

COMPOSITION.

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THE term *Composition*, in this paper, will be used to include all written work in which the expression is original with the pupil; the thought may or may not be original. This definition, it will be seen, includes everything from the briefest statement which the child may write in answer to a simple question, provided the expression be his own, to the most elaborate attempt at essay writing by the advanced student. I shall confine myself, mainly, however, to the work done in primary and grammar grades.

With this definition and limitation in mind, I invite a brief consideration of the following points: First, the value of composition in education; second, the preliminary work which serves as a preparation for composition; third, the choice of subjects; fourth, methods of conducting the composition exercise; fifth, the necessary training for teachers of the subject; and, in conclusion, composition viewed in its relation to reading.

What claims has composition to a recognized place in our courses of study? Both fallacies in thought and weak and inadequate expression, it will be granted, are much more readily detected when the pupil attempts to express himself in writing. He feels more dissatisfied when the result of his slipshod thinking faces him from the written page than when he produces equally shabby oral work, and becomes ambitious to express himself more clearly; for often he does not recognize the fact that the fundamental trouble is in his thought and not in his expression of it.

But clear expression is dependent upon clear thinking, is, indeed, impossible without it; and—what is

more—the effort toward clear expression, the effort to impart thought to others, reacts upon thinking and forces it to be more discriminating. In its reactionary effect upon thought, it seems to me, lies the chief value of composition work.

In the second place, added power in the use of clear, forcible, elegant English is a result which we have a right to expect from judicious practice in the art of composition.

Again, composition may be used effectively as an incentive to the imagination; because even the simpler processes of composition require a recombining of the materials with which the mind is already stored, while the higher forms of the art call for the highest and most far-reaching activity of the creative imagination.

Finally, composition may be so employed as to awaken a more intelligent and sympathetic appreciation of literature; inasmuch as the effort to produce work of any kind leads an intelligent and candid mind to value more justly the work of others in the same field.

That it renders thought more discriminating, increases the power of expression, incites the imagination to greater activity, and develops an appreciation of literature: these are the claims which entitle composition to an honorable place in our school programmes.

Admitting the claims of composition, what training shall be given little children from the time they first enter school until they are ready to take their first, feeble steps in the art? Since in the natural order of things, oral expression precedes written, since, in truth, written language is but a later and more artificial dress for