

Fear in the Schoolroom

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There are people who love abstract ideas that they believe hold absolute meaning. With the notions Fear, Incentive, Effort and Schoolroom they would play cleverly for hours, as if they were balls of definite color and size. And there are others who like to watch that game, which is certainly sometimes very brilliant.

We also find men and women who consider such a show as barren and tiresome. They would rather carefully observe life in the concrete, in order to discover hints which may render fertile their intercourse with children, with a view to helping them become useful and happy citizens of the world of tomorrow. With their eyes wide open for reality, these men and women have met numerous persons who had been hard-working pupils because they were always in fear of punishment and who passed their university examinations splendidly, but, nevertheless, received for the essay of their life the marking: "Neurotic."

These observers have usually noticed, too, that in social life, fear of punishment, even capital punishment—by the gallows, electric chair, guillotine, or axe—has rarely made anybody act with that love of his neighbor preached so sublimely by Jesus of Nazareth. So in regard to a school, they may be inclined to ask how can the error occur that Fear is considered an incentive for children's efforts?

These observers may find an unfortunate teacher who has before him in a crowded class forty or more children to whom his very appearance is frightening, and who never forgets the amount of knowledge that he has to put into the heads of his pupils in a given time. He makes them uneasy with the exaggerated importance which he attributes to the curriculum. He is an ambitious master who, in order to conquer in the erroneously conceived "struggle for life," strives to appear as a superman in the eyes of the world in general and of his principal and supervisor in particular, and tries unduly to push his pupils ahead. Sometimes he is a human being who suffered in his childhood from cruel domination of his surroundings and became a teacher because this profession allowed him to reverse the early situation. Now it is he who inspires fear in others, who, being youngsters, seem to be easy objects for his lust for domination.

The unbiased observer who is not caught in the magic circle of this "fear-maker" recognizes quite easily certain truths which escape the limited perception of the anxious teacher. For instance, the former sees that a frightening attitude toward the pupils provokes both uneasiness and a permanent rebellion among them; that an atmosphere of hostility does not show the teacher as an educator but as a "policeman;" that in this way he is able to teach even less of the sacred curriculum. Again, the observer will recognize that the man of fear will remain a poor person-

ality as long as he does not have enough social interest to work and fight outside his profession for a better order of society, in which crowded classrooms are considered as unworthy prisons and the policeman function as incompatible with the dignity of an educator.

But let us not take the attitude of those whom we criticized at the beginning. "Better Order of Society," "Prison," "Dignity," can become bloodless abstractions, too, which do not help anybody to achieve better results. The ambitious policeman-teacher with his neurotic "will to power" and "striving for superiority" cannot wait until the transformation of our society allows him a real dignity. And here is the point: Being a product of his circumstances, he is at the same time their producer. If we can bring him to renounce the principle of Fear as an incentive to effort in the schoolroom, his bewitched circle may be disenchanting and he may become able to create a new world in his old schoolroom. Probably he will not admit his error unless he has had a nervous breakdown—a character crisis which shattered his very personality—but in those lucky cases where professional conflicts have made an educator re-educable, he will learn that greater than Fear is Courage, that everywhere the technique of encouragement overcomes the penology.

Courage is connected with the attitude which some call "love of neighbor" or "social interest." It can never be directed *against* humanity. It means the ability to sustain failures and to overcome difficulties through training and common sense. People who are afraid will inspire fear. In order to incite efforts by use of encouragement instead of fear, one must oneself be courageous.

The encouraging teacher will avoid everything that is, in the long run, discouraging, as, for instance, corporal punishment, threatening, belittling, making unjust criticism, prophesying a "bad end," pretending that one or the other character trait is inherited, declaring that a child is a hopeless case, not gifted, just too stupid. (There are fewer stupid children and many more stupid teachers than one usually thinks.)

The encouraging teacher, however, will never pamper children by praising them unrestrictedly or for things which are not the result of their personal effort; or by removing difficulties which they must learn to tackle by themselves. He will banish all pessimism and introduce joy as an incentive to effort. He will also set himself against vain comparisons which many parents make between their children and others. As Rousseau suggested, if he must compare, he will make the comparison between the former, present, and possible future state of the child. When you explain to children how weak and ignorant they have been formerly, how much they have already learned, and what progress they have made, you encourage them toward new efforts, toward new successes. The encourager will not allow that vicious circle to creep up, in which failure and discouragement are linked, but will install that sound circle where every little success augments the courage, and where more courage spells

new success and progress to the child in the ripening and developing of his personality.

If you as an educator see your main function in creating this joyful game, in modestly helping the development of the child's vitality to overcome growing difficulties, you will not worry about your personal prestige or about a curriculum. You may even dare to dissolve large classes that can be dominated only by fear into small study groups and working communities. You will thus save a lot of now wasted time and force, and you will no longer discuss the fictitious value of fear, but will work, besides teaching, for the betterment of the economic conditions in a world that is as frightful as it is marvelous.

THERAPY

Five times Jonathon Pryde
Wrestled with the Devil
Deep inside.
Five times the Devil ran—
Jonathon cried, "I'm a new man!"

Ten times Jonathon Pryde
Called to the Lord,
"See I'm new inside."
Ten times the Lord did call,
"Jonathon, you're not changed at all!"

Jonathon dropped a tear from his eye,
Said to his friends, "I think I'll die."
Went to a lair like an old Tom cat,
Grew a face of whiskers and hair like a mat.

One day Jonathon looked in a glass
And his knuckles turned white
At what had come to pass.

No one heard when the mirror crashed,
No one knew when Jonathon fell,
No one ever saw Pryde before
Beat his head and fists on the floor.

No one knew when weak and bruised
Jonathon crawled to the side of his bed,
Raised his arms and made this cry,
"Lord, Lord, I must not die."

Jonathon fell and slept like one dead,
But forgotten pictures danced through his head.

When he woke at last he went down the street
And each old friend he sought to greet.
He met Sam Prout on Gallways Corner
And asked for a job on his farm for the morrow.

He didn't say what and he didn't say why,
But he wanted to work out under the sky,
Under the sky with the Lord above,
And close to the earth that showed His love.

And as he worked he knew what to do—
He'd do his best with what he knew.

Irving G. Moore