

THE ESSENTIALS OF GOOD TEACHING

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The essentials of good teaching by Edwin Arthur Turner & Lotus D. Coffman

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PREFACE

MANY years of experience in supervising practice teaching and in conducting method courses preparatory to such teaching have developed in the writer the conviction that intelligent self-direction is the most economical and respectable means of producing improvement in the art of teaching, provided the "self-direction" is guided by a knowledge of the basic principles of good teaching. Thus safeguarded, self-direction is *economical* in that it insures a thoughtful beginning and thereby avoids much of the wasteful expenditure of energy involved in reconstructing harmful habits that have resulted from imitation. It is *respectable* in that it has a universally accepted foundation and is, therefore, capable of being defended.

The form of the present volume is the result of a desire, and even a hope, of the writer to lay bare the *essentials of good teaching* in a simple, concrete, and consistent manner in order to conserve the time and energy of teachers who are anxious for intelligent guidance in their teaching. The order and the organization of the various chapters are determined by the principles that are emphasized in the first chapter. An occasional reference to these principles will aid one in determining the sequence and relative worth of the topics presented.

The writer desires to acknowledge the valuable suggestions he has received from the critic teachers of the practice department of the Illinois State Normal University during the years he has been director of practice teaching. He desires especially to express appreciation for the helpful suggestions of Professor M. J. Holmes and of Principal T. J. Lancaster, of the Illinois

State Normal University, who read the entire manuscript, and for the sympathetic assistance of his wife, Charlotte Griggs Turner.

NORMAL, ILL.

July 1, 1920.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

MOST books on classroom technique are filled with helps, outlines, devices, and tricks of the trade. They are concerned with the practice of education. Such books usually find a ready market because teachers want to know *how* to teach. Moreover, skillful manipulation is frequently accepted as an index of good teaching. But to fix attention upon helps and devices is to fix attention upon the externals of education. It means that thought is arrested on the plane of thinking in things rather than on the plane of thinking in principles; it means that the practical judgment — the judgment which deals with the near-at-hand in a manner analogous to some similar experience — is emphasized at the expense of the conceptual judgment — the judgment which determines conduct in terms of principles or tested experience. It is obvious that these levels of thought find expression in levels of technique. The exercise of the practical judgment results in devices; the exercise of the conceptual judgment results in principles.

Few writers on education have reduced practice to principle, and yet it is only as one is cognizant of principles that he is able to illumine practice. Not a few still cherish the tradition that theory is something separate and quite apart from practice. They fail to recognize that, in general, theory is the result of the failures of practice. One discovers fundamentals by observing their manifestations. Just so long as things run smoothly, so long as there is no break in the current of things, there is no occasion for thought. One thinks when his mental equilibrium is disturbed, when he is conscious of some maladjustment, when the sensation of strain between what one is and is not but

ought to be is intensified. Only then does he have a problem; only then does he search for the hidden factors which explain the breaks in thought or the breaches of conduct. These considerations hold with equal force when applied to school procedure. To arrive at the essentials of classroom teaching one must observe teaching itself. He will note its failure to secure satisfactory results. He will interpret its strengths and weaknesses in terms of life outside the school. He will check the completeness with which the child is being adjusted to the world outside by being adjusted to a constantly enlarging series of worlds inside the school. Every stage and every step of the process will be tested to discover the principles that underlie and explain the best practice.

Such is the manner in which the philosophy of this book has been built up. The author for years has been the director of a training school. His program of education and outline of principles are the result of thousands of recitations that he had observed. At the very outset he differentiates teaching from other forms of activity. He defines aims of public school teaching in terms of social needs; describes the origin, growth, and organization of subject-matter and shows its functional implications; explains clearly how the child is the chief determinant of method; applies the principles thus arrived at to ways of learning, acquisition of habits, the development of appreciation, means of imposing responsibility; outlines the character of stimuli involved in good teaching, and finally shows how these essentials of good teaching should actually be employed in the presentation of the various elementary school subjects.

For the teacher who desires a safe and sane philosophy, a wholesome philosophy, one that has stood the test of experience, this book will prove invaluable. For one who needs a solid base upon which to build a substantial superstructure of school-room experience, this book will serve as a safe guide. For one who is disturbed by the thousand and one miscellaneous and

apparently inchoate performances of the schoolroom, this book will aid in unifying and in interpreting them. In addition the manuscript has the merit of being simple in style and of possessing that concreteness of illustration and wealth of detail that adapt it to the use of young as well as to old teachers.

LOTUS D. COFFMAN