

Mental Hygiene in School Practice

By

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Mental Hygiene in School Practice

To

J. C. F.

L. L. F.

N. E. F.

PREFACE

THE MAJOR purpose of this book is to suggest practical ways of making schools more effective with respect to the development of personality in pupils. Closely identified with this purpose is the mental health of teachers and their satisfaction with their work. The relations between the school and the community are treated because of their vital importance for mental hygiene, and this is done with special reference to wholesome environment in the home.

The contributions of many workers in the field of mental hygiene are represented, and although notable advances in scientific knowledge of mental hygiene have been made in recent years, the social scientists who have contributed in this important area of human progress would be the first to bring to the attention of students the many questions still unanswered.

The book was planned to be of practical value to classroom teachers, administrators, and the many laymen who support the program of education. The intention has been to consider the problems of children in general and to avoid undue concentration upon the minority of children with exceptional needs. The major sources of the actual content of the book have been practical experiences over a period of twenty-five years in many school systems, children's institutions, and other community agencies. The volume also represents an attempt to define the nature, purposes, applications, and limitations of school case work.

In the interesting but demanding work of preparing the manuscript I was helped most extensively by the professional advice of my wife, Jessie Chase Fenton, and the editorial suggestions of Alice B. Scudder. In August 1941 a group of Stanford graduate students, who had had teaching experience, read the manuscript critically. Subsequently many other graduate students with similar professional backgrounds offered constructive comments. During the autumn of 1941, through the interest of Curtis E. Warren, the teachers and administrators of the Santa Barbara City Schools held a guidance workshop. It was under the leadership of Charlotte D. Elmott. Members of the workshop read the book in a mimeographed edition. Their reactions and those of other educators who read the experimental edition were very helpful. To my good friends and colleagues, William H. Davis and Alvin C. Eurich, I am greatly indebted for their encouragement and constructive criticism.

N. F.

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PART ONE

HOW MENTAL HYGIENE SERVES
THE SCHOOL



CHAPTER I

MENTAL HYGIENE IN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

What does mental hygiene mean?

WHOLESOMENESS or healthfulness of the human mind is the fundamental implication in the term "mental hygiene"—this is what the words themselves mean. But our knowledge of human nature itself is still far from complete, and we are not ready to state with finality the conditions that determine the wholesomeness of the human mind; we can describe them only tentatively. Obviously some sort of working definition of mental hygiene must be evolved before a discussion of its uses and its application can profitably be undertaken; but the reader is cautioned to remember that no definition is to be thought of as static or final. What constitutes good mental health is especially difficult to define at a time of great change, when a nation enters a war or when it returns again to the life of peacetime. On both of these occasions the need for mental hygiene is acute in order to facilitate the adjustment of citizens, young and old, to the changes in the conditions of their lives; yet there might be differences in the implications of the term in the two situations.

A group of mental hygienists, meeting at the Third White House Conference on Child Health and Protection in 1929, attempted to formulate the current concept of mental hygiene and arrived at the following statement (388, 465):*

The healthy mind is sometimes described as one which presents no definite symptoms of the sort ordinarily associated with one of the recognized mental disorders But in its broader definition, mental health comprises more than this. Mental health may be defined as the adjustment of individuals to themselves and the world at large with a maximum of effectiveness, satisfactions, cheerfulness, and socially considerate behavior, and the ability of facing and accepting the realities of life. The highest degree of mental health might, therefore, be described as that which permits an individual to realize the greatest success which his capabilities will permit, with a maximum of satisfaction to himself and the social order, and a minimum of friction and tension. This implies a stage of such well-being that the individual is not conscious of unsatisfied tensions; does not show

* The boldface number in parentheses designates an item so listed in the Bibliography (page 419, below); the number in lightface type designates the page from which the quotation derives.

socially inadequate or objectionable behavior and maintains himself intellectually and emotionally in any environment under any circumstances.

This definition emphasizes a standard of positive mental health. From the earliest definitions of the term, hygiene has implied the attainment and preservation of health. The concept of physical hygiene has undergone during recent decades a transition from that of mere protection against disease to that of optimal well-being—the condition which Dr. Helen B. Pryor has called “positive abounding healthfulness.” The modern definition of the total field of hygiene is the preservation, inculcation, and promotion of those conditions or influences that lead to the most effective development of the personality of the individual and his most interesting, wholesome, and useful life in society. Mental hygiene in the school sense consequently no longer means merely the protection of children from delinquency and other mental illness; rather it has positive implications in the curriculum, using that term to mean either a series of courses such as the prenursing or pre-medical curricula or, in the more recent definition of the *Encyclopedia of Educational Research* (238, 374), as “all the actual experiences of the pupils under the influence of the school.” In an especially interesting paper, Prescott (278, 28) has defined the task of mental hygienists as “more than the mere amelioration of maladjustments. They must see their jobs in the more positive aspect of helping the individual to develop a sense of personal worth based upon efficient action that harmonizes with the actions of others striving with him for a collective goal.” The ideal of mental hygiene for the schools of the democratic society may be described as the achievement of equality of opportunity for personality development in relationship to individual potentiality.

Before we can discover how best to promote mental well-being in the field of education we need to formulate the concept of personality in new ways. With reference to the fullest possibilities for the development of personality, we must understand the basic needs and values of the developing child or youth and learn about the nature and the effects of human relationships in the formation of personality. We must see how these human relationships and the satisfaction of these needs and the realization of these values are related to the learning process. We must investigate, for example, the ways in which the curriculum may be adapted to the needs of individual pupils—and how the personalities and personal and administrative relationships of parents, teachers, and administrators influence the mental wholesomeness of children.

Above all, the lesson must be learned that the state of mental health in democratic society cannot be considered in descriptive terms that make it resemble Nirvana, "a beatific freedom from worldly evils." Rather, the mentally healthy person will be characterized by an ability to absorb or master frustrations, disappointments, even temporary defeat, without the use of evasive or compensatory reactions that bespeak weakness or immaturity. The wholesome or well-adjusted personality is one able to endure the inevitable conflict and disturbances of daily life with a minimum of surrender or self-pity and a maximum of insight and self-control. Plant (273, 196), who has described the dynamic aspects of mental health, pointed out that "adjustment loses its quality of a static satisfaction, of something attained, to become at once an acceptance of the complexity of the problems ahead with a certain confidence that they can be met." The psychological backgrounds in the lives of pupils and teachers and parents together with educational practices which may be helpful in the development of wholesome personality are among the materials which we shall scrutinize and attempt to understand in the course of this book.

The interrelationship of mental and physical hygiene

The term "hygiene" is defined in the latest edition of *Webster's New International Dictionary* (1935) as "the science of the preservation of health; sanitary science; a system of principles or rules designed for the promotion of health." The same source defines mental hygiene as "the science and art of maintaining mental health and preventing the development of insanity and neurosis." Both definitions include the positive aspects of hygiene—the improvement of human life and the cultivation of human personality through the betterment of all aspects of society. Bassett (28, 3), a professional mental hygienist, indicates how intimately mental and physical hygiene are interrelated: "Because of the great complexity of human personality, mental hygiene is a 'mosaic of aspects' of biology, medicine, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, psychology, eugenics, etc." No valid line of separation should be drawn between mental and physical hygiene by the professional worker. From the standpoint of teacher education, both may be combined with profit in one larger course, school hygiene, to be taught by specialists in both fields. Because each has accumulated its own body of facts and doctrines, it is possible, and indeed customary, to separate mental and physical hygiene for