

HELP TO CHILDREN WITH DIFFICULTIES IN STUDIES

Project

After ten years of teaching regular classes on the primary level. I asked myself in what apostolate I should continue my work. Three possibilities presented themselves to me: become a missionary in Cameroon, teach teenagers in the secondary school, or continue on in the primary but directing my attention only toward that clientele of children having difficulties in adapting themselves to their studies. After discussing the matter with my Brother Visitor, I decided upon the third option.

Seeing that I lacked the scholastic credentials for working with such children, I enrolled at the University of Sherbrooke where I received my Masters Degree in Education, with orthopedagogy as my major. I sought employment at the Educational Commission of Rivière-du-Loup, where we have a community. My services were accepted at once.

Now, for the past eleven years I have been engaged in this work.

The task consists of coming to the assistance of pupils who have difficulties in learning and in adapting themselves at the beginning of the primary course. I do this work in two public schools. "The Open Class", which is the name given to my class, indicates my availability to accept for three to five lessons a week, pupils from the Home Rooms of the first three primary grades, in view of giving them personal pedagogical help.

Special Pupils

These children, who are usually intellectually gifted, are referred by the subject teacher and those in charge of the school, because they are presenting some problems or have a very slow rhythm in language learning, in reading (this is the majority of the cases), in mathematics, and sometimes in writing.

The length of the special help varies between three months and two years. When the child attains the level of reading or of calculation equal to his proper grade level, when his language usage has become adequate, he ceases little by little to profit by this form of help.

From the first meetings, I evaluate the level of each child by a diagnostic test. The results obtained serve as a guide for the assistance which I will give to each child.

For the help sessions, the child comes either alone or together with one or two other pupils experiencing the same difficulties.

Main activities

On the language level, the children are at first given exercises in articulation in view of loosening up their jaws and tongue, in view of mastering such or such a sound. Other exercises develop proper respiration and the quality of their hearing. Then they are led to pronounce everyday words better and better. Progressively, through game activities, their oral communication develops.

The syllabic method is further used as an aid to reading. The child goes from the level of letters to that of syllables or sounds, then to words, and finally to phrases. A certain number of words are learned totally. A reading program is adapted for each child.

The children arrive at an understanding of mathematical systems by learning how to handle slide rules and logical blocks. Also they learn to correctly perform the arithmetic operations according to their level of studies.

In the course of the meeting, some psycho-motor exercises give the pupils a little rest from their effort and help them to acquire greater self-mastery. Certain exercises develop a better awareness of their body, its symmetry, equilibrium, the coordination between the hand and the eye, and the loosening of the wrists. From other exercises they learn to relax.

Some reactions

The parents are invited to work together with the school during those times when special attention is being given to their child. They can come to meet with me especially when they return the "scholastic bulletins". These relations with the parents are important for the development of the child himself.

All the pupils benefiting by the "open class" appreciate the help sessions and they always find the time too short. The initiatives for helping them are personalized as well as multisensory. Because of the climate of confidence and the motivating framework which surround the sessions, the pupils, beside learning how to speak better, read better, and count better, feel better "in their own skin", are more open and happier to be alive.

Development

After some time, the helping formula evolved. Thus, in the two schools where I work, the teachers are in charge of a double class. That is to say that they have two groups of pupils of different levels. To free these teachers and to achieve a better pedagogy, I work with one of these two groups.

Sometimes I take the ten best pupils of a class of the same level, the homeroom teacher works with the others. On occasions, I help the teacher during the French or mathematics courses, staying with him in the same class room, as a type of "team-teaching".

Conclusion

I really like my work in the two schools which were assigned to me by the Education Commission of Rivière-du-Loup. It has been for me a great joy to assure a good start, at the beginning of the primary grades, to those pupils who need assistance in their first school training.

To collaborate with the teachers, parents, and school administrators, all of whom are solicitous of giving a quality education to each child, is for me also an elevating task and very Lasallian.

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