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# Truancy : its sociological implications

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TRUANCY: ITS SOCIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

BY

HELEN MARIE HULCHER

A THESIS  
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## Preface

I wish to thank the United States Department of the Interior, Office of Education, Washington, D. C., for its cooperation in preparing a bibliography on truancy and attendance officers. I am indebted to the Welfare Department of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for its report. Also I appreciate the correspondence of Bertha Leming, General Supervisor of the Social Service Department of the Indianapolis Public Schools, of John E. Wade, Deputy and Associate Superintendent of the New York City Public Schools, and of Robert F. Lafferty, Assistant Director of the Division of Pupil Personnel and Counseling, Philadelphia. I am very grateful to Miss Rosalie Harper, Director of the Attendance Department, Richmond, Virginia, for her kindness in giving me access to the annual reports of this department. I wish to thank W. D. Ellis, principal of A. H. Hill Jr. High School, Richmond, Virginia, and W. L. Prince, member of the University of Richmond faculty, for their time and assistance.

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## Introduction

The term, "truancy", is interpreted in various ways. Julia Richman, District Superintendent of the Public Schools of New York in 1909, said, "The law in some states defines "truancy" as a failure to attend school, making no difference between the parents' offense in keeping the child at home and the child's offense in remaining away from school without the parent's knowledge. It is this latter form which the school and the school alone must check."<sup>1</sup> A. O. Neal, Superintendent of Schools, Franklin, Indiana, in the same year said, "Some juvenile courts in Indiana have held that the truancy law means not only that the parent shall send the child to school, but that the child shall come provided with proper equipment and decently clothed and clean.

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1 Richman, Julia, "What Share of the Blame for the Increase in the Number of Truants and Incorrigibles Belongs to the Schools?", Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of Forty-seventh Annual Meeting of the National Education Association, held at Denver, Colorado, July 3-9, 1909 (Published by the Association, Secretary's office, Winona, Minn.) p. 225

If this latter condition is not met, they hold that the whole child has not been sent to school and the spirit of the law has been violated."<sup>2</sup> In the Report of the Committee on Socially Handicapped, 1932, truancy was described as unlawful absence, whether or not with parent's knowledge and consent. Court proceedings could be in the name of the child, or proceedings could be brought against the parents for violation of the school attendance law.

In Richmond, truancy implies absence from school without the parents' consent or knowledge. The Welfare Department of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, describes such conduct as willful truancy, implying that the child is absent from school of his own volition. This paper is a discussion of truancy as interpreted in this light.

Truancy is serious in light of what causes it and what sociological and psychologically maladjustments may be the result of it. It is a most complex problem involving questions of environmental influences, personality development, and educational opportunities. Wherein has the home and the family failed to instill in the truant a sense of re-

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2 Neal, A. O., "The Indiana Plan for Handling Truants, Indigent, and Pauper Children", Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Forty-seventh Annual Meeting of the National Education Association, held at Denver, Colorado, July 3-9, 1909 (Published by the Association, Secretary's office, Winona, Minn.) p. 879

sponsibility? What is wrong with the truant, himself? What is there in the school or in the program which it offers which engenders such an attitude in some pupils?

Dr. Muriel Brown, Director of Mental Hygiene, Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in Rochester, New York, has said, "Truancy is one of the commonest forms of so-called delinquent behavior, and it should be possible not only to distinguish the mechanism involved but also to find out how youngsters with such attitudes can be reconditioned."<sup>3</sup>

Bert Hall, Chief Truant Officer of the City Schools of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1909 said, "Truancy in children is delinquency and delinquency is in thousands of cases incipient crime. This question of truancy, therefore, is of more vital importance to the American people than the so-called great political questions of our time."<sup>4</sup> M. E. Kirkpatrick and T. Lodge have said that the sin of the truant is one of omission rather than commission, characterized by no overt injury to anyone or by any damage to property. However,

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<sup>3</sup> Brown, Muriel, "Causes of Nonattendance as Found in the Child - the Psychiatrist's Point of View", Problems of School Attendance and Pupil Adjustment (University of State of New York, Albany, 1932) p. 26

<sup>4</sup> Hall, Bert, "Truancy: A Few Causes and a Few Cures", Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Forty-seventh Annual Meeting of the National Education Association, held at Denver, Colorado, July 3-9, 1909 (Published by the Association, Secretary's office, Winona, Minn.) p. 217

they felt that truancy is accompanied by other mischief and that many cases of adult criminality have had histories involving truancy.<sup>5</sup>

Not only is a study of truancy important to reveal the causes of such delinquent behavior, the effects of such conduct, and possible means for the correction of such attitudes, but such a study should also stress the need for the study of each delinquent as an individual. William Healy and Augusta F. Bronner reveal themselves as being alert to the deep underlying difficulties implied in abnormal behavior when they said, "The terms by which delinquency is designated - larceny, truancy, breaking and entering, and so on - are descriptions of behavior which do not in the least indicate what is expressed by the offender in the delinquent act. While it seems necessary to have labels for such type of conduct, yet it must be recognized in all common sense that naming the offense reveals nothing of the determinants of the behavior. It would seem obvious that it is just these determinants which must be known and coped with if effective treatment is to be undertaken."<sup>6</sup> In their opinion the im-

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5 Kirkpatrick, M. E., and Lodge, T., "Some Factors in Truancy", Mental Hygiene, Oct. 1935, Vol. 19 (National Committee for Mental Hygiene, Albany, New York) p. 610

6 Healy, William, and Bronner, A. F., New Light on Delinquency and Its Treatment, Institute of Human Relations (Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn., 1936) pp. 5-6



portant matter for consideration is the fact that in only part of the child's activity is he delinquent or antisocial, and they feel that these particular behavior trends need an explanation in terms of causation. The writers continue by stating that "in spite of the diversity of determinants the authoritarian attitude toward all truancy and all truants is very likely to be the same, whether on the part of the school principal, the attendance officer, or the juvenile court."<sup>7</sup>

Although the two-fold responsibility of the school in coping with the problem of truancy is one of prevention and one of cure and although both phases require flexibility on the part of the school, it is hard to believe that the school is largely responsible for this type of delinquency. In the introduction to Preventing Crime - A Symposium, Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck write, "Dissatisfaction with school work is a fertile soil for truancy and other forms of antisocial behavior which may develop into more serious delinquency."<sup>8</sup>

Is it not more plausible to believe that the fertile soil for such delinquency lies in the personality of the pupil, himself? M. E. Kirkpatrick and T. Lodge have written, "Children who get along poorly at school give open expres-

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7 Ibid., p. 6

8 Glueck, Sheldon and Eleanor (editors), Preventing Crime - A Symposium (McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., New York, 1936) p. 10

portant matter for consideration is the fact that in only part of the child's activity is he delinquent or antisocial, and they feel that these particular behavior trends need an explanation in terms of causation. The writers continue by stating that "in spite of the diversity of determinants the authoritarian attitude toward all truancy and all truants is very likely to be the same, whether on the part of the school principal, the attendance officer, or the juvenile court."<sup>7</sup>

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7 Ibid., p. 6

8 Glueck, Sheldon and Eleanor (editors), Preventing Crime - A Symposium (McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., New York, 1936) p. 10

sion to their unrest through truancy."<sup>9</sup> The school, nevertheless, has its obligation in guiding the pupil to integrate his personality around a healthier core, and the school must adjust its curriculum to remove unnecessary irritation.

As early as 1916, W. L. Kuser referred to truancy and all that it leads to as a most vexing and serious question<sup>10</sup> and in the same year, Edward B. Shallow, Assistant City Superintendent of Schools in New York City, showed a keen appreciation of what new sociological factors were involved in the old problem of truancy when he said, "...illegal absence from school, and especially truancy, meant much less 50 years ago in this country. Then when the population was more largely rural, if a boy was a truant, he usually went a-fishing, or played games in open fields, or went for a day to a circus in his own or a neighboring town. Now, if he plays truant in a large city, he is likely to fall into the worst of companionship, to consort with loafers and juvenile criminals, and to learn vice and crime. Statistics show that most of the juvenile criminals have been at some time

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<sup>9</sup> Kirkpatrick, M. E., and Lodge, T., "Some Factors in Truancy", Mental Hygiene, Oct. 1935, Vol.19 (National Committee for Mental Hygiene, Albany, New York) p. 611

<sup>10</sup> Kuser, W. L., "Truant Children", The Survey, Dec. 30, 1916, Vol. XXXVII, No.13 (Survey Associates, Inc.) p. 366

truants."<sup>11</sup> If this was true 29 years ago, how much more potent must such an observation be today! F. Brown reflected the same concern by writing, "Truancy, especially in our city schools, presents a persistent and serious problem."<sup>12</sup>

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11 Shallow, E. B., "Does a Strict Enforcement of the Compulsory Law Assist Teachers and Supervisors in Their Work?", Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Fifty-fifth Annual Meeting of the National Education Association, held at New York City, July 1-8, 1916 (Published by the Association, Secretary's office, Ann Arbor, Mich.) p. 1096

12 Brown, F., "Truant Children", School and Society, Vol.40, Dec. 8, 1934, p. 772

### How Prevalent Is Truancy?

It is difficult to ascertain the extent of truancy as an accurate check would require the homeroom teacher to investigate every absence the first day. However, under this procedure, a certain percentage of truancy cases would still occur unrevealed to the school if the parents failed to cooperate with the investigator.

F. Brown reported that truancy is listed as a form of delinquent behavior in the statistics of juvenile courts and, as such, it constitutes a major item in all reports of this nature. Walter M. Hall and Robert K. Atkinson have said, "Every town and small city has its vicious meeting places for boys, its slums, its abject poverty, its delinquents, truants, misdirected gangs, its unwholesome street night life."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Hall, Walter M., and Atkinson, Robert K., "The Foundation for Youth, Columbus, Indiana", Preventing Crime - A Symposium, edited by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck (McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., New York, 1936) p. 69

Approximately five per cent of the high school population is truant, according to L. C. Halberstadt who reported this finding in 1938 from his survey of attendance literature. According to his analysis, truancy is less common in periods of depression and more common in the spring term. "There is a progressive rise in truancy beginning with the new term, reaching its peak in a few weeks, and steadily declining toward the end."<sup>14</sup>

W. H. Johnson reported that truancy in Chicago had dropped from 2.85 per cent to 1.03 per cent of the enrollment between the years 1900 and 1936. He accounted for the increases in 1925, 1930, and 1935 to the periodic reduction of the staff. In the school year 1935-1936, Chicago had 803 different girls, under 16 years of age, truant. In this same period there were 71 girls over 16 years of age who were truant. Mr. Johnson felt that there were fewer girls truant than boys because parents watched their daughters more closely and because the school and close application to study appealed more to the feminine mind.

Franklin County, Arkansas, was reported to have had .29 per cent of its enrollment truant and .28 per cent that the

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14 Halberstadt, L. C., "Highschool Truants, A Survey of Attendance Literature", Nation's Schools, Vol.21, April, 1938, p. 37

parents were unable to control, according to a report made by R. V. Hill in the Peabody Journal of Education, November 1927. Approximately the same percentage was reported by J. Jennings in the Peabody Journal, March 1927, from a study made of the absences in the schools of two counties in Tennessee. Shelby County was reported to have 1.1 per cent of its absences due to truancy, and Rutherford County had .9 per cent truant cases.

The Committee on Socially Handicapped reported to the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection in 1932 that out of 1,985,710 pupils enrolled in the public schools in Pennsylvania, 1926-1927, there were 2,884,434 cases of unexcused absences. Eighty-four and four tenths per cent of these absences were attributed to parental neglect and 13.7 per cent to truancy, often occasioned by dissatisfaction at school.

In 1931-1933, one-eighth of the delinquency cases in the Cleveland courts were truants. Sixty-three per cent of all the boys who were truant originated at Thomas A. Edison School for problem boys. According to George H. Chatfield, 90 per cent of the 20,000 hearings a year conducted by the Bureau of Attendance in New York City are truants or irregular in attendance.

The Welfare Department of the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, schools has made a summary of the extent of truancy in

Milwaukee, and it reveals a marked decline in truancy over  
the entire.<sup>15</sup> This department has also tabulated the total  
number of individual pupil days lost on account of truancy  
as reported by the principals. From 1928 to 1939, the days  
lost had dropped from 32 days per 1,000 pupils to 15 days  
per 1,000 pupils.<sup>16</sup> "With the extension of the compulsory  
attendance age, truancy and other serious nonattendance  
cases in elementary schools have gradually declined."<sup>17</sup>

Rosalie Harper, Director of the Richmond, Virginia,  
Attendance Department, in her annual report for the school  
year 1942-1943 stated that 42 cases of truancy had been re-  
ferred to the Juvenile Court. Seventeen of the cases  
were white children, and 25 of the cases involved colored  
pupils. In the report for 1943-1944, Miss Harper said that  
30 cases had been referred to court for truancy (21 white  
and 9 colored). The attendance workers investigated 733  
white cases and 742 colored cases reported for truancy.  
Miss Harper cited the West End District as offering the  
most problems for the school attendance workers. However,  
ten years ago, the East End and the Fulton School Districts  
were considered to be, by far, the most difficult from the

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15 Appendix I  
16 Appendix II  
17 "The Welfare Department Study", Milwaukee, Wisconsin,  
March 1, 1940, p. 10



standpoint of school attendance. Miss Harper has recently reported that 49 new white and 95 new Negro attendance cases were assumed by the Department during January, 1945. In this month one Negro child was taken to the Juvenile Court for truancy and 18 Negro children were taken to court for violation of the compulsory school attendance law. Two white children were taken to Juvenile Court for the violation of the attendance law.

### Characteristics of the Truant

While it would not be correct to argue that there is a certain type of pupil who is always truant, yet there appear to be certain trends in a pupil's scholastic progress and certain characteristics in personality that many truants have in common. The main advantage in a discussion of these qualities lies in the hope that such a consideration may aid in determining the causes of truancy and may assist in correcting or removing such factors.

James S. Hiatt, Secretary of the Public Education Association of Philadelphia in 1915, made a study of 100 cases of the most flagrant and persistent truant offenders. Sixty-five of them attended public schools and 35 attended parochial schools. Out of Philadelphia's total population at this time, 69 per cent were of white American parentage; 24 per cent were of foreign parentage; and 7 per cent were of Negro parentage. However, only 32 per cent of the fathers of the truants investigated and 30 per cent of the

mothers of these truants were of American birth. Fifty-four per cent of the fathers and 56 per cent of the mothers were of foreign birth, and 14 per cent of the fathers as well as of the mothers were Negro. A table showing the distribution of truancy cases by nationality appears in the Appendices.<sup>18</sup>

From several studies which have been made of the economic background of truants, it seems significant that the majority of truants come from the lower economic level. These studies are presented more fully in a later chapter.

W. H. Johnson discovered from his study of truants in the Chicago schools that 50 to 55 per cent of the cases had both parents living together.<sup>19</sup>

Dr. Harry M. Shulman of the New York Crime Commission reported in 1929 that problem children were apt to occur in families which had other members maladjusted or delinquent.<sup>20</sup>

<u>Conduct of Other Members</u>	
per cent of cases	Type of misconduct
43	truant
50	delinquent
66	misdeamenant
83	felon

18 Appendix III  
 19 Johnson, W.H., "The Problem of Truancy in the Chicago Public Schools", School and Society, Vol.45, May 15, 1937, (The Science Press, New York) p. 672  
 20 Ibid., p. 672

L. C. Halberstadt reported that boys are more often truant than girls. Out of the 100 cases of truancy studied by James S. Hiatt, 95 were boys and five were girls. The investigator reported, "This seems to bear a definite relation to the usual distribution of truants noted in the school records. A recent investigation of all cases of chronic truancy in the city of Chicago gives approximately the same figures, 96 per cent being boys and only 4 per cent being girls."<sup>21</sup>

L. C. Halberstadt stated that high school truants usually "skip" only once and that few become chronic. However, George H. Chatfield has expressed the belief that in almost every case of a committed truant there is a record of years of irregular attendance and only occasionally is truancy of quick development. Also the findings, reported to the White House Conference in 1932, from a study of 251 adolescents committed to the New York truant school revealed that "... truancy became a serious problem early in school life. Children who became juvenile delinquents were serious truancy<sup>22</sup> problems when they were in grade 1 a." Miss Alice B. Hopkins, former Director of the Attendance Department of the

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21 Hiatt, James S., "The Truant Problem and the Parental School", Bulletin no.29, United States Office of Education (Government printing office, Washington, D. C., 1915) p. 9

22 Halberstadt, L. C., "Highschool Truants, A Survey of Attendance Literature", Nation's Schools, Vol.21, April, 1938, p. 109

Richmond, Virginia, schools reported in 1941 that "the child who gives the school visitor trouble is the one who started out missing only a day now and then. If an adjustment is not speedily made in many cases, these children lose interest and little by little the hold of the school over them lessens until they finally become habitual truants."<sup>23</sup>

Julia Richman has said, "...there is a general agreement that truancy is most prevalent during the years from eleven to fourteen inclusive. Almost all declare that the third and fourth years of school life show the critical period and many find among little boys of six or seven years of age a tendency to play truant."<sup>24</sup> W. H. Johnson deemed the median age of truants to be 12.6 years. M. E. Kirkpatrick discovered from his studies of the truancy situation in Cleveland that truancy was most frequent in the sixteenth year and that girls who were truant were a little older than boys. He also stated that the highest amount of truancy occurred in the 9th grade. James S. Hiatt also concluded that the prevalence of truancy appeared to be correlated with the age of the truant.

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<sup>23</sup> Hopkins, Alice E., "Annual Report of Attendance Department of Richmond Schools, Richmond, Virginia" (1940-1941) pp.2-3

<sup>24</sup> Richman, Julia, "What Share of the Blame for the Increase in the Number of Truants and Incurables Belongs to the Schools?", Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Forty-seventh Annual Meeting of the National Education Association, held at Denver, Colorado, July 3-9, 1909 (Published by the Association, Secretary's office, Winona, Minn.) p. 224

It seems to be true that there are increasing cases of truancy with increasing age. Of the 100 cases studied by James S. Hiatt in Philadelphia, 35 per cent were between 12 and 13 years of age; 14 per cent were 11 years old; 17 per cent were 14 years old. This made a total of 66 per cent of the cases between the ages 11 and 14. Four were under ten years of age, two of whom were eight and two were nine. Seven of the cases studied were ten years of age. Fourteen were 11 years old; 20 were 12 years old; 33 were 13 years old; 17 were 14 years old; and five were 15 years of age.

M. E. Kirkpatrick discovered that almost all the truants in the Cleveland schools have been subject to one or more school failure. The average retardation is two years. One fourth of the children are three or more years retarded. There appears to be a slight, but consistent retardation among boys than among girls. W. H. Johnson reported that 80 per cent of the truants in the Chicago schools were retarded one to five years. However, four per cent were found to be above their normal grade. James S. Hiatt, in his study of the situation in Philadelphia, reported that 28 per cent of the truants were in the third grade, only 12 per cent had reached the sixth grade, while eight per cent still lingered in the first grade.<sup>25</sup> Twenty-one per cent were retarded

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five years, or more, while 51 per cent were retarded three years, or more. Only six per cent were normal in their grades.<sup>26</sup>

The study made of the Chicago truants revealed that the average I.Q. of the truants was from 75 to 78. M. E. Kirkpatrick revealed that the average mental age of a 15 year old boy truant was 12.2. He judged that the girl truant was, if anything, duller. The average mental age of a 15 year old girl truant was 11.6. In a study by Dr. Eleanor T. Glueck of mental retardation in its relation to juvenile delinquency,<sup>27</sup> the following statements were made:

"Ninety-two per cent of the delinquents of lower intelligence had either been truants or had otherwise misbehaved in school (82% had been truants). The delinquent of higher intelligence did not show the same extent of school maladjustment as the lesser proportion of 82% had either been truants or otherwise showed school dissatisfactions (72% had been truants). This degree of difference in school misbehavior probably has to do with the fact that the delinquents of lower intelligence had more difficulties in keeping the scholastic pace and that, as stated above, no special recognition had been given to their need for segregation in classes for retarded children."

Of the 100 most persistent truants in Philadelphia, 68 per cent, in the judgment of their teachers, were of normal mentality, 26 per cent were backwards, while but six per cent seemed really deficient. "That is, while less than a

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26 Appendix V

27 Anderson, Meta L., "The Binet Schools of Newark", Preventing Crime - A Symposium, edited by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck (McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., New York, 1936) p. 177

third appeared to be below normal mental keenness, more than a half were over three years behind grade in school. Evidently some other cause is at work." <sup>28</sup> W. A. Kincaid presented this summary based on a study of the mental condition of boys committed to the Chicago Parental School, 1909-1910: <sup>29</sup>

<u>Mental Condition</u>	<u>Per cent</u>
Well endowed	15%
Bright	9%
Normal	36%
Below normal	14%
Degenerate	8%
Nervous defects only	<u>18%</u>
	Total 100%

H. R. Pestalozzi discovered that over 60 per cent of the truant and delinquent children in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in the early 1900's when he was chief of the attendance department suffered from physical disease or were mentally different. W. A. Kincaid summarized the physical condition of the boys committed to the Chicago Parental School, 1909-1910, as follows: <sup>30</sup>

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28 Hiatt, James S., "The Truant Problem and the Parental School", Bulletin no. 29, United States Office of Education (Government printing office, Washington, D. C., 1915) p. 12  
 29,30 Kincaid, W. A., "What Light Have Investigations Thrown on the Causes of Non-attendance?", Problems of School Attendance and Pupil Adjustment (University of State of New York, Albany, 1932) p. 68



<u>Physical Condition</u>	<u>Per cent</u>
Good	17%
Fair	33%
Poor	50%

The Committee on the Socially Handicapped presented to the White House Conference in 1932 its finding that "it is common to find in children who are persistently truant or otherwise maladjusted educational or physical difficulties, or both, so acute that placement in ...special classes is indicated."<sup>31</sup> The Committee further stated that a study of about 2,000 boys who were truant or otherwise delinquent in Los Angeles found only 30.17 per cent in normal physical condition.

Bertha Fulton, in writing of the Alfred Willson Children's Center at Columbus, Ohio, said that in the cases which had come under her observation truancy was a phase of other maladjustment which needed the attention of thoughtful people. Julia Richman, as early as 1909, spoke of truancy and incorrigibility as being closely interrelated and almost interdependent. "...on the whole, the chronic truant is lawless in school, and the chronic bad boy plays truant when

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31 "The Delinquent Child", Report of the Committee on Socially Handicapped - Delinquents, Frederick P. Cabot, Chairman, White House Conference on Child Health and Protection (Century Co., New York, 1932) p. 122

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he can."

While it would be unfair to use any composite picture to distinguish the truant from the non-truant, such a picture gathered from statistical studies reveals that truancy is a pattern of action with deeply rooted stimuli and far reaching results. There certainly appears to be good reason for an understanding study of the causes of truancy in the hope that such a discussion may afford a working basis for the preventive and remedial adjustments desirable.

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32 Richman, Julia, "What Share of the Blame for the Increase in the Number of Truants and Incurrigibles Belongs to the Schools?", Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Forty-seventh Annual Meeting of the National Education Association, held at Denver, Colorado, July 3-9, 1909 (Published by the Association, Secretary's office, Winona, Minn.) p. 223

### Some Causes of Truancy

We may ask with W. L. Kuser, "What is at the bottom of the 'hookey habit'?"<sup>33</sup> "Correct diagnosis and interpretation frequently transforms the truant in the eyes of the world from a mere nuisance to a suffering human being."<sup>34</sup> "Few children stay away from school from choice. Back of almost every case of chronic truancy is the enfeebled home, or the home divided against itself, or no home at all. The child is a victim, not a transgressor."<sup>35</sup> It seems that the truant must be studied in the light of the many sociological and economic influences that tend to frustrate him and prevent

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33 Kuser, W. L., "Truant Children", The Survey, Dec. 30, 1916, Vol. XXXVII, no. 13 (Survey Associates, Inc.) p. 306

34 Chatfield, George H., "How Effective Is Compulsion?", Problems of School Attendance and Pupil Adjustment (University of State of New York, Albany, 1932) p. 16

35 Shallow, Edward B., "Does a Strict Enforcement of the Compulsory Education Law Assist Teachers and Supervisors in Their Work?", Journal of Addresses and Proceedings of the Fifty-fifth Annual Meeting of the National Education Association, held at New York City, July 1-8, 1916 (Published by the Association, Secretary's office, Ann Arbor, Mich.) p. 1099

him from becoming a responsible individual. The committee on Socially Handicapped, 1932, stated, "Truancy is not only the acknowledged milieu of many of the more disturbing mal-adjustments, but also usually the earliest overt indication of a more serious failure in life adjustment that may have been of long standing." <sup>36</sup> As early as 1915, Boston was viewing its truants as victims of "extraneous circumstances" and believed that very few were inherently bad. At this time, George C. Minard was superintendent of the parental school; and he regarded lack of proper care at home and mental and physical defects responsible for most cases.

John W. Davis, Director of the Attendance Bureau of the New York City Schools in 1916, listed the following causes <sup>37</sup> for truancy:

1. nagging teacher
2. lack of clothing
3. improper physical and mental condition
4. dislike for school brought about in other ways
5. overindulgent parents
6. incomplete family
7. stern father and relenting mother
8. squalid and filthy homes
9. drunkenness on part of one or both parents

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36 "The Delinquent Child", Report of the Committee on Socially Handicapped - Delinquents, Frederick P. Cabot, Chairman, White House Conference on Child Health and Protection (Century Co., New York, 1932) p. 99

37 Davis, John W., "The Work of the Bureau of Attendance, New York City Schools", Addresses and Proceedings of Fifty-fifth Annual Meeting of the National Education Association, held at New York City, July 1-8, 1916 (Published by the Association, Secretary's office, Ann Arbor, Mich.) p. 858

10. gang of older boys induces or seduces younger ones to play truant

The list of causes of truancy among girls as outlined by W. H. Johnson is not noticeably different from the above

- 38
- list. The latter considered girl truancy was caused by:
1. fancied grievances with teachers
  2. call of great outdoors
  3. environment of poverty and unsanitary housing conditions
  4. evil influence of bad companionship
  5. influence of older women and girls, as well as boys, and evil communications of the street
  6. dance halls
  7. taverns
  8. smoking
  9. indifferent, intemperate, and illiterate parents;
  10. mental, auditory, and visual defects
  11. employment of both parents during day
  12. wife desertion
  13. retardation in grade
  14. ambition of girls who want to go to work
  15. malnutrition and the physical rebellion of an underfed child
  16. lack of shoes and clothing
  17. the sensitive temperament of the girl

James S. Hiatt has said, "The real cause of chronic truancy, which extends over from 5 to 8 terms, is difficult to ascertain. In any case it is probably a complex of causes, no one of which seems paramount. Some of the contributing causes may, however, be clearly stated." He asked the opinion of the school on the 100 truants studied in Philadelphia

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38 Johnson, W. H., "The Problem of Truancy in the Chicago Public Schools", School and Society, Vol. 45, May 15, 1937, (The Science Press, New York) p. 670

39 Hiatt, James S., "The Truant Problem and the Parental School", Bulletin no. 29, United States Office of Education (Government printing office, Washington, D. C., 1915) p. 13

and compared this opinion with that of the investigator.

<u>Cause</u>	<u>Teacher's opinion</u>	<u>Investigator's opinion</u>
Bad companions	26	20
Fault of home	17	29
Dislike of school	14	26
Desire to work	3	10
Illness	3	4
Fault of boy	1	11
Not stated	36	0
Total	100	Total 100

"The investigator's judgment would put a far larger burden upon the school as now organized and upon the home. Only 20 out of the 100 cases were charged by the investigator to bad companions. In 26 cases it is noted that the child definitely disliked school and would escape it whenever possible. In only 10 cases did the child claim that he wanted to be out of school in order to work, while in 29 cases it was agreed that the fault lay either with weakness or shiftlessness or greed or immorality in the home."<sup>41</sup>

As an illustration of the typical remarks heard by the investigator, Edward B--- gave his story in these words: "I don't like me teacher, and she don't like me. She never gives me no time to think over the questions. She just calls on some other boy to recite. No matter how hard I try I don't suit her. I never played truant before, and I wouldn't do it now if I wuz in some other teacher's room."<sup>42</sup> Upon fur-

40 Ibid., p. 13  
 41 Ibid., p. 14  
 42 Ibid., p. 15

ther investigation of the boy's family it was concluded, in spite of the boy's professed dislike of school, without any doubt the fault lay in the home. Emilio's case was related by James S. Hiatt as being typical of a situation "where both gang spirit and dislike of school are the causes of truancy." <sup>43</sup> Emilio felt that school had too many restrictions and too long a confinement, and he said, "I don't see what you learn in school anyway....You learn more by goin' to a movin' picture show, and besides it's more fun." <sup>44</sup> A father reflected his inability to cope with his truant son although he desired to correct the situation. His frustration was revealed in these words, "He's not a bad boy; he's just a truant...But tell me, what can I do with him, where can I send him? I want him to have a good education." <sup>45</sup>

George H. Chatfield has asked, "What makes a child a truant? Obviously he does not like something up to the point where he is willing to run away from it. Dr. William Healy in describing the attitude of one of his cases said that when the urge to depart came on the boy went even though he knew he would suffer intensely from hunger and cold. Everyone delights in escaping from a forced routine although we may return to it with equal delight, and in this

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43,44,45      Ibid., p. 15

the truant should receive our understanding. Many there be who chafe at the harness yet who lack the courage to escape from it. But life demands routine, if it is to be effectual, and the truant must submit too, like all the rest of us. Usually he comes from a home in which order is lacking, that is, an intelligent routine. A well known physician for children once gave as one of the greatest obstacles he had met with in the treatment of children, the lack of just such a routine, specific times and methods for doing things, eating, sleeping, and the like. School with its insistent demands for regularity conflicts with such environments and since adults, not children, are the source of the trouble, it meets with opposition and failure. Long-time habits of irregularity are not easily to be overcome, even by compulsion. When to these conditions are added mental dullness, vice, different moral standards, a truant is easily made." <sup>46</sup> In continuing the picture, George H. Chatfield said that from this disorderly home in which both parents work, or father is dead or incapacitated and the mother works, and the parent's ability to adapt to the environment is not high comes relaxation of control and supervision; new habits and attitudes are being formed unknown to parents who lack time,

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46 Chatfield, George H., "How Effective Is Compulsion?", Problems of School Attendance and Pupil Adjustment (University of State of New York, Albany, 1932) pp. 14-15



contact, comprehension, and the intelligence to note the change and to realize the child is physically and mentally alive. Personal unhappiness at home and school causes the child to turn away from accustomed points of attachment. Truancy may spring, therefore, from unhappiness that follows the inability of a child to compete successfully at home or at school. If the affection is denied him at home that is given to a brother or a sister, he may respond by not going to school. George H. Chatfield was wise in his belief that the conduct of an orderly home is a task even for able parents with sufficient income and it assuredly requires competent guardians for the management of a growing boy. There is a decided need for "1) patience, 2) interest, 3) intelligence, 4) skill and self-abnegation to know and interpret what is going on in a boy's mind, to know what he is doing, where he has been, with whom he goes, and to exercise an influence that will be potent when the boy is away from the father and mother, as well as when they are present. The parent of the truant boy is not likely to have these qualities."<sup>47</sup>

In discussing the extent of truancy, M. E. Kirkpatrick also expressed his belief that the influence of the family was important when he explained the appearance of fewer cases

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47 Ibid., p. 18

of truancy in the earlier ages by saying that children are more dependent on their parents' attitudes at this period of life, but in adolescence many parents may have completely lost control over the child's behavior.

Abbott and Breckenridge made a study of the causes of nonattendance among school pupils and reported that five per cent of the 1158 absences in two elementary schools for three weeks were classified as being situations of the kind in which the mother thought the child was in school. W. A. Kincaid commented that even where absences were explained in this way it was quite possible that the home was partially to blame in that one parent or the other had not assumed the necessary responsibility at the proper time or that the "unknown" absence was a direct outgrowth of parental negligence.<sup>48</sup>

H. R. Pestalozzi, descendant of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, the great educator, "early came to the conclusion that a lack of parental care was at the bottom of almost all cases of truancy, and that therefore the parents must be held to account".<sup>49</sup> Many educators share this opinion.

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48 Kincaid, W. A., "What Light Have Investigations Thrown on the Causes of Non-attendance?", Problems of School Attendance and Pupil Adjustment (University of State of New York, Albany, 1932) p. 66

49 "Truancy in Milwaukee, The Work of a New Kind of Truant Officer", The Survey, Vol. 35, February 26, 1916 (Survey Associates, Inc., New York) p. 637

Bert Hall has said, "Truancy in its broadest meaning is not confined to school children. This country has a large population of adult truants - men who 'leg' from their duty; women who shirk and have but the faintest conception of, and no training for, life's most sacred duties.

"Children coming from homes presided over by truant adults cannot be expected to be without truant tendencies. The burden in these cases rests upon the school management and other agencies to correct such tendencies with the best methods that have been or may be devised." <sup>50</sup> He estimated that more than 80 per cent of truancy is the result of indifferent or negligent parenthood. "There are many parents who make no effort to keep their children in school regularly." <sup>51</sup>

Julia Richman deemed unfavorable home conditions as the causative factor carrying the heaviest share of blame for the prevalence of truancy. These influences were studied under four headings: 1) Subnormal physical condition, including malnutrition; defective vision, hearing, or mentality; organic weaknesses; throat and nose trouble; the cig-

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50 Hall, Bert, "Truancy: A Few Causes and a Few Cures", Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Forty-seventh Annual Meeting of the National Education Association, held at Denver, Colorado, July 3-9, 1909 (Published by the Association, Secretary's office, Winona, Minn.) p. 217

51 Ibid., p. 219

arette habit; and sexual depravity. 2) Inefficient parenthood - negligent, indifferent, incompetent, intemperate, discouraged mother or father, or both; deserted wife; wage-earning mother, unsympathetic, often brutal, step-mother or step-father. 3) Degraded parenthood - parent offender against law or in league with child in order to share in profits of his illegal occupation or even of his criminal acts. 4) Vicious associates - particularly the influence of young loafers beyond school age. Julia Richman felt that truancy among little boys under eight years of age may be accounted for by one or more of four general causes: 1) Some children acquire the street habit before they are regularly entered into school. 2) School has been held before the troublesome little fellow at home as a place of terror. "You wait till you go to school. They'll make you mind" is no unusual argument on the part of weak mothers. 3) School work under some teachers is not sufficiently attractive to appeal to the child who finds more attraction on the streets, and 4) compulsory education laws rarely require attendance of the child under eight.

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52 Richman, Julia, "What Share of the Blame for the Increase in the Number of Truants and Incurables Belongs to the Schools?", Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Forty-seventh Annual Meeting of the National Education Association, held at Denver, Colorado, July 3-9, 1909 (Published by the Association, Secretary's office, Winona, Minn.) pp. 223-224

In a study of the parental status of truant children

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in Chicago from 1908 to 1915, W. A. Kincaid reported:

<u>Parental condition</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Per cent</u>
Father dead	680	17%
Mother dead	341	9%
Both dead	78	2%
Parents separated	35	1%
Father deserted	121	3%
Mother deserted	30	1%
Parent insane	16	..
Parent blind or crippled	6	..
Total abnormal	1307	33%
Families apparently normal	<u>2683</u>	<u>67%</u>
Total	<u>3990</u>	<u>100%</u>

Often if parents are immigrants, the child adapts himself more quickly to the new environment and, noting his superiority, uses it for his own ends. Charles, an American-born child of foreign parents, was a truant. Upon an examination of his case, it was felt that this defiance was due to the inability of the parents to deal with the child because of the difference in nationalities. "The poor mother had lost all control over the boy. He thought she was ignorant because she knew no English. In the case of foreign truant boys this is almost invariably the situation."<sup>54</sup>

This truant, Charles, said, "I started to play truant because I didn't like my teacher. I'm in a special class now"

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53 Kincaid, W. A., "What Light Have Investigations Thrown on the Causes of Non-attendance?", Problems of School Attendance and Pupil Adjustment (University of State of New York, Albany, 1932) p. 67

54 Hiatt, James S., "The Truant Problem and the Parental School", Bulletin no.29, United States Office of Education (Government printing office, Washington, D. C., 1915) p. 16

and like the teacher very much." In response to the question, "But you still play truant, don't you?", he said, "My mother don't give me no money to spend, and I stay away until I get the money." This statement was verified by the mother who said, "I give him pennies to go to school, but now he want ten cents and quarter, and I no can give him quarter all the time...He go upstairs and break everything, and throw them out of the window. When I see he no go to school, then I give him so he go; but when I not got, he no go."<sup>55</sup>

Mr. Kincaid made a summary of the economic status of the homes of 369 parental school boys.<sup>56</sup>

<u>Condition</u>	<u>Per cent</u>
Very poor	43%
Poor	37%
Comfortable	18%
Very comfortable	2%

James S. Hiatt, discovering that home surroundings had a large bearing upon the cases of the 100 truants studied by him in Philadelphia, reported that 30 per cent of these youthful vagabonds lived in poor neighborhoods; 32 per cent in poor, neglected, squalid surroundings; 25 had no father in the home - 20 of the fathers had died, five had deserted, and three were in prison; 11 were motherless, while 40 had mothers regularly employed and, therefore, but little in the

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55 Ibid., p. 16  
56 Op. cit., p. 67

home; 28 per cent of the fathers were addicted to drink, and 20 of the mothers had similar habits; 14 of the mothers were found to be ignorant, neglectful, and of low mentality; nine refused to cooperate in any way with the investigator, and eight were reported as positively vicious. In 15 per cent of the families there were other truants other than the cases being investigated. Thirty-three per cent of these parents had been prosecuted before the magistrate for permitting the truancy of their children. "This picture of squalid, ignorant, vicious home surroundings can not but impress one as being the largest contributing cause of the lack of prompt and regular attendance in school. The only wonder is that so large a proportion of children living in such so-called 'homes' do regularly find their way into the schoolroom."<sup>57</sup>

M. E. Kirkpatrick discovered that the median monthly rental in Cleveland in 1935 was \$36.25. However, in the areas in which truancy prevailed the median rental was only \$28.12. "Although children from the upper economic brackets seldom appear in court, this should not be taken as evidence that their virtue necessarily corresponds with their ability

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57 Hiatt, James S., "The Truant Problem and the Parental School", Bulletin no.29, United States Office of Education (Government printing office, Washington, D. C., 1915) p. 17

to evade entanglements with the law."<sup>58</sup>

Rosalie Harper, acting Director of the Attendance Department in Richmond for 1939-1940, expressed the opinion that the two chief reasons for irregular attendance were poverty and parental neglect. "Troublesome problem children are so because of some definite condition - physical, social, emotional - which often may be corrected through the efforts of the school. The causes of the child's difficulty very often lie largely outside the school. Destructive forces in the home or the neighborhood will sometimes thwart the best efforts of the teacher and the school...By no means all, or even the major portion, of the cases referred to the district welfare officers prove to be cases of wilful truancy. More often the parents are negligent."<sup>59</sup>

Miss Harper has said that the war-time situation and the resultant broken home have a far-reaching effect upon those left behind from an emotional standpoint. She feels that there is too often a breakdown of morale and indifference to school attendance in such homes. Mothers working to supplement the income leave children without supervision

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58 Kirkpatrick, M. E., and Lodge, T., "Some Factors in Truancy", Mental Hygiene, October, 1935, Vol. 19 (National Committee for Mental Hygiene, Albany New York) p. 64  
59 "The Welfare Department Study", Milwaukee, Wisconsin, March 1, 1940, p. 2



a large part of the time. With no one to get them ready for school, children fall into poor habits of attendance. In her annual report for 1942-1943, Miss Harper reported that new problems arise from mothers working. Children are having to make entirely too many decisions for themselves and are, therefore, living abnormal lives. Much restlessness among pupils, particularly of the junior high school age, is noted. They are all "straining at the leash" in order to earn money. She cited the case of Tom who was 14 years of age, very intelligent, clean-cut, and sensitive, but truant from school. He was obviously emotionally upset, and he finally confided to the counselor in his school that he could not sit in school as he was so worried about conditions in his home. His father drank to excess and was verbally cruel with sarcastic remarks and ridicule. The boy was deeply hurt. His grades dropped, and his mother was disturbed. After a four-way conference, the father discovered his own part in the boy's upset state and the situation at home was remedied.

"The New York State Crime Commission study based on 201 truancy cases revealed that 55 per cent of the children came from normal homes. The study concluded that the economic situation has some bearing on truancy. A majority of the 201 cases came from homes where the income was less than \$50. a week...Of the investigations considered approx-

imately one-half of the truants came from abnormal homes."<sup>60</sup>  
An investigation of the homes of delinquents in Chicago showed that in 50.5 per cent of the cases studied the parental conditions of the delinquent children were not normal, the home relationship being marred by death, desertion, divorce, intemperance, poverty, insanity, and degeneracy.<sup>61</sup>

"A second husband objected to the presence of his wife's small son and he was sent to board with a friend, and he rebelled by running away from school. When restored to his family, his truancy ceased.

"A sympathetic officer discovered that a high school boy about to be committed was ashamed of his shabby clothes. A decent suit of clothes restored his self-respect and he voluntarily resumed his studies."<sup>62</sup>

The case of a truant who was brought to one of the ungraded classes illustrates that the physical condition of the pupil may be the cause of his maladjustment. This boy was found, by the school doctor, to be suffering with an

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60 Kincaid, W. A., "What Light Have Investigations Thrown on the Causes of Non-attendance?", Problems of School Attendance and Pupil Adjustment (University of State of New York, Albany, 1932) p. 70

61 Hiatt, James S., "The Truant Problem and the Parental School", Bulletin no.29, United States Office of Education (Government printing office, Washington, D. C., 1915) p. 17

62 Chatfield, George H., "The Social Meaning of Truancy", Problems of School Attendance and Pupil Adjustment (University of State of New York, Albany, 1932) p. 18

ulcerated tooth, stomach trouble, earache, and tonsillitis. He could not sleep nights and, withal, was a stammerer. These conditions were remedied, and he was soon able to resume his regular studies.

Marie Ray related the case of Tom Griffin who was incorrigible, being guilty of truancy, stealing, and throwing knives and lamps. The cause of his irregular conduct was discovered to be physiological. Due to defective thyroid glands, he was lacking in thyroxin with the result that his mental processes had been dulled. He was given thyroxin crystal (65 per cent iodine) and in a short time the boy began to develop mentally. Soon he was normal. "No longer suffering from feelings of inferiority, he dropped bad companions, attended school regularly, and was a pleasure to have around the house."<sup>63</sup>

While most of the group of truants studied in Chicago "were not classified as normal mentally and physically, 60 per cent were classified as normal or above and 40 per cent were classified as below normal. Not all truants are of low mentality, nor are all children of low mentality truants."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Ray, Marie Beynon, Doctors of the Mind, The Story of Psychiatry (Little, Brown, and Co., Boston, 1942) p. 268

<sup>64</sup> Kincaid, W. A., "What Light Have Investigations Thrown on the Causes of Non-attendance?", Problems of School Attendance and Pupil Adjustment (University of State of New York, Albany, 1932) p. 70

William Healy has stated that a great many forms of misconduct arise from mental conflict and cited truancy as one manifestation of this difficulty. Continual failure in important school work, exposing the child to the ridicule of his classmates, reproaches of his teachers, and personal humiliation, physical deformity, and emotional upheavals due to "clandestine introduction to the field of sex ideas and sex irregularity" have their influence in creating a frustrated personality easily susceptible to the desire to es-

<sup>65</sup>cape. A child's emotional life upset by furtive tales of sex and mental conflict, according to George H. Chatfield, results in misconduct and truancy; until the cause is discovered and the normal aspect of life is restored the boy remains a problem. "This is not to assume the nonexistence of the self-willed boy confident of his ability to get the best of his adults by whom he is surrounded and have his own way."<sup>66</sup>

William Healy and Augusta F. Bronner have contrasted the many factors contributing to truancy by saying that one boy may be avoiding a situation in which he feels inadequate and discouraged, another has developed out of his family life antagonism to all forms of authority - school representing

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65 Chatfield, George H., "How Effective Is Compulsion?", Problems of School Attendance and Pupil Adjustment (University of State of New York, Albany, 1932) p. 16

66 Ibid., p. 16

one form, another has such need for recognition that, even though he does not dislike school, he truants in order to be "a regular fellow" with the other boys, still another is the victim of peculiar anxieties which make the classroom hateful to him. "The point is that while we discover emotional disturbances to be such a great incentive to delinquent behavior, yet the part that the ideational life plays can not be neglected. At the same time this part should not be overemphasized... Yet ideas derived from the environment do fashion the form that youthful activities take in delinquency as in sports... For example, school truancy which is such a common phenomenon in this country occurs hardly at all in Switzerland because it does not fit in with the ideas of the children there."<sup>67</sup>

F. Brown wrote an interesting summary of the complexity of the situation when the truant child was described as trying to preserve his sense of adequacy by escaping from a situation which magnifies his inferiority. Such inferiority is often traceable to low mentality, speech defects, or some specific disability. The child may declare he does not like school. However, the failure to point out the real reason is understandable since it is obscured by the complexity of

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67 Healy, William, and Bronner, A. F., New Light on Delinquency and Its Treatment, Institute of Human Relations (Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn., 1936) pp. 135-136

the situation. The writer further stated that the maladjustments may be an intra-psychic conflict traceable to the home conditions. One boy is reported to have stayed at home to guard his mother from threatened suicide. In another case, the boy was addicted to auto-erotic practices and feared that his classmates could read the results in his features. Inadequate clothing, or poor home conditions for studying, may also be causes for such conduct; therefore, "truancy, as these examples will indicate, is by no means a simple problem of whether or not the child is willing to conform. It must be regarded as a symptom of some fundamental maladjustment."<sup>68</sup>

As Julia Richman has asked, what share of the blame for the increase in truancy belongs to the school? James S. Hiatt has simplified the situation when he wrote, "In a number of cases there seems to be no definite cause except that the child is a 'misfit' in the school system. In other cases oversize for class can be assigned as a distinct reason for truancy."<sup>69</sup>

Dr. Muriel Brown, Director of Mental Hygiene for the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, in Rochester, New York, blames the schools. "It is apparent that

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<sup>68</sup> Brown, F. "Truant Children", School and Society, Vol. 40, December 8, 1934, p. 773

<sup>69</sup> Hiatt, James S., "The Truant Problem and the Parental School", Bulletin no.29, United States Office of Education (Government printing office, Washington, I. C., 1915) p. 15

ready-made systems of education are no more likely to fit a particular growing child than ready-made clothes... Instead of the finely objective appraisal of factors involved which alone can lead to diagnosis in such cases (intellectual or emotional disturbances) we find procedures dictated by ignorance, superstition, and personal prejudice."<sup>70</sup>

"By playing hockey, John and Sam and the rest of the gang are telling the world that the school is not providing them with satisfying experiences and that they propose to look for these elsewhere."<sup>71</sup>

Dr. Brown believes that practically every child, including those who are later the most confirmed truants start school with the most extravagant expectation of happiness. "When does this joyous interest turn to disappointment, to bitterness? What creates in these youngsters those feelings of dissatisfaction which later drive

them away from the doors of the school?"<sup>72</sup> She continues by explaining that it takes time and many frustrations to produce the avoiding reaction. She says that frustration may occur in 1) physical defects which make it impossible for the child to receive instruction in ordinary classrooms, 2)

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70 Brown, Muriel, "Causes of Nonattendance as Found in the Child - The Psychiatrist's Point of View", Problems of School Attendance and Pupil Adjustment (University of State of New York, Albany, 1932) p. 25

71 Ibid., p. 28

72 Ibid., p. 28

mental defects make it impossible to grasp the meaning of the lessons which other children easily understand, or 3) emotional disturbances may paralyze his mind so that he loses control of his thought processes and, to a greater or less extent, breaks off his contact with the world outside of himself, or 4) special interests and special abilities may make so strong a drive for expression that c-a-t, cat, and the multiplication tables have no power to rouse interest at all. "The thwarted child looks for an open window or a beckoning street and is off with the sun, the wind, the rain, and a pal ...who is a 'good scout'...The natural instinctive reaction to failure is flight." <sup>73</sup> Dr. Brown outlines her thoughts in

<sup>74</sup>  
three concise, but emphatic, statements:

1. That by forcing children to submit to a school routine which is not adapted to their needs, to situations which bring constant dissatisfaction, we are simply fixing in them antisocial attitudes which can only with difficulty be eradicated later.
2. That if children have a chance to engage in the right sort of activity they are naturally productive and happy, persistent and attentive; in short, are not truancy problems at all.
3. That so long as the school systems continue to insist upon ready-made education, without cutting the pattern to fit the child, there will be and should be truancy problems.

Joseph A. Bache, Superintendent of the Jewish Training School, Chicago, Illinois, in 1909, said, "Inasmuch as what-

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73 Ibid., p. 30

74 Ibid., p. 30



ever there is in the school which tends to oppose the natural growth and inclination of the boy will also tend to make his school life irksome, and in this way assist in developing any hereditary tendencies toward truancy." <sup>75</sup> Also Lowell Juillard Carr, Director of the Michigan Child Guidance Institute of the University of Michigan, has said that truancy from school is listed as behavior indicative of an inadequate adjustment to a situation and further states that many cases of truancy are due primarily to the school.

Dr. Peyser reported that out of 166 cases for whom he had complete educational histories, 154 were retarded.

"School failure appears to have been the unfortunate experience of these lads more than any other condition, including poverty, broken homes, absence of religious affiliation, physical defect, mental defectiveness, psychopathic states, or even truancy...Lack of success leads to disinterest, discouragement, antagonism, rebellion, truancy, and other forms of defensive and compensatory behavior." <sup>76</sup>

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75 Bache, Joseph A., "Delinquency and the Responsibility of the School Toward It", Journal of the Proceedings and Addresses of the Forty-seventh Annual Meeting of the National Education Association, held at Denver, Colorado, July 3-9, 1909 (Published by the Association, Secretary's office, Winona, Minn.) p. 1003

76 Peyser, Nathan, "Character Building for Crime Prevention, Public School 181, Brooklyn, New York", Preventing Crime - A Symposium, edited by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck (McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., New York, 1936) p. 108

However, as James S. Hiatt has said, "Whether this retardation is due to truancy, or truancy is due to retardation and consequent distaste for school, can not be proved; but in 74 per cent of the cases (studied in Philadelphia) the principal of the school stated that truancy had a direct influence on the amount of retardation. The fact that 73 per cent of these children had been truant more than one term would bear this statement out."<sup>77</sup>

Dr. Peyser continued his argument by saying, "The purpose of any curriculum is to furnish opportunity to the children to learn what they should know, and to develop skills and attitudes which will prove useful to them as children and as adults. If the curriculum fails to provide these opportunities, the children not only do not learn what they should, or acquire the skills they need, but they more often than not develop antisocial attitudes which are expressed in truancy, fighting, lying, stealing, and a host of other habits of delinquency."<sup>78</sup>

Alice B. Hopkins in her annual report for 1940-1941 described the case of a boy who skipped school once or twice each week. It was learned that on the days that he had

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77 Hiatt, James S., "The Truant Problem and the Parental School", Bulletin no.29, United States Office of Education (Government printing office, Washington, D. C., 1915) p. 12  
78 Op. cit., p. 178

physiology he became sick and that he was using the principal of avoidance. Another subject was substituted and the school had no more trouble with the boy. She stated, "It is axiomatic that when a child is well adjusted in school there is no trouble with his attendance. The children from John Smith School last year had an unusually good attendance record. It shows that when a teacher has a small number of children and is able to understand their individual needs just what can be accomplished."<sup>79</sup>

L. C. Halberstadt summarizes that "broken homes, bad home conditions, lack of school adjustment, small family income, bad companions, and poor intelligence are listed as the main causes of truancy."<sup>80</sup>

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79 Hopkins, Alice B., "Annual Report of the Attendance Department of the Richmond Schools, Richmond, Virginia" (1940-1941) p. 4

80 Halberstadt, L. C., "Highschool Truants, A Survey of Attendance Literature", Nation's Schools, Vol. 21, April, 1938, p. 33

### Some Remedies for Truancy

The arresting and prevention of cases of truancy is an important step as an aid in building the character of pupils, as a means of safeguarding society from delinquent activities which are costly in so many ways, and as an aid in establishing a sense of values which may guide the whole community to a saner and happier life. W. H. Johnson has presented a very challenging concept of the need for controlling truancy when he said, "...it is evident that the greater number of cases of truancies prevented in one generation, the better the chances are for favorable conditions under which children will be reared in subsequent generations and the less likelihood of their becoming truants." <sup>81</sup> However, the course is not an easy one. George H. Chatfield has said, "The diagnosis may be easily made, the treatment easily stated, but the application is exceed-

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81 Op. cit., p. 672

ingly difficult and coercion may be helpful but not necessarily effective." <sup>82</sup> "In states where there are adequate school attendance laws, and the enactment of such laws is the first step in solving the truancy problem, it seems foolish to wait until a child has committed a felony before the authorities take steps to correct and shape aright his life. Why wait and turn the child over to a juvenile court for correction when a study of the home life of the child by the school department - a truancy department, if you will - might have corrected or prevented the whole trouble? ..... A truancy department should, if properly organized, reach the child before his evil tendencies have crystallized into habit." <sup>83</sup> This quotation reveals the foresight of our great educators in the early 1900's.

Julia Richman's enumeration of the factors contributing to the control of truancy constitute a fine appraisal of the things that can and have been done to aid in this problem; school authorities are paying more attention to the situation, larger appropriations are being secured, more and

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82 Chatfield, George H., "How Effective Is Compulsion?", Problems of School Attendance and Pupil Adjustment (University of State of New York, Albany, 1932) p. 15

83 Hall, Bert, "Truancy: A Few Causes and a Few Cures", Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Forty-seventh Annual Meeting of the National Education Association, held at Denver, Colorado, July 3-9, 1909 (Published by the Association, Secretary's office, Winona, Minn.) pp. 217-218

better qualified attendance officers are being employed; a special superintendent is often assigned exclusively to the truancy department; compulsory attendance and child-labor laws are being more systematically enforced; parental schools are being managed better; special classes for mental defectives or physical defectives, for recently arrived immigrants, and for dull, backward, and over-age children are on the increase; children are being better graded; teaching is better; manual and physical training exert a wholesome influence; social forces aiming at the betterment of child life are cooperating more and more; and last, but not by any means least, the delinquent is being treated as an individual and not as one of a class.

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Julia Richman also gave a challenge which has been met:

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"Truancy and waywardness in children must be regarded as moral diseases and must be dealt with scientifically.

"Here and yon, someone has worked out the problem locally; a few reports show truancy under comparative control; a few records give in general terms the mode of treatment; but at best such treatment is the expression of the personal attitude of one or another man or woman toward the evil. Such practices, no matter how

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84 Richman, Julia, "What Share of the Blame for the Increase in the Number of Truants and Incurables Belongs to the School?", Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Forty-seventh Annual Meeting of the National Education Association, held at Denver, Colorado, July 3-9, 1909 (Published by the Association, Secretary's office, Winona, Minn.) p. 228

85 Ibid., p. 228

successful in individual cases or places, can never of its own force develop into a science...We need to study and imitate the methods of the medical profession. Leading physicians from all over the civilized world met in Washington last September (1908) to discuss only one thing - the most pressing problem in physical disease - the control and prevention of tuberculosis. The danger to the morals of the community from the spread of truancy and other forms of juvenile delinquency is greater and more far-reaching than the danger to the health of the community from the spread of the 'white plague'. Let us study and imitate the methods of the medical profession. Let us demand that a regular or special conference or congress of the N. E. A. be held, devoted exclusively to the problems of the delinquent boy and girl."

H. R. Pestalozzi is said to be the father of the National Convention of Truant Officers which had its first meeting in 1910.

Someone has said that there was no truancy until there were compulsory education laws. This may be true in a legal sense; however, it seems apparent that, whenever a child made up excuses to avoid school or let other interests and distractions deter him from attending after his parents had sent him on his way, he was a truant child! It seems that compulsory education laws developed from an appreciation of the advantages of an education and were means of preventing truant children from taking their responsibility so lightly and of protecting pupils from negligent parents. No one would say there was no small pox until we had compulsory vaccination in our schools. This practice has made it the duty of all parents to give their children this protection. On

failure to do so, the parents may have to answer the charge of being neglectful. It appears that the story of compulsory education follows the same pattern of thought.

According to George A. Hall, "The truancy law of 1853 was enacted (in New York) to stop children wandering in public streets and lanes without lawful occupations and require their school attendance up to 14 years for 4 months in the year. In 1874 the first general compulsory education law provided that children 8 to 14 years of age should be required to attend school 14 weeks a year."<sup>86</sup>

In Chicago the first compulsory education law, 1883, required children 8 to 14 to attend school for a period of 12 weeks each year unless excused. No provision for the enforcement of this law was made except that "any taxpayer" could sue the board of education "for any good cause". If the child's mental or bodily condition prevented school attendance, or if the child had acquired the branches of learning ordinarily taught in public schools, or if there were no public school conducted within two miles for 12 weeks during the year, the arguments for the defense were well founded.

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86 Hall, George A., "The Growth and Advancement of Compulsory Education and of Child Labor Laws", Problems of School Attendance and Pupil Adjustment (University of State of New York, Albany, 1932) p. 62



In 1889 a new law was passed in Chicago which required 16 weeks of attendance. One or more truant officer was appointed in each school district, and a superintendent of compulsory education was named. This superintendent saw the need for an ungraded school or room, and the demand for a parental school was acted upon in 1899. Today, Chicago requires children between the ages of 7 and 16 to attend public or private school for the entire time it is in session. Violation of this law is penalized with a fine from \$5. to \$20., plus court cost. There is a continuation school for the working child between the ages of 14 and 17. These minors must attend eight hours each week, and the parents and employers are held responsible. Violators are subject to a fine from \$25. to \$200. and cost.

The first compulsory school attendance law in Virginia was enacted on March 14, 1908. However, it was not until 1914 that Richmond voted in favor of its enforcement, according to Alice B. Hopkins. Miss Ella Ball was the first truant officer. On September 1, 1915, the law was put into effect. Children between the ages of 8 and 12 who could not read and write must attend school for a period of, at least, 60 days during the school term. The worker spent much time interpreting the law to parents. "As the city has grown and expanded in the course of the years, so have the attendance

laws changed and emphasis has shifted from one phase of work  
to another." <sup>87</sup> In 1922 the law was amended so that children  
between the ages of 8 to 14 were required to attend. In  
1934 the law was again amended to include children from the  
ages 7 to 15. The new law which went into effect in 1944 re-  
quires that children stay in school until they are 16 years  
of age. Superintendent Binford was quoted in the Richmond  
News Leader as saying, "Only children under 16 years of age  
who will hereafter be excluded from the Richmond schools will  
be those classes as mental defectives, who, it is believe,  
cannot profit by school instruction." Previous to this time  
some children classes as habitual truants or whose moral  
character was questioned had been excluded by school princi-  
pals, Mr. Binford said. The Juvenile Court has requested  
that the local school system keep children who are to be  
committed to a correction institute until the court is ready  
to commit them.

"The earliest boarding schools for truants in this coun-  
try were those in Cleveland founded in 1850 and in Newark  
founded in 1874." <sup>88</sup> These were reform institutions receiv-

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87 Hopkins, Alice B., "Annual Report of Attendance De-  
partment of Richmond Schools, Richmond, Virginia" (1940 -  
1941) p. 1

88 Hiatt, James S., "The Truant Problem and the Parental  
School", Bulletin no.29, United States Office of Education  
(Government printing office, Washington, D. C., 1915) p. 20

ing children committed for criminal offenses as well as for truancy. "The first real parental school was established in Boston in 1896. Buffalo followed in 1897; the Jefferson Farm School at Watertown, New York, was founded in 1898; the Seattle School in 1900, and the Chicago Parental School in 1902. Four schools, in Baltimore, Kansas City, Spokane, and Tacoma, were started in 1907 and 1908, and the most recent is that in New York established in 1909." <sup>89</sup> The older parental schools were built on the congregate plan. A latter tendency was the use of the segregate or cottage plan. Boston, Baltimore, Buffalo, New York, and Watertown, New York, took truants only. The other schools named took both truants and delinquents. The academic subjects and the grading of the regular public schools were employed. In nearly all instances the boys were taught farm work and gardening. Feeble-minded children were usually rejected. "The attempt is made in all cases, whether backward or normal, to develop the individual. It is the constant aim of principals and teachers, matrons and caretakers to study the individual child, catch his interest, and appeal to the bent of his mind, and by giving steady encouragement to all that is good to bring out the very best that is in him. To fit the sys-

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89. Ibid., p. 20

tem to the child, not the child to the system, is the basic principle of the parental school." <sup>90</sup> The average number who were returned to the schools after dismissal was only 24 per cent of the cases handled. This gave some indication of the success of the parental school, according to James S. Hiatt. "Thus, even allowing for those who are released because they reach the age limit, it is fairly safe to say that in two-thirds of the cases received, and they are without exception the worst cases of truancy in the city, the fault for which they were committed is cured by residence of a year or more at the parental school." <sup>91</sup> Approximately three-fourths of the pupils committed attained a fair amount of success in their future career, and only a small percentage relapsed or became criminal. "When it is remembered that these boys come usually from homes of degradation and poverty of the very worst type, and are considered practically hopeless cases, it may reasonably be inferred that the treatment received in the parental school has done something which the regular public school could not do to start them on the way to a useful life." <sup>92</sup>

There were 25 special truancy rooms for boys at the end

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90 Ibid., p. 30  
91 Ibid., p. 32  
92 Ibid., p. 32

of the school year 1922-23 in Chicago and three for girls. In 1924 the rooms were grouped in centers which allowed for better grading and classifying and made it easier to keep the pupils interested and busy. In 1935 Chicago had five schools with special rooms for truants and two schools to care for truant boys. "Both schools cared for these special cases with educational, psychological, physical, and mental methods applied to their development and adjustment."<sup>93</sup> The Montefiore Special School for Problem Boys was opened in 1929 for the study and treatment of boys who are unadjusted and, therefore, truant and incorrigible and well started on the road to delinquency. The school is located across from Stanford Park, and the facilities here are available to the school in its search for the proper development of the interests and aptitudes of these problem boys. Moseley is the other special school in Chicago. Richards Prevocational School for overgrown girls who do not seem interested in academic work and who are given an opportunity to do more handwork is also located in Chicago. The Parental School for Girls was established in 1926.

Cincinnati, Ohio, has a special school for its con-

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93 Johnson, W. H., "The Problems of Truancy in the Chicago Public Schools", School and Society, Vol. 45, May 15, 1937 (The Science Press, New York) p. 366

firmed truants. "Truancy often seems confirmed in the lad's  
very nature and so he is sent to the Special School."<sup>94</sup>

The school accomodates both day pupils and boarders. Cases of tardiness and absence are investigated at once. The pupils are placed on their honor, in school and out, whenever possible, and the gates are ajar at all times. The boarders may be promoted to day pupils, and the day pupils may be returned to their former schools. "Sometimes, too, truants are such pronounced delinquents that nothing remains but to commit them to the Boys' Opportunities Farm in the hills. These are rare. Instead, the boys at the Special School, one and all, come to feel that with each one of them the school itself and its unique liberties are upon trial. 'Esprit de corps' brings them to love the school, love the teachers who strive to win them from their old ways for their good."<sup>95</sup>

The Binet Department in Newark, New Jersey, includes both special classes in elementary schools and special schools which are given over entirely to the education of mentally retarded children with its standard expressed in these words: "The pupil's success shall be the school's suc-

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94 Koch, F. J., "Public Schools for Hookey Players", American City, November, 1921, Vol. 25 (The Civic Press, New York) p. 382

95 Ibid., p. 383

cess, and the pupil's failure shall be the school's failure." <sup>96</sup> Its aim is "to teach children to behave as they otherwise would not behave, as well as to teach them to know what they otherwise would not know." <sup>97</sup>

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The following are excerpts from teachers' reports:

"There have been no cases of truancy this year and with one or two exceptions none have been absent without very good reasons. One boy who missed more than half of each month in a regular grade has missed only two days in the two years he has been with us." and "When we began last September one of our difficult problems was the building up of good attendance. Our list of habitual truants numbered 27. The Attendance Department cooperated most faithfully. Our present list of truants contains two names, neither of which was on our original list of 27 names. The attendance for the year has ranged from 90 per cent to 92 per cent."

John Smith School in Richmond, Virginia, enrolls boys who present various problems of maladjustment in regular school. Children are dealt with understandingly. There is an adjustment of the curriculum to the needs of each so that he has a feeling of achieving. Unlimited patience is shown, and firm but consistent discipline is administered. The stigma of being a pupil in the school has almost completely been erased, according to Miss Rosalie Harper. This

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96 Anderson, Meta L., "The Binet School of Newark", Preventing Crime - A Symposium, edited by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck (McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., New York, 1936) p. 182

97 Ibid., p. 182

98 Ibid., p. 189

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school has had an outstanding record for its collection in the war effort.

As early as 1916, the role of the attendance officer was interpreted as that of a social worker by John W. Davis. "The attendance officers are instructed to look primarily for the cause (of the absence) in order to ascertain whether the individual officer can effect a cure, always remembering that he must put himself in the place of the erring pupil, when he begins to judge the boy, and to be a big brother to him."<sup>99</sup> More recent discussions of the duties and philosophy of attendance officers correspond to this enlightened viewpoint. George H. Chatfield described the duties of school and attendance officers as being aware of the possibilities, detecting the causes, and being resourceful in suggesting the treatment. He said the first step is to bring the source of the trouble to the surface and then discuss the situation with the parent and child. He further stated that failure was as likely as success. Henry J. Gideon has said that the work of the attendance officer consists of four phases; 1) investigation, 2) diagnosis, 3) treatment, and 4) follow-

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<sup>99</sup> Davis, John W., "The Work of the Bureau of Attendance, New York City Schools", Addresses and Proceedings of Fifty-fifth Annual Meeting of the National Education Association, held at New York City, July 1-8, 1916 (Published by the Association, Secretary's office, Ann Arbor, Mich.) p. 858



up. Mrs. Henry J. Gideon has added, "In the matter of attendance the attendance officer is interested in securing the mental and spiritual as well as the bodily presence (of the child) at school."<sup>100</sup> W. H. Johnson has summarized the duties of the attendance officer. He should be desirous of: 1) promoting attendance, 2) reducing truancy, 3) awakening the cooperation of the home with the school, 4) cooperating with special schools in pupil adjustment, 5) testifying in court when prosecutions are made, and 6) being humanitarians in aiding in relief of economic distress in improvident homes in order to make school attendance of indigent children possible.

Dr. Brown has written, "A truant child is an unadjusted child and unadjusted children can be helped. They can never be helped by threat, coercion, 'hollering', humiliation, or abuse. Methods of child study have been worked out and can be successfully used even by those with a minimum of training in the special skills. We know, now, what it means to take an inventory of a child's physical, intellectual, and emotional equipment to plan a course of treatment that will bring out in him all of the best that he has to offer...An

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100 Gideon, (Mrs.) H. J., "School Representatives in the Home", Problems of School Attendance and Pupil Adjustment (University of State of New York, Albany, 1932) p. 37

attendance officer should be a liaison officer between the child in trouble and the source of help. He must learn to approach each truant with the attitude of the scientist, not of the dictator. He must learn to say first, not 'What can I do about this?', but 'How did this happen?'. He must be ready to say, 'I myself do not know the answer, but I will find someone who does - nurse, doctor, psychologist, psychiatrist, or visiting teacher.'<sup>101</sup>"

There can be little doubt that the child's problem and his future adjustment can best be handled when those interested in his case take this psychological approach. The Division of Pupil Personnel and Counseling, Philadelphia, apparently is well organized to discover pupils with problems, make a study of their difficulties, and plan for the correction of such maladjustment. "Attendance officials realize that children cannot be really educated when forced into school and kept there by compulsion. They may, of necessity in some cases, return children to their classes by the use of coercive measures, but such children do not enter easily into the life of the school, and often make heavy demands upon the time and attention of the principal

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101 Brown, Muriel, "Causes of Nonattendance as Found in the Child - The Psychiatrist's Point of View", Problems of School Attendance and Pupil Adjustment (University of State of New York, Albany, 1932) pp. 30-31

and the teacher. Experience has taught us that permanent correction of individual truancy and maladjustment in school can be effected only when there has been created, in the child, an attitude of willingness to return to school and a sincere desire to succeed in his studies." <sup>102</sup>

For a number of years Richmond has had three white and two Negro attendance workers all of whom are well trained social workers. The workers follow a definite daily schedule. Five schools are visited each day, and the workers go on call to the other schools. They seek the assistance of various social agencies to aid in the study of the child and the problem he presents. The Social Service Exchange cooperates, as a clearing-house, in summarizing the agencies to which the child or his family is known. The workers visit the homes of the pupils in a sympathetic manner to discover the cause of the irregular attendance, and they endeavor to correct any underlying difficulty, realizing, as Alice B. Hopkins has said, "that next to the home, the school exerts the greatest influence upon the child's personality development and civic adjustment." <sup>102</sup> "The major-

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101 Lafferty, Robert F., "Division of Pupil Personnel and Counseling", Annual Report for period beginning Sept. 1, 1942, and ending June 30, 1944 (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) p. 1

102 Hopkins, Alice B., "Annual Report of Attendance Department of Richmond Schools, Richmond, Virginia", 1938-39, p. 1

ity of our parents and our youthful clients do not look upon us as people who are out to enforce a law upon them but rather to regard us as someone who will be helpful in circumstances not only linked with the school but with all the outside problems which touch their lives." <sup>103</sup> The Richmond attendance workers have done the usual court work where it has seemed necessary. "We find every year that the less we go to court, the better we do our jobs. Court is not an effective method for dealing with difficult cases of persistent truancy. We find our best help from the court comes when we refer cases of neglect and improper guardianship." <sup>104</sup> Miss Harper also stated that frequent visits and much encouragement have proven the most effective methods in dealing with truants. Teacher-visiting helps, too.

The work done by our attendance officers resembles the case work done by any other social worker. W---, a colored boy, failed to enter on the opening day of school. When his mother enrolled him, he was absent on the next day. The boy was brought to the principal by the attendance worker, and he was again absent. This time he disappeared. When he was found, he was brought into court by the worker

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103 Harper, Rosalie, "Annual Report of Attendance Department of Richmond Schools, Richmond, Virginia", 1943-44, p. 2

104 Ibid., p. 2

as a persistent truant. A psychological and physical examination was given at the Children's Memorial Clinic. The test indicated that W---was feebleminded and would gain nothing by attending school. Since the Colony was crowded, W--- was returned to regular school and made custodian of his classroom and school messenger. He was given perfect freedom in his art work at which he was adept. His attendance became perfect. The story of the two W--- boys show how agencies assist the Attendance Department in its work. The mother of these boys was addicted to drink and neglected them. The older boy began to be truant from school, and his younger brother followed him. Both began to "skip" frequently. They were studied at the Children's Memorial Clinic, and efforts were made to adjust them to the conditions. The Family Service Society worked with the father who agreed on the placement of the boys. The case was turned over to the child placement division of the Social Service Bureau.

Two interesting activities have been undertaken by the attendance officers of New York City and Philadelphia. In September, 1941, J. E. Wade issued a bulletin to the principals of the New York City schools outlining the new plan for dealing with absentees and truants.

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105 Wade, J. E., "Bulletin to Principals of Schools, New York City", (Office of Superintendent, Sept. 12, 1941) pp. 1-2

"In each class or section will be found one or more pupils who are truant or irregular attendants. The essence of the new plan is to concentrate upon these pupils. It is unlikely that everyone of them will be absent everyday. The attendance officer can at the beginning look up everyday every one of the 25 worst absentees. The first step is to make a list of all the pupils in the different sections or classes who are truant and from this total number select the 25 to be looked up everyday they are absent. The objection to the acceptance of the plan is that there are likely to be truant pupils whose absence cannot be reported as desired.

"What has been found to take place is that a pupil who is reported and followed up every time he is absent tends to become more and more regular so that in a few weeks the 25 truants reported upon daily can be increased to 50 and eventually the number can be further increased. It has been objected that incipient truants cannot be reported under this plan, but slight modifications in the plan are always permissible. There is good reason to believe from last term's experience that lasting improvement in attendance will result if the instructions laid down in this circular are carried out. There will be at least 15,000 truants constantly receiving attention, probably more.

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"Attendance officers will notify the schools to which they are assigned of those pupils admitted by transfer from other schools who were 'listed truants' during the last term. As truants are usually unsatisfactory in class work, principals of schools are expected and directed to work out remedial programs for these pupils. A specific report will be required of each school, at the middle of the fall term and at the end of the fall term showing what has been done to remove the handicaps of these pupils."

In September, 1943, the chronic cases of absences in the previous term were interviewed prior to the opening of the schools in Philadelphia.

The school has an opportunity not only to cooperate with the attendance officers in their work but to check