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CLASSIFICATION IN A MINIMUM SECURITY INSTITUTION

Vernon Fox

The author was psychologist for the State Prison of Southern Michigan for three years, and upon his return from the army in July, 1946, the Department of Corrections sent him to Michigan's experimental minimum security institution as psychologist and chairman of classification. In this paper, he describes the system of classification he established at the Cassidy Lake Technical School near Chelsea. It is apparent that the classification committee in a minimum security situation must be more skillful, accurate, and discerning than a similar committee in a maximum security prison.—EDITOR.

Two significant trends in present day penology are toward greater specialization and wider use of the small-sized, minimum security institution. Michigan's Cassidy Lake Technical School exemplifies both of these trends. There is greater specialization in the selection of the younger first-offenders and of the State's wayward minors for intensive vocational training. The school's population of approximately one-hundred is scattered over 340 acres in the Waterloo recreational area of lakes and wooded hills. It is truly a minimum security institution. The continuity of nature's terrain is interrupted only by the simple and rustic buildings that house a well-equipped machine shop, a building for classrooms, a kitchen and dining hall, a frame administration building, and the cabins in which the boys live. The "correctional" aspects are at a minimum. There are no uniformed guards, no uniform dress for the population of the institution, no weapons and there isn't a fence on the premises. There is no correctional connotation in the name, "Cassidy Lake Technical School." Although the Civil Service Commission calls the head of the institution a warden for purposes of job classification, the Corrections Commission addresses him as "superintendent."

There are two groups of boys in the school, the first-offenders and the wayward minors. The first-offenders are young men who have been sentenced to the State prison system. From those who have gone through the classification system at the State Prison of Southern Michigan¹ and have been transferred to the Michigan Reformatory at Ionia, nearly fifty youngsters with the best institutional records and who would profit most from a vocational program have been selected for the Cassidy Lake Technical School. These boys have previously experienced a maximum security situation, and are almost awed by the freedom, the lake, the woods, and the atmosphere at Cassidy Lake.

¹ See Akers, Elmer B.; "Classification in the State Prison," *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, May-June, 1943.

The wayward minors at Cassidy Lake Technical School are boys who have been committed by the juvenile divisions of the various county Probate courts under Michigan's version of the "wayward minor" law. Many States have similar laws covering adolescents who are "in danger of becoming morally depraved." As early as 1882, New York provided for special treatment of adolescents from 14 to 21 years of age (12 to 21 years of age in 1886) who were in danger of becoming morally depraved, under the "incurability statutes."² In 1907, Michigan passed a "wayward minor" act,³ somewhat similar to New York's later Wayward Minor Statute of 1923. Michigan revised in a minor measure its wayward minor act in 1939.⁴ The acts of 1907 and 1939, however, provided for placement of wayward minors on probation or commitment to the Girls Training School at Adrian or the Boys Vocational School at Lansing, but both of these institutions were overcrowded with juvenile delinquents. As a result, the commitment phase of the wayward minor law was not used. In 1944, however, Michigan amended the act of 1939 to provide for commitment of wayward minors directly to the Corrections Commission, and provided for segregation from adult offenders.⁵

The definition of the wayward minor remained the same throughout the history of Michigan's wayward minor acts. According to the 1944 amendment, a wayward minor is:

Any child between the ages of 17 and 19 found within the county (1) Who is repeatedly addicted to the use of drugs or the intemperate use of alcoholic liquors; or (2) Who repeatedly associates with criminal, dissolute, or disorderly persons; or (3) Who is found of his or her own free will and knowledge in a house of prostitution or assignation or ill-fame; or (4) Who repeatedly associates with thieves, prostitutes, pimps, or procurers; or (5) Who is wilfully disobedient to the reasonable and lawful commands of his parents, guardian or other custodian and is in danger of becoming morally depraved; or (6) Who habitually idles away his or her time.⁶

The law provides that a minimum term be set by the judge, but in most cases the commitment is an indefinite one. All jurisdiction under the wayward minor law is lost when the wayward minor reaches his twenty-first birthdate. Many of the wayward minors at Cassidy Lake are boys between the ages of 17 and 19 who have committed an offense that might have been tried in circuit court, but are bound over to the juvenile division of the

² New York Laws of 1882, c. 410, sec. 466; Laws of 1886, c. 353, sec. 1466.

³ Act 6 PUBLIC AND LOCAL ACTS, MICHIGAN, 1907, Extra Session.

⁴ Act 288, Chapter XII, PUBLIC AND LOCAL ACTS, MICHIGAN, 1939.

⁵ Act 54, PUBLIC AND LOCAL ACTS, MICHIGAN, 1944, Extra Session.

⁶ Act 54, PUBLIC AND LOCAL ACTS, MICHIGAN, 1944, Extra Session, sec. 2, subsec. c.

Probate court so that they can be committed as wayward minors, thereby saving the boys from a felony conviction and a prison record. This action is generally based on the premise that the parent or guardian did not tell the boy to commit an act that could be charged as a felony, and would not have condoned such behavior had he been asked. Therefore, the boy must be "disobedient to the reasonable and lawful commands of his parents, guardian or other custodian and is in danger of becoming morally depraved." In court procedure, there need be little or no actual connection, of course, between the precipitating act and the legal reason given for commitment as a wayward minor.

The existence of small first-offender and wayward minor groups in the same minimum security institution poses the question of segregation of the wayward minors in conformity with the law. This is to be eventually solved when present plans for a purely wayward minor institution are consummated. At the present time, however, the physical plant is so well spread over the 340 acres of conservation area that the living quarters of the first-offenders are well separated from those of the wayward minors. The wayward minors are served in one end of the long dining hall, while the first-offenders dine at the other. In order to maintain the segregation on assignments, such as machine shop, welding, drafting, and radio, the first-offenders, termed "students" to avoid a less complimentary distinction from the wayward minors, may use the shop in the morning, while the "waywards" are in academic classrooms. In the afternoon, the "boys" are in academic classrooms. In the afternoon, the boys may be in the shop, while the students are in the academic school. The gymnasium and other recreational facilities are used by students and waywards on alternate nights. Segregation in classification procedure is maintained through regular meetings for waywards on Wednesday afternoons, while the students meet with the classification committee on Friday.

Classification Committee

The classification committee is made up of all those members of the staff who have to do with the supervision of the boy during his stay at the Cassidy Lake Technical School. The superintendent is always an *ex officio* member of classification, and sometimes sits with the committee, though he prefers to permit his staff to function without the risk of undue influence from the head of the institution. Chairman of the classification committee is the institution's psychologist. The vocational director, each of the three vocational and academic school instructors in his

turn, and one or both of the wayward minor counselors always sit with the classification committee. Occasionally, other members of the staff sit with the committee, such as the steward, the maintenance supervisor, the part-time chaplain, the part-time institutional parole officer, and any of the six custodial officers.

The facilities available to the classification committee include training courses in machine shop, radio, welding, limited auto mechanics, drafting, typing, algebra, shop theory and mathematics, English, and the elementary school subjects. Work assignments, some with possibilities for apprentice training, are in the kitchen, carpentry, electrical maintenance, plumbing, truck driving, clerical work, practical nursing, and similar work necessary to institutional maintenance. Medical facilities include, besides the infirmary and contract physician, the medical facilities of the State Prison of Southern Michigan for the first-offenders and of the University of Michigan for the wayward minors. Both of these institutions are located about twenty miles in opposite directions from the Cassidy Lake Technical School. Psychiatric services are available through the Parole Board's psychiatrist. Cassidy Lake has its own psychologist.

The general objectives of the classification committee, of course, involve the development of self-respecting and wage-earning citizens from the wayward minors and first-offenders within the institution. The committee has taken upon itself the obligation to use all available means to accomplish this end. All phases of the personality are considered. Psychologists have suggested many factors that are presumed to be important in shaping personality. Most psychologists agree with Garrett⁷ that we may select, as of special significance, appearance and physique, temperament, intelligence and its appropriate use, and social adaptability. With regard to appearance and physique, the committee recognizes that the problem of social adjustment of the handsome, well-proportioned lad is much different from that of the weak, puny, or defective child. With that recognition in mind, the facilities of the University of Michigan Hospital and dental clinic are freely used—in one case to insert a plate into a boy's skull that had been grossly deformed by complete fracture in an automobile accident three years before his commitment. A person's mental ability may greatly affect his social and emotional behavior. The committee attempts to facilitate education and training adapted to the needs and the

⁷ Garrett, Henry E.; "Great Experiments in Psychology," Revised and Enlarged Edition, 1941, p. 96.

level of the boy, on the theory that such is good mental hygiene. The boy's temperament, his degree of self-control, is considered vital. Discussed objectively with the boy is the fact that people who lack emotional stability and self-control have trouble in making and keeping friends. Social adaptability may come with the above three factors, but the classification committee attempts to lead the boys to the conclusion that conformity to the folkways, mores, customs, and laws of the group in which they live constitutes wisdom in conduct. Habituation in conforming to established procedure in the institution will facilitate conformity to established procedure in the larger community outside.

There are four general areas in which the classification committee functions: (1) the development of the initial program, (2) progress interviews and reclassification, (3) behavior problems, and (4) consideration for parole. The development of the initial program for the first-offenders is based upon the classification study and diagnosis made when the man first entered the receiving depot of the Bureau of Prisons, as well as upon recorded findings pertaining to his subsequent institutionalization in the Michigan Reformatory at Ionia. The classification committee meets with the first-offenders upon their arrival at Cassidy Lake Technical School from the Michigan Reformatory, so that no time is wasted prior to their starting on a program.

In the case of wayward minors, the classification study and diagnosis is made by the psychologist at the Cassidy Lake Technical School. There is no quarantine period during this study, for it is made during the first few days at the institution. During this time, the new wayward minor is with one of the wayward minor counselors in an orientation process when he is not busy with the psychologist. The study is made on the basis of the commitment papers, tests, and interviews with the boy, and is later supplemented by routine contacts with various other social agencies located by clearing through the appropriate central clearing houses for social agencies, by information from previous schools attended and previous employers. The complete classification study includes (a) a medical report based upon a first aid examination, with subsequent serology and physical examination by the contract physician, (b) the educational report, which includes a summary of transcript or letter from the school which the boy previously attended, as well as the results of a reading test and the appropriate Stanford Achievement Test, (c) the report of the psychologist, which routinely contains the results of the Wechsler-Bellevue Adult and Adolescent Scales, one or two mechanical aptitude tests, and occasionally

a clerical aptitude, an O'Connor Tweezer Dexterity Test, in addition to clinical observations, (d) the social history based upon interviews with the boy, the commitment papers, and information from previous employers and other social agencies that have had contact with the boy or his family, (e) the identification and personal data sheet used for all cases sentenced or committed to the custody of the Michigan Corrections Commission, (f) a cover sheet bearing the name and number of the wayward minor, and (g) a one-page classification summary which bears the significant findings in the above reports in a condensed and related manner, to which is added, after consideration by the classification committee, the final paragraph containing the recommendations of the committee. This is the general form of all classification studies on men committed or sentenced to the Michigan Corrections Commission. After the study is completed, the classification committee meets with the boy, and the initial program is outlined, with the boy's interests considered as a primary, but not the ruling, factor.

After the initial program is begun, the classification committee meets with each boy every month in order to ascertain the effectiveness of the program and the progress of the boy. These monthly interviews serve to provide a unity of aim and effort among the persons who supervise the boy in his development in the institution. They bring to light problems that might otherwise go unnoticed or under-rated as to their importance. The monthly interviews facilitate changing of the program as the dynamic needs of the boy change. Above all, they provide for the adolescent boy the recognition, reward, and eventually a recommendation for parole, for a job well done—or a knowledge of his status if improvement is needed. This need to know his status is basic in the development of 'teen agers. If they are not well oriented, they become impatient, dissatisfied, and run-aways occur. For this practical reason, frequent meetings with the staff are almost mandatory in a minimum security situation.

At Cassidy Lake, the same committee that formulates the initial program, that molds the program to the needs of the boy, also handles the behavior problems. There is no summary court. When a boy transgresses, his problems are reviewed and considered with him in a classification committee meeting. If a change in his program is deemed advisable, such a change is consummated. If detention is warranted, which is not frequently the case, the boy is placed in bed at the camp's infirmary. If a reprimand is sufficient, much time is saved. Frequently, the transgressor in a minimum security situation can be helped merely

by reviewing his record, and pointing out the advisability of changing, probably in a small way, his pattern of behavior. The effectiveness of this type of treatment in a penal setting has proved to be little short of amazing.

It is very important that the time for transferring the first-offender or the wayward minor from the institutional situation to supervision in the community be well judged. If he is paroled too soon, he may lapse into his old pattern of behavior. If he is kept too long, on the other hand, he may become anxious, discontented, resentful, or "sour," and cease to be a good parole risk. The classification committee at Cassidy Lake watches closely the development of the first-offenders and wayward minors in the institution, and recommends parole for each when it is felt that the optimum time has come. In the case of wayward minors, the State Parole Board reviews each case automatically each six months, and the classification committee presents recommendations to the board on all boys. Also, the classification committee makes a recommendation for the parole of any boy at any time it is felt to be to the advantage of the boy, and, in turn, to society. In the case of first-offenders, who are sentenced to an indeterminate sentence, the classification committee frequently recommends boys to the Board prior to the expiration of the minimum term set by the judge. In these cases, the Parole Board may contact the sentencing judge for an opinion and possible action. This policy of close co-operation between the institutional classification committee and the State Parole Board is almost mandatory in the minimum security situation. All activity of the Parole Board is reflected in the behavior of the boys in the institution. When it becomes known among the first-offenders and wayward minors that frequent checks are made by the classification committee, and that the opinions and recommendations of that committee are seriously evaluated by a Parole Board that considers cases at Cassidy Lake each month, the incentive for self-improvement becomes strengthened.

Evaluation

The effect of the use of this type of classification system, the control by one committee of the boys' initial programs, development and program changes, behavior, and recommendations to the Parole Board, has been most reassuring. In the first place, there has developed a unity of purpose and policy among the personnel who supervise the boys and who meet with the classification committee. There has developed among the officers who take the periodic counts, the steward, and other non-professional

personnel, an awareness and sympathy for the services of the psychologist, sociologist, psychiatrist, and physician, and their consequent co-operation has exceeded expectation. In several cases, minor infractions of institutional order have been entirely overlooked by the officers in "touchy" cases, for the express purpose of avoiding a conflict that might have been disastrous to the boy's rehabilitation. In other cases, the most minor infractions have been called to a boy's attention in co-operation with the institutional treatment program outlined in the classification committee meeting. A consciousness of the long-range and short-range value of striving toward self-improvement has permeated through the institution, which did not exist when the so-called "treatment program" was not co-ordinated by a classification committee. A more conscientious effort toward things constructive is in evidence. The number of run-aways and their frequency have been definitely reduced. The morale of the entire body of first-offenders and wayward minors has been elevated as a result of the work of the classification committee.

In evaluating the effects of this classification system at Cassidy Lake, cognizance must be taken of the conditioning effect of previous maximum security institutionalization in the case of first-offenders. Also, the selection of wayward minors by the courts and the selection of first-offenders by the corrections system introduces a highly differentiating factor. On the whole, the first-offenders present a more hopeful picture than the wayward minors, which brings up the question as to which group is profiting most from the segregation. In general, it seems that the first-offenders are less affected by progressive classification, consciously at least, than are the wayward minors. The memory of high prison walls and bars tends to make the apparent freedom, trust, and woodland atmosphere of paramount importance, relegating the progressive classification system to relatively secondary importance in the minds of the first-offenders. The monthly interviews give the first-offenders an opportunity to discuss their problems with the staff as a whole, an opportunity to chat, and the resulting feeling of friendly interest in a common goal is valuable.

For the wayward minors who have not been conditioned by maximum security placement, the classification system seems to be of major importance. It is here that the minimum security situation presents a special problem to the classification committee. Without the threat of return to prison, without the conditioning effect of prior prison experience, and without maximum or even medium custodial facilities, the wayward minor must be

convinced that it is better for him to be a good boy, remain in the institution of his own free will, and to avail himself of the opportunity for self-improvement. Two wayward minor counselors are employed to live with the boys, and assist them in their personal and institutional adjustment. As members of the classification committee, they keep the staff in close touch with the boys' off-duty pursuits and problems. The psychologist is used freely by all boys, particularly wayward minors. Most wayward minors actually meet with the classification committee more frequently than once a month for a variety of reasons—request for change of program, behavior difficulty, clarification of institutional and personal problems, and the like. This close touch is necessary for the adolescent, restless boy of seventeen and eighteen, particularly when they present problems of social adjustment deeply rooted in their personalities. The seemingly docile or resigned boy in the institution who does not get into difficulty, who does not request assignment changes, and who apparently presents no problems at all, meets with the committee at least once a month, and many problems are thereby discovered and treated.

In summary, the minimum security situation calls for a more adequate and skilled classification committee than does the walled prison. There are probably four main principles underlying classification in a minimum security institution. Firstly, there is greater need to encourage unity of purpose and effort among the staff members to minimize the possibility of any disunity having a demoralizing effect upon the boys. Secondly, there is greater need for diagnosis of personality difficulty and well-advised formulation of the initial program to be made immediately and accurately because of the lack of custodial security. Thirdly, there is greater necessity for a constant check on the problems and emotional trends of each lad by the classification committee to make certain that the boy's program keeps pace with his changing needs. Lastly, but probably more important in many aspects than the others in making minimum security penology work, the relationship between the institutional classification committee and the State Parole Board must be one of mutual understanding and working cooperation.