

GUIDANCE FOR DEMOCRATIC HOME LIVING

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It is a truism that education, and most particularly education for democracy, like religion, must begin at home. Indeed if it does not, the efforts of the school toward that end will not be of maximum effectiveness. In fact, it is often the case that the work of the school is defeated where it should find its fullest application and fulfillment; namely, in the home, in the relationships of the members of the family with each other and with relatives and friends. Family life offers unlimited opportunities of making daily living meaningful and fulfilling. If democracy is to function as our way of life, it must be applied whenever and wherever human relationships exist. The integrity of personality around which the democratic ideal revolves is no respecter of social classes, and applies to the humblest *muchacha* as much as it does to the wealthy land owner.

The first school for democracy is, therefore, the home. With the exception of those who are in correctional institutions and a few other unfortunate, every child is a member of a family. For the great majority of the children of the nation the family can be made the first training ground for democratic citizenship, and since all of us are members of families, the home can be and should be made the center for practising the ways of democracy by everybody from the time he is born to the time he dies. Either that or the home will become, as indeed it is for many not only in dictatorships but in democracies as well, a center for learning and practising the ways of totalitarianism. From one or the other

there can be no escape and no other alternative.

How, then, may the family contribute best toward the education of the child and youth for effective membership in our democratic society? In what way can the school help the family toward that end?

Education involves inspiration, theory, and practice. The learner must have a motive for action, must know what to do and how to do it, and must practice what he knows in dealing with problems and situations that confront him. As ordinarily organized, the school offers mostly theory and little else—very little inspiration and much less practice. The home, on the other hand, gives a maximum of motivation and application and a minimum of theorizing. As a result it can be said without hesitation that as a center for learning the way to live, and of making a living, too, the home is far more efficacious than the school. Of course, it must be admitted that the school has more and better theories on the way to live and make a living than the home, but when it concerns the outcome in terms of demonstrated performance, the school is far behind.

A democratic atmosphere inspires the child to act—to express himself, to make known his wishes, to make suggestions, to be critical, to take on responsibilities, and to carry on a task to completion. As the child is habituated to do these at home in choosing his toys or his friends, in offering to help clean the stairway, in helping to plan a menu for Sunday dinner, and in participating in numerous other family ac-

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tivities, he learns the ways of democracy spontaneously, not to say most effectively. An American child does all these "naturally," so we say, not because she is an American but because she was born in an American home of parents who have the democratic attitude and practice it at home in dealing with their democratic atmosphere. Filipino children born in America of parents who have the democratic attitude and practice it at home in dealing with their children, and other members of the family behave similarly. In fact, we all know of instances right in our country of relatively more democratic families among those of us who have never left the Philippines. It is the atmosphere, not the race or any accident of birth and economic or social status, that nurtures one to become independent in his ways, cooperative and helpful, and critical of himself and sympathetic toward others.

In progressive democratic homes, the family council is a common thing. It includes all the members of the family, and it decides and plans family activities from making a menu for dinner to planning the way to celebrate Christmas. The children are asked to make suggestions and evaluate those made by other members, depending, of course, upon interest and maturity. The parents who act by turn as leaders decide what problems and activities their children can profitably participate in, and encourage them to take part in planning and going ahead with the plan. If democracy is both an end and a means, participation in these family councils is a joy in itself as well as an effective preparation for life on any level. As a training ground for leadership and followership their worth cannot be overestimated.

Let us cite an example. All children play with toys. A parent should see that his children do not play with

dangerous toys or engage in hazardous activities, and he does so by precept. A democratic parent counsels with her children about what toys to have and what games to play. Pre-school children can tell what effect a nail has upon the skin if accidentally driven into it, and they can decide whether to play hide-and-seek in a yard which is not rid of broken glasses and other sharp things. To decide these things for them may be the most efficient way of getting them out of trouble, but giving them a chance to suggest the dangers and decide to do something else or removing the dangers before going ahead is not only more satisfying to the children who will do the playing, but is also a most effective method in educating them to take care of themselves when there are no adults to watch over them.

And why shouldn't a four-year old girl choose or at least help choose a style for a new dress? From pictures she can see what is most pleasing to the eye, and if given a few hints, she can tell that one style rather than another fits her slim figure. Wearing a new dress is more of a thrill to her if in addition to having it she was consulted as to the way it should be made. The same is true with a three-year old boy in matters pertaining to what he should wear or eat. The point is that the concern of the parents, educationally speaking, is not just to have the thing done but to do it in a way that will result in maximum education for the children, and, for themselves, too.

Other and more complicated activities may be cited in which family counseling may provide unlimited occasions for educating the children and the older members in the ways of democracy. Take the case of preparing for and celebrating Christmas, which is getting

to be a major occasion for many a Filipino family. If there is to be a Christmas budget, and there should be, the children as members of the family should be encouraged, at least allowed, to make suggestions. And budgeting includes such items as material, time, and labor, as well as money. Then there is the problem of what to buy for gifts and for whom to buy them. Should they ask for gifts? What should they see and feel when someone gives them a Christmas gift? Who should do the cleaning of the house, of the yard for Christmas? Who should help mother prepare the meal and wash the dishes later? Who should do the cleaning later? Who should do the decorating? Who should take charge of bringing home the Christmas tree? And after Christmas: How well was it celebrated? Did the family behave properly toward each other and toward the guests? Should the Christmas spirit be extended? To whom and when?

Taking up and discussing those and similar problems is a way of democracy which can be undertaken at home as an enduring family satisfaction in itself as well as an excellent training for dealing with bigger problems in business and in life generally. A girl who has had this kind of experience at home will very likely be prepared for a similar activity in school. She will also be better able to choose a good husband than one without the experience. Furthermore, she will the more be willing and able to extend the privilege to others in her own circles later. In short, she is apt to be more democratic, capable, and more agreeable to others than if she has had the traditional home atmosphere of being told always what to do and how to do it.

The difficulty with school-home-community relations in the past has been that it was nearly always a one-way

traffic affair. The school expected cooperation from the parents, but gave little of it, itself. The result is that while the school building and grounds give the appearance of modernity, inside and outside, the home is as primitive as it ever was. There are many exceptions, to be sure, but they are few and far between. A democratic school atmosphere is the first step, in the relation between the teacher and the pupils. The pupils are apt to talk about what they do in school and to expect or even demand it at home.

Then the teacher can help the parents to be democratic with their children by treating them democratically when they come to school to observe their children or to answer questions about matters of attendance and discipline. Parents admire teachers that are considerate and kind, who consult them about school problems, who give them other opportunities to participate in school affairs. In parent-teacher meetings, the teacher should describe what they are trying to do to teach the ways of democracy, and invite the parents to create similar situations at home. The home visit can be and should be democratized, and as it is made so, the parents get the democratic atmosphere in their relation with the teachers. And as they acquire a taste of it, they tend to behave similarly in their dealings with their children.

How much democracy is practiced in the home can not be more than the amount and quality of it that the parents and the children have to give to each other. The least that the teachers can do is to give the children occasions to learn the democratic way of life so that they have that much to give to their parents and later that much to expect from them in return. The democratic process is a two-way traffic, and like the proverbial "gentle rain from heaven," it blesses both the giver and the receiver.