



**THE MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOLS (3)
"Teaching made to measure"**

03-A-19

One of the first essentials for the first Brothers with their large and heterogeneous classes was the organization of the time table and the programmes. The aim of the "Management" was precisely to propose actual methods of organization based on successful experimentation to inexperienced young teachers.

The following chart enables one to understand better how the different kinds of lessons were introduced and distributed and, therefore to give an idea of the normal school career of the pupil. It is immediately evident that the disciplines are introduced progressively one after the other while the new pupil devoted the greater part of his time to reading and the various religious exercises prescribed for the school.

PLAN FOR SCHOOL COURSES

Plan of School courses in the conduct of Schools

<p>1) READING LESSONS</p> <p>1. Alphabetical chart</p> <p>2. Spelling chart: beginners</p> <p>3. Spelling Book: moderate advanced beginners</p> <p>4. First book: moderate advanced beginners</p> <p>5. Second book: moderate advanced beginners</p> <p>6. Third Book: moderate advanced beginners</p> <p>7. The Psalms: moderate advance beginners</p> <p>8. Politeness: moderate advanced beginners</p> <p>9. Handwriting: moderate advanced</p>	<p>2) LATIN</p> <p>beginners advanced</p>	<p>3) WRITING</p> <p>Round Inclined</p> <p>1st Order 2nd Order 3rd Order 4th Order 1st Order 5th Order 2nd Order 6th Order 3rd Order 7th Order 4th Order 8th Order 5th Order</p>	<p>4) ARITHMETIC</p> <p>Addition Subtraction Multiplication Division</p>	<p>5) SPELLING</p>
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N.B. *In reading*: "All pupils, at all stages, except those reading from the charts, will be divided into three sections: 1st beginners, 2nd moderate, and 3rd advanced and perfect in that lesson."

"There will however be only two sections in 'Politeness'. The first will be those who make errors in reading it, the second those who make none". "All the pupils in the three sections on the lessons will however read together without discrimination or discernment, as the teacher will tell them".

READING was, therefore, the first initiation into school life. And the Management of Schools in no way differs from the customary practice in 17th century France. Some primary schools, indeed, offered only this teaching. Others added arithmetic but rarely handwriting which was the monopoly of the "writing masters", and this explains the difficulties M. De La Salle had with this corporation.

LATIN. "The book in which they will learn to read is the book of Psalms; only those will be admitted to this lesson who can read French perfectly". This sentence recalls the important revolution which De La Salle introduced into the schools by having the child learn to read in his mother tongue.

WRITING. Because of the instruments in use at that time, this art demanded a long and difficult apprenticeship. "The children must be able to read perfectly in French as well as in Latin before beginning to write". "Arrangements will be made so that children do not learn to write before the age of 10". "If however a child should have reached the age of 12 without having started to write, he can start writing lessons before learning to read Latin providing he read French well and correctly.

ARITHMETIC. Arithmetic will be taught only to those who have started on the fourth stage of writing in the round and the second inclined and it will be the Director or the Inspector who appoints them to these lessons as well as to the others.

SPELLING. The teacher of handwriting will take care to teach spelling to those in the seventh stage of writing in the round and the fourth inclined, and the Inspector of Schools will pay attention to this.

SIMULTANEOUS TEACHING BUT DIFFERENTIATED

Such an organisation of the time table enables classes of homogeneous groups of pupils to be constituted for each of the subjects taught.

Within these groups there was real mobility each month when the changes of "Orders" or "Lessons" were made.

A class must therefore be seen not as a group of pupils doing the same work together but as a collection of distinct groups coexisting together and working simultaneously for secular subjects. The class became as one for catechism, prayers and religious offices. These groups were differentiated by the level of knowledge acquired and by the individual rhythm of progress.

The varying number of pupils in the classes and in the groups, differences in age, and sometimes dates of admission to the school were so many factors leading to suppleness and diversity in these groupings.

If we are to compare this kind of class with what we know of modern teaching practice we must refer to what is known as "subject level homogeneous groups" to be seen in some schools. We can thus note the modernity of some of the concepts put forward in the Conduct of Schools.

THE TWOFOLD OBJECTIVE OF ORDER AND EFFICIENCY

Strictness in progress and in the division of the children into the different Orders and Lessons allowed order to be established in the classroom. With the large numbers of pupils involved this was a necessity. It was also, no doubt, a means of avoiding having to have recourse to the "corrections" in use in the schools of the times and to which the Management refers at some length.

Order also allowed efficiency to be attained in a simultaneous teaching practice which was relatively recent in the 18th century in primary schools and which the Brothers tried to systematize from the very beginning. This is illustrated by a passage from a recent book. "General History of Teaching and Education in France" (Paris 1981):

"Besides the priority given to French, which was more or less exclusive, other pedagogical innovations explain the success and efficacy of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Established in towns and always in groups of two or three, they are thus able to divide their pupils into classes and different groups according to their level. The homogeneity thus obtained enabled the individual method to be dispensed with by occupying all the children in a group in the same activity. This "simultaneous" method experimented with in the 16th century had already developed in the 17th century in the east of France where in the schools of Pierre FOURIER there were three levels in reading: that of the alphabet, that of the printed book, and a higher level where the pupils learnt to read manuscript registers... But it was with the Brothers of the Christian schools that the method was systematically applied at all levels of apprenticeship to the rudiments". (*Various authors*, Vol. II, pp. 440-441)

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Besides efficiency and order, this organization shows that attention is paid to the person of the child for it allows his abilities and progress to be taken into account. It is a personalized approach to teaching.

Assuring order and efficiency is also a means of showing the respect one has for the child and especially for the poor who have no time to lose in inefficient schools.

Differences in age also permitted the employment of mutual aid among the pupils. Generally speaking one can see a tentative effort at mutual teaching.

It is not perhaps the actual methods of organization in which we are interested today, but we can look into the essential and lasting educational orientations they imply.

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