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**THE AUDIOVISUAL METHOD
OF READING
(1/2)**

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In issue number 234 of the Institute Bulletin which dealt with illiteracy issues, reference was made to the audiovisual method which was invented and used in Equatorial Guinea. Now the author presents it as a pedagogical suggestion and an idea which was well understood for the teaching of reading to African people who for generations have spoken Spanish in addition to their indigenous language. Equatorial Guinea is a small country of some 350,000 inhabitants and it was colonized by Spain.

The norms of the audiovisual method are based on the Spanish language, but they have been adapted to the Guinean race and culture. An equivalent may not exist in French or English, the other languages in which LASALLIANA is published, and for that reason some examples will have to be adjusted as they are translated from the original Spanish text.

Where and how the audiovisual method was born.

In January, 1980, we arrived in Equatorial Guinea as part of a large group of male and female religious who were invited by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of said country. We belonged to the FERE, the Spanish Federation of Religious Educators. Our mission then was and continues to be today one of collaborating, along with other Spanish educators, with the Guinean teaching staffs in the reestablishment of the educational system of Equatorial Guinea which had gravely deteriorated during the 11-year dictatorship of Macías.

The picture that we found in all places and in educational establishments was one of desolation: school buildings that had been completely abandoned, a total lack of textbooks and teaching materials; dismal school attendance; a dearth of study plans and programs... we practically had to begin from square one.

Months went by and classes did also and the students continued without textbooks; there was no progress being made in the Guinean Ministry nor in the Spanish cooperation. As Director of Studies of the Normal School in Bata, I thought to myself about igniting a small light in the world of these children and that is how the idea of the Audiovisual Method came into existence.

Adapting to circumstances.

In teaching, it is of paramount importance to adapt to place, time and circumstances. The Founder frequently reminds us of this when referring to a Catechism lesson. In our case, here we were in Equatorial Guinea in the midst of a precarious situation in terms of pedagogical and methodological resources, and added to that was the extreme shortage of economic resources. It was necessary to approach the Guinean children, keeping their aptitudes in mind as well as their limitations. Therefore, the method used would have to take advantage of the psychological and socio-cultural characteristics of the Guinean child and it would have to replace support materials, which were impossible to obtain anyway, with the resources of the persons themselves and the environment of the children.

In my opinion, the merit of the Audiovisual Method, aside from its novelty, was that it took maximum advantage of the psychic, corporal and expressive abilities of the students, as I will explain later.

The Audiovisual Method.

This method consists of one of the many ways to introduce comprehensive reading to children as well as to adults. The analytic and synthetic elements of other methods are merged into this method and I would therefore call it syncretic. The child begins to express, which is a form of speaking, what s/he feels and thinks by means of a drawing. It would be natural for the child to draw, rather than write, the letters before learning their sounds. Drawing and learning from the sounds should be simultaneous and this is where the name audiovisual comes from.

Fundamentals of the Audiovisual method.

As I pointed out earlier, I attempted to base the method on norms relevant to the Guinean people and their culture. The contribution of the students in the Normal School was very important in this respect.

Psychologically, since the Guinean child does not live in a world bombarded by images, s/he is an observer; the child's interest is limited to its surroundings; s/he lives intensely in the present; the past and future hold little interest for the child unlike the way they do for older people; the child, becomes involved in a great deal of activity, as can be seen by the toys that are employed. Observation, interest, experience and creativity – these are the four great pillars on which the Audiovisual Method is based.

The student relies psychologically on the phonic, the globalization and on the fact that self-teaching is the key.

Beginning with sounds for the learning of phonemes offers unquestionable advantages:

1. It avoids mistakes in pronunciation, since Guineans often confuse several Spanish sounds; a Guinean might confuse a C for an F or an R for a D, etc.
2. This method avoids the problems associated with dyslexia.
3. The learning of correct pronunciation must be simultaneous with learning to read. Learning to pronounce well is an indispensable condition for learning to speak (Rosa Agazzo).

4. The combination of sounds that the Audiovisual Method offers the child enables him/her to read naturally and correctly from the very beginning.

The Audiovisual Method stimulates, accelerates and fixes the knowledge of sounds when various stimuli are used simultaneously:

- a/ Linguistic-visual stimuli: drawings, records...
- b/ Auditory stimuli: onomatopoeic sounds, songs...
- c/ Cinematic stimuli: gestures, mime, play-acting...
- d/ Intellectual stimuli: lexicon, sentences, songs, traditions...

A large part of the efficacy of these methods depends on the teacher who uses and drills them. The success of the Audiovisual Method is in direct proportion to the preparation of the teacher and to the strict way s/he applies the methods. In the Teacher's Guide the learning of each sound is set out in detail. The teacher needs to become very fluent in the method's philosophy and methodology; if the teacher fails, the method fails.

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