

## Guidance for Living

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EVERY CHILD needs "guidance". Intelligent fathers and mothers recognize that learning how to *guide* their children wisely and understandingly is a major obligation of parenthood; similarly, the forward-looking school is organized with its guidance program as an integral part of its whole school system. *Guidance* may be broadly defined as *any planned experience or contact with individuals for the purpose of helping them to develop in certain directions*. Such a definition presupposes planning; it implies directions, objectives, or goals toward which guidance is directed, and volition and ultimate self-direction on the part of the person guided. Although guidance for a young child may sometimes involve telling him what to do, our objective is to develop an individual who can decide for himself what to do. We help the child on the way so that he may ultimately be able to find his own way. We do not seek to set him in ruts from which he cannot emerge; we strive to set him on broad highways on which he may learn to take his own course, competent, eventually, for *freedom with responsibility* as a citizen in a democratic way of life.

The "guidance movement" began, for some strange reason, as *vocational* guidance with emphasis at the secondary level. It began as a specialized field with a separate department or bureau staffed with specialists, to which a child was sent when in need of "guidance". This sort of setup still exists in all too many

places, but increasingly the guidance program is an integral part of the whole school system. It is concerned with staff-morale, pupil-teacher load or ratios, curriculum, "emotional climate" of classrooms, tensions of pupils and teachers, physical setup—in other words, it is concerned with the total program and functioning of the school, because these affect the development and adjustment of the individual pupil. Guidance must also be concerned with home and community situations of children. The key persons in such guidance of children are parents and classroom teachers. In the newer concept of guidance, specialists are even more necessary than formerly because they are regarded as essential "resource persons" available to parents, teachers, and others to help them in guiding children. *Vocational* guidance takes its proper place as a very important but highly specialized aspect of a broader guidance which is *guidance for living*.

### Education is Continuous

We still speak of "twelve years of general education", referring to the elementary- and secondary-school years. We should learn to think of at least *thirteen* years of general education, since research has clearly demonstrated the educational importance and values of kindergarten. This is already being extended downward, as many public and private schools are providing Junior Kindergartens for four-year-olds, and some schools provide nursery-school units for two- and three-year-olds, but our concept of general education should include at least one year of kindergarten experience in which the child learns to live and work in a group of his peers before launching into the basic "school learnings" usually expected in the first year of the elementary school.

As a matter of fact, all guidance is of one piece, so to speak, forming a "circle of guidance", made up of segments which are periods of life—preschool, elementary-school, high-school, college and adult years. One cannot

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*Many schools are breaking away from the concept of guidance as a specific term used in suggesting a vocation to a student, or outlining subject-matter to be used in the classroom. It is defined broadly by Ethel Kawin, guidance consultant, Public Schools, Glencoe, Illinois, as a contact with an individual to aid him in self-development. From this point of view, Miss Kawin emphasizes the importance of a guidance concept which is concerned with the earliest learning experiences of the young child, as well as the problems of the adolescent.*

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guide the preschool and elementary-school child unless one has sufficient understanding of the adolescent and adult years to be able to evaluate the experiences of these earlier periods in terms of their possible effects on the later ones. Nor can one guide an adolescent or adult wisely without some understanding of his experiences in his earliest years and their significance in relation to his present patterns of personality and behavior. For practical reasons most of us have to "specialize", working at least at any specific time primarily at one or another age level. But if one is to work wisely and effectively one must always see that area against the background of the total circle into which it must be integrated and of which it is only a segment.

In fact, we should go beyond this static concept of a circle to a dynamic concept of continuous cycles. Here is a child growing up. One cannot deal with this young child without dealing with the adults responsible for his upbringing. To a great extent his personality and behavior are responses to situations which these adults create for him. They, in turn, are dealing with him in ways largely determined by their experiences in their own early childhood. What they do now to this young child will affect what he will do to the children he eventually undertakes to rear when he becomes an adult and in his turn creates the next generation. So is established an endless cycle—a dynamic, continuous process through which guidance runs like an endless chain.

### Basic Patterns Begin Early

Obviously, then, if schools are to meet the needs of children adequately they must be able to help parents when parents need guidance. Just how extensive this service should and can be will depend upon the philosophy and the resources of the school. A fundamental preventive program would begin in the child's preschool years, extending parent education and counseling for parents to the school's future patrons. Many Parent-Teacher Associations do have preschool sections which represent at least the beginnings of such programs.<sup>1</sup> Since, for every individual the

foundations of personality and the basic patterns of behavior are laid in the earliest years of life, the school could best serve not only the individual and society but also its own purposes by doing what it can to see that these foundations are soundly and satisfactorily established.

Until they are able to extend guidance to the preschool levels, schools may wisely concentrate their major guidance efforts on the child's earliest years in school. It seems obvious that the strategic area at which public schools should attack their whole guidance program is the kindergarten-primary level. Guidance is based upon recognition of individual differences. Individual differences are apparent from birth. They are very apparent by the time the child enters school. The earlier they are recognized, the better the chance of successfully adjusting the school to the child and the child to the school. Efforts to prevent maladjustments during the early years constitute a much more constructive and significant mental hygiene program than do attempts to find remedies for serious problem situations which have been allowed to develop. Each child should therefore be studied from the time he enters the kindergarten or the first grade.

### Parent-Teacher Interviews Have Value

As soon as the teacher has had a chance to become acquainted with the new pupil, a friendly interview with at least one of his parents makes a good first step in trying to know and understand each child. It also furnishes data with which to get the pupil's individual cumulative record well started.<sup>2</sup> Such an interview is very valuable in establishing a friendly relation between the school and the home in the interests of the child. It gives the teacher a background for understanding the child and helping him to make his first important adjustments to the school. Ordinarily, if a child develops problems which baffle the school and the parent has to be "sent for", the latter is at once on the defensive and all concerned get off to a bad start! When a friendly contact between parent and teacher has been routinely made be-

<sup>1</sup> The National Parent-Teacher Magazine publishes monthly a Study Course for parents and teachers of children of preschool age, directed by the author of this article.

<sup>2</sup> The use of such records with parents and also their use in guidance in both elementary and high schools is discussed in: "Handbook of Cumulative Records", Bulletin 1944, Number 5, United States Office of Education. (For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing office, Washington 25, D. C.—Price 20 cents.)

fore there are any particular signs of difficulty, tension is much less likely to arise in those cases in which the teacher must make a later approach to the parent regarding specific problems which have arisen in the child's school progress or adjustment. In addition, periodic analyses of the data gathered through parent-teacher interviews give the school considerable insight into the home backgrounds, parental attitudes, family situations, and other characteristics of the community as a whole which may be significant for the school program.

Of course parents are almost entirely dependent upon the school for information as to their child's development in academic achievement, but that is not the only area in which the school should function as a major source of guidance to parents. It is to the school that parents must look as their chief source of information concerning their child's reactions as a member of a group other than the family. From the school they should get considerable information about his physical health, his mental health, his special interests and abilities, his handicaps, or special disabilities. To the school also, they must look for much of their information on the child's developing character traits and habits of work. Few parents have any real knowledge of child development or child training; few parents have any agency other than the school to which they can naturally turn for help in these fields.

Initial parent-teacher conferences of the type described were found so helpful in the Glencoe Public Schools that enthusiastic teachers now have at least one conference with *every* pupil's parents every year. An increasing number of schools throughout the country substitute such a conference for a written report on pupil progress at least once each school year. Guidance specialists are often asked to participate in these parent-teacher conferences when either parent or teacher wants guidance. Such conferences should continue regularly through the elementary school, and they are often helpful to parent, teacher, and student if carried on through the high-school years.

#### **Capacities for Decisions Increase Self-Direction**

The specific function of the guidance program of any school is the satisfactory mutual

adjustment of the school and the individual pupil. The program has two major aspects: (1) the infusion of guidance, based on mental hygiene principles, into the total school program, and (2) the specific guidance and adjustment of individual pupils so that each may develop his highest potentialities.

As the child progresses through the first three grades usually designated as the "primary" level, his personality development, his behavior patterns, and his gradual acquisition of basic skills and knowledge must all be carefully watched and periodically recorded. Effort should be made to see that no child passes out of the primary into the more complex activities and developmental tasks of the intermediate years with a major handicap that could have been overcome.

Although special emphasis is put upon the study and adjustment of children in the primary years, the guidance program of course should continue through the intermediate and upper grades. Parent-teacher conferences, testing programs, adjustment of curriculum to individual needs, interests and abilities, with guidance counselors available to teachers and parents when special help is needed—all these continue as the child proceeds through the intermediate and upper grades. Increasingly, the pupil should take on responsibilities for his own guidance. In the guidance of even a very young child we assume some capacity for self-understanding and self-direction on his part. We assume that his powers of self-understanding and self-direction will increase as we help him to discover his own needs, desires, and capacities, and to learn to decide for himself what he wants to do and how best to accomplish his purposes. From the kindergarten through the eighth grade the guidance program should be organized to help the individual make choices and adjustments for himself. Children in the intermediate and upper grades can often participate in their teachers' evaluations of their progress and achievements. In the seventh and eighth grades they are interested in actively discussing their own goals of personality development and in evaluating their own progress toward those goals.

In a sound program of general education, the continuity of pupil guidance should be maintained by close articulation of elementary and high schools. Such close cooperative relationships are all too rare in schools today.

Major goals must be consistently striven for over a long period if they are to be achieved.

#### Foundations of Good Adjustment

To provide twelve or thirteen years of sound general education, a school system must formulate over-all, comprehensive, ultimate goals as well as more immediate and specific objectives to be striven for from year to year. Schools have an obligation to help every child develop his highest potentialities. This obligation is not limited to the development of such fundamental skills as reading, writing, number calculation, and the like, or to the acquisition of such significant facts and knowledge as have long been regarded a function of the school program. The development of mental health and the ability to adjust successfully to life situations are among the major purposes of the modern school as it educates children. These goals of personality development are closely related to subject-matter goals. The unhappy, maladjusted child is likely to have difficulty in scholastic learnings; the child who fails in his efforts to learn what other children succeed in learning is likely to develop feelings of inferiority and to become an unhappy, maladjusted individual. Scholastic

objectives and personality objectives must therefore be integrated in any sound guidance program.

A major purpose of general education is to establish foundations of good adjustment in every individual; these constitute the over-all, comprehensive goals. Included in them are: physical health; feelings of security and feelings of adequacy; a sound balance of success and failure and the ability to take both with equanimity; the ability to face reality and to use intelligence in solving problems, making wise choices based on "values"; self-understanding, with the ability to see one's self both objectively and in perspective; the ability to understand and cooperate with one's fellows; goals and purposes in life; abilities for self-expression and creative living; the integration of freedom and discipline in one's life pattern; and a constructive philosophy built upon acceptance of eternal change.

These are vast objectives. The daily tasks and routine of a school classroom become truly significant when seen against a background of ultimate objectives such as these. *Guidance in general education* becomes a challenging adventure when viewed in such a setting!



#### ASCD Publications Committee for 1946-47

Vernon E. Anderson, director of curriculum, Portland, Ore. has been named by the ASCD Executive Committee to head the Association Publications Committee for 1946-47. Ivah Green, State Department of Instruction, Des Moines, Iowa, has been appointed by the Committee to fill the vacancy created by C. L. Cushman, associate superintendent of schools, Philadelphia, Pa.

Bess Goodykoontz, *ex officio*, assistant commissioner of education, Washington, D. C. is a new member, and those continuing are Mrs. Dora Skipper, Florida State College for Women, Tallahassee; J. Paul Leonard, president, San Francisco State College, San Francisco, Calif.; and Henry Harap, associate director of the Division of Surveys and Field Studies, George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville, Tenn.

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