

"What Lutheran Sunday-School Teachers Should Know"

by Dr. P.E. Kretzmann

Bulletin Insert # 19

Mental and Physical Equipment of the Child.

It seems almost self-evident that a teacher ought to have information on the children who are to be taught, on the physical and mental equipment of the pupils in the various departments or according to the various ages. It is true that we cannot see the minds or the souls of the children, but we know that the bodies of the children which we see before us are the homes of their minds and of their souls. We also know that education is not primarily the acquisition of knowledge, but a correct use of it. In addition, modern pedagogy knows that heredity will ordinarily bestow capacity, environment will provide opportunity, and personality will recognize capacity and improve opportunity. It follows that all these factors must be studied most carefully by one who desires to do real teaching.

The body of a child as such does not come into prominence in Sunday-school teaching; that is, we have little to do with muscle-training or with those abilities which are commonly included in manual work. Only to some extent does this factor enter into Sunday-school teaching, namely, in sand-table work, if this has been found feasible, and in the cut-out lessons of the Primary Department.

And yet the teacher, to be successful, must be familiar with the functions of a child's body, at least to the extent of being able to give advice to both the children and parents concerning the advantage of a healthy body in every form of school-work. But above all the teacher must be familiar with the senses, which serve as avenues of approach to the mind and, to a certain degree, to the soul. Some of the senses are of minor importance in Sunday-school work, namely, the sense of feeling, the muscle sense (except as just stated), taste, and smell, since the images called forth by the perceptions of these senses are not very prominent in Sunday-school work. But the two senses which must be used continually in teaching and learning are the sense of hearing and the sense of sight, the second one being of greater importance in the work of the school. It has been said that 80 per cent. through the ears, and 2 per cent. through the muscle sense. And as far as memory is concerned, it has been found that the average child remembers 10 per cent. of what he hears, 50 per cent. of what he sees, 70 per cent. of what he says, and 90 per cent. of what he does. Very naturally the teacher must be ever on the alert with regard to the more important senses. Although Sunday-school classes are usually small, it may nevertheless be necessary, at least occasionally, to call the attention of parents to defective vision or hearing. [pages 36-37]

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Bulletin Insert # 20

Approaching the Child.

But our main interest in the approach to the child lies in the manner in which we use the avenue leading to the child's mind. It is necessary for the teacher to be fully alert with regard to the possibilities associated with clear enunciation in speaking and with proper demonstration in all visualized education. Furthermore, the teacher ought to know the natural forces of interest in children; for example, the power of curiosity in stimulating the child's mind. The laws of contrast and novelty tell us that a reference to opposite and to new and startling effects often produces excellent results. This will make for good attention in class-work; for attention is interest properly focused. The involuntary attention which a child will give to something new and startling must be changed to voluntary attention to the values contained in the material studied; the native attention connected with a natural bent of mind must become acquired attention or that which is associated with lasting values; the sensorial attention of a child, or that which depends upon the senses alone, must become intellectual, so that the intelligence of a child will be bent on understanding the material offered. Or to summarize the best features of teaching: All natural forms of attention must be utilized in such a manner as to lead to a new interest, that of secondary passive attention. To give an example: The little child will like the picture of the Primary lesson first because it is printed in beautiful colors. This attention is utilized by the teacher to present the story of the picture, so that the children will finally read the story for themselves and maintain their interest in the lesson taught thereby. At the same time the teacher must be conscious of the limits of attention, partly with reference to time, since little children cannot pay sustained attention for more than ten or fifteen minutes at a time, so that we must give them relief by way of varying the lesson. Similar points with regard to limits of attention are those which reduce the width of a line in the printed page, which keep the size of the type large enough for easy reading, which insist on dull paper for the lessons, and which carefully mark any weariness on the part of the children. [pages 38-39]

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Bulletin Insert # 21

Child's Reaction to Surroundings.

If all the factors are properly taken care of, the child will usually react favorable to teaching conditions. The perceptions which will be received into his brain will be clear and distinct, thus forming concrete pictures or correct ideas, and the child will be ready to reproduce these ideas. And the more we observe the proper associations or natural mental processes by way of teaching similar things or contrasted things or such as are relative to others in time and space, the better our teaching will tend to become. At the same time we must try to remove every form of interference or inhibition, that is, any element which tends to blur the percept in the mind of the child, thus causing his ideas to be not correct. Sometimes this interference will be due to distractions in the schoolroom, to false hearing, or to previous misconceptions. The teacher will correct every form of false impression. [pages 39-40]

Memory.

If ideas are correctly formed in the mind of the child, the teacher using the laws of apperception, according to which every perception entering a person's consciousness connects up with material already stored in the mind, thus adding to knowledge previously acquired, both retention and reproduction on the part of the children will be simplified. Memory plays an important part in all school-work. it [sic] implies not merely the retaining of material, but the reproducing at will of ideas once stored in the mind. With little children a good deal of drill is necessary because they learn largely by repetition. This repetition, however, ought not to be in the form of a dead drill, but of a rational drill, on the basis of a correct understanding of the text or the language used. It will usually be easy for children to memorize if the first impression received is vivid, if there is frequent and intelligent repetition, and if the mind actually is concentrated upon the material which is to be retained. [page 40]

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Bulletin Insert # 22

Imagination.

In this connection the teacher must not overlook the important of imagination in Sunday-school work; for it is simply impossible to do any teaching of the Bible without using the faculty of the imagination. Children must imagine the face and the form of Jesus and of His disciples, in fact, of all Bible characters. They must imagine the scenes which are described in the Bible history. They must even imagine much of the scenery of Bible lands, although good photographs will be of assistance in this respect. Since much of the religious and moral teaching of the Bible is given in abstract terms, we very naturally begin teaching of this kind by using concrete examples, by learning how people acted in given circumstances. Later we may speak of the virtues and vices apart from specific instances, or examples, and the children's imagination must be continually trained. [page 41]

Reason.

But if we take care of these various phases in our instruction, the children will learn to think; they will learn to classify concepts. They will learn to compare one thing with another; they will learn to identify, to generalize, and to name correctly. They will formulate the concepts in clear statements; they will learn to judge correctly, then to reason. They will be able to draw conclusions, such as: God loved the world; I belong to the world; therefore God loved me. They will learn to express their reasoning in proper actions. Faith in itself is an activity based upon a conclusion drawn from Bible-truth. The entire life of sanctification is a series of acts based upon reasoning drawn from the Bible. Children will learn both not to tell a falsehood, on the one hand, and, on the positive side, to speak the truth at all times. Children will learn, on the one hand, not to take anything belonging to some one [sic] else and, on the other, to help and befriend their neighbor whenever he is in need of assistance. [pages 41-42]

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Development.

All these facts hold true in a general way for the teaching which is done in Sunday-school; but the consecrated teacher will also familiarize himself with certain peculiarities pertaining to the various ages of the children. These factors may well be summarized in the following manner. The age of infancy shows us the child as one who discovers his mother, then the world about him, then himself; as an imitator of those to whom he looks up and as avid for the first steps in learning. After the age of infancy comes that of early childhood, with the play instinct very prominent and the mentality of the child expressing itself in endless questions. At this time a child will most readily believe his parents and teachers, so that the foundation of religious training can very well be laid. With middle childhood, or the junior age, comes the transitional period. At this time the child is developing strongly physically; but he no longer plays alone, preferring the company of his playmates; mentally he is an observer, and by the law of apperception he interprets each new experience by its relation to his own ideas, instincts, and previous habits. He begins to discriminate between right and wrong, and the spirit of worship is very readily inculcated. In later childhood comes the experience of energy and independence, with verbal memory in its best form and with the mind eager for investigation. At this time the training for church-membership on the basis of doctrine has been found most advantageous. [pages 42-43]

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The Infant.

In order to summarize the various steps in the age and development of children more exactly, a fairly detailed outline is here offered. In the age of the Infant Department, known as the Font, or Cradle Roll, or the Beginners' Division, the following factors are to be noted: age of the children in this department up to the completed fifth year; mother (and father) the natural teacher at this time; material for teaching should be so organized as to serve the interest of parents in telling the principal Bible-stories. -- Physical characteristics: great activity and restlessness; physical growth and development fairly rapid, reaching a good degree of sturdiness; yet the child is easily fatigued. -- Mental characteristics: the child is eager for new sensations, usually avid for learning, but as yet only for outward form of facts, the who, what, and when engaging his attention chiefly; the facts which form the world about him, pictures, and objects are interesting to the average child of this age. -- Moral development: largely through inhibition, absolute obedience, but imitativeness a factor to be reckoned with; reaction of sensations and impressions from without as yet not deep or lasting and hence habits still formed with great difficulty; there is much suggestibility and impulsiveness, with little or no consideration of effects. -- Dangers to be guarded against: exaggerated sense of child's own importance, especially in small families, selfishness, and other antisocial attitudes. [pages 43-44]

The Primary Pupil.

In the age of the Primary Department the following factors are to be noted: age of children in this department five and six; home influence still powerful; ability to read not ordinarily good. -- Physical characteristics: physical growth rapid, but body still immature, weak, unable to stand prolonged strain; natural appetites still vigorous. -- Mental characteristics: will as yet with little steadying or controlling power; senses rapidly developing, but must be treated with great care in view of possible overstrain; memory acquiring considerable strength; imagination apt to run riot upon the slightest pretext; reasoning power as yet not strong. -- Moral development: strict discipline of early childhood may often be tempered or modified by suggesting reasons; the so-called "lying proclivity," or the telling of falsehoods, on the basis of imagination causes some trouble; credulousness is rather strong and must be watched with care, since an abuse might cause skepticism; the child still strongly self-centered. -- Objects to be kept in mind: lessons taught so as to bring the facts of the story home to the child in a very vivid manner; use of pictures as starting-point is advisable; much blackboard and other visual work. [pages 44-45]

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The Junior Pupil.

In the age of the Junior Department the following factors are to be noted: age of children in this department seven or eight; home influence rivaled by that of school and its attractions; ability to read simple stories usually fair. -- Physical characteristics: the period one of rapid growth in both weight and height; bodily activity more purposive and controlled; coordination of mind and muscular activity becoming better, but still requiring much guidance. -- Mental characteristics: senses under better control; imagination very strong, memory becoming better right along; the process of interpreting, comprehending, digesting, and assimilating showing increasing intelligence. -- Moral development: absolute obedience motivated more often by appeal to reason, with simple explanations fitted to the intelligence level of child; imagination still often running riot, but child showing more control, beginning to realize his relation to others as a social unit. -- Objects to be kept in mind: the facts of the stories taught still to be kept in the foreground, but with greater attention to detail, and occasional application to be made by pupils; pictures and blackboard work still very prominent. [pages 45-46]

The Intermediate Pupil.

In the age of the Intermediate Department the following factors are to be noted: age of children in this department nine and ten; school influence as strong as that of the home; ability to read well and eagerness for learning usually present. -- Physical characteristics: gradual retardation in growth toward end of this period; endurance very good for age; coordination of mind and muscular activity making rapid progress. -- Mental characteristics: intellect developing very rapidly, with reasoning power growing stronger under proper coaching; child beginning to put his world together; causes and effects joined. -- Moral development: need of meeting the demand which reason of child makes upon teacher, since he now searches for cause, consistency, openness, and sincerity needed on part of the teacher; child imitating the doer rather than the deed. -- Points to be kept in mind: amount of memory work which may be demanded considerably increased; romantic leaning and hero-worship of children to be utilized in teaching Christian virtues, using Bible characters for that purpose; social adaptation still to be emphasized. [page 46]

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The Senior Pupil.

In the age of the Senior Department the following factors are to be noted: age of children in this department from eleven to thirteen, which brings at least the girls into the period of pre-pubertal acceleration or even into the stage of puberty (quick physical growth and many structural and functional changes); the influence of home and school about equally strong. -- Physical characteristics: girls forging ahead of boys when about eleven or twelve years old (but boys will catch up in middle adolescence); bodily endurance in both sexes fairly good; it is a time of good health and abundant energy, with possible periods of depression in girls. -- Mental characteristics: lessons learned at this time usually retained with ease and recalled in later years with little difficulty; emotional and imaginative life receding somewhat in favor of development of reasoning power; interest in skills and specialized ability growing. -- Moral condition: independence and self-assertion coming to the front; social instincts beginning to ripen; girls more nearly governed by adult motives than boys. -- Points to be kept in mind: the doctrinal side of teaching may be emphasized very strongly; the memory may be depended upon; sense of honor must be cultivated. [page 47]

Adolescence.

In early adolescence the following factors are to be noted: age of young people in this department from twelve or thirteen to fifteen or sixteen (for girls) and thirteen or fourteen to seventeen or eighteen (for boys), most of them confirmed members of our Church and familiar with the chief doctrines of the Christian faith. -- Physical characteristics: a time of very rapid growth (if puberty has actually set in) both in height and weight; trouble about coordination of bones and muscles, which often results in clumsiness; first consciousness of sex may result in extreme shyness or in sexual forwardness; many irregularities due to turmoil of development. -- Mental characteristics: the age of supine self-assurance, possibly of skepticism; disregard of the knowledge and experience of older people, marked tendency to try out their own ability and knowledge, especially in the "terrible teens" (thirteen to fifteen). -- Moral characteristics: adolescent love, although not always with some definite person of the other sex, but "falling in love with love"; doubting some of the fundamental facts of Scripture; challenging every form of fixed doctrine; a passionate idealism; maturing of social instincts; religious turmoil sometimes present. -- Points to be kept in mind: keep the confidence of young people; sympathy with their difficulties; guidance rather than prohibition; deepening the grooves of doctrinal foundation; various points of attack in teaching must be utilized. [pages 47-48]

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