

Children's Public Speaking Project

By Gayle Woolson

Following are some highlights concerning a children's public speaking project inspired by instructions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá about children giving "speeches of high quality." The project was initiated in 1980 by Mrs. Gayle Woolson, a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh, and is lovingly shared with anyone desiring information about it.

"Man's treasure is his utterance . . ." -- Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 62.

A Golden Key for the Development of Children

A golden key that opens a mighty door to one of the most transforming and progressive influences upon children is found in these dynamic instructions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

"Encourage ye the school children, from their earliest years, to deliver speeches of high quality, so that in their leisure time they will engage in giving cogent* and effective talks, expressing themselves with clarity and eloquence." (*convincing) "Take the utmost care to give them high ideals and goals . . ."

--Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 134, 136.

That illuminating guidance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá holds the power to raise the level of mankind from its roots -- the children. It conveys a unique and vital way in which children can participate importantly in building a better world by promoting the great Bahá'í ideals for a universal Divine Civilization -- the Kingdom of God on earth, the Golden Age.

A New Higher Dimension for Children's Activities

The development of the ability of children to give "speeches of high quality" gives a new constructive, purposeful dimension to their activities. The very smallness of children is a special power when it is coupled with talks that express the lofty Bahá'í teachings such as: the unity of mankind, world peace, brotherhood, justice, and love among the people of all religions, races, nations and classes, and virtues of the higher nature of man, the purpose of life and the glorious destiny of humanity. To hear a child give an eloquent speech about such "high ideals and goals" is deeply impressive in its impact, even electrifying.

There is nothing that excites my imagination more than to think of the dramatic renovation that would take place in the world if children in all nations could "deliver speeches of high quality" as 'Abdu'l-Bahá had indicated!

Some Benefits for Character Enhancement

Experience has shown that when children participate in a program by giving a speech, it gives them an edifying sense of doing something great, a sense of accomplishment. It strengthens their self-confidence and helps them overcome shyness. It identifies them closely with the work of the Faith.

A Method for Teaching Children Public Speaking

Following is a simple method for developing the ability of public speaking in children which, in my experience, has proven effective. It is a method for helping them to memorize a speech and adequately present it before an audience.

Teaching to Memorize By Ear

1) A few words of a speech are repeated three times for the child by the trainer, then the child repeats them three times. The same is then done with the next few words. Before going on to a third set of words, the first two segments are connected, first by the trainer, then by the child, repeating three times.

It is important to explain the meaning of any word and concept that the child does not understand as one comes to it, as a learning process.

2) When a whole sentence is learned, it is repeated three times by the trainer and then by the child. When a whole paragraph is memorized, drill in it until it is fluent. As each new paragraph is learned, connect it to what was learned before and have the child repeat until fluent.

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The entire speech is learned in this way, by repeating and connecting. Each session of drilling can take 5 to 15 minutes or more, depending on the age and attention span of the child.

Inflection

As the trainer is repeating for the child, he should stress certain key words so that the child will imitate the sound. This will prevent developing a monotone or mechanical sound in the presentation. It is helpful to underline words that should be stressed.

Pausing at the End of Sentences and Paragraphs

The trainer should give importance to slight pauses at the end of sentences and especially between paragraphs so that the words will not be quickly run together.

Voice Projection

Most children have delicate voices. They should become aware of the importance of speaking loudly and clearly when giving a speech to an audience so that even the persons sitting in back of the room or hall can hear them. To strengthen the vocal chords, sometimes have the child recite at a distance from the trainer, at the end of the room or next room. When the drilling is done by telephone by a trainer who lives elsewhere, the same can be done and the child's phone should be placed on its side so the trainer can hear him/her.

Teaching By Telephone

The volunteer trainer who does not live in the same home as the child can very well conduct the work by telephone. This saves time and transportation. All my training work is done by phone except when I am teaching a class at a Bahá'í School. My students collaborate with me by calling me at a scheduled time. Likewise, I tape record the drilling process by using a telephone pickup and thereby can record the child's voice also.

Slowing Down the Speedy Speakers

The talk that is most effective is one in which each word is clearly enunciated and is not speedily spoken. That gives beauty to the presentation and makes it more understandable. The child that speaks fast can be trained to slow down by drilling him in saying each word separately when practicing his speech.

Children's Participation in Programs

Efforts should be made to get child speakers on programs. This motivates the children. It is vital to tape record such programs and, better yet, video-tape them, take pictures, and keep a written record of the story.

Developing Genius in Your Child or Someone Else's Child

A concept of my late husband, Dr. Clement Woolson, an early American believer and Bahá'í teacher, is that by learning to express the great Bahá'í teachings, which constitute the guidance of the Genius of God for building a glorious world, one clothes himself with rays of that Genius like a cloak of light. It is not from oneself but from the teachings.

This is the type of genius that can be developed in children. An expert in child development has stated that a child who contributes towards creating a better world has genius.

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