Good morning, dear colleagues and friends,

I am very glad to meet you all here in this workshop, and deeply appreciate your interest, enthusiasm and participation in the guidance counselling service. As many of you know, the Extra-Mural Studies Department of the Institute of Education, has started offering the in-service training course on "Introduction to Child Guidance and Counselling" for primary school teachers since 1975, and it is fact, some of you may have attended this Course. The main objective of the Course is to give primary school teachers a basic exposure to guidance and counselling. Its duration is 20 hours. Therefore when I was approached by Mr S Lowe, Deputy General Secretary of the Singapore Teachers' Union, to give a talk on Understanding Children, in this one-day workshop; my first reaction was "mission impossible." However, as we discuss further I agreed that this workshop could give a very brief introduction or "synopsis" of this course. Within the 45 minutes scheduled for my talk, I will begin with the common basic needs of children and then focus on the needs and adjustments of our pupils in primary schools.

1 Common Basic Needs of Children

According to Maslow's theory, every person has the following needs:

a. Physiological needs - those necessary to maintain life, eg food, shelter, clothing, etc.

b. Safety needs - need for routine and rhythm, things that give a sense of security.

c. Love and belonging needs - affectionate relationships with others and membership of groups; sense of identity and loyalty.

d. Esteem needs - recognition by others as a worthwhile person. If these needs are not met, a person may develop a sense of inferiority as a feeling of helplessness.

e. Self-actualization needs - to develop all the potentials in a person and to become what a person can be.

f. Needs to know and understand - cognitive needs - presence of such needs are seen in a person's tendency to systematize, to organize, to enquire, to analyse and to look for relationships.

A child's physiological needs, sense of security, love and attention are usually well looked after by his/her parents and/or other family members, in the local context. Of course, there are many exceptional cases such as abandoned babies, ill-treated children, child rape, child abuse etc. I think perhaps we can spend some time to explore these areas in this morning's group discussion after my talk.
In the process of socialization, a child's need for recognition and need for sense of belonging, identity and loyalty are met not just by their parents, but also by many other people living in his/her world. They are the child's siblings, grandparents, uncles, aunts, servants, neighbours, teachers, classmates etc. Through the frequent interaction with these people, the child gains gratification as well as frustration. If the emotional bond with parents or family members were strong, the child could have more tolerance in a frustrated or distressed situation. At the school-going stage, the child's centre of life moves from the family to the school, the boundary of socialization is thus enlarged. Recognition and encouragement from teachers and classmates are very essential for the child's intellectual, emotional and social development. Consistence of the patterns of training and transmission of values among adults, parents, senior members in the family, teachers and principals, are very important for the child's mental health. It is not uncommon to find that children who exhibit emotionally disturbed symptoms are actually suffering from anxieties and turmoil caused by the conflicts existing between father and mother, parents and teachers, grandparents and parents, natural parents and substitute parents, etc.

In order to meet the child's "cognitive needs" for exploration, to know and to understand, both parents and teachers should be responsible for providing proper and sufficient opportunities for the child to learning by himself. In Piaget's systematic studies of children of all ages, after the age of seven, a child is possible to have a democratic and co-operative attitude in his social relationship. He begins to have concrete operational logic. From seven to twelve, the abstract logic develops. Overprotective attitude, rigidity, monotonous programme, unrealistic expectation, etc. will hinder instead of enhance the child's cognitive development.

The need for self-actualization is closely related to the need for exploration and learning. It is the natural inner drive that makes human beings creative and intensive. The ultimate objective of guidance and unselling is to enable pupils to develop their full potentials. The helping process consists of developing pupils' self-awareness, building their self-confidence, giving information and suggestions, guiding pupils to make right decisions, etc. I think Miss Low Fook Yeow will elaborate on these in her talk on "Guidance Counselling in the Classroom" in this afternoon.

2 The needs and adjustment of our pupils in primary schools

After talking about the common basic needs of children in general, let us now focus at a particular group of children, i.e. our pupils in primary schools.

The first day in school can be very exciting and enjoyable or very frightening and terrible to our pupils. It all depends on the previous experience of individual children. The child rearing pattern, and pre-school social and educational life play significant parts at this critical moment. If a child is very attached to the mother and seldom left on his own, he/she may suffer from 'Separation anxiety', and develop school phobia. Such experience
is not very commonly found among our pupils because most of them have gone through kindergarten education.

The adjustment to the daily routine of the school, which is of great difference from the child's family life, is a great task or him/her to accomplish. To be punctual, go to toilet only during recess, to buy drinks and snacks from the tuckshop, to concentrate and listen continuously for almost half-an-hour, to wear uniforms, to sit for tests, to study for examination, etc. Pupils generally can manage to adjust to these activities at various degrees and different rates. However, some pupils may have difficulties to overcome this crisis owing to many reasons, e.g. unmet needs at home, physical and mental handicaps, excessive tension and fear, etc.

After the first term in school, pupils normally are more familiar with the school life, classmates, and teachers. Some pupils get along very well with others, but some are not so sociable. Teachers sometimes find one very quiet and withdrawn pupil sitting at a corner of the classroom during recess. On the other hand, teachers are "annoyed" by troublesome fellows who always irritate others or even attack other children. All these are the dynamics of the class, and teachers need to be more observant and know how to detect the maladjusted pupils.

In order to understand the reasons for the pupil's maladjusted behaviours, a teacher need to take the following steps:

a. Give more attention to the pupil and keep records of his/her behaviour

b. Study the pupil's home background and contact his/her parents/family members.

c. Self-evaluation of teaching approach and attitude, and even personal things like manners and speech habits (Is there any hints showing favouritism, prejudice etc.?) (Am I talking clearly or am I talking too fast, too slow?) (Have I been fair with my pupils?)

In cases of maladjustment, the pupils may be victims of maternal deprivation, illness, disability, family discord, isolation by peers, wrong group, unfair treatment given by teachers or principal, unreachable academic standard, unrealistic school policy etc. Sometimes, if there is more than a half of the pupil population showing restlessness in the class, poor academic achievement, disrespectful to teachers and the school, disregard school rules, the school and teachers have to make some adjustments after a thorough self-evaluation. It is because the core of problem is not lying in pupils' inability to adjust. Adjustment is a relative term. In action, it can be the changes that have taken place on one side/part while the other side/parts remain constant, or the changes that have taken place on both sides and all parts. While we look at school as a system, pupils, teachers, staff members, principals, physical settings, curriculum, ECA etc. are parts of the whole. Generally speaking, for better adjustment of our pupils, all other parts of this system should be assessed and modified whenever necessary.
3 Conclusion

Just now when I mentioned the school and teachers may need to make some adjustments, you may question me how come I moved away from the theme of th. 1. World Hop - "Guidance and Counselling?" The answer I give is: "feedback information and sensitisation to the class to the school authority and to carry out self-evaluation are the tasks of a guidance counsellor. I see the guidance counsellor as a change agent as well as an enabler in developing our pupils' potentials. Without this role expectation in the mind, I can only see guidance-counselling as merely a dictating process which is not really enhancing the growth and development of our pupils.

To conclude this talk, I would like to highlight that in order to understand our pupils it is necessary for us to have on-going self-evaluation.

Effective self-awareness brings effective guidance and counselling as well as successful teaching. Of course, knowledge of child development and skill in counselling are also important components of guidance and counselling we need to explore. Thank you.

Reference

Oinott, G

Wolff S.

Rutter M.

Schwelbel M. & Rapht J (editors)

Holt, J.

Holt, J.
Questions for group discussion

1. Have you ever encountered any pupil whose basic needs were not looked after by his/her parents/guardian(s)? If yes, please briefly describe the situation and state your reaction/intervention.

2. Do you agree that teachers should look after their pupils' needs for love, recognition, exploration, sense of belonging, and self-actualization? If yes, how are you going to put it in action.

3. Is it feasible for teachers and guardians to play the role of chaxige-agemi in the local school?