

Holy Child Education

Summary by Helen Foreshaw, SHCJ

To sum up: the first element required for sound effective teaching is a well-trained teacher who has a good self-knowledge, values herself, appreciates the importance of ongoing formation both as a person and as a teacher, and who is imbued with the desire to help her students grow into mature, independent, well-integrated human beings.

She goes on to offer advice on how to secure the attention of the pupils in the first place.

- a. With regard to the subject taught
 1. It must be suited to the class.
 2. Taught by suitable methods observations and illustrations.
- b. With regard to the teacher
 1. The manner sympathetic
 2. Language simple.
 3. The whole mind engaged.
 4. Vigilance should never flag.
- c. With regard to the children
 1. Character of each child considered.
 2. Sympathy of members brought into play.
 3. Attentive children have opportunities of distinguishing themselves.
 4. For young children frequent change of position and exercise.

The novices also have more detailed instructions in the *Book of Studies* — for example, the guidelines for teaching Reading to the youngest children are very specific. (*Book of Studies*, p.31)

And again she comments that “Our Mother used to say, “I like the children to like all the Nuns.” And in both the Rule and the Book of Studies we find this directive couched in the language of the day:

“They (the teaching Sisters) must watch over themselves carefully lest they utter any hasty words, or show contempt in their demeanour, or precipitation in punishing the guilty. In their intercourse with the children let them seek to be amiable though not familiar, gay but not noisy; patient though not indifferent; vigilant though not anxious, having ever in view the sweetness and unchanging meekness of our Blessed Lord.”

On the question of punishment and using fear of it to control children, which was so common in all kinds of schools at that time, she has strong views. For instance, in the *Book of Studies* she urges the teachers to “remember that more can be successfully done by exciting a desire for honour, hope of reward and sense of shame, than by fear of punishment, and let them generally lead their pupils by love rather than fear.

And I have always particularly liked the paragraph on Punishment. “Let not the mistresses be too hasty in punishing, nor too eager in seeking adults, but let them dissimulate when they can

do so without injury to anyone and not only must they never use corporal punishment, but they must abstain also from any abusive word or actions...”

Francis Bellasis records the corollary of this: the teachers were told to “Encourage your children. Let them see you are on the look out for the good in them...Seize every opportunity, she would say to us of praising a child for any advance in a virtue you wish her to acquire. Work on every good point in her character, and don’t peck at her weak and faulty “points”.”

“The Mistresses shall on all occasions show great respect for each other, one must never countermand the orders of another, but on the contrary uphold each other’s authority by every means in their power. (Religious) Community affairs are never to be spoken of to the children, nor remarks made upon the Mistresses, except such as are edifying. One Mistress is not to be compared with another...”And towards the end of this paragraph comes the observation that the children “will never respect anyone who does not respect herself.”

Finally, the exhortation in the last paragraph of the Rule for the teaching Sisters has probably not lost its relevance 150 years on for any team of teachers:

“Let the Mistresses among themselves as well as with others avoid that dictatorial tone which the practice of teaching often gives, and if any have contracted such a habit they should rejoice in being warned of it. Let concord and union reign amongst them, and to this end let them speak to one another with sweetness, forgive one another, and overlook one another’s failings with true charity.” (par. 118)

“the sweetly laborious duty of Education.”