

## **One Can Never Hear It Too Often – Maria Montessori, London 1927 & India 1940**

In our casa we have 120 children who differ in age by three years, we distribute them in three classes, but instead of dividing them, as is usually done, according to age, putting all the children of one age in one class, we shall have three classes of mixed ages, and the 40 children in each class will each be doing his own individual work, solving its individual difficulties. This is what we consider social life.

Another difference in our approach is that in our schools, if a child can do in one year what other children take two years to do, he has the possibility of doing so; on the other hand if there is a child who is slow in understanding, who is very young and who goes very slowly in his progress of acquiring instruction, he progresses at his own pace and does not retard the progress and mental growth and the growth of the other children in the class. Thus the same class not only permits the children to be occupied at different tasks, but may also contain children who are on different mental levels.

What I consider another advantage is that by working together the children find a practical solution to their difficulties. For instance, in the case of someone wanting some particular thing that is being used by another, he has to wait till it is free; moving about they meet each other. Whereas if they were on the contrary seated on benches as you are, this social meeting would not take place. Society is not formed, is it, by passive individuals who are performing actions.

Another thing I find strange in society is its expression of “collective work” when a number of people are doing the same thing, in order to distinguish it from “individual work” where everyone is doing something different.

I should like to say a few words in a positive sense about this concept. We consider that children of different ages should work together, and in practice we have determined that these children should be of three different ages – of one year’s difference between, for example: classes of three, four and five years or classes of six, seven and eight years, and that boys and girls should be together. Having three years of difference in one class enables the younger children to be helped through imitation or otherwise of the older children, and as it often happens that the older children give real lessons to the younger ones, it also gives an occasion to the older ones to learn to sympathize with the younger ones by realizing how one reacts when one has not yet reached the mental development of the older age. As we do not force the children to this reciprocal help it results in a form of social relationship.

In returning to speak of the ordinary school, we ask ourselves what advantage is there in all the pupils doing the same thing at the same time; this may be called simultaneous work, but it could not be called collective work. We have collective work in the true sense of the word when we have the cooperation of many individuals. Collective work exists when there is a combination of labor. We have an example of this in the setting of the table in our children’s schools and homes, and the clearing away afterward.