

The Whole Teacher

by Joseph H. Allen

Who is the Teacher?

TEACHING is not a simple technique of instruction but a mutual respect in reciprocal communication. It is essential to attain the best in Child Education to relate the three main participants in the following order of importance: the child, the parent and the teacher. In the ideal teaching situation, the teacher is least important. The teacher's chief importance is in the position of custodian of the child. Therefore teaching, though a Profession, is primarily a Vocation. It is a profession in that it assumes a Code of Ethics, with a specialised knowledge; and contains a variable number of acquired teaching techniques. For Profession is a cold word; whereas, Vocation has a warmth of understanding.

It must be seen that teaching is a Vocation, for it demands of the good teacher a dedication to the work undertaken. Also, it presupposes a gravity of thought in which the teacher must find himself placed, for a teacher is voluntarily placed as custodian of the children under his care. The teacher is, in this sense, no more than a foster parent of the child, without ever usurping the parental right over the child. This is not to say the teacher will not be called upon to bear, often with great charity, some part of a parent's responsibility toward the child under his care. Nevertheless, the teacher must recognise at all times his supplementary position and, here, I apologise for a continued reference to the teacher as he. It is equally relevant to refer to the teacher as she. The fact remains, the mother is by nature and instinct the best of all teachers.

What Makes a Good Teacher?

A good teacher must be a person with a belief. The teacher must believe sincerely in that which he has voluntarily undertaken to do. Therefore, a teacher with a belief must be a person with a faith; for belief and faith are synonymous terms. The good teacher must have faith in the belief of his ability to contribute, as stated in the 1944 Education Act, to the child's spiritual, mental and physical development. Also, as faith and belief are synonymous so, too, is trust; for there is no faith without trust. Hence, a good teacher must be trustworthy for the child to be able to trust him implicitly. These are not high-falutin terms, or pious thoughts, they are absolutely fundamental to the work of a good teacher. They are the simple words of what some people may consider an old morality. But like the teachings of Charlotte Mason, you can be sure they are the words to be there when the new-fangled words of much of the expertise jargon of today are no longer in fashion.

A good teacher is a person, who must consider his work seriously, but never take himself too seriously. He must always be prepared to express the humility of humour. In this way, the good teacher always must try to disprove George Bernard Shaw's dictum concerning teachers. A teacher must not be

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'a man among boys; and a boy among men'. In fact the good teacher must prove the converse to be true and, by so doing, the good teacher will have the child's respect without losing the humility to laugh at himself, a humility that will help restrain a natural inclination to pomposity.

Therefore, a good teacher must never feel too embarrassed to say, 'I don't know' for the teacher is not engaged as a walking encyclopaedia, or dictionary.

Once a man said to a colleague, thrusting a dictionary into his hands, 'That's a book you should read'. But, we know, a dictionary, is not a philosophy; and reflects no more than the meanings of conventional words. More important to a teacher is the need of a philosophy. A philosophy in which he believes, as a faith, and, in which, he and the children can trust. Even a simply [sic] philosophy of service, based in sympathy and understanding without being sentimental and lacking in discipline. Without such a philosophy, the unfortunate teacher will go the way of too many of his colleagues, down the path of the barren wastes of cynicism and ineffectualness. A most grievous deficiency in any teacher; and a denial of his vocation if not apostasy. It is a deficiency often found in a teacher, who has lost the art of learning simplicity from the children he teaches; a teacher, in fact, who is no longer amazed at the wisdom and honesty of children.

The same honesty, as of the child, who recently [sic] told his Maths teacher, 'Sir', he said, 'I'm not half getting on well in my Maths!' 'Oh, are you?' the teacher replied. 'I am pleased.' 'Yes,' the child concluded, 'especially since my dad's been teaching me!' Such a back-handed compliment, the good teacher must not only accept but welcome. It is then, he knows, he has the necessary rapport and a firm relationship with his children; from which to help form successfully the characters of his children. To this end, in his help in the formation of his children's characters, his true vocation lies. It is from this two-way respect, he will create a love and appreciation within his class, which is the base of all good teaching. A further misconception, not to be overlooked, is that wisdom is not the sole prerogative of the 'A' child. An observant teacher will find wisdom, understanding and sympathy within the slower child, often in excess of the more intelligent child.

What Must a 'Good' Teacher Not Be!

The good teacher must never teach his children according to a frequently used maxim, 'Don't do as I do—do as I say'. To do this is to prove Shaw's dictum of teachers to be true; for such a teacher is not even a man among boys. Not only will that teacher lose his children's respect, but unwittingly, expose his hypocrisy to his children. It is a maxim, too, that is not consistent with good discipline.

Further, true discipline is self-discipline, which is not forced. Therefore, the good teacher must be seen, as in law, to 'do as he says'. By example, he must be seen to subscribe to a personal discipline. The final fruition, of which, is an ordered discipline.

Discipline is also maintained through consistency. The good teacher must be consistent; and, like justice, his handling of his class must be seen to be consistent. This does not mean the teacher's character must develop to a certain pattern before his class; but there must be a consistency of development. The children's trust in their teacher must grow with the personal [p 102]

confidence instilled in the children by the teacher. An example, as shown, by a recent remark made by a child of another colleague, 'Sir's all right,' he told his mother, 'but we've only had him for one term'.

'So?' his mother asked.

'Well,' said the child, 'we'll give him a little longer; for, if he's going to slip up, he'll slip

up later than sooner.’

A teacher must be of such a character, to which, he may hope, the children will aspire. Always, too, he must recognise he is under the constant scrutiny of the children. This does not presuppose the teacher must be a paragon of virtue, as such. He must, in a Christian sense, be virtuous but not self-righteous. Never must he impose upon himself an impossible, hypocritical standard of behaviour. His behaviour must be true to his own character, and not assumed to impress. Such false hypocritical behaviour will certainly not impress his children but help erect a barrier between him and his children. Simply, he must be true to himself. Then a child can write of his teacher, in a written piece to describe any character, ‘He is a grey-haired man of many years. Yet, unlike many other teachers, he wears colourful shirts and ties; and always wears white socks.’ As another child wrote of the music teacher, ‘I like her very much—but we don’t get enough of her’. These are the genuine remarks of children who identify themselves with their teacher; and, such teachers are happily accepted in their classroom.

The good teacher should be diligent in the promotion of new and good educational ideas, without the unworthy hope and inordinate desire for promotion. Promotion should come from an honest endeavour to serve the children and not to use the children to promote his own ambition. This is another hypocritical pose that will be identified as such, sooner-or-later, by the children. Such teachers will attend courses not to improve their ability in the classroom but to furnish themselves with ammunition for their next application for promotion. Their honesty will soon be suspect; for, unlike the good shepherd, they would abandon their sheep, and the classroom for more secluded pastures. In a modern sense, they wish to be ‘with it’ but not ‘in it’. These teachers will immediately identify themselves with the professional jargon and questionable, educational fashions of the moment. They become self-seeking and a lie to a teaching situation.

We can assert, that, neither a committal nor loyalty to a class situation will be achieved through gimmickry. For it is possible to be up to date without either the use of gimmickry or keeping up with the Television Ad’s [sic] . A true base for good teaching is a natural sincerity; to be simple enough to talk in tune with the children’s many, and often, surprising interests. It is well to remember two and two made four before you came into teaching and will remain four when you have retired. No gimmick can substitute the fact. These facts a good teacher recognises and presents them to his children in the simplest possible way.

Finally, a teacher is not set before a class to discriminate between child and child. It is enough to say, if all children are equal before God, they must remain so before their teacher. Still, should this reason not suffice, the teacher should never lose sight of the natural fact that, despite any reason for a dislike of a child, *that* child the teacher does not like, is the child of some mother, whom, we trust, sincerely loves him. The dislike a teacher has for

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a child arises from hurt pride. Probably, the child in question has, at sometime, not responded as the teacher had hoped; or has not given the teacher the respect the teacher thought he deserved. Respect is relative; and a teacher is respected by his children to the same degree that he respects them.

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Such are the main recommendations for the role of the good teacher, and pitfalls to be avoided. Next to consider is a closer child-teacher relationship.

The good teacher, then, must at all times be sincere with a sincerity that will help create loyalty and self-discipline [sic] in his children. His sincerity will help gain for him the respect the teacher must have to create a true teaching situation. Classroom discipline is a two-way process. It is created out of a mutual respect and understanding between children and teacher.

A good teacher will commit his children to all aspects of their class-relationship, despite the erroneous argument that children, especially Junior schoolchildren, are too young to be committed, a spurious argument when we consider the many thousands of young children committed to the support of their favourite football team.

The question is, to what will the good teacher commit his children? What is a class-relationship? First the child must be committed to honesty which, you hope, he will never lose. The child must be committed to learning. Knowledge for the sake of knowledge is not a sufficient end in itself. Temporarily, the bright child may find satisfaction in the pursuit of knowledge so that he may know; but all knowledge will turn sour if it has no end to which it can be applied.

Therefore, it is necessary, to return to the invaluable importance of an overall faith or purpose; and this purpose cannot be assumed. It is better to assume the converse.

With all true knowledge, to know is not the same as to believe. It is through trust a child will be led to a belief. Hence, a good teacher will instill trust in his children and be sure he and his class have an identity of aim; for, without this unity of aim, the teacher's work, and the work in which they are all engaged, will, in time, become pointless and in vain. Unfortunately, the teacher, who ignores this premise will sadly arrive at a point, or question, expressed by many disillusioned colleagues: 'What is the point?'

The point, surely, is found in the end; in which it is our privilege to be chosen to have care of those children of whom it was said of Christ: 'And taking a child, he set him in the midst of them. Whom when he had embraced, He said to them, "Whosoever shall receive one such little child as this in my name, receiveth me. And whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but Him that sent me".'

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