

Three Teachers Tell Their Story

EDNA DOROTHY BAXTER and TEACHERS

Edna Dorothy Baxter, director of guidance in the Floral Park, Long Island schools, introduces this three-part guidance viewpoint.

THE IMPORTANCE of the classroom teacher in the guidance program is increasingly being realized by administrators and guidance supervisors. It is recognized that all effective teaching involves guiding children toward happy growth and learning and toward the acquisition of those social skills which make group living rewarding.

However, there is need for special guidance techniques which will help the classroom teacher reach the hearts of children, understand their feelings and emotional desires, and guide them toward ways of meeting problematic situations. There has been a great need for a framework, flexible enough for meeting both particular group problems and individual difficulties in the group, through which the classroom teacher may carry on guidance activities.

The classroom teacher may *prevent* many behavior problems among children and may observe and redirect children who are pre-delinquent. This pos-

sibility is one of the classroom teacher's greatest potentialities in guidance. If the early insecurities of children may be recognized and if the beginning of unhappiness and frustration may be detected by the classroom teacher, human wastage during childhood and adolescence may be averted or decreased.

In the following three contributions an effort has been made to describe a framework of guidance that has been developed through the combined work of children, teachers, and administrators. It is being carried out in all of the classrooms of the Floral Park and Belle-rose public schools. Beginning with the child's interpretation of his behavior, every effort is made to reach and guide every pupil regardless of his level of emotional maturity, his mental quotient, or his social and economic status. His thoughts about himself become the point of departure for all guidance efforts regardless of what he is ready to recognize and admit about himself.

INFORMATION ABOUT OUR PUPILS

The first in this set of three articles is written by Laura Keefe, a first grade teacher in the Floral Park-Bellerose School, Floral Park, New York.

THERE ARE MANY CHILDREN who enter the first grade before they are emotionally mature or ready for first grade work. Sometimes much time

must be taken from the group as a whole to help these so-called problem children. They may need extra help in learning basic fundamentals if they are

to master the skills they need or if they are to understand other children; they are often insecure and unhappy in group activities; and, frequently, they bring into the classroom a background of insecurity and instability from the home.

If guidance is given its rightful importance in the curriculum, many of these children may develop emotionally through group activities. The teacher may then devote the time that has been spent on a few to other activities for the whole group.

What are they like on the inside, these very young children? How do they *feel* about themselves and their experiences?

Understanding How Youngsters Feel

If children are to be guided toward happy and successful living, we classroom teachers need to know as quickly as possible how they feel about themselves. Case histories cannot be compiled for every pupil, but it is possible to learn how each child feels about himself. About two months after school has begun, we give the Baxter Group Test of Child Personality.¹ This test gives an indication of the child's feelings about himself, about his home, and the reactions he has toward school. Told in the form of a story about two "normal" children, having no total score and no "right" or "wrong" answers, the test encourages children to react naturally to the situation and tell their feelings and opinions of their behavior. Before the tests are given, children are made to feel comfortable about the whole experience. There is no pressure to tell anything other than the truth.

¹ Standardization is being completed and the test will appear on the market at a later date.

The extent of pupils' feelings of insecurity, unhappiness, and frustration is a shock to most teachers. In one first grade class, for example, there are thirty pupils from a high middle-class community. Even in this excellent community over fifty percent of the class said that they "*often* felt unhappy or angry." (These percentages were lower than the "average" first grade reactions in the national group.)

There was little S . . . , who felt that her parents showed partiality toward another member of the family and who had social jealousies that prevented effective learning. There was L . . . , who had very little regard for himself and his abilities and who felt that he was very selfish. There was C . . . , who had extreme jealousies of other children's possessions and who worried a great deal about herself.

All of these children had feelings about themselves that may or may not have appeared during classroom activities. They needed an adult friend, someone who knew how they felt about themselves and could guide them toward some self-appreciations and feelings of achievement and growth. They had lived their early lives during the time our country was at war and brought into the classroom the uncertainties, griefs, and instabilities their parents had transferred to them.

Getting Next to Children

Every teacher has an interview with each pupil after the administering of the test and summaries have been made by the guidance director. From the summarized data it is possible to understand children's feelings about themselves and to know each child's emo-

tional needs. Rapport may be established between child and teacher during these interviews, and the pupil may develop a real feeling of belonging with a teacher. There must be a complete feeling of confidence and trust as the child talks out his problems, feelings, and frustrations. A bond is usually established at this time which brings them closer than they have ever been before.

A wonderful feeling of satisfaction in one's work may come to the teacher who helps children talk out the worries and anxieties they are having. Without giving advice; without sermonizing or preaching; but merely by offering friendship and interest, the teacher may reach a child who is lonely and disheartened and her interest may become a real inspiration to the child.

There was little S . . . , whose father had left home, who began talking to herself during school, muttering that her daddy was going to come home soon. She couldn't concentrate on the sum of one and one, and words held little meaning for her. During the inter-

view she had an opportunity to talk out her feelings about her daddy, an opportunity she did not have with a mother who was tense and strained about her marital relationship.

There was J . . . , who had never played much with other children and who had had a very brief kindergarten experience. She had had little opportunity to learn how to get along with other children, and problems of honesty were bothering her. She had denied that she had taken a pencil from another child but admitted it during the interview and felt the relief of such an admission.

During the time that this relationship is being established, the teachers of our schools begin group activities that are intended to help pupils help themselves. After the first few interviews, the teacher's responsibility for developing the kind of classroom emotional climate in which children can be happy is obvious. A group spirit is developed through the interviews and the guidance activities described below.

ACTIVITIES IN GROUP GUIDANCE

Clare Romer, a third grade teacher in the Floral Park-Bellerose School, contributes this account.

IT WAS OBVIOUS that there was a great need for guidance in group living after the Baxter Group Test of Child Personality was given to our third grade youngsters. Individual tests were studied and the information about the group as a whole revealed fears, frustrations, day-dreaming, and anxieties.

Children Who Needed Help

There was Ronald, who was filled with childhood jealousies. Some of his feelings were taken out on other children. Frank was in serious need of guidance. He had lost much of his self-regard and seemed to have difficulties in

facing adversities. Paul, too, was unsure of himself—awkward, rebellious, and unkind toward others. Eileen, who was shy, had resorted to day-dreaming and had isolated herself from the group. And Richard, who should have been a leader, was resented by the group because of his aggressiveness.

In planning and carrying on a program of group guidance, it was necessary to think of each individual and to plan with and for him so that he would have the kinds of experiences that would help him gain insight into his own behavior and his relationships in the group. Ronald serves as an example in describing the individual process that developed in the group.

Let's Take Ronald

Here was a boy who expressed jealousy of a sibling, of other children's companionship, and of other children's possessions. He protested and rebelled against adults; showed sarcasm, discourtesies, and resentment toward other children; and had low confidence in his own abilities.

His behavior in the group verified the feelings he had expressed. During the early morning activities, when a host or hostess had charge of the class, Ronald did everything he could to distract the class and to focus attention on himself. He would steal others' chairs and made himself so offensive to the group that they were annoyed with him.

Other Children Help

One morning the group was talking about how to improve individually and how to develop group spirit. Several children spoke of Ronald in a depreca-

tory manner. When he was urged to express himself he said that he wanted to improve, too, and be a part of the group.

The class then began a study of the first chapter of *Understanding Myself*.² It deals with group relationships and being friendly with others in the group. Children were urged to talk about those times when they did not feel friendly or cooperative, and Ronald began to see that other children sometimes felt as he did. His feelings of guilt and self-condemnation were relieved, and he felt less defensive about himself.

The material then led the group into a discussion about the differences between being friendly and unfriendly in the group. Children found pictures of boys and girls getting along together and were led further into other creative activities—pantomime, stick drawings, stories, songs, and poetry—that helped them learn that they have a *choice* of behavior. Through discussions children were relieved of some of their guilt about themselves, and through creative activities they are now learning to exchange ideas about how problems may be met and solved.

Ronald is interested in art and is also a very good reader. He has been encouraged to help one of the boys who has had difficulty in reading. It seemed to be his first experience in doing something for someone else, and he liked it. Whenever possible favorable attention is given to his art work, and he is learning what it means to gain an acceptable kind of attention.

Of course there are days when one realizes that Ronald's social behavior

² An unpublished book adopted by the Floral Park-Bellerose Schools.

and his place in the group leave much to be desired; but it is a real source of delight to hear him say to another child, "Here, take my pencil. I have another one." It's good to see his smile of greeting in the morning instead of the former sullen look as he pushed everyone out of his way at the coat closet.

Each child in the group has his own kind of problems, and every pupil knows that each person in the group is trying to improve himself in some way. This knowledge has helped the entire class feel more kindly toward each

other, appreciate other's problems, and lend others support.

Parent Interest Increases

Many parents are taking an active interest in the program of the school. They are showing an intense interest in their children's feelings as they have been revealed on the tests and are coming in greater numbers to the guidance office for help in meeting home difficulties. One of the most encouraging parent reactions has been their interest in developing a home program that will relate to the efforts of the school.

CLASSROOM GUIDANCE REACHES THE COMMUNITY

The author of this third account is Ruth R. Eames, a sixth grade teacher in the John Lewis Child's School, Floral Park, Long Island.

MY COMMUNITY is a book about different nationality groups in a mid-west community.³ It had real meaning for one sixth grade group in the John Lewis Child's School.

The Children in the Group

In this class of thirty-five children, ten different nationalities were represented. Only seven children were second-generation Americans. Each child had a different problem of security. Some felt that because their parents were not naturalized citizens they were not a part of the community. Others were disturbed because of language differences between the home and the school.

One girl remembered that during the war their front porch had been painted in white lettering, "Nazi." During class discussion about how people may live together in a democracy, one child told about being called a "dirty Jew" when she walked home each night. A boy, whose stepmother was born in Greece and whose home was filled with friction, had begun to develop melancholia and a feeling of futility. Another child's greatest problem was old world discipline which did not parallel the democratic procedures in the school. Although some problems were more serious than others, one boy felt so different because of home background that he removed himself mentally from the class and was a greater problem to his teacher than children who were so-called discipline problems.

³ An unpublished book adopted by the Floral Park-Bellerose Schools.

Understanding Each Other

The first chapter in *My Community* brought interesting reactions from the class. Resentment and rebellion were expressed by many children. The emotional disturbances that had resulted from feelings of being different and apart from the community had an interesting effect upon the group as a whole. A new kind of unity grew and took root. Children realized that others had hurts not unlike their own. Children of American parentage began to realize what it was like to be isolated in one's own community.

The contributions of different nations to this country were studied. As particular customs were considered, it was recognized that all groups are basically alike but that they have developed habits that make them seem different. The contributions that the German has made to America through music, art, and science were recognized. Italian, Chinese, Jew, Negro—all were considered in terms of their value in the community.

Parents Teach and Learn

A number of parents have participated in this classroom undertaking. They have sent books that they brought from the old country, pictures they took in foreign countries, movies, and old world art. An Italian mother sent a cold pizza pie to let the teacher sample her cooking. Talks by mothers and friends about their countries all showed the children the importance of each parent's country in making our own democracy.

One mother asked the teacher to tutor her so that she could become a citizen. The child who had been labeled

"Nazi" brought in the Christmas customs of Germany and the class realized that many of these were now American customs. The boy with strict discipline at home brought his mother to school for a visit and she began to see that the freedom her son enjoyed in the school could be followed with advantage at home.

Looking at Ourselves

Each month the children in all classes evaluate themselves on the progress they have made in the improvement they decided they wanted at the beginning of the year. This evaluating is in terms of living, learning, and growing together in the classroom—and it is done entirely by the children. It presents some interesting results.

According to the children's self-estimates, a great amount of improvement has been made in the development of that kind of courage needed to face daily problems. They feel that they escape less into day-dreams, that they have become more tidy in their school-work (and this is evident), and that it is easier for them to concentrate than it was earlier in the year.

From the teacher's point of view, the guidance program in this sixth grade has been expressed admirably by one child who has written, "Hearing the troubles of other children in my class has helped me to understand them and get along with them better. This work also shows us that it is up to us, the leaders of tomorrow, to put an end to racial discrimination and it gives us, the children of America, a lot of help toward doing the job which will be ours some day—helping to keep good America's good name."

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