

## The Teacher as Psychological Observer

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There are not only many physical differences between the children in a class, there are numerous psychological differences as well. Of course there are often strong points of similarity (it is these points, in fact, which permit us to postulate "types") but even the two most similiar children are distinguished from one another by certain nuances. Every child, like every single human being, is precisely a unique phenomenon, an individual unit that exists but once. To classify a child, to put him down as one of a certain type—as is done in diagnosis—tells us little about his special case. To know him we must study the shades and tints peculiar to him, and to do this "presumes artistic understanding on the part of the observer."

In other words, the teacher lives in a world of many colors, so if an attempt is made to reproduce it in a few rapid strokes of the brush it is impossible to do justice to the finer details of tone and shade. Nevertheless, if we try and portray certain members of the class, depicting them simply as "types," we can hope that the reader will be generous enough to set his imagination to work and fill out the general composition and form—as well as add a dash of color here and there. It is not unlikely that he will recognize these types, for without doubt, at some time or other, they have brought him many hours of happiness and often he has mingled his laughter with their own. And, on the other hand, he may often have been overwhelmed with anxiety over the progress of a child who has been led astray by a characteristic fault, and often he may have known great sorrow when one of his wards went too far out to be rescued.

Each teacher is faced by the same onerous tasks and consequently all teachers are members of a single body, no matter what geographical divisions may separate them. Identical, or at least similiar difficulties confront us all, no matter what language our charges may speak, and each one of us wrestles with these problems and searches for ways and means by which they can be eliminated. *The school formula has yet to be found:* we are all seekers, strugglers, bemused travelers. But the fact that we bestir ourselves and reach out our hands to one another across all borders and *make common cause of our search for the right way*—this is truly the best part of our lives as teachers and it fills us with that inner satisfaction and freedom which brings us strength and happiness.

So now, with a single spiritual aim because of our fated bond, let us enter the classroom. Thirty-six youngsters, averaging ten years of age, sit at their desks bent over a written exercise. There is absolute silence in the room. Slowly one of the boys raises his head and his eyes stray to his neighbor in search of help. He has hardly begun to work before succumbing to a choking sense of his own helplessness. His wavering eyes reflect his anxiety about his work, an anxiety that is characteristic of his whole

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nature. It stops him from taking part in discussions and it is still evident when he gets out on the playground and has to "tag" his man; it is expressed in his dreams, dreams that condemn his mother to endless nights of wakefulness and faithful care when he screams piercingly and shivers in his bed, white to the lips. He is the *Scared Rabbit*, the type who sees life as a demon past whom one must squeeze, shyly and timidly, or flee from with one's knees knocking together.

How different is his neighbor! The latter, unlike the Scared Rabbit, doesn't tremble all over when he has to stand up in front of the class and give his answers. He speaks quietly and modestly and gets his business done, but at the same time he is deeply self-absorbed. He is a restrained keeper-of-the-peace. Only rarely does he take part in rowdy games; he prefers to stand aside and remain a quiet onlooker. Hardly ever does he voluntarily become involved in a discussion; he seeks no friends and he has none. He treads his own path and withdraws into his own solitariness, where, as a *Hermit*, he builds himself a private world, shut off from the boisterous, intrusive stream of life by an invisible wall.

The boy with the soft, girlish visage, with a hazy expression in his dark, moist eyes, belongs in quite another category. His mother is a calm, tender woman who told him fairy-tales and stories that are still real to him; when he passes a little square of green park it turns into a fairy forest in which gnomes go about their trickery and bright elves dance dream-drunken in a misty ring. Through a shroud of smoky vapour a little stream glides sluggishly through the coal-fields and he sees its murky ripples with their oily lights become the multi-colored, iridescent palace of slender water-sprites—little beings besieged by the black demons of the land and fled away into the depths of the crystal waters. He sets to work to pile little wooden bricks on top of one another, till finally they become a castle of gold and ivory. Then he, the fairy prince, withdraws into the castle with the princess he has rescued from a host of dangers. . . . How oppressed he feels in this bleak, realistic world; a world in which there are such things as sums, and irritating teachers who insist that sums can have only right or wrong solutions! Where only too rarely he finds friends who are ready to slip away into the world of fantasy and tread the same path as our *Dreamer*. What can he do but wish himself out of this realm of hard facts and in a world that slips farther from his reach every day, and with this longing in his heart what can he do but dream in broad daylight?

But the boy behind him is cast in a very different mold. He feels the world's just the right place for him! Look at him now, stretching, lolling, and bursting into a huge yawn! We can almost hear him saying: "School-work's by no means pleasant, but one can put up with it all right. All one has to do is make it a bit less troublesome. Four pages we're supposed to write . . . ? Oh, let's make it two! After all . . . what's the odds? One sermon more or less—that's about all it comes to. A bad report? Oh, well, if the rain drums around your ears all day you soon get used to it and in the end you just don't hear the swish of the drops at all. And, to tell you the truth, its quite pleasant to get so much attention

from the teacher! He pays far more to me than he does to the fellows who go racing along like squirrels. So I never feel much like watching the board when he's trying to explain something, nor do I bother when—absurdly enough—I'm expected to hand in a written exercise! Its much better and much easier to crib it off a pal. People are always crying 'Faster! Faster!' to me. So what? As though I couldn't do anything I liked if I really felt like putting my mind to it. And people are always ramming 'the future' down my throat. Telling me what I, the *sluggard* am already making of it! Gosh, why worry; something'll turn up all right. . . . Why sweat when you can take it easy? Now there's real pleasure in dawdling through life, in being lazy and, at the same time, realizing that in spite of everything you're a real, smart fellow who'd only have to make up his mind and he'd leave the whole class gaping!"

Next, Reader, do you recognize the slim, pale kid over there who often must have brought you to the verge of distraction? We'll introduce him:—*Master Waterfall*. He has a pretty tough time with the other boys—but how hard he makes it for them! And—how hard for the teacher! When you speak to Waterfall your every word must be selected with the utmost care, for his ears are pricked to catch the faintest suggestion of rebuke. When a game gets going he has to be "tagged" by the merest touch of the hand, for he feels the mildest blow in the form of a burning pain. And, of course, if some truculent little fellow thinks this is a good chance to have a bit of sport . . . well, there's nothing for Waterfall to do but rush his woes to the teacher and submerge him with a flood of tears. When so much pain, danger and defeat exist, one can only shirk and surrender.

In any case, what good would it do him to turn into a struggling, plodding type of boy when there is another member of the class to whom the thrill of victory is meat and drink, and who constantly inveigles and plans for the defeat of his fellows so as to satisfy this appetite? Everyone is very much aware of the power of his muscles, which are worked into shape every day on a punch-ball. The *Bully* knows how to plan his victories. First he provokes his victim with biting, sarcastic remarks and challenging looks and gestures. (He is adept at the art of rousing his prey.) Then he follows up with jibes, insults and apparently playful cuffs and pushes, until finally the other, flying into a passion, hits back once . . . in earnest. Only now does the Bully really get to work and in a few minutes his man is lying defeated on the ground. The victory is savoured to the full as a whole vial of scorn is poured out upon the conquered wretch, while the audience is treated to a detailed description of just how the victory was won. Then the *Camp Followers* burst into applause and each vies with his fellow in praising the victor's strength and technique, each woos him with honeyed words because he is terribly afraid of being the next sacrifice himself and also secretly hopes to consolidate his own status by obtaining the hero's friendship.

There is only one boy in the class of whom the Bully is afraid and at whose disposal he is ready to place his entire armory. This boy is a real *Gang-Leader*. He hardly ever takes the center of the stage for the simple

reason that he is too busily employed behind-scenes. A certain clique of children have become his subjects, and he lords it over them, not by sheer brawn, but by the command he has of peculiar situations and of the technique of trickery; by his clever exploitation of existing antagonisms; by sly dictatorship through the medium of an appropriate middleman, and by a refined method of extortion. He rules with his personality, for he is the kernel of an almost legendary structure. Fabulous deeds, vastly impressive to the children, though actually quite imaginary, are attributed to him; a veil of mystery surrounds his person. His tools are his lieutenants, who bask in his reflected glory and share the fruits of his conquests. His subjects are always aware of his fascinating mysteriousness and it is this which engenders in them an obsequiousness that verges upon serfdom and makes them ready to pay any tribute he may demand. A boy will go so far as to lose all thought of himself and throw in his lot with the Gang-Leader even when the latter moves contrary to his deepest convictions.

A far more sympathetic type in many ways is the *Smartaleck*. As far as his companions are concerned he is always the center of attention; and at times the class resembles a group of enthusiasts awaiting the start of a steeple-chase. Regular bets are made on whether Smarty will come up to scratch and make a good showing today. Some of the class get disappointed if a full hour goes by and Smarty, absorbed in his work, has failed to perform one of his famous smart-alecisms. With a good deal of condescending pity the word goes round: "Too bad! He's lost his nerve today!" Now such disparagement hits Smarty very hard and he simply cannot take it lying down. So in the next period he gets to work on a sensational program. He has a comment for every word the teacher says; he replies by pulling a long face at him and he probes his weak spots, deprecates and overwhelms him with caustic foolery. Nor does he worry over the fact that a business of this nature is very expensive to run. Even when he has been punished with a written assignment he throws it off by remarking: "Gee! That'll be too much for my fountain pen," and thus, even in defeat, he contrives to flaunt a banner of victory. Superficially the rest of the class seem perfectly horrified at Smarty, but inwardly they are gurgling with delight. Smarty is the hero of the hour and his public is jubilant: "Gosh! He's got a nerve, all right! He's no sissy!"

Yes, the public! How grateful it is to anyone who can introduce a little diversion and fun. . . . As the bees swarm around their queen so do the children swarm around the *Buffoon*. Some of the types I have listed here may not be present in every class, but the Buffoon is always there. His caprices are endless. He has to train his facial muscles to perform the most incredible contortions, and his limbs to break into the most grotesque postures. A youngster's favourite character is the clown, and the Buffoon imitates him; on someone's back he pins a bit of paper bearing the words: "I can't think why you're all laughing!" He hides in a closet and during the period celebrates the occasion with happy smirks, amid peals of laughter from the others. His mere appearance is enough to cause extravagant mirth: a couple of grimaces—and a whole avalanche of

laughter gets under way in surges which drown all appeals for studiousness and continue long afterward in fading, murmuring ripples of infectious titters. The Buffoon is the center of attraction, (and how it flatters him to be!) he provokes laughter, amazement, applause and admiration! He can always rely upon the unconditional sympathy of his fellows, and even the teacher finds it hard to get really angry with him and refrain from joining in the general laughter, for the Buffoon's antics are usually harmless and always droll.

The *Leech* is another conspicuous type—conspicuous, however, in a very unpleasant way. He spends his entire time clinging to the teacher, ceaselessly begging information about the most trivial details simply to keep the teacher on the run and force his attention. The Leech never leaves the teacher's side; he is forever making some kind of unimportant request: "Please, should I . . . ?," "Please, can I . . . ?" "Please, how ought I . . . ?" He is a parasite, attached to the teacher with suckers in the form of questions, wants, difficulties; he never gives his mentor a moment's peace and, ultimately, even drags him into the sphere of his private life.

Well, shall we introduce any more types? Is it necessary when, in the abundant experience of your own life as a teacher, you have learned to know them all, and to know them only too well:—the Ninny, the Fawner, the Tittle-tattle, the Grumbler, the Show-off, the Prattler, the Peace-breaker, the Busybody, the Stubborn, the Braggart, the Truant, the Fatalist, the Spitfire, the Whiner . . . and a thousand other dispositions, each with a characteristic flaw which, retained in after-life, plagues both the individual and the community in which he lives.

Any teacher would be driven to desperation if he did not know that there was another side to the medal, that there were types in his class whose activity was essentially of a positive variety. Of these, for instance, there is one who is a real *Leader*. His most prominent characteristic is his superiority; his personality fascinates the children and they devote themselves to him with every ounce of their childish faith. He is intelligent enough to be able to grasp a given situation with great promptness and to know exactly where he stands in relation to it; his imagination covers a wide field and is constantly creating fresh notions which entirely captivate the children. He is serious, when seriousness is necessary, but has also a great turn for fun. He commands his personal group, but does so with creative initiative directed toward joint action of constructive value. His tactful nature helps him to effect compromises with the opposition and to reconcile warring elements, but he performs these reconciliatory acts without pomposity and exhibitionism, making his goal a positive and progressive one. It is the results he obtains through such activities that command the esteem, respect and even complete self-abnegation of his comrades.

Very similar qualifications are found in the *Specialist*. He is one who leads in a certain field and, as a rule, his creative faculties do not extend beyond it. For instance, he may be a popular games-leader, but not outstanding in any other sphere. As a games-leader his supremacy is undisputed and, what is more, it is accepted voluntarily, even enthusiastically, by the others. He has an inexhaustible creative ability when it comes to

working out new ways of playing old games: with a flawless certainty that greatly impresses the children he plans the part each boy shall play, so that, quite automatically, the captaincy falls to him. Sometimes, of course, the Specialist's line is some manual activity—say woodworking—and through it he acquires a special and often very envied status. When occasion arises such Specialists come to the surface in the most varied spheres of activity, and to the teacher they are most helpful and welcome persons to have around.

As a type, the *Helper* definitely must be ranked with the positives. It does not occur to him to exert influence upon others and to organize them. Helpers are not in direct, intensive contact with the others in the way the Leaders are. In the main the Helpers are children who, as a result of their good natures, are very popular, but they never stand out prominently in class-life because of their lack of social activity. They have a typical function—that of helping, and through helping they make their appeal to their fellows. Probably their actions are inspired by purely objective considerations. They do not make a point of helping certain boys—say, their friends—on the contrary, they are ready to give help wherever it is needed. Pleasure in the task itself seems to be the predominating motive. On the whole a pleasing type of youngster.

And so we see that each class is a blend of cooperative and uncooperative children; a melee of conflicting tendencies with the teacher as its center. In so difficult a position there is never an hour when the teacher is not aware of how hard it is to reconcile the most contrary cross-purposes, and to turn positive, creative powers into their proper channels. For this he must do before even he can begin to teach! No outsider—father, mother, or even school official—can fully appreciate the complexity of this task, this welding together of such heterogeneous elements. Day in, day out the teacher must perform this work of co-ordination, must lead these many types of children as near as possible to a state of frictionless harmony; and this job is not one imposed upon him by the orders of a superior; it is made inevitable by the very nature of things. He alone, the teacher, really *experiences* the work in its full complexity, and he alone feels the red-hot exigencies of the situation actually burning his finger-tips.

Consequently it is not surprising that the cry for right and proper means of teaching, for *reformed education*, should come from the lips of the teachers. They are in no position simply to *take notes* on the children's psychological manifestations and then evolve ingenious, academic theories. Nor is it much help to them if a similarity of cases enables them to postulate "*types*" and to classify their cases accordingly. This is an invaluable means of obtaining knowledge in the field of economics, but it cannot be satisfactory in the pedagogical field for the simple reason that every time a teacher faces a class an inexorable voice cries: "Action!" This is the whole crux of the matter, and hence the question before us is: "What is to be done?"

The teachers' difficulties are made still more complicated by the parents' attitudes. Sometimes parents seem to feel that school is simply a place for academic instruction, and their interest is devoted entirely to their child's scholastic progress. At other times they regard the school as

a necessary evil, and anything that transcends the most rudimentary learning and achievement they condemn as entirely superfluous, on the grounds that "in real life" such trivialities don't get a person anywhere. Or, thirdly, the teacher may find embittered opposition to his methods hidden behind a mask of enthusiastic agreement. Again, we often meet with the type of parent who is exaggeratedly anxious regarding the child's welfare, who cannot do enough for it, but considers any deviation from his or her special recipe for blessedness as a personal insult. Finally, there are parents with whom every teacher is familiar—those who possess a vast cornucopia of pedagogical theory and practice which they empty over the teacher's head on every possible occasion.

From the teacher's point-of-view parents appear as the protagonists of a thousand different forms of education, each form having its special maxim. Hence, when all the parents are shouting their maxims at once, like a massed choir, the result is a chaotic din. "The only right way is the way of natural development!" "Through discipline we attain freedom!"; "Children must learn to fight their own battles!"; "Children must learn to be humble!"; "Spartan austerity is the road to strength!"; "Love is the only way!"; "If you love your child you will not spare the rod!"; "My child must have a better school-life than I had!"; "Only the severest discipline is effective!"; "Everything comes right of itself!"; "One is obliged to bow one's head before the majesty of a child!"; "The little brats aren't worth the trouble!"

On these maxims children are reared. They are pampered, coddled, nagged at; they are treated harshly and unlovingly, and these various methods of training have their roots in the specific life-styles of the parents which, in turn, are the fruits of the formative influence of certain traditional methods of upbringing, or of the revolt against such methods. The type of upbringing sponsored by the parent is the outward and visible sign of a certain conception of life. It is this which is so shattering; the fact that these diverse, parental maxims arise out of deep, sincere convictions; that the specific method of training employed by the parents is based upon the best intentions. *The parents know no better*: their actions are bonafide throughout! Who will think to cast the first stone? And yet, on the other hand, so often parents come to the teacher, bewildered and helpless, and look upon him as an expert guide who must point the right way. "You must tell me what to do, teacher! I've tried everything: I've been lenient and I've been strict, but it's no good." Once more we put the question: "What is to be done?"

Our world is a hard one; a world that demands strong, capable human beings, so the school is obliged to hunt up ways and means by which their pupils can satisfy highly complex demands. This is why the school tries so hard to find out where a child's talents lie. Behind this talent-research, primarily, is belief in the necessity for supplying the child with a definite preparation for the economic system. Hence the school's leaning toward Experimental Psychology, and its interest in tests for summing up a child's qualifications, individual specifications and defects; hence its role as standard-bearer for all those psychologies nicknamed "Possession Psychologies"

by Alfred Adler, i.e., those which aim chiefly at ascertaining everything with which a child is naturally endowed.

It is obvious that human society reserves its chief interest for the school as a place of instruction. Those whom it elects as its deputies in the instructional field do not wield any power of their own; they are, indirectly, the users of a power that springs from an economic ideology. Consequently their main efforts are devoted to raising the degree of functional ability in children who are ready to become part of the economic process. Again, these economic demands qualify very largely the extent of the course of instruction in the school curriculum, and the representatives of the educational directors concentrate mainly upon the instructional results obtained by the teacher.

This becomes all the more understandable when we realize that a school supervisor has only limited visiting-time at his disposal and can hardly be expected to study the teacher's achievements in the field of child-guidance, let alone to establish the results obtained in this field with individual cases. All the supervisor can do is the easy task of examining the child's functional ability, and pass a professional opinion upon the method of teaching employed. If we add that the supervisor is almost crushed by a load of administrative work we realize how great is the danger that the teacher's activities—subject as they are to the strictures of a Board—may be hemmed in by a bureaucratic hedge.

Should the teacher, by reason of professional ethics, decide to put more stress upon the child-guidance side of his work, he will find his greatest stumbling-block in the insistence upon "stuff" that can be mastered; i.e., upon results that are easy to recognize and easy to gauge. Moreover, placed in his post as an instructor by the representatives of society, he cannot evade their demands—despite the fact that he stands in the heart of the school, is sensitive to its every daily need and convinced that *the increase in material success, so hotly desired by his superiors, is dependent primarily upon the child's taking a proper attitude toward life and its tasks.*

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#### RECENT LITERATURE IN INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY

Lee R. Steiner's book on "Where People Take Their Troubles" has recently been published by Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, Mass., and has been very well received.

"A Manual of Child Guidance" by Dr. Rudolf Dreikurs has been published as a text for use at the Chicago Medical School and may be obtained through the Bulletin.