WHY GUIDANCE
In the Elementary School?

Take account of individual differences.

Meet children's emotional needs.

Provide for the whole child.

Give children love and security.

Respect children as persons.

The growth and development of children are the major aims of education.

Early prevention of maladjustment is more important than later efforts at adjustment.

THESE and hundreds of other mental hygiene maxims roll glibly from our tongues. At countless university extension courses, at teacher institutes, summer sessions, educational conferences, PTA meetings, forums, workshops, panels, discussion groups, and lectures, "needs of children" are repeated. "We hold these truths to be self-evident," and develop new techniques to make them more evident. Films, slides, tape recordings, sociodramas, dramatic plays, group dynamics and 6-6 discussions are but a few of these techniques.

Where does all this get us in terms of what happens to children? Are teachers being made to feel less adequate to deal with children in the classroom? Are parents being made anxious about their children, and is their potentiality for action therefore paralyzed by what seem to them impossible strictures? Some maintain that this is happening. But need it happen? Is it not possible to translate the knowledge and experience gained from the research and clinical work of psychiatry, psychology, medicine, and social work into reasonable practices leading to desirable outcomes? Certainly there is need for an energetic approach, based on the best available knowledge about human behavior, to retard the rapidly accelerating trend toward serious maladjustment. While we spend our energies on debates of theories, mental hospitals and psychiatric clinics are becoming more crowded, juvenile delinquency is on the increase, and personal and social maladjustment becomes more common and more palpable.

There are no miracles in this field; there are no panaceas; nor are there any sure-fire specific remedies. There are, however, some convincing leads as to directions to travel. Guidance workers must extract from these leads ideas for expanding the relatively limited guidance goals of the past and bringing them up to date for present conditions.

In many respects the guidance movement has made tremendous strides and has exerted great influence on the educational process over the past 40 years. In other instances, however, the guidance field has not kept pace with developments and needs. As happens so often in all professions, accepted practice has become routinized and stylized, and change is resisted by many practitioners. Two areas in which change is overdue in the guidance field are: (1) continued emphasis on guidance in the secondary school or higher, to the neglect of the population below secondary school level, and (2) continued emphasis on the mechanics of the guidance process, like the presentation of occupational information, psychological testing, record keeping, and guidance toward schools and jobs, almost to the exclusion of attention to child growth and development, personal and social adjustment, and other dynamic factors of adjustment. Guidance of adolescents in secondary schools is, of course, very important; if anything, there is too little of it. But to begin guidance at age 14, as though life began then, is contrary to all we know about

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personality formation. In the same way, occupational information, psychological testing, and vocational guidance are also very important, and more rather than less of these are needed. But to guide for vocations without taking into account the vast amount of evidence from industry about the vocational maladjustment of competent workers because of personal, emotional and social factors, is to guide blindly.

Guidance for Young Children

This discussion will be limited to one of the areas mentioned above as requiring the attention of guidance workers—the need for provision of guidance services to young children. It is a commonplace that the prevention of maladjustment and the inculcation of habits of adjustment at an early age yield greater dividends than later efforts to undo the results of poor adjustment. Everybody admits this; but, like the weather, no one, or very few, do anything about it. When those in authority in educational circles are approached about the need for guidance services in the elementary schools, the response usually is "What for? These young children aren't ready for jobs or college;" or "We have special classes for the mentally retarded; isn't that enough?" Occasionally the response is, "We need more child guidance services for the extreme deviates, but can't afford it just now." And sometimes we hear, "In the elementary schools, every teacher is a counselor, so why have guidance specialists?"

These statements, heard often, are the logical outcomes of a philosophy of guidance fostered by guidance workers over the past 40 years. It is a type of guidance that can be labeled "catastrophic." It aims to provide assistance in emergencies—when a course or school has to be selected; when a job has to be obtained; when failure has occurred; when school is being dropped; when delinquency has been engaged in, or truancy, or inappropriate behavior, or when some other grave crisis occurs. It is at these times that guidance workers are expected to plunge in suddenly, and rapidly arrive at decisions that will solve the problem or clear up the undesirable situation. In more advanced guidance programs, the counselor will assist the client in arriving at solutions. This in spite of long experience that tells us that it is much too late to do a great deal after failure, or truancy, or school leaving, or delinquency has occurred.

How much more logical is it to approach the process of education from the very beginning as a planned means of personality development. With such an outlook, guidance becomes an adjunct of education, a positive force, rather than the negative one that appears only in emergencies. Guidance then becomes a means of child development rather than a tool for handling crises. Developmental guidance is concerned with child personality development in all its phases, without, however, taking over the functions of the educator. It is concerned with the child's learning process, and leaves the teaching to the teacher. It is involved in the child's physical, social, emotional, and moral development, but the guidance worker does not take over the functions of the physician, social worker, psychiatrist, or clergyman. The modern guidance worker in the elementary school must have considerable orientation in all of these specialties, but must be a great deal besides. He must supply the integrating force, be less absorbed with the specialties listed than the specialists, and more concerned with the manner in which these specialties affect the growth and development of each child.

The Teacher Needs Help

Cannot the classroom teacher be this catalytic agent? Definitely, but she cannot do the job without assistance. Unless her

Life doesn't begin at age fourteen

teaching incorporates the best in mental hygiene and child development, she will not be as effective as she should be in her teaching, but her major concern is with instruction, whether her methods are traditional, progressive, or in-between. She has a group for whom she is responsible the entire school day. She has neither the time, the training, the resources, nor the experience to do what the modern guidance worker can do for individual children. In elementary schools which have the services of a modern trained guidance worker, or teacher-counselor, almost every teacher in the school functions better in the guidance of her children than in schools where no such services are available. But she needs the assistance and advice of that guidance worker.

The guidance worker or teacher-counselor serves as much as teacher-trainer and consultant as he does as guidance worker. To begin with, he functions as a conveyor of the guidance and mental hygiene point of view. He may do this through conferences, or consultation, or demonstration, or work with individual children. Doesn't the principal do this? Certainly. But the principal, unless he has charge of a very small school, has more than enough to do in his administrative and leadership responsibilities. The principal is always the head of the school, but he can no more do the guidance work of his school than he can do all the teaching. For an effective guidance program, the principal must stand solidly behind it, or it cannot function. The principal sets the tone of the school, and the guidance worker who does not have the full support of the principal had better not attempt to work in that school.

How about the school psychologist, or social worker, if there is one? They are specialists in mental hygiene, but their specialized functions make it necessary to devote most of their time to those functions. In many small school systems the practice of engaging guidance-trained psychologists to serve both as guidance workers and school psychologists has been noted in recent years. Probably this practice will spread; and more and more do we see psychologists obtaining training in guidance, and guidance workers taking intensive training in psychology. Perhaps the future guidance worker in elementary schools will be a fusion of the two professions. In ideal situations, particularly in large school systems, the clinical professions, that is, psychiatry, psychology, social work, and medicine, are as necessary to complement the work of the guidance worker as the latter is to complement that of the classroom teacher. In a one-room school house, one teacher can be teacher, principal, janitor, and guidance worker for children of all ages and grades. In a time of specialization, mass education, and rapid social changes, however, the teacher can do the guidance of her children up to a point; the trained guidance worker must be available for direction, consultation, and more intensive guidance work; and the child guidance or mental hygiene clinic, or their equivalent, is essential when even more specialized and intensive services are required. In a well-rounded guidance program these three facets of guidance function jointly for a single objective: the best adjustment of each child. They do not compete with each other.

Where to Find Personnel

Assuming that communities will recognize the importance of such guidance work in elementary schools with younger children, and be willing to pay for it, where will they obtain personnel with the requisite training, experience, and competence? There are numerous excellent training centers in educational and vocational guidance, in individual counseling, in group work, in clinical psychology, and in social work. The counselor of young children must possess skills culled from all of these fields. Even if training centers offering the optimum combination of skills existed, it would not be feasible to require such extensive training for salaries paid to guidance workers today. This may not be the ultimate answer to the problem, but the only practicable one open to most of us at present is in-service training of available personnel, coupled with selective supplementary training by the regular training institutions. In a large school system the personnel potential

exists among the guidance workers and the teachers, but, since the former are over their heads in guidance responsibilities in junior and senior high schools, they cannot be spared for the younger children. Besides, guidance work with younger children requires such complete re-orientation for most guidance workers that retraining does not seem feasible.

Where effective training of personnel in the elementary schools has occurred, emphasis has been placed upon developing fresh materials, dynamic in nature, which will provide teachers and specialists with sensitive means of knowing more about their children. Thus, the emergence of a guidance program in the elementary schools has made an important contribution to another area in which change is overdue in the guidance field: the change from complete emphasis upon the mechanics of the guidance process—presentation of occupational information, psychological testing, record keeping, and the like—to the application of these mechanics for the best adjustment of boys and girls. One approach to the presentation of occupational information, for example, concerns itself with developing knowledge and skills about particular industries such as the petroleum industry, the retail trades, plastics, and others. By selecting an entire industrial field, it becomes possible to emphasize vocational and other skills at various levels and at the same time present a realistic picture of jobs available in the area. This can be done with different degrees of intensity at the elementary school, junior high school, and senior high school levels. An important need for integrating information about the world of work in all curriculum areas has also been an important concept which has evolved during the past 15 years. This is particularly applicable to the elementary schools and junior high schools. Every subject area can be utilized—English, social studies, science, and others.

In a similar way at a particular period in the development of guidance it was important to develop effective systems of cumulative record keeping to avoid the earlier tendency to record only grade results. In many school systems it is now possible to find outstanding examples of good cumulative records. It is far more difficult, however, to find examples of effective functioning of these records. Until such time as school personnel are aware of the importance and usefulness of particular entries on a record and the need for studying and reviewing records as a means of knowing children, neither fine paper stock nor carefully prepared items will avail much. Here again, in-service training can make an important contribution, for it is constantly found that when teachers and administrators are aware of the vital material which records reveal when carefully studied, they bring to record keeping a sympathetic and intelligent point of view.

A sound guidance program in the whole school system will eventuate when the program begins at the kindergarten and extends through the elementary school, junior high school, and high school years, with a dynamic program well integrated in the curriculum, based upon creative materials placed in the hands of talented teachers, who profit from the supervision of real leaders in education and in guidance. Before this happens, however, those of us who have grown accustomed to ways of working over many years need to appraise these ways, to retain the valid and to substitute some new approaches for those that have served a useful purpose in the past, but which require modification because the world has not stood still the past 40 years.