

tributions, and respect for excellence in all areas of learning.

In a classroom and school environment where all people are important, whatever their talents, interests, backgrounds, each has the freedom and the help to grow at his own pace and make his unique contribution.

"Why?" "what?" "how?" "who?" are questions asked by even the youngest

kindergarten children. Promising ways of working in classrooms throughout their school lives help them find answers and encourage them to discover more questions. Pupils want to learn when their work is important and makes sense to them. Many schools today are helping pupils move into each new experience with confidence, creativity, skill in problem solving, and concern for others.

ARTHUR W. COMBS

Adjustment . . .

Through Guidance and Special Services

EARL KELLEY once remarked that whenever you find two ideas so stated as to be clearly in opposition to each other the probability is that they are both wrong! So it is, it seems to me, with the argument over education for "life adjustment" or education for "intellectual development." Clearly, these are not mutually exclusive goals of education. Actually, it would be impossible for a person to be well adjusted in the kind of complicated society we live in today unless he were *also* intellectually informed. A stupid man in the kind of world we live in finds himself continuously in trouble. On the other hand, the individual who is intellectually informed but unable to get along in our society would be of little value either to himself or the society in which he lives.

ARTHUR W. COMBS is professor of education, University of Florida, Gainesville.

What we must seek, as Dr. Ahrens has pointed out in the introduction of this symposium, is not an emphasis upon adjustment, but upon fulfillment. When we speak of adjustment we usually refer to a degree of conformity to a given norm. But who, after all, wants to be average? Education, if it is successful, must foster the maximum development of the potentialities of each individual who comes within its influence. The problem we face is not a question of encouraging adjustment but of fostering fulfillment, actualization or realization of the best one can become.

The goal of guidance and the special services is, of course, no different from the goal of education in general, namely, the maximum development of the individual. In carrying out these functions the role of guidance was once seen as a problem of fitting children into their "proper" slots. The special services provided by the schools were likewise seen

as places where problems could be better solved than in the classroom setting. We have had to change these concepts in recent years largely because of two great shifts in our thinking about the nature of people and their capacities.

The Creation of Intelligence

Once it was believed that the capacity for intelligent behavior was as severely limited as one's physical characteristics. Just as one's physical abilities to run or jump are limited by his physical structure, so it was assumed that people were born with a certain capacity for intelligent behavior which might be reached but could never be exceeded. With such a static concept of capacity the idea of education for adjustment made sense. Guidance was primarily concerned with helping the individual to find his level and to settle in it.

More recently, psychologists have been raising serious questions about this view of human capacity. Capacity for behavior it now appears is not so strictly limited by our physical structure as once we thought. The capacity for intelligent behavior we now understand *can* and *often does* change. Research has shown, for example, that children's intelligence decreases when they are placed in situations with little opportunity for enrichment. Intelligence frequently rises, on the other hand, when children are freed of emotional blocks or when they are removed from rigid, inflexible surroundings to more varied and stimulating environment. The problem of guidance in this view is not simply a problem of fitting a child to his capacities, but of enlarging, developing, expanding capacities. Education in this sense is not the victim of intelligence but the creator of intelligence and the goal we seek is not adjustment but self-fulfillment.

Prosaic Nature of Behavior Change

We have often been accustomed to thinking that human behavior is primarily affected by the traumatic events that happened to us in the years of our growing up. When we think about ourselves we recall the dramatic events in our lives which seem to us to have had extremely important effects upon our behavior. Psychologists too, point out the importance of such events in the life of a child which seem to have produced good behavior or bad. As a consequence of these observations we have come to believe that these kinds of special events are crucial in human behavior. Nothing could be further from the truth. While dramatic events are, of course, important, of far greater effect in producing behavior are those little everyday kinds of events which mold and structure personality bit by bit often without our ever being aware of what is going on. In this fashion we form convictions, beliefs, feelings, understandings and attitudes as a consequence of the everyday business of living.

People do not change by being told. Even the conversion experiences produced by a Billy Graham are disappointingly temporary for most people. Behavior seldom changes permanently from "telling," but only through the provision of a different kind of experience. The delinquent child who has taken 15 years to get this way is unlikely to be changed by what someone tells him some Tuesday afternoon at three o'clock. This understanding of the dynamics of behavior change is making it necessary for many people to revise their concept of guidance and special services. It means that effective guidance is most likely to be accomplished through the efforts of the classroom teacher rather than the specialist.

The most important guidance functions we now understand can only be carried out by those people who have a *continuing* relationship with the child and this, of course, means the classroom teacher. This is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the case of the guidance counselor at the high school level. Adolescents are deeply sensitive people and do not readily talk with strangers about things which are deeply personal to them. Many a well trained guidance counselor thus finds that very few students seek him out to make use of his services. Even when they do, the problems they discuss are likely to be comparatively superficial. As a consequence he often finds himself sitting in lonesome splendor in his office while youngsters seek out other less well trained people for guidance in time of need.

The matter is made much worse, of course, if the counselor's job is defined in terms of "seeing everyone" whether they have problems or not as for example, when he is expected to see "all the members of the senior class." Under these circumstances he never sees anyone long enough to develop rapport and so may end up shuffling papers, making out schedules, or dealing with disciplinary problems. In spite of his training he becomes a second rate administrator instead of a first rate counselor! Meanwhile the students he was hired to help seek out their English teacher, coach, or the advisor of the high school annual to discuss the truly important events that affect them. Modern guidance training programs recognize this fundamental problem and are more and more training guidance counselors to work assisting teachers rather than directly with the children themselves.

The above should not be taken to imply that there is no place for special

services or for special personnel in the school setting. There will, of course, always be children with special needs which cannot be adequately met in the ordinary classroom setting. To help such children achieve their maximum potential it may be necessary on occasion to utilize special services, special personnel, special classes, and even, sometimes, special institutions. Once such special services were seen primarily as ways of taking care of the "casualties of the system." Often, special classes were used as field hospitals where the wounded could be parked while the rest of the company moved forward to new battles and new adventures. Now we are much more inclined to see such special services as supplementary to the work of the classroom rather than as substitutes for it.

Work Is Therapeutic

To many people the concepts of adjustment and mental health have to do with a kind of dilettante business of conformity, comfort, fitting into a niche, being "happy." Teaching for adjustment seems somehow tied up with non-direction, permissiveness, resignation, and messing about with things that do not matter. It does very little good, however, for the guidance counselor or the educator to argue that when he uses the terms adjustment or mental health he does not seek the kind of dilettantism implied above. What these words mean to the educator or the guidance counselor is important. Of equal importance, though, is what such words actually mean in the perceptions of those persons in the general public with whom we hope to communicate. If we are not understood, that is our fault, not the fault of those we try to speak to. Communication is, after all, the responsibility of the communicator not the communicatee.

Actually both the educator and the man on the street are interested in exactly the same thing: The production of adequate effective working personalities. There is nothing antithetical about these kinds of people and intellectual achievement. To live effectively in our kind of world requires people with knowledge and understanding about an ever wider field of events. The achievement of fulfillment requires effort, understanding, and downright hard work. Indeed, it has long been recognized in the treatment of mental illness that hard work is itself therapeutic. Striving for mental health in no sense calls for softness, resignation or the breakdown of discipline. In fact, truly adequate persons are characterized by quite the opposite. They are strong people, intelligent and well disciplined.

The proper function of guidance is the nurturing of fulfillment, creativity or self actualization. This is true whether we are talking about teachers, administrators, supervisors, counselors or the Dean of Girls. It cannot be done by coddling

children but neither can it be accomplished by threatening them. We know that people, single or as nations, make little or no progress without challenge. In the absence of challenge, people vegetate or spend their days in idle, pointless behavior. On the other hand when people feel threatened they are so busy defending themselves as they are that they cannot change. It is only when people feel challenged enough to think new goals are worth while and unthreatened enough to be free to move and try, that progress can be made.

In the degree to which we succeed in challenging people without threatening them we are likely to achieve the goals of both education and guidance in the achievement of fulfillment and the production of effective, efficient, dependable, successful people. What is more, if we succeed in helping people become these things, the likelihood is they will be regarded by others as *both* adjusted to life and intellectually informed. Perhaps we can "have our cake and eat it too"!

FOURTEENTH ANNUAL ASCD CONFERENCE

Cincinnati, Ohio

March 1-5, 1959

Theme: Action on Curriculum Issues

If you have not already returned your completed preregistration form, now is the time! Additional forms are available on request from the Washington office. It is to your advantage—you save money on preregistration and have a better choice of study groups.

For further information write:

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA
1201 Sixteenth Street, N. W., Washington 6, D. C.

Copyright © 1958 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.