

BOOK REVIEWS

Teaching the Language Arts,—Speech, Reading, and Composition.

By B. A. HINSDALE, PH.D. LL.D., Professor of the Science and Art of Teaching in the University of Michigan, author of *President Garfield and Education*, etc. New York: D. Appleton & Co.

THERE was a time when dignified writers upon educational topics felt that they must be concerned almost wholly with some phase of the philosophy of education. It was thought that the details of teaching could be suitably left to those who were not competent to do highly abstract or theoretical thinking. The belief seems to have run in men's minds for a long time that it was a greater mark of talent to deal with theories in any branch of knowledge than with their detailed application in regulating human affairs. Times are changing though, in the matter of education at any rate. The ablest thinkers are no longer esteemed to be philosophers simply, but rather men who have breadth of mind enough to grasp both theory and the conditions of its application, and fit the two harmoniously together in some way. *Teaching the Language Arts* is preëminently a dignified and scholarly book, treating of methods of teaching by bringing fundamental principles down to actual practice. While it is not the purpose to discuss in minutiae methods and devices, still these are presented in some detail as they should be employed from the kindergarten to the college.

Perhaps no group of subjects gives so much trouble in teaching as those comprising the language arts,—reading, writing, language, grammar, composition, rhetoric, and literature; and it is an excellent plan to treat them all together as is done in this book. From one point of view these branches are all instruments or means through which thought is gained and expressed. Now it has happened since the time of the Renaissance that it has been deemed necessary to acquire these instruments or means in the schools apart from their use in gaining or expressing thought;—to learn them formally as bodies of symbols, that is to say. The argument has been stoutly maintained

that the schools should put the pupil into possession of the keys of knowledge, not the knowledge itself; so these language arts have all been taught in a formal, logical manner as independent studies. The beginning in reading was made with letters, which were in time put into words, these into sentences, and these into paragraphs. In writing separate letters have been learned and drilled upon at great length. In spelling words have been learned which were not a part of the pupils vocabulary at all, and which he never encountered in daily reading or conversation. In language the rules of grammar have been memorized in the hope that sometime they would be applied in speech and writing. Following the same principle, rules in rhetoric have been industriously memorized, and literary masterpieces have been torn to shreds to discover the formal mechanism of their construction. In every case, in the elementary school, the high school, and the college, *form* has been made paramount; it has been the letter, not the spirit; the husk, not the full ear that has been given to the student.

If one should attempt to say in a single sentence what is the purpose of Dr. Hinsdale's book it would be to show that in the teaching of all the language arts thought, reality, life should come before and have greater emphasis than the forms or symbols through which they are expressed. The interest of the pupil demands this, and the arts—reading, writing, etc.,—may be more easily and more serviceably acquired if they are learned incidentally, rather than explicitly and formally as things in themselves. Dr. Hinsdale grounds his arguments upon sound psychology everywhere. He shows that language is the result of imitation, and he rightfully emphasizes the unconscious process naturally pursued in learning much of the technique of the language arts. There is surely a great truth here that teachers have not fully appreciated. If the pupil be surrounded throughout his school life by excellent models in speech, reading, and composition, he will absorb in large degree the necessary forms and conventionalities to make his own speech, reading, and composition accurate, fluent, and graceful. Psychology shows conclusively that it is a waste of time and energy to learn rules first and then seek to apply them; rather derive the rules incidentally through noting their application in an abundance of the right sort of thought-material. To impress this is, I take it, the leading purpose of *Teaching the Language Arts*.

Dr. Hinsdale acknowledges that in the high school and college the forms of expression may be studied as sciences in themselves. Gram-

mar, philology, etc., are legitimate subjects of study in the proper place, but this is by no means in the elementary school; and the old notion that grammar and rhetoric as they have been taught served to make one's speech and composition more accurate and elegant has been thoroughly exploded in late years. But most of the high schools and colleges seem not to have heard of this. They have apparently not awakened to the fact now thoroughly appreciated by the majority of elementary school-teachers that the method of teaching a subject does not ordinarily correspond with the logical arrangement of that subject. While reading, spelling, writing, and language are being taught very differently in most of the elementary schools now from what they were a quarter century ago, still rhetoric and literature go on in the high schools and colleges for the most part in the same old, formal, lifeless, fruitless fashion.

Dr. Hinsdale does not go as far in his book in the direction of the "new education" as some prominent educators of our time would wish. He makes a place for learning rules and for drill upon forms that are not thought by some persons to be necessary. It seems, however, that in the public schools as we have them at present there must be drill; the formal part of education must receive some explicit attention. In my opinion Dr. Hinsdale preserves a wise balance in the teaching of content and form; he puts the emphasis where it belongs, and points out the proper order in the relationship of the two in the language-arts. He would doubtless agree to the proposition, that the less drill the better if we can only lead the pupil to a thorough, automatic mastery of the instruments of thought-getting and thought-expression. This means, of course, that the amount of formal drill will vary with different teachers and in different schools; but however much is necessary it must always be subservient to the acquisition and expression of thought from the primary school through the college.

The writer cannot agree with Dr. Hinsdale in a few comparatively minor matters. For example, on page 49 it is advised that the slate be used by the child when he enters school in copying exercises. Modern studies upon the health of school children show that the slate ought to be banished from the schoolroom altogether and forever with all pupils, but especially with the youngest. To properly manage a slate-pencil in writing demands far greater power of muscular coordination than the child is ready for. The writing at first ought to be with chalk upon the blackboard, or at least with a soft pencil on rough paper.

Again, on page 88 the author says: "On the day that he enters school the pupil should also attack the significance of the literary symbols." There is a pronounced conviction arising amongst the best educators today that reading and writing are begun too early. They are artificial, arbitrary studies, and demand more concentration of attention to master them than the young pupil is capable of without injury to health and loss of interest in school work. The normal development of childhood requires great freedom of bodily action, and it were far better that a pupil spend his first two or three years in school in games and plays and in contact with nature and the appropriate kind of literature, expressing what he gains through the natural methods of drawing, modeling, manual training, etc.; this were better than that he should at once attack the literary symbols. Ever since the Renaissance we have been crowding the learning of the language-arts earlier and earlier into the child's life, until in the opinion of the writer we have gone to a harmful extreme. The impression seems to exist in some people's minds that if a pupil does not begin to read and write the first day he enters school there will be nothing for him to do, and his mental development will be greatly retarded; whereas it has been shown by experiment in a few places that when these symbolic studies are left for two or three years the pupil rapidly makes up lost time, besides having gained a great amount of knowledge in other directions which would have been impossible if he had at the outset spent all his time and energies in the formal studies.

It is to be questioned if Dr. Hinsdale does not too much emphasize the learning of rules of expression in reading and of construction in composition. It is probably true that when one fully appreciates the thought and feeling contained in any selection he can give proper expression to it through voice, face, and body; and also if he has an idea clearly in mind he can readily find the proper literary garb in which to clothe it. Perhaps in composition there must be some study on the part of older pupils of good forms of construction; but it may be questioned whether this would be necessary if children were expected to express their thoughts freely in writing throughout the grades.

It is to be hoped that many teachers will read this book. It is written in a delightful spirit,—clear, terse, always modest, never dogmatic. It stands for the best things in the teaching of the language-arts, and at the same time for methods that are practicable in all class-rooms.

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