

Message of
the Montessori
process

primary teachers on this continent, that the best method for teaching reading and writing in our own schools, while keeping to the principle of teaching through as many types of images as possible, eschews both the above-mentioned objectionable features. It may be, however, that we can learn something concerning the co-ordinating of various types of imagery from the experiments of Dr. Montessori.

As to phonic synthesis: It is now generally recognized by English-speaking teachers that the teaching of reading and writing should be based on previous oral language work. On the basis of the story the child may have his attention drawn to the word as a complete whole. From this he is to proceed by the analytic-synthetic method to a phonic mastery of the letters as component elements. In this way the English-speaking teacher complies with two important laws of teaching—proceeding from the whole to the parts, and from the known to the unknown.

In this way, also, the best phases of the Montessori Method can be adopted by using, not letters but whole words upon which the child may begin the muscular co-ordinations which lead to a mastery of the alphabet. Children with us, it may be noted here, acquire skill in the use of the pencil in the correlation of art work with nature study and the constructive occupations. Moreover, ordinary writing is, not the writing of single letters, but the writing of letters combined into a single word. To require the child to begin with the tracing of whole words will, therefore, be a very natural method. As we proceed with the work of phonic analysis, the vague whole of the muscular sense may, co-ordinately with the sound, be analysed into its component movements.

Dr. Montessori seems to argue the validity of her method solely on the premise of certain results in special cases. In connection with the teaching of writing she says:

The Method
measured by
results

"After the first word, the children, with a species of frenzied joy, continued to write everywhere. I saw children crowding about one another at the black-board, and behind the little ones who were standing on the floor another line would form consisting of children mounted upon chairs, so that they might write above the heads of the little ones. In a fury at being thwarted, other children, in order to find a little place where they might write, overturned the chairs upon which their companions were mounted. Others ran toward the window shutters or the door, covering them with writing."

Just such enthusiasm on the part of the pupils in connection with this type of work, though displayed in a more orderly way, may, however, be seen any day in the class of every successful primary teacher in the much-abused public school.

In connection with reading also the author says:

"As to the average time required for learning to read and write, experience would seem to show that, starting from the moment in which the child writes, the passage from such an inferior state of the graphic language to the superior state of reading averages a fortnight."

"There is no question of beginning with words that are easy or difficult, for the child already *knows how to read any word*; that is, he knows how to read the sounds which compose it."

In the light of the last statement, however, the following will sound rather inconsistent:

"And, indeed, the children did not display the same constancy in the reading of books which they showed toward the written slips, since in the books they met with so many unfamiliar words."