

‘The heart alone can guide the heart.’

How Can We Manage 22 Without the Cane?

It was easy to maintain discipline with the cane in your hand. The little rascals knew all about the bruises and weals, so they behaved themselves. The bad old days!

And today? This really happened: a pupil hands in a sloppily written piece of work, the teacher asks him to rewrite it and the pupil says, without batting an eyelid, 'You'll have a long wait.' The bad new days!

This example is by no means exceptional, worse things happen every day. How can one teach under these circumstances? Schools, which are legally required to deliver the syllabus, can only function if it is not just the teachers who comply by taking their task seriously, but if the pupils in particular do what is asked of them.

In many classrooms today we are suffering the consequences of the anti-authoritarian movement of the late sixties and early seventies of the previous century. What started off as justified criticism of any form of oppression ended up as absolute criticism and rejection of power in any form. And the authority quoted is Jakob Burckhardt with his statement that power is *inherently* evil.

They could have quoted Pestalozzi as well: *It is not power, it is the person who wields power who is responsible for the corruption of the human race. Everything that flows from power is sacred and good, as long as the person wielding it is faithful, his word an honest word and his faithfulness as steadfast as the steadfast stars.*

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What is power? It is simply the *potential for one individual to subject the behaviour or the fate of another to his own will*. If I choose the topic of ‘guinea pigs’ it is the *fate* of my pupils to be confronted with the life of these charming animals. And I subject their *behaviour* to my will by telling them to have a good look then try to tell me what they can see. What is wrong with that?

In other words, the teacher must have undisputed power in order to do his job.

But how does this fit in with my argument that using one’s power in trying to resolve conflicts is counterproductive and Gordon’s ‘no-lose method’ of resolving conflict requires one to set one’s power aside? The answer is simple: *only someone who wields power can decide not to use it*. It is, anyway, impossible for an inexperienced teacher with a disruptive class (which existed in the past just as today) to try and resolve the mass of conflicts that threaten to overwhelm him in the first five minutes by Gordon’s method. What do you do, if you shout above the noise that they should be so good as to sit in a circle so that you can all discuss problems together, and they thumb their noses at you or, as a sign of their contempt, take all the papers out of your folder and scatter them round the room? It quickly becomes clear that you are lost without power. That was the reason why, when training teachers I advised my future colleagues, when we were studying Gordon’s methods, to forget not using power until you’ve actually got it. As teachers we do not refrain from using our power because it has been snatched from us but because we realise that children develop better in conditions where power has been replaced by a sense of community. To refrain from using one’s power one must be free to use it.

Let us return to the above-mentioned chaos. In such a precarious situation teachers in the old days could compel the respect of the class with the cane, or something similar. That is a thing of the past now, I’m glad to say. Today we need *power without the cane*, and that means *authority*. And that was the case in the old days as well; a teacher with authority had no need of the cane.

Which brings us to the question: What is authority? We teachers possess two kinds of authority, which must be clearly distinguished. As holders of an official position we are part of a legally defined institution

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and thus share in the power that goes with it. This *institutional power* appears, as far as pupils are concerned, in our right to demand things of them, to assess and mark their work and to require them to observe the school rules. But the pupils couldn't care less about such legal niceties. What is important for them is what they actually see in the person of the teacher. To the extent that they feel obliged to follow his instructions, they are responding not to his institutional, but to his *personal* authority.

Personal authority is something of a mystery. Two people can stand in front of a class and use the same words to instruct the pupils to do something; in one case they will obey as a matter of course, whilst in the other they will behave as if they had not heard anything. The effectiveness does not, therefore, lie in the words themselves, but in the force that lies within them and emanates from the one who spoke them. This force is connected with the aura a person gives off and to which children and adults react spontaneously. This aura tells us something about the person's credibility, trustworthiness, competence, strength of will, reliability and seriousness. Usually we react to it within a few seconds, either with acceptance, indifference or rejection. This reaction has something to do with resonance. If a person's appearance and bearing sets something resonating in others, he will become an authority for them, a person they take seriously, obeying his expressions of will. And they do this without feeling oppressed. Genuine authority does not oppress others, on the contrary it leads them, they are uplifted by it.

Here is an example. At a school camp a trainee teacher noticed that some boys were constantly teasing and tormenting another and excluding him from their games. He quite correctly spoke to them about their behaviour, tried to get them to understand the feelings of the boy who was excluded and appealed to their consciences, but with resignation he concluded, 'Hardly had I turned my back than they were teasing him again, as if I hadn't said anything.' What he lacked was real authority, his words carried no weight with the children.

This shows us the way genuine authority works. As Goethe said, we humans are creatures with 'two souls in our breast' — one that encloses us within ourselves and makes us into egoists, and one that raises us above ourselves, sending us in search of what is good, of our true selves.

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This will, I am sure, be the case with those ‘bad’ boys: in certain situations their behaviour is antisocial, but each of them bears within him the potential to understand others and treat them with consideration, in brief, the potential for good. And here we can see the effect of genuine authority: *It is by genuine authority (and by that alone) that the good forces in the child can be helped to gain the upper hand over the less good ones.* Genuine authority awakens and strengthens the child’s self, helps him to be and become himself.

We teachers want more than just momentary successes. We are not satisfied — to return to our example — with the excluded boy being left in peace or integrated in the group. We want all those involved to grow through the conflict and to develop an attitude which will have a positive effect in other situations. To quote Pestalozzi, authority aims to reach the innermost core of the person, its goal is to bring out the powers of the heart. Empathy, trust, courage, gratitude, a sense of justice and of community are to be developed.

Of course, authority is not a quality one does or doesn’t have; one person has more, another less. From Pestalozzi’s point of view, authority is a faculty that can, like any other faculty, be *developed*. Consequently the degree of perceptible authority is always a blend of natural talent and deliberate cultivation. If the natural talent is great and the corresponding cultivation as a moral force lacking, authority can be dangerous. It enables its possessor to fill people with enthusiasm, to lead people, but it can also enable him to lead them astray, if what he fills them with enthusiasm for is bad. History has plenty of examples. The lesson therefore is: the greater the natural talent for leadership, the more important its cultivation as a moral force — and that means the development of a sense of responsibility.

As far as the cultivation of authority is concerned, I consider the following points essential:

- First of all one must have the courage to believe in one’s authority and to put it to the test. If one loses it, one must leave the profession. The best intentions, the most conscientious preparation, the most ingenious ideas, the highest ideals are ineffective without authority. It is the soil in which everything thrives.

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- That is why, as teachers, we should react especially firmly to anything that undermines our authority. However, we get into a circular argument here — or is it a vicious circle? — that is impossible to break out of: to be able to deal convincingly with actions that diminish our authority we need to possess a high degree of authority, otherwise the pupils will not take our response seriously.
- Since genuine authority demands self-confidence and a healthy degree of self-esteem it is essential for teachers to make that part of their personal development.
- Beyond that, there are a number of techniques one can use to bolster one's authority which one can bear in mind and consciously employ: when speaking, a teacher should make a point of maintaining eye contact with the whole class and not continuing if they are not paying attention or talking amongst themselves. He should take care to speak clearly and understandably, and his whole bearing and expression should emphasise his authority.
- Equally, there are ways of behaving which diminish one's authority, though I will not go into them in detail. It is sensible to avoid embarrassing the pupils.

Now it is true that there is a type of authority that the pupils feel is simply a demand to be obeyed. True authority, therefore, always goes together with *love of children*. Modern educational theory tends to avoid discussing this basis for fruitful work as a teacher. It almost seems as if it is taken for granted that everyone feels affection for children or that it has no relevance for education. It is true that some effects of this basic attitude — for example 'engage with the child' or 'always be polite' — are demanded, but that is behaviour which can, if necessary, be acquired by practice without that mysterious something — love of children — being alive in the teacher. In Pestalozzi's view of mankind, love as the basis for the development of our moral faculties cannot be reduced to a few behavioural practices. It is, rather, a mental and psychological reality beyond any specific situation, which is still a living

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presence even if there is no interpersonal contact at the moment. Love supports our sense of responsibility, our capacity for understanding, our desire to work, our self-criticism and our willingness to tackle difficulties and overcome them.

But we must distinguish between two forms of love: Love for children in general and love for the individual child.

To anticipate any possible misunderstanding — the affection for children that is under discussion here has nothing to do with sexual love. It is about the teacher as a person being open to children's nature as such. It is comparable to the attitude of a person who is open to the fascination of a wild flower in bloom and stands looking at it in wonderment, pondering, while others pass by unnoticed. A teacher who loves children is open to the spontaneity of burgeoning life in a child, to its imagination and creativity, which keep appearing at the most surprising moments, to the workings of a mysterious force of development, indeed, to the mystery of life itself which reveals itself in children in ever new ways. Such a teacher can therefore never be bored by children. Deep down inside he feels himself a kindred spirit and is thus always on the child's side when its childish nature is in danger of being crushed by the harsh realities of life.

It is precisely this love for children that makes teachers aware of children's weaknesses and the dangers they face, for their love is not sentimental. It is, to quote Pestalozzi, a 'seeing' love. Such a teacher is well able to distinguish between genuine childish naivety and artful coquetry. He knows the difference between obstinacy, which always appears when a person wants to refuse something that is necessary or gain an advantage at another's cost, and independence of mind, which is an expression of a person's innermost being. He would never regard pupils who were overexcited as 'lively' or take their bluffing, their cheap imitating, for creativity. Nor would he confuse forwardness, precociousness and a craving for recognition with self-confidence and healthy self-esteem. And, finally, he would not wrongly interpret cheekiness and uncouth behaviour as honesty, nor the fear of engaging with something new as strength of character.

Love for children always expresses itself as affection for the individual child the teacher is dealing with at the moment. Thus he feels

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not only the duty but also the need to see the child as an individual, as a unique, unrepeatable personality. It is, of course, necessary to pay attention to each child's *performance in school work*, but a loving teacher will not stop at that, he will also *recognise the child as a person* and learn to see him as he really is. We can only do that if we accept him as a human being and are interested in his individuality, his circumstances, his likes and dislikes, his talents, his state of development, his thoughts and feelings, his weaknesses and his difficulties. All that is part of what Pestalozzi calls 'seeing love'. This comprehensive perception of the child enables the teacher to get inside the child, to come to him with understanding and to assist him in his difficulties instead — as so often happens — of confronting him with punishment.

This approach often meets with the objection that it is impossible to expect teachers to like all pupils equally since we, too, are subject to feelings of sympathy and antipathy. That cannot be denied, for we are only normal human beings. However, we discover from experience that feelings of sympathy and antipathy very much fade into the background when we succeed in truly *understanding* a person the way they are. The question, though, is: what should we do to get our understanding of a person to grow? I am convinced that *open dialogue* is one of the fundamental requirements for that. In this respect the art of guiding a discussion, as Thomas Gordon teaches us, for example, is of great importance for a teacher. If we can *listen with empathy*, our liking for the person opening themselves up to us will grow.

As a rule, love is returned. The younger the children, the more they are prepared to make an effort to please the teacher. The aim of all this is naturally not to get the children to work hard just to please the teacher; they should commit themselves to their work because they realise it is right or simply because they find it rewarding. But with younger children it is a very human motivation to try to win — or, even better, respond to — the teacher's love through their hard work and the effort they put in. In so doing, they will develop an interest in the subject and pleasure in a neatly done piece of work. And that will stay with them later on when they no longer do it to please their teacher, but from their own motivation.

The love we are talking about here is not simply the legitimate partner of authority, it can also strengthen authority or even serve as

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a basis for it. There is an impressive example of this in a report written by a seventeen-year-old trainee teacher: in the summer camp he was helping to run, one boy stood out because of his grumbling and blatant disobedience. Whatever orders the leaders gave, he ignored them. One morning the children were told to get ready for a day out walking with their hiking boots and waterproofs. The ‘notorious grumbler’, as he appeared to be to the leaders, set off in trainers and even left his windcheater behind. And, sure enough, the weather did get worse in the course of the afternoon, which gave the senior leader the opportunity to savour his triumph: ‘Now do you see that you should follow our orders. If you won’t listen you must take the consequences.’

That was certainly not a bad thing the leader said and there are enough educationalists who, following Rousseau, would do the same — we learn from our sufferings. The snag is that it doesn’t work, for the simple reason that this ‘teaching by logical consequences’ lacks love.

The student felt sorry for the poor lad and lent him his pullover — which, in the eyes of the leader, was acting contrary to good educational practice. This meant that the two of them got left behind a little and the boy told the student his whole life story, with all his worries and problems, and from that point on he obeyed the student unquestioningly and did whatever the other asked of him.

To avoid any misunderstanding, I must point out that I do not maintain that the student’s behaviour as described here would work in every case and independently of the people involved. I am also well aware that it would have been better if the leaders had checked that their instructions had been obeyed before they set off. I simply wanted to demonstrate the connection between love and authority.

To conclude this chapter on the teacher’s love of children I will look at an extended quotation from Pestalozzi. This passage, from the final version of his novel *Lienhard und Gertrud* (Leonard and Gertrude), describes the teacher, Glülphi, after he has become acquainted with Gertrude’s teaching in accord with human nature: *As soon as he entered the school the very next day, he forgot his dream, the world and all his desire to improve the world and people. He was once more heart and soul the schoolmaster with nothing in mind but this moment in which he stood among his children as father and teacher... In these hours of work*

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he was completely absorbed by their presence, as if there were nothing in the world apart from his children round him... As they gathered together, Glülphi no longer saw his children as a group. Each child appeared individually, and when he saw, or even just thought of a child, his being was entirely concentrated on him or her, as if there were no others around... Thus he bore all the children of his school in his heart. That also meant that, day by day, he knew precisely the stage each one was at in his teaching. Every day he looked more deeply into the heart of each one and with every day he became more familiar with all their thoughts and endeavours...

The cane no longer has any place in classrooms where the teaching is in that spirit. But modern education still brandishes the cane, a very different type of cane, it is true, but one that hurts just as much as the old one: the system of giving marks. I would prefer not to have this system in our schools but to see it replaced by a more sensible one. Pestalozzi himself was against it, and for very good reasons. Already I can hear people ask in astonishment, 'But how are you going to get the pupils to really work instead of sitting around doing nothing?' It is a question that must be taken seriously and my answer comes from this chapter: by the teacher's authority that is rooted in love. If he presents the material in a way that is appropriate to children and brings it alive, he will motivate his pupils to learn and to work, without having to threaten them with marks.