

A Study of the Interview And Interviewing Techniques

Definition and Classification of Interviews

Counseling is the heart of any guidance program and interviewing is the basic technique for counseling. Guidance may be rendered in many different ways, but it is generally agreed that the most effective means of assisting an individual to make wise choices, interpretations and adjustments is through skillful counseling. Interviewing is so intimately related to counseling in its personnel or guidance significance that the two words are sometimes used singly and interchangeably rather conjointly: interviewing implies counseling and counseling cannot take place without interviewing.

The interview may be defined as a fact to face conference between two people, conducted for any one of a number of purposes. There are many types of interviews, are held for a variety of purposes, and take place under very different conditions as to environmental factors. The interview may be introduction (get acquainted), evaluative (appraisal), information-getting, information giving, or for treatment (therapeutic) purposes (3). This is an inclusive classification that covers almost any situation in which an interview may take place and will serve very well for our purpose in this instance. However, it is well to recognize that many other classifications of the interview can be made. It may be classified according to the major area or field in which the topic of the interview seems to lie; physical, medical, or health, educational, religious, social, mental, vocational, economic, and the like (9).

Germane and Germane in classifying the interview and considering it chiefly from the school joint of view list only the casual and the purposive interview (7).

The casual interview is considered as one that might take place anywhere, anytime, while the purposive interview is planned for specific fact-collecting and clinical counseling. Young categorizes the interview as formal and informal (13). He considers the formal interview as one in which there are more or less standardized procedures and a predetermined type of material to be required or requested of the interviewee. The informal interview is defined as one in which an effort is made to secure the desired information in the course of conversational interaction.

Much more important than any classification of interviews is the obligation of remembering that the counseling interview, irrespective of its classifications, is always a method of education, always personal, always purposive, and should always be professional.

Preparation for the Interview

It can be stated axiomatically that preparation is possible for any interview. There are two types of interviews with reference to opportunity to make specific previous preparation: the one is based upon more or less abundant and previously collected information regarding the individual to be interviewed; the other is dependent upon what the counselor is able to uncover through observation and the content of the interview. The former is known as a prearranged interview. The latter is termed a "cold interview" in which the interviewer is not acquainted with the interviewee, has had no opportunity to consult recorded information concerning the individual that may be available from various sources, and has no knowledge of what the problem is. General preparation is possible for this type of interview, baffling though it may seem. If one has made the proper general preparation he will be in full command of the situation for the moment and can lay a foundation for future interviews of the prearranged type. The preparation for the prearranged interview will be discussed at length but first consideration must be given to general preparation.

General preparation for an interview presupposes that the counselor has had adequate training in methods of gathering information and data. If not, then certainly the acquisition of such training will be the first step in his general preparation. In addition to this training the general preparation should include familiarity with types of individuals with whom interviews are likely to be held; knowledge of the major agencies which help to cause or to prevent maladjustments and of the major areas of life within which problems seem to come to a focus on different age and educational levels; understanding of the various influences, both personal and environmental, which form the matrix of problems; and the setting up of some criteria for evaluation of one's own potential strengths and weaknesses as a user of the interview technique (9).

General preparation is just as important for the prearranged interview as for the cold interview, but the situation is somewhat different. Additional specific information relative to the interviewee and his problems or to the purpose of the interview will be available and will permit specific preparation on the part of the counselor. One caution is needed here, however: the counselor must not allow his general preparation to stereotype him or cause him to form premature judgments.

The first step in making specific preparation for the interview must be that of deciding just what is to be accomplished during the interview.

The second step is that of knowing the individual. This can be accomplished by gathering together all the information possible from every available source and evaluating each item with reference to the part it may play in accomplishing the objective or purpose. The maintenance of an open mind is essential, particularly if little worthwhile information is available. In that case one must use his common sense and judgment and come to know the individual as well as possible. Even if practically no information is

available the situation is still more favorable than that of the cold interview in that the problem and purpose of the interview is known. The resourceful counselor will make the most of the sketchy information available and will rely on gaining further information and coming to know the individual through the first interview.

The scheduling of the interview is the third step. A definite time, convenient to both the interviewer and the interviewee must be arranged. Ample time should be allotted so that there will be no "meeting a deadline" pressure on either of the parties involved.

The fourth highly important step is the provision for privacy. The interview should be scheduled in a room which will insure privacy and an environment conducive to the spirit of conversing freely. Anything suggestive of a disciplinary nature will detract from the interview. For example, it is inadvisable to have the interview conducted in the office of the school principal or the school nurse. In the former instance there will be a strong disciplinary suggestion and in the latter the association with that of illness or abnormality is highly undesirable. A clean, well-ventilated, informally arranged room is advantageous.

The practice of taking the interviewees point of view may well be included as a fifth step in the preparation. This point will be treated under the psychological factors of the interview which follow. It is included here because the same psychological principles apply in the preparation for the interview as during the actual interview.

The Psychology of the Interview

An interview between a counselor and a counselee is obviously a form of interaction. We know that people learn to assume varied roles in terms of the particular social situation with which they are confronted. Successful social adjustment, in fact, depends upon just this sort of capacity, and the interview is only a special instance of person-to-person adaptation. In the interview two selves come into relation with each other, and the success or failure of the interview will rest largely upon the character and direction of the verbal and gestural contacts between the two participants. We may state the essentials in this fashion: The interviewer comes to the situation with a view or a role of himself as interviewer, and with a corresponding concept of the subject or counselee as a person who will furnish him certain data. In the same way the subject or counselee, will have a conception of himself, and another of the interviewer or counselor. In order that an interview may proceed successfully—that is, enable the interviewer to secure the wanted information from the subject—there must, sooner or later, emerge a sympathetic identification between the two persons concerned. In addition to the external conversational interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, there will be—on the part of the interviewer—an imaginary and internal interplay between his ideas of himself and his idea of the subject. Likewise, the interviewee will experience an interplay between his

concept of his own role and his concept of the interviewer. In fact, the course of the conversation will be directed and qualified at all points in terms of this dramatic process. That is, from the very beginning of the session the interviewer will in imagination begin reacting to his image of the interviewee, and likewise, the interviewee will begin reacting to his image of the interviewer. Throughout the entire process, therefore, not only will every exchange of words and gestures influence the internal concepts of both participants, but these latter, in turn, will qualify their verbal and overt interactions.

In identifying himself with the interviewee the interviewer must be able to sense or "feel" the former's aims, traits, attitudes, values, and other inner states. Yet in this understanding of the role of the other, the interviewer must not overdo his identification and thus lose his own integrity and his critical capacity. The successful interviewer must have the ability to play a dual role—his own as manipulator of the situation and seeker of information, and also in imagination that of the subject or informant. Only in this way will he be able to follow the latter's answers, comments, and confessions sympathetically. In other words, he must learn to play another's role in his overt or verbal reactions.

The competent interviewer must possess keen perceptive faculties and an accurate memory. Not only should he hear correctly what is said to him, but he will be alert to the overtones of the interviewee's verbal and overt reactions, noting changes in voice, indications of feeling-emotional states from facial or other gestures, and any other possible clues to inner states which may subsequently be exposed. And, while he must know how to direct the session with skillful and revealing inquiries, he must also possess the capacity for sympathetic listening. Often in interviews, especially with persons under the emotional stress of mental conflicts, once the informant has begun to pour forth his troubles, the interviewer need but listen attentively in order to gain significant information about the fundamental inner life and problems of his subject.

Discussions of the psychology of the interview technique often emphasize the importance of insight and rapport. These qualities have much in common. **Insight** refers to the capacity of one individual to identify himself sympathetically with another's inner life and verbal and overt reactions or the capacity of an individual to understand himself and gain knowledge of his environment and the effects it has upon him. **Rapport** means more particularly the degree of mutual sympathy and congenial interidentification between the participants. To secure rapport, then it is necessary for each person in the session to possess insight into the other. Thus, if an interview takes place in the emotionalized atmosphere of fear, anger, or blame, obviously little or no rapport will be established (13).

The interviewer creates the atmosphere of the interview. His personality is the dominant factor in the first impression which counseling makes upon interviewees, whether they be public-school and college students, or adults. A personality which radiates cordiality, invites confidence, removes

fears, leaves the impression of shock-proof qualities owing to familiarity with the entire range of human strengths and weaknesses and implies that broad information and wide experience are available on any topic the interviewee may care to discuss will counteract almost any material deficiency which is conceivable.

This treatment of the psychology of the interview is in no wise all-inclusive. It is impossible to isolate every psychological detail and discuss it apart from the actual interview. By way of summary, it may be stated that there is a psychological basis for each technique employed by the counselor in the face to face interview situation. The trained counselor, or the teacher-counselor in training should be aware of this fact and should note the psychological implications throughout the discussion which follows.

The Content and Conduct of the Interview

In general, the content of the interview will comprise material designed to establish rapport, material definitely related to the problem at hand, material which is a by-product of the main theme but connected with some broader aspect of the individual's interests, and parting comments of the type which tighten the knot of confidence. The specific content of the interview should always be in harmony with the purpose of the interview.

Likewise, the conduct of the interview depends upon its type and purpose and upon whether the two personalities involved clash or are able to find common ground of interest and understanding. There are no rigid rules that can be laid down for conducting an interview. There are, however, certain practices involving both **dos** and **don'ts** which every counselor should know. Most of these practices will apply generally to each and every interview situation, although there will be some common sense deviations in keeping with the highly different situations encountered.

W. W. Charters several years ago suggested five one-word rules which he felt were the essence of good interviewing. These five words are relax, listen, question, decide, and quit. The following list of positive principles which should be applied in conducting the interview is based upon the sound advice embodied within these simple rules (1).

1. Meet the interviewee cordially.
2. Be sincere.
3. Begin the interview with whatever topic will be of most interest to the interviewee.
4. Approach the problem as soon as rapport is assured.
5. Avoid a patronizing attitude.
6. Uncover the real difficulty.
7. Isolate the central problem.
8. Encourage but do not urge.

9. Ask questions to direct attention to salient facts. Use the direct question infrequently and with caution.
10. Avoid disjunctive and implicative questions.
11. Make the interview a joint undertaking.
12. Maintain and exercise a sense of humor.
13. Avoid embarrassing the interviewee unnecessarily.
14. Face the facts calmly and professionally.
15. Observe closely the interviewee's behavior.
16. Avoid putting the interviewee on the defensive.
17. Alleviate the shock of disillusionment.
18. Establish a reputation for being fair and for keeping confidence.
19. Let the interviewee formulate his conclusions or plan of action.
20. Allow time for insights to mature and attitudes to change.
21. Present alternatives for his consideration.
22. Give information as needed, but give advice sparingly, if at all.
23. Make certain that all vital considerations relevant to a decision are brought forward.
24. Achieve something definite.
25. Make subsequent interviews easy.

To summarize the conduct of the interview the following paragraphs quoted directly from Garrett are excellent (6).

"No matter how many questions need to be answered, no matter how much information he wishes to impart, the interviewer should always 'begin where the client is.' After the brief introductory statement about the manifest purpose of the interview, a few leading questions that will enable the client to express what is on 'the top' of his mind will usually be most helpful. Of course, the interviewer will have thought over the interview in advance and will know fairly definitely what he wants to obtain from it. But by letting his client talk first, he finds out the client's purpose and is able to pick up many leads for the best way of getting the information needed to help him. He knows his goals but he will keep his plan of procedure flexible until such "leads" indicate the best course to take.

"Somewhere during the interview, and often early, the client should be given a fairly clear idea of the sort of things the interviewer and his agency can do to help, and of the sort of responsibility the client himself must assume in meeting his problem. Often the matter can be introduced by asking the client, "In what ways did you think we might be of help?" He needs reassurance that he has come to the right place for help, but he should not be over-assured or led to believe that he is now relieved of all responsibility, that his problem will be 'taken care of.' Usually a very brief statement of

services the agency tries to render will suffice at first. Later, as the interview proceeds, further explanation of the precise ways in which the agency can help can be given. Often an interviewer finds it useful in closing the interview to run over with the client the next steps each has agreed to undertake.

"After the interviewee has told his story largely in his own way, the interviewer will make use of the clues thus revealed to introduce additional questions and discussion in crucial areas so as to fill out the picture and focus the interview on that territory where exploration promises to be more fruitful. It is at this stage that expert direction of the interview is most called for. The interviewer must decide on the areas to be explored and the best way of drawing out the client. Indispensable to the successful accomplishment of the latter is the establishment and development of that rapport between the client and himself which will give the client confidence in the interviewer's unselfish desire to help and in his possession of the understanding and general knowledge required for effective assistance. This confidence established, he can proceed by careful direction of the course of the conversation to the necessary knowledge of the underlying basic factors of the specific problems of this particular client.

"It is not easy to achieve the golden mean of leaving the client free to talk spontaneously and at the same time giving the interview continued direction into fruitful channels. Mere listening and encouragement simply leaves the client floundering in the same sea of uncertainty in which he was lost when he applied for help. But over-direction can stifle the interview in its infancy by preventing the salient features of the matter from rising to clear awareness.

"Again, it is not easy to achieve the ideal balance between relieving a client of the unbearable burden of what seem to him insurmountable difficulties, and of leaving him with essential responsibilities for working out his own destiny. The counselor should do enough to make the difficulty seem conquerable, yet, in each case, carefully leave responsibility and initiative with the client. It is a temptation to work out a solution in full detail, especially when working with children or old people, but this temptation must be resolutely resisted. It is better to have a few details wrong but have the client feel that the plan is one he has been instrumental in developing and is carrying out, with help to be sure, but essentially on his own initiative.

"In bringing an interview to a close, several things should be kept in mind. It is usually a good plan to end with a recapitulation of 'next steps.' A tying together of the threads of the interview and a restatement of what interviewer and client are each going to attend to next are valuable. If possible, a definite next appointment should be made. If the interviewer has involved considerable

expression of emotion, the interviewer can usually avoid an emotional let-down by turning his client's attention to objective factors before closing the interview.

"One of the most important skills for an interviewer is a knowledge of his own limitations. To know when to refer a client elsewhere, when to terminate an interview, when to explore an emotional situation, and when to leave some area unexplored requires skill that comes only with practice. It is a help to remember that an interviewer seldom aims at a complete personality change for his client; his functions are usually much more limited. He mustn't stop too soon or too late, but at just the right time. And the 'right time' varies from case to case. With growing skill in interviewing, it is selected with increased ease and confidence."

Recording the Interview — Interview Follow Up

The records of an interview are an essential and legitimate part of the cumulative records of students on all levels of education and items recorded should comprise all statements, observations, or interpretations which throw light on growth or suggest guidance values. The so-called case notes should be structured—this means simply that the various types of material selected for the record should be distinguished from one another for the purpose of clarity and ease of understanding when examined by one not thoroughly familiar with the case.

There has been considerable disagreement relative to the advisability of taking notes during the actual interview in order to provide a more complete and accurate record. Many have been against this practice, but as all counseling procedures have become more scientific, a change in attitude has been noted with an increased in the number of authorities who feel that the most salient statements and most significant observations may usually be recorded by an efficient interviewer without causing inhibitions or in any way lessening the effectiveness of the interview.

The subject of follow-up has been mentioned either directly or indirectly from time to time throughout this entire discussion, hence it is only necessary to include a few supplemental points of importance. First it must be emphasized that the matter of follow-up when interpreted as indicating interviews to follow the initial interview is rightfully a matter of choice on the part of the interviewee. If he does not choose to make appointments for additional interviews, then he should not be forced to do so under normal circumstances. If the initial interview has been properly conducted the subject in most instances will indicate a desire for additional counseling when the opportunity is provided for him to make the choice. If a large percentage of the interviewees are reluctant to schedule follow-up interviews when it is apparent, at least to the interviewer, that such interviews are advisable, then it is time to make a careful appraisal and evaluation of the

original interviews in an attempt to ascertain the cause for this loss of contact.

As a term follow-up is also used to indicate activities on the part of the counselor to render personal services for the counselee such as securing valid information, making appointments, and noting adjustments on the job if one has entered a particular occupation as a result of a vocational interview.

Follow-up also serves as an informational service through which the end results of the interview may be appraised. While appraisal as such is not a technique of interviewing its importance cannot be minimized. An accurate appraisal is the best means of evaluating the various interviewing techniques employed and efficient follow-up is the best means of appraisal.

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