

Methods of Securing Good Writing

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This paper was read before the Philadelphia Teachers' Association, April 17 1905. After urgent solicitation on the part of the editor of *The Business Educator*, Mr. Flickinger finally consented to allow us to publish it.

It is now yours to peruse and enjoy. The subheadings are ours.

Within the past twenty-five years many changes have taken place in the methods and manner of transacting business. Not long ago all communications were written with the pen. Now correspondence is conducted almost exclusively by the use of the typewriter. The use of the pen has been somewhat restricted in consequence, and the style of our penmanship simplified to meet the exigencies of the times. In these days the prime requisites of a practical handwriting are only two: -legibility and rapidity. Beauty, as expressed by complex forms and heavy shades, has been eliminated, and has become the sole property of the card writer and engrossing artist. Only that beauty which is manifested through uniformity of size, slant, etc., is now acceptable. Still, the matchless beauty of the Spencerian models will long remain as the inspiration of the professional penman, and the delight of the lover of artistic writing.

I presume the simplest definition of what constitutes good writing is that which is easy to write and easy to read. Not all writing which is done with a fluent movement is easy to read. And much that is easy to read may have been drawn with laborious effort. It would, therefore, be unfair to base our judgment upon the appearance of the finished product alone. Here is a page of writing. It is beautiful; every word stands forth as plain as print, but is it good writing? That depends upon the time required for its execution, and the purpose for which it is intended. To have a commercial value, writing must be plain and rapid, and it should also present a pleasing appearance.

FORM AND MOVEMENT.

Now, how shall the power to write plainly and rapidly be acquired? I answer through the study of simple models of form and the practice of sensible movement exercises which bear a direct relation to the forms to be learned.

Form includes shape, size, slant and spacing. The knowledge of correct form is gained by study; by the careful scrutiny of every part; its proportions, the lines which compose it, and the relation which one line bears to another. Pupils learn in a comparatively short time, and at an early age, to draw the letters, but a much longer time is necessary to write them with ease and precision. This requires skill which is gained only through training the hand and arm. Success comes only to those who are willing to study and practice. Form and Movement must be combined. The first for legibility and the second for speed. Clear and graceful lines are the result of an easy movement.

FINGER AND ARM MOVEMENT.

The two forces used to propel the pen are the fingers and the arm. The Finger movement is the extension and contraction of the thumb and fingers, while the hand and arm remain stationary. This movement is employed in exact writing, when the greatest care is demanded, but it is tiresome, and unsuited to the demands of business. The Arm or Muscular-, movement is the vibratory action of the arm while resting upon the muscles just below the elbow, moving the hand back and forth, obliquely and laterally, forming letters and combining them into words while the fingers remain passive.' This movement gives force and grace and is attended by very little weariness. The fingers should hold the pen loosely and should be used slightly in certain parts of letters, such as loops.

There are four different directions in which the arm must be trained, namely: the direct rotary movement; the reversed rotary movement; the projective, or push and pull movement, and the progressive or lateral movement. These are all embraced* under what is known as the Muscular movement..

The Rotary movement is developed by tracing ovals of various sizes with the object of gaining such control as will enable the student to use a quick, elastic movement in making capitals.

The Projective movement consists in moving the arm in and out of the sleeve with a rapid motion, and is employed in making both capitals and small letters. It is developed by practicing upon straight lines and writing them very lightly and compactly.

The Progressive, or sliding movement, consists in carrying the hand across the page and is that which is used to join letters. Many persons have very little range of lateral movement, and consequently their writing has a very cramped appearance. Such persons are unable to write a word of ordinary length without raising the pen. A favorite way to develop this movement, with many, is to turn the paper and use the ruled lines as guide lines. Take for example a small letter like the o: join several without lifting the pen, being careful that every letter touches a blue line. The distance between the letters may be one or more spaces.

BIG WRITING FOR LITTLE FOLKS.

Regarding the work, with smaller children I agree with my friend, Prof. Zaner. of Columbus, Ohio, editor of The Business Educator, "that too much writing has been required of children who are too immature to learn to write correctly. Excessive finger movement,, gripping, the pen and crippling the muscles, and unhealthy positions have been the logical and inevitable results." For the little people who are just beginning to write, it seems to me it would be wiser to give them work at the blackboard or upon manila paper with crayon or pencil, than to start with a pen, giving them large tracing exercises such as ovals, and letters not less than an inch high for the minimum size. This plan, under competent instructors, I believe would result most satisfactorily.

INEFFICIENT TEACHING.

The subject of penmanship is admitted to be one of the most important of the fundamental branches of the public school system. And yet, as compared with other subjects, It fails to enlist in its earnest study any large number of teachers and educators. Why? It is a serious fallacy to suppose that less carefully preparation I necessary to teach penmanship success fully than is needed to teach the other branches. Is it presumed that because a teacher may write a fair hand, that, therefore, she is capable of teaching penmanship .successfully? Is it fair to cast the teacher entirely upon the copy book with the meagre instructions it contains? Would it not be wiser to give her the benefit of as thorough professional training in penmanship as in the other subjects which she is expected to teach? I believe I may safely say that one of the chief causes of failure lies in the scant qualification of the teacher. It matters but little what style of writing is taught, the same fate awaits the teacher who is not intelligently equipped to. give instruction.

I trust it is understood that I am not criticizing any teacher present.

VERTICAL CAME AND IS NOW GOING.

Penmanship is a difficult subject to teach. Was it for that reason that teachers were so ready to adopt vertical writing Being so plain and simple in appearance, perhaps they thought it would, therefore, require no special fitness to teach it.

Were the superintendent to say to all applicants for certificates, you must be as proficient in penmanship as in reading, arithmetic, etc., the standard of excellence would immediately be raised. Do our Normal schools meet this demand as fully as they should?

Several years ago some of our educators made what they considered a startling, discovery which completely demoralized our style of penmanship. The children in our schools were in imminent peril. Some had spinal curvature; some had weak eyes, and others had various disabilities. The cause must be ascertained and a remedy applied. Doctors were consulted. Educators discussed the problem and it was decided that sloping writing was the cause, and that the remedy for all these ills was upright penmanship.

Vertical writing came; it came like a storm, not with standing the protest of professional teachers, and it swept across the country, over our cities and villages with the rush and roar of a tornado. It was irresistible. It opened up a new and very profitable field for enterprising publishers, and they made the most of their opportunity. The markets were soon flooded with vertical copybooks. This was about ten years ago. But during the last two or three years murmurs of dissatisfaction have been heard in all, quarters. Vertical writing is being discarded. In several large cities where it had been enthusiastically adopted, it has been abandoned. The storm has at last subsided; the atmosphere is clearing; and now we are rubbing the dust out of our eyes, and are as long the question, What has been gained by the experiment? Better ask how shall we atone for the many cripples that have been made. Is the writing of the children any better? Have the physical conditions improved? Is there any improvement in the matter of eyesight? Is the spinal column more erect? Many children have never written anything but the upright style. Of course we will not expect to see any of them wearing glasses. Occulists seem, however, to be just as busy treating children's eyes now as before the introduction of vertical writing. My oculist says it has not diminished the number of his youthful patients. Does it not seem absurd to hold slant wholly responsible for defective eyesight, while there are so many causes connected with school work which may contribute their share to produce such a condition? The position assumed by the properly taught slant writer is hygienic, easily acquired, and allows that free exercise of hand and arm which is absolutely necessary to gain a thorough mastery of the pen.