

The Junior College Teacher as Advisor and Counselor

Jean F. King

(This article by Mrs. Jean King, a professor at Chowan College, appeared in THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST EDUCATOR, October, 1971.)



Mrs. King chats with a fellow professor, Rowland Pruette, between classes.

One of his most challenging and rewarding responsibilities, any teacher will concede, lies in counseling with the students under his tutelage concerning their problems of maturation combined with concerns for their future vocation. While it is important that the work of the professional guidance counselor during the years of secondary education be recognized, it is equally important that the dual function of the junior college instruction staff be underscored. We hypothecate the ideal: that the junior college teacher should have some professional training and experience in the field of guidance counseling. We further presuppose that the full-time junior college teacher will not be assigned more advisees than he can relate to in a meaningful way in today's rapidly changing educational scene. Certainly, 25 to 30 would be a maximum number.

The junior college expects its instructional staff to assume the dual role of teacher and adviser. There is a third role in counseling that is extremely rewarding to the teacher who has an open door and the gifts and skills to listen with empathy and understanding. This is one of the most attractive aspects of the smaller junior college wherein the student may develop a maturing rapport, during his period of schooling, with his adviser and also with those teachers whom he seeks as confidants and who thereby become informal counselors. The need for and value of counseling at this level is greatly underestimated.

Most junior colleges have professional counselors in residence and departments to administer tests and measurements. Often the teacher will want to refer a student to one of these professional specialists. Indeed, in many cases the practice of proper ethics, as well as the demands of time, will require it. Still, it is the prerogative of the student to select a teacher (or teachers)—adviser or not—with whom to converse concerning his personal needs, problems of adjustment, and vocational aspirations. It would be wrong to deny the student this right and the qualified teacher this rewarding, creative experience.

It is often the willingness to listen and the ability to guide nondirectively that makes the telling impact upon the student's campus life and eventually his future. Herein lies the case for the student's personal selection of faculty confidants and the willingness of the faculty to offer appropriate, open response.

This brings up the problem of accessibility to confidential documents about which much has been written in recent months. The teacher, of course, has access to grades and should have access to health records, disciplinary records, and test results administered by the college. A simple, non-threatening, personal data sheet and brief autobiography should be obtained from each student upon entrance into college and made available to the student's adviser and accessible to any faculty member requesting this basic information. Certainly, this will give the teacher-adviser/counselor some prior knowledge of the student and avoid an impersonal and sterile atmosphere during early interviews.

One particularly helpful aspect of separate professional counseling and tests and measurements departments in the college is the general acceptance of such a service by the student body and the secondary value of making testing a less threatening and more relaxed activity. Because of total participation, test results will have a much greater validity and be of less traumatic concern to the more sensitive student.

A further advantage in the separation of the professional counselor-testing department will be realized in the improved rapport between adviser and advisee. In junior college vocational counseling this is particularly important. As early as 1966, *Fortune Magazine* was cautioning vocational counselors against encouraging an oversupply in the vocational fields surrounding the glamorous new aerospace and engineering careers. Increasingly, both news magazines and professional journals have shown this to be an accurate prediction that has now become a genuine problem. We can hope that the problem is temporary, but in the meantime, there are many highly trained men and women out of work. Here the junior college with its two-year programs, its sympathetic faculty, its professional counselors, and its tests and measurements departments can help direct students into training for available job markets. In many instances a student can be shown the validity of a terminal two-year college program leading to immediate employment, possibilities for ad-

vancement, and a satisfying career, instead of feeling the necessity for continuing for another two to six years of traditional professional education only to face a nonexistent job market and disillusionment.

The teacher as adviser-counselor must be careful to realize the limitations of any testing program. Still, when it is constructed in accord with the needs of a given socio-geographic area or with the particular study programs and philosophy of the junior college in mind, and when it is administered by trained personnel, a carefully selected battery of measurements can be of invaluable help to the staff in working with the advisee-student.

While it is important that the teacher not prejudice an advisee by accepting at face value everything in his confidential file (and certainly not accepting all test data as final), these data, as stated earlier, should be available to every professional member of the staff before he works with a student in depth. The area of vocational counseling will involve allowing each student to talk at length about himself. It is quite important that a nondirective approach be used because the student has already received too much direction by implication from parents, from secondary school teachers interested in guiding him toward their own specialty, and from the media which imply that a traditional four-year college program supplemented by graduate study or professional training, far from being just a status symbol, means dollars in the bank. The advisee must be viewed as an individual with unique needs, interests, abilities, and aptitudes, and allowed to help unlock the blueprint for his own future.

One suggestion is that the Kuder Preference Record be given by the adviser to each advisee. The removal of this from the testing division is suggested in that it is an inventory that can be taken and scored by the student with the adviser's help. By the student's completion of the profile he will have a particular feeling of self-discovery. With careful nondirective guidance by the adviser-teacher, he can begin to see some possibilities of careers (perhaps new ideas) opening before him. The use of the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* prepared by the Government Printing House will be helpful (Washington, D.C., 1970, two volumes, \$12.50 each).

This is just the beginning of a series of discussions in which the student can be guided into discovering what he really desires vocationally. At the same time, the skillful adviser-teacher/counselor will be able to help him compromise with what is practical for him to do within the limits of his capability and within the limits of projected job availability.

Students with special interests can be referred to the testing section for further aptitude tests, and those who have a particular interest in vocations that require further education can be helped in the selection of an appropriate college or university. The use of the *Cowles' Test Preparation Manual* is recommended to students to help overcome nervousness and feel confident before taking major tests such as the Miller Analogies, vocational tests, professional school entrance tests, and government job placement tests. Those who have particular problems and needs can be given direct help through the use of state service publications. Such useful information should be in every adviser's file.

McCann in his book *Delinquency: Sickness or Sin?* (Harpers, 1957) has shown the tremendous problem of inadequate counseling and vocational indecision based on conflict of interests between the student and the projected value system of the family. Similarly, Denton in his book *What Is Happening To Our Families?* (Westminster, 1963) has pointed to the need for an individual to separate himself from the projected ambitions of his parents and to see himself as an individual, as a self-knowing individual, as an individual seen by others, as an individual with deeply cherished goals, and as an individual who clearly understands what constitutes failure and success to himself.

Nothing in the junior college will take the place of a warm, understanding teacher-adviser/counselor, eager to listen and intensely nondirective in helping an individual to achieve such self-understanding. With this understanding will necessarily come an appreciation of all work as being "something of value" and a realization that in the modern world various types of work will constantly be shifting on the sliding value scales of social judgment. Thus, in making a vocational choice, the individual's needs are far more important than the values assigned by society. Further, job satisfaction will come only through self-discovery and this self-discovery must come as quickly as possible so that plans can be laid while the student is still completing his first year of college.

In the large junior college the separate testing and counseling department can be of immense value in this important early plan of vocational counseling. As Karl Rogers so wisely construed in his major works, the successful final outcome in the field of counseling—vocational or otherwise—will depend on the crucial factor of the counselor's (teacher's) ability to help the counselee (advisee/student) to the inner light of self-knowledge—the foundation stone of self-confidence and ultimate success in living—through the reflective, and nondirective technique.