

CLASS TEACHING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

P. S. Vedamuttu



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By the Same Author

Honest to Mine Own Self.

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To Girlie,

my only guide and support,

from January 4, 1928 to October 10, 1973.

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"It was natural to think of his future as a bright one, and I believe that no one, least of all Paul himself, dreamt that he would spend his life in the obscurity of a class-room."

The Aloysian, 1960 — 1962, p. 205.

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through these pages to all the Secondary School Teachers who are the real architects of our new nation just beginning to rear its head in the modern world.

P. N. Peiris, S.J.

1. THE TEACHING PROFESSION

The right to practise law or prescribe medicine depends on its respective professional bodies. A doctor or lawyer bows to no external authorities. His professional conduct is guided and zealously guarded by his professional compatriots. But the teacher must always necessarily remain a member of "a subject profession". The reasons are twofold.

As teaching is biologically necessary for the continuity of the race, man inherits the capacity to teach. The parent birds must teach their young how to fly; the mother bear must teach her cubs how to track their prey and protect themselves against their enemies; the savage hunter must teach his son the uses of the bow and arrow. It is especially so true of the social birds, animals, and man that, if there is one thing that a man can successfully do, it is to teach. But, where the professional teacher differs is that he has formed "the habit of teaching" and elevated that habit to an art. This important aspect of teaching Bernard Shaw apparently ignored, when he wrote that 'He who can does, he who cannot teaches'.

Secondly, the teacher has to perform his work in combination with that of the men of all other professions, from the metaphysicians to the sweeps. 'The teacher spreads the butter which the scientist, the explorer, the poet, and the historian make, even if he finds the time to make a little butter himself. The daily class-room lessons of the teacher cannot take place without the active co-operation of many who are not teachers, scholars and their parents, tax payers and tax collectors; and that co-operation will not be efficient unless those who are concerned are given a voice in the common work.'

Consequently, the function of teaching is not an isolated process and cannot be confined to the professional teacher. The teacher must ever remember that for the sake of convenience and national economy teaching is now at the present stage of our social evolution relegated to him, but the whole community in a democratic state continues to be "unqualified teachers", many of whom have learnt the methods of teaching in their school days from various teachers and could to a certain extent discriminate methods.

In modern Sri Lanka which has had the benefits of free education from Primary to University Education for over two decades, where the national newspapers allocate much space to educational topics, and where, except politics, education is the one subject which forms the common serious topic of conversation, it is necessary that a teacher, besides his professional qualifications, must possess tact, insight, and understanding in a large measure if he is to practise his profession successfully.

In spite of the much publicized nobility of the teaching profession there is no doubt that those who enter it are those who have no particular vocation for anything else and who vaguely feel that if everything fails they can at least be teachers, though here and there, a few become

teachers with a very definite enthusiasm for teaching. The question is, therefore, whether teaching is "a life where the sense of vocation can be developed in the exercise of the profession itself". The answer is strongly in the affirmative.

'There is no profession which is so apt, if exercised faithfully and sympathetically and tenderly, to broaden the character and enlarge the spirit. A man who goes to be a schoolmaster with the expectation of having to discharge prescribed duties and afterwards to fill his leisure time as cheerfully as he may, suddenly wakes up to find himself bound like Gulliver with all kinds of Lilliputian chains. The little people, who seem at first sight to be all so much alike in tastes and character, he realizes are human beings with hearts and idiosyncrasies. He finds himself guiding and leading. The paternal protective instinct which lies at the bottom of so many male hearts wakes up; the man who begins as the careless, self-regarding practitioner of a not very dignified trade, discovers that he is in the thick of a very real and vivid life, which stirs all sorts of interests and emotions and brings home to him some of the deep realities of life.'

The following pages are neither a treatise on education nor a discussion of the principles and methods of teaching. They are an attempt to "consider the life of a teacher from within" by a teacher of considerable experience to help young teachers from errors and worries that generally lead to a premature old age of physical and mental ailments.

2. THE ONE THING ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY— CLASS CONTROL

The best way to begin teaching in the upper classes is for the teacher, immediately after the mutual exchange of greetings on the first day, to tell the pupils very clearly that he is there to teach them as well as he can, and that he expects them to learn as well as they can, and any one who is not prepared to work together with him would do well to keep away from his class.

When the pupils know what the teacher wants, knows how to get it, and means to get it, they will soon settle down to serious work, and there will be no difficulty about keeping order in the class.

Until the teacher has acquired complete mastery over the class, any pupil who disturbs the class at work should be promptly but courteously corrected. Any action of a pupil that distracts the teacher or any pupil from the work that is going on should be considered as disturbance. But only deliberate offences should be taken serious notice of. To excuse any deliberate attempt at disturbance on the plea that it is the first offence can be fatal, for there will be as many first offences as there are pupils in the class. Once a teacher gets a reputation for impartiality and strictness, his difficulties are at an end. It will never occur to a pupil to displease or defy the teacher.

An attempt on the part of the pupil to get some information from his immediate neighbours or to borrow a pen or a pencil or some instrument should not be considered a disturbance and should be completely ignored. When the class is engaged in written work and a pupil walks quietly up to another pupil for some information connected with the work set, he should not be considered an offender. A certain amount of co-operative help should be encouraged. What is important is that work should go on smoothly. When the pupils know what can be done, and what should not be done, they will soon buckle down to purposive work.

Unless a teacher has actually to do some written work, he should always stand in the class so that he can have his eye on every pupil in the class and notice especially the facial expressions of the boys so that no boy will ever hope to get away with any of his pranks.

On no account should a teacher shout at a pupil or show any loss of self-control or begin arguing with a pupil or adopt a menacing attitude. A disciplinary difficulty is best dealt with outside the class. The teacher should ask the boy quite politely to see him alone at a convenient time in a suitable place in the school premises. The suspense alone will be corrective enough, and pupils are generally very reasonable when they are alone, but in a group they can be troublesome and defiant.

In rare cases a pupil may be asked to stand outside the class-room within the sight of the teacher, but should never be allowed to roam about the school premises.

Every offence in the class-room should be dealt with by the teacher himself, and should not be referred to anybody else or discussed

outside. Offences in the class-room should not be confused with breaches of school discipline or rules. If a teacher feels that in spite of all his efforts, a pupil continues to be incorrigibly recalcitrant, then the pupil should be regretfully told that he would be reported and the teacher should make his report in writing to the competent authority.

Unless a pupil is caught in the act he should not be punished or spoken to about any offence on mere suspicion or reports from any. If a pupil makes a complaint against another of the same class, he should do so in the class; the alleged offender should be called upon for his version, and the matter should be disposed of then and there. Not only should the teacher be absolutely just in all his dealings with the pupils but also should be seen to be just. No pupil resents a just rebuke. But nothing is more conducive to indiscipline than listening to sneaks or talebearers, and favouritism.

Mass punishment of the whole class for an undetected offence of a single pupil is a serious reflection on the ability of the teacher to manage a class, and should not be resorted to. Such a form of punishment only leads to mass rebellion and mass defiance and is an encouragement to gangsterism.

In every class there are two or three pupils who are born leaders, and if a teacher is wise enough to win them on to his side of class control, the whole class becomes manageable.

Class control or class discipline is no problem at all to a teacher who goes to class well prepared, and begins punctually and carries on his work without being bored or boring his pupils. If a lesson is boring to the teacher it will be more boring to the pupils, and boredom breeds listlessness and disorder. A pupil yawning or nodding over his desk is a severe vote of censure on the teacher's ability to teach.

If a person has neither the personality and power to maintain order nor the ability to acquire it, it is best that he takes to some other calling before it is too late, for the pupils will make the class-room a 'hell' for him and his life a burden and a misery.

3. AIDS TO CLASS CONTROL

Besides a pleasing personality, academic qualifications and professional training, the possession of certain mental, moral and physical qualities are valuable armaments in a pedagogic arsenal.

A teacher who is punctual, goes well prepared to class, carries out punctiliously all that is expected of him, obeys the school regulations and has harmonious relations with his colleagues and his conduct is irreproachable, would become unconsciously worthy of imitation.

A teacher who is invariably late, asks the monitor of the class where he had stopped the previous day, neglects his records and registers, exhausts all the possible short leave, casual leave and medical leave and does not hand in the question papers in time, should not expect the pupils to be punctual, ready with and for work and be generally good students.

There is no substitute for personal example.

If a teacher wants disciplined pupils, he should first discipline himself. If he is strict with the pupils, he must be stricter with himself. This may sound rather too exacting, but nobody who knows anything about teaching pupils between the ages of thirteen and nineteen would say that teaching is a soft job. It is certainly much more exacting — and certainly more useful — than stacking files and files of reports on Plans for the Future, on the Mismanagement of State-Corporations, on the escapades of corrupt public officers and plotting graphs on a number of minor problems which leave humanity where it was before, or signing memorandums and Administration Reports prepared by others.

Next, if a teacher is an "educated" person, he will have easier access to the minds and hearts of his pupils. What is an educated person? An educated person is 'one whose mind is alive to ideas; who is interested in politics, religion, science, history, literature; who knows enough to wish to know more, and to listen if he cannot talk; a person who is not at the mercy of a new book, a leading article, or the chatter of an irresponsible outsider; a person who is not insular, provincial, narrow-minded, contemptuous'.

An interest in some extra-curricular activities has an immediate appeal to the pupils. It certainly helps greatly to observe pupils in their spontaneous activities and to spot any talent, originality of taste or interest among his pupils, and so to be ready to sympathize or help. For instance, a teacher who is in charge of the Students' Literary Union will readily recognize the pupils whose interests can be canalized into productive, fruitful and creative channels like literary articles, stories, poems etc. for the school Magazine or the Junior Page of the national newspapers to enjoy "the sweet pride of authorship".

Pupils unconsciously learn from those whom they respect. Nothing earns the respect and admiration of pupils more readily than prowess

in some branch of extra-mural activity like Cricket or Football or Athletics, Drama or Music or Dancing etc. It is not all teachers who can show accomplishment in any of these activities, but possession *is* certainly a very valuable asset.

The knowledge of the background of a pupil is very valuable. Whenever it is possible, such knowledge should be acquired indirectly in the course of walks in the town or village. A teacher should know how and where his pupils live, and what their outside interests are. On no account should pupils be embarrassed by questions that would satisfy only a teacher's idle curiosity. In any case the relations between the teacher and the pupil should be paternal, never sentimental. A teacher should always be rigid in principle but tender in blame.

4. THE GOAL OF TEACHING

The guiding maxim of a teacher should be that he has not taught anything unless the pupils have learnt what he tried to teach. But, alas, many teachers rush through the syllabus attempting to cover it well before the end of the year. They then think that they have performed a great feat, done their duty by the pupils, the school and the State, and then go about grieving that no one has cared to pin gold medals on their narrow pedagogic chests for their brilliant performance.

There are also many young teachers who do not care to find out what had been taught the previous year or what their pupils already know of the subject. They enthusiastically begin with the prescribed syllabus for the year which the majority of the children often cannot follow, and the rest of the class have only a vague feeling that they are being taught things that are likely to come up at the examination.

Then we have a class of teachers, specially in the Collegiate Sections, who call themselves Lecturers. They lecture and dictate voluminous "notes" which are in reality a verbatim dictation from a textbook (the name and the author of which are zealously guarded from the pupils) of the same topic, adequately and perhaps more clearly treated in the class textbook. The notes are dictated deliberately so fast that the students have no time to raise their heads. The nett results are: the syllabus has been well and truly covered, the teacher has earned the reputation for perfect class control, the pupils have a pile of Monitor Exercise books within whose covers is a mass of "notes" and their handwriting thoroughly spoilt.

The prize for the easiest method of teaching should, however, be awarded to those teachers who sit tight on their chairs and name a pupil to stand and read a few pages, and then call upon a second to continue from where the previous pupil has stopped, while they twiddle their thumbs or write their private letters or read the newspaper for the day till the bell mercifully puts an end to this fiasco! These are the teachers who are the first—hence the prize—to inform their colleagues with gusto that they have covered the syllabus for the year. The pupils, the more intelligent ones, have learnt to skip and jump a few paragraphs or pages so that their work will be completed the faster!

It is quite understandable why hundreds of candidates sitting the G. C. Examinations score no marks at all.

Methods of teaching a subject vary, but all successful methods are a slow process and demand much patience and diligent co-operation between the pupils and their teacher.

A teacher should always begin the new year by devoting the first few weeks of the first term to *remedial teaching* which consists in a rapid revision of the work of the previous years and the elucidation of those knotty points which, in the teacher's opinion, might have been overlooked or insufficiently understood, or be necessary before he can proceed to the new syllabus.

At every stage the teacher should ensure that the pupils understand clearly what is taught, can relate it to what they already know, and can apply it in life situations. Knowledge is power only when it is applied purposively; otherwise it remains mere academic lumber.

A few remarks on the art of questioning, the use of the class textbook, and note taking may be useful.

Questions should not be asked in order from the first pupil to the last pupil in the class, from left to right or from right to left. No boy in particular should anticipate to be questioned. A question should be put to the whole class and a few seconds given to think out the answer; the boy who perhaps least expects to be questioned should then be named for the answer. If the teacher follows a set pattern, many of the pupils will become inattentive, knowing very well they have had their turn.

The same procedure applies when the pupils do the exercises in the textbook orally. A pupil should do two or three, one after the other, before another pupil is asked to continue.

No pupil should be allowed to think that he has done for the day. The teacher should unexpectedly revert to a pupil, though he might have done an exercise before. This is the best way to ensure that every pupil is always on the alert.

Pupils should be trained to make their own notes which should not be a paraphrase, a precis, or a copy of the original. Notes should always be in "point form" like the outline of an essay, or "the points" before the first draft of a precis. The whole aim of note making is to fix the essential points in memory of what is read or taught and certainly should not be a tabloid form for cramming.

The art of note taking is an essential training for those preparing for higher studies, which is regrettably ignored even in some of our best schools.

To make sure that the pupils have grasped what is being taught, the teacher should constantly watch the facial expression of the pupils; the teacher would then know whether he has carried the whole class with him. If he feels that some have not understood him, he should repeat his exposition slowly by referring to concrete examples from life situations within the experience of the pupils till he is quite sure that every one has understood the point at issue.

A pupil who does not understand the teacher or follow the lesson or hear what is being said should be encouraged to put his hand up to enable the teacher to repeat or explain further with more familiar or homely examples. It is always useful to drive a point home by examples or instances taken from various aspects of life. The pupils should feel that they are learning something actually connected with the work-a-day-world and not some useless facts to be stored in the brains of some fogeys who have special aptitudes for such things.

The practical importance of learning may not be always obvious, and the work in class may not be always interesting. But it is easy enough to convince the students that it is advisable for "every one to

cultivate the habit of doing well whatever is expected of them and that nine tenths of the noble work done in the world is drudgery" though drudgery itself is by no means noble work.

Of course, a wise teacher will avoid drudgery as much as possible. For instance, taking piles of exercise books home to correct scrupulously every mistake is wasteful drudgery. In fact, there should not be any need to take home any exercise book. As much as possible, all corrections should be done in class. If some long answers like composition, cannot be corrected in class with the pupil beside him, they should be corrected in the Teachers' Room whenever it is convenient.

A teacher should not write out the corrections. He should underline the errors by symbols, the significance of which pupils should be made familiar with at the beginning of the academic year.

The written comment should be brief and refer to the matter of the topic or a few words of praise or encouragement like good, better effort, refer to p. 59 in your history textbook for more material etc. If pupils are correctly trained to think, properly guided before they begin to write, and are set only subjects within their interests and range of experience, adverse comments will be absolutely unnecessary. 'To praise diligence, to find words of appreciation for a thoughtful piece of work is far more likely to produce further diligence than to be critical and cold.'

Written work should be regular. A clear, legible, cursory handwriting and handing in exercises at the appointed time should be insisted upon.

Whenever a pupil fails to hand in the work, "work not done" should be inserted in the exercise book and dated by the teacher. This will have a salutary effect on the boy and be self-revealing when the need arises.

Laborious and elaborate correction of pupils' exercises is only a Pharisaic display of self-inflicted martyrdom.

Common mistakes should be pointed out immediately after the review of every written exercise, but individual mistakes should be corrected when the pupil stands beside the teacher.

Correction in any form should aim at self-improvement and never savour of punishment or discourage a pupil or suppress originality. On no account should a pupil's work be compared with another's, for such comparisons, it is now known, cause emotional conflict and psychosomatic diseases.

Every teacher would do well to ponder carefully over the implication of the following passage in *Emotional Conflict* by Peter Fletcher:

'When we know, as we can know by experience and observations if we use our minds attentively, that fear between man and man is created by everything said and done to assert a contrast of value between one person and another, by every attempt to exercise power over another for our own satisfaction, or to make another responsible for our actions in order to avoid learning by our own mistakes and failures, then nothing more than plain commonsense should be

needed to persuade us not to behave towards others in a manner which generates the fear we want to be free from and destroys the human communication we want to establish. After all, we are human beings.

It should not be insuperably difficult to learn how to behave like human beings, even if we have rather got out of the habit of doing so.

Terminal Tests are an integral part of class teaching. They enable a teacher to assess how much of what he had taught has been assimilated by his pupils, and enable the pupils to assess their own achievements.

Test questions should not be a mere repetition of exercises actually done in class or copied from the class textbook. A teacher should always fully work out the answers to problems etc.; otherwise he may be setting snares for himself!

The answer scripts should be marked by the teacher himself, and the mistakes of the pupils should be carefully underlined. At the earliest opportunity the marked scripts should be handed to the pupils who should carefully note the mistakes they had made. A free exchange of marked scripts among the pupils in the class has a very salutary effect.

A careful review of the answers is an excellent preparation for the new work to follow.

If the classwork had been systematically done and the tests are properly set and marked, there will be a remarkable correspondence between the marks scored at the terminal tests and the averages of those scored in the class exercises, and the pupils will gain valuable confidence in themselves and will face the public examination with confidence and take it in their stride.

There can be no case of "the massacre of the innocents" at public examinations. Incompetence of marking examiners is not the valid reason for "the annual massacre". The most deplorable offence a teacher can ever commit is misleading a student under his or her direct charge.

5. ENGLISH FOR THE LIVING

The usual advice to teachers of English as a second language is that each lesson or a group of lessons should deal with a life situation within the experience of the learner, for instance, the Home, the School, a Picnic, and so on.

In the General Certificate Examination Classes the best way to teach English is to base a series of lessons on a topic of current interest arising from the real needs of community life and capable of evoking the immediate and spontaneous interest of the pupils for instance, cricket in the first term of the school year in an urban school.

The greatest advantage of taking a topic like cricket is the pupils' familiarity with a ready made vocabulary. Whatever the standard of attainment of the pupil may be, he has already a practical command of a good number of words he has quite casually picked up. Even if he has not learnt English, he is still familiar with many words in the English language whose general meaning he already understands and is able to use for all relevant purposes.

Who is the city boy of fourteen or fifteen years of age today who has not heard of bat, ball, batsman, bowler, wicket keeper, captain, pads, gloves, umpires, pitch, boundary, score, sixer, run, hit, out, team, side, coach, draw, stump, spin, fast, slow, crease, catch, l.b.w., throw, match etc.? The next great advantage is that the pupils would be really interested in the subject and willing, and perhaps only too willing, to participate actively in the conversation and express their opinions, provided the teacher listens to their views in a sympathetic spirit. It would certainly not be a lack of the power of conversation but over enthusiasm that would have to be politely but firmly regulated and controlled by a tactful disciplinarian.

Further, a topic like cricket may be discussed at various levels; class matches, house matches, school matches, "big" matches, test matches, cricket stories, biographies etc.

Fourthly, the topic lends itself to consideration from various aspects as a game, as exercise, as extra curricular activity, as part of moral training, international fellowship etc.

The topic of cricket may also be continued and sustained throughout the term without any slackness in interest. In fact, many urban schools still consider the first term essentially a cricket term, and as the season advances the pupils' interest quickens, and even the shiest and usually tongue-tied pupils may have something to contribute to the discussion.

Another great advantage is that many types of written exercises may be set. As the pupils command a vocabulary and have enough material from personal experience to draw from, they find it comparatively easy to express themselves in writing with confidence and freedom.

Once the pupils' interest in cricket has been aroused and maintained they would spontaneously begin to discuss among themselves.

and to read the daily newspapers at least for the latest cricket news with keen interest and some of them may even buy books on cricket by famous cricketers of the day and read them with eagerness.

By the end of the term, the teacher would find that he has unavoidably co-ordinated all the aspects of the language—Speech, Reading and Writing—all integrated harmoniously by the spontaneous interest of both the pupils and the teacher.

The details may be easily worked out. After two or three oral lessons the pupils would have, by listening to the teacher's talk and to the comments of one another, enough material to select from and write on, with a sufficient and reliable vocabulary to express that material in. Let the class now write an account of the cricket match each enjoyed most.

A careful scrutiny of the exercises would show the general weakness of the class and the mistakes in expression or vocabulary peculiar to each. For instance, the general defects may be the wrong use of certain forms of verbs such as participles instead of finite verbs or wrong sequence of tense, and mistakes in spelling.

How should these errors be corrected? Certainly not by making each pupil to write the correct form three or more times below each exercise! Correction of written exercises should by no means carry even a faint suggestion of punishment.

In the next oral lesson the teacher should deliberately introduce the same participles correctly in full sentences and write two or three such sentences on the black-board, and proceed to get the pupils to make a few more sentences of their own, and also write on the board the correct form of words mis-spelt by the pupils without in any way letting the class know the names of boys who made these mistakes.

Before the next written exercise is set, the class should read the marked exercises and proceed to correct the mistakes by writing the right form in the left margin along the line in which the mistake occurs. In addition, each pupil should be encouraged to make a list of the words he had wrongly spelt, in the last page of his exercise book or in a special note book.

Before the teacher marks the next set of exercises he should carefully check the corrections. The work is slow and taxing but, as the pupils' progress in the language will be rapid, it will be rewarding, and this method will certainly save much recrimination, annoyance, and unhappiness.

From exercises in composition to exercises in letter-writing is an easy transition. Letters should deal with situations that naturally arise in the cricket seasons such as accounts of matches, invitation, challenge, protest, explanation, or giving news of the season to a friend, ill either at home or in hospital, or to a friend abroad. Exercises in Comprehension may be taken from passages in articles or books on cricket.

Cricket was taken, as I said before, only as an illustrative example. Any current topic of public interest would well serve our purpose perhaps with suitable adaptation.

6. A NEW APPROACH TO LANGUAGE TEACHING

Eyebrows were raised high in the G.C.E. Preparatory Class when the Language Teacher proceeded, on the first day of the first term of the scholastic year, to dictate "one of the national newspapers" as the first textbook and then the names of the textbooks approved by the Establishment.

Soon his students became avid readers and critics of the newspapers, and a good number of them ignored the approved textbooks to the delight of the teacher!

To use the newspaper as a textbook for teaching a living language, it is absolutely necessary that the Language Teacher should buy at least one national newspaper and read it before he enters the classroom. On no account should he carry any newspaper into the classroom or ever express his political or religious views on any controversial question of the day.

One of the chief reasons why the standard of English (and Arithmetic) at any rate is deplorably so low is that a good number of teachers set written work in these subjects and then, ensconce themselves in their chairs, and proceed to read the newspaper that they had bought on their way to school.

Indeed some teachers would complain that they could not afford to buy a paper. But no teacher who smokes at least three cigarettes or cigars or drinks more than two cups of tea a day should ever bemoan the lack of money to buy a newspaper!

The teacher in his preliminary talk should ask the students to read, before they come to school, at least one of the national newspapers of the day, anything in which they are interested: Cricket, Athletics, Science, Films, Music etc. and the latest news of the day on the first or last page. The important thing is that every student should read something of anything in which he is interested. If he is not interested in anything at this age, then he is a clear case for a psychiatrist!

The teacher should devote a few minutes every day before he begins the formal lesson, to asking some questions on the news or articles of the previous day, and then recommend one or two readable and educative articles in the issue of the day to be read before they retire to bed. Undoubtedly a teacher cannot do this unless he has at least intelligently glanced through the issue of the day before he enters the class.

To give positive evidence of their reading, students should be asked to bring to class on a specified day, preferably on the day following the Sunday, a summary of any article which interested them.

If the language lesson on every Monday is devoted to the discussion of articles in the week-end papers, which the teacher as well as the students would have read, it will be very profitable and rewarding. The teacher can quickly and timely check the students' reading, comment on articles of interest, and draw their attention to matters of national and international importance. Or it may be that the

students themselves may draw the attention of the teacher to articles that he might have overlooked.

Occasionally, students should be asked to bring to class a list of factual errors, grammatical and spelling mistakes detected in any paper they have read. They should always give the proper reference, the name of the newspaper, date, number of the page, and the heading of the article. Nothing gives a student a greater joy than finding mistakes in printed material or in the language of the teacher!

Comprehension exercises can be set on any of the passages brought by students to class, or the class may discuss freely any matter of interest reported in the papers. The teacher should on no account dismiss summarily any personal views but listen patiently, tolerantly, and good-humouredly to any views openly expressed by the students, however absurd they may sound. He should only correct errors of fact or expression.

Often a student in the same class may point out the errors of his fellow-students. The teacher should play the part of the impartial and disinterested judge. The teacher himself may often be astounded at the views expressed, and should be humble enough to learn much from students of this age!

A few lessons may be devoted to the consideration of "Letters to the Editor". Students could critically study the form and content of the various letters which should provide living examples of letter-writing on topics of current interest in the work-a-day world.

When that aspect of the syllabus is handled, students may be asked to write in class composition exercises on subjects of topical interest as reported in the newspapers. The students may reproduce what they have read or express their own views on subjects they have read about.

Here the Junior Reader's Page is very useful. Students should be encouraged to read it regularly, cut out at least one article suitable for their level, and paste it into their Note Books maintained for the purpose and checked occasionally by the teacher. Students themselves may be inspired to contribute articles of their own to the newspapers.

Later, exercises in Precis Writing, Essay Writing, aspects of style and vocabulary and idiom may be all adequately found in the columns of the newspapers of the day. In fact, if the newspaper is intelligently used, the whole syllabus in language for the N.C.E. and H.N.C.E. levels can be completely and adequately covered by the exclusive use of articles in the newspapers.

In the hands of an honest and enterprising teacher the students would acquire the habit of reading, correctly assessing what they read and value the important part modern newspapers play in national life, and know why and how the 'Freedom of the Press' they should cherish and preserve.

These days when the general lament is that students do not read, possess only a meagre general knowledge, and have no ideas to express, a language teacher has a very handy and easily accessible

tool to get them to read and enjoy what they read, to form their taste and opinion and to educate them in the use of a language as a means of effective communication.

If the language is taught in the way outlined here teachers will be not only helping the pupils to learn a very useful living language — Sinhala, Tamil or English — but also directing, correcting, guiding the pupils' attitude to matters of the day and so educating them to become intelligent citizens in a democratic welfare state.

In short the teacher of any Language for the Living will be the best educator and the trusted friend of the senior pupils of the School, and through them will wield a tremendous influence in moulding the tone of the school.

7. MORAL TRAINING IN THE CLASS-ROOM

The type of correction connected with written exercises is the outcome of faulty understanding or defective intellect or inattention. It is wrong and futile and generally only harmful to punish any person for lack of understanding. No amount of punishment will remedy that defect. What is needed is more patience, more explanation, and sympathetic help.

But faults of the will in the class room too have to be corrected and sometimes checked. These are generally laziness, disobedience, dishonesty, and personal affront.

A teacher should, as early as possible at the beginning of the first term, learn to appreciate the various nuances that differentiate the work of the pupil who does his best, from that of the pupil who does just enough to pass muster, or from that of the indolent.

Unless there is a serious motive like winning an award or a strong sense of duty, most of us generally try to get things done with the least possible effort. But once the teacher has assessed aright the capabilities of each student, he should demand the best from each according to his ability. Whenever a boy brings up work below his level, he should be told that he is not doing justice to himself; he would consider it a compliment and respond to the teacher's demand. At the same time, the teacher should not push any student beyond his capability, for that will only nudge him into rebellion.

With regard to dishonest work like copying in the class-room, or trying to help another or get help from another, when they have been strictly instructed not to do so, it should be immediately checked, and the pupil or pupils concerned must be politely told that they are only deceiving themselves and defeating the very purpose for which they are sent to school and are not giving a reasonable opportunity to the teacher who is there to help them.

In cases of personal affront etc. the teacher may find himself in an embarrassing situation. Very often pupils do not really mean what their tone or words imply. In such clear cases, the teacher would do well to make a joke of it or ignore it altogether.

'A turn for ready repartee is a very useful thing, because a boy above all things dislikes being made to feel a fool before others. A certain quiet irony, as long as it is not cruel, is a very effective weapon, but not to be used except by indubitably good-natured men. Another very useful quality is the power of losing one's temper with dignity; almost all people, whether boys or men, dislike being confronted with anger; but it must be kept in the background. . . .

'But a deliberate insult had better not be dealt with on the spot; if a boy is told to wait afterwards, he has to pass a disagreeable period, wondering what is going to happen; and the excitement has a way of oozing out of the heels of the boots on such occasions. Moreover, boys are generally reasonable enough alone; there is a kind of excitement, which might be called *comitalis*, which sustains a boy in the presence of his fellows'.

The offender should be asked to meet the teacher at a convenient place in the school premises where he will be able to convince the boy of his offence and persuade him to make honourable amends by apologizing to the teacher in class before the beginning of the next lesson.

It is part of a pupil's training to be taught that public insults should, whenever it is possible, be atoned for publicly.

If the offender is not amenable to such treatment, then the incident should be faithfully reported to the proper authority at the earliest possible opportunity, and considered closed as far as the teacher is concerned.

If the insult has been deliberate and his fellow students regard it as such they themselves will advise the offender what to do. When he knows that "public opinion" is against him and that the sympathy of his colleagues is with the teacher, that feeling alone will have a deterrent and reformatory effect on the offender.

It is well, however, for a teacher to remember that to admit one's mistakes takes a sense of humour, and this wisdom very frequently does not come until late in life, and to some never at all.

One cannot over emphasize the fact that consistency is important in all dealings with the pupils. Reasonably firm rules with regard to work and behaviour make life pleasant and smooth for every one. Wholesome consistency which allows for relaxation of the rules on special and exceptional occasions gives a pupil the security he needs badly in an insecure world.

As the boys get older it is important to remember that there should be an increase of respectfulness imported into the manner of a teacher and that they should be addressed as equals, when they are about to enter the portals of the seats of higher learning or to take their place in that society which has educated them at its cost.

8. THINGS TO REMEMBER

Every teacher should ever remember that:

1. The class-room is only a part of the school. At times he may find it extremely difficult to do his work on account of noise or disturbance in the adjoining classes. He should never try to reform his colleagues: he should learn to adapt himself or perish! He should never raise his voice or shout at the pupils. He should *lower* his voice, and his pupils will be forced to attend to him.

2. The class-room is *not* the ideal set-up for teaching. It is only a compromise among various conflicting theories. A teacher must accept this compromise at our present stage of social evolution.

3. Class teaching and class control should never reflect his personal health problems or unhappy domestic relationships.

4. All education principles and methods of teaching are only general truths. Learning is an individual process. His real interest should be in the individual and not in the group.

5. He should not be daunted by the welter of theories of educational experts who have spent a few months abroad and come back to sit at their desks with their eyes ever on the next one above to plan, co-ordinate, develop, and administer.

6. He should remember that he has gone through, in order, a religious domination, political administration, and is now going through a period of reforms based on the social needs of the country. But unless he knows the social needs and the individual capability and needs of each child and of the geographical region from which he hails and where he will earn his living, the projected reforms will continue to be only a dream. This is why this little booklet lays much emphasis on the right student teacher relationship without in any way disparaging Principles and Methods of Teaching.

Very unfortunately the role of the teacher is not sufficiently appreciated even at this stage of Sri Lanka's political and social evolution. The threat of "promotion only to dedicated teachers" is a premonitory sign that the administrators have failed to secure the co-operation of the teachers.

When boys and girls leave school after their Secondary Education, it is important they go into the world with a firm determination to live successfully as useful members of the community in which they find themselves. They should know their own place in Nature and their social responsibility and the social relevance of what they do and how they live. They should leave school thinking internationally and globally and firmly convinced that hard work, honest work, and intelligent work in co-operation with their fellowmen alone can help them to solve their own personal problems, their own country's problems, and the global problems of food, population, and inflation.

Unless we live in accordance with Nature and maintain the balance of Nature and its resources, live harmoniously with our fellowmen, we alone are responsible for the disaster on this planet

and for man's inhumanity to man or woman, or bird or beast, wherever it may be found. Whose duty is it to inculcate in their minds and hearts this attitude of the school leavers?

Modern means of mass communication and wider education have opened the eyes of modern youth. Now they see: they realize only too well that they have been misguided far too long and nurtured on ignorance and her stepdaughter superstition. They may not know how to solve their besetting problems, but they can no longer be bludgeoned into obedience or threatened into conformity.

Neither by violence nor by force, but by long and arduous struggle of trial and error, by the use of all intellectual and moral resources on the basis of accumulated experience in mutual aid and co-operation and by hard work alone can man save himself.

We should cease to consider the so called intrinsic and formal value of a subject. We should not approach our work from the subject end at all. If out of our knowledge we mean to help our children to live richer, nobler and fuller lives, and become useful and good citizens, we should not then think of the internal logic or the mind value of the subject we teach but think more about the pupils themselves and *the social relevance* of whatever we teach. We shall then be certainly teaching our subject better and helping our pupils more effectively and purposefully. Are we democratic enough for this task in Independent Sri Lanka? None but democratic citizens can train would-be democratic citizens.

9. RESPONSIBILITY AND REWARD

The teacher is the most powerful influence brought to bear on a student. Most of the direct moral instruction received by the students is given by the teacher, who is held responsible for their moral as well as their intellectual training, and therefore for the fuller and perfect development of their civic sense. Hence is the importance of a high moral standard on the part of the teacher, for "the conduct of our lives is the true mirror of our doctrine".

Instruction can have no moral weight unless children see that teachers are sincere, that they practise and that their own lives are influenced by, the principles which they seek to instil into their pupils. The teacher whose life is worthy of example for his pupils to follow does more to form their character to virtue than he can do by all his instructions and all his laws". On no account however, should a teacher deliberately set himself up as a model teacher.

The teacher should, therefore:

1. Rigidly adhere to strict honesty in all the many small and perhaps apparently trivial matters connected with the school work.
2. Be always tidy, neat, and clean in his own person and habits.
3. Be always punctual; lessons should be ended as well as begun at the proper time.
4. Be patient with the dull; tender, considerate and encouraging towards the weakly or afflicted, the shy and the timid; courteous and attentive to all.
5. Be friendly, but not patronising, towards parents, and forbearing and conciliatory when messages are received from them.
6. Avoid the slightest appearance of partiality, favouritism, unfairness or inconsistency; in other words, be perfectly just, not allowing himself to be influenced by any other reason than the welfare of the children, nor be swayed by passion, caprice, desire of popularity, indolence, or love of ease.
7. In punishment, consider what is best rather than what is deserved; rather encourage, persuade, remonstrate or warn than resort to scolding, threats, or punishment.
8. Be perfectly reasonable in his requirements and demands, and not harsh or demonstrative in wielding his authority.
9. Be conscious of his weaknesses and deficiencies.
10. Be the best embodiment of the culture and the refined and gentle manners of his age—an educated and enlightened man.

If the responsibility is great, the reward is great. When a teacher retires, he has the joy of feeling that he has contributed effectively to human welfare. Though he may not have had monetary rewards or any recognition of his work, a teacher will live in the grateful memories and hearts of his old pupils.

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