

## WHEN SHALL GRAMMAR BE TAUGHT?

In an effort to make education a less stereotyped and more living experience for the child, there is a marked tendency to defer the study of grammar to a much later age than formerly. But this raises two questions. 1. Is the child of today at a disadvantage in not possessing a working knowledge of his mother-tongue? 2. Can this knowledge be brought to him in a manner suited to his stage of development?

Rudolf Steiner, whose art of education closely follows the child's natural development, contends that the child of nine or ten not only is ready for the study of grammar but actually needs it. For a knowledge of the structure and laws of his mother-tongue gives him a feeling of confidence in using it. Before the age of nine or ten, children speak or write largely from their unconscious instinct of imitation, but from then on it is important for them to become more conscious in forming their sentences, in choosing their words. At this age a child becomes really aware of himself as an individual and the study of grammar helps him to strengthen this awareness.

Because grammar has not been presented in a manner actually suited to young children a feeling against teaching it has arisen. We have expected children to reason from cause to effect with adult logic. But Rudolf Steiner has made us see the child as an artist, learning through his feeling and imagination rather than through his intellect. This does not mean that we should make a game of the grammar lesson, but that we should teach in such a living manner that the child will work in the same wholehearted way in which he plays.

Each teacher can build creatively on Dr. Steiner's broad and general indications. He suggests beginning grammar with the verb which, in its activity, is most akin to the child. Such a sentence as, "Ann is writing on the black-board", describing what one of the pupils is actually doing, grows out of their own actions and makes a real impression. Since children delight in color it is helpful to write the words in different colors. They instinctively see a verb as red, a noun as blue, if they have real feeling for color. The choice for each different part of speech is never arbitrary, but the color should be found which gives a certain individuality to each word.

Definitions are avoided in early stages since they tend to crystallize a concept too soon. It is better to call a verb a "doing word" and a noun a "naming word". Nouns may be introduced by enacting the story from Genesis. One child plays the part of Adam; the others choose an animal which is represented by action or description. Adam then gives the proper name to each child.

The following verses arose from the desire to stimulate the understanding of the various parts of speech by letting them come to life and speak for themselves. We give only three, but the adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction and interjection each has its own verse.

### THE VERB

I am a verb; I like to act,—  
To walk, to run, to dance—it's a fact—  
To plow, to build, to work, to strive,  
I like to feel that I'm alive!  
But sometimes I just say—I *am*—  
And act as meek as a little lamb.

### THE NOUN

I am a Noun; I give names to things,  
To persons, from beggars to royal kings;  
To animals also, great and small;  
To flowers and trees that grow so tall,  
To things like tables and chairs and sticks,  
To houses and stone, concrete and bricks;  
And to things you can't see or hear or feel,  
Like goodness and truth and honor and zeal!  
I like to be quiet,—I don't run about—  
I just sit still and let others shout.

### THE PRONOUN

I am a Pronoun; it isn't quite fair,—  
I'm only about when the noun isn't there!  
Sometimes I'm *I* and sometimes I'm *you*,  
Or *he*, *she* or *it*, or *they* or *them*, too;  
I change my form when it suits my whim,  
Then *she* becomes *her* and *he* becomes *him*.

Sentence-structure is given when the parts of speech have become familiar. If diagramming seems too stereotyped, one may depict the subject and predicate as the main trunk of a tree and the various modifiers as branches. This could later be transformed into a simple diagram, for the plant form out of which it grew would remain in the back of the pupil's mind. A compound sentence of two independent clauses may be shown by two colored circles drawn side by side, connected by the conjunction. A complex sentence can be a small circle within a larger one, the circumferences touching at one point where the conjunction is written.

Many other ways might be found to bring the living forces of a child's active imagination into play. If this is done, the parts of speech may be taught even in the third grade. It is always well to anticipate the work of a later stage, and to begin serious study of grammar in the fourth grade. By this means the child will be strengthened within himself at this crucial moment of his life. For, to quote Dr. Steiner; "It is the task of speech to inaugurate self-consciousness (consciousness of self) between the ninth and tenth years . . . and in a general sense the principle of self-consciousness invariably comes to light in grammar and syntax."

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With the first number of The Bulletin we have to report the death, at Easter, of Mrs. Irene Foltz, one of the school's original teachers.

From the moment of joining the school project twelve years ago her whole thought and energy were poured into the task of establishing the educational principles which she considered essential for the world at the present time. Through this task she not only served the children with contagious enthusiasm, but found the way of her own development. The children felt this reality of her striving as a living force for their own learning. By this power their hearts as well as their heads were vitally nurtured.