

Broader Roles for School Psychologists

A special program assists psychologists in developing needed knowledge and skills.

TODAY'S schools, beset by the many problems attendant upon increased enrollments, by stress upon the identification and fostering of academic talent, and by demands for special provisions for a wide range of exceptionality, are seeking new and more broadly effective modes of operation. In this search school executives are increasingly looking toward certain specialists upon their staffs to provide data and points of view to aid in the optimum solution of these varied and urgent problems. One such specialist to whom educators are looking is the psychologist trained for work in the schools.

Thus, school psychologists are in high demand today. The supply, however, is and will continue to be hopelessly inadequate if the roles we expect school psychologists to fill remain those most prevalent today—examining individual school children and working toward individual remedial efforts. These are important and highly skilled functions; there are simply not enough school psy-

chologists to go around. Even if every psychologist in the country today were employed in the schools, there would still not be enough for this approach of working with the individual, when we consider our current forty million school children. If there is any solution to this problem it must lie in somewhat different and more broadly effective methods of functioning for the psychologist in the schools.

It was this belief that somehow we must train psychologists to develop more far-reaching ways of contributing to the school's efforts in promoting the optimal educational, social and personal development of children that led to the expanded program for the training of school psychologists that George Peabody College for Teachers initiated in 1957. The program was made possible by the financial support of the National Institute of Mental Health. This article is an attempt to describe our four-year doctoral program in school psychology, particularly as it relates to teaching students to use psychological knowledge productively in school settings.

We started our training program with two major premises. The first was that

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the most useful psychologist for the schools would be one who was in every sense a generic psychologist. This premise was based upon the belief that a highly trained specialist may have particular knowledge and skills, as well as points of view, to contribute to the complex operating of schools today. The second major premise was that the school psychologist-to-be must learn how to apply his psychological skills and knowledge flexibly and creatively within the schools.

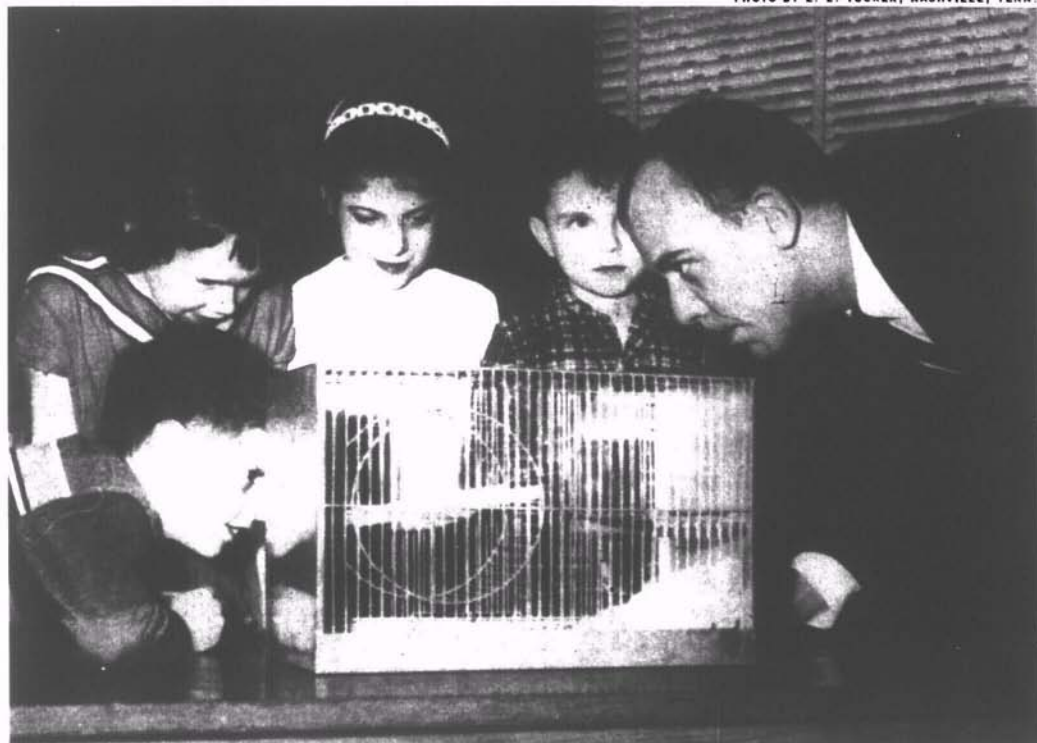
Training as Psychologists

To carry out the first major aim in our training program, insuring that our students become *psychologists*, the bulk of

the student's course work is that shared in common by all students in our psychology department. Thus our students take basic courses in experimental, developmental, personality theory, learning, measurement, and social psychology. Heavy emphasis is placed upon statistics and research methodology. Considerable stress is placed upon training in clinical skills. What we particularly hope will emerge from these aspects of the student's program are four things: (a) the acquisition of a general fund of knowledge about human behavior, (b) the development of skills to acquire new knowledge as it develops, (c) skills in working with individuals and groups, and (d) a problem-solving attitude that approaches new situations in terms of

Learning to know children of all ages is part of the training program.

PHOTO BY L. L. TUCKER, NASHVILLE, TENN.



what knowledge is available about them and what empirical data are or could be obtained to aid in answering the questions the situation poses.

Training for the Schools

But our goal is not just that our students become psychologists but that they become psychologists who can function effectively and productively in the schools' common task of promoting the educational, personal and social welfare of children. We have seen particularly two broad modes of functioning in which we would wish the student to apply his psychological knowledge and skills. One is through extending his functioning by working with those having the broadest contacts with children, their teachers, and with other members of the school staff. Helping one teacher means helping hundreds of children over the years. Coupled with this would be the use and also development of community resources for psychological help. The other way of functioning we have stressed is that of adapting research skills to working upon those problems occurring in the schools for which empirical data might provide solutions.

Certainly essential in developing the competencies we have suggested is a thoroughgoing knowledge of schools, of school personnel, and of the community of which the schools are a part. Our students must know the limits and potentials of school situations; they must understand the aspirations and anxieties of school people. They should understand schools in the context of the particular community of which they are a part and of the broader national setting.

Understanding of schools and school purposes and an ability to empathize with teachers are characteristics for

which school executives are constantly searching. An easy solution sometimes offered is that all school psychologists have teaching experience. At Peabody we have rather deliberately rejected this solution. We are glad when our students have had teaching experience, and in actual practice three-fourths of our students thus far have had such experience. Our rejection of this solution is based upon two considerations.

One is the unreasonable nature of a demand that high level specialists in one field should find it mandatory to build up a considerable competency in yet another field. The manpower problem in psychology today makes this a weighty argument. An even more cogent argument, however, is that teaching experience is no guarantee a person understands schools and school personnel on the many levels, and that there are other more economical and perhaps more effective ways of providing such understandings. The kindergarten teacher may have little understanding of the needs and problems of the high school teacher of physics. Neither may have an awareness of the pressures and responsibilities of the superintendent.

Our approach has centered around three ways of furthering understanding of the schools. First is the obvious way of requiring a limited number of courses in education. Our students, for example, take courses in curriculum, administration, special education, and the like. Most of them in their doctoral program of courses have a minor in some aspect of education.

A second way we try to provide this understanding is through a seminar taught jointly by a member of the education department and a member of the psychology staff. This seminar over the period of a year addresses itself to the

question of the role of the school psychologist as seen in the light of a broadened view of the schools and an understanding of the concerns and modes of functioning of the personnel within them.

Yet it is our conviction that students will learn best how to use their psychological knowledge creatively and productively through actual experience working in the schools. Thus we have provided a field center where students spend the equivalent of at least one day a week, from their entrance into the training program until they go out in their fourth year of training to a year's internship in a school setting.

Uses of the Field Center

This field center has been made possible through a cooperative arrangement with the schools of Murfreesboro, Tennessee. In this city of 20,000 a psychological services center has been established which we hope will in time serve three purposes for our training program—an empirical test of the role we are trying to develop for the school psychologist, a demonstration center for other school systems and training programs, and most importantly for the present concern, a training center for students.

During their years of training the students have opportunities to come into contact and to work directly with children and teachers at all grade levels. Opportunities are given to participate in in-service training programs, to work with PTA groups, attend relevant school and community meetings, to become acquainted with the administrative staff, to meet with community agencies and community leaders. Throughout all these experiences an effort is made to give the student as responsible a position as he is ready for and to enable him to general-

ize his growing knowledge of schools and school people as he compares Murfreesboro with other school settings.

Practicing the Role

In large measure we have attempted to organize these experiences with schools around opportunities for the student actually to practice, on the level which is appropriate for him, the role of the school psychologist as we have conceptualized it in our program. This has been done chiefly by having each student, in consultation with the staff, select some project on which he proposes to work individually or with other students and/or faculty members over a period of time. For beginning students we try to see that projects meet the following criteria: they are relevant and often of immediate concern to schools; they are ones for which empirical data exist or could be made available; they will bring him in close contact with children, school personnel, and the community; they tend to give the student experience in areas which he needs to strengthen. Three illustrations follow that are representative of the range of projects undertaken.

One student, a beginner in the program, made a survey of recreation facilities in the town from the standpoint of availability and extent of use. Since Murfreesboro has an exceptionally fine recreation program, this gave him an opportunity to learn more about an area in which school psychologists may well be expected to contribute points of view. The study brought him into contact with many persons in the school and community. Some of his findings not only point to possible improvements in an already good program of recreation but also to

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are available, how to get them and how to make best use of them, you may not need a handy little guide like the one produced at Grosse Point. But teachers new to your school particularly, and possibly a number of the veterans, might well appreciate the policies, the information and suggestions contained in this attractive booklet.

About 30 Grosse Point teachers participated in a special workshop conducted by Wayne State University to produce the audio-visual handbook. Undoubtedly more and better use would be made of resources available for teaching and learning if every school developed for itself such a useful tool as this.

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School Psychologists

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ward areas in which research is both needed and practicable.

A more advanced student concerned himself with a problem in the broad area of improving school learning. His interest was with three methods of learning spelling that made use of mechanical devices. Planning of the three approaches, developing a research design to test their effectiveness, working with the teachers and children, and reporting back the findings to the teachers concerned, and to the schools, have been rich training experiences in functioning as a psychologist in a school setting.

A third project which involved a number of students and staff members, has

centered around an attempt to provide special experiences for culturally deprived children during the summer before they enter the first grade. This endeavor, which grew directly out of the concerns of the local schools, has seemed to fit particularly well the criteria by which we have tried to select projects. Probably for our students the most valuable outcome has been the extended and close contact with young children demonstrating the particular problems and needs of youngsters from culturally impoverished backgrounds as they enter school. Also significant has been the planning of a research design to test the effectiveness of this experience for the children, conceptualizing the variables with which we worked, and the day-by-day planning for the children.

The three years of experience at the college and in Murfreesboro will be followed by a year's internship in a school setting. This experience, we hope, will serve to provide the student with increasing responsibility and scope in practicing the role of the school psychologist and also with a broader understanding of the total school operation and of the concerns and hopes of school people.

The model of school psychologist we are attempting to develop at Peabody, then, is that of a specialist with flexibility and creativity in adapting his particular knowledge and skills to the demands of school situations. Alone, such specialists can be of little use. But together with the front line personnel of schools—the teachers, with other specialists on the school staff, and with the school's administrative officers, they can work towards that comprehensive and difficult, but most essential goal of the school, that of promoting the optimum educational, social and personal growth of the children in its charge.

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