THE TEACHING OF HISTORY IN JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

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PREFACE

This book has been written in the interest of better history teaching. It deals in most part with what might be denominated everyday classroom problems in the teaching of history in the upper-elementary and high-school grades, both junior and senior. The technic of teaching has received the chief emphasis in the majority of the chapters, and the general psychological, pedagogical, and historical phases of the subject, as well as the unsettled problem of what to teach, have been omitted. The idea back of the discussion throughout is that there is a technic of teaching history in the junior and senior high schools that can be mastered by a teacher and actually applied in directing the daily classroom activities, regardless of the content of the course.

The writer fully realizes the dangers accompanying a discussion which attempts to be so practical and concrete as the one contained in the following pages purports to be. When one presents a history-recitation score card, a specific procedure for supervised study in history, a detailed outline of how to use a textbook, a definite scheme to attain progress within the subject, directions for writing a term paper, concrete examples of the problem-solving method in history, and a score or more of similar suggestions, one is likely to be met with the objection that the specific procedure proposed is by no means the best or the only one. The author's rejoinder to such an objection is that in no case has he done more than present *a* way of doing a specific thing. This definiteness in all probability will be more helpful to some teachers than to others. It is highly desirable that the beginner know a number of effective

ways of doing a multitude of things connected with everyday procedure in history teaching. While a teacher might eventually discover through experience many or all of the suggestions this book contains, his initial success will be more certainly assured if he knows on beginning his career an effective way to do a number of things.

The reader will observe that the author has made considerable use, mainly for illustrative purposes, of the work of others in the field. Painstaking care has been exercised throughout the book to give due credit for all material used in this manner. Some utilization has also been made of the writer's material recently published in the *Elementary School Journal,* the *School Review,* and the *Historical Outlook* (formerly the *History Teacher's Magazine*). For the privilege of drawing quite freely on this material he wishes to express to the editors of these periodicals his sincere appreciation. He also desires to express his gratitude to Mr. Howard C. Hill, Head of the Department of History in The University of Chicago High School, for a critical reading of the entire manuscript and for valuable suggestions relative to the content and organization of a number of chapters.

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CHAPTER I

THE HISTORY RECITATION

A history teacher's success is largely determined by what goes on from day to day in the recitation period. While it is highly desirable that a teacher possess certain personal and social qualities, it is nevertheless true that he must be able to show considerable skill in conducting a recitation in order long to maintain his existence in a progressive school system. Since this fact is so generally accepted, the problem for the actual or would-be history teacher becomes one of mastering a recitation technic, the application of which will give worth-while results. However, before one can master this technic, one must objectify it and analyze it into its component parts to discover the contribution of each of these parts to a well-conducted recitation. In other words, one must see that certain conditions are requisite to a good recitation in history, that there are definite principles to apply, standards to attain, and qualities to seek; that there are also certain forms or types of a recitation to employ, definite things to do in making an effective assignment of a history lesson, a legitimate amount of time due the pupils in most recitations, and a proper number and a desirable kind of questions to ask. It is to a consideration of all these important phases of the history teacher's daily work that this first chapter is devoted.

Conditions Necessary to a Good Recitation in History

Before a history teacher can expect to do effective teaching he must surround himself and the class with conditions necessary to a good recitation. Generally speaking, these conditions are freedom from distraction by the teacher, the pupils, and the outside world; interest and enthusiasm on the part of the teacher and the pupils; carefully planned work on the part of the teacher and carefully prepared work on the part of the pupils; high standards of attainment; a spirit of coöperation and sympathy; and pupils surrounded with suitable material equipment.[1] All of these are both desirable and necessary. The majority of them are also under the direct control of the teacher. The two not completely under his control are distractions from the outside world and the proper environment in the matter of heat, light, and a room of suitable size and appropriately supplied with desks, tables, chairs, and historical laboratory equipment. State and municipal regulations may aid in securing the first of these exceptions, but if a history teacher gets what is absolutely necessary for effective work in the line of maps, charts, pictures, diagrams, models, books, and magazines, he will often need to use all the persuasive powers at his command to convince superintendents and school boards that he deserves an equipment for his subject, history, equal to that which is almost universally supplied for physics, chemistry, manual training, and domestic science; and that to do good work in history he should have his share of the money which is too often lavishly spent in equipping laboratories, shops, and cooking establishments in high schools.

While a teacher does not have full control of the distractions from the outside world, he is personally responsible for those created either by himself or by a member of the class. Here is a high-school student's actual description of her history

[1] G. H. Betts, *The Recitation*, pp. 81 ff.

teachers who hindered the progress of their recitations by their self-created distractions and exasperating annoyances:

The teacher of Greek history was a nervous little old woman who did not seem to know what she was going to do next. She would bob around the room continually, no matter whether she was explaining something or one of the pupils was reciting. This seemed to me very annoying and distracted attention from the work. Besides this, she talked extremely fast and her voice did not carry well. She very seldom repeated her statements or questions when asked to, but more often gave one a zero for inattention. When this happened two or three times, it usually led to discouragement and, on the part of several including myself, to stubbornness. The Roman history teacher was quite a different individual. She was a fluffy little middle-aged woman who tried to act like a girl of sixteen. She had many new and fancy clothes which caused a great deal of comment among the girls and boys of her classes. She was always careful to strike a becoming pose when sitting or standing, which disgusted the girls and made the boys snicker quite often.

While these are in all probability extreme cases, the fact remains, however, that the teacher is occasionally the distraction which most interferes with the progress of the recitation.

Of all the factors essential to a good recitation in history none are more important than interest and enthusiasm on the part of the teacher. These plus a charming personality are the main factors so far as the teacher is concerned in causing high-school pupils to like and appreciate history. "I liked and appreciated history in the high school because of a wide-awake, interested, and enthusiastic teacher" occurs over and over again in the answers of high-school graduates to the question, "Why did you like history in the high school?" Typical of many of these answers is the one which reads:

The reason I liked history in high school was because the teacher under whom I started was unusually good. He made the subject very interesting and it was no longer a forced subject, but I loved

to study it. When I took up medieval history, my teacher was changed and my interest shifted too. This teacher was not as enthusiastic as the former and failed to arouse an appreciation for this period of history; consequently it was of very little interest to me. My history teacher for the last two years of high school was a lady of remarkable personality who seemed to radiate her enthusiasm for the subject. She strove to arouse and guide our appreciation and to elevate and train our taste, as well as to impart knowledge and to increase skill. The interest she aroused was not a means, but served as a motive, for the acquisition of knowledge and for the formation of right habits of thought and action.

Carefully planned work on the part of the teacher, carefully prepared work on the part of the pupils, and high standards of attainment are also prerequisites to a good recitation in history. A teacher who has labored through a recitation for which neither he himself nor his pupils had especially prepared knows how painful such an experience really is. Exigencies of time occasionally compel all parties concerned in a recitation to approach it somewhat unprepared. Making due allowance, however, for all such occasions, there should be no escape for a single individual from a painstaking preparation of the material on which each history recitation is to be based. A good rule for the teacher to follow in this matter is always to be sure that each student knows in advance exactly what is required of him and subsequently to see that each one lives up to this requirement to the best of his ability. As for his own preparation, the ideal for the teacher is to have the entire course planned in considerable detail before beginning to teach it. Evidently no teacher can know on beginning a course just what he is going to do on the sixteenth day of the semester. To be prepared in detail he does not need to know this, for what he does on this particular day will be determined by what he did on the fifteenth and the fourteenth or possibly on all of the fifteen preceding days. The detail that he does need to know consists of the general organization of the field

of history to be taught, the dates-events worth remembering, the personages to be known, and the maps to be made. He should also have in his possession a teaching outline of each main division of the field with the best available references, maps, charts, pictures, and similar supplementary materials indicated in their proper places. Painstaking carefulness in the organization and preparation of work on the part of the teacher will invariably pay big dividends in the form of well-prepared work on the part of the pupils, because the teacher will be able to make clear from day to day just what is required and will consequently be in a position to demand that each pupil live up to the requirements to the best of his ability. All of this in the end will result in recitations where high standards of attainment are maintained. Slackers will soon discover that to come to a recitation unprepared is a very disagreeable experience, one which they will not desire to undergo repeatedly.

Governing Principles and Fundamental Qualities

If a history teacher wishes to become an artist in the matter of planning, managing, and conducting a recitation, it will be necessary for him to master and apply the old and familiar principles of unity, proportion, and coherence. In all probability the application of these principles will be a conscious one on the part of beginners, but with the accumulation of successful teaching experience they will be applied with ease and facility quite unconsciously. There are, of course, certain types of formal work such as drill and miscellaneous reviews in which one does not expect to apply them. Generally speaking, however, as the work progresses from day to day there will be few meritorious recitations that ignore them entirely.

How the principles of unity, proportion, and coherence can be applied in a single recitation period in history may be illustrated by the following concrete example. The assignment for the recitation in question was on early canals and railroads in

the United States. The three main topics for consideration were the Erie Canal in New York, 1817–1825, canal construction in other states, and the first American railroads. In the recitation based on this assignment unified thinking was attained in many ways. In the first place the whole discussion centered on early canals and railroads in the United States. Everything said and done throughout the period related directly to the main topic. The members of the class knew at every stage of the recitation what phase of the main topic was under consideration. Other unifying phases of this same recitation were the position of the pupil in front of the class when making a recitation of some length, the use of maps, charts, sketches, and drawings large enough for the entire class to see, and the summary at the close of the period. All these unifying devices were employed with excellent results. The summary served to bring together the main features of the discussion and leave the class with a unified body of material. A review at the beginning of the period was instrumental in unifying the work of the previous day with that of the present.

The principle of proportion was applied in this particular recitation in two ways; namely, giving a specific amount of time to each phase of the recitation and devoting a specific amount of the time allowed for the new material to each of the three subtopics. The phases of the recitation were assignment, review, consideration of the new lesson, and the summary. To each of these was given a specific amount of the entire time of the period, thus applying the principle of proportion. The twenty-five minutes devoted to the consideration of the new material was distributed in such a way as to bring out what one of the three subtopics was of most importance, what one next, and what one least. The class was conscious of this distribution, and when the summary was made by one of the members the three subpoints were emphasized in about the same proportion that they had been in the original discussion.

Coherence was much in evidence in the recitation under consideration. The review connected the past material with the present. Inasmuch as the lesson the day before was on the general subject of internal improvements, it was important that the relation of the previous work to the present be shown. The summary also served to tie the work of the day more firmly to that of previous days, thus applying the important principle of coherence. Individual recitations of some length on each of the three subtopics also served to give a connected view of the material relating thereto.[1] Thus it will be seen from this brief description of an actual recitation in history that the principles of unity, proportion, and coherence can be applied in teaching just as they are in literature and art.

Besides controlling principles there are certain fundamental qualities of a teaching exercise that it is well for a history teacher to keep in mind if he is to achieve other than mediocre results. These are clearness, force, and fine adaptation. The boy who said that a "furlough" is a "mule" is a splendid example of the need of clearness. This same boy attempted to prove that he was right by citing the picture of a soldier on a mule, with the legend, "Going Home on a Furlough." There are certain unavoidable defects in history texts which make it imperative for the teacher to keep the quality of clearness always in evidence during the recitation. Textbooks in history by necessity are made up largely of generalizations; they also contain many unfamiliar words, as well as words expressing ideas differing greatly from the ideas commonly associated with them. The history teacher must continuously be on his guard for all such pitfalls. To make the abstract generalizations of the text concrete, he must use an abundance of illustrative material in the form of supplementary reading, pictures, diagrams, sketch maps, and charts; and to clear up any misconceptions which are likely to result

[1] The recitation described above was taught by H. C. Hill, of The University of Chicago High School.

from familiar words used figuratively or expressing ideas not usually associated with them, he will need to give such words special attention. The necessity for care along both of these lines will be brought home to the teacher every time he reads a set of test papers, in which he is sure to find words used incorrectly, facts wrongly applied, and, in truth, all sorts of historical monstrosities. To minimize the misconceptions he is sure to find on testing his teaching for the quality of clearness, the history teacher must plan a multitude of schemes to determine the clarity of his own and the textbook's presentation of the subject as well as to give the pupils every possible opportunity to express in their own words what they have gleaned on any given subject from various sources; for it is only through the exercise of vigilant care and intelligent foresight that the history teacher can feel sure that his presentation of the subject contains the all-important quality of clearness.

The quality of force is a spiritual one and consequently difficult to define and measure. One can recognize it in a recitation when one sees it, but just how to attain it is not easy to tell. It depends very largely upon the interest and enthusiasm of the teacher. An enthusiastic and interested teacher begets in a class like characteristics. A teacher full of vivacity, natural vigor, and life will fill his class with similar desirable qualities. Forceful history teaching is almost sure to be good teaching, since much of the value of historical instruction lies in the lasting impressions made upon the students. Recitations continuously lacking in force seldom make any impressions at all on a class. A dead history recitation is certainly not to be tolerated. A study so teeming with life must be forcefully taught. By conscious striving a teacher whose recitations are lacking the quality of force may in time acquire considerable skill in injecting this desirable quality into them.

Fine adaptation is a prerequisite to the qualities of clearness and force. If what the teacher is teaching is not adapted to the age, interest, and capacity of the pupils, it will

unfailingly be difficult to make it either clear or forceful. The great problem of adapting history to children both in the elementary and in the secondary schools is far from a satisfactory solution. As the situation now stands, it is incumbent upon the individual teacher to take the material outlined in the course of study or in the textbook and to adapt it to those he is teaching. He can be materially aided in this matter if both syllabus and text strive to select and discuss only the topics and movements which are adaptable to the pupils for whom they are intended. Since this is a condition still to be dreamed of, the teacher will need to give much attention to the matter of adaptation; and since adapting history to high-school pupils is so much a problem of method of presentation, there is much necessity for a careful consideration of this problem. What is meant here is this: The American Revolution is taught on both the junior and the senior high-school level. It often happens that a teacher presents this subject to the same pupils on each of these levels. In all such cases the material taught would have to be adapted to the age and capacity of the pupils largely through the method of presentation. Facts relating to the Stamp Act Congress, the Boston Tea Party, England's commercial policy toward the colonies, and the battles of Bunker Hill and Lexington and Concord might be taught on each level, but if the same devices and methods of presentation were used in both cases, there would certainly be a lack of adaptation on one of the levels. Thus it will be seen that adapting to the pupils the material taught in any given recitation is a problem of supreme importance and one largely left for the individual teacher to solve.

Controlling Aims

History teachers are often accused of doing indefinite teaching. This criticism has resulted in wholesome efforts on the part of some teachers to make their work more definite.

They accomplish this by setting up specific objectives for a series of lessons or even a single lesson. If a teacher sets out to teach the American Revolution with a very explicit aim in mind and tests his results strictly according to it, he will escape the criticism of indefiniteness so common and so just nowadays.

Besides the explicit aim that the teacher may have in mind in teaching the American Revolution or a similar topic, there are certain specific aims common to all recitations. These are no other than the common ones of testing, teaching, and drill. Whatever else he does with the assignment made the day before, the history teacher must unfailingly test the pupils' preparation of what he has assigned them; and since knowledge of history and historical movements will always remain one of the legitimate goals of all history teaching, he will need to test the actual knowledge his pupils are acquiring as they proceed along the historical way. If he is unacquainted with the class, he will also want to spend much time in testing habits of study, since it is only by this means that he will be able to locate improper methods and to supplant them with proper ones. During the time of the recitation given over to such testing the teacher should secure the information necessary to make it possible for him to diagnose the cause of both general and individual failures. He can also check his own skill in applying the principles and qualities discussed above. Such a self-examination may often bring disappointments, but will in the end work for the good of all concerned.

The history teacher's real skill is best evidenced by his ability to do what in reality he is paid to do; namely, teach. To teach, however, does not necessarily mean to do all the reciting. This may be advisable occasionally but not often. Among other things, high-school history teaching means (1) giving the pupils opportunities to express themselves concerning things they have read; (2) correcting wrong impressions wherever they exist; (3) helping pupils to master and to organize related historical facts; (4) giving additional

information which the teacher has acquired through reading and travel; (5) having at hand at the opportune time illustrative materials to make abstract and general statements concrete and meaningful; (6) developing certain principles underlying history study; and (7) inspiring pupils to better efforts, not only in history but in all phases of their work both in and out of school.

In spite of the fact that he may run the risk of being dry and formal, the history teacher should spend some time in actual drill work. Before this can be profitably done, however, he must have definitely in mind the phases of the work which he hopes to make automatic. Quite often too much is attempted along this line, with the accompanying result of making little or nothing automatic. There are, of course, certain dates in each field of history which must be learned for all time, personages who ought to be known very intimately, maps which must be produced from memory, large historical movements which need to be known and remembered as unified wholes. Before the teacher can do any effective drill on dates, personages, maps, and the story of large movements, he must decide with definiteness just what is to be included in each of these lines. In other words, before beginning his work as a teacher of American history, or in any other field of history for that matter, the history teacher ought to make a list of dates-events to identify and remember, of personages to know, of maps to make—and he ought to formulate an overview or story of the entire field. Having done these things he will never be uncertain about the drill phases of the work—a very desirable state of mind in which to be. Of course the teacher's method of teaching facts of this character will make certain that there is much content associated with them before any drill upon them. A good way to think of such material is to look upon it as forming the multiplication tables of history, which are to be drilled upon and known quite automatically just as the tables in arithmetic are.[1]

[1] See Chapter XI for a full treatment of this phase of the teacher's work.