



The Psychologist's Role in Programs for Exceptional Children

Robert Ames

The psychologist, or psychological examiner*, is one of the key members of the school guidance team in programs for the exceptional child. His primary role is identifying, diagnostically, the learning and behavior problems of students.

In the school setting, the psychological examiner is often the first special services person to whom the child is referred. Typically, the process goes something like this: The teacher becomes aware that a particular child does not perform as well academically as her other children are performing. In addition, the child may be exhibiting unusual behavior. He may be distractible, or hyperactive, or withdrawn. In any event, his behavior is probably not typical of the behavior of his age-mates. The teacher forms some tentative working hypotheses:

1. The child does not have the ability to do the work.
2. The child may have the ability to do the work, but something

is interfering with his performance.

In order to test these hypotheses, the teacher refers the child to special services.

The Psychological Examiner

At this point the psychological examiner may enter the scene. By the use of individually administered tests and clinical observation, he assesses the various levels at which the child is functioning: his academic ability, achievement, perceptual-motor coordination, personality, etc.

The examiner reports and interprets his findings to the teacher and the principal. The results of the examination may suggest further referral to other members of the guidance team, such as the school counselor, school social worker, and speech-and-hearing specialist. Or, the results may indicate the need for a referral to an outside agency, such as a physician, clinic, or public health service. Sometimes, of course, the problem in

learning or behavior can be solved by the teacher, with help, in the regular classroom setting.

One possible outcome of the psychological examination is special class placement for the child. The Hawaii public schools have a limited number of classes for the educable mentally retarded, the trainable mentally retarded, the emotionally handicapped and the neurologically impaired. Considerable weight is attached to the results and interpretation of the tests administered by the psychological examiner whenever a child is being considered for special class placement. The psychological examiner, then, has a prominent role in recommending, not just special class placement, but the specific special program into which the child should go, the specific strengths and deficit areas the child may possess, and specific techniques to which the child may respond.

Continued on page 24