

exercises of mental and conversational training is a task soon accomplished. They are then taught to utter distinctly all the vowel sounds. The characters or letters representing these sounds are then shown and described to them, till the form and power of each are distinctly impressed upon their memories. The same process is then gone through in respect to diphthongs and consonants. When this step is mastered, they are taught the names of these letters—with the *distinct understanding* that the name of a letter and the power of a letter, as used in a word, are *distinct things*. Exercises are given to show this and repeated till the children give evidence that they *understand* the difference.—Each letter, observe, is made a subject of interesting conversation. It is described, its power or powers, are illustrated as embodied in words, and this continued till the children can in turn explain, illustrate and describe. They are then considered prepared to commence reading, which is done as follows: Letters are printed in large form on square cards—one on each card. The class stands up before a rack. The teacher holds the cards in his hand, places one on the rack, and a conversation of this kind passes between him and his pupils: what letter is that? W, sound it—give its power. W. No places another on the rack. What letter is that? E. What sound does it represent? e. Sound the two in succession. *w-e*. Join the sounds. *we*. What is the meaning of *we*? Us, not them.—When they cannot give the meaning, the teacher, of course, gives it—and leaves it not till well understood. [One thing passed before well understood is a serious defect in teaching—especially at the *beginning* of a child's education.] Another word is then brought up letter after letter, in the same way, and with similar questions and explanations; then another and another till the teacher has brought before his class as many as make a short sentence. Suppose after, *we* he brings before them in the same way, *do, like, school*, with the meaning of these four words he familiarises them both separately and conjoined. They are then read as a sentence.—*We do like school*. Other simple sentences are brought before them in the same successive way; and thus they are grounded in the knowledge and powers of letters, and are taught to read words of one syllable, or of several syllables, and to read in plain reading, by the same process, at the same time.—The rule is, *that only one thing is taken at a time, and they must be perfect in each as it occurs, before they proceed to the next*.

After being well exercised in this way with the cards and the rack, they then proceed to read suitable sentences in their spelling-books. In reading these the same care, and the same particularity, are bestowed.

But all these initiatory exercises are gone through with so much animation and zeal that the children catch the fire of the teacher, and show as much earnestness in getting hold of his instructions, as he in communicating them. Even in explaining letters and showing the differences of their powers, he manifests the same earnestness and animation as if expounding some important principle to an advanced class. The zeal of the teacher enkindles the scholar. He charges them with his own electricity almost to the point of explosion. Such a teacher has no idle, mischievous, whispering children around him, nor any occasion for the rod. He does not make desolation of all the active impulses of childhood, and call it, *peace*; nor, to secure stillness among his scholars, does he find it necessary to ride them with the nightmare of fear. At the end of an hour, both he and his pupils come from the work all glowing with excitement.<sup>22</sup>

How different from the preceding is the method of the majority of teachers in our schools.—A teacher calls up a class of abecedarians; or, what is more common, a single child; he holds a book or a card before him, and, with a pointer in his hand, says, *a*, the child echoes, *a*; then, *b*, and the child echoes, *b*; and so on till the vertical row of lifeless and ill-favoured characters is completed, and then, remands him to his seat, to sit still and look at vacancy. If the child is bright, the time which passes during this lesson is the only part of the day when he does not think. Not a single faculty of the mind is occupied except that of imitating sounds; and even the number of these imitations amounts to only twenty-six. A parrot, or an idiot could do the same thing.—And so of the organs and members of the body. They are condemned to inactivity, for the child who stands most like a post is most approved; nay, he is rebuked if he does not stand like a post. A head that does not turn to the right or left, an eye that is moveless in its socket, hands hanging motionless at the sides, and feet immovable as those of a statue, are the points of excellence, while the child is echoing the senseless table of *a, b, c*.—As a general rule many days, in some cases, not a few months, are spent before the twenty-six letters are mastered; and when

mastered, pray, what training has the mind undergone? What done to encourage the child in his work? to make him like his teacher and his school: to convince him that school-work is a work of the understanding; and that the things taught there are engaging, interesting, and are calculated to give as much pleasure, as any out-of-door play? An effect the reverse of all this is the result.—What has this *a, b, c* work of a quickening tendency; to stir up and bring out a single enlivening thought, or to give direction and activity to the mind.—teaching it how to think—judge and reason? His tendency is the very opposite of all this. By it the child's native activity and sharpness are rendered stolid and unapt; and he whose mind needs most to be trained and stimulated to a state of energy, is in danger of becoming stereotyped in indolence and dulness. The effect of thus dealing with the mind of a child in commencing his education is serious. Impressions thus made upon his mind cannot be rubbed off as a school boy does the process of a sum worked on his slate. It is an effect which works into the *very grain* of his intellect; and seldom or never is it altogether worked out.

It is high time that this injurious, deadening, repulsive way of beginning school-work be forever banished from our schools.

But I find that this powerless—lifeless and very unintelligent way of giving instruction, is not confined to the initiatory part of teaching. It pervades the whole of the methods of teaching in very many schools. Of teaching power the teachers of these schools appear to know nothing: if they do, they are too much wedded to their own slow unprofitable way of teaching to be moved to any improvements.

We would respectfully and affectionately forewarn them that they cannot long keep their ground unless they in earnest set about improving their methods of teaching, and system of conducting schools. While improvements in teaching are advancing around them,—invading them on every side—they cannot long preserve their position, as teachers sought after, unless they keep up with the improvements of the age. Able and more efficient educators will throw them into the shade, and their applications for schools will soon be disregarded.

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### How can the Young People pleasantly and profitably spend the long Winter Evenings.

This is an inquiry of no little importance, and one which should receive the serious consideration of parents and teachers. A vast amount of benefit or injury,—of improvement or contamination,—of elevation or degradation,—may be realized, according to the manner in which the evenings of even a single winter are employed. Where instructive public lectures, lyceums, and other similar means of improvement are afforded, there may be but little difficulty in finding pleasant and profitable employment for this season: but where such advantages cannot be enjoyed, as is the case, perhaps, in most of the rural neighborhoods and smaller villages, there is, frequently, no resource but reading, study or amusement at home, or at best, *profitless roving* abroad. The latter course is, too often, not merely *negative* in its results, but decidedly *pernicious*.

As tending partly to answer the inquiry, and to meet the want above alluded to, I may be allowed to mention a plan which may be new to some of the readers of the *Journal*, and which may be successfully carried out in almost any village or neighborhood. I refer to the formation of *Reading Associations*, to meet once a week, or oftener, as may be thought expedient, for the purpose of reading, criticism, inquiry, &c. The meetings may be held at private houses, or wherever may be most convenient; and while designed more particularly for the benefit of the young, should not be confined to that class. Parents or teachers should attend and see that the exercises are of a proper character, and properly conducted; but all who attend should be expected to take part in the exercises when called upon in their turn. For the benefit of any who would like to try the experiment, and wish more particular directions, I submit the following outline in the form of *Rules*, which could be varied or extended, as circumstances might require.

1st. This association shall be called the *Reading Association*; and any person may become a member by signing the Rules, if accepted by a vote of a majority of members present at any regular meeting.

2nd. The Association shall meet at such times and places as may be deemed expedient,—arrangements being made at each meeting for the next subsequent meeting,—and the exercises shall consist of reading, criticism, inquiry, etc.