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Developmental guidance: Teacher role and competencies

Abstract

Over the past 25 years, elementary school guidance has come into being and struggled to develop its own character. While its secondary school counterpart was born from the need for vocational guidance and grew to provide both educational guidance and career development (Aubrey, 1982), elementary school guidance has come to be characterized increasingly by a developmental approach (Muro & Miller, 1983). In 1977, Struck surveyed publications of state departments of education throughout the United States and found that philosophies of elementary school guidance in most of these states described their programs as developmental in nature, focused on meeting individual needs, preventative, ongoing, provided for all children, and part of a total school effort.

DEVELOPMENTAL GUIDANCE:
TEACHER ROLE AND COMPETENCIES

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by
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Developmental Guidance:
Teacher Role and Competencies

Over the past 25 years, elementary school guidance has come into being and struggled to develop its own character. While its secondary school counterpart was born from the need for vocational guidance and grew to provide both educational guidance and career development (Aubrey, 1982), elementary school guidance has come to be characterized increasingly by a developmental approach (Muro & Miller, 1983). In 1977, Struck surveyed publications of state departments of education throughout the United States and found that philosophies of elementary school guidance in most of these states described their programs as developmental in nature, focused on meeting individual needs, preventative, ongoing, provided for all children, and part of a total school effort.

The need for a developmental guidance program in the elementary school has been well documented (Gazda, 1977; Jones & Nelson, 1985; Youngs, 1981; Zaffrann, 1984). Woldt (1982) summarized several studies of research data by listing 21 benefits to students from participation in emotional education programs. These benefits included increased awareness of feelings, greater skill in verbalizing feelings, more respect for peers, fewer discipline problems, increased motivation to study and to achieve, and increased self-confidence. In addition, Woldt cited benefits reported by teachers when they incorporated systematic, developmental, affective-social educational programs

into their regular classroom teaching. Among the successes noted by teachers were improved attitude toward students, more excitement about teaching, enhanced self-esteem, better classroom control, and more interactive communication as students participate more responsibly in the learning process.

Theoretical and empirical evidence collected by many researchers was cited by Morgan and Jackson (1980). The evidence supports the need for programs that provide students with social and emotional skills to enable them "to cope with today's stresses, to avoid potential emotional disturbance, and to live productive lives" (p.100).

If a developmental guidance program for all students in the elementary school is both valuable and necessary, then the question arises: How is this most effectively provided and by whom? The professional literature has generally presumed the presence of a school counselor to coordinate and deliver the guidance program. However, Chanow-Gruen and Doyle (1983), Duke (1978), and Kornick (1984) have acknowledged the limitations of one counselor in reaching all students in the school or schools to which the counselor is responsible. Kornick suggested that teachers, administrators, and parents become more involved in the guidance process, and Chanow-Gruen and Doyle recommended that counselors serve as "consultant trainers, coordinators, and psychological educators....teaching others, primarily students and teachers,

how to foster the developmental growth of students" (p. 16).

Foster, Fitzgerald, and Beal (1980) emphasized the key role that teachers have in guidance because of their close daily relationship with students. This daily contact provides guidance opportunities which are not as available to counselors. According to Foster et al., "Counselors are, in fact, resource persons" (p. 8).

The importance of the teacher, particularly in a developmental guidance program and in an elementary school, was further stressed by Weis and Weis (1982), who noted that

teachers for many years have been identified by some as the primary guidance person in the school setting. It has been suggested, since teachers have the most direct contact with the student, that they have the opportunity to have the most impact on a student's development....It is becoming apparent that the teacher must continue to assume a major responsibility for providing the type of classroom climate and experience that will enable individuals to develop to their greatest potential. (p. 139)

A note of caution was raised by Read (1982) regarding the use of guidance techniques by teachers with minimal training. Read, an advocate of affective education, stated that his concern is "not the utilization of such techniques..., but that the well-meaning teachers using these techniques may have merely participated in a 'mini' workshop or have simply read one or two books in the area

of affective education" (p. 315). Such people, Read said, can cause harm by hurting feelings, bruising egos, reducing trust, and/or wasting time in the classroom.

This concern was echoed by Hutson (1982), who offered the following caution regarding the teacher's role as helper when students need to explore alternatives, understand their feelings, make decisions, or formulate plans:

Willingness to help is certainly a first step, but willingness is not enough. Persons who are willing, but unskilled, may inadvertently close off rather than open up discussion, may impose value judgments, or may respond only to content rather than to feeling behind the content. They may offer their own solution rather than helping other persons to work through their own. (p. 153)

Hutson went on to note that teachers can become more effective helpers by receiving training in certain guidance skills.

Assuming therefore that a program of developmental guidance or affective education is both valuable and necessary in an elementary school, and acknowledging that classroom teachers have a primary role in the delivery of such a program, bearing in mind the caution that adequate and appropriate training in guidance skills is essential, it is the purpose of this paper to review current literature regarding the nature of the classroom teacher's guidance function and the particular attitudes, knowledge,

and skills required for those who teach developmental guidance in the classroom.

The Function of Classroom Teachers in Developmental Guidance Programs

Although there is general agreement in current literature (Cant & Spackman, 1985; Foster et al., 1980; Jones & Nelson, 1985; Weis & Weis, 1982) that the elementary classroom teacher has a key role in a developmental guidance program, there is often only vague and meager discussion of the specific nature of the teacher's guidance function. Foster et al., however, did present at length a description of the classroom teacher's role. According to Foster et al., the teacher's function is twofold: to help students develop accepting attitudes toward education and to help make school experiences meaningful. Among the specific guidance activities suggested for the teacher were (a) taking time to talk to each student, (b) studying pupils to get to know them as individuals, (c) leading large group and small group guidance activities, (d) having individual conferences with students, (e) allowing students to raise questions of concern, (f) providing materials related to personal, social, and career guidance, (g) consulting with parents, other teachers, and counselors, (h) adjusting the curriculum to meet student needs, and (i) reading professional literature in the guidance field.

Creating an appropriate classroom climate for affective

growth was one of the guidance functions most frequently noted for the classroom teacher. Weis and Weis (1982) described the desired classroom climate as one in which the teacher accepts, understands, and encourages children to develop positive attitudes about themselves. It is a "student-centered atmosphere coupled with a cooperative relationship among teacher and students [which] form the base of a developmental oriented classroom" (p. 151).

Foster et al. (1980) characterized the appropriate classroom atmosphere as "a blending of inspiration, warmth, acceptance, and challenge" (p. 19), being careful not to infer that the elementary classroom should be a "cozy nest" that fails to be conducive to growth and development. This thought was echoed by Combs (1982), who advised that the atmosphere should be challenging without being threatening.

Another guidance function identified for teachers was enhancing interpersonal communication within the classroom. Listening to students is one of the most important services of teachers, according to Foster et al. (1980), who further suggested that talking personally with each student daily is a vital teacher role. "It is no exaggeration to say that it is as important for a teacher to learn how to talk comfortably with students as it is to perform other aspects of teaching" (p. 23). The authors suggested that teachers systematically conduct interviews with individual students and offered guidelines for such interviews.

Cooper and Galvin (1983) also noted the importance of good classroom communication. They asserted that a supportive classroom climate is built when the teacher listens, has relevant curricula, and involves the students. Communication improves, explained Cooper and Galvin, when teacher and students know each other well and give congruent messages.

In sum, the particular guidance function of the classroom teacher, as identified by Combs (1982), Cooper and Galvin (1983), Foster et al. (1980), and Weis and Weis (1982), is first of all to create a student-centered classroom climate characterized by positive, cooperative relationships, open communication, and student involvement. Secondly, it is the teacher's job to get to know each individual student and to take time to listen and talk to each one regularly. Thirdly, the teacher is to treat students with acceptance and challenge for growth. Finally, the teacher's function includes conducting guidance activities with both large and small groups and providing guidance materials and information to students. Not to be overlooked is the teacher's responsibility to consult with parents and other school personnel in order to help the students in their development (Beale, Feeney, & McLeod, 1984; Foster et al., 1980; Jones & Nelson, 1985).

Teacher Competencies for Performing Guidance Functions

Guidance competencies may be considered under three headings: skills, concepts (knowledge), and attitudes (personal qualities

and beliefs). To determine the key skills, concepts, and attitudes for guidance teachers, Strein and French (1984) surveyed 13 authors, selected from a cross-section of theoretical orientations. Each of the authors was given a questionnaire listing 71 teacher skills, 31 concepts, and 25 attitudes. These experts rated each item in terms of its importance for teachers in order to foster the affective growth of students. The results of the survey serve as a framework here for discussing what other authors have identified as important competencies for guidance teachers.

Skills

Of the 71 skills listed on the questionnaire, the experts selected 30 skills as essential. Foremost among these skills were effective (and affective) teacher/learner communication skills and skills that increase student independence by fostering the development of problem-solving skills and decision-making skills.

The emphasis on communication skills is consistent with the recommendations of several writers. Weis and Weis (1982) suggested that teachers need basic communication and human relation skills in order to fulfill their guidance function. Pecoraro and Leonard (1983) and Hutson (1982) proposed guidance inservice for teachers using the Carkhuff training model (Carkhuff, Berenson, & Pierce, 1977), which was designed to develop interpersonal skills of attending, responding, personalizing, and initiating. Gerler (1982)

reviewed the skills counselors use in listening to children: reflection of feeling, open-ended question for clarification, paraphrase, minimal encourager, self-disclosure, and summary. These skills are based in part on the microcounseling skills of Ivey and Authier (1978), which can form a basis for teacher guidance training, as suggested by Hutson (1982).

Hargie (1984) conducted research to determine the efficacy of the microcounseling technique in training teachers for guidance work with their pupils. Hargie argued that there are differences between the patterns of teacher questions common in classrooms and those appropriate in guidance and counseling. Furthermore, differences exist, he proposed, in the proportion of teacher-talk and pupil-talk in both settings. As a result, Hargie observed, "it is often necessary for [teachers] to unlearn, or at least re-focus, some of their existing teaching skills" (p. 214) in order to develop and refine a repertoire of skills appropriate for guidance and counseling. Hargie's research confirmed that microcounseling is a promising, if still evolving, technique for training teachers in the skills of counseling.

The survey of Strein and French (1984) also identified as essential for teachers, skills involving effective discipline, teaching self-control, and crisis intervention. An article by Thomas, Karmos, and Altekruise (1981) has relevance to these skills. Thomas et al. suggested that teachers can use skills of "I" messages,

brainstorming, logical consequences, and conflict resolution to deal with various types of interpersonal problems that arise in the classroom. This approach is based on the Teacher Effectiveness Training program of Gordon (1974) and the Systematic Training for Effective Teaching program of Dinkmeyer, McKay, and Dinkmeyer (1980).

Skills that foster development of self-esteem were identified as essential in the Strein and French (1984) survey. Weis and Weis (1982), in their rationale for developmental guidance by the teacher, reiterated the important need for teachers to help students to accept and grow within their potential. It is not enough, they said, for teachers merely to understand the existence of individual differences in their students; they must also be able "to communicate to their students the acceptability of student differences" (p. 141).

Discussing the results of their survey, Strein and French (1984) noted that the panel of experts "clearly advocated a role for teachers in the affective domain but generally concentrated on an approach less intensive than counseling and more educationally oriented" (p. 341). The experts rejected the more therapeutically oriented activities, such as puppetry, drama, and dance, and supported the more traditional school activities, such as creative writing and literature. Role-playing was supported as an important teacher skill. Consistent with this was the recommendation of Weis and Weis (1982), that two appropriate methods for teachers who present and facilitate discussion of developmental guidance

concepts are structured role play and guided group interaction. Similarly, Dinkmeyer and Dinkmeyer (1982) offered a program of elementary school guidance which makes extensive use of listening, discussion, and dramatic play to focus on feelings, communication, and problem-solving. The Dinkmeyer program (DUSO) requires no special training for the teacher, the authors claim, and the suggested activities use methods that are similar to other school activities. Whereas the experts in the Strein and French survey rejected puppetry and drama as relatively unimportant for guidance, the DUSO program does incorporate both of these, though not in an intensely therapeutic setting.

Van Riper (1982) proposed a role for teachers that was not referred to in the Strein and French survey. According to Van Riper, teachers can play a part in contemporary appraisal by facilitating systematic self-assessment. The goals of such appraisal are self-examination, self-exploration, and self-direction by the student. The teacher and student would meet together to go through a process of expression of needs, discussion of interests, description of strengths, comparison of assets, and choice of goals. Van Riper explained that the skills teachers would need to practice in this process are soliciting instead of stating, encouraging instead of questioning, listening rather than talking, responding not telling, relating instead of evaluating, and summarizing without advising.

Cooper and Galvin (1983) provide a representative summary of the interpersonal skills necessary for developmentally oriented teachers. The teacher competencies listed were: (a) positive self-concept, (b) appropriate self-disclosure, (c) descriptiveness (nonjudgmental observation and feedback), (d) owning feelings and thoughts, (e) empathy, (f) listening (including paraphrase and perception check), (g) appropriate response styles, and (h) behavioral flexibility.

Concepts

The Strein and French (1984) survey identified only six essential guidance concepts for teachers out of the original 31 concepts given. These six revolve around understanding students' self-esteem as it relates to school practices and recognizing individual needs in the affective domain. It is interesting to note that the experts who were surveyed saw little need for teachers to have an understanding of counseling theory.

Zaffrann (1984), on the other hand, referred generally to counseling theory in his list of knowledge that guidance teachers should have. According to Zaffrann, teachers should receive training in (a) the basics of individual and group guidance and counseling, (b) the elements of an affective curriculum, (c) ways to increase their own self-esteem and communication skills, and (d) ways to modify their teaching formats and styles to effectively deliver developmental guidance units to youngsters.

Weis and Weis (1982) were more concrete in indicating the basic concepts needed in order to teach developmental guidance. They listed (a) knowledge of normal developmental stages of children, (b) understanding of Maslow's theory of self-actualization and the hierarchy of needs, and (c) acceptance of the concept of individual differences.

Research on the effectiveness of four elementary affective education programs was reported by Medway and Smith (1978), who concluded that teaching affective education requires considerable familiarity with group processes. Teachers need "an understanding of child development, knowledge of group dynamics, and an ability to facilitate the expression of feelings" (p. 268).

Wolf (1982) added a unique suggestion for teacher inservice. He proposed that teachers learn about indicators of psychological distress, so that they can recognize and refer students who need preventive or remedial help.

To summarize then, the guidance concepts necessary for teachers, according to the authors reviewed, would include the role of self-esteem, individual affective needs, normal child development, group dynamics, distress indicators, and a general overview of affective education concepts. It would seem, according to the Strein and French (1984) survey panel, that an in-depth study of the various counseling theories is not of primary importance in order for a teacher to conduct classroom guidance.

Attitudes

Of the three areas of teacher guidance competencies (skills, concepts, and attitudes), the one given the most emphasis by several authors was that of the personal qualities, beliefs, and attitudes of the teacher. The experts in the Strein and French (1984) survey indicated "a strong preference...for a nonbehavioristic position that emphasizes the importance of the teacher's own emotional development, attitudes, values, and other personal characteristics" (p. 342). Indeed, of the 25 attitude items given on the questionnaire, the panel rated 21 as essential for teachers to foster affective growth. Some common themes among the teacher attitudes selected were (a) concern, acceptance, and respect for students as unique individuals with diverse needs, (b) genuineness, (c) willingness to listen, (d) teachers' own self-awareness, and (e) self-confidence and belief that teachers can have an impact on students' emotional development.

The importance of the teacher's personal qualities and attitudes was underscored by Weis and Weis (1982), who noted that "not all teachers are interested in applying developmental guidance principles in their classrooms. Some teachers, although willing, are not ready or capable of applying the principles in a consistent manner" (p. 143). Weis and Weis therefore identified eight assumptions which are prerequisites for teachers who wish to establish a developmental guidance climate in the classroom. These assumptions dealt with

(a) the teacher's own level of emotional development, (b) openness and acceptance of each student, (c) ability to establish a classroom climate characterized by freedom and cohesiveness, (d) belief that interaction among students promotes learning and that teaching goes beyond imparting knowledge, and (e) willingness to work cooperatively with parents and other school personnel.

Combs (1982) stated that "empathic teachers, sensitive to the feelings and beliefs of students, are far more likely to achieve productive learning situations than those who pay no attention to the affective aspects of learning" (p. 496). Thus empathy is again identified as important in guidance, along with a student-centered orientation. Foster et al. (1980) stressed that teachers need to have a "fundamental regard for every student as a basically worthwhile individual, capable of learning and growth" (p. 23). The student's dignity as a person in the process of developing is the basis of such positive regard. However, Foster et al. cautioned that although an accepting attitude toward the student is basic, it does not mean that the teacher must accept anything or everything the student does. Irresponsible or offensive behavior requires more than acceptance if a student is to grow.

In summarizing the area of essential teacher attitudes and qualities, the prevailing emphasis on personality above technique must be noted. The quality of the teacher's relationship with students was seen as important. Genuine interest in and acceptance

of individual students was considered necessary for teachers of developmental guidance. As Foster et al. asserted, "If the teacher is genuine and sincere, an occasional breakdown of 'technique' is of minor importance" (p. 24).

Conclusion

This review of literature relating to the classroom teacher's role in a developmental guidance program found general agreement that teachers have an important guidance function. The nature of the teacher's function was found to involve creating a student-centered classroom climate, knowing and communicating with students individually, being accepting and challenging, leading guidance activities, providing information, and consulting with other personnel.

Competencies required for guidance teachers were considered under three headings: skills, concepts, and attitudes. This review found that authors gave the strongest emphasis to the teacher's personal qualities and attitudes as prerequisites for fostering student affective growth. Teachers who are self-aware and self-confident and who can establish a genuine, warm relationship with students, expressing interest, empathy, acceptance, and positive regard, were considered more likely to be effective guidance teachers.

Concepts thought to be important for guidance teachers included normal development, group dynamics, individual needs, self-esteem,

indicators of distress, and an overview of affective education concepts. Guidance skills identified as essential for teachers included communication skills, discipline, crisis intervention, and skills that foster self-esteem, self-control, and student independence by teaching problem-solving skills and decision-making skills.

A point of clarification: Since the classroom teacher is not a counselor, there are limits to what the teacher can and should try to do. The teacher's purpose in classroom guidance is to enhance the self-concept and interpersonal skills of all students, to foster the emotional, social, and psychological development of each one. While teachers can provide guidance in large groups, small groups, and individually, they must still rely on trained counseling personnel for consultation and for direct services to students whose needs require expertise beyond the teacher's scope.

Counselors and administrators who supervise developmental guidance programs in which teachers function as primary instructors, need to be aware of the competencies required. It is hoped that this paper has served to clarify what some of those competencies are. Schools might next conduct a needs assessment relative to these guidance competencies and build inservice and staff development programs accordingly.

A word of caution is in order. In providing guidance training for teachers, it should be remembered that the personal qualities and attitudes of the teacher have a most significant impact. Not

all teachers are willing, ready, or able to create the type of atmosphere and relationship with students that effective guidance requires. Although training in specific skills and courses on certain guidance concepts are more readily planned and implemented, it may be more important to work for changes in teachers' attitudes and beliefs.

In view of the clear need for developmental guidance in elementary schools and of the strong impact that teachers can have on students through close daily contact, it is important that attention be given to the guidance competencies teachers need. Given appropriate training in guidance skills and concepts and provided with experiences that foster personal development of genuine warmth and caring, teachers can become more effective helpers in the field of developmental guidance.

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