

The Problem of Handwriting

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IT is probable that teachers devote far more attention to handwriting than the subject really deserves. Handwriting, like reading, is of very little educational value in itself; it is a skill, an art, a dexterity which is used as a tool for the more important written compositions of later times. Consequently it can only be a "subject" for the lower grades. In the higher grades it merges into the other branches of the curriculum—composition, history, geography, etc.,—and fails to get separate periods assigned to it in the time-table.

Although we may not live to see typewriters as common as pens and pencils now are, yet their universal use in school is only a matter of time. They are so much more efficient as writers when judged by any standards we care to adopt. Handwriting, therefore, will diminish in importance and never again will assume the prominence in education that it reached in the ecclesiastical schools of the Middle Ages; manuscript writing is no longer a necessity but a luxury of luxuries. Printing aimed the first great blow at handwriting; the invention of the typewriter bids fair to pave the way for its complete disappearance.

Granting, however, that handwriting will have to be taught in school for many decades to come, it behoves us to try to discover its fundamental problems. What are the main factors in the teaching of handwriting? It seems to me that the following, arranged in the order of their importance, are the main problems: (1) legibility, (2) speed, (3) artistic or aesthetic merit. Have we not as teachers paid more attention to the aesthetic appearance of the finished product than to legibility and to speed? It is true that legibility to a certain extent depends upon the shapes of the letters, but generally speaking 'goodness' in handwriting is judged by legibility rather than by its artistic appearance.

1. LEGIBILITY.—Legibility of handwriting depends more upon spacing of words and lines than upon the spacing and the shapes of letters. Yet the old method of "pot-hooks and ladles" ignored this easily verified proposition. Regularity of writing is also more important than the particular shape of component letters. The following are useful rules for the attainment of legibility: