READING LESS AND GRASPING MORE OR
READING SLOWLY AND GRASPING QUICKLY

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Abstract. The presentation outlines unconventional and very effective ways of proper arrangement of students' work. From the beginning we were interested in learning whether a randomly selected student can effectively master an optionally selected subject at the level of high marks. As a result of tests and observations that we have conducted at various stages of the education during many years we have come to the following conclusions. Regardless of gender and ethnicity, a randomly selected student can effectively master an optionally selected subject at the level of high marks. The algorithm of achieving such results is outlined in the presentation. If properly organized in accordance with outlined method, student's performance will give positive results in short term. Accounts of the need for the main attention to be focused on the formation of the student's self-confidence and high spirit are given by means of clear examples. The stated method aims to gradually build the ability of a student to independently study without resorting to help from someone. Yet another noteworthy feature of this method is that it can be applied in learning of any subject.

Keywords: student's mental state; learning slow, gaining fast; learning less, gaining more; oral speech culture; independent thinking; speed of thinking; examples; questionnaires; encouraging student; independent thinking.

The learning process starts with self-awareness, i.e. with psychological readiness of a student to master a subject. Student's self-awareness includes the student's ability to know himself, to understand his skills, to know what he is capable of. In addressing this issue a student needs the support of adults. Opinions and conclusions of his teachers, parents, and even friends are of great importance for the student. Moreover, such conclusions sometimes would puzzle even adults. A learner, even a student of a higher education institution is a person who has little life experience and who frequently changes his mind. In most cases, such students are susceptible to remarks of surrounding people. For example, a teacher repeatedly tells his student that he is not clever and these words reach his parents, in most cases, the student and his parents will assent to that conclusion.

However, a thorough analysis of the activities of the student shows that he can be a talented person as we came to know based on our tests. Thus, the ability of a student to master a subject depends very much on his mental state, his attitude towards his skills, will, work, as well as his conclusions about his ability to master subjects.

Based on the results of numerous experiments and observations, we can say that given a proper education and training, the student can effectively master randomly chosen subject. Some students will do that faster, others slower. With the passage of time the pace of mastering any topic or concept will be measured not by days or months, but rather by hours or in most cases by minutes. In general, there cannot be that all students in one classroom can achieve the same level of learning. Aptitude of a student for certain subject or profession is a different matter. That is to say, we cannot deny that there are students who are good in learning one or several subjects. However, it is also true that almost all students can be good in learning all disciplines.

In order to do that first and foremost a teacher must help his students to get the right mental state.

The right mental state cannot be achieved through repeated statements only. To achieve that a student must acquire self-confidence to learn a subject. And in order to acquire self-confidence it is necessary to prove and demonstrate that of any person can achieve the expected results if he works hard.

Such activity requires the following steps:
– to talk about great people, in particular life and work of our great ancestors, using interesting and exemplary stories;
– to explain that their lives too was filled with all kinds of tests and tribulations, difficulties and challenges, and that they overcame those obstacles, and most importantly, that they also used to be students, studied hard, and tirelessly explored and as a result of that they achieved such fame;
– to promote activities of today’s great scholars, public figures and successful young people;
– to accentuate that possibilities of a human being are limitless, and only those who cannot properly use those possibilities cannot find a place in life;
– to explain with examples that the knowledge gained as a youth will help at every step later in life;
– to tell that the assignments should be completed not for the sake of being in time but for learning;
– to underline that success will surely come to a student who feels positive changes day by day in learning process and who can get satisfaction from that;
– to encourage whatever success in efforts of a student who is not making big progress in learning.

We observed that all these actions led to a situation when a student starts to be more confident and undertake more daring actions.

In particular, when students who usually annoy most teachers were encouraged by a certain teacher, we saw that their attitude towards a subject of that teacher positively changed.

If a teacher encourages a student by saying:
– “I am amazed by the changes you achieve”,
– “I believe you”,
– “I expect better results from you”,
– “You will certainly achieve results” will result in uplifting the student’s mental state.

Noting to the student that learning of 40-50% of any topic or concept is already a success in the early efforts of the student; usually parents of the students as well as teachers often tell the students in lecturing tone “You must thoroughly learn the lesson,” “You must thoroughly read this,” “You must do better.” But do we explain to students how to thoroughly learn the lesson, thoroughly read, or do better? In particular, when we say you need to read a lot what do we mean, do we tell how many times a topic and concept should be read? One should not see it as if a student must read a topic umpteen times or until he memorize the task. If compelled to do so, the student will start to shun away from that due to complexity of the task. Such abstract tasks that are given to students do not serve the purpose of teachers, nor of students. As a result, the teacher blames the student and latter loses confidence in his ability. It is very dangerous situation in teaching process.

Teachers must teach the students how to read a topic. It means not just reading a text, but reading and contemplation. Let’s assume that a student has quickly read a topic. He realizes that he did not understand anything. He would read couple of time more. But the result will be the same. As a result, without understanding the basic rules, he would prefer to memorize. Memorizing without understanding of the essence of a topic, in particular in learning natural sciences, is nothing but fruitless labor.

We propose the following method to learn the theoretical part of a given topic:

1. Have a student read a sentence very slowly until one full meaning is completed trying to understand every word. If the student misspells the endings and omits the letters he cannot get the meaning.

2. The student must contemplate over the written thought, concept, description or rule and talks out loud to himself. While talking he doesn’t have to repeat word-for-word what is written in the book. It is sufficient that he speak in his own words. But his spoken phrases must match the meaning in the book. For example, for a 5th-grade student it is sufficient to be able to describe whole numbers in the following way:
– only natural figures that are divided into one and themselves are called as whole figures;
– natural figures that have only two dividers are called as whole figures;
– natural figures that have one divider besides themselves are called as whole figures;
– natural figures that have only one divider besides one are called as whole figures.

Moreover the ability to express one thought in a variety of ways will significantly affect the student’s oral speech culture and thinking abilities.
3. The student uses 3-4 examples. Why do we need examples? If a student does not use examples, first, it becomes evident that he memorized a topic not understanding it, and secondly, a link between theoretical and practical knowledge will be lost.

4. Using a questionnaire notebook. The student writes down questions to which he already knows the answers and time to time he repeats the answers to those questions.

We have proved in our experiments that if every description, concept or rule is learned this way the student will be grasp a lesson within a short period of time. Thus, slow reading leads to quick learning.

Such learning method may seem to both teacher and the student as something that takes a lot of time and energy, but it is worth trying. We don’t deny that the initial attempts will not bring good results immediately and may take longer time. However, if one would work hard for the initial one month at most, it is possible to get good results.

Thus, the algorithm of grasping a topic in a book or lecture is as following:

Reading slowly making sure to understand the meaning of each word → oral expression of the learned material → using examples → creating a questionnaire.

This method proved effective when we used it in vocational education institutions (excluding primary education schools).

Now, let’s analyze every point of the aforementioned algorithm:

We witnessed that slow reading of a topic trying to understand the meaning of each word initially requires reading 1-3 times, then 1-2 times, and after a week or 10 days it requires reading in most cases only one time. It means that one can grasp more by reading less.

– It is not easy for a student to orally narrate a material that he learned. Naturally the initial attempts may not be as desired. There is big difference between colloquial street language and scholastic language. The said practices first of all form the ability to state clearly and succinctly his opinion through algorithmic thinking, second of all, it can be very effective in forming the skills to make general conclusions based on the expressed thoughts.

– Why do we need the questionnaires? The number of questions in the questionnaires will be increasing day by day and one should not be worried about it. Learning any subject requires repetition time to time. If a student wants to read a book once again, due to the familiarity of the text he cannot tell which part of the book he grasped well or which part he didn’t. He will try to answer the questions in the questionnaire. Each time when he fails to answer a question he marks those questions. After two or three attempts whatever question has been marked most of all would mean that the topic related to that question has been studied insufficiently. In other words, the questionnaire would act as a mirror that reflects the knowledge of a student.

If a student would work applying the stated method, in no time he would feel the changes. We noticed that students who followed the aforementioned algorithm started to acquire self-confidence in respect to their ability and knowledge, were inspired and started to act more confidently in decisively proving every thought they said. Most importantly, the students stated that they started to treat lessons not as something they are obliged to do, instead they looked at lessons as one of the daily needs and that they admitted that they are not getting tired anymore while doing lessons.

The main purpose of the method is to form ability to independently learn optional scientific notions without anybody’s assistance. The task of the teacher is to properly organize the lesson and in timely manner address the questions and problems faced by students. Failure to provide proper education may lead to a situation when the ability of very talented persons may never be discovered.

The article was written based on results of experiment that was carried out in the period of more than thirty years. Originally, these experiments began in the process of preparation school graduates to entry exams to colleges. Later it was perfected by involving school children, lyceum, college and university students.

In this period the number of students who participated in lessons conducted according to this method and who achieved good results reached more than 5,000. Initially those who were fully satisfied with our lessons and who desired to fully engage in it made up 50-60% of all participants, after four-five years that number increased to 70-80%, in recent years it stands at 85-95% and achieving their goals. The reason of such indicators is that the students are achieving results they never expected to achieve.

Noteworthy feature of the stated method is that we have selected aspect of the education sphere that many people do not pay attention to or they consider it to be futile, i.e. we strived to achieve higher level of learning in students who are considered by teachers as less promising. From the very
beginning of our activity we always believed that irrespective of ethnic background, gender, any student can grasp any subject on sufficient level. Indeed, among 90% of randomly selected students we have seen high marks (for example in 5 point indicator their received 4-5 points).

Besides we have developed methods that would address almost any problems that are usually faced by students.

References