



"THE SCHOOL GOES TO THEM"

03-C-10

The purpose of the Gabriel Drolin Association may best be summed up in its own statement of objectives, "In view of the number of young people regarded as failures, the Association has for object the creation and putting into practice of teaching methods designed to reduce backwardness during school and formative years."

The Association began with a meeting between Brother Pierre and the teachers newly assigned to the special classes for reluctant or backward pupils in an area of high rise flats at Garges les Gonesse.

In the course of his twenty-two years' teaching in primary schools in various parts of the region Brother Pierre had been able to consult leading members of the teaching profession. His availability, due to the fact that he was teaching in a private school, led to his accepting a completely new post. He was assigned to the education of children of families of no fixed abode. There he learned from the inside the real problems. Faced with the illiteracy of the children he initiated a program of action to make the parents aware of the need for instruction. His qualities as an educator were given full scope.

He was asked to supervise the introduction of new teaching methods at Garges les Gonesse for a full school year. He was then asked to extend the scope of his action to other areas, hence the formation of the Association.

Let us go back a little. An educational aids system had been provided to help young people and adults. A large team of monitors had been recruited. The sector dealing with itinerants had done some research and introduced new methods.

In the early stages, teaching was based on the practical experiences of daily life not on literary textbooks. After two years' experience each monitor was asked to write a summary of the methods employed with beginners in reading. Little by little an original method was developed and published under the title "At last I can read and write". Requests for training in the system came from outside the area. Teachers and educators became interested and asked us for further publications: a critique of reading methods in common use, an explanation of some of the other means of helping beginners. The booklet "How to learn to read" went through three editions and was used in the national literacy campaign of one foreign country.

Our preoccupations at national level soon led us to call on government departments concerned and our document entitled "A real educational service for itinerants" with its twenty-six proposals helped to make the general public aware of the problem. As a result, official studies were made such as: "Education of the children of Gypsies and Nomads" 1981, and "Sixty Proposals to counteract insecurity and poverty", 1980. These official reports show evidence of the experience we gained during thirteen years of dealing with the problems.

The awareness of the public authorities encouraged us to invest in additional personnel and more mobile classes.

The Association has established several mobile teacher units and has persuaded the authorities to allocate money for the payment of voluntary teachers. At first it was the Brothers who, because of their experience in school, were appointed to these posts. We must now enlarge these teams which set out each morning to teach the children on the city's outskirts who cannot yet attend ordinary schools. The teachers of project "The School Goes To Them" are happy — happy because of the joy of those "kids" who cannot understand why teachers should want a vacation.

The Catholic education authorities are becoming interested in our methods and have given priority to our project, "The School Goes To Them" in their training programme for teachers of itinerants in 1984 and 1985.

In January, 1984, we launched the "Campaign for 1,000 scholarships" in reading, with the help of a teaching aid which has proved very stimulating: "A Reading Licence"... Yes, a folder in three sections with one, two or three stars to encourage the learner-reader to work for a scholarship that entitles him to buy the books of his choice. The campaign organisers are hoping to provide a fund of 500,000 francs.

The learner-readers want more, so other teaching aids are forthcoming. A remarkable method of teaching numeracy has come from an outstanding teacher, Sister Marie de Vendée. Training periods are also provided by our Association.

A system of writing, a method of division, certainly, but above all a dynamic pedagogy — a pedagogy of success... and 40 propositions to be learned (not merely to be read).

In conclusion, let us quote a passage from Jacotot (1836), University Professor who challenged hidebound teachers.

"Look for the poor, the ignorant. Take them from their corners and the ignorant will soon show you that they are the same kind of creature as Lagrange and Pascal and that there is but one and the same human intelligence."

Bro. Pierre ETIENNE

Centre Gabriel Drolin,
26, Place Pierre Sémard - 44400 REZÉ (France)