GUIDANCE:
Education or Therapy—or What?

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GUIDANCE is a big and prosperous business in American education today. From a modest beginning in the establishment of the Vocation Bureau in Boston under the aegis of Frank Parsons in 1908, the so-called “guidance movement” has grown literally into a national enterprise. The Zeitgeist fostering this growth is well represented in recent legislation concerned with manpower mobilization, financial assistance, educational opportunities, and even international relations.2

Presence of a professional organization, called the American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA), with 20,000 members early in 1966, attests further to the rapid expansion of guidance. The APGA consists of eight divisional organizations, the largest of which is the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) with a membership of nearly 10,000.3 Compare this with such figures as the total NEA membership of about 1,000,000, the total number of classroom teachers (1,500,000 as of 1962-63) in American public schools, or the total number of principals and supervisors (86,000), and one can get some idea of the size of present-day guidance.

“Guidance”—Linguistic Game?

What, then, is guidance? Interestingly, it is not easy to find a definitive answer to this question through various official publications of the APGA. For example, in a brochure for general dis-

1 Other seven are: American College Personnel Association (ACPA), Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES), National Vocational Guidance Association (NVGA), Student Personnel Association for Teacher Education (SPATE), American Rehabilitation Counseling Association (ARCA), Association for Measurement and Evaluation in Guidance (AMEG), and National Employment Counselors Association (NECA).
tribution, the APGA and NEA jointly gave the following description:

Guidance can best be defined as the services available to each student to facilitate his academic success in school; to help him better understand his strengths and limitations; to identify his interests; to aid him in planning for and attaining realistic goals. The emphasis is always on the individual, even when students meet in groups for guidance purposes.¹

Here, guidance was identified with the helping services available to a student in his academic and other pursuits of a peculiarly individual nature. The specific services which constitute guidance were not clarified, although the leaflet described counseling as "the primary activity employed in a guidance program" and then listed possible clients (students, parents, and teachers), techniques (tests, vocational-educational information, orientation), and resources and facilities (school, placement, and community).

Difficulties involved here may be easily seen if we take the field of medicine as an example. It is one thing to define medicine as the services available to each client to facilitate his physical "success in society, to help him better understand his strengths and limitations, to identify his interests, and to aid him in planning for and attaining realistic goals," and also to state that individual diagnosis and treatment are the primary activities employed in the practice of medicine. It is another to describe medicine as the science and art of prevention and healing of diseases and to proceed to discuss the basic concepts of disease, prevention, and cure. Obviously, medicine is something over and above any collection of surgical, internal-medical, pediatric, obstetric, pathological, nursing, hygienic and other services, and a medical program cannot be simply equated with the activities involved. In other words, operational definitions do not satisfy the need for clarification of substantive concepts.⁶

A statement of policy issued by the ASCA for secondary school counselors summarized its position as follows:

The perspective used by the American School Counselor Association in outlining the role of the school counselor is that of the student needs which he serves. . . . The counselor implements his responsibilities for meeting these needs by employing his professional competencies in two areas: (a) counseling, and (b) related guidance services.⁷

Later, it was indicated that the "related guidance services" include pupil appraisal, teacher consultation, parent conference, research, and liaison. Unfortunately, guidance itself was nowhere defined in this statement, although the needs to be satisfied were spelled out as:

(a) The need for the pupil to understand and accept himself, develop personal decision-making competencies, and formulate and implement plans for his further develop-

² Ibid., p. 4.
opment. (b) The need for the school staff to understand the importance of the individual student and for assistance in making appropriate educational provisions for his development. (c) The need of teachers and parents for information regarding the development of individuals and groups of pupils. (d) The need for various kinds of assistance from non-school sources for some pupils.*

Notice that all these needs are of a broad prescriptive nature, originating in either school or social requirements and directives. But the ASCA argues as if the needs were personal and motivational.9

Neither of the foregoing statements by the APGA and ASCA clearly explicated the concept of guidance. Instead, they depended heavily upon the physical existence of some concrete operations as an index of the presence of guidance. In contrast, a joint ACES-ASCA committee pronounced that:

We believe that guidance for all children is an essential component of the total educational experience in the elementary school. . . . By guidance we mean a continuing process concerned with determining and providing for the developmental needs of all pupils. This process is carried out through a systematically planned program of guidance functions.10

For some reason, the composition of these guidance functions was not made explicit, while a tripartite scheme of counselor responsibilities was presented as “counseling, consultation, and coordination.” More unfortunate, however, was the lack of clarification of the developmental needs, which I assume have something to do with the concept of developmental tasks. According to Havighurst’s original definition,

A developmental task is a task which arises at or about a certain period in the life of an individual, successful achievement of which leads to his happiness and to success with later tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the individual, disapproval by the society, and difficulty with later tasks.11

These tasks are therefore predicated upon both an individual’s physio-psychological readiness and general sociocultural expectations at each stage of his development. If the committee meant by developmental needs those tasks required of individual children by the society, the needs concept is again prescriptive in nature and not motivational. In this context, affirmation of the committee’s process viewpoint of guidance makes its claim rather preposterous since the counselors now take on responsibility for all the requirements imposed by our society on all children.12

It would be far more meaningful to say, “We believe that formal education is an essential component of guidance for all children,” than to state, as did the committee, “We believe that guidance for all children is an essential component of the total educational experience . . .”!


Beyond the above three cases, one searches in vain for a clear definition of guidance among official documents of the APGA. Under such circumstances, an observer may be justified in questioning the Emperor’s invisible clothes when he reads, in the first article of the constitution of this “educational, scientific, and professional organization dedicated to service to society,” the following declaration:

The purposes of the American Personnel and Guidance Association are: to advance the scientific discipline of personnel and guidance work; . . . (Italics mine.)

We ask a simple question, “Is there such a thing as guidance?,” and we receive an answer obviously taken for granted: “Of course there is!” Strangely, guidance seems to be something that everyone in the profession knows but which no outsider can see!

Wise Men Speak

What is, again, guidance? Failing to obtain a clear answer from the APGA and its divisions, let us turn now to learned scholars for their counsel. For example, Mathewson presented the following definition which he regarded as quite clear-cut.

Guidance is the systematic, professional process of helping the individual through educative and interpretive procedures to gain a better understanding of his own characteristics and potentialities and to relate himself more satisfactorily to social requirements and opportunities, in accord with social and moral values.

While admitting that “the guidance process as a whole cannot proceed without the continuous participation of teachers, parents, pupils, specialists, and administrators,” Mathewson was not willing to equate guidance with a process more inclusive and basic than that engaged in by counselors alone. This is clear in the following statement:

Such a definition enables us to distinguish professional guidance from usual instructional and administrative activities as well as from the activities carried on by such functionaries as school psychologists, social workers, and remedial specialists. (Italics mine.)

The process interpretation of guidance was also offered by Glanz, who defined it as “the process of helping in-


Ibid., p. 142.
dividuals to solve problems and to be free and responsible members of a world community within which they live." This is indeed a broad definition. Glanz also tried to make a strange distinction between education and guidance: "Education focuses upon groups or large numbers of persons; guidance focuses upon the single person." Seemingly, Glanz was confusing means to an end with ends themselves. His later statement, "Guidance is the primary instrument for the individualization of the entire process of education" (italics mine), is again misleading.

Miller also offers the process viewpoint of guidance:

In this sense we shall mean by guidance that part of the total educational process which is concerned with helping the individual make plans and decisions to implement his development in accordance with his own emerging life pattern. Thus, Miller regards guidance as a component of education, although the rest of the total educational process was not made explicit. This failure, and the artificiality in such distinction, seems to make it rather difficult to claim the need for any separate personnel for guidance.

Possibly for these and other reasons, many writers appear to prefer to identify guidance with a viewpoint to describing it as a process. For example,


Ibid., p. 4.


Ibid., p. 142.

What is commonly called guidance is a philosophy, a point of view with regard to the individualization of the student's educational experience; part of this, the coordination of his personal learning in and out of the classroom to the end of better personal understanding and wiser judgment and decision-making is a particular responsibility of the counselor. . . . But what he (counselor) does is only one way of carrying a philosophy of guidance into action. Teachers and administrators also have major responsibility for this point of view.

This statement is probably the clearest which any administrators, teachers, and curriculum planners can find in the literature. Wrenn further wanted it to be known that,

The Commission on Guidance in American Schools proposes that the confusing term "guidance services" be abandoned—and that pupil personnel services be seen as the activities of the school counselor, the school psychologist, the school social worker, the school health officer, and the school attendance officer. Pupil personnel services thus become broader than any so-called guidance services and yet a central function of such services is the work of the school counselor.
Unfortunately for outsiders, there are two kinds of dissension with this proposal. One centers around the concern that some of the programs included in "pupil personnel services," e.g., pupil accounting, health service, financial aids, and remedial services (activities of school psychologists, remedial specialists, special educators, and social workers), may not be educative enough to be worthy of sharing the same roof as "guidance services." However, the dissenters' writings are not clear as to what concrete activities are to be subsumed under their "guidance services," except counseling and possibly testing.

The other disagreeing note comes from those who are worried about the possibility that the very process of specialization in personnel services themselves may eventually nullify the basic claim of personnel work that it is interested in the whole person. An overzealous emphasis upon specialism in the form of a constellation of highly expert and splintered programs may, in this context, cause personnel workers to lose sight of the fundamental commitment to the guidance point of view shared with every other educator.

To be realistic, none of the ought or thought statements reviewed so far, no matter how reasonable or high-sounding, will ever take the place of what people actually see in guidance. Therefore, let us first look at what school counselors, the heirs apparent of pupil personnel work, think they are presently doing and what they think they are supposed to be doing.

What Participants Say

Wrenn reported on results from three studies, two covering high school counselors (ASCA and Project TALENT studies) and one dealing with elementary school counselors. The TALENT study, representing a fairly accurate national cross section, revealed that close to one-third of high schools had no counselors and nearly one-half did not have anyone assigned full time to pupil personnel service duties. The ratio of counselors who devoted half or more of their available time to student counseling ranged from only 15 percent in smaller high schools to 64 percent in the largest schools. Moreover, of the limited time spent in seeing students, most emphasis was placed on "counseling for college." Some time was devoted to "counseling for developing potential" and "counseling for inadequate achievement," while very little attention was paid to "counseling for occupations."

The ASCA and elementary studies, on the other hand, showed that what these counselors say they want to do now and in the future is "counseling students," with an additional emphasis from the elementary group on "conference with parents and teachers." One-
half of the ASCA counselors felt that "clerical work" (record-keeping, filing, transcript preparation, and the like) should not be their duties, while one-third expressed the same opinion with regard to "supervision of study hall, lunch room, library, etc." This last observation fits revealingly with Hitchcock's, which showed that more than one-third of counselors in his study felt that they should not be concerned with such activities as counseling students with academic difficulties, assisting in students' course planning, interpreting test results to teachers, and counseling parents of failing students. 28

It is interesting to note, in this connection, that administrators and counselors tend to disagree on these same matters. 29 For example, it has been found that administrators expect more administrative, leadership, and clerical help from counselors, while the latter want to be nonparticipant observers and impartial arbiters. Whether counselors have succeeded in winning educational colleagues, above all teachers, and students over to their side is, however, quite doubtful. 30


In spite of the previously noted tendency among school counselors to accord little emphasis to counseling for occupations and academic matters, there are several studies to show that parents, students, teachers, and administrators regard counselors as responsible for, and (potentially) most helpful with, problems in vocational and educational spheres. 31 The same groups of people also judged counselors to be inadequately prepared and least helpful in dealing with emotional-personal problems. Most leaders in counseling tend to agree that counselors in schools are not psychotherapists, 32 and a reexami-

Milton E. Hahn. "Forgotten People: The Normal Individual and, and in, Professional
nation of the crucial importance of vocational counseling for a Man in a World at Work seems to be in progress.41

Examined "Guidance"—Desideratum

Recently Shoben reminded us of the saying of a philosopher of old that an

unexamined life is not worth living42; I believe that this is true also with our life as professionals. "Guidance is not a matter of gimmicks, nor of rules of thumb. A guide, like a philosopher and friend, is a person who loves wisdom and loves his fellow men," 43 (italics mine). And we all know how difficult it is to love wisdom humbly but vigorously and to have compassion for our fellow men genuinely and faithfully, do we not? Insight and maturity do not come easily by any standards.

One of the most critical tasks facing school counselors, both as individuals and as professionals, seems to be clarification—or even formulation for the first time—of ultimate objectives which can lend meaning and coherence to their immediate activities and intermediate goals.

In 1955, Cribbin wrote: "After examining over 120 different expressions of ends in guidance, the writer concluded that the scholastic distinction between ultimate aims and proximate objectives was one which concerned few guidance authorities." 43 Four years later, Wrenn observed: "Very much of


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our attention is given to method, but basic to method are ends. And the ends phase of our professional development is immature as yet. . . . Man's purpose in the total scheme of existence calls for some postulates not covered by science.” 

Four more years later, Beck, in one of the few treatises of this issue, pointed to the inconsistency found among presuppositions held, explicitly or implicitly, by many workers. The belief in social and scientific determinism to reveal the truths about the objective world of realism is not quite congruent with another belief in basic human freedom and choice. He thus proposed existentialist philosophy and Daseinanalyse psychology as the possible future framework to accommodate all the philosophical presuppositions discernible in the present-day counseling.

Judging from numerous discussions in the recent literature, existentialism seems to be increasingly in and other “old stuff” out. To my way of thinking, however, it is not so important that everyone agrees with this or that viewpoint (just as he used to do with clinical counseling at one time and with client-centered therapy at another!) as that he continuously examines himself honestly and rigorously without trying to follow fads and fancies. If, after such critical reflection and analysis, he does not see any reason why he should jump onto the “being and becoming” bandwagon with others, may he have the courage and integrity to express his conviction and go his way, all alone if necessary.

We are notoriously culture- and time-bound in our thoughts and other-directed in our behavior. Thus, it may be practically unavoidable that any formal preparation program for counselors is tinged with provincialism and dogmatism. Woe to those, however, who encapsulate themselves in a ready-made cocoon of self-righteousness and com-


placence" and who forget man's best weapon for advance, namely, his awareness of himself and of the world around him.  

Life is of a piece. In the final analysis, I believe that counseling, as well as teaching, is a matter of person, and not that of mere knowledge or technique. In their search for maturity, both the guide (counselor) and the guided share the same basic task, i.e., achievement of identity and integrity. The problem cannot be solved by imitation or by evasion since the task is starkly individual and imminent in nature.

Just as each generation is to "find the wisdom of ages in the form of its own wisdom," so must each person create the identity of human race in the form of his own. The process of such creation is necessarily fraught with doubt and anxiety. Nevertheless, only those individuals who continue to live through it with humility, sensitivity, and courage, can claim to be of any help to their brethren. "It will not be easy to be a counselor. Only the strong need apply."  


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