of the regular teacher (Suprina, 1979). The advocates of school change argue that the lack of student participation in school government also contributes to student absenteeism (Birman & Natriello, 1978).

An important intervening variable associated with the onset and intensification of truancy is the child's entrance into the junior high school. The larger junior high school with its unfamiliar students and multiple teachers, each providing less personal attention, presents difficulties for many students--some of whom will respond by being truant (Nielsen & Gerber, 1979; Teachman, 1979). Additionally, the same effect may be seen in the transition between junior and senior high school. The results of a study by Yudin et al. (1973) showed that unexcused absences rose dramatically for students after 7th grade, especially during grades 9 and 10. Dropouts most frequently exited in the 10th grade. The grade most often repeated by dropouts was the 10th. Indications are that the ability to cope with these transitions is a critical factor in the success, the attendance, and the future of the student in the school system.

The results of the Yudin et al. study (1973) also suggest a distinction between "good" and "bad" schools. It appears that a student has a better chance of "making it" depending on which school he or she is attending.

In an extensive study related to school structure, Moos and Moos (1978) used the Classroom Environment Scale (CES) to study absenteeism rates as related to competition and teacher control and affiliation and teacher support. Nineteen classes in which students were involved in a college preparatory curriculum were sampled. Each of the nineteen classrooms was characterized by 9 student and 9 teacher subscale scores. These eighteen scores were correlated with the median number of absences per student per class and the mean grades of the students in each class. Student absentee rates were significantly and positively correlated with student perceptions of competition and teacher control and significantly negatively correlated with teacher perceptions of teacher support. The researchers concluded that "the classrooms which students perceive as high in competition and teacher control (and to a somewhat lesser extent rule clarity) and which teachers perceive as low in teacher support tend to have higher rates of student absenteeism" (Moos & Moos, 1978, p. 265).

Absenteeism is partly a function of physical symptoms and medical illness. Characteristics of social environments

have been related to these variables. Of interest are the correlations between the classroom social environment and the rate of medically excused absence which were similar to those for total absences. Medically excused absences were also significantly correlated with student perceived involvement and teacher control.

An analysis to determine the particular aspects of the classroom most closely related to absenteeism rate showed 8 CES items correlated at the $p < .01$ level. Students in classes with high absentee rates were likely to feel that they were clock watching, that they needed to be careful about what they said, that there were clear and set rules, and that it was relatively easy to get into trouble in the class. These students were more likely to state that they did not enjoy the class, they could not discuss outside activities in class, that passing the class was relatively difficult, and that the teacher was fairly strict (Moos & Moos, 1978).

The third and final category used by Birman and Natriello (1978) to describe reasons for increasing absentee rates is called "societal level." According to these writers, the school has failed to recognize the students' new social status, i.e. that of citizens with legitimate needs and interests. The school is responsible for providing activities which fit these interests. Low school

attendance is an indication of poor communication between the school and the rest of the world. The workplace is one example. Students see little relationship between school and the work world. School attendance is not a guarantee of employment, therefore, it is less useful in meeting future needs. Other societal factors which contribute to high rates of absenteeism are: (1) increase in desegregation; (2) earlier physiological and psychological development of youth (including development of a youth subculture); and (3) lengthening delay between the time when youth are ready to assume adult roles and when they are allowed to do so (Birman & Natriello, 1978).

To avoid making Birman and Natriello's categories seem too concise and easily definable, the following data must be considered. For middle class children school is very central and is continuous with the totality of their life experiences. There are few incongruities between school experience and other experiences; therefore, intrinsically motivating and molding properties exist for these children in the school situation. For lower class children there is not the same contiguity or continuity. They do not have the coping mechanisms for internalizing success or for psychologically surviving failure in the formal learning setting. They do not have the support from family or community or school as their counterparts.

Many poor youths are placed in a school environment that does not fit their disposition, for which they are unprepared by their background, and one which does not interest them. They simply develop a "reactive stupidity" very different from their behavior on the street or ballfield (Schreiber, 1967). Yudin et al. (1973) found individual differences in dropouts and other students evident from the time the children entered school. They also saw increasing differentiation between college bound students and dropouts throughout their school histories, indicating that explanations of a student's absenteeism cannot be simple and that students themselves do not often fit neatly into categories.

Difficulties arise when attempts are made to explain truancy. The issue of who is responsible for truancy is open for discussion. Factors to be considered, however, include the effects of transitions from school to school, classroom environments, employment considerations, and class values. These effects may be as negative for truants as they are positive for college-bound and other students.

SOLUTIONS TO THE TRUANCY PROBLEM

Whatever the reasons for which students may be absent, school personnel are still faced with the problem of truancy. Several solutions for every explanation of student absenteeism may be found in the literature. These solutions, as well as the negative and positive aspects of each, will be presented.

The punishment system. A school can ignore truant children, suspend them, expel them, or give social promotions. Allowing absences to continue is easier than dealing with the consequences of remediation efforts; i.e., behavior problems and school overcrowding (Birman & Natriello, 1978). Thus, these children rarely get treatment for their problems until they get into trouble. Expulsion and suspension are common methods of punishment which schools use to deal with troublesome students.

Educators may decide that school is not the place for problem children and encourage them to leave school (Children's Defense Fund, 1974; Lichter, Rapien, Siebert, & Sklansky, 1962). "The locals are getting pretty tired of 'Edsel' and are about ready to get him out of there with a hammer and sickle if necessary. If we are to grow anything better, the dropouts are the kids to start with" (Schreiber, 1964, p. 37). Balancing the welfare of the

majority of students against the needs of youngsters with problems is difficult for school personnel. Skillful, objective handling of problem students and therapeutic attention has been found to be effective in reducing the number of students with absenteeism problems. Unless students are given every opportunity to resolve their problems, society shares in their failure (Lichter et al., 1962).

Almost no suspensions are justifiable in terms of the best educational interests of children. A Children's Defense Fund (1974) survey found 24.5% of suspensions were related to truancy and tardiness. Suspending students because of tardiness or truancy is seen as a way to get the parents to school and to get them involved. Although the parent has been found to be by far the most effective anti-truancy intervention (Nielsen & Gerber, 1979), the results of the Children's Defense Fund study (1974) showed that many times a suspension is never followed with a parent conference. Thirty-three percent of the suspended students returned to school alone. Little evidence showed the conference, when held, was used to discuss the child's problem or plan for future prevention. It is ironic to suspend a child for staying out of school. The negative consequences of being out of school on suspension are much the same as those of being out of school in the first

1. The child cannot participate academically. Each day's work is usually recorded as an unexcused absence during a suspension and cannot be made up. The child may lose an academic year through suspensions. If the student is weak academically the suspension may doom him or her to fail.

2. Merely removing troubling children does not obtain the diagnostic or supportive services which could uncover and remediate causes of misbehavior.

3. Suspension is a label that stigmatizes the child in or out of school. It follows the student in later academic or employment pursuits.

4. Suspensions are highly correlated with juvenile delinquency. Leaving children idle and without supervision, especially those with problems, does not provide them with the guidance needed to solve the problems they face at the time of the suspension and will face in the future.

Winborne (1980) found that students with excessive absences were more successful in re-entering the classroom after in-school suspension. No more than four students were placed in a classroom in this suspension situation. They were not allowed to leave the classroom. Students were evaluated, tutored, and counseled in an effort to increase their potential for success upon re-entry into the regular classroom.

In findings by Nielsen and Gerber (1979), however, 93% of the truants interviewed thought that contacts with assistant principals which led to detention were mainly punitive and ineffective in diminishing further truancy. Detention resulted in more hostility between truants and school adults and interfered with assessment of truants' underlying problems.

Surprisingly, Nielsen and Gerber (1979) found students viewed contacts with the criminal court positively. Students felt understood and taken seriously by probation officers. By studying truant court cases in England, Berg, Hullen, McGuire, and Tyrer (1977) found that certain court procedures resulted in about one-half as many subsequent absences as other procedures. However, confounding variables such as poor handling of truants in one condition of the study may have biased these results.

Indications are that no intervention for remediation of truancy can be simplistic and address only some of the issues involved in the problem. A particularly poor procedure or program may only serve to worsen the problem.

The reward system. It is difficult to develop remedial programs that are naturally reinforcing and to find legal reinforcers that successfully compete with reinforcers available to the problem teenager (Neel & DeBruler, 1979). Following is a description of several attempts to develop

such programs and their results.

Stringer (1978) instituted an attendance contest among students in grades 7-9. Highest attenders after four weeks were given a party during one period. He used periods in the school year during which attendance had been low in previous years to hold additional contests. Other rewards for attendance included suckers, athletic activities, and passes for all school activities for a quarter. The average daily attendance was over 95%, an increase over previous years. Other benefits from the program included better school morale and improved public relations between school and community.

To reduce truancy in a 13-year-old learning disabled student, Zweig, Epstein, Chlebnikow, and Cullinan (1979) employed a contingency contract. Using trading stamps as a secondary reinforcer was effective in changing the truant behavior of this learning disabled subject. Generalization of improved behavior was reported in academic and social areas.

A study by Morgan (1975) involving 92 Mexican-American students in grades K-5 as subjects used behavior modification techniques to help chronic absentees. His findings support the use of a combination of material plus peer social reinforcement, material reinforcement alone, and teacher social reinforcement alone. No differences were

found between material and social reinforcement methods in reducing absenteeism.

One truant girl interviewed by Nielsen and Gerber (1979) had been placed in a special tutorial program. She developed a close bond with her tutor and her attendance and learning improved dramatically. Minkler (1980) also found that giving special help to high school truants in the form of counselors and additional tutors improved the average daily attendance in his school from 80% to 97% in one year.

The policy system. "A policy to control attendance appears to be a frequent response among today's secondary school administrators" (Brokowski & Dempsey, 1979, p. 129). Most policies are designed around a maximum number of days the student must be present to pass a course (Childs, 1979; Jett & Platt, 1979; Perlberg, 1980; Suprina, 1979; Teachman, 1979). It is not enough to have an attendance policy; the policy has to be enforced (Teachman, 1979). To enforce attendance policies accurate attendance records must be kept. One school used a computer to monitor attendance (LeCrone, Doolen & Wilkenson, 1978); another hired an attendance clerk (Jett & Platt, 1979). The idea of "making students accountable" is honorable (Childs, 1979), but it is still the school that does the accounting. The school with an attendance policy is saying, "We

believe school attendance is important--that school attendance is of value to the student." Schools reporting institution of attendance policies also report increases in average daily attendance (Childs, 1979; LeCrone, Doolen, & Wilkensen, 1978), decreases in class cutting (Suprina, 1979), and increases in academic achievement (Brokowski & Dempsey, 1979).

Possibly as an outgrowth of attendance policymaking, one system studied adopted a self-management attendance program. Children at least two years behind in one or more of the basic academic areas of learning in an alternative school were placed on a self-management attendance program. Students were given requirements to meet if they were to be allowed to attend classes; for example, attend each class on time and complete specific assignments. Students were denied admittance to school until they performed the appropriate tasks. The average number of students absent dropped from 24.3 to 13.5 students ($t=11.9$, $df=119$; $p < .0005$). Assumptions of this study were that school is valuable and would retain its value only if students could experience academic success, and that successful school work is reinforcing (Neel & DeBruler, 1979).

Change the system. A major problem in dealing with educating young people is the design of an appropriate

educational environment (Neel & DeBruler, 1979). Environments must be challenging to encourage growth in achievement and understanding (Moos & Moos, 1978). A number of educators began to call for changes in the school as an institution in the 1960's and 1970's. These educators became active in the alternative school movement (Birman & Natriello, 1978). The alternative school has become a popular solution to the absentee problem. Sentelli (1980), in Elizabethton, Tennessee, designed an alternative program for chronic absentees to meet in a location apart from the regular school. Assignments were made by regular teachers, but the students were responsible to one special teacher all day. Students remained an average of two weeks (10 days) in the alternative school. Sentelli termed his program successful since students returned to the classroom without falling behind in their studies.

Some students do perform better in environments outside the regular classroom. The special school should be therapeutic, not custodial. It should offer academics, not just vocational or busy-work courses. It should have a staff of educators, psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers (Lichter et al., 1962). Although environments should be challenging, Moos and Moos (1978) found students in competitive environments had greater rates of absenteeism. Other studies indicate that some children may be harmed by

a highly demanding educational environment (Lichter et al., 1962). There is evidence that the nature, strength, and availability of social supports are protective factors which cushion a person from the effects of various psychosocial life stresses; therefore, social supports should be increased, especially in competitive settings (Moos & Moos, 1978; Morgan, 1975).

Some educators contend that the teacher must do his or her part in changing the system. In a program set up by Jett and Platt (1979), teachers have the responsibility of structuring their classes so that absences are detrimental to pupil's grades. Many in-school truants are "good" kids and are, therefore, allowed to make up the work. Additionally, the population of one class may change from day to day with as many as 30% of the students absent each day. The teacher's workload is increased not only by creating daily work and make-up work, but also by reviewing (Teachman, 1979).

One of the most common suggestions made to teachers is to make their classes more interesting. Dialogue with faculty, students, and parents indicated stimulating classes were the best deterrent to student class absenteeism (Suprina, 1979). In deference to Suprina, Teachman (1979) stated that many students equate difficult with boring and that students, like adults, prefer to do what

is most enjoyable. Therefore, even interesting and exciting teachers have to be the most interesting and exciting things in students' lives if this is to be the sole motivating factor in getting them to class. Meanwhile, the school becomes a vaudeville stage where teachers are busy entertaining in the hope of keeping students in school (Neel & DeBruler, 1979). Additionally, students may be exposed to diluted, more superficial instruction. Teachman (1979) hypothesizes that this is the reason a great number of the "A" students in Detroit public schools score below the 50th percentile on national examinations.

Nielsen and Gerber (1979) and Birman and Natriello (1978) found evidence that better peer attitudes and relationships could result in high rates of attendance. However, attempts to encourage positive peer attitudes by fostering a relaxed social climate can cause problems. Under these conditions some students may attend school primarily to socialize with their friends (Birman & Natriello, 1978).

As society's requirements of the individual change, the schools' requirements also begin to change. Skills are becoming as important or more important than course content. A recent intervention implemented by many schools in an attempt to measure knowledge and skills has been the competency examination. Educators are cautioned not to

define away absenteeism without addressing its negative individual and social consequences. High absenteeism rates deprive students of the skills and credentials needed for later occupational attainment. Minimal competency examinations will not mitigate these effects if they are not rigorous or if they are viewed as providing a "second-class" diploma (Birman & Natriello, 1978).

Another intervention which is aimed at increasing the "flexibility" in the arrangement of the high school as an institution is lowering the school exit age. Reducing the number of hours of compulsory attendance is being considered and implemented by some schools. Four students interviewed by Neilsen and Gerber (1979) were allowed to come to school on shortened schedules. The assumption should not be that the school is toxic and the toxicity can be reduced by decreasing the dosage (Neilsen & Gerber, 1979). This intervention will not help if large numbers of students are left unoccupied and without skills to obtain future employment (Birman & Natriello, 1978).

Efforts to improve school attendance are diverse. Evidence shows that any attention or support given the truants may influence them to produce desired behaviors. However, remediation involves more than holding a contest or requiring more homework. Just as the total individual must be studied, the total problem must be addressed in any real remediation effort.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COUNSELOR

Research cited by current articles indicated that the same truancy issues present in today's society were problematic in the 1940's (Morgan, 1975). The truant has been identified and described, the causes of truancy defined, and some of the results of truancy enumerated. However, specific procedures for counselors to use with problem attendees have not been developed (Brooks, 1974; Morgan, 1975). Different writers see the role of the counselor differently. The counselor's role may shift from one of working with children and teachers to engaging parents in an active and on-going educational program (Schreiber, 1967).

The guidance counselor as a counselor. Many believe that one-to-one encounters between counselors and students will enable students to gain a better understanding of themselves and the situation. Some writers are convinced that counseling can cure the school dropout syndrome. There is some research to indicate that as the number of counselors per students increases the number of dropouts decreases. This faith in counseling ignores the long history of school failure that may be present in the student's life, and the diversity of reasons that may have contributed to the failure.

Although three-fourths of the truants studied by Neilsen and Gerber (1979) had seen guidance counselors who were perceived as sympathetic listeners, contacts were brief and rarely led to resolution of the truancy problem. Counseling the student with a truancy problem is a difficult task in itself. Trouble at school affects the start of counseling. Negative feelings toward the school often dominate treatment. The counselor may be pressed to solve the students' school difficulties. School officials may need to be persuaded to tolerate school problems until the counselor can involve the student in a meaningful relationship (Lichter et al., 1962).

Guidance counselors, although supportive, had little effect on truants in one study because of their absence of authority. It was suggested that the non-punitive authority of probation officers could serve as a model for counselors in working with truants. By using non-punitive authority to get students involved in discussing their problems, counselors could then work on correcting problems at school (Neilsen & Gerber, 1979). These procedures might include providing structure and limits for the student, assisting the students in setting goals, and providing evaluation, tutoring, reinforcement, and other directive counseling procedures.

For many truants the crucial issues are mainly

problems in dealing with school adults. Teacher difficulties are often central in truancy cases. In one study, problems with teachers were handled by changing class teachers altogether. This process avoids direct attempts to improve the strained relationship. The situation could be improved by involving the teacher in the remediation process (Nielsen & Gerber, 1979). The counselor as well as psychologists and social workers and other professionals should be available to consult teachers about students (Lichter et al., 1962).

Classroom problems, learning problems, social problems, and many other factors may cause educational gaps for the student. Tutoring is one means of closing these gaps. In many cases tutoring is a necessary part of psychological treatment (Licher et al., 1962).

Some evidence indicates that providing support to the student may help the truant youngster (Lichter et al., 1962). The results of Morgan's study (1975) indicate the need for large scale utilization of supports in the form of material reinforcement, material and peer social reinforcement, and teacher social reinforcement for dealing with attendance problems in the public school.

The counselor needs to be in close contact with referral agencies. One-third of the truants studied by Nielsen and Gerber (1979) were referred to social service

or mental health agencies. Contacts were brief and only three lasted for more than one month. Five truants felt helped and three felt these contacts helped to reduce truancy (Nielsen & Gerber, 1979). Case studies of students may help counselors in finding the cause(s) for the absenteeism and assist other agencies to which the student may be referred. Dropouts need to be referred to some agency which will keep in touch with them and assist them in finding jobs and adjusting to work. Dropouts have high rates of job changes and unemployment and their support may fall upon the community; referral may ultimately benefit the community and society.

Sometimes, these young people will manifest an interest in returning to school, and some will return successfully with a little help (Lichter et al., 1962). The counselor will want to maintain communication and be open to contacts from dropouts to assist the student should re-entry be desired.

Counselors will need to be alert to emotional problems that may interfere with educational success. Students often accumulate a long history of problems before treatment is recommended. If treatment is deferred until the child is ready to dropout, the odds are against prevention of his or her leaving. Counselors can identify these students by signs of personality problems; emotional

problems manifest themselves readily in school situations. Early intervention in problems of school truancy can prevent adult character disorders and ultimately benefit the individual and society (Lichter et al., 1962).

Early non-attendance predicts later poor attendance which is related to low achievement. Although the level of attendance of a child at age 7 has a slight relationship to achievement and behavior at age 16, the relationship is not significant. Thus, a child missing a great deal of school in the early grades will be able to overcome any resulting disadvantage if attendance improves (Fogelman, 1978).

The guidance counselor as an evaluator. Adequate diagnostic techniques which would permit the early identification of high risk students, i.e. those with a greater than average risk of school failure, could make it possible to reverse an established tendency toward failure (Yudin et al., 1973). Countless numbers of diagnostic tools exist for use by guidance counselors. A simple checklist consisting of items relating to characteristics of the dropout can be used for identification of potential dropouts (Greene, 1966).

Other diagnostic methods include the study of classroom environments as suggested by Moos and Moos (1978). Teacher-pupil conflicts seem to indicate problems in this

arena. The Classroom Environmental Scale was mentioned previously as a tool to provide feedback on classroom environmental characteristics, to motivate change in desired directions, and to evaluate the change process. Classrooms which are identified as high risk early in the school year could be used experimentally and diagnostically. Preventive counseling might then be accomplished (Lichter et al., 1962).

The guidance counselor as an advisor. The counselor has a responsibility to be aware of the psychodynamics of truancy. Counselors need to know the psychological implications as well as the various results of different truancy interventions that may be tried in the school. They should be ready to advise principals and administrators on policies and programs they may wish to adopt. The literature recommends that school administrators design and enforce a policy that makes attendance in all classes mandatory and that this policy lead to acceptance of personal responsibility on the part of the students for their attendance (Brimm, Forgety, & Sadler, 1978; Teachman, 1979). It is also recommended that disciplinary exclusion policies apply only to acts involving violence to person and property (Children's Defense Fund, 1974).

Additionally, by working closely with principals and administrators, the counselor can help to improve the

school situation, thus making it easier to work with truant students. Many program changes have been suggested which could improve the school environment, i.e. reduce truancy. Some of these will be discussed below.

1. Alternate or diversified curricula: Curriculum modification may include independent study, work study, or additional courses. Independent study includes study at colleges and work with professional people or craftsmen (Children's Defense Fund, 1974). Work study programs of indepth experience with skilled or professional workers might help to diminish truancy in students who can imagine no one whose career they would like to emulate (Nielsen & Gerber, 1979). Academic credit can be given for student work or activities in an office or clinic, in an environmental project, or other settings outside the classroom. Simulation exercises or real life courses such as "family living" may make school more relevant to students (Brimm et al., 1978).

2. Flexible class schedules: This procedure includes re-organizing the day's activities on Monday and Friday. Special programs on these days should require student involvement. Re-think the daily classroom routine (Brimm et al., 1978).

3. Student participation: Encourage students' curricula input and involve them in student government as well

as local politics (Birman & Natriello, 1978; Neel & DeBruler, 1979). Work on ways to increase participation in after school activities which may generalize to other school situations (Birman & Natriello, 1978; Neilsen & Gerber, 1979). Try new ideas to increase school spirit (Birman & Natriello, 1978).

4. Transitional programs: These programs attempt to reduce the stress of transition to the junior high or senior high school (Morgan, 1975; Nielsen & Gerber, 1979). Some activities could include orientations, the buddy system, and early identification of students with difficulties. Transitional programs could especially help peer phobic students by getting them involved with other students and promoting better peer relationships (Nielsen & Gerber, 1979).

The guidance counselor as an educator. Besides working as a counselor, evaluator, and advisor, the counselor must also be an educator. Wrenn's comments (cited in Schreiber, 1967) describe how the counselor can influence others to provide a more meaningful environment and modify others' perceptions of the chronic absentee. To facilitate early identification and better understanding of the truant, the counselor can conduct workshops for administrators and teachers to discuss absenteeism. Trends in absenteeism can be analyzed (Neel & DeBruler, 1979). Educators with appropriate information on factors that

contribute to learning difficulties and poor school adjustment can be of great assistance to the counselor. When administrators and teachers have information about emotional factors that lead to personality disturbances, earlier referral will result. The school can then become concerned with the broader welfare of youngsters as their strengths and weaknesses become apparent (Lichter et al., 1962).

Social workers need to understand the general nature of the educational process. As the liaison between the school and other social services, the counselor may need to take responsibility for teaching these therapists about the philosophy and aims of educators. All professionals working with the student need to know exactly what the school can do with the student and what differences exist between the counseling situation and a mass educational setting. Counselors can be instrumental in informing the therapist of administrative channels, school organization, and views and attitudes of school personnel. The therapist needs to know what school life is like for the student, what resources are available in the school, and the procedures of the educational system.

Counselors can educate the community about the truancy problem--its quality and quantity and the cost of services necessary to prevent students from dropping out. The

community can be made aware that the cost for school services is much less than the cost of expenditures in unemployment, court costs, and social services that may continue throughout life of the "problem student." To take advantage of the potential of future citizens, programs and facilities must be developed to help students whose adaptation to school is hampered by conflicts (Lichter et al., 1962).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Students who are absent are difficult to study. Any remarks about the study of truants, chronic absentees, or dropouts must be prefaced with the above statement.

However, the myriad of problems associated with the chronically absent student make almost any type of study feasible. The present literature concerning the characteristics and behaviors of the truant suggest the following as appropriate areas for more in-depth study.

1. Motivation--intrinsic or extrinsic
2. Problem check lists
3. Self-concept
4. Relating to others
5. Locus of control
6. Achievement
7. Social class
8. Differentness

Interviews, follow-ups, and some statistical analyses of attendance data have been by far the most used methods in studying the truant. Results of tests (achievement, ability, interest, aptitude, self-concept, locus of control, etc.) would be of interest to the counselor interested in pursuing the study of these students.

Some specific studies recommended in the literature are:

1. Study the relationship between attendance and achievement;
2. Identify specific factors that increase attendance (Neel & DeBruler, 1979);
3. Determine generalization of desired behaviors after reinforcement programs have terminated;
4. Show how moderator variables such as teacher warmth, structure, classroom climate, etc., would effect desired changes in behavior (Zweig et al., 1979);
5. Find a suitable system of material and social reinforcers to back up token systems;
6. Investigate comparisons of behavioral procedures using a combination of material and social reinforcers and social reinforcers alone (Morgan, 1975).

The guidance counselor has little choice but to be involved in improving attendance in the school. If the current situation is to be improved, professional services must be extended to those individuals who struggle in one of society's basic institutions--the school. Present methods of dealing with truants must be examined. Whether the problem is school based, society based, or within the individual, responsible adults must be creative, imaginative, knowledgeable, resourceful, and open-minded in

devising programs, influencing others, and counseling for the cause of the truant. Counselors may or may not be able to reduce the myriad problems that truant youngsters must deal with on a daily basis, but they may be able to provide the support to help them cope with these problems. Contacts with counselors must be more lasting, thorough, and supportive than in the past. The services of the school guidance counselors as well as other mental health agency personnel need to be used on a much larger scale in dealing with truant students. Society will ultimately be held accountable if it fails to consider the welfare of its basic unit--the individual.

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