

THE CHRISTIAN TEACHER

by

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

Observation and Practice Teaching

WHILE there is much that can be learned from textbooks on pedagogy, its principles can be made permanent by observation and practice teaching.

I. OBSERVATION

Visit some class where there is good teaching, and carefully study what goes on. Observe what the teacher does, how he does it, what the pupils do. Note the place, equipment, arrangement, materials. Watch the teacher's attitudes. By observing others, you may receive more vital instruction than from a textbook.

The great difficulty will be to find teachers who are sufficiently well-trained as to afford a good example. It will be of no help to copy mistakes. For this reason, a student who is sent out to observe another teacher at work should be prepared to be a critic. He should have a definite schedule which he can follow.

That you may understand the nature of this schedule and how it was used by one of my students in the Christian Education Course, the written report made will be inserted at this point. The assignment was to the Intermediate department of the Sunday school in one of the city churches, and the criticism concerns the platform exercises of the departmental session, as well as the class period.

1. Physical conditions.

a. Ventilation.

The facilities for proper ventilation were splendid—two large French windows on the east side.

a. The room was airy, sunny, and very pleasant.

b. Temperature – Normal - 68°

c. Seating arrangement. This conformed to a certain adopted principle - boys on one side and girls on the other.

d. Handicaps.

In a way the room was all that could be desired. It was pleasant, inviting, and conducive to worship. The large vase of colorful flowers on the piano, the floor lamp, flowered drapes and two beautiful pictures (Christ in the Temple and The Good Shepherd) hanging on the wall, gave the room a homelike atmosphere.

The room was unsatisfactory for the lesson period however. The department consisted of two classes of boys and three classes of girls. For the lesson period, the two boys' classes adjourned to the rooms adjoining the Department. The girls' classes remained in the larger room; curtains were drawn to separate the three groups while in class session. The hum of voices was audible throughout the lesson teaching.

I sat with the class at the rear of the room. I saw the various intrusions, the elements that disturbed the progress of the lesson. Two secretaries worked at a desk nearby. Their conversation, the jingling of coins, the walking to and fro from the classrooms, certainly did not help the situation. All in all, it was a difficult atmosphere in which to teach. Furthermore, the comparatively small space did not permit blackboard work or any type of handwork that required a board.

2. Worship program.

The service started promptly at the appointed hour. A man from another department led the singing, and a young woman played the piano. The song leader announced the opening hymn, "*Jesus Is All the World to Me*," which was followed by the raising of hands asking for certain favorites. One of the boys requested "*We've a Story to Tell to the Nations*," and another boy asked for "*Holy, Holy, Holy*." The final hymn was chosen by a girl, "*All the Way My Saviour Leads Me*."

At the close of the song service, the leader left and a young woman took charge. She announced the Scripture portion, which was read by one of the girls. I was a little disturbed to notice a boy taking the register for his class to the secretary's desk during the reading of the Word of God.

Following the Scripture reading, a special musical number was announced. A young man from another department sang, "*Morning*," by Oley Speaks. This was beautifully done, but it seemed to me inappropriate in a worship service. It did not correlate with the theme of the lesson. The offering was taken after the solo. The most uplifting moment of the service came when the woman in charge called on one of the boys (about eleven years of age) to lead in prayer. This was most impressive. He prayed for the members of the church, those outside the church, the missionaries, and finally for the nation and those in authority. The worship service was nicely arranged, but I could not help questioning whether or not the pupils had grasped the full significance of worship and reverence. Seated in the rear of the room, I could see that several children were talking during the program.

After the lesson period, the classes again assembled in the Department room. The acting superintendent called on a ten-year-old boy to announce a meeting of a certain boys' organization in the church. This was well done, and the boy gave promise of ability as a leader. Then the group was dismissed with prayer.

3. Routine.

a. Record making.

The registers were marked during the worship period. In two of the classes, a pupil did the marking. Some registers were picked up by one of the secretaries immediately after the classes adjourned for the lesson period.

b. Distribution of materials.

Registers were distributed during the song service. Sunday school papers were given out at the close of the session, as the pupils filed past the secretaries' desk.

c. Entrance and exit of pupils.

There was no difficulty in this regard, for the entrance was at the rear of the room and tardy children could slip in quietly. The boys, since they did not remain in the room for the lesson period, sat near the front; but the girls sat in their respective classes, and it was impossible for the girls who were late to slip in without being observed and disturbing others in case of no vacant seats.

4. Personal factors in teaching.

a. Appearance.

I trust I am being fair in judgment when I say that this teacher did not measure up to the standards for her position. Both dress and extremely unnatural coloring attracted undue attention to herself.

b. Voice.

This teacher had a rather pleasant voice, but it was much too weak. Since I was sitting near her, I could hear, but the noise from the lesson taught in the other classes was distracting. Her tempo was good, and the pitch with intermingled inflections pleasing.

c. Mannerisms.

Since the teacher sat in the circle with her class, it was difficult to note mannerisms. She kept the same pose throughout the lesson - sitting with legs crossed, book in hand.

d. Personality.

She had a pleasing personality, and at times showed real animation in her teaching. Her lack of confidence was in evidence, doubtless attributable to my presence. With lack of ease she could not give herself wholly to the lesson.

I admired her tact and patience with the pupils when they could not answer her questions. She did not allow the noise from the other classes to distract her. Although her lack of knowledge in spiritual matters was evident, she showed promise as a teacher.

e. Attitude.

There was real effort to reach the pupils, but they did not respond very well. Had this teacher had more of a Bible background, she could have shown more enthusiasm for the lesson. I am sure that she would be most willing to be taught in the Scriptures and in methods of teaching.

5. Pupils' behavior.

a. Attention.

The girls were courteous, but the least sound diverted their attention. While they sat passively, they gained little from the lesson, as the questionnaire at the close revealed.

b. Interest.

Since the pupils did not participate in the lesson, they were not vitally interested. They did not give the teacher their undivided attention, and the lesson did not seem to have anything for them personally.

c. Manners.

This group was well-mannered; judging from their dress and behavior in the class, they had come from good homes. They did not talk during the lesson; they were intelligent enough, but the teacher just did not win their interest.

d. Regularity.

The Department had a total membership of 56. On the day of my visit, there were 36 members and 7 visitors present.

e. Punctuality.

For the most part, this was not a problem in the Department. The majority came on time; two boys were a few minutes late.

f. Initiative.

Only two girls, out of the class of ten, showed initiative or made any attempt to answer a few of the questions. On one occasion, one of the girls endeavored to give an opinion. She was the only one who did so; the others remained silent and content to let the teacher do the talking.

g. Co-operation.

There was apparent lack of real co-operation between teacher and pupil. I am inclined to believe that it was because the teacher failed to interest the girls in the lesson.

6. The teacher.

a. Preparation.

Lack of preparation was evident and this lack was admitted by the teacher. When I was introduced to her, she said in the presence of the pupils, "I felt rather badly about your being present this morning, for I have not prepared the lesson.

b. Plan.

The teacher had neither outline nor aim. I believe that reading the lesson once or twice constituted the preparation. There was no opening prayer. The approach was made by asking the girls to read the lesson through - each one reading a verse.

c. Application.

No application was made to include experiences or problems with which the girls would have been familiar. The application which was made was not suitable; it could have been given to juniors or adults with the same results. Without an aim or a plan one can understand the inability to make a worthwhile application.

d. Method.

The lack of interest and co-operation on the part of the pupils forced the teacher to do practically all of the talking. She did not make use of stories, similes, or practical applications, but gave an exposition of the Scripture verse by verse.

e. Class participation.

Judging from the inability of the pupils to answer questions it seemed certain they had not studied the lesson. One girl answered two questions and volunteered an opinion on a third; another girl answered one question, but that was the extent of the pupil activity during the lesson. The questions were directed to the group instead of being directed to individuals. Toward the close of the class session the attention of the girls was directed to the questionnaire at the bottom of the page of the lesson sheet in the manual. Mentioning those questions was the only recitation for that class period, with only a few participating.

7. Sundry remarks.

This experience was not only interesting, it was intensely helpful. It did much to impress me with the soundness of my own classroom training and work along these lines.

An explanation needs to be added lest the report given appear too critical. At the close of the class period, we were introduced to the regular superintendent of the department, and she explained that the teacher in whose class we have been seated had accepted the class for that particular Sunday only. What a need for teacher-training was shown to me that day!

The young lady asked to teach had accepted with the admission to me that she had not prepared for the lesson. Another thing which this young woman told me was, "I can't find words to express myself."

Some expressions she used seemed to be far removed from the requirement of the sacred Scriptures. The foundation upon which she built the lesson was weakened greatly by a lack of positiveness which could have been given in Scripture itself.

There was a hope expressed of reaching Heaven in this way: "Heaven is prepared for people who believe Christ, I hope to go there someday."

With regard to prayer there was this statement: "When we are in trouble we get down on our knees and pray, hoping that God will answer our prayer." Proper Christian training would change a teacher like that to one able to point the way to Christ, Heaven, and answers to prayers, all to the eternal blessing of the pupils entrusted to her care.

II. PRACTICE TEACHING

All students who attend normal schools are accustomed to practice teaching. It is recognized as one of the most practical ways in which one can learn how to teach. Probably there is no subject in which the pupil is more influenced by the teacher than pedagogy. Attention has already been called to the importance of the teacher's personality - that he himself is the greatest visual aid that can ever be presented to a class.

No one can develop skill in teaching without practice. One can learn to do well only by doing. Mere practice, however, never makes perfect. Unless it is practice of the right procedure it will be clumsy, wasteful, and imperfect. One must practice on the basis of accurate knowledge, with adequate provision for constant correction and improvement.

Constructive criticism by another, especially if he be experienced in teaching, will be of great value in connection with practice. Both the teacher and his critic must conform to well-recognized principles. This removes any possibility of personal prejudice, or an individualistic viewpoint. The individual who practices should have the information and know the standards needed for criticism.

In the last analysis, all criticism must become self-criticism. For only as one accepts the criticism graciously and heeds its suggestions will it be of any value.

1. Teaching.

Where I taught for years, one of the most popular and practical classes in the Christian Education Course was Practice Teaching. Everyone in the class was expected to teach twice, so that there would be good opportunity to observe improvement. The teaching material was the Bible Units of the Preliminary Course of the Evangelical Teacher Training Association in use for three reasons:

- a. The class was composed of young people of the age for which the manuals had been written.
- b. The contents of the course served as a survey and review of the Bible knowledge the student had acquired.
- c. The manuals constituted the teaching material that these students would use in training classes.

The student was given one-half hour in which to present his lesson. Not only was he required to begin promptly, but also to find good terminals for completing his presentation. In his preparation he would provide contacts with the pupil and with previous lessons. He would prepare a list of questions in order that his ability to awaken and direct thought might be tested. He would also secure some good illustrations, and especially for this age, historical, geographical, and literary illustrations. He was also expected to reserve sufficient time for a recapitulation and arousing interest in and making assignments for the next lesson.

Toward the end of the term, it was customary to have at least one composite lesson. All of the students were required to prepare for this occasion, though none of them knew who was going to teach, or at what time during the lesson he would make his contribution. The presentation was largely to test the student's ability to fit his instruction in with the teaching of those who had preceded, and of those who would follow him. He had to keep in mind not only the point to which the lesson should have progressed at the time he was called upon, but also that his contribution should not introduce so many details as to make it difficult for subsequent teachers to complete the lesson in the time remaining.

2. Criticism.

In one sense, all of the class were critics, as they would have to divide their attention between the presentation of the lesson and criticizing the observance of one of the laws of teaching. In addition, if the class were sufficiently large, eight of the number served as judges. Each was a critic who gave his entire time to criticizing the observance of one of the eight laws. They were not called upon to recite, so they could give their undivided attention to criticism. The seven laws of Gregory were the standard by which criticisms were made, and there was added what was called the law of personality, in which the appearance, voice, gestures, and animation of the teacher were criticized.

As soon as a student had completed his assignment in teaching, he was responsible for the law of the personality. At the next session, he began to judge the instructor by the law of the teacher. And then, on successive days, his assignment was the law of the pupil, the language, the lesson, the question, the response, and the recapitulation. At the conclusion of the teaching, we listened to the reports of the eight judges. In addition to the verbal presentation in class, the students were required to write their criticisms later and hand them in. The verbal report occupied fifteen minutes.

This allowed me ten minutes to pass on the merits of the teaching, and especially to criticize the reports of the judges.

3. Examination.

How could a class like this, that is being constantly tested, have a final examination? This was not difficult to arrange. As the classes generally were so large that it was impossible to have all of the students teach twice in one term, the new students were not required to teach the first term.

As members of the class, they were merely observers. However, they constituted excellent material with which to conduct a final examination. At the last session, these new students were given their first opportunity to teach. No one knew who would be called on, or just when.

Moreover, to give as large a number as possible an opportunity to appear before the class, no one would teach more than three or four minutes. Meanwhile, the others were carefully noting the strong and weak points of each teacher, so they could later go to their rooms and prepare their appraisal of the teaching ability of each one who had participated. Thus far, the class had concentrated its criticism upon one person and then observance of only one law. In this final test, they were required to observe a group of teachers and all of the laws of teaching.

QUESTIONS

1. Why should observation and practice teaching be essential in a course of pedagogy?
2. What are some of the difficulties in observation?
3. Prepare a diagram of the department, noting windows, piano, platform, exits, and arrangement of classes.
4. What points should the observer note about the physical conditions?
5. What three things should be noted in the routine?
6. Name five personal factors to be observed in teaching.
7. In what seven respects is the pupils' behavior to be criticized?
8. Name five points for judging the teacher.
9. What is the value of practice teaching?
10. Explain the plan followed in my Christian Education Course classes.
11. What arrangements were made for criticisms?
12. How was the final examination conducted?

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