

The Individual Psychological Experimental School in Vienna¹

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Years have passed since several young enthusiastic teachers tried to put the Individual Psychological knowledge into practice in the school. There soon emerged two centers of the movement: the Higher Elementary School with Dr. F. Friedmann and Mrs. Seidler, and the Higher Elementary School *Staudingergasse* with the trefoil Birnbaum, Scharmer, and Spiel.² In looking back we can discern a development in stages.

During the years 1920 to 1924 we spent most of the time in studying the Individual Psychological technique of child guidance. I want to remember here in deep gratitude the help and understanding given to us by our master, Alfred Adler. We had to learn how to make use of this technique in our class and school respectively, and how to transfer the technique of treating one child to the treatment of the collective, the whole class. In these years the fundamentals of the Individual Psychological system of education *in* and *through* the school were developed. Our unforgettable friend Ferdinand Birnbaum not only laid the theoretical basis for his work and that of his friends, but also, in sharp debates with Scharmer and myself, gave us his famous Five-Phases Theory, a true Individual Psychological technique of living. The system of the "class-discussions" was completed in 1924 and the first publication of this "group-therapy" appeared in the *Internationale Zeitschrift für Individualpsychologie* in 1925.

The second stage comprises the years 1925-1930. In these years our classes were visited by guests from Austria and abroad. The Board of Education (*Stadtschulrat*) was very much interested in the experiments and its President, Otto Glöckel, often brought guests himself.

The third stage started in September, 1931. As the result of long negotiations with State Inspector of Public Schools (*Landesschulinspektor*) Dr. Burger, we received the official permission to call the

¹Presented to the International Congress of Individual Psychology, Zurich, July 26-29, 1954.

²Elementary school in Vienna consists of grades one through four. Higher elementary school includes grades five through eight.

Bürgerschule in the twentieth district “Individual Psychological Experimental School.” The program of this school was outlined by Ferdinand Birnbaum in the *Internationale Zeitschrift für Individualpsychologie*, Vol. X, p. 176. When we read this article today it sounds quite natural to read about “inner training” and the method of interpolation, about the class as a Work-group (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft*), Experience-group (*Erlebnisgemeinschaft*), Discussion-group (*Aussprachgemeinschaft*), and Aid-group (*Hilfeleistungsgemeinschaft*). That it appears so natural today is proof of the fact that Alfred Adler’s line of thought has, as he predicted, penetrated our thinking and become our own. But in 1931, these ideas had to be put into form; they had to become alive in a practice which revolutionized our teaching methods.

Our school got a new principal, Dr. Feichtner, who supported our new ways. Then came February 12, 1934. This day was the end of our Experimental School. The next eleven years were years of Fascist terror. Only a great writer could describe the economic and cultural havoc which destroyed our whole school system. We were doomed to silence through eleven long years. We could only try to prepare ourselves with all our idealism for the time of a new school-reform which we were sure would come. But we never even imagined that it would happen under such desolate circumstances in a world where everything seemed lost. We took up contact with August Aichhorn and, through him, with Psycho-Analysis, and made a truce with him and his School which has lasted to this day. The closer the end of the Fascist era approached the more we felt that we needed a program for reorganization of the school work. Glöckel’s³ school reform had brought a reform of the teaching methods, and the renovation of our school had to have new and stimulating impulses. Our program became: “From the Working school (*Arbeitsschule*) to the Guiding school (*Erziehungsschule*)” as the school had to comprise the *whole* child. This program proved clear, convincing and effective. A new Individual Psychological Experimental School was opened on September 6, 1946, and I was appointed its pedagogical consultant.

In the beginning the two *Hauptschulen* (Higher Elementary Schools) which formed the basis of the planned experimental school were housed in a provisional building. It was a rather derelict house with cardboard for windows and no heat. We suffered bitterly from the cold and all were hungry, children as well as teachers. The teachers

³ Superintendent of Public School System.

were skeptical, struggling for their mere existence, and yet were somehow ready to take up the struggle for the souls of these miserable, neglected children. Some of the old teachers remained at the school where they had served during the Fascist era, others came from various schools whom we had invited to co-operate, some were driven by an inner impulse to join the new school. I was entrusted with the educational guidance. I realized from the start that a legally formal division in administrative and pedagogical tasks was impossible. We could only work together as *equals* and, as I dared hope, of the same mind and not in the relationship of super- or sub-ordination. The teachers were at this time politically divided into "Red" (Socialists and Democrats) and "Black" (Conservatives and Clericals). The greatest drawback was that they had not the least knowledge of Individual Psychology.

I had to start with pure teaching work by taking up all the techniques of the *Arbeitschule* as they had been handled in the time of the Glöckel school reform. But even this return to the old ideas was new land to the young teachers, and so we had to approach the technique of the Problem School partly by inducing the teachers to study respective works, partly by giving them theoretical instruction and by showing them in practice how it should be done.

The second task was to introduce the young people into the system of class and group education as it had been developed by our group. This was done in a series of lectures delivered by Dr. Ferdinand Birnbaum at the Pedagogical Institute of Vienna until his untimely death in 1947 at which time Professor Scharmer took over. All the theoretical instruction was accompanied by practical demonstrations at the school.

The third task was to give instruction in Individual Psychology at least to those who were responsible for the class; the class teachers and principals. This was done at the Seminary for Individual Psychology at the Pedagogical Institute. Medical consultant was *Dozent*⁴ Karl Nowotny, M.D. I was the pedagogical consultant. The theoretical teaching was done by *Dozent* Nowotny, M.D., Margarethe Hofbauer, Ph.D., Ferdinand Birnbaum, and myself. The practical work was done partly at the Child Guidance Center attached to the Seminary and partly at the Ambulatorium for Children and Young People which *Dozent* Nowotny, Primarius of the Psychiatric Hospital *Maria Theresien Schlössel* had put at our disposal. This course was continued

⁴ Equivalent to Assistant Principal.

throughout the following years and in this way quite a remarkable number of teachers were trained in Individual Psychology.

In 1947 the school moved into another building and the Elementary School was added. From this time on the teachers of the Elementary School underwent the same training. In September, 1949, the school found its final home. The three schools, one Elementary and two Higher Elementary, were gathered into one building. There were now ten Elementary School classes, sixteen Higher Elementary School classes, three one-year classes for children over fourteen; a total of twenty-nine classes with about eleven hundred children and forty-four co-workers. For Vienna, this was an institution of quite remarkable size.

Now for a few words about the sociological structure of these twenty-nine classes. The school is a real district school. The children of a certain part of the fifteenth district attend this school. 38 per cent of the children live in typical proletarian flats with one room and a kitchen, 38 per cent live in flats with one big and one smaller room and a kitchen. This means that 76 per cent live in very restrained circumstances as these flats are shared by two to eleven persons. 2.8 per cent have a bathroom. The parents, or those entrusted with the care of the children, are either railway or tram employees, skilled or unskilled workers, or small tradesmen. In the Higher Elementary School we have not one single child of a doctor, lawyer, manager, professor, or the like. It is purely a proletarian *milieu*. Of eminent importance is the fact that 35 per cent of the children are "only" children, 30 per cent have either no father or no contact with their real father, be it that he died in the war, or has not returned, is missing, or that the parents are divorced or live separately. With Individual Psychologists there is no need to stress what that means. 28 per cent live with their mothers who work for a living. These children are placed under the care of their grandmothers or a kindly neighbor or run the street when mother is not at home. One cannot say that the children of this school are particularly selected. And besides, in the course of the years, the rumour has spread that this school gives special care to difficult children so that children are brought to the school from all parts of the town.

During the school year of 1952-1953 there were children who had been turned out of two or more schools because they could not fit in at all; children who were most aggressive and a danger to their comrades. Most were neglected children and some were mentally damaged. There were some legasthenics, postmeningitics, pseudodebiles and de-

pressive-neurotic personalities. Some had been stealing, some had been sexually misused, some had been caught by police as vagabonds. Of the sixty-three children with clinical records whom the police or the social workers sent to our school, sixty could be kept and restored to normality. Three had to be turned away because they endangered the other children, and were sent to special institutions.

Usually these difficult children are incorporated according to a fixed program.

Someone (it may be one of the parents or a relative responsible for the child, or a teacher of another school, sometimes the principal of the Child Guidance Clinic, or the Child Welfare Station, child guidance workers, the head of the police youth station, welfare and social workers, etc.) calls on me and asks me to take the child into my school. Then I have a preliminary talk with the mother, father or the referring person. Since the school should serve only the children of the district, I must make sure that the Board of Education agrees to accept the child. I send the child to the School Psychological Bureau or to the Child Guidance Clinic or to the Children's Department of the Clinic for Psychiatry and Neurology, and ask that the child be tested and examined. Then I inform the prospective teacher as to the child's difficulties. When this administrative work is done, the child, with mother, father, or guardian, enters my office. And now, only the educational recording is played. I begin again.

1. There are weeping mothers or shouting fathers: the tears have to be dried, the furious tempers appeased. I let the mothers weep their full and let the fathers run out their tempers. The main thing is to listen; to listen patiently with smiling sympathy, to listen to all that is *not* exposed, to take a real interest. This is a first survey of what has happened and what the difficulties are. Then follows a detailed talk with the teacher who receives all the records of the tests and clinical examinations so that she may be fully informed and use her knowledge discreetly in the discussion with her class concerning the treatment of the newcomer, his peculiarities and difficulties.

2. I talk to the child in the presence of his parents or guardian and try to reach him and make him feel released; for child and educator must get the feeling that they start afresh.

3. Now a preconceived routine starts:

A boy and a girl, delegates of the class who have been informed of the newcomer's arrival, appear in my office and announce that they

have come to fetch their comrade. He is then solemnly welcomed by the class and the teacher. Sometimes I introduce the child myself or the teacher takes over. Now the child is in the midst of a community which consists chiefly of well adjusted children led by a teacher-educator who is well trained in Individual Psychology and who understands the technique of *Entlasten* (unburdening), *Enthuellen* (disclosing to), and *Belasten* (re-burdening) the child, a technique developed by the Vienna School of Individual Psychology.

Thus the child is put into "grand psychotherapy." We simply call it "re-education." To make the work clear, it is necessary to divide the teacher's educational task into different problem areas.

The Class as a Working-Group (Arbeitsgemeinschaft)

The Experimental School's first task consisted in re-establishing the methods of the *Arbeitschule* of the Glöckel school reform. From this practical work there originated many specific experiments continued throughout one year or more under the guidance of the pedagogical principal. Below is a sample of special problems which arose in the course of the year 1952-1953 which were handled theoretically and practically by various teachers:

First grade:

1. Discovering the whole personality of the child.
2. Pupil drawings judged from the Individual Psychological point of view.
3. The holistic method in the elementary class.

Second grade:

1. Children's faults as stimulating the self-education of the educator.
2. The pedagogical function of "acting" in instruction.

Third grade:

1. Points at which modes and the methods of instruction overlap.
2. The development of class community in the Elementary School.

Fouth grade:

1. Planning of individual coaching based on an Individual Psychological anamnesis.
2. Rhythm as a means of education and teaching.
3. Modern singing and music instruction with performances of works by modern composers such as Hindemith, acting a whole opera such as *Beggar-Balad* by Presgen, and *We Build a Town* by Hindemith.
4. A contribution of case studies.
5. Co-operating with the school choir of the Austrian Broadcast.

These were the special subjects which were worked on in 1952 besides the normal demonstrations for guests at the Elementary School.

The teachers at the *Hauptschule* had their special pedagogical hobbies:

1. Development of a class into a real community in the course of the first and second year.
2. Application of mass-psychology laws in the self-government of the pupils.
3. Diary of a fourteen year old boy after an attack of schizophrenia.
4. Didactic grouping according to Muckle's study phases.
5. In co-operation with the University clinic for Laryngology, "Psychogogic Function-training of the vegetative nerve-system."
6. The Sociogram and its evaluation for group-therapy.
7. *Ex tempore* dramatizing.
8. Psychodrama.
9. The technique of the anamnesis with parents.
10. Experiences with classes where slow and quick working children work side by side.
11. Psychological observations on the problems of the *Schullandheime*.⁵
12. Special way of recording children's progress.

⁵ Summer camps maintained by the Board of Education.

The variety of experimental work gives an idea of the tasks which are put before a pedagogical consultant who has continually to watch, advise, and finally co-ordinate these various experiments. All this is not the real school work, but "hobby."

It was of decisive importance that the teachers change from their old teaching method to the didactic working-phase developed by Phillip Muckle.

On the problem-phase, the problem is put before the child and clearly formulated. On the solving-phase (*Loesungsstufe*), suggestions are put forward, possibilities for solution are considered, methods of solution developed and the solution itself is brought forward by mutual discussion. On the application-phase (*Anwendungsstufe*), systematic order is established and necessary training applied.

From this comprehensive system we developed a technique of switching over from instruction modes to instruction methods.

Instruction Modes

1. Presenting: Lecturing by the teacher or the child; reports of a referee.
2. Developing through questioning: The teacher asks questions and thus the children associate.
3. Free discussion of the class collective or of the group: Argument and counter-argument, independent working out of thoughts and summarizing in rules.

Teaching Methods

1. Individual work.
2. Group work; either the group working on the same subject or each group working on a part of the problem.
3. Working of the whole class.

Depending on the peculiar problem to be solved, the spontaneity and activity of the class is evoked by a switch of approach on what we call the "switchboard of instruction"; it may occur in the course of a single lesson that we switch from the report of several groups to the discussion of the whole class and thence to the explanation or lecture of the teacher. We may switch from the discussion of the collective to the work of the single pupil, or, if one wants to prove a result, we switch from the result of the classwork to the work of the group, and so on in endless variations. Thus we developed in our school an extraordinarily mobile system which aims at the mastering of problems through the teacher-guided activity of the children.

The problem child is put into this active and stimulating working-group. He is continually provoked to co-operate, indirectly through the intensive activity of the other pupils and directly through the urge of the comrades who prompt, "Can you tell us what you think about it? Perhaps our new friend can tell us how his former colleagues have handled this subject." At some time the new pupil, driven by his interest, will make some remark, and since the community has been prepared for it, this positive contribution will be immediately appreciated by the collective. Without singing his praise, but purely as a matter of fact, his contribution is demonstratively acknowledged. Thus *work* is the basic element to bring forth order. A class full of interest, working at their own problems, does not offer any difficulties in discipline. All guests from here or abroad tell us that our children show a true inner discipline.

While working, each child is not only attached to the work itself, but also to his co-workers. Through the common work, interhuman relations and contact and collaboration are inaugurated and trained. Our system is proudly called "work-therapy."

Each one of our problem children is put to such work-therapy, either through a system of help rendered by more efficient pupils under the supervision of the teacher, or through coaching by a trained teacher.

Here may I state that from the viewpoint of Individual Psychology, no training through coaching can enable a feeble-minded child with an I.Q. such as 75 to follow the instruction in a *Hauptschule*. I think nothing has done more damage to Individual Psychology than the enthusiastic ado that appreciative encouragement alone can make all children "tops" of the class. If my co-workers show me that they have done everything possible to understand the child's failure, to help him through coaching and intensive personal efforts, if they prove to have struggled with all their might for the soul of the child and all in vain because the child is not yet mature enough to follow the teacher in this class, then—and only then—I agree to having the child repeat the same grades or to having him transferred to a special class, if, besides that, the child has been tested and the transfer is neither a surprise nor a shock to the child or his parents. Nothing more can be done if one does not want to lose the safe ground of reality.

The Class as an Experience-Group (Erlebnisgemeinschaft)

The class functions not only as a working-group, but also as an experience-group. Interhuman relations mean more than common

work. Children not only have to learn to work together, but also to live together. Each class has its own climate. It starts with the discussion about the recesses and continues in planning and carrying out outings. Common festivals, especially, change the class into an experience-group. Each class forms its own Christmas festival, its Carnival party, its Easter feast. There are also big feasts for the parents, children's teas with their self-made programs, dances with a real polonaise (all our classes are co-educational), and a buffet with sandwiches, fancy cakes, pastries, cocoa, tea, and ice cream prepared in our school kitchen. There are performances of modern plays, and musicales such as Hindemith's *We Build a Town*. Our children frequent the Youth Theater and we had our famous *Burgtheater*⁶ visit our school three times with scenes of Mary Stuart, Don Carlos, and some scenes of Raimund's works. Under the exchange program of Vienna's *Schullandheimwerk* (summer camps), a group of boys and girls of our *Hauptschule* make a trip to England every year for four weeks and live there in the English way. Then again, a fourth grade *Hauptschule* plays the role of social worker in living together with English children in the Hostel of Mittelwald in Corinthia throughout four weeks and arranges a trip to Venice with their guests.

What four weeks *Schullandheim* (school summer camp) means from the point of view of education I need not stress: to live together day and night, child with child, child with teachers, teacher with teacher, welded together through common sorrow and pleasure, teaches responsibility not only for oneself, but also for others. For all children, but especially for our problem children, these weeks at the *Schullandheim* mean living in the community for the community. Only if we experience what community is really like are we ready to work for it.

But our system makes us realize that experience alone is not all. This experience must be made conscious. All that furthers community or hampers it must be raised into consciousness by discussion.

The Class as a Discussion-Group (Aussprachgemeinschaft)

The children experience another world when they realize that the children discuss everything; what furthers them, what oppresses and hampers them, what helps their work or hinders it, who or what disturbs them, what they judge should be done and how it could be done

⁶ Outstanding legitimate theater group in Vienna.

better, and how to choose their helpers when difficulties arise. They do control and criticize, but they also suffer criticism because they feel it to be of help. Here, especially, our problem children learn that, "Here, even *I* am allowed to speak. Here I may have an opinion of my own. Here I am taken seriously. No one laughs at me because I am different. Here is consideration and negotiation. Here we think over what could be going on in another child's mind when he does not behave well. Here we learn to understand one another and to help one another. Here we really live together."

We try to gain co-operation between the school and the home. The parents of the pupils form parents' associations which meet once a month and discuss subjects of common interest such as: "Why co-education?"; "Problems of Education in Puberty"; "Modern History Teaching"; "Why a School Parliament?"; "Kindness and Severity Both Ineffective"; and "School Once and Now."

More effective in their pedagogical value are the meetings of the parents of one class. Nearly every month the teacher calls the parents of her class to a meeting. In the Elementary School nearly 100 per cent, rarely under 75 per cent, follow this invitation. In these class meetings there is a close contact between parents and teacher, with a most favorable result. All the problems of the class can be discussed and many a clever teacher conducts group-therapy. It is understood that parents may attend class lessons occasionally. We have open doors.

The third form of co-operation is the Individual Psychological technique of child guidance. Our co-workers engage in child guidance in their spare time. More complicated and problematic cases are talked over with me, or I take over. This therapy is an essential part of our endeavors because, lacking the active co-operation of many mothers, and especially fathers, we at least manage that the parents keep neutral and do not hamper our efforts. There is much effort and explanation needed to convince the parents of the necessity of their co-operation. The parents of the problem children are most grateful for our help, but many parents of the so-called "good" children cannot and will not understand why their "sweet" child should be held back by such "good-for-nothings." These parents feel that such problem children do not belong in a normal class.

This attitude of so many parents hampers our work the most. But parents' class-meetings and personal discussions help us to overcome the difficulties.