

how children learn to
WRITE

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and

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Bulletin 1953, No. 2

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
OVETA CULP HOBBY, Secretary
Office of Education • RALPH I. GRIGSBY, Acting Commissioner

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Season	Color	Spring	Words
Spring	Green	Flowers	birds
Summer	Yellow	sun	vacation
Fall	Orange	leaves	halloween
Winter	White	snow	ice

You tell me — I'll write it down.

FOREWORD

A LOGICAL FOLLOW-UP to the publication, *The Place of Subjects in the Curriculum*, Office of Education Bulletin 1949, No. 12, is a series of bulletins in brief form. These are designed to discuss in more detail problems of teaching in some of the subject areas; and to analyze situations and illustrate ways in which teachers can help children do a better job of living and working together. Each of these bulletins subscribes to the philosophy of *The Place of Subjects*, but shows more specifically how teaching and learning go on (1) in the fields of reading, arithmetic, written expression, and art; (2) in the area of developing the ability to solve problems; and (3) in organizing the classroom so that children understand their rights as individuals, and the responsibilities that go with these rights. Each discussion is planned to emphasize meaningful, purposeful experiences for children which the teacher can adapt to his situation and his group of children.

In this bulletin there are suggestions for the teacher who wants to use sound methods in teaching children to express themselves in writing. When children learn to write they are using handwriting and spelling, as well as expressing ideas in written form. Written expression is thought of as part of the language arts program which includes listening, speaking, and reading as well.

In the pages that follow the authors attempt to show that language arts is an important part of a total school program that is

good for children; and that it contributes to other learning activities. When a child writes he must write about something with which he is familiar. So science, health, social studies, construction activities, and daily happenings provide content about which children write. Specific skills involved in written expression include writing legibly, spelling correctly, and expressing ideas clearly and interestingly. Such learning is an individual matter, and no group of children will learn equally fast or equally well.

The purpose of this bulletin is to show teachers and parents that the development of written expression is a continuous process which begins simply with young children, and adds to their skills during each year of their elementary school lives. The teacher in grades beyond needs to take each child where he is and help him to go as fast and as far as he is able.

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How Children Learn To Write

WRITTEN EXPRESSION is a skill greatly needed by children and adults as a means of communication in their daily living. The material of this bulletin is organized around some of the questions that teachers and parents ask about how children learn to express themselves in writing. A discussion of six of the most important questions follows.

What Is the Place of Writing in the Total School Program?

Whenever children of elementary school age write down their ideas in a meaningful way and for a purpose that is real and important to them, this is written expression. Such writing involves thinking, talking, organizing what is to be said, and then using the skills of spelling and handwriting to get the ideas down on paper, on a blackboard, or any other similar medium. Such writing may take place at any time during the school day, and in relation to any learning experience. The older the child the more such opportunities are provided.

TEACHER A SKILLFUL GUIDE

The teacher who believes that writing comes about in this meaningful way does not depend upon incidental teaching. He helps children to recognize a lack of skill or a need for improvement in skill as groups and as

individuals. Although each boy or girl has his own individual needs, for purposes of practice he may be grouped with several other children whose needs are similar. The situation is a flexible one, since it does not depend upon using a little compartment in the school day where children are assigned a textbook exercise which every child carries out at the same time and in the same way. Instead, the teacher must be especially skillful in helping children plan their work and other activities, carry out their plans, and evaluate the results. The teacher must himself have an overall picture of the skills that are involved in writing so he may help a child to grow continuously in his ability to express ideas clearly and correctly.

EARLY SCHOOL YEARS

Young children need the experience of using large crayons, large brushes, large sheets of paper, of playing with large blocks, and other activities that encourage large movements in order to develop hand-eye coordination before they are ready to take a pencil in hand to write.

In primary grades, the youngest children will probably learn first of all to print their names in order to identify drawings, chairs, or things brought from home to show the other children. The next step may be one of writing both first and last names. When children have had some experience in dictating a story to the teacher which he writes on the chalk board and then copies for future use, and when they have read and re-read individual words, parts of sentences, whole sentences, and perhaps the whole story, they begin to have the feeling of wanting to write for themselves. A child may write a brief title for a picture he has made. He may write a sentence for the school newspaper, or make a label for the turtle he brought for the other children to see. Most children who complete first grade will probably have had such experiences, but this is not necessarily true for every child.

NEXT STEPS

In second and third grades there will continue to be many situations in which children and teacher talk about a trip, an experience, how to play a game, or how to dye Easter eggs. Then as the children dictate, the teacher writes on the chalk board or large chart. As they look at the words and sentences, children begin to have a feeling for the way in which ideas can be expressed in writing. The child is helped to see that each new thought begins with a capital letter and ends with a period. He gets some idea of the form of writing, that it moves from left to right, and that for each new line the word begins directly under the first word of the line above, unless there is a new paragraph. These skills illustrate some of the specific learnings that the child acquires in the primary school years.

OLDER CHILDREN

In grades four, five, and six children have an ever-widening number of uses for writing whether it be taking notes on reading they have done for science or social studies, writing a poem, making a chart, contributing to the school newspaper, writing a letter for information, writing an invitation to parents, copying a recipe for one of the popular foods in the cafeteria so that it can be taken home, or doing any number of writing jobs that relate to all the activities of the school day.

Writing, as written expression, permeates all school activities. The need for it increases during each year of the child's school life. With each year he adds new skills and improves others already begun, especially if he has a skillful teacher who helps him to see the importance of writing legibly, spelling correctly, and expressing ideas clearly. He is given many opportunities for practice that will enable him to become more skillful in his use of these tools.

Why Do Children Need To Write?

We have another new girl. Her name is Linda. Now we have 12 girls and 12 boys.

This page from the *First Grade News*, a booklet of daily news releases written by a class of pupils in Vermont, is one way in which children use writing to communicate with their parents.

NEEDS FOR COMMUNICATING

Children of elementary school age have frequent needs for writing in order to carry on their activities at school and home. They must write letters for materials, memos when telephoning, lists for shopping, notes of thanks, and items for school magazines.

In the *CAMPUS CUB*,¹ a monthly school magazine of the Ernest Horn Elementary School, each class gives an account of one or more of its activi-

¹ *Campus Cub*, 24: 3, Ernest Horn Elementary School, Greeley, Colo., December 1952.

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ties for the month. These are usually the result of group writing of a report. One second grade wrote:

Every Friday our class has a play. The play is given with little puppets we make ourselves. Each week we choose a committee to decide upon a play for use on Friday afternoon.

We have had two plays and are preparing a third one now.

The first play was "The Three Billy Goats Gruff." The Committee was: Karel King, Chairman; Sherry O'Keefe; Diana Burton; Roger Candelaria; David Kliever.

Young children often feel a desire to see their names in print. They need to write their names on their property as a means of identification and protection. For many, this is a first experience in writing, which leads to further accomplishments with writing addresses, picture titles, and short sentences.

All communication through writing is a two-way process. The writing is done for someone else to read. The individual has something he wishes to tell, or to share with others by reading aloud. In the case of diaries, records, and personal notices, the writing may be intended primarily for the writer himself to read at some later time. Gene writes an announcement of a ceramics exhibit for an all-school bulletin board. Marie makes a memo as she talks with a member of her camera club by telephone. Charles pens an invitation to his father to attend a fathers' night meeting at school.

Not only do children of elementary school age experience many needs for written expression in their daily living, but the majority of them *like* to write. In Jersild's² study of children's interests carried on in a number of school systems, it was found that in grades 1-6 English usage and spelling received much more favorable than unfavorable mention on the part of the pupils.

PURPOSEFUL WRITING

When children write for a purpose, the content counts as well as the format. Actually the idea or information to be communicated is of primary importance. Children need guidance in the selection and clarification of the ideas to be written. As these ideas and concepts are being recorded, the pupils often need assistance in expressing them effectively. This involves

² Jersild, Arthur. *Children's Interests*. New York, Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1949. p. 27.

matters of sentence and paragraph structure, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and handwriting.

Frequent needs for writing with a purpose are felt by boys and girls who write letters, announcements, outlines, reports, records, or diaries. No child is likely to do all of these kinds of writing in one day, but it is probable that on most days he will carry on one or more of these purposeful writing experiences at school or at home.

One group of Cleveland pupils felt the need for communicating with their principal while she was away attending a convention, because any collection of funds required official approval. Their letter was composed by the class and written by one pupil:

Robert Fulton School

3291 C. 140 st

Cleveland 20, Ohio

Feb. 11, 1953

Dear Mrs. Skelly,

Our class room 307 would like to ask your permission to collect money for Holland instead of spending all our money for valentines. The children feel that they are old enough to give their own spending money to people who have lost their families and need money desperately.

We would be very happy to hear your decision.

Sincerely yours,

Room 307

Gene Ellen Shapiro

CREATIVE WRITING

Much creative writing is done by children to be enjoyed and shared by others. Such writing also meets the need of children to express their thoughts and feelings. Some of the emotional problems and tensions of those who are old enough to express themselves in writing may be resolved through this means.

If such writing is to provide effective release, there must be good rapport between the children and their teacher. They must have confidence that he will accept and understand their ideas. They must know that he will keep in confidence any communications which are written for him only.

Stories, poems, and plays are developed as the children feel the urge to express their thoughts in these forms. Sometimes these are developed for individuals and again by groups. At all times such writing experiences should be enjoyable, so that writing will be a satisfying and well-liked activity. When first drafts are being produced, there should be considerable freedom from fear of criticism if mistakes are made in the mechanics of writing. These things can be cleared up during the editing and polishing process. For the child who is careless about writing legibly and about checking correctness in spelling, the fact that stories and poems will be posted on the tack board or will appear in the school newspaper represents a springboard for further concentration on these skills.

RELATION TO DEVELOPMENT OF CHILD

The child's need for both purposeful and creative writing has a close relationship to his total pattern of growth. As a child matures, his experiences broaden and deepen, his vocabulary expands, his interests widen, his sense of humor may sharpen, and his needs and desires for writing increase. Since no two children develop in exactly the same pattern, the development of needs and of skills in written communication varies with each child and with the different levels of maturity.

Ten-year-old Gwen may have considerable facility with writing and other language skills. Her 9-year-old brother, Billy, may be acquiring this skill at a much slower pace, though his abilities in number skills and understandings are developing more rapidly than those of his sister.

When teachers and parents see a child's writing achievements in terms of his own interests and needs and his total growth pattern, they are able to give him more effective assistance in making appropriate progress. They are less likely to penalize him for errors and lack of achievement in certain aspects of written expression, just because he does not measure up to some adult standard. Children who do encounter such adult disapproval and penalties, often develop blockages to learning the skills of written expression which then are greatly delayed or never attained.

How Do Children Learn To Express Themselves in Writing?

In everything that children learn, the teacher must make it possible for them to begin where they are. This means that boys and girls will start with their experiences, their vocabularies in listening, in speaking, in reading, and in writing. With these so-called raw materials, the teacher's job is to guide children in developing the skills of spelling, handwriting, and written expression in a working relationship that brings about improvement in all of these skills simultaneously.

MATERIALS FOR WORK

The teacher will have at hand materials that make writing easier. A simple picture dictionary for young children and a more comprehensive one for older children are important aids. Some of the materials children will have helped to prepare themselves. Individual word card files or those developed by a group are helpful. *The Handbook in English*³ is a guide for middle-grade children which helps them to work independently when they need to check on matters of form or correctness. Large sheets of paper, soft pencils, and sometimes a primer-type typewriter are aids that encourage children to express ideas.

GUIDING CHILD EXPRESSION

The teacher can make the job easier by providing the opportunities for children to talk before any writing is done. Children are helped to think clearly, and at the same time to see that in organizing their ideas they put together those that belong together. When a second-grade child says, "My grandpa took me to the zoo last Saturday and we saw bears and monkeys, and the lion and a baby deer. And we bought peanuts to feed the elephant and I ate some too," the teacher may help both the individual child and children in the group in which he is working, to see that Bill is talking about several things:

Where we went.

What we saw.

What we did.

These three "helpers" make it possible for Bill to write his story more

³ Kibbe, Della E., LaBrant, Lou L., and Pooley, Robert C. *Handbook of English*. Chicago, Scott, Foresman and Co., 1939. 128 p.

easily, and perhaps to add other details that he did not think of the first time. When children have written down their ideas, however briefly, they need to be given an opportunity to read aloud what they have written, to a partner, to a small group, or to the teacher. Such reading aloud often helps them to tell whether or not they have written complete sentences, and whether punctuation has been correctly used. They should take responsibility for making changes that will improve the writing, although no child should be required to go over a piece of work until it is correct in every respect if such a procedure will develop a thorough dislike for writing.

WAYS TO SECURE IMPROVEMENT

One of the best means the teacher can use to help children improve is to keep a folder of each child's written expression. The teacher and child together should select the examples to be placed in the folder. From time to time the illustrations should be evaluated in order to see (1) in what ways handwriting has or has not improved; (2) whether there are words that are consistently misspelled; (3) whether his ability to express ideas is improving; and (4) whether he is learning to use compound and complex sentences, adjectives, and adverbs, and in other ways to show that he is becoming more mature.

PLACE OF PRACTICE

One of the debatable issues which teachers often face is that of balancing the amount of emphasis on practice with the amount of actual writing which the child does. There are those who believe that a child should be taught over a period of years by such methods as the following:

1. Drilled on a list of spelling words in order to secure 100 per cent accuracy.
2. Drilled on writing individual letters separately or in a simple sentence.
3. Assigned to copy a group of numbered sentences from the board and insert the correct verb forms.

It is the belief of these individuals that if these exercises are repeated often, at the end of 7 or 8 years in school the child should have learned to write correctly and effectively. But this conclusion does not necessarily follow. It is often the child who has received just such drill who does not write correctly and who develops a positive dislike for anything connected with written expression. In contrast to drill, which depends for learning primarily upon regular repetition, practice follows rather than precedes use in situations that are meaningful and for which the child sees a reason and a need for developing skill. This procedure with respect to practice is frequently called the "functional" method of teaching.

As an illustration of teaching which emphasizes good procedure, we may

take the following example. Each fifth-grade child writes a letter to a city in the United States which he has chosen from a list selected by the group. After he has written his letter in first draft, he is asked to proofread it to see if he can improve it. There are some suggestions on the blackboard which he and his classmates have drawn up with the guidance of the teacher:

- Have you used the correct form for a letter?
- Have you made a neat looking page?
- Can you find any misspelled words?
- Can you find any groups of words that do not make a sentence?
- How many different kinds of punctuation marks have you used?
- Is each used correctly?

Each child may have the help of the teacher and may ask another child who has finished quickly to work with him. He makes all the needed corrections and then copies the letter. An editing committee is formed from the class. The committee members read the letters in corrected form to discover if there are still errors, and, if so, what types are most frequently made. The teacher and class locate practice exercises for such items in language textbooks so that the group can use these helps to improve their skills—in punctuation, in use of verbs, in spelling, in use of capital letters, and in the form of the letter. Not all children practice on all the exercises. Time is taken to talk over what each child needs and an inventory is set up on the blackboard to indicate what skills he will work on. Such exercises are checked by the individual child, by a committee, and by the teacher. The corrected copies of the letters are then checked again by each child. He should discover whether the letter can still be improved, and makes the needed changes. There should be an evaluation period in which the children and teacher discuss what they learned from this experience, and what the group as well as each child will need to work on in order to make further improvement.

The activity described above cannot be carried on in a single lesson and in one day. It will probably extend over a period of a week's time. But when children have a definite understanding of what their difficulties are, they make a real attack on learning, which in the long run brings about improvement that is steady and which is retained throughout the lifetime of the individual.

In a situation where the teacher always corrects and the child copies, there is little genuine learning, and the child can be expected to make the same mistakes each time that he writes. Effective written expression is secured when children write, check, practice, evaluate, and write again. This is a continuous process that goes on throughout the elementary school years under the guidance of a skillful teacher.

Skills in handwriting and spelling are requisite to effective written expression. Whenever possible these skills are learned simultaneously, since they

are used together. Modern teachers help children learn handwriting and spelling skills when they engage in various forms of written communication. At the point where special help, study techniques, or practice is needed, this is provided in individual and group situations after the child has recognized the need for it. Often direct instruction and practice in handwriting and spelling are given during the same lesson. As soon as possible these skills are used again in situations where the child has a real need for communicating in writing.

HANDWRITING

Most children in primary grades first learn manuscript writing. All of the letters of the alphabet are formed of straight lines, circles, or parts of circles. The writing is large in size and without slant. For the young child, whose muscle coordination is not yet highly developed, this type of writing is easy to produce and generally more legible than cursive writing. Since the letters are fairly similar to the Roman alphabet, it is believed that both reading and writing skills benefit when the manuscript form of writing is used.

As a part of the planning period at the beginning of the school day, children may recognize or be helped to recognize their need for working on certain skills as a result of difficulties encountered the previous day or the previous week. Such difficulties may include failure to use capital letters correctly, or need for developing a definite method for learning to spell a word, or need for practice on letters in cursive writing in which the a, d, and g must be closed if they are to be legible. As children work individually or in small groups to improve their skills through the use of practice exercises, the teacher helps them to evaluate the amount of improvement or the lack of improvement. Such failure to improve may make it necessary for the teacher to reteach a skill supposedly learned in an earlier grade, if there are children who need such help. Written expression is a highly individual matter in which each child needs help at the time when his difficulties appear.

REAL PURPOSES FOR WRITING

Children learn to write by writing. There should be opportunities for every child to write every day in ways that are purposeful. This will not be writing of a formal sort, but rather for many purposes: writing a question on the board, taking notes to answer questions on a problem, writing directions for going on a trip, keeping a record of the weather, writing a letter, ordering merchandise, making an outline for a play, making a bibli-

ography of books containing stories about dogs, writing a fanciful story, or any one of a hundred or more activities that children find interesting and useful.

What Part Do Handwriting and Spelling Play in Written Expression?

Cursive writing is usually introduced at some point during the elementary grades. The transition is often made during the middle of the third year. By this time most of the children have developed sufficient control and skill to make the more intricate formations of cursive writing.

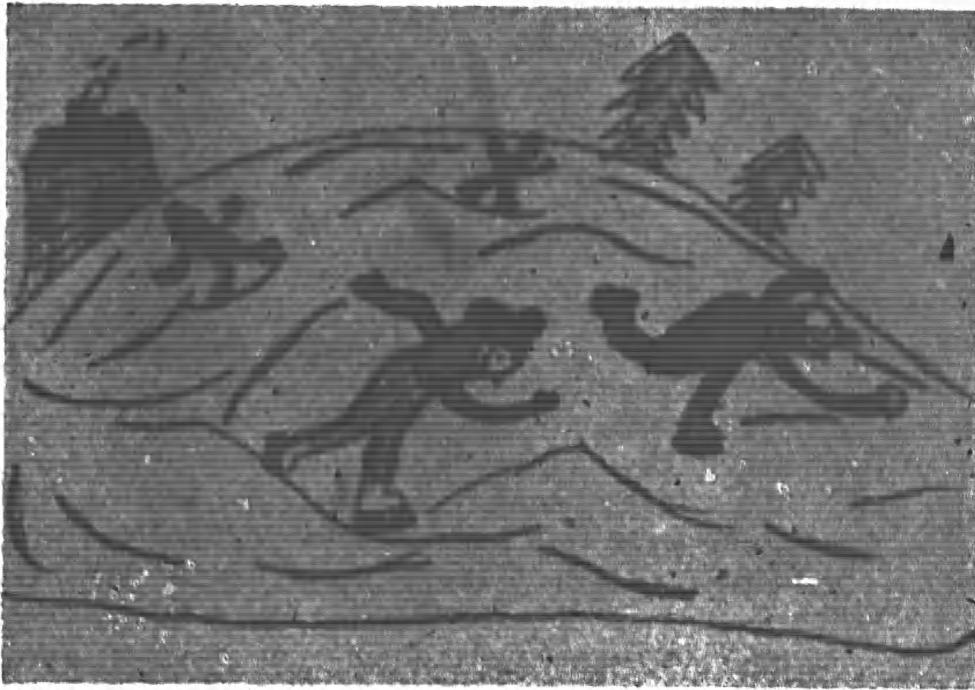
At first the teacher begins to connect some of the letters and then to use regular cursive writing as he writes on the board and on charts. The children become interested and begin to make the change with him. In many schools children continue to use manuscript writing for certain purposes such as captions for pictures, bulletin board notices, or other situations in which it is appropriate. In the same way cursive writing is used when it is appropriate.

Today much handwriting instruction is given in connection with functional situations. For their daily newspaper project, first-graders decide to report, "We made a snowman." The teacher writes it on a chart. Pupils make copies to take home to parents. The teacher points out the fine round circles needed in the e, a, d, a, and o. The pupils try to make better circles in these letters as they write their messages for parents to read. While they write, the teacher gives individual help to some, and encourages all of the children through noting their successes. He observes where their problems in writing lie and will plan future lessons to overcome the difficulties. A few children are using small, cramped letters; others need help with spacing. Most of the children will illustrate their messages with drawings of snowmen before taking them home.

Increasingly, much of the handwriting instruction is individualized. Samples of children's writing, covering a period of several years, are filed in individual folders so that the child and his parents, as well as the teacher, may watch his progress.

In today's schools, handwriting is not taught as frequently in a separate period, apart from other subjects, as was formerly the case. On the other hand, its teaching is not left to chance. Provision is made for handwriting instruction as an integral part of all effective language arts programs.

The importance of using legible, streamlined alphabets, both cursive and manuscript, cannot be overemphasized. Those responsible for effec-



Skating
I went skating.
I can skate on one foot.
It is fun.
Do you like it, too?
Carol Merriman

We make pictures about things that are fun.
We write about them, too.

tive language arts programs study the alphabets being taught in their schools to see that there is uniformity of form and size for similar letters and that unnecessary loops and flourishes are eliminated. These items have much to do with legibility and with ease of learning to write.

Children can be given much help in learning to write legibly if they are helped to acquire uniformity of slant, of height of the various types of letters, of forms of similar letters, endings, and spacing. As each individual child in the fifth grade compares his own writing with a master copy or with samples of his own previous writing, he is helped to see that he needs to close his "d" and his "g," that he must make his "h" more than twice as high as his "n," and that dotting his "i" and crossing his "t" contribute to legibility. He must be encouraged to observe, to compare, to evaluate, and in so doing to decide whether his writing is better, has made no improvement, or is poorer.

While a streamlined alphabet is desirable and uniformity is generally taught in handwriting, ample provision is made for variations in the writing of children so that individuality of handwriting may result. While individuality is desirable to a point, care must also be exercised that such differences not be so marked as to interfere with legibility. Generally, meeting the need for legible, clearcut communication for someone to read is the major objective of handwriting.

In the middle grades, children learn to write with ink. Its use depends upon the individual child and the school he attends.

Opportunities for typing are available for children in some schools and homes. Many children are able to use the typewriter for certain kinds of letters and manuscripts. Often it is easier for a child to touch a key to make a letter than to write the letter itself. In a few schools, typewriters have been used extensively with children as young as first-graders with good results in terms of written communication.⁴ Experimental studies indicate that children who type usually spell better than those in the control groups with which they are compared.⁵ Cecilia Unzicker's⁶ experimental study of the effect of the use of the typewriter on beginning reading showed slight but constant superiority by those first-grade children who used the typewriter. It also showed that these children did more writing than those who

⁴ Engelsman, Naomi L. *The Machine That Speeds Up Learning*. *Parents Magazine*, 27: 40-41, September 1952.

⁵ Wiggam, Albert Edward. *Children at the Typewriter*. *School and Society*, 49: 212-14, Feb. 18, 1939.

⁶ Unzicker, Cecilia E. *An Experimental Study of the Effect of the Use of the Typewriter on Beginning Reading*. New York, Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1934. 95 p. (Contributions to Education, No. 610).

relied only upon pencils. In some schools, there may be one typewriter in a room for writing business letters, class magazines, or stories for booklets and books.

Specific help is given left-handed children. They are helped to learn best ways of seating themselves, of placing their paper, and holding their pens and pencils. They are sometimes given special helps for gaining skill in making left-hand motions. When the left dominance is not pronounced, the child may be given guidance in changing to writing with the right hand. This should not be attempted without adequate tests by a competent person with the consent and cooperation of the parents. Sometimes such speech difficulties as stuttering may develop as a result of changing a child with a strong left dominance to right-handed writing and other usages involving a change from the left to the right hand and arm.

SPELLING

Significant experimental work in the teaching of spelling is being carried on in a number of American schools at this time. To date, most of these studies and experiments are attaining success with a combination of functional and drill methods. No one method has been selected as best, but varied methods are being tried out or are in regular use, and are adapted to the needs of individual teachers and pupils.

Much experimentation with "a language arts approach to spelling" has been and is being done in New York City. Here the belief is held that a functional approach to spelling reinforced by systematic drill produces the best results. By a functional approach, it is meant that children are encouraged to use all of the words they wish in their written expression and are helped to locate those that cause difficulty, in word lists, and in picture and regular dictionaries. To lessen the gap between the vocabulary the child uses when he expresses himself freely in writing and his spelling vocabulary, drill is used for basic lists of words commonly used. Success in spelling is judged by an individual's ability to spell words correctly in his daily writing. Since spelling and handwriting are used together, they are taught together. A useful device for studying the spelling practices of a school is "A Check List for the Cooperative Evaluation of Practices in the Teaching of Spelling,"⁷ which has been adapted from a scale previously developed by the New York State Education Department.

In Minneapolis an experimental study of functional spelling in relation to the textbook method was made 2 years ago. The findings showed that the functional method resulted in higher spelling accuracy in children's

⁷ What Can We Do About Spelling? *Curriculum and Materials*, 7: 6-9, November 1952. (New York City Board of Education).

daily writing at school than did the textbook method. Now in 1953, this work is being followed up in 10 pilot schools by further experimentation with a "free" writing program in which children write freely in the various learning situations of a good classroom program. Permission has been secured from the New York City Public Schools to use their spelling lists which were developed by their curriculum research division with the assistance of Gertrude Hildreth and others. These basic word lists are being used by the children as a reference and as a basic study aid; and by the teacher in guiding a definite, planned spelling program.

Throughout the country, schools are using some basic word list, either from spelling textbooks or special lists developed through research, to help children gain a spelling vocabulary of words commonly used. They are learned through functional or drill methods or a combination of the two. This basic vocabulary is extended through learning to spell the words needed for written expression in social studies and science units and other learning experiences, emphasizing those words that appear in both instances.

When a unit of study is being carried out by a group of pupils, special provisions for vocabulary development (spelling, reading, speaking, listening) are made. One teacher arranged a large chart on which new words, learned as a social studies unit developed, were placed. The children referred to this whenever they needed help in spelling a new word or when they wished to check their own spelling. Word games were played from the chart, thus providing repetition and enjoyment at the same time. Another class made a large picture dictionary which hung on the wall and was used in a similar manner during a science unit. Older children are often interested in developing an individual or group alphabetized list of words related to a unit of work which they are studying. Often many words which usually appear in basic word lists of much higher levels are learned by this means. Frequent usage in meaningful situations plus the interest factor make such learning possible without undue strain.

Most children need systematic study of basic word lists in addition to the spelling they learn in functional situations. Each child needs to learn how to spell a new word. He needs to learn how to study its configuration or shape, divide it into syllables visually, note how it is written, practice writing it, and check his accuracy. Specific methods for such study are supplied by spelling texts, are developed by teacher and children together, or are sometimes arrived at by the individual child with teacher guidance. As far as possible these include auditory, visual, and sensory approaches.

The group-study method most commonly used in spelling is the test-study-test method. Children are tested on a certain number of words. They study those they do not know, and are retested—usually at the end of a week. Lists are kept of words that continue to give difficulty—for further study. Provision is made for adequate repetition in the checking and study of the basic words.

One of the important tasks of the teacher is to develop a spelling consciousness on the part of children. For best results they must have a real desire to spell correctly in their written expression. The card files some children keep help in developing an interest and pride in their spelling vocabularies. These files may consist of words in children's writing vocabulary that give them difficulty, or new words they are adding to their store of words. Such files are also used as study aids in review work and for reference when writing.

Individual graphs of progress in spelling are made by children in Grand Rapids, Mich. They take great pride in keeping this graphic account of their growth in spelling.

To help parents understand how spelling⁸ and handwriting⁹ are taught in their schools, the Seattle Public Schools have prepared booklets for this purpose. Ways are indicated in which a parent can help a child in learning these skills.

What Opportunities Do Children Have To Write in Purposeful Situations?

Since written expression has become an integral part of children's daily experiences, rather than something on which they practice for a few minutes only in a separate class period, modern elementary schools provide many opportunities for children to write in purposeful, meaningful situations. These are tied in with the social studies and science units, varied activities of social living, and personal needs of children.

TOTAL SCHOOL SITUATION

One school on a wooded Maryland hillside carried out a school beautification and conservation enterprise. The children and teachers surveyed the grounds and planned improvements. They wrote lists of projects that

⁸ Seattle. *How We Teach Spelling*. Seattle, Wash., Seattle Public Schools, 1951. 6 p.

⁹ Seattle. *How We Teach Handwriting*. Seattle, Wash., Seattle Public Schools, 1951. 6 p.

needed to be done. They sent notes and letters to the principal and their parent organization concerning their plan and the materials they would need. Each class selected its own special project: Secret Gardens (for quiet play), Lily Pond, Oak Tree Garden, Memory Garden (plants and rocks for a bare slope), Outdoor Theatre, and others. Each pupil of one class drew a picture of their project and shaded in the areas where he wished to work, labeling all the areas with necessary captions or keys. These sketches were used as a basis for deciding who would work on the various parts of the project.

The enterprise took the children out of doors a great deal for active participation in developing the various projects. Indoors they made plans, wrote many letters, recorded activities, listed problems, wrote descriptions, and charted progress for the information of parents, visitors, and other pupils. Throughout the spring months, much digging, planting, and construction work was going on, accompanied by writing and other language activities.

SCHOOL NEWSPAPERS

Many sixth-grade classes in Denver, Colo.,¹⁰ produce school newspapers. These children make a study of newspapers and then decide what they might include in their own. News stories, sports news, society columns, nature columns, editorials, movie reviews, radio news, original imaginative stories, jokes, comics, cartoons, and advertisements are among the items chosen.

Editors, reporters, copy writers, and other staff members are elected or appointed. Usually all members of a class participate in the work. Opportunity arises for learning or practicing most of those skills in written expression appropriate for sixth-graders. They are helped to improve their handwriting, spelling, English usage, punctuation, and capitalization. They gain improved ability in sentence sense and paragraphing.

The young newspaper writers learn to report happenings with considerable accuracy. They learn to express opinions and develop the beginnings of critical analysis in their editorial columns, film reviews, radio columns, and book reviews. They learn the importance of checking their written efforts before submitting them to others for reading.

The production of these school papers is part of a broader unit in which the pupils gain increased skill and understanding in the selection of newspapers and in reading and understanding them.

Seventh-graders of the elementary school of Potsdam, N. Y., have the

¹⁰ Denver. *A Program in English. A Guide for Teaching the Language Arts. Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve.* Denver, Colo., Denver Public Schools, 1953, p. 59-68.

major responsibility for their school newspaper, *Eavesdropper*.¹¹ Children from other classrooms have the opportunity to contribute also. A fourth grade reports:

Hola amigos! Hay noticias! Mrs. Crane's fourth grade is studying Mexico. We are also studying Spanish. We have been making clay pottery. We did some Mexican songs and dances for assembly. Adios amigos! Hasta la vista!

by David Welch
Reporter from Room Twenty-nine

STUDENT COUNCILS

An activity involving much written communication in many elementary schools is the student council. Records and reports are kept; class representatives take notes; announcements are posted or sent out; letters and memoranda are written to school staff members, parents, and others in the community. The pupils of one student council in a Georgia elementary school wrote slogans for posters and their concepts of what various objectives of the council, such as "cooperation," might mean in terms of school and community action. While much of the work of a student council is carried out orally, this is almost always accompanied by some form of written expression.

EXCURSIONS

An excursion provides excellent opportunities for written expression as well as for other learning experiences. Pupils write letters to the owners or managers requesting permission to visit, and notes or letters to parents concerning permission and arrangements for the trip. They write questions and make lists of things they wish to learn more about. They draw up a written schedule of time and places for their trip and often sketch a map showing the route to be taken.

While on the trip, the children may take notes and make sketches. On their return to their school, they may develop stories of their trip for class reading; charts, booklets, or reports to take home to their parents. Thank-you letters are written to the persons who make the trip possible at the place visited, and to those who helped with transportation.

In the Florida bulletin on *Experiencing the Language Arts*,¹² going on trips is listed as one of the situations leading to written expression. Among

¹¹ *Eavesdropper*, Vol. 2, No. 1. Congdon Campus School, Potsdam, N. Y.

¹² Florida. *Experiencing the Language Arts*. Tallahassee, Fla., State Department of Education, 1948. p. 126.

those community resources suggested for trips are the railroad station, boatways, rides in train and boat, circus quarters, post office, museums, farms, fire station, airport, State parks, beach, turpentine still, radio station, and walks about the neighborhood.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Experiences with food often provide excellent opportunities for written expression. Children write recipes used by their mothers at home to bring to school for cooking or for exchanging with other pupils. They can fruits and vegetables or make jelly and preserves. The recipes are often made into booklets to be taken home.

Parties, picnics, and birthdays are occasions which provide numerous opportunities for writing. Invitations, greetings, shopping lists, and thank-you notes are required. For such purposes, children usually take considerable interest and pride in the quality of their written expression.

Many children derive considerable pleasure and benefit from writing informal notes, poems, or diaries. In some classrooms the children or the teachers enjoy writing surprise notes on chalk board or paper for others to read.

Throughout the school day, in modern elementary schools, children are finding these varied opportunities for purposeful writing awaiting them. By wise guidance the teachers are helping them gain skill in the needed fundamentals of written communication.

How Can Children Be Encouraged To Do Creative Writing?

Basically, all children are creative. The teacher and the school have the responsibility to release and to encourage creativeness in boys and girls. All the arts are closely related. Music, art, rhythms, the dance, choral speaking and writing reinforce each other when they are used in combination. Since children are not likely to think of these arts as separate and apart, neither should the teacher. They may paint or dance to music; dramatize in choral speaking; or "dance" a poem, such as "The Potatoes' Dance."

BASIS FOR CREATIVE WORK

Children cannot create in a vacuum. First of all, they must have experiences, and then be encouraged to translate such experiences into actions such as: Making of a finger painting; working with colors at an easel; creating rhythms that show a clown, a rag doll, a skater; choosing music that expresses how a person feels who uses a potter's wheel, who visits a big industrial plant to see the machines, or who goes fishing; or writing a poem that describes the first snowfall of the year or tells of the joy of wearing a new hat.

Each teacher builds upon the experiences that children have had in earlier years. If they have not had experiences that help them to be creative, the teacher begins where they are with activities in which they can be successful, and which will lead on to self-expression and creativity.

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM POETRY

Take poetry for example, in relation to writing. Children's own language is often poetic before adults encourage them to use more fixed patterns of expression.

Many children have heard nursery rhymes before they come to school. The teacher reads to them rhymes such as "Hoppity" or "The Little Turtle." He may say, "Christopher Robin goes hoppity, hoppity—How do you go?" The young child may answer, "I go bump, jump, jump," or "Bumpety, bumpety, bump," or "Bang, bang, bang." Each child may then add words that tell *when*, or *where*, or *why*. If he is given the opportunity to tell what he feels in his own way, he will continue to find interesting ways of sharing his ideas.

Children who are a little older will be interested in listening to the couplets in Christine Rossetti's "What is Pink?" and in trying to write a question about a color, then supplying their own answer, with the description. "What is white? Clouds are white. See them in the light." When boys and girls find that they can manipulate words with some degree of success, they are encouraged to try again, by adding another verse to poems such as Rose Fyleman's "Wishes," or to make a verse of their own.

Children in a Cleveland school¹⁸ enjoyed reading and learning Hilda Conkling's "I Am." They pooled on the blackboard ideas relating to touch, hearing, and sight, trying to find descriptive words that would give clear pictures. The results looked somewhat like this:

¹⁸ Hazeldell School, Cleveland, Ohio, Grades 3A and 4B.

Whiteness

new fallen snow
a billowy cloud
a field of daisies

Softness (sound)

a soft lullaby
gentle rain
a cooing dove
droning bees

Freshness

rain-washed air
dewy grass
a clean snowdrift

Softness (touch)

a silky pussy willow
velvety moss
milkweed fluff

Darkness

stormy clouds
sky at nightfall
a gloomy cave

Sharpness

roll of thunder
a blue jay's cry

Next the group looked at the list to discover relationships. Darkness, sharpness, freshness seemed to describe a storm. The group made a poem together, and then individual children worked alone.

Older children may use a "starter" such as, "Everything is covered with white velvet" as they look out at the ground covered with snow. From the group or from an individual child may come the following lines that further develop the idea:

Dried grasses wear tall feathery crowns of snow
And gently nod as sharp winds blow.

Out of this group experience an individual child may write lines that give expression to how he feels about the snow:

Snowflakes floating lazily by
Like bits of lace in the deep blue sky.
On window and sill they leave their traces
Like pieces of ancient dainty laces.

Such results cannot be expected, however, unless children have enjoyed a rich experience with poetry, in hearing it read, reading it aloud themselves, sharing in choral reading, tapping out rhythms, dancing to poetry, and other activities that further an interest in poetry and in self-expression.

ENCOURAGING THE CREATIVE

How can children be encouraged to be creative? First of all, the teacher herself must be creative in her own thinking. She needs to have broad interests, hobbies, a love of reading, and a genuine love of children, as well as a wide knowledge of books, poems, and stories. Ideally, she should herself have tried her hand at writing, for then she better understands how children feel as they take pen or pencil in hand and apply it to a blank sheet of paper.

Equally as important as the teacher is an environment that stimulates and challenges children to write. The room in which children live and work

should be as much as possible like a pleasant and comfortable living room. Large sheets of newsprint paper should be available on easels, on tackboards, or on tables. There should be many invitations to children to write:

In answer to the question on the blackboard, "What did you do over the weekend?"

As a part of a diary record of how the polliwogs are developing each day.

As a play based on reading.

As contributions to the school newspaper.

Many centers of interest in the classroom are in the form of nature and science materials, books and still more books, things to be manipulated such as hand puppets, art materials, a potter's wheel, a loom, an electrical questioner—all of which encourage children to express themselves. The writing that comes out of these experiences will not all be imaginative, but it will still be the child's own creation. For some children, a typewriter will help in getting ideas down on paper, especially for the child who finds handwriting difficult. The teacher may type the child's story as he dictates, so that he sees his own book grow almost before his very eyes. In some schools, such books are bound, illustrated, and given a place on the library shelf along with books by well-known authors.

And, finally, the way in which teacher and children work must represent a creative approach to problems and activities. Feeling must come along with knowing. For example, a teacher with a fine background in music joined a group of sixth-grade children who were interested in manipulating the potter's wheel. As a child worked the treadle, others in the group tapped or clapped. Then someone hummed a few notes spontaneously. The teacher hummed them, and said, "Is that the way it should sound?" Slight changes were made as several children made suggestions. Then she jotted down the notes on the board. These were added to until they made a complete tune. Then each child was encouraged to write some words that would fit the melody, which itself gave the feeling of the rhythm of the wheel. Out came such lines as:

See my wheel turn round and round
How it makes a humming sound
As my wheel goes round and round
As I work all day.

There is no recipe for securing creative writing. Children must write because they can't help doing so. The teacher is there to clear the track, to see that each child is encouraged, and that he receives the kind of recognition that will make him secure and happy in his accomplishment.

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Grateful acknowledgment for pictures or information is made to the public schools of Baltimore, Md.; Burlington, Vt.; Cleveland, Ohio; Denver, Colo.; Grand Rapids, Mich.; Minneapolis, Minn.; Montgomery County, Md.; New York City; Seattle, Wash.; and the Ernest Horn School, Colorado State College of Education, Greeley; and the Congdon Campus School, State Teachers College, Potsdam, N. Y.