

TOWARD BETTER TEACHING PRACTICES

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In any organized society education is a vital function, and since education is to a large extent the result of instruction, it behooves every teacher to devise and employ such classroom practices and procedures as will make his teaching positively effective. Effective teaching is that which enables a pupil to learn in the quickest and most economical manner whatever he has to learn as a means of adjusting himself to life.

One who really knows the Filipino teachers, knows them well and intimately, as I believe practically every supervisory official does, cannot doubt their earnestness, their indefatigability, their willingness to serve, and their devotion to duty; however, it cannot be denied that not a few of them hardly know what they are about, do things by halves, or flounder in their work, and the reason is not that they are naturally incompetent but that they lack the necessary cultural background and professional preparation. Happily, these two essentials for successful teaching are within the reach of ambitious and energetic teachers, because culture may be self-acquired and occupational proficiency may come through conscientious and intelligent practice of one's calling, and because opportunities have already been provided for teachers to improve their educational qualifications while they are in the service.

I propose to mention some of our undesirable teaching practices as I have noted them in the course of my school visitation and supervision, solely for

the purpose of pointing out ways and means whereby our pedagogical mistakes can be corrected and better methods introduced.

VERBALISM

Verbalism is a common objectionable teaching practice, and what I mean by that is the tendency on the part of teachers to use too many words which are vague and unintelligible, or which do not mean anything in particular in so far as they are so used or put together in sentences. This is particularly noticeable in the case of recitations in the social studies and in elementary science: both teacher and pupils say ever so many things which are pointless or have a doubtful meaning one simply cannot make either head or tail of what they say. The asking of questions by the teacher and the making of statements by the students seem to consist in words only rather than in the ideas to be conveyed by words. The whole affair is sometimes dominated by such wordiness and such obscurity of thought that one cannot help wondering whether or not the teacher has succeeded only in making matters more complicated. The verbosity characterizing the recitation is truly appalling.

This defect cannot be remedied unless the teacher disciplines himself to be accurate and orderly in expressing his thoughts and ideas and in conducting the recitation. He must know in each class period just what he wishes to accomplish; at least before coming to his class he should clearly out-

line in his mind the lesson that he is to teach — it goes without saying that a teacher must master every lesson he gives. Then it is well for him to announce at the beginning of the class what he hopes to accomplish during that period. In a class in social studies, for example, he might say, "Today we shall study how the Philippines were peopled, beginning with the first inhabitants. We shall trace through the centuries how the Filipino race were developed from various peoples." In this way the lesson becomes more definite and meaningful and the students are helped to direct their thinking as well as their discussion to a well-defined topic. After all, order is not only heaven's first law but also the law of the intellect.

Another way to put straight this wrong practice is to avoid abstractions as much as possible. By their very nature abstractions are vague and general, and not many young people can readily think of a quality apart from any real thing that has the quality. Therefore, the teacher should make the presentation of the work or lesson concrete with pictures, charts, objects, diagrams, and other visual aids, and should help the pupils to express themselves in a clear and precise manner. The use of many unnecessary words, or words with little meaning should be avoided, and simple, direct statements should be preferred to long, involved ones. At least this will combat, if not do away with, stupid verbalism.

DRILL

Many teachers, finding developmental lessons more interesting to the pupils and easier to conduct, conceive an aversion to drill lessons; consequently, they either neglect drill les-

sons or conduct them in a haphazard and ineffective manner. Whatever the teachers' attitude towards drill may be, the fact remains that drill or repetition is a necessity in all education, particularly education on the elementary level. To show how necessary drill is, I have to cite but one example: a child with an I. Q. of 100 must meet a word 35 times and one with an I. Q. of 70 must meet a word 70 times before it is his for good. Many a teacher labors under the impression that merely having a pupil do a thing over and over, oftentimes to the point of boredom, will make that child learn that thing well, and I say never in the world will this be true. It is only well-directed, purposeful practice that makes perfect in the acquisition of skill or in the mastery of any fundamental.

At the very outset teachers must remember that the purpose of drill is to fix certain facts securely and accurately in the pupils' minds so as to facilitate the recall of such facts whenever they are needed by an individual in the performance of any act, and in order to achieve this purpose it is necessary that the teacher should make use of improved drill techniques. Such techniques must include some or all of the following characteristics:

1. Drill is most effective when it furnishes multiple associations — auditory, visual, and motor — to the concepts that are being fixed.
2. In drill the same fact or particular should be used in a variety of situations.
3. Drill, instead of being isolated, should be tied up with its context, because isolated drill is of little value.
4. Drill must fix attention on specific facts that are highly important to the pupils.
5. Drill exercises must present ideas in concise and terse language.

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