

Re-Evaluating Our Guidance Programs

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WE are rightfully proud that guidance is a recognized function of our secondary schools today. Almost all of our high schools have some kinds of a dean or counselor. The homeroom period is a part of most school programs. Yet it must be admitted that the effectiveness of our efforts leaves much to be desired. Ask the following questions to the average teacher and not the responses:

- How does guidance relate to the goals of education?
- Why do we have guidance in our schools today?
- What are the possibilities of the subject you are teaching for guidance?
- How many of your students this year have benefited from the guidance services of the school?
- What is the homeroom period doing for your students?

Too often teachers are just given mimeographed sheets listing the topics that can be taken up in the homeroom period with an admonishing sermon from the principal that hardly clarifies the home-room period to the teacher advisers. It is probable that we have jumped at putting guidance into our schools without clarifying its philosophy and purposes. Are we having it merely because it is the prevailing practice? In some instances the guidance program is rammed down our throats or the position of deanship is created to make an item for a teacher who must be promoted. As teachers who know, feel and recognize the importance of motivation in learning, we are not using it on ourselves. For guidance to be effective administrator, counselor and teacher should feel a real need for the guidance program, see its value and realize what it can do to the entire educational atmosphere of the school. In this connection, a university professor and authority in the theory and practice of guidance has mentioned how he has tried to interest school teachers in a guidance program. Dr. Schimdt, instead of launching into a scholarly discussion of guidance goes to the school two or three hours before he meets the teachers. He digs up facts about a number of problem students, studies them and begins his talk with the teachers by discussing these students without giving their names. Pretty soon the teachers begin to identify these students or talk about cases similar to them and a round of pertinent

talk is started. In this way there is emphasis on what the guidance program will do for the teachers instead of what the teachers will do for the guidance program.

Fundamental to a successful guidance program is the spirit of cooperative group work. Guidance to be of real value must involve everybody in the staff, the administrator, the guidance specialist, the school doctor and nurse, the librarian, the teacher sponsor, the home and the community and the psychologist or psychiatrist if they are available. It cannot be imposed but must be accepted by everyone as education itself. Guidance is education and education is guidance, every teacher is a counselor and every subject a means for guidance service.

With only a sincere intention to think through our present guidance problems and to focus attention on probable pitfalls for our own edification, an analysis of what experience has found to be the deficiencies of present practices will be made. At this point we emphasize that we are doing well but can do better.

1. The lack of leadership and organization:

So much depends on the principal for, like the captain of a ship, chipping paint here and there and repainting, he keeps the program going towards its goal. He must have a sound philosophy of education and a firm belief in guidance. He must give the program his personal support. Teachers very quickly sense if he is only giving lip service to guidance and they readily fall in step with his attitude. It becomes truly regrettable when some teachers have a better understanding and feeling for guidance than he does and are continually frustrated but administrative red tape in their efforts to do what they believe is right. Consider the teacher who wishes to do counseling but has neither the time in his program nor the place and cumulative record with which to do effective counseling or who sends her problem students to the principal or counselor only to get a more embittered student back to the class.

2. Teachers do not have the right conception of guidance and do not participate in laying down the school's policies.

Most teachers are capable and willing to understand and contribute their efforts for a better guidance program. Students are not to be discussed as though teachers were gossiping about these problem cases. The professional attitude and the policy of keeping information about the students confidential is a sign of professionalization.

This can be secured by group study and discussions of the philosophy of guidance, the need for it supported by actual studies of students, rates of drop-out, facts about delinquency or by inviting resource persons or guidance specialists and having open forums with them. When finally a guidance program is planned, it is important that teachers participate in laying down policies and defining each functionary's duties. This insures cooperation instead of mere lip service.

3. Poor relationships between counselors and teacher, nurses and others involved in the work.

Where teachers do not possess a clear understanding of guidance and lack of professional attitude the tendency is to give cases to the counselor saying it is the counselor's job and not the teacher's job. Sometimes the counselor works in complete disregard of the teacher who also handle the student. In some cases the teachers and the counselor come into heated argument over students, which is most unfortunate and often amusing to students. The counselor should recognize that there are things a classroom teacher is in a better position to know and act upon since she meets the student everyday. The classroom teacher should likewise recognize that there are many things a counselor by virtue of her training, facilities and her program of work can handle better than she can. Case conferences over individual cases that are difficult should bring together the teachers, nurse, doctor, and counselor in a cooperative venture to help the student with his problems.

4. The inadequacy of information in the cumulative record.

Most cumulative records contain a cursory listing of parents, address, occupation of parents, hobbies, clubs and grades. At the end of the year the teacher fills in all the blanks to be over with it and get the clearance for vacation. Such records are usually kept and rarely used except to have when checked. One has yet to see a cumulative record that contains running accounts of previous conferences or interviews with the student, anecdotal records of incidents that help give insight into the behavior of students, statements of patterns of growth and development from the school nurse, facts about family backgrounds, comments of previous teachers, and results of intelligent tests, aptitudes, interest and vocational plans. (We realize that our present class size renders this work most cumbersome if not almost impossible).

Again such files should be confidential. Students hate being discussed by the teachers as problems. We each want privacy of our lives. To adolescents a loss of prestige among his peers can be very damaging. As teacher our outlook regarding human behavior and its development into socially approved patterns differs from that of people without educational philosophy. Strict care in keeping these records confidential may extend to court situations in which certain information may not be divulged and used against the student.

5. Guidance counselors perform work that are not in the field of guidance.

In many instances the counselor issues excuse slips for absences, handles discipline, watches passing in and out of students, supervises extra-curricular activities, gives out forms and supervises athletics. Counseling becomes a minor function when these duties are added to guidance work. Such practices bespeak of a lack of sound understanding of guidance on the part of administrators and the counselor themselves. When counselors handle discipline students will naturally develop negative attitudes towards going for counseling. It is all too true that when a student is asked to see the counselor, the class thinks he has done something wrong and will be punished. We have many students who do not cause trouble but need real help too. We have students who are doing so well that we should commend them. When parents are requested to drop in to a counselor's room or the teacher adviser's room the first impulse is to think that the student has done something wrong. May we not call on parents and say how much we have enjoyed having their child in our classes?

6. Lack of clear ideas of the function of the homeroom.

In most of our schools we spend from 30 to 40 minutes a week for homeroom. This becomes for most advisers a chance to collect this and that fee, complete the form that are due, talk to this boy and girl of his grades, deliver a sermon on honesty etc., or just a chance to let go and allow the class to have a program extemporaneously.

The homeroom period is an excellent opportunity for group guidance activities. Occupational information, human relation classes and group discussion of teen-age problems are best conducted in the homeroom period in its atmosphere of freedom, informality and absence of grades. Role playing, panel discussions, inviting parents and other resource persons to speak and just plain discussion among all members of the class will give variety to present procedures and help teacher-advisers gain an insight into pupil problems, interests and motivations.