

HOW TO GIVE AN ASSIGNMENT

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Perhaps one would say that giving an assignment is a very simple matter which needs no particular technique. On the contrary, giving or making an assignment is not to be trifled with, for the assignment of lessons proceeds generally in some more or less recognized order. There are various problems that recur again and again in much the same order. The problems concerned are the following:

1. How to lead up to a new topic
2. How to present a proposed unit, topic, or activity
3. How to organize an attack upon it
4. How to allot tasks
5. How to record proposed activities
6. How to clear up difficulties and misunderstanding
7. How to get pupils started to work
8. How to control time
9. How to control length of assignment

In order to help the teacher in giving assignment to produce satisfactory results on the reaction of the students in the lesson, the following suggestions are worthy of consideration:

1. In making an assignment, assume an attitude of interest. Even if you are not vitally interested, try to become interested. You cannot teach something in which you are not interested.

2. Remember that the students will understand your feelings toward what you are doing and gain an added incentive to attack the subject vigorously—or do the opposite, depending

upon how you feel about it.

3. Assume the cooperative spirit; expect cooperation from your students and show willingness on your part to cooperate with them.

4. Do not under any circumstances assume the bullying attitude of a traffic officer toward your students. Such a manner is generally a smoke-screen to cover up some real weakness

5. In planning an assignment, ask yourself, first: "What do my pupils need next?" and second, "What is the next thing suggested for them in the course of study?" See if these two things fit together. If not, attempt to make them fit.

6. Talk a great deal of opportunities, of good experiences to be had, and little of requirements.

7. In general, appeal to the will to work by making learning attractive; do not put it in a negative light to the students.

8. In planning a new assignment, allow plenty of time for preparation and presentation of the problem; do not hurry this matter. Enlist the will of the students by arousing their interest in the new undertaking. Do not assume that they should learn the new lesson whether they are interested or not. Remember that lack of interest makes learning very difficult, if not impossible.

9. If unit plans, contracts, guide sheets, or other materials are used, remember that these materials must be presented to pupils and their interest in them must be aroused.

10. Adjust the time of the assign-

ment to the needs of the situation. Let it come where it is most advantageous.

11. Let the duration of the assignment depend on the nature of the problem and the needs of the pupils.

12. Try to have in each assignment some challenge to the student's curiosity, to his ability to think, to his ingenuity in construction, or some other stimulus to his interest, so that he will find doing the work pleasant.

13. Distribute the work to be done according to the abilities of the pupils. Challenge each to the limit of his capacities. Don't discourage the backward.

14. Let every assignment end with encouragement. The student should have confidence in his ability. An attitude of despair or a sense of injustice is a poor preparation for a good attack upon a new lesson.

15. Remember that success in the performance of one assignment is the very best preparation for another. Make the assignment neither too easy nor too difficult. Let it be a pleasant exertion to the student, but let it be rigorous. Soft methods are not implied in this emphasis upon the necessity of success and interest.

From the above suggestions, it is clear that the assignment of lessons is a distinct technique in the presentation of the new subject matter to be taken up in the next recitation. A thorough perusal of the suggestions reveals a good application of common sense in the giving of assignments in order to attain the desired effective results in the learning process on the part of the students.

THE VALUE OF A DEFINITE ASSIGNMENT

One of the many good reasons urged

for new typewritten assignments is the quality of definiteness. It is obvious that if a definite assignment is given, the students know precisely what to do and how to do it. In this case, the minimum time wasted is negligible if at all and the results of students' reaction are satisfactory. It is therefore necessary that it pays to discuss here rather thoroughly the value and significance of definiteness in the assignment of lessons.

Now, our question is, When is an assignment definite? A lesson assignment is definite when it is so thoroughly understood by the student that it leads to successful accomplishment. It must set up in the mind of the learner certain purposes or objectives. It must suggest what is to be done, why it is to be done, how it is to be done, when it is to be done, and how well it is to be done. This applies equally well to assignments that are purely arbitrary announcements or commands by the teacher and to co-operative, socialized assignments that characterize the work in the modern school. Early training in definite types of assigned activity is a necessary preliminary to later freedom of choice and independent research. Guidance is very exact and detailed at first; later it becomes much relaxed; and finally, it is calculated to give the individual large freedom within a certain field or on a definite problem of some type without specifying unnecessarily the exact details of either method, materials, or results to be obtained.

From the findings of such educators, as Grace E. Bird in "An experiment in Focalization," W. L. Beauchamp in "A Preliminary Experimental Study of Technique in the Mastery of Subject Matter in Elementary Physical Science"

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C. E. Germane in "Outlining and Summarizing Compared with Rereading as Methods of Studying"; G. A. Yookam in "The Effects of a Single Reading"; and Louise B. Wright in "The Value of a Motivated Assignment." We conclude that a definite, detailed assignment centers the child's attention upon specific things and motivates his efforts. Therefore, we could improve our teaching to a mark-

ed extent by giving more definite and detailed assignment.

After presenting to you the characteristics of a good assignment, you will have realized its importance as a vital factor in students' preparation. Other things being equal, under normal conditions, the degree of students' preparation depends much upon how the assignment is prepared, presented, and motivated.

HOW BADLY DO WE FARE In Comparison?

The following excerpt was taken from a report on the state of the national educational system, U.S.A., by Benjamin Fine, education editor of the New York Times. This was a six months' study. The article on page 12, Ladies Home Journal, for April, 1947 contains 20 items, among which are the following:

350,000 teachers left the American public schools since 1940.

125,000 teachers are serving on emergency basis.

70,000 teaching positions are unfilled — no teachers.

60,000 teachers have only high school education or less.

175,000 (25%) teachers are new in the job each year.

37 DOLLARS a week is the average pay.

200,000 teachers get less than 25 DOLLARS a week.

22% of all college students attended teachers' colleges in 1920; NOW only 7% attend teachers' college.

6,000 schools will be closed because of lack of teachers.

25,000 children will have no schooling during the year.

2 MILLION children will suffer a major impairment in their schooling because of poor teachers.

5 million children will receive inferior education this year because of the inadequate teachers supply.

Only 50% of teachers employed in 1940-41 are still teaching today.

Only 15% of all elementary and high school teachers are men.

56% of teachers in this country do not have tenure protection.

U. S. spends 1.5% of its national income for its schools; Great Britain, 3%; Soviet Union, 7%.

THE ASSETS OF DEMOCRACY

Among the important assets of which we are proud and which we can use in the defense of democracy are the following:

A common speech and a common culture;

A willingness to consider with open mind the contributions offered by diverse races, cultures, and religions, and to adopt those that promise enrichment of the national life;

A widespread respect for human personality and a recognition of each individual's right to live his own life so far as it does not interfere with the welfare and happiness of others;

A common conviction that it is the duty as well as the privilege of every individual to share in the making of decisions concerning general policies that affect the welfare of all;

A long experience in self-government, in which every adult may take such part as his interests and abilities warrant;

Dissatisfaction with the present, and hope that stimulates to activity for a better future;

Agreement that changes must be made by peaceful means;

A general willingness to abide by majority decisions made at the polls, with due respect for minorities who may continue their activities to influence a subsequent decision;

Recognition of the right of any minority, however small, to propose, to advocate, and even to agitate by proper means for social changes without as well as within the pattern previously approved by the majority;

A widespread approval of the right of the individual to secure, interpret,

and disseminate information, to come to such conclusions as it indicates, freely to express opinions, to exert the influence of argument, to choose one's associates, to assemble, to vote, to move freely, to labor at work of one's labor, after contributing a just and proportionate share to the cost of protection and promoting the general welfare;

Generally approved and practiced civil liberties, which may not be abrogated or curtailed, even by majorities;

A widespread system of free education;

Sympathy for and care of the unfortunate and the needy;

Intolerance of enduring social stratification, whether caused by birth, race, religion, or wealth, inherited or otherwise acquired;

The right to worship according to the dictates of one's conscience;

Equality before the law and a presumption of innocence until proved guilty;

Freedom from fear of persecution by those in authority...

With such general assets it is imperative that we clarify the meanings of democracy, develop a renewed faith in them and devotion to them, and also that we realize their implications for modern life. The defense of our nation demands that we understand what democracy is, that we passionately believe it superior to all other ways of living, and that we apply it consistently to making our country the best possible for a free people.

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