

THE VISITOR

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THE ASSIGNMENT

A recent writer in the field of elementary education states that the assignment of the lesson is the best index of a teacher's ability. If this test were applied to teachers of vocational agriculture many of us would be condemned. It seems worth while, therefore, to bring out the important points of a good assignment even at the risk of stating some principles already known to Visitor readers.

There are eight questions which should be asked about an assignment. A brief discussion of each question may prove suggestive.

1. **Does the assignment relate the lesson to what is already known by the pupils?** What is known may consist of what has been developed in previous lessons or may be the result of out of school experience. The setting up of such associations in the mind of the learner is an aid to memory, is an effective way of reviewing the material learned, and helps to give the student a somewhat connected view of what has gone before and what is to come.

If we are assigning a lesson on dairy feeds made from corn, we may recall the exercise on the parts and composition of the corn kernel which we may have given as the part of the course in field crops. If the lesson is on breeding for egg production we may ask from which parent a cow usually inherits milk production capacity and ask the class in studying the lesson to compare inheritance of milk production and inheritance of egg production. The teacher may often connect the lesson with the farm experience of the members of the class.

2. **Does the assignment formulate a problem?** If the lesson becomes a problem to the learner and he is thereby given aim and motive, the most important requirement of the assignment has been met. Suppose that a subject is so outlined that every lesson is a problem which the learner will meet in

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A FEW SUGGESTIONS ON CORN JUDGING

The aim of the instruction in corn judging should always be clear. We do not expect all the members of the class to become judges at fairs or corn shows nor is it justifiable to take time to instruct fifteen boys so that one of them may become an expert judge. Most of us will admit, however, the primary purpose of scoring and judging is to instruct the boys so that they will know an ear of corn from A to Z. The ultimate aim, of course, is to make them experts in seed corn.

The score card used at the University of Minnesota is especially well adapted for this purpose. It emphasizes the points of an ear which are important for the corn grower, i.e., the points which indicate percentage of shelled corn, maturity and adaptation, germination, and variety characteristics.

Scoring and judging without a thorough knowledge of the points is not worth while. The foundation of scoring and judging should be an understanding of the points of an ear of corn, in fact, scoring and judging are methods of applying knowledge of points. Yet there are teachers who let their classes score and judge corn without ever seeing examples of some of the points.

The following practices have been found useful by the writer in giving a knowledge of score card points.

1. Specimens which illustrate the points are essential, not only ears which are perfect but also ears which are defective in respect to each point on the score card.

2. The teacher should have a permanent collection of ears which illustrate the points. After the first year it will be necessary merely to substitute new ears for those that are missing or damaged or are inferior to the new ears as illustrations. Any one who has tried to make such a collection will realize that it is difficult to collect at

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A OPPORTUNITY FOR PROFESSIONAL IMPROVEMENT

The Division of Agricultural Education is conducting a seminar in agricultural education on Saturday mornings for teachers of agriculture within reach of St. Paul. The success of this seminar has resulted in a plan to extend this opportunity to more teachers of agriculture during the next quarter, January 4 to March 23. Other courses in the Division of Agricultural Education and in other departments of the College of Education are in prospect, so that sufficient work can be offered to make an attractive schedule.

The work done will be credited toward an advanced degree for those persons who are eligible to register. Supplemented by summer work, it will be possible to satisfy residence and course requirements for such a degree. Boards of education are showing a willingness to grant a teacher of agriculture six weeks instead of a month's leave, providing he attends summer school for professional improvement purposes. When it is considered that the teacher of agriculture is in a position to do research work in connection with his regular activities, this new arrangement is a practical way to get an advanced degree.

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his vocation—for example, pruning an orchard. The assignment can easily create the problem attitude under such conditions. It is more difficult to make a problem out of the principles of germination; these might better be included under such problems as testing seed corn or drilling oats.

In assigning the lesson "How to Rent a Farm" the class may be reminded that most of them will some day be tenants or landlords or both. They should understand renting both as tenants and as landlords. The landlord favors intensive crops because labor, the major cost, is furnished by the renter. A provision in the lease that certain intensive crops shall be grown favors the landlord. They should know which party every provision in a lease favors and which party the lease as a whole favors. They should know how to draw up a lease which will favor both parties equally. As these points are brought out the problem attitude is developed.

3. **Does the assignment reveal enough to stimulate but not enough to satisfy?** If the problem is solved or partially solved in the assignment, there is no challenge to the student to attack it. How far the teacher should go is a matter of judgment. Suppose we are assigning a lesson which includes a study of the qualities of a good dairy ration. The assignment should not deal with these qualities but merely with the importance of knowing them, sources of information, possible difficulties, etc.

In assigning a feeding ration to be worked out by the class there is a temptation to go so far in the computation during the assignment that the class needs only to do a little arithmetic in order to finish the problem. The challenge is removed and the routine work remains.

4. **Does the assignment emphasize the important points?** The student is frequently unable to judge what are the important parts of the lesson. This is especially true of assignments in agricultural texts written to apply to the forty-eight states. In a given community some of this matter is important, some of it does not need special emphasis, some of it should be omitted. There are other reasons for emphasis in addition to community importance, such as application to future lessons, and probable future importance.

Two ways of emphasizing the important points may be used. Pivotal

questions may be assigned which will bring out desired points, or the teacher may go over the lesson indicating omissions and important parts. If we are assigning a lesson on apple insects, for example, we ought first to select those insects which are important. There are four important points to emphasize under each insect: (1) life history; (2) identification of larva, pupa, and adult; (3) identification of injury caused; (4) control measures.

5. Are individual differences provided for? In any class some students are more capable than others; the more capable ones need a challenge in the form of more work and more difficult problems. Again, many boys are especially interested in certain phases of a subject. Individual assignments in addition to the regular assignment are advisable for these reasons.

If we are assigning a lesson on corn cultivation, the following individual assignments in addition to the regular assignment might be made:

1. What do experiments show as to the yields when different methods of cultivating corn are employed? Interpret Table XLVIII in Montgomery's Corn Crops. Make a written report to the class giving figures to support statements.

2. What kinds of tools are used in cultivating? See Montgomery's Corn Crops, pages 197-202. Omit listing tools. Report in writing to the class giving (1) tools used and (2) for what particular conditions each tool is best adapted.

6. Is assistance given on difficult points? We do not need to master the difficult points for the class during the assignment. On the other hand, we must prevent possible misconceptions which will have to be unlearned without removing the necessity for effort on the part of the class. Some of the helps we may give are:

- a. Make clear parts of the texts that are obscure in wording.
- b. Call attention to new words or phrases like check plat, photosynthesis, line breeding, zenia, crop index, pedigreed seed corn, labor income.
- c. If it is not advisable to explain new words or phrases, tell where to find explanations.

It is evident that the teacher cannot judge which are the important points or the difficult ones unless he knows the lesson in detail.

7. Is instruction given in methods of study? This is an extremely important point. Most boys in high school do not know how to study; the same may

be said of many college students. Teachers of agriculture might help here more than they commonly do; they could increase the effectiveness of study in agriculture and other subjects. A little book with which teachers of agriculture should be familiar is "How to Study Effectively," by G. M. Whipple, published by the Public School Publishing Company, Bloomington, Ill. This book can be read through in an hour. In the assignment we can develop whatever methods of study suit the needs of the class.

Suppose we wish the class to learn the ten essential elements of plant food. We may suggest the Hopkins plan, i.e., C HOPKINS CaFe Mg, the symbols of the elements associated in this way. Dr. Cyril Hopkins likened the soil to a cafe for plants, a mighty good one. He found that he could write an advertisement for this cafe, designating himself as the proprietor but leaving the "I" out in order to be duly modest. "Mg" stands for "mighty good." We can not only help the class to remember the ten elements but can use it as an example of how to remember by association of ideas.

Many high school students cannot proceed directly to the point or points which a table in a book or a bulletin shows. The assignment period of the first lesson which contains tables is the time to go through a table with the class and show them how to draw out the essential points.

8. Are directions clear? The sources of information should always be given. Though the class should be trained in finding information, the teacher should be very certain that every member of the class has this training before assigning by subject. Specific assignment are preferable to general directions.

Occasionally the assignment is not in books or bulletins but consists in directing pupils to find out facts at home or in the community. General directions here are useless. The assignments should go into details and the class should be given an opportunity to ask questions.

For example, we wish the class to draw a plan of the poultry house on the home farm. It would be well to make out an outline for each student, telling what measurements to make and what features to note and include in the plan. Even then some questions will be raised because one outline can not fit all conditions, special directions should

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be given for certain individual cases.

At a conference of apprentice teachers at University Farm, an attempt was made to formulate a score card by which to judge an assignment. The above eight points were agreed upon but it was impossible to agree on the number of points to be assigned to each because the importance of each characteristic varies with the composition of the class and the kind of lesson assigned. The following points assigned are a rough estimate and necessarily changeable.

Qualities of an Assignment.	Points
Does the assignment relate the lesson to what is already known by the pupils?	10
Does the assignment formulate a problem	25
Does the assignment reveal enough to stimulate but not enough to satisfy?	10
Does the assignment emphasize the important points?.....	10
Are individual differences provided for?	10
Is assistance given on difficult points?	10
Is instruction given in methods of study?	15
Are directions clear?.....	10

It has already been indicated that a good assignment requires careful preparation. The teacher should have already made sufficient preparation to teach the lesson.

Allow enough time for the assignment. A hurried assignment loses its effectiveness. The teacher should not feel that he is wasting time in giving 10, 15, or 20 minutes to a good assignment. He increases the effectiveness of the class in preparing for the lesson; he often saves class time, as an assignment may prevent the retracing of wasted steps. The time spent in assignment will pay large dividends in improved quality of class work.

This is especially true in the case of a laboratory lesson because the slower pupils are then intent in catching up with the rest of the class and drop their work reluctantly. Or some question arises which needs to be settled. It is better to cut short a lesson, however, than to skimp an assignment. The lesson can be finished the next time but usually the assignment can not. It would be preferable to give the assignment at the first part of the period if this is necessary in order to have adequate time for it, in spite of the advantages of giving it at the close of the period.

F. W. L.

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any one time ears which illustrate all of the points.

3. The points can be taught effectively by distributing ears to the class, each one being unlabeled and illustrating a point. The class should understand that illustrations of each point are before them. As the points are named, the boys are expected to discover who has the illustrations and these are then examined by all of the boys. At this time it should be made clear why the point is on the score card, e.g., why a discolored germ has become discolored and will not grow.

4. When the class has become familiar with the points and is ready to score ears, a set of twenty ears should be supplied. These are "joker" ears; each one is especially strong or weak on some point on the score card. When these ears are scored, the scores are checked over with the class. The teacher knows that each ear should be scored high or low with respect to some point. The boys who did not see the outstanding feature of each ear are shown again and asked to make corrections. They are now ready to judge show corn if desired. The steps taken up to this point are the essential ones, however, and the boys should know an ear of corn as well as the good dairyman knows a cow.

F. W. L.

A BOOK ON TEACHING METHODS

Some books are read by teachers of agriculture in order to get concrete suggestions for everyday work.

"How to Teach Agriculture," by Storm and Davis (J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia) is a book of this sort. This is the first book on special methods of teaching agriculture; it is being widely read and discussed. The book is especially applicable to Minnesota conditions; the senior author is a Minnesota man and has long been in close touch with the problems of teaching agriculture in this state. This is not to say that the book is only applicable to Minnesota conditions; the experience of the other states has been drawn upon. It is a valuable addition to the library of any teacher of agriculture.

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