

PART ONE

Teachers and their Relationship with Students

In order to succeed in the very difficult task of effectively educating young people, a teacher truly must possess certain qualities.

Vigilance The word vigilance is connected with watchfulness and hence signifies alertness. It is a virtue that makes us attentive to our duties. Vigilant teachers forget nothing of what they ought to do and do not become distracted from what they ought to be thinking about, seeing, hearing, or doing. There is nothing more necessary for teachers than this constant watchfulness over themselves and their students.

Teachers need to watch themselves in order to conduct themselves as they should in front of young people, who closely study their teachers' faults and notice any weaknesses. Do not forget that young people are naturally observant and that they see all and hear all: Teachers are greatly mistaken if they believe that they do

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not have to be concerned with what students see or hear if the students are occupied with all of the distractions that go with being young.

Teachers need to watch, above all, over the young people placed in their care. Indeed, they are the spiritual parents of these young people. How else will teachers be able to carry out their responsibilities to the families that rely on them to help develop good values in their children? From the moment teachers accept charge of young people for their education they become their guardians. This vigilance does involve some annoying, tiring, and disquieting things, especially for those who are new to the profession. Until they have responsibility for their first classes, teachers don't realize the concerns that often bother those in positions of responsibility and authority. When they are put in charge of a class, they often experience a loss of calm and peace and create anxieties for themselves that are contrary to what should be motivating them. Looking out for students becomes a heavy responsibility and a real problem, since it leads teachers to dislike their work and even question their calling. I caution young teachers not to take this virtue to the extreme.

Teachers must keep their vigilance within reasonable limits and not imitate those who are always in a state of great alarm, often over some childish prank that they are unable to evaluate correctly. Those who are too vigilant are unaware that a great talent of good teachers is often to pretend not to notice what he or she does not want to be obliged to punish. An indulgence prudently managed is worth much more than outbursts and the punishments that follow them. Always avoid this embarrassing vigilance. It is revolting to students and unbearable for teachers. Let your watchfulness and attention be calm, without over-concern, without agitation or trouble, without great constraint or affection. But also avoid the opposite, which involves carelessness, distraction, unwillingness to act, and tardiness, which are all contrary to this virtue of vigilance.

