

## Teaching Geography to Slow Learners

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Retarded children do not seem to lack the power to remember nearly as much as they lack the power to reason. Slow children can learn and can remember what they learn, if they are capable of absorbing what you try to teach.

During the past four years the writer has taught geography to nearly two hundred boys and girls classified in the lower quarter. It must be understood that these children are not the lower quarter of the entire mentality spread, but rather the lower 25 per cent of those who have become sophomores in high school.

The intelligence quotients of this group ranged from 63 to 89 with the majority under 78. Reading abilities ranged from grade one to six, as did their ability to write. None of the students of a group randomly selected could read a complete paragraph, seventh grade level, without stumbling.

We find in these children a group of individuals who cannot always reason why a thing happens, but willingly accept that a thing is right or correct because you, the teacher, say so. In dealing with poorer students it is imperative that the instructor be well liked by the class and that the material presented be neither boring or above their ability to grasp.

Students with normal intelligence or better can gain much by being confronted with more than they can learn. The challenge to their ability enables them to get what they can from the lessons. The slower students, who have very often been resigned to roles as failures, like and appreciate the chance to do something which they can do, completely and relatively well. A time limitation factor is necessary so as not to produce boredom before the completion of a project.

Discussed here, without too much detail, are some of the ideas and practices that have been put to good use.

### I. Conservation and identification of vegetation.

A. Each student was assigned as homework the task of bringing to the classroom some kind of vegetation. They were to make notes on the surrounding vegetation and terrain when they secured their samples. They were cautioned not to bring in the easiest plants to obtain. The students were free to secure any sample of vegetation where they wished. The results were gratifying. Materials brought to class ranged from the simplest plant forms still attached to rocks and pieces of wood to a sprig of dead sequoia accompanied by vacation pictures. Each student displayed his material, described its location, and the experience he went through to obtain it.

B. During the period in which the plants were coming in and being displayed and talked about, conservation movies were shown and discussed.

C. The final two hours of the total of fifteen class hours consumed by the project were used in discussion of personal experiences with conservation of vegetation.

### II. Identification of the world's water bodies, other than the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

A. Childish as it seems, the heart of the unit was crayola maps drawn on cotton broadcloth, generally small pieces of a sheet. The students provided the broadcloth, the crayolas were part of the classroom equipment.

B. Each student drew on his piece of material the map of a water body, coloring only the water portions of his picture. The surrounding

land areas were delineated with dark crayola and named, but not conspicuously enough to detract from the water body. Enough land was drawn into each map to help identify its location. Water bodies used were the Mediterranean Sea, Red Sea, Japan Sea, Gulf of Mexico, Strait of Gibraltar, Panama Canal, English Channel, Baltic Sea, and others.

C. Each student completed his work by drawing a map, similar to his project, on white, unlined paper. The water bodies were colored blue but not named, and the surrounding land areas were identified.

D. The test over the unit constituted identification of the waters drawn on the white paper maps which were displayed around the room. The students spent considerable time and effort studying after the test was announced. Names of surrounding land areas served as aids in recognizing water areas. A complete list of water bodies, larger than the number of maps displayed, was put on the board to aid in recall of answers and to help prevent the frustration that comes from the inability to spell.

### III. Location of countries of the world.

A. The enjoyment of the final days of this unit was boundless and noisy. The first step was the announcement of the form of the test. As the test began, each student pinned to the back of his shirt or blouse the name of a country. Each student was given a hand atlas. A red or white streamer was tied around each student's neck for team identification. Each student was then allowed to ask each member of the opposing team three questions which could be answered "yes" or "no." In this manner he endeavored to identify the country he represented. Each correct identification became a team point. Due to the type of activity, no student dropped out of the action after identification. The regulation of asking questions of only the opposing team members cut down on the possibilities of cheating. The teacher refereed the proceedings to see that everything went "according to Hoyle."

B. Prior to the test the students worked two weeks on blank maps locating the various countries of the world. Later in the project, but still prior to the test, the class was divided into two teams. The teams were lined up on either side of the room. A member of one team named a country, a member of the other, the continent on which it was located. The procedure was then reversed. An incorrect answer or failure to respond in the time allowed (15 seconds) tallied a point for the opposing team. On another day the same two teams alternated at naming countries on a continent which the teacher named. This can be made applicable to classes of higher level by requiring that the students be able to correctly spell their answers. A missed answer or failure to respond again meant loss of a point. Points were also acquired by challenging an answer; the team in the wrong losing a point.

Other than the projects afore mentioned the following are some of the other projects and practices used for classroom instruction.

#### I. Construction of a desert terrarium.

The frame was constructed through aid of the boys in the manual arts division. An art student, using plaster of Paris, built a small dam and the animals and plants were purchased and brought in by students.

#### II. Field trips to the local park.

Students were taught to recognize by sight common place items such as:

- 1—common types of trees.
- 2—common plants other than trees.
- 3—drainage patterns and examples of erosion.
- 4—common place birds.

III. Moving pictures were shown every other week and discussed in class.  
IV. Blackboard illustrations, both in color and in black and white, were used without end.

The singular item that the teacher must bear in mind in teaching poorer groups is that success breeds interest, and success occurs much more readily when the goal is constantly in sight. Remember too, such a group thrives on competition.