

## SOME DIFFICULTIES OVERCOME.

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It is with no little pride that I can say I have been teaching under the P.U.S. system since 1917.

My school was at that time one of the first little group which experimented in Gloucestershire, and which led to prove that what the child of the employer can do the child of the employed can do equally well. You may imagine my joy when, together with a very encouraging report after our first Term's Examination, came a request from Miss Mason that she might be allowed to keep the girls' papers. But do not think for a moment that the work went on oiled wheels. I was as much a learner as were my children. The principles underlying the system I hoped I understood, but the same difficulties which rose before me then I find again and again before others now.

There is the question of the (1) *Set Books in Literature*—Scott, for example. Many people have said to me that Scott is far too difficult. No child could understand Scott. We know that they can. Scott is not too difficult, *but* (and there is a "but") all children do not take to his novels equally well. Well, the child being an *individual*, we do not expect that he should. We should like him to learn to. So what must we do? Give out a so-called "Child's Edition?" No! for that is not Scott. We must encourage by reading with the slower children, being interested one's self, showing a little mystery or animation in the reading as the story suggests, at the close discussing the portion read and leave the children wanting to know more. Then when the next reading comes they are prepared to be interested until, finally, they will read for themselves. "We have opened the door," but though some will enter boldly and find the flowers in the corners, for others we must just hang a lamp in the porch.

(2) *In Narration*. We sometimes find it difficult to get some of our children to narrate, while others more fluent with language are only too eager. Here, again, encouragement is [p 440] the medicine. Ask the slow child first to tell *something*, be contented with a little and then pass on to a brighter child. I have sometimes found an inexperienced teacher expecting the child to narrate in the order and as nearly as possible in the words of the paragraph read. This is fatal; what we want is "The Gospel according to Tommy!" If we remember that narration is not the purpose of reading but the means of settling in the mind of the child the subject matter of what has been read, many of the difficulties with narration will vanish. Do let us remember that in every school and in every class are to be found our Moses and Aarons.

(3) *The Village Child*. We are aiming at giving a liberal education. In the country we are met with a great difficulty, and that is the limited experiences of our village children. This I have found so pronounced in their expression work. In a boy's illustration for a scene from *Macbeth*, Macbeth was seen in the present-day night attire with a very cottagey candlestick in one hand, holding a dagger behind him in the other. Ships, too, are extremely odd. Near a town a teacher finding this would naturally take the children to a good picture gallery. Fortunately, I possess an illustrated Shakespeare, but I have found Quennell's *Everyday Things* most useful and, though

copying is not an ideal method of drawing, have let the children from time to time study and draw from the costumes of the various periods, and also subjects from other good books.

(4) *Various rates at which the children work.* Some teachers have found a difficulty in the different speed with which children will accomplish their work in a class. Some write much more quickly than others, some are slower in every way. What are the quick children to do while the others finish? Let us remember Miss Mason always said, "The child must read plenty of poetry, at least ten minutes a day." Here is an opportunity. Always have the poetry books at hand; all odd minutes can then be well employed. Of course, I do not mean that the slow children should miss their poetry, but the quick ones get extra time for it.

(5) *The Backward Child.* Here is a difficulty which is imagined by the outsider. So many people have an idea that the P.U.S. programmes are only suited to the bright and clever but quite unsuited to the slower mentality. This is a very great mistake. I have spoken of a liberal education. I may say it is a liberal mental menu. There is something for the

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weak as well as the strong, and milk for the babes. I have known children of my own school whose minds have been awakened and roused to effort through the P.U.S. work. One little boy who was marked as *mentally deficient* was one of the best in the narration of the stories. He could do very little writing, and arithmetic was a worry to him, but still, there was an awakening, and he was able to put forth mental effort. I lost him just at the first stage, as the family left the neighbourhood. I was sorry, for it would have been most interesting to watch the progress of a boy such as he.

The P.U.S. does not allow things are too difficult, it is a system which helps all stages of mental development. A P.U.S. teacher does not scold or punish if she finds a page of narration very imperfect in spelling and punctuation, as long as she knows the child has done its best. No, she looks for the rays of light and the gleams of truth, and is more than satisfied. And what a wonderful power a kind encouraging word has with these poor little ones: how they try next time! No, the backward child is not a difficulty, for faith and patience, together with a smile and a kind word, soon conquer.

(6) *Small School with Two Teachers.* In a small school the number of subjects and the limited staff present a real difficulty, and Mr. Household's strong advice is that no school beginning to work the P.U.S. programmes should attempt a form higher than Form II.

When I lost one of my staff, Form Ib. was sent into the infant room. There the teacher had been teaching the little ones on the P.U.S. lines, they had had the stories read to them (at least the First Class infants), so the plan worked very successfully. The most important thing is to get the little ones as early as possible to do individual reading. I may say if this is done and done wisely the difficulty of a small staff vanishes, and this brings me on to the P.U.S. in *Large Schools.*

(7) So often in talking of P.U.S., people have said, "Of course, the P.U.S. could not be taken in large schools. How are the children to narrate?"

Yes, of course it is taken, and most successfully in the large school.

The next question is: How about the narration, they cannot all narrate where there are such large numbers? No, they cannot *all* narrate to their *class teacher*, nor is it necessary they should. There comes in the *Group System.* These groups,

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with their group leader, read and narrate, the teacher passing from group to group, hearing a bit here and a bit there, but thoroughly satisfied that all is well and that steady intelligent work is going on. Yet it is not the system, as some have put it to me, "Where the children work and the teacher has nothing to do." No, the teacher must live in his class, his personality must be felt, but as a head that cares and, I may say, loves; they must not be John Jones or Tom Walker, they must be *his* boys. It seems to me that Miss Mason lives in a P.U.S. School and sheds her loving care over the child life there, bringing that sweet home-like atmosphere into the school which makes the work something most sacred. If we remember her and have faith and patience, what difficulties are there that we may not overcome?