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| Title     | Guidance in the classroom  |
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| Source    | <i>Guidance for Youth Convention, Singapore, 26 February to 3 March 1975</i> |

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## **"GUIDANCE IN THE CLASSROOM"**

A Paper

presented by

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at the

GUIDANCE FOR YOUTH CONVENTION (26.2. 75 -3.3. 75)

on 1 March 75

There has been a certain tendency for words in educational usage to lose the essence of their simple meaning with the passage of time. Words like "educated", "teach" or "read" are beclouded with a host of definitions and are perhaps, no longer as clear as they were fifty or a hundred years ago. Educational jargon, like everything else, has not escaped technological progress.

We make much of the science and techniques teaching, for example, but few are the teachers who can say joyously and with confidence.

*"My heart overflows with a goodly theme...  
My tongue is like the pen of a ready writer." <sup>1</sup>*

The act of teaching, put under the microscope in proper scientific fashion, has become a set of observable behaviours: the heart and the art tend to get lost in the analysis. Likewise, the word, "guidance" has steadily acquired, in a manner appropriate to the trend, such a specialist flavour that nobody dares to guide any more.

I am not so much decrying the actual practice of teaching or counselling: in each case, new psychological and scientific insights made more specific the particular methodology suitable to the task. Rather, I am attempting to remind ourselves that tasks like "teaching" or "counselling" are still the functions of heart and soul, and these, all teachers do possess. (1) Ps.45:1 Christian scripture.

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<sup>1</sup> Ps.45:1 Christian scripture.

I am particularly glad, therefore, to be given today's topic, a last day topic, which draws attention to the teacher as playing a most important role in guidance.

Mention has been made of career masters and vocational guidance. There is also that aspect which *is* associated with special consultations, manuals and psychological tests. But these specialist functions aside, there is still a great deal to account for under the term, guidance, more particularly, if we regard "guidance procedures as enabling us to understand individual behaviour, to react intelligently to that behaviour and to assist the individual in the course of making choices and decision,"<sup>2</sup>

From child to man, the individual obviously faces innumerable choices and decisions. Were it necessary for a specialist to be called in for every decision, a whole army of counsellors would be required. In actual fact, the task falls on those who go before to guide those who come after. Parents guide the child at home; teachers guide the child in school. Just as the child's growth is a normal process, guidance is a normal concomitant.

Some points need to be made here.

First, guidance can be good or bad. Some adults give poor guidance. I know of a child who, when caught by the mother for stealing from her, was severely thrashed. Several months later, the child was found by the teacher to be in possession of some notes of large denomination which, the child admitted, had been stolen from an elderly neighbour. She was persuaded to tell her mother. When the latter heard about this, she forbade her daughter to return the money. She would rather, she said, give the money to the school building fund.

Under these circumstances, the mother gave her child poor guidance. Misguided children like this girl grow up confused and may develop problems of maladjustment and even anti-social behaviour.

A teacher who constantly tells a child that he is "of no earthly good" is misguiding him. He is helping him to develop a poor self-image. The child may decide to give up all attempts to achieve something through his studies. He then drops out from school. There is good evidence to indicate that dropouts tend to come from the low-achieving group in school.

Secondly, guidance is generally not prescriptive, except where a child is so young that the explanations given by adults exercise very little influence on

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<sup>2</sup> Zeran F Natal Guidance: Theory and Practice, American Bk Co., 1964

his behaviour and commands are found to have greater effect. Nevertheless, as R S Peters has pointed out, young children "can and must enter the palace of Reason through the courtyard of Habit and Tradition"<sup>3</sup>. The adult who counsels wisely helps the individual child to appreciate values and principles of attitude and behaviour which, over the years, become for the child an acceptable, conceptual frame of reference which he can use for making his own choices and decisions. The best form of guidance enables the child to act independently and constructively as a social being. Such guidance is supported by sound reason.

We often hear prescriptions handed out with great facility in the classroom:

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| "Don't talk! Keep quiet!"   | <p>If the teacher has not planned enough activities to occupy the pupils' time, why should they not talk?</p> <p>If the teacher has not made it clear as to what he expects them to do, is there reason to keep quiet?</p> |
| "For goodness sake, girls, be punctual!"  | The teacher herself arrives late for the class without a reason. If she wishes to gain cooperation, she should be able to demonstrate the importance of punctuality.   |
| "I'd like you to work hard. Please complete your home-work assignment by tomorrow I should like to check on your work." | Pupils hand in their homework on time. The teacher returns the answers the following week unmarked. Is there any demonstrable reason for working hard?   |

These examples lead us to a third point, namely, guidance in the classroom is not provided solely in words. The teacher's every act and behaviour is mentally recorded by his pupils. Values are confirmed or revised and the conceptual frame of reference set or modified accordingly.

Fourthly, guidance should not be regarded as being meant particularly for problem children, though treatments for the problem child and the normal child may differ. Problem children are more generally dealt with by a specialist; normal children rely very much on their classroom teachers. Those of you adults, who have not yet forgotten your childhood, may recall, perhaps, some teacher who gave you an opportunity to cultivate an early taste for good books, or another, to whom you confided your childhood ambitions and who accepted them in seriousness. Such teachers made you

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<sup>3</sup> Peter R S, "Reason and Habit: The Paradox of Moral Education" in *Moral Education in a Changing Society*, Faber, 1963, p. 55.

feel that you meant something to them. Their encouragement helped to shape the life style you choose.

Because guidance is based in a knowledge of behaviour, it is important that a teacher should know as much as possible about his pupils, both as a group and as individuals. The more the teacher knows, the better he can understand the specific behaviour and adapt his methods intelligently in reacting to that behaviour.

How does the teacher go about improving his knowledge of his pupils? There is much that can be gleaned from the day-to-day situation. With respect to this, it should always be remembered that the pupils we teach are possessed of soul, spirit, body as well as of mind. It is not enough to rest our judgement on mere scholastic attainment. Feelings, attitudes, values, health characteristics besides mental ability enter into the making of the whole person. If it is our intention to build up a proper profile of each pupil, then information which includes all these various aspects should be carefully acquired. Our search for data should be prompted by committal to the belief that each individual has his own intrinsic worth and is, therefore, undeniably unique. He has to be guided to achieve the optimum limits of his full potential.

Towards this end, the new system of education has been made more flexible. Progress at the individual's own pace, presumes a knowledge of the individual's capacity, his work attitudes and habits, his interests and his aptitudes. Non-retention will not mean a total halt in a child's progress, with unimpeded escalation on the relentless moving belt of time towards a pushout point. Non-retention implies that each point in time will mark a step forward in space.

What kinds of information may be considered useful? Knowledge about the quality of the child's attempts at achievement, not only in the scholastic area, but also in the physical, social and other domains would be important. Anecdotes written by the child himself to show his perception of the world about him -- his family, his peers, his hopes, his dreams -- should generally yield interesting insights. Frequency of truancy, inability to work with others, withdrawn behaviour or over reticence, attention-demanding behaviour may provide danger signals.

The teacher acquires his information in small increments over time. In other words, the information is cumulative. Guidance based on such knowledge should be appropriate and within the capacity of the teacher to administer. Action could be taken in three ways. It may be deferred action, particularly, when it is not clear as to the nature of help which the person requires. It

may be guidance given at the specific time of need. Some occasions may require group guidance, others individual guidance. Finally, the guidance required may involve in-depth probes and corrective action. Here the specialist counsellor should be called in.

As examples of what is meant, I supply a few anecdotes.

### **Anecdote 1 Premature Guidance**

Over Chinese New Year, a mother 'who visited me told me that the teacher of her son in Primary 3 had assured him that he was a "6-year type". She wondered if I could advise her on what the pupil in the 6-year stream needed to know so that she could give her son close attention. She was afraid that, being a playful boy, he might not be able to maintain his even progress.

Here, the teacher was over-hasty with her guidance. It would seem that she relied heavily on clairvoyance, since there are no standard criteria as yet to determine which children should go into the 6-year stream and which into the 7-year stream. Besides, if continuous assessment were to be maintained in the spirit of the innovative change in the system, any attempt at prediction must be tempered by a note of caution on elements of probability. Indeed, if the new system really functions well, it would not be possible to determine outcomes till the child enters the sixth year. The point-to-point assessment will indicate his progress.

It would have been better, if the teacher had deferred advice, as the basic information necessary for sound counselling was not fully available.

### **Anecdote 2 Guidance appropriate to the need**

It was noticed by a certain teacher that one of her 7-year old pupils had received a blue eye during recess; his shirt was also torn. When questioned, the boy would not answer. Another pupil volunteered the reason on his behalf: he had had a fight with an older boy who had said that his policeman father was a coward and a fool.

The teacher attended to the swollen eye and explained to the boy that, while he was right in being loyal to his father, what he did was really quite unnecessary. Since his father was generally known to be a good policeman, what the bully said was not going to do him any harm. If the bully persisted in name-calling, he could inform the teacher. It took a braver boy, the teacher said, to be able to receive ill-will or bad treatment and not retaliate.

Later, the teacher also dealt with the bully and encouraged the two boys to make friends.

### **Anecdote 3 Case of the Overprotective Mother**

S.C., a 7-year old boy and a primary 1 student, was referred for being unruly in class and aggressive towards others. He would scream or howl when checked by the teachers and took a long time to recover on each occasion.

After the initial interview and a home visit, it was soon revealed that S.C's problem was caused by the overprotectiveness of his mother. He was the only adopted son of a childless couple. Mother was in her late thirties and father his late forties. Both parents doted on him, especially the mother. Since infancy he had been sharing mother's bed and he refused to sleep anywhere else. Mother waited on him as if he was still a helpless baby and would give in to all his demands. Throughout the school year mother visited him daily in school during recess time to feed him some home-cooked food as "he's not used to eating outside food". It's obvious that in a case like this, it is more important to counsel the mother than to work with the child himself.

A case like S.C's should be referred to a specialist counsellor. Actually, his anecdote has been taken out of IE's counselling record. Presently, a clinic is being operated at IE for pupils from experimental schools who need particular attention.

There are teachers who have questioned the behaviour of pupils, but their concern does not go beyond the superficial confines of classroom control. Human interaction between teacher and pupils should not occur merely in the classroom, however satisfactory the extent of rapport which has been achieved between them. There should also grow up an increasing empathy so that pupils and teacher almost identify with one another. In this way, the sensitivity of the teacher to his pupils' needs will be increasingly sharpened.

I can hear the moot question pressing to be answered. "How can a teacher with a large class of 42 children ever expect or hope to know each and everyone of them well enough to counsel them effectively?" I know no other way except that of "feeling into", which is what empathy really means. The teacher can only do his best. He should not be alone in his efforts. What he cannot do, the specialist should take over, and the threefold bond of common purpose between parents, teacher and specialist counsellor should not be easily broken.