

subjects at such a high level and that some of the lessons and topics they touch upon are not even treated in the Lycea. All of them say that they have never come across such classes and that culture may indeed be imparted at a very lofty level.

So, judging from what we have been able to experience, the success of the Montessori secondary school has all the more possibility of success, the greater is the number of children coming from good Montessori elementary schools and the better and more intelligent and cultured are the teachers. Many good things can be done, even keeping as they are the regulations of the State secondary schools. But one could do marvels if one could dispose of more space and longer time.

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EXPERIENCES OF A MONTESSORI TEACHER

THE FUNCTION AND THE USE OF PUNCTUATION IN WRITTEN LANGUAGE

In spite of the advantages shown by progressive education which encourages and applies successfully free expression in all fields - on language as well as on arts - one cannot ignore the widespread complaints about the lack of exactness in the children's oral and written language, in their choice of words, in the construction of sentences, the orthography and the use of punctuation.

Must overlooking shortcomings be accepted as a necessary evil to safeguard free expression? Are they perhaps not due to uncertainty on how to improve or on how to raise interest for improvement without harming other factors?

It is curious to experience how greatly we are influenced by contrasts: new views go against previous ones and abolish them altogether without considering the useful elements they may contain. This happens in all fields and of course also in cultural education. Yet experience shows that technique and spontaneous free expressions should not be considered as antipodes; they should be integrated and they can.

Here also one comes to realize the importance of 'sensitive periods', for the practice and conquest of techniques by means of attractive exercises on which young children take a real interest and become concentrated, exercises which, without the children realizing it, prepare the mechanism for creative work on a higher level. There is a succession of steps, according to age, interest and mental ability.

Could one ever banish continuous and stimulating techniques in artistic expressions or scientific experiments?

Why should one banish them in the realm of language? Here as elsewhere if one makes use

of the 'sensitive periods' during which, driven by inner energies, young children absorb, one will see how children give a solution to many pedagogical problems. Returning to our starting point, the exactness in linguistic elements, experience has shown that there are indeed 'sensitive periods' for the intelligent and sensitive choice of words and their shades of meaning, for orthography, for the function of parts of speech, for analysis of sentences, for figures of speech and for punctuation.

Let us take the latter as illustration.

For development of conscious realizations pertaining to language, we start from speech.

One speaks to give informations, to ask questions, to utter exclamations. As soon as we make young children (3 to 4 years) interested in these different expressions, groups of them become keen to express verbally all kinds of examples. Later, when they are preparing for reading and writing, the children make great use of the small coloured movable alphabets which include (not without intention) the different punctuation marks. In special compartments of the alphabet box one can find the symbols meant for questions, exclamations, etc. If we dictate to a child a sentence such as: 'It is fine wheather to-day', we can introduce the dot which represents the full stop as the appropriate symbol which determines the end of this information. But if we read the sentence in a joyful exclamation, we have to substitute the full stop with an exclamation mark. Can we also read it as a question? Yes, but then the verb must come before the subject. The relative position of the two words is changed and then the question mark is placed. This greatly impresses the child.

This realization is a new conquest for the young child and an activity starts which will arouse the interest of more and more children in various ways. Some will make sentences with the movable alphabet, others choose the blackboard for their expressions, others again write on paper, while many hunt for sentences in their reading books. They stress the punctuation marks by using coloured pencils or chalk. They will be very exact in applying them. No sentence without a mark! The children will show us the way and we shall follow their interest.

It is quite clear that, meeting them in books, some will ask us the name and the use of the other punctuation marks: , ; : " " (coma, semicolon, colon and quotation marks).

But later it happened also, that after the introduction of one of the literary forms "the dialogue" (a most interesting episode!), we introduced as technical elements the colon, quotation marks, etc. The children used differently coloured alphabets to distinguish the persons taking part in the dialogue. They were careful to put the colon after the names of the different speakers and the quotation marks before and after the spoken sentences. And then they became actors, they studied the parts and each taking one, they enacted the dialogue. Once introduced, this became a usual occurrence in the class. In the course of time I saw that in the mixed-age group the older children do lose this spontaneous interest.

They are more preoccupied with the contents of their compositions etc. and do not pay much attention to orthography or punctuation. For these a new element can be introduced. Dr. Montessori on this writes in "The Advanced Method": "All the exercises hitherto given, require more or less spontaneous attention to punctuation. We offer, however, in addition several series of sentences for analysis in illustration of the principal rules for the use of punctuation". We can collect these rules in a booklet. A group of children unites and organizes a mutual dictation from a printed series, without mentioning the punctuation which has to be put by those who write. At the end the printed cards serve as control.

What do we do if we see that notwithstanding a clear and impressing lesson in an exercise of practical life, the children no longer apply the technique and become a bit neglectful? We choose the right moment to repeat the lesson in a different way e. g. how it should not be done (great laughter!) and how it should be done.

We can use the same method for other subjects. The principal thing is to have in mind certain tendencies pertaining to 'the sensitive period' and to appeal to a renewed interest and collaboration.

(Eventual experiences in other schools will be welcomed!)

R. Joosten-Chatzen

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This year's (no. 10) issue of the Indian Magazine "Around the Child" published by the Association of Montessorians (18, Suren Tagore Rd. CALCUTTA - 19), includes an article of special interest.

Sister Johanna describes the appalling life conditions of very primitive tribes in the Ranchi area and what was done to bring help and relief.

The last item in this connection was the creation of a "Montessori House of Children". The results obtained were astounding.

Mr. A. M. Joosten who asked Sr. Johanna to write the article, sent us these impressions after a recent visit.

We are very grateful for the article contributed at great cost of time and energy and in spite of the most heavy demands on the author. It opens new perspectives and contributes more proof of the value of the Montessori approach, especially for the benefit of social uplift and development. I myself had the great privilege of visiting the Montessori House of Children some time ago and to appreciate the work done there by children and adults. It was of course wonderful to see the joy and enthusiasm, but also the care with which they carried out their exercises of practical life which will help them form such valuable and lasting habits of great social and human importance for their future lives; to find them absorbed in their sensorial activities and take a new and more intelligent and conscious interest in their environment, making genuine discoveries of things and aspects they passed