

English.

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TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE HIGH SCHOOLS.

PERHAPS, before explaining my present methods, I should explain the process by which I attempted to follow our great teacher, in order that others may profit by my experience. When I began to teach literature, the ordinary text-book describing the development of English literature from the early time to the present was put into my hands. I had been through the same process as a student, but without interest, nor could I interest my class in that text-book. Copious extracts were given, but I found that it was very much like selling goods by sample—the sample did very well as far as it went, but every one would like to see the whole piece before purchasing. Determined to get at the bottom of the matter, I tried a new scheme with my next class. I gave them lectures upon the history of literature, discarding the text-book altogether, but requiring them to take notes which they were to write out in a note-book. In connection with this work, we read a few masterpieces in full. I found that I was now on the right track. The interest was even more marked than I had expected. As I was preparing the work for the next class, it occurred to me that here might be the solution of the essay problem, which had much troubled me as a student in both school and college, as well as since I began to teach. Accordingly I incorporated the essay plan in the general literary scheme for the next year, asking the students to write up the works which we read in class. Some of the work done was very creditable, and I found that I had gained two points—the interest and attention were much better than before and the essays were written without complaint. Of course these successes encouraged me to proceed with my investigations. Every year I added some new point until I reached the method which I now employ. After thoroughly testing it, I feel confident that I make no mistake in recommending it to those who have no better, while I shall be perfectly delighted to learn from any one who can suggest an improvement. Briefly, then, my plan of procedure is as follows:

I divide the work into two portions, which I call outside work and class work respectively. For the former I give, at the beginning of the year, a representative list of the best works of the present century, including fiction, essay, history, and biography, numbering perhaps 300 volumes. This is followed at intervals during the year by lists from preceding centuries until each student is in possession of a fairly representative list of books in our literature. Each student is expected to read one work per month and to write an essay upon it, in the course of which she is to answer a series of questions, which will be explained later. For the class work I have found it advisable to devote a few moments at the beginning of each recitation to the reading and discussion of one or two of the essays. The remainder of the time is devoted to reading masterpieces from the poets. During the year we find time to read Chaucer's "Prologue," one canto of the "Fairie Queene," Milton's "Short Poems," Pope's "Rape of the Lock," two or three of Shakespeare's plays, "The De Coverley Papers," with short poems from Burns, Shelley, Byron, Keats, Tennyson, and Browning. This list admits of great variation from year to year, authors being added or subtracted as occasion may arise.

Having given the general outline of my method of teaching English I will now explain a little more fully the details of the plan. I begin with the present century, because I find that it is easier to keep up the interest by working backwards than to begin with the earliest period. Unless we can arouse an interest in

the work, the work has no lasting effect in the formation of character. I find that the "Outside Work," treated in the manner described in the preceding paper, has proved so inspiring that some of my students have read and written up nine works during a term of thirteen weeks instead of three, the number required. The essays, when properly arranged and indexed, form a very valuable collection for future reference. More than this, they help to form the habit of writing logically and concisely, and to make essay writing a pleasure, as it should be.

As a sample of the questions to be answered in the essays may be taken the following list, to which I attach explanatory notes, indicating by italics the questions given to the students. Of course this list admits of endless variations, and is only one of those which I have found useful.

1. *Author*, i.e., the author's name, dates of birth and death, with names of chief contemporaries.
2. *Sketch*, in a very summary manner, any important events in the author's life.
3. *Title* of work to be reviewed.
4. *Department*, i.e. state whether the work falls under the head of history, fiction, biography, etc.
5. *Classify* the work in its own department, as for example in fiction state whether romantic, realistic, historical, critical, novel of character, etc.
6. *Style*, giving only the essential elements.
7. State whether the book has any distinct *purpose*, any great ethical lesson to teach, to expose any wrong, or merely to amuse, etc.
8. *Analyze*, but in a very summary manner.
9. *Criticism and Comment*. This question may mean an infinite variety of things, and I think it best at first to limit definitely the scope of the answer to a few points such as—Has the purpose been consistently carried out? Has the author a firm grasp of his subject? Is he sincere or effective?—gradually increasing the limits according to the ability of the students.
10. *Compare* with other works read.
11. *Quotations*. These should be carefully selected, and should be made to illustrate, more even than the analysis, the character of the book under discussion.

In class work care should be taken to select well edited works, but those containing the fewest notes, explanatory and critical. It seems to me that copious notes and explanations are a hindrance rather than a help in class work. The life which is in the text needs to be absorbed directly from the work itself, not through the medium of explanatory notes. Such notes may show the learning and industry of the annotator, but there can be no doubt that they encourage indolence and dependence on the part of pupil. If words are not understood it does the pupil good to consult the dictionary, and if the meaning is not self-evident a little study will make the pupil self-reliant. For example, last term my class read Hamlet, and the edition which most of the students had was profusely annotated. As we read the play, I found it quite difficult to concentrate the attention of the class upon the thought of Shakespeare instead of upon the interpretations of the annotator. When, at last, I succeeded in weaning them from their notes, the study of Shakespeare became a source of constantly increasing delight. The problems proposed, studied, and discussed, gave room for individual thought and judgment. There will always be a difference of opinion upon such questions as, "Did the Queen know that her husband was guilty of his brother's murder?" "Why did Hamlet practice his scheme of madness upon Ophelia first?" "What was the ghost?" etc., but each member can back her opinion by what she considers good proof. I hold that it is no part of the teacher's business, in such cases, to attempt to settle the question. I consider that my pupils are sensible beings and have as much right to their opinions as I have to mine, and I make

them understand my position. My duty is to see to it that they reach their conclusions logically and after examining both sides. As teachers, we must give our own opinions only as individuals, recognizing the force of all that our pupils have said, never arbitrarily saying that we are right, and that our pupils must agree with us.

The essay work should be carefully attended to and revised. A short discussion of the style of the essay, or of the arrangement of the subject matter, will furnish valuable hints to the writer and to the whole class. For my own part, I have found this method to give such satisfactory results that I hope it may commend itself to my fellow-teachers. Among the many results which might be mentioned I will name only one. I have been very much interested in noting the change which has taken place in the *taste* of my pupils. In the list of works given at the beginning of the year were some light works. These were the first ones chosen, as a matter of course. Soon, however, the students began to find themselves interested in deeper, more wholesome works, until I think they may safely be trusted to select their own books with the certainty that they will enjoy the best. In other words, to end where we began, this system brings the pupil into such close contact with the intellectual life-fountain that the germs of life are sure to develop.

My plan for next year is to bring the "Outside Work" into all the classes, in connection with the history of the first two years and the literature of the last two. —Colin S. Buell, in the *School Journal*.

COMMON BLUNDERS.

A COUNTY superintendent in speaking of his institute, told the writer recently that he always planned for a short recess "between every exercise." He doubtless meant between every two exercises, as "between" does not go well with single things. The mistake is not an uncommon one.

A teacher recently said, when speaking of the government of his school, "I treat every pupil alike." Alike what? You cannot treat one pupil "alike," and "every" indicates that they are taken separately. He meant to say that he treated *all* pupils alike.

A teacher recently said that he believed that "every pupil should have the same chance." This is a blunder of the same kind as the above. He meant that *all* pupils should have the same chance. "Every" is a distributive adjective and indicates that the objects to which it refers are to be taken *separately*.

"Now."—Many teachers use this little word "now" many more times than they need to. They are in the habit of unconsciously beginning every explanation and many of their sentences with it. The writer recently heard an institute worker use it *forty-seven* times in a single talk. "Now," this detracted much from the value of the exercise.—*Indiana School Journal*.

THE teacher's success may be measured by the degree in which he can bring his scholars to make exertions absolutely without aid.—*Dr. Temple*.

THE primary principle of education is the determination of the pupil to self-activity—the doing nothing for him which he is able to do for himself.—*Sir Wm. Hamilton*.

ALL learning is self-teaching. It is on the working of the pupils own mind that his progress in knowledge depends. The great business of the master is to teach the pupil to teach himself.—*Anon*.

THE teacher must not attempt to think and speak for the pupils, nor to consider his own work is skilfully done, when he has made easy, by explanations, whatever is assigned to be performed.—*J. W. Dickinson*.