

Secondary

TWO NEGLECTED POINTS IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

Power of expression is to some extent inborn; to a still greater extent, however, it is acquired by association. If a boy could hear only good English spoken and meet nothing but good English in his reading, practice would be the one thing that he would need to secure a satisfactory command of the language. But unfortunately our boys do hear and read a great amount of slipshod and indirect language. To offset this and to supply the necessary practice is the task of the school.

Three things are generally recognized to secure the desired end: acquaintance with the best literature, knowledge of what constitutes good English, and extensive practice in the application of this knowledge.

The purpose of this paper, however, is not to discuss the broad question of the teaching of English, but merely to call attention to two points in training our pupils that seem in danger of being slighted or overlooked altogether.

In the first place, the value of reading as an aid in securing a good style is not so generally recognized as it should be. Reading, especially reading aloud in such a way as to bring out the meaning and force of the sentence, fixes in the mind the force of expression, and there is an unconscious tendency on the part of the reader, when he comes to express thought for himself, to reproduce the form or at least the style of the model.

A careful series of observations carried on for a number of years has led me to the conclusion that poor spelling and poor expression are very frequently due to poor reading. Bad spellers will be found almost invariably to be bad readers. Their eyes take in the word as a whole, without a clear perception of its component parts, and the result is not only inability correctly to

reproduce the word later, but, at the time, frequent hesitation over a word or the mistaking of it for another similar in form.

In the same way there is a general tendency to read a sentence as a whole, with only so much attention as may be necessary for a fair jump at its meaning; the natural and logical result of such a habit is seen in careless and incorrect expression.

For the prevalence of this tendency our modern methods of elementary education must be held largely responsible. For its correction there is a direct and practical remedy at hand in allopathic doses of reading aloud.

For the effect on the pupils' power of expression, then, if for no other reason, all the reading that is possible should be done in school. In the earlier years there should be daily practice in reading aloud, and during the more or less crowded later years the practice should be as frequent as possible.

One point remains, in some respects the most important of all. Much of the weakness of our pupils in power of expression is due to their lack of clearness and exactness of knowledge, and to the lack of insistence on accurate and precise statement in recitation. Clearness of thought must precede clearness of expression, and teaching that produces clear and accurate thinking will tend to produce clear and accurate speaking and writing.

The modern theory of education makes the recitation a teaching exercise, not a simple hearing of the lesson.

This is excellent, but it is often carried to such an extreme as to sacrifice almost entirely the much needed training in expression.

It is not enough that the pupil is able to know and think; he must be