Discussion of the methods used in introducing the parent-teacher conference technique into the Charlo Public Schools

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DISCUSSION OF THE METHODS USED IN INTRODUCING
THE PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE TECHNIQUE
INTO THE CHARLO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by

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B. A., MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY, 1949

Presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
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Approved by:

Chairman, Board of Examiners
Dean, Graduate School

Date
# Table of Contents

## Chapter I. The Problem
- Statement of the problem ........................................... 1
- Limitations of this study ........................................... 1
- The general importance of the problem ....................... 1
- Survey of types of reporting ..................................... 2

## Chapter II. Background of the Conference Method at Charlo Public Schools
- Inservice training .................................................... 9
- "Selling" the program to the community ....................... 12
- Preliminary mechanics for the conference day .............. 13

## Chapter III. The Conference Day
- Teacher preparation ............................................... 17
- Registration desks manned by P.T.A. members and students .................................................. 18
- The interview ........................................................ 19
- Suggested topics for discussion ............................... 22
- Interview techniques ............................................ 24

## Chapter IV. Evaluation of the Charlo Program
- Attendance compilation ........................................... 26
- Administration of the questionnaire ......................... 28
- Form of the questionnaire ....................................... 31
- Summary of the questionnaire ................................. 31

## Chapter V. Summary and Conclusions

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Comparison by Percentages of Numbers and Sex of Parents That Attended the Charlo Parent-Teacher Conferences in the Years 1952 Through 1954</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Comparison of Attendance at the Charlo Parent-Teacher Conferences Fall 1953 and Spring 1954</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Comparison of Attendance by Parents at Various Class Levels to the Spring, 1954 Parent-Teacher Conference in Charlo Public Schools</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

The problem of this study involves the investigation of the procedure used in introducing the parent-teacher conference technique into the Charlo Schools.

Statement of the problem. The purposes of this study were: (1) to investigate the problems involved in instituting the parent-teacher conference in a school system of three hundred students; (2) to make recommendations to the administration of the Charlo Schools regarding the progress and success of the technique; and (3) to prepare a discussion of the problems involved in order that administrators of the small schools might utilize this information to guide the initiation of the parent-teacher technique in their schools.

Limitations of this study. This study is limited to the problems involved in introducing the parent-teacher conference technique into the Charlo Public Schools and covers the period from 1951 to 1954. The questionnaire was the investigative procedure used in this study. Only those parents with children in the Charlo Schools or the Charlo teachers were given the questionnaire; therefore broad generalizations from this study may be unwarranted.

The general importance of the problem. In many of
the smaller school systems of Montana, the elementary and high schools serve as a unit under a single administration. The Charlo Schools offer an integrated program of conferences in all grades one through twelve.

The author found very little information available regarding the procedural techniques necessary in initiating the parent-teacher conference in the schools. This paper is written to serve as a guide for the administrator interested in initiating the program in his school. More and more schools are becoming dissatisfied with their present method of reporting pupil progress to parents. These schools are investigating the various methods in use today, and many are preparing to use the parent-teacher conference technique. The conference method can be used to improve the school public relations program.

Survey of types of reporting. Report cards have been used generally for many years as a means of reporting pupil progress to the parent. Usually these cards become a mere series of marks with regard to the accomplishments of the child in the academic material with no indication as to the growth of the individual.

Sites indicates that:

The philosophy of the school is moving from concern with the factual reporting of 'what the child does in the subjects' toward what 'education is doing for the child'. Schools today have changed their emphasis from subject matter goals to those of child development. Mastery of the information is essential, not as an end in itself, but for the contribution it will make to broader and more important objectives.

Parents don't want to be reported to, they want to be consulted. They can give as much helpful information
to the teacher as she can give them. Substitute the word consult or confer for the word report.

Grade cards are at best only a one way report. A signature, you know, is all that is asked of the parents.¹

In addition, comparative marks have frequently stimulated competition to the point where they have promoted antisocial attitudes and practices such as lying, cheating and stealing. Many children will attempt to use any means available to them to gain recognition as a result of this competition. Often parents contribute to this tragic situation because they attach more importance to the marks gained in school than to the social attitudes engendered and the knowledge gained. The pressures brought to bear by parents, teachers, peers, and friends to excel in marks, can and do produce all sorts of undesirable reactions within the child. Only by discontinuing the use of specific ratings in report cards, can the schools hope to free many students from the eternal urge to excel above all others and to allow students to work to the best of their ability to improve as individuals.

There is dissatisfaction with the old fashioned report card because it did damage to the child's personality development in emotional insecurity with his parents. The child's own sense of achievement and recognition, as well as his feeling of personal worth, are apt to be damaged. Aside from the damage, the card didn't give the parent much help in understanding what really was wrong with their child's development and how

¹ Walter G. Sites, "Shall We Grade Them or Guide Them", School Executive 70:35-7, August 1951.
they might help him to be his own (not his parents) best self.²

One of the main difficulties with report cards is that they, in themselves, contain so little true inherent meaning and value. The parent is left to form his own conclusions concerning the child's accomplishments from a mere grade or mark. Certainly, the difficulty is apparent in this process: how can a complete picture of the progress of an individual be demonstrated in the form of a letter or sign. Certainly, the separate components of the child's character can not be compressed into one single mark and still retain a representative meaning for the parent.

Check lists increase the meaning of the grades, to be sure, but these checks are again limited to certain areas and sometimes give rise to inaccuracies and confusion as to meaning for the parent, who is limited by this one-way exchange of information.

Value of report cards can be increased also by supplementation with telephone calls. Though due to the impersonal nature of the telephone, many problems still remain unsolved. Rapport with the parent can not be gained usually under such conditions. This process ends again in a one-way exchange of ideas and information from teacher to parent. The parent has much to add to the exchange.

Report cards may be substituted for or may be enhanced by use of letters and written reports. Much

information about the child can be sent home to the parent, but this can be gained only at the expense of much time and energy by the teacher. Considerable work is necessary to complete thirty or more letters to parents and still retain the individuality due the child. This task becomes a most distasteful one. Like the report card, the notes and written reports become one-way reports from the teacher to the parent.

One means of overcoming this one-way transmission of ideas is by use of home visitation. Here the parent is given the opportunity to ask questions and present information regarding the child. "Teacher home visitations are rather successful but it is more logical for thirty parents to make one visit rather than one teacher to make thirty visits." ³

Many teachers agree to the value of home visits, but the elements of time and distance often make them impossible. . . . a University of Washington survey of three hundred classroom teachers showed that fifty percent accomplished more than an occasional visit. Home visits should be brief and primarily for the purpose of becoming acquainted. Conferences in which the child and his work are discussed are usually more effectively handled in school, where materials and records are available. ⁴

³ Sites, loc. cit.
The atmosphere of the classroom is more business-like and more conducive to discussion of the problems of the child then is the home where both the parent and teacher are easily distracted to other topics of discussion. To be most effective, the conference needs to be held in complete privacy in school.

At present, many variations in parent-teacher conference technique are being used. In one form, the parents meet in groups with the teacher, either during school time or after school. This group process aids in school-home relations, in general, and gives the parent an opportunity to discover what his child is doing in school. However, because of the impersonal nature of the group process, the parent and teacher can not discuss the highly important personal problems involving the individual children. Much opportunity for parent-teacher cooperation is lost. Some remedy to this problem may be found in scheduling individual conferences with interested parents at some future time.

Another variation in the conference technique is to have the teacher meet with parents during school time. A substitute teacher is hired to replace the teacher while she is in conference with the parent. One difficulty with this is in the scheduling problem for the parents who have more than one child in school.

The teachers may meet after school or in the evenings with the parents. This process is being used in some schools at present. This places a considerable burden upon
the teacher. In order to lessen this burden on the teacher some schools have scheduled the conferences with parents in such a manner that each teacher meets some of the parents individually and represents the remainder of the staff to that parent. This process saves considerable time for both parent and teacher but does not seem to solve all the individual problems that may arise among the parent, the child, and the teacher.

In an attempt to present the opportunity for individual conferences by all parents with all the teachers, some schools dismiss classes for one or two days. During this period teachers meet with individual parents at scheduled intervals throughout the day. This system operates most effectively in the elementary school but presents some problem in high school where the teacher must meet some sixty to one hundred parents. This situation presents a considerable problem in scheduling and is further complicated when the conferences are held in conjunction with the elementary school conferences.

The conference makes a two-way exchange of information on the child available to the parent and teacher. Public relations are improved considerably and the child enjoys the benefits of a more complete education made possible by the insight gained as the teacher and parent act together to help the child to help himself. The conference must be regarded as joint planning for the child's best development. As the parent and teacher gain in mutual
understanding, so benefits the child in a more wholesome education.
CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND OF THE CONFERENCE METHOD AT CHARLO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The parent-teacher conference method now used in the public schools in Charlo, Montana was commenced in the fall of 1951 when Stan Grayson became Superintendent of Schools. Much of the initial work in the program was carried by Superintendent Grayson, who had had some previous experience with similar programs at other schools. He convinced the teachers of the value of the program at the faculty meetings then proceeded to indoctrinate the faculty with the procedural techniques involved in the process. This work was supplemented further by recommendations of various members of the faculty versed in counseling techniques.

For the first year, rather than to begin immediately with the conference program, the faculty voted to use an intermediate step. On a Friday in April, 1952, the students were excused from school. The parents were to come instead of the students. This intermediate type of conference was chosen to bridge the gap to the actual parent-teacher conferences which were to be held later that fall. The procedure of this preliminary conference was as follows. Preceding the conference, invitations were sent to the parents and townspeople to visit the school on this Friday to become acquainted with the teachers and with the problems of the
students. Busses were sent out as usual that morning; this time, to carry the parents to school. The parents followed the same schedule as the students would follow during a regular day at school. Arriving at school, they were allowed to go to the classes of their choice.

In these classes, the teachers discussed the subject matter and the philosophy and purposes of the various classes. Each teacher maintained his schedule for the day. The parents moved from class to class becoming acquainted with the teachers. This was the first visit to school for many of the parents, even though they had had children in school for many years.

At this conference no scheduled meetings between parents and teachers were held. This session was for the purpose of acquainting parent and teacher. Those parents who had individual problems to be discussed with the teachers, scheduled them during free periods between classes and during noon hour when parents and teachers ate together in the school lunchroom. Every attempt was being made to make this day as similar as possible to a regular class day. Following lunch, the parents returned to the classrooms till about 2:30 P.M. when the parents and teachers met to discuss the conference and the possibility of holding an individual type of conference in the fall. After considerable discussion, a motion to hold the conference at the end of the first nine weeks of school in the fall was made and passed unanimously. This vote signified the movement in the
direction of greater parent-teacher cooperation that was to follow.

In the fall of 1952, after many preliminary faculty meetings to establish the procedural techniques, the sponsorship was offered to and accepted by the local Parent-Teacher Association. The procedural techniques remained with the faculty; the task of gaining public support for the plan was assumed by the P.T.A. Due to the lack of civic organizations in this small community, the total burden of the public relations remained with the P.T.A. and the school.

Next, the faculty tackled the problem of establishing the procedure for scheduling the first conference. Questionnaires were sent to parents to determine the best possible time for them to come to the conference. All possible parents were scheduled at the time of their first choice only after a long tedious session by the teachers after school. About five hundred conferences were scheduled for the parents within the two day period. The problem was further aggravated by some situations in which families numbered nine to ten children in school scattered from the first grade through high school. One family had six children in grade school and four children in high school, making a total of some twenty-five conferences. Parents were scheduled, as much as possible, with consecutive conferences to the completion of their schedule. Then, the schedules were typed on post cards and mailed to the parents to inform them of dates and time of conferences. For the
subsequent conferences, the same methods have been used to schedule the parents because of the success in the first conference.

Through this course of action, the conference technique has come to be accepted by the parents in Charlo to the point that one hundred per cent of the families have been represented at the conference at least once during the years 1952 to 1954.

Inservice training. As with any successful school project, the administration had to approve and instigate the initial action to the establishment of the conference in Charlo. Because of the previous contact of Superintendent Grayson with the conference technique, he assumed the initial leadership and began to define the process at general faculty meetings. The major problem involved in initiating action within the faculty arose from the fact that almost the entire faculty was ignorant of the process. This problem was to be met by inservice training.

The faculty was quick to accept the conference because of the many apparent advantages to be gained. This technique seemed to hold the solution to many of the school problems such as discipline, school-community relations, teacher, student relations and parent-teacher relations.

Accepting the interest and enthusiasm of the administration, members of the faculty began to investigate the method. At subsequent faculty sessions, interest was further accelerated as various members reported findings of
their individual research. After discussion during several meetings, the faculty was prepared to combine the results of their individual efforts and to formulate the actual training program.

When the teachers became aware of the conference procedure, much of the remainder of the program was involved with acquainting the faculty with the personal interview. Members of the faculty were weakest in this area and still, the interview, itself, seemed to hold the key to the success of the entire program.

Thus the task appeared to be one of teaching the interview technique to the teachers. At subsequent meetings research materials were presented on this topic by various members of the faculty. This material consisted mainly of tips on conducting interviews and topics to be used in the discussion with the parent. These materials were supplemented by model interviews between members of the faculty. Some members were still uneasy concerning the prospect of meeting with parents for such a long interval as fifteen minutes.

"Selling" the program to the community. The Parent-Teacher Association in Charlo was the only organization through which the school could meet the community with the problem. Thus the problem was one of acquainting the Parent-Teacher Association with the conference. This procedure was to be accomplished through the activities of the Lower Flathead Montana Education Association. At the
next meeting of this organization Superintendent Wright of Florence-Carlton School and Superintendent Lafond of Corvallis were invited to attend. These superintendents brought with them faculty members and townspeople of their local parent-teacher groups. Also the Charlo parents were invited to attend this meeting. The superintendents described the operation of the conferences in their respective schools. Further information was presented by the faculty members and the parents; each giving his own view of the program. Following this presentation, many questions were asked by the Charlo group that was present. This meeting was the beginning of the Charlo parent-teacher conferences. The parents and teachers reported back at the next parent-teacher meeting. After a complete discussion, this group assumed sponsorship of the Charlo conferences and began to set the plans for the first conference. Thus the parents and teachers were included in the planning of the conferences.

Enlightenment of the lay public and of the professional educators must be accepted as a necessary parallel to the introduction of any technique that presumes cooperation between parents and teachers. Many schools have instituted routine conferences between parents and teachers with little realization of the significance of the shift from isolation to cooperative responsibility.5

The problem of getting information to those parents who did not attend parent-teacher meetings was attacked, first, by having discussion of the conference technique in class. The value of the conferences was seen readily by the

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students and they became the avenue of information from the school to the home. Information concerning the purposes and values of the conference was sent home in various bulletins from time to time. In this manner much of the basic groundwork was established for the conferences that were to follow.

Preliminary mechanics for the conference day. Two weeks preceding the date of the first conference, letters were sent to the parents instructing them as to the purpose and character of the conference. Also included was a blank to be completed indicating the choice of the parent regarding the date and the time of conference with the teachers. The parents were given opportunity to indicate first, second, and third choices on this blank. These blanks were to be completed and returned to school. When the blanks were returned, a general faculty meeting was scheduled to complete the time and date of all the individual conferences for all parents.

The method of selecting the time and date demanded the services of all teachers. Large families were scheduled first because of the large number of conferences that had to be scheduled. In this manner, these parents could meet with the teachers in as short a time as possible. The importance of this procedure becomes apparent as fourteen conferences were scheduled for a single family.

The best method that was discovered for scheduling
the conferences was the reading of the name of one of the families and allowing each of the teachers who had children from that family in his class to obtain a conference time with that family. This was a cumbersome method but was the only apparent method of scheduling the parents so as not to incur conflicts in time. This process was very simple on the elementary level where each teacher had as few as twenty to thirty pupils, but was highly complex in the high school where some teachers had as many as sixty to seventy parents to meet.

Two days of school time were to be used as conference days; Thursday and Friday were selected. The pupils remained at home except for a few who acted as guides. Since Charlo is a farm community the children were needed at home to care for the children and the farm work while the parents were at school. In general, this process appears to have operated very well.

Conferences were scheduled to the convenience of the parents. Most of the meetings were held during the day on Thursday and Friday but others were held during the evening, on Saturdays and by special appointment on other days, at the choice of the parents. The use of school days for conference days proved most satisfactory in Charlo because of the large percentage of farmers. The time of conference may have to be changed at other schools because other occupations would not allow the parents to visit school during the week. This problem will have to be solved by each of the individual schools.
Teacher preparation. A comfortable and attractive room should be prepared by the teacher for the parent. Chairs should be arranged in such a manner that the teacher does not sit behind the desk. When the teacher sits behind the desk, the parent is not being treated as an equal, and a considerable barrier is raised counter to the success of the interview before it begins. Exhibits of student work may be displayed about the room on the walls and desks, or may be presented in an individual folder.

Teachers should have a schedule of parents in advance of the conference in order to organize the materials in order of attendance. A limited amount of time is available between interviews. Some teachers maintain alphabetized folders containing work and records of the student, thus, eliminating much of the final pre-conference preparation. "The teacher who becomes interested in the development of the child rather than in teaching subject matter will find that she has an abundance of material for parent conferences."6 In addition to preparation of room and materials,

6 G. T. Driscoll, "The Parent-Teacher Conference", Teachers College Record, 45:463-70, April, 1944.
the teacher should prepare herself with an understanding of conference technique. B. F. Parker lists the following as ideal conditions for the interview:

1. Secure ample time so a thorough discussion may be completed without hurry.
2. Insure as much privacy and freedom from interruption as possible.
3. Consult records beforehand and have on hand samples of work.
4. Give a friendly and unhurried greeting.
5. Teacher shouldn't sit behind desk."

"The satisfaction and mutual good feeling derived from parent-teacher conferences make them well worth the time and energy spent by the teacher in their preparation."8

Registration desks manned by P.T.A. members and students. The registration desks in Charlo were attended by the parents. By assuming this duty, the parents freed the teachers to hold the conferences without this additional worry. Also, here was an opportunity for the parent to participate in the conference. Many of the room mothers were available to help with coffee and lunch. In addition, high school girls were recruited to act as guides for the parents. As each parent registered, he was assigned a guide to take him to the various rooms as previously scheduled by the teachers. This information had been sent to the parent on a post card, which he was to bring to the conference

The guides brought the parents to the rooms, introduced the parents to the teachers and then returned to the registration desk. At the end of the fifteen minute conference period, the guide returned to accompany the parent to the next teacher. This service was most helpful for many of the parents who were not acquainted with the school plant nor with the teachers. At the first conferences, the registration desk crew distributed report cards to the parents as they arrived. This pattern was changed at later conferences and the cards were sent home several days preceding the conference, because the parents and teachers agreed that more could be accomplished if the parents could have something more specific to discuss with their children prior to the conference and thus be better prepared to discuss the children with the teachers. With this information, the parents were prepared to make the interview a true two-way exchange of information and then the parents had a responsibility to the conference also.

The interview. In the in-service program, the teachers were instructed in the use of interview techniques. By wise use of these techniques, the teacher can create within the parent an awareness of what constitutes the best in educational advantages for their children—in housing, equipment, materials, teachers, curriculum—and an awareness of the methods used to obtain these advantages.
Ida Di Fencier lists these advantages of the successful interview:

1. The teacher gets a better understanding of the background of the child.
2. The teacher learns the parental reaction to their children and to the school.
3. There is opportunity for the parents to obtain a better idea of what the teacher is trying to accomplish.
4. The conference provides a basis for friendliness between teacher and parent in their work with the children.
5. For the slow child, there is opportunity for making explanation rather than giving him low marks.  

The conference has some disadvantages and limitations which must be considered in conjunction with the advantages:

1. The conference does not provide a written record for later comparison.
2. The interview is most effective if the teacher has the child for most of the day.
3. Many teachers are not trained in child study and guidance and thus may not be able to recognize symptoms of insecurity or maladjustment.
4. Some teachers are unprepared or feel insecure in the use of the conference or interview technique.
5. There is the heavy time investment required by the conference method and provision should be made for it in the days schedule. In reality it is a time saver because it helps eliminate classroom problems.

Thus the success of the interview depends upon the capabilities, interest and concern of the individual teacher. In addition, the personal conference stimulates the teacher to better understand the individual child.

Three major factors tend to influence strained parent-teacher relationships. These factors are:


10 Ibid.
1. Misunderstandings of or lack of agreement over the school program.

2. The efforts of parents and teachers to protect their vested interests.

3. The personal inadequacies of parents and teachers. These can demonstrate how easily and frequently prejudices and emotionalism block the effective cooperation of home and school.

Louis Kaplan states that troublesome parents are of two types: "those who reject the child and will have nothing to do with schools or conferences and the overprotective parent who can find no fault in his own child". 11 The challenge to the teacher is to determine the type of parent with whom he is conferring, then, to formulate a means of dealing with these parents. "Parent-created problems place a great strain on the teacher. Not only must he regulate the behavior and learning activities of--say--thirty children, but he must also deal with sixty parents." 12 Thus, like all areas of human relations, the interview must be "give-and-take" if the parent-teacher problems are to be solved.

The teacher can lead the discussion in the conference by encouraging parents to express their ideas, by increasing parental insight in child behavior through timely suggestions, by endeavoring to clarify any areas of misunderstanding, and, when no solution of a difficulty seems


12 Ibid.
evident, by providing references for reading or advising services of a specialist. The teacher should ask leading questions to which the parent can not answer with a mere "yes" or "no". Thus, the parent is encouraged to relate valuable information to the teacher.

Suggested topics for discussion. Subject matter of the conference rather than technique seems to present a hurdle to most teachers, who are not qualified to assume leadership in planning for the total growth of the child. A teacher is often at loss regarding how to help a parent who expresses concern over undesirable behavior of his child and may have no resource at hand to which to refer the parent. Some resources to overcome this problem can be gained by studying the child daily, reading material on child psychology or child development, and through inservice training. In the interview, the teacher should: attempt to get acquainted with the parents and at the same time gain an insight into the out-of-school life of the child, report the behavior and progress of the child, and to secure support in correcting undesirable behavior of the child that is affecting his progress.

The teacher may have prepared for discussion, at least mentally, some of the following topics.

1. Speech--correction of speech defects, improvement of oral grammar, or pronunciation.

2. Reading--correction of reading disabilities or improvement of reading rate and comprehension.
3. Writing—expressiveness, legibility, grammar, and correctiveness.
4. Numbers—speed and accuracy.
5. Sight—seeing disabilities and observation abilities.
6. Hearing—hearing disabilities or poor listening habits.
7. Health—nourishment, lack of good food, or improper eating habits.
8. Play—continued fatigue, non-participation.
9. Intellectual interests—studies or hobbies.
10. Character—morality, ethics, sense of right or wrong.
11. Personality traits—neatness, accuracy, thrift, scholarship, leadership.
12. Social growth—getting along with other people.
13. Family background.

The teacher who has prepared one or more of these topics as problem areas for the child should have little difficulty in completing a successful interview. "It is better to keep the number of ideas in the interview to a minimum and make sure there is a common understanding of them. The successful public speaker recognizes the value of frequent repetition of a few good thoughts." 13

13 John A. Barr, "Parent-Teacher Conferences", College of Education Record XX, November, 1953, 16.
Interview techniques. Attempting to improve the interview, the teacher should endeavor to master some of the following rules:

1. Plan for a pleasant meeting to make the conference easier and more meaningful.
2. Show appreciation and start with a compliment.
3. Help the parent feel at ease. Remember to be friendly, to have something good to say about the child, and to feel at ease herself.
4. Be a good listener. Letting parents talk it out will often pave the way for mutually constructive thinking. Avoid a defensive attitude.
5. Encourage exploration of the problem. Retain suggestions until the parent has had a chance to talk and then is ready to accept them. Don't become an authority.
6. Stress the importance of home and school working together.
7. Give the parents information on the child that will be of value to them and beneficial to the child. A good cumulative record for all students will make this easier.
8. In offering suggestions to the parent, offer alternate ones so that the parent may make the decisions as to which to use. Most parents really don't want advice; they want support. It is best if the parents can be lead to make their own
decisions as to the best course of action.

9. Be willing and prepared to accept any adjustments that may come from the conference.

10. Accept the child emotionally, respect him, feel a sincere desire to help him to his best all around development.

11. Establish joint responsibility of parent and teacher.

12. End the interview in a positive manner. The participants should summarize what has been accomplished. Set a time for a subsequent conference or telephone conversation if necessary.

The instructor will remember always that the parent, since he brings another slant or viewpoint, may have as much to teach and suggest, as the latter, himself may have. The teacher, too, may have an entirely different view of the child than that held by the parents. The teacher sees the child, perhaps, more objectively, but certainly in a situation which is more formal, as he lives and works with others in a social group. The instructor is concerned with the pupils acceptance of, and adjustment to, that group, while the parent may be worried or pleased on quite another count.14

CHAPTER IV

EVALUATION OF THE CHARLO PROGRAM

Attendance compilation. Records were kept at the various conferences to determine the numbers and sex of parents in attendance. Reports of the conferences held in 1952 are available but incomplete.

The attendance at the Charlo conferences has dropped slightly since the first conference as indicated in Table I. This drop may indicate a lack of interest on the part of parents or poor quality of the program. The attendance does not seem to be decreasing more after the initial drop and does indicate a slight increase. The initially high percentage may be due in part to the inquisitive nature of the public to investigate something "new". The table does, however, demonstrate an increased interest on the part of the fathers. Paternal interest is sometimes lacking or limited in matters such as these. Since the conferences were held during the day, some of the fathers could not come because of work commitments. Since the fathers could not come, neither could the mother in some cases because of the lack of transportation. Attempts were made to schedule at their convenience those parents who could not come during the conference period. Some parents took advantage of this offering, but they were not scheduled in the percentages.
TABLE I

COMPARISON BY PERCENTAGES OF NUMBERS AND SEX OF PARENTS THAT ATTENDED THE CHARLO PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES IN THE YEARS 1952 THROUGH 1954

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<td>27</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 1953</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 1954</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>74.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
because of the difficulty of maintaining adequate record. Table II seems to indicate that attendance at the conference varied only slightly during the school year 1953-54. One fact that does not become apparent in these tables is the fact that one hundred per cent of the parents of children in the Charlo Schools have attended the conference at least once during the two years. In the questionnaires answered by the parents ten stated they had come once, twenty-one had come twice, eighteen had come three times and thirty-four had come four times. The majority of the parents have attended more than half of the conferences.

Table III seems to indicate a greater interest by parents of children in the lower grades. This fact is not too startling since parents usually are interested in the younger children more than those in the upper grades and high school in the Charlo Schools.

**Administration of the questionnaire.** The questionnaire concerning parental and teacher opinion of the parent-teacher conference was presented to the parents and teachers at the time of the spring conference, April 1 and 2, 1954. A copy of this questionnaire for parents is included in this paper in Appendix A on page 39 and for teachers in Appendix B on page 41. The parents and teachers were presented the questionnaire to be completed and placed anonymously in a ballot box upon completion of the conference. To those parents who did not attend the conference, the questionnaire plus an additional set of questions, (Appendix C page 43)


**TABLE II**

**COMPARISON OF ATTENDANCES AT THE CHARLO PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES FALL 1953 AND SPRING 1954**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 1953</th>
<th>Spring 1954</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of families in attendance</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of families scheduled</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of fathers attending</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of mothers attending</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of parents attending</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of fathers scheduled</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of mothers scheduled</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of parents scheduled</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of conferences scheduled</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per cent of family units in attendance</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>73.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per cent of possible fathers in attendance</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per cent of possible mothers in attendance</td>
<td>73.4</td>
<td>66.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per cent of those attending that were fathers</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per cent of those attending that were mothers</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>74.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of elementary students</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of high school students</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of elementary teachers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of high school teachers</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of administrators</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>family units scheduled</td>
<td>family units attending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
concerned with reasons for absence was mailed within the next week. These forms were to be completed and returned anonymously in an addressed envelope included with the forms. In this manner, one hundred per cent of the parents and teachers were given the opportunity to state their views regarding the conference.

Form of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was of two forms, one for teachers and the other for parents. The former was composed of eighteen questions while the latter had twenty-three questions. Each group was presented the opportunity to add additional comments at the bottom and on the back. Each of the forms was headed with a short message stating the purpose and use of the questionnaire.

Summary of questionnaire. Of the 117 parents who were sent questionnaires, 72.6 per cent returned them completed. One hundred per cent of the faculty returned theirs. The percentage of return by those parents attending the conference was 83.7 per cent; while from those not attending, this figure was 43 per cent.

The occupation of the heads of family was principally farming—sixty-four of the seventy-six polled were farmers. The remainder was distributed among the laboring classes.

In the summary of questions regarding the conference the parents seemed equally divided as to opinion regarding the question of increased interest in school by their children following the conference with a similar opinion
of pre-conference interest. In contrast to the parents, the teachers reported that students displayed some increased interest before and considerably more following the conference. Nearly all of the parents felt that they were capable of helping their children solve their problems. The parents believed that the teachers were likewise capable as did the teachers, themselves. Most of the teachers felt that the conferences helped to understand the children better, and one hundred per cent of the teachers said that they made use of the information gained. Most of the parents agreed that the parents made use of the information gained and wanted the teachers to help the children with personal problems.

The parents and teachers agreed that they share equally in the conversation and both felt equally at ease during the conference. Both groups thought that the other was friendly and relaxed.

The teachers and the parents who attended the conference voted one hundred per cent in favor of the conference method of reporting. However, three of the parents who did not attend voted not in favor of the conference method. Nearly all of those polled wanted to retain the report cards in addition to the conference. Most of those polled wanted two conferences per year, but six of the sixteen teachers wanted only one. All the teachers and most of the parents thought that school should be dismissed for the two days and that each of the individual conferences should be fifteen minutes long.
No appreciable differences were found between the opinions of the parents who attended and those who did not. Likewise, no pertinent differences could be discerned among teachers of the various grade levels.

Some of the parents thought that the conferences should be held earlier in the semester at the end of the six weeks session rather than at the end of the nine weeks. By having the conferences earlier, these parents thought that they could help their children more if they were informed of the problems sooner. This opinion was shared by some of the faculty also.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary. This paper has been written to serve as a guide for the administrator about to include the conference method of reporting in his school program. Not all schools will present a situation identical to the program in the Charlo Public Schools, but certain phases of the program should be similar enough that other administrators may find valuable information in this paper. The general intent of this paper was the creation of an awareness of the problem involved in the initiation of this type of program into the Charlo Public Schools. Specifically, the purposes were as follows: (1) to investigate problems involved in instituting the parent-teacher conference in a school system of three hundred students, both elementary and secondary; (2) to make recommendations to the administration of the Charlo Schools regarding the progress and success of the technique; and (3) to prepare a discussion of the problems involved for the purpose that the administrator of the small school might utilize this information to guide the initiation of this technique into his school.

To achieve these purposes, questionnaires were given at the time of the conference to the parents and teachers of students attending the Charlo Public Schools. To those
parents who did not attend the conference, questionnaires were mailed to be returned anonymously in the enclosed envelopes. The questionnaire was of two forms, one for parents and the other for teachers. Of the 117 parents and 17 members of the faculty questioned, returns were received of 72.5 per cent of the parents and one hundred per cent of the faculty.

**Conclusions.** The conference method of reporting is satisfactory to both parents and teachers of Charlo. In this farming community both parents and teachers agreed that the conferences helped to better understand the children. The teachers felt that the conferences helped to increase student interest in school, though this opinion was not shared by most of the parents.

The parents and teachers are not yet prepared to do away with the report card. Both groups agree that the conference is of considerable help in understanding the child and in promoting relations between parent and teacher; but also agree that some sort of tangible mark should be given to the parent as a measure of pupil progress in school. However, a small group of parents and teachers is prepared to dispense with the report cards and rely entirely upon the conference as a means of reporting pupil progress.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Driscoll, G. T., "The Parent-Teacher Conference", Teachers College Record, 45:463-70, April, 1944.


Rember, K. W., "Pupil Problems With a Parent", Grade Teacher, 70:45, February, 1953.


APPENDIX
We, the teachers of the Charlo Schools, are constantly attempting to evaluate and improve our program of education as offered to the community. To aid us in the evaluation of our present program, please complete this questionnaire. We need your help to determine the manner in which we can be of most service to you. Thank you.

Please complete one questionnaire per family.

1. The number of conferences that you have attended including this one is........
2. Your sex: male.....female.....
4. Age of your husband or wife: 25-35.....35-45.....46-55.....over55.....
5. Please enter the number of children in grades 1-4.....5-8.....H. S.....
6. Occupation of head of family.................................
7. Do your children display more interest in school just following the conference period? Yes.....No.....Can't tell.....
8. Do your children display more interest in school just preceding the conference period? Yes.....No.....Can't tell.....
9. Do you feel capable of helping your children solve their personal problems? Yes.....No.....Can't tell.....
10. Does the conference help you to understand your children better? Yes.....No.....Don't know.....
11. Do you think that the teachers are capable of helping your children solve their personal problems? Yes.....No.....Don't know.....
12. Do you think that the teachers make use of the information gained in the conference? Yes.....No.....Don't know.....
13. Do you think that your children want their teachers to help them solve their personal problems? Yes.....No.....Don't know.....
14. Do you want the teachers to help in solving the personal problems of your children? Yes.....No.....Does not matter to me.....
15. Do your children have more interest in school now than before when we used only the report card? Yes.....No.....Don't know.....
16. Do you talk as much as the teachers during the conferences? Yes.....No.....Don't know.....
17. Do you feel at ease during the conference? Yes..... No..... Don't know.....
18. Do the teachers seem to be friendly and relaxed? Yes..... No.....
19. Are you in favor of the conference method of reporting pupil progress to parents? Yes..... No.....

(If you answered "Yes" to question number 19, please answer the following):

a. Should we have report cards in addition to the conferences? Yes..... No..... Does not matter to me.....
b. How many parent-teacher conferences should we have during the year? 1..... 2..... 3..... 4..... whenever necessary.....
c. Should school be dismissed for the conference days? Yes..... No..... Does not matter to me.....
d. How long should the conferences be? 10 min..... 15 min..... 25 min..... 30 min..... as long as necessary.....

Please note any likes or dislikes regarding the present method of reporting (use the space on the back if necessary)
APPENDIX B

We, the teachers of the Charlo Schools, are constantly attempting to evaluate and improve our program of education as offered to this community. To aid us in the evaluation of our present program, please complete this questionnaire. We need your help to determine the manner in which we can be of most service to you. Thank you.

1. You teach in grades 1-4........5-8........H.S........
2. You have taught in Charlo (including this one) 1 year..........More than 1 year........
3. Your sex: male...........female........
4. Do the students display more interest in school just following the conference period? Yes........No........ Can't tell........
5. Do the students display more interest in school just preceding the conference period? Yes........No........ Can't tell........
6. Do you feel capable of helping your students to solve their personal problems? Yes........No........Don't know........
7. Does the conference help you to understand the students better? Yes........No........Don't know........
8. Do you make use of the information gained in the conference? Yes........No........Don't know........
9. Do you think that the students want your help to solve their personal problems? Yes........No........Don't know........
10. Do the students have more interest in school now than before when we used only the report card? Yes........No........Don't know........
11. Do you talk as much as the parents during the conference? Yes........No........Don't know........
12. Do you feel at ease during the conference? Yes........No........Don't know........
13. Do the parents seem to be friendly and relaxed? Yes........No........
14. ARE YOU IN FAVOR OF THE CONFERENCE METHOD OF REPORTING TO PARENTS? Yes........No........

If you answered "Yes" to question number 14, please answer the following:

a. Should we have report cards in addition to the conferences? Yes........No........Doesn't matter to me........
b. How many parent-teacher conferences should we have during the year? 1........2........3........4........Whenever necessary........
c. Should school be dismissed for the conference days? Yes........No........Does not matter to me........
d How long should the conferences be? 10 min.....15.....
25 min.....as long as necessary.....

PLEASE NOTE ANY LIKES OR DISLIKES REGARDING THE PRESENT
METHOD OF REPORTING (USE THE SPACE ON THE BACK IF
NECESSARY)
APPENDIX C

According to our records you did not attend the parent-teacher conference on April 1 and 2. In this poll we are attempting to determine if the conferences are of value and should be continued next year. This is your opportunity to state your desires. We value your opinion. Please return the completed questionnaire in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. Please do NOT sign your name.

Please answer the questions on both pages:

1. You did not attend the conference because:
   (Please check the reason or reasons below)
   ___a. You were working and couldn't leave the work.
   ___b. You were out of town.
   ___c. There was sickness in the family.
   ___d. The conference was scheduled at the wrong time.
   ___e. The conference was a waste of time.
   ___f. You are not interested in what your children do in school.
   ___g. The teachers are not interested in helping your children in school.
   ___h. There was no one at home to take care of the children.
   ___i. The conference is just an excuse for the teachers to get out of school.
   ___j. It is the teacher's job to see to it that the children do well in school. They are getting paid for doing this.
   ___k. Your children are doing fine in school, so you don't need to come to the conference.

   PLEASE STATE ANY OTHER REASONS IN THE SPACE BELOW