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TEACHING ILLITERATES

General Principles

It is better to teach adults separately from children to avoid the embarrassment which is caused if a child learns faster than an adult. By and large, the adults progress faster than the children, but there are always exceptions, and it isn't safe to have them together. Ideally, the adults of an area should be taught before the children, but this is often impossible.

Do not go too fast for your students. To us our primers may seem monotonous and boring--but consider the vast difference between our academic preparation and that of the folk we are teaching. This is unconquered territory for them, and we should constantly strive to look at our material and our methods through their frame of reference. If we are enthusiastic towards the material and towards each step of their achievement, they will be enthusiastic, too.

Materials

At least one blackboard, one or two yards square, is a must. However, the more the better, for use of a blackboard is one of the best ways to give the students practice without using paper and pencil if you are in an area where these are scarce. Also, working at the blackboard provides a welcome change from working at a desk.

Newsprint makes excellent cheap copy paper for writing practice. One of the best features of it is that you can cut it to your students' size. Small sheets are better for beginners--especially small children. Newsprint does have the disadvantage of needing to be lined, and this takes time, but can be done without too much labor if your students help you draw the lines.

Flash cards are also a must for faster learning. They must be made out of fairly supple but durable cardboard to enable you to flip them quickly without wrinkling and tearing. As the students progress, some of the more advanced ones can help the others with flash card drills.

Games, balls, coloring materials, etc. are all very useful in giving students either a recess or a classroom change. It is not just children who like to experiment with crayons.

Prizes--such as pencils, rulers, notebooks, Christmas cards, candy, combs, etc.--are of remarkable value in motivating students. They need not be either expensive or elaborate to please--they need only be distributed equally, as awarding each student a ruler upon his completion of the Pre-Primer, or other specified section of work. Attendance prizes are very good for several reasons; one of the main ones being that a student who is slow and finds it difficult to win other prizes can have the satisfaction of receiving a chart of Noah's Ark Animals, or a cardboard sword whose handle glistens with red and silver stars, etc.

Methods

If you have more than one student, it is well to make a large sheet of your material to be taught, large enough to be easily seen by the whole class.

Point, in turn, to each word on the first sheet, pronouncing it yourself and having the pupils pronounce after you. Then have the pupils pronounce by themselves. Do this as often as necessary. Proceed to the next sheet and teach the words there. Return to sheet 1 and review, then to sheet 2 and review. Depending on how much material you have per sheet, it is well to do at least 2 or 3 pages to give the pupils repetition in contrast. (The assumption here is that the material on pages 1 and 2 would be repeated on page 3.)

It is well to begin writing practice simultaneously with reading. If you have several students in the class, it is unlikely that they will stay together in progress. Hence, you will have to teach different levels at different times, and it is well for the group not studying reading to be practicing writing while you are helping another group read.

Rather than teaching the alphabet per se, it is more helpful to teach the students to write the letters they first see used in words--first doing letter practice, then word practice.

It is good to have the whole class, regardless of progress state, to review together at least once every day--going through all pages of a primer covered to date and through a set of flash cards. This is of value to both slow and fast learners. Use flash cards first in a fixed order, then mixed.

Use fast learners to help slow learners. This helps develop group 'team feeling'. It will also keep you from spreading yourself too thin and will give you an idea as to those who may make teachers in the future.

I'd repeat here for emphasis what I said under General Principles, not to go too fast. This is the biggest danger, and it is near fatal in any learning situation, for it discourages the students and makes their learning experience a tragedy instead of a triumph.

All of the above are important physical factors in teaching the yet-untaught. However, the most important factor in successfully reaching our folks and helping them become able to read the Word of the Lord is our own daily looking to the Lord for enabling by His Holy Spirit for each day.

Eugenia Johnston