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SUGGESTIONS ON TEACHING ENGLISH.

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The compositions printed at the end of this paper demonstrate, I believe, the theory that young children can be taught to write well. Perhaps the best way to make clear my method of teaching English is to give my personal experience. To begin with, I am convinced that English is the most important work in the grades; that the ability to appreciate the best thoughts of others and to express for others one's best thoughts is the greatest acquirement; that no other study so develops and directs the individuality of the child. Written work should be emphasized in the lower grades because children in the fifth grade are more susceptible to outside influence than older children and they are not self-conscious in expressing their thoughts. For these reasons, they soon learn to write with a freedom seldom acquired in later years.

My aim when introducing the work is to interest the children and to make it seem as natural and easy to write as to talk, and with this end in view I tell the children in an easy, simple manner what I saw on the way to school. They are interested, and an animated talk follows. But they do not confine themselves to observations of the morning. My talk has awakened a different line of thought in the mind of each child and this individual thinking is a pleasing result. I suggest that as there is not time to hear what each child wants to tell that they may all write what they want to say, and add that I shall read the best aloud the next day. On the second day they are very much interested in the themes read and each child has an ambition to write something good enough to be read aloud. Many of the children have made up their minds what they want to write about, but to such as have not I put a few suggestive questions as: Did you go to the country this summer? What did you see? Can you tell me what you did at a picnic? What did you see at the park?

As a suggestion for the third day, I tell something interesting about a pet which I once owned and my talk is followed by incidents told by the children. The transition from talking to writing is made without conscious effort on the part of the child. Each child on the following day tries to present his pet

in a good light, drawing oftentimes upon his imagination. But this presentation does not satisfy all of the children. Pauline asks if she may bring her cat to school. Permission is given, and the next day kitty visits us. She wanders about unconscious that the children are watching every movement and when the time comes for theme-writing "Pauline's Cat" is well described. Other pets come to school. Ludisa brought a turtle home with her from the lake shore. She has a string fastened through its shell and we tether it to a chair and many children find fifteen minutes too short a time to write all that they want to say about "Ludisa's Turtle." However, while all are interested in this particular turtle some children prefer to write about some other animal which they have observed. James saw a squirrel gathering hazel-nuts. It dug a hole and buried them, carefully patting down the earth and laying a stone on top. This observation of animals continues to be of interest. The children watch the birds, the insects, everything that has life with the view to the material which they furnish for a theme. They are pleased with the thought of writing from the point of view of the animal. I illustrate how this can be done by telling a story which a schoolhouse mouse tells to its little ones and the creative faculty of the child is awakened.

By this time, the habit of daily theme-writing is established and the children look forward to this exercise with pleasure. The aims of the first lessons have been reached; the children are interested and they write as naturally as they talk. Now it is desirable to introduce people into their work, and I begin by telling a story of my childhood. It is a curious fact that children of ten, eleven and twelve look upon their earliest childhood with great interest and like to write reminiscences of that first period of their remembrance, and so they take up this part of the work with enthusiasm. They are, moreover, encouraged to write an observation at any time or to write of any good time they have had. The choice of the material is significant of growth. Then, too, children write best about the things that they are most interested in, all children are interested in younger children and my suggestion that they write about the baby pleases them. If they are not so fortunate as to have a baby at home they borrow one for the occasion and the children whose baby brothers and sisters make a public appearance at the theme-reading period the next day are admired as well as envied. I then suggest that they write an autobiography and tell them certain points on which they can enlarge. At different times I describe different types of interesting people, and they are soon able to write on 'the most interesting person that I saw yesterday,' 'my dearest friend,' and some children create a character.

The next step is to teach them how to introduce different characters, and I begin with the dialogue. I relate an imaginary conversation between an old and a young turkey previous to Thanksgiving and from this suggestion many original themes grow which in creative thought I confess are an improvement upon the original. Indeed some children carry the idea so far that they introduce a plot which ends with the escape of the turkeys and the consequent discomfiture of the farmer. Dialogues become popular. Conversations between trees, wild-flowers, animals and children, show originality and imagination.

The dialogues are followed by themes introducing conversation. I tell the children about a walk and relate a conversation with some one whom I met, trying to have the conversation short and to the point. Such a narration is followed by similar ones by the children, and they, being unconscious of my motive in telling the story, are themselves unconscious in their talks. The suggestion that the stories told would make good themes meets with their approval, some even venturing the opinion that they have read worse stories in children's books. The children now introduce conversation naturally into their stories and, as was the case with the dialogues, some work out little plots. They show readiness in writing about people, animals and things; they introduce conversation and they sometimes have a little plot but they have not consciously introduced a setting.

This work of seeing and interpreting nature is most interesting and important. It creeps into the work consciously at times, at other times spontaneously. I tell the children of some sweet commonplace thing that gave me enjoyment, as the shimmer of a wave, the gold of a leaf, the swirl of a gutter-river, the glisten of the frost, the bend of the willow, the wreathing of the smoke, the flight of a dove, the voice of the wind, the red heart of the rose, the smile of a child, the antics of an animal—and have found that the heart of a child responds to the same touches of nature. They soon bring to me their impressions and these impressions begin to appear in their written work. But a conscious effort is made toward producing a setting to the story. I describe a sunset and many children think that they saw the same one or one more beautiful which they wish to describe. We decide to observe the sunset and to write a description of it. This is done and the results are sometimes surprisingly good. Another time I describe a favorite landscape, and again each child has one in mind about which he is anxious to write. Indeed there is never any hesitancy on the part of the children about writing on any theme which is suggested, and they thoroughly enjoy this work. Foggy days come frequently in the autumn and we talk of the curious

appearance of objects we have seen through the mist. A snowstorm gives us splendid material, a rainstorm is suggestive of new thoughts. These settings for a time form themes, but I suggest that they introduce a setting into a story and this they soon do remarkably well. Indeed they become critical when a story does not have a setting.

This development of the setting adds color words and the children discover that they need a larger vocabulary. I suggest that we give words suggestive of color and head the list with "shadowy," "brilliant," etc. It is surprising how fast the list grows. Some one discovers that some of these adjectives, for I call words by their right names, can express action "whitened," "darkened," and words of this sort frequently appear in the themes. They become more critical of the themes read aloud and are indeed rather severe, much more so than the teacher, but children are not sensitive to the criticism of each other.

Closely connected with the color words are the words suggestive of sound and motion. After a windy night I ask what words will express the sounds made by the wind. The list begins with "shrieked," "moaned," "whistled," and it grows until I get many suggestions for my own writing. Children are such responsive, spontaneous, original things! It is strange that we do not oftener go to them for inspiration. They like to make lists of this sort and I suggest that they listen to the water, the fire, cries of animals and calls of birds and write lists suggestive of the various sounds. Not less interesting are the motion words and again we think of some specific objects as "the grass" and we get such words as "nodded," "waved," "fluttered," "bended." Then we take other words as "the path," "the fire," "clouds," "animals," "people."

The use of words of color, sound and motion is naturally followed by comparisons. These need only to be suggested. The child will create his own although he often borrows one which particularly pleases him as "as brown as a leaf in autumn," "as clear as the eyes of a child," "as blue as a summer's sky," and he invariably commends work that contains comparisons, although he criticises adversely work that contains grotesque or trite ones.

But some one may ask, "What about the time and the material for these themes and how do you manage the criticisms?"

Themes should be written daily. From fifteen to twenty-five minutes should be allowed for the writing, and during the time nothing should happen to distract the child's attention. All of the children should write at the same time. The suggestive talks and the reading of selected themes consume twenty-five minutes each day, but since no individual preparation is neces-

sary on the part of the child, the time given to theme-work is less than the time allotted to arithmetic and the other so-called fundamental studies.

In regard to the material, I always suggest a subject if the child wishes it, but the theme work develops the individuality of the child and many prefer to make their own selections, following, sometimes, suggestions already given. The study of the theme-work of the child shows me his personality as nothing else can for in this grade he writes without restraint. The imaginative, dreamy child will write fairy stories; the practical child will tell clearly what he sees and does; the artistic child paints pictures with his words; and not infrequently the poetic child writes a poem.

The criticism is a very important part of the work. The themes are looked over carefully each day, and it is not drudgery; I am too much interested in the child who is daily giving me his personality; and there is a fascination in watching each child's development from day to day. Children like to produce a good piece of work and they like to copy a paper correcting the mistakes. At first I mark only misused verbs, mistakes in capitalization and punctuation, but I add to these corrections soon by reading an interesting theme and telling why I like it, and also by calling attention to mistakes and telling how work can be improved. The criticisms made are aptly applied by the children to themes read aloud and sometimes they venture original criticisms. They very soon become discriminating and are at times rather cruel in their frankness, but no one seems to feel hurt and a criticism made by a child makes a decided impression on the child whose theme is criticised. Frequently such criticisms are made as: "It was n't worth while," "Too long in getting started," "No point to the story," "No setting," "Did n't stop when he had finished," "Too many adjectives," "Sentences choppy," "Did n't know what he wanted to say," "Trite," "Too many details." But not all of the criticisms are adverse. Children commend originality, imagination, movement, and to a certain extent structure and phrasing. They are curious as to the source of the material and they do not hesitate to accuse each other of plagiarism. They do not object to imitations but they criticise a child who does not indicate in some way that he has gotten his idea from a book or from some other child. They admire most the child who can "make up stories," and they frequently say some one's story is better than they have read in books.

Each child should have individual attention and I manage to give it in this way: The themes of yesterday have been returned and lie on the desks. As the children are writing their new themes I pass from seat to seat and talk with each child about

the mistakes which he has made, giving him such individual help as he needs. Each child's needs are different, and a general criticism seldom hits the ones it is aimed at. Some children, too, need to have a point emphasized, while for others a hint is enough. This method then is fair for all. The slow child gets the reiteration which he needs, and the bright child to whom this is unnecessary and stultifying, can be given suggestions as rapidly as he can take them.

COMPOSITION IN THE EIGHTH GRADE.

The teaching of composition in the eighth grade is fascinating but the requisites on the part of the teacher are correspondingly high. In this work I always feel that I am approaching the "holy of holies," for when a feeling of confidence is established and maintained, the child gives me his individuality, his composition becomes the outward expression of what he is. This gives me toward each child, a reverent attitude, and appreciation of the dignity and respect due him, as the highest manifestation of the creative principle of God or good.

One must be able to put one's self in the place of each of the two hundred children whom one teaches daily. One's imagination must be great enough, not only to classify the children according to certain types but must enter intimately into the life of each. It is as if one were permitted to open the windows of the soul and let the light which each individual can reflect from the Great Source, shine out; or given the privilege to supply stimulus to the different impulses within the child so that he may be able to express them in words; and allowed to watch the unfolding of these impulses day by day. This work requires time and effort, but there is a fascination about it found in nothing else. Children are as diverse as the flowers of the field, and when through imagination one is able to enter the invisible realm in which each is supreme, one should remove the shoes from off one's feet for the place is holy ground.

If one's imagination is great enough to enter into the child's world, then, and then only, is it possible to know his interests. They are what must be utilized, they must be the common meeting place, the ground from which the teacher gives him a chance to express himself in his own environment and in the direction of his own activities.

It is necessary for the teacher to organize the child's impulses so that they will get some place; that out-going energy must be made use of. Some means of connection between his present interests and those interests which he ought to have must be found. The somewhat chaotic condition of his thinking must be systematized in order that the output may be logical expression. That work with the child may count, not only

must one know where to begin but one must have the vantage ground of a broad outlook. One must have had experience in writing and must also have a definite notion of the work one expects to accomplish with the child while the sequence in which the work of developing the child's expression is presented, must preserve the natural association of the ideas of the child.

Very few of the children who come to me have had real composition work. They have not learned to look upon a theme as a finished whole. The work viewed from their experience in writing sentences about unassociated ideas, has made them hate the very sound of the word composition, and they look upon me, at first, with some distrust. The possibilities which my position as special teacher of composition gives me for inflicting stupid, senseless lessons, must seem to them appalling.

The first step, then, is to disarm their suspicion. I hold before them a very high aim. I tell them that I have known children who were able in a year to write so well that it was a pleasure to read their work, also that I shall preserve everything that they write and when the year's work is finished they may bind it into a book; and if possible, I show them a book which some child has made. The project begins to appear alluring but it looks hard.

With apparent irrelevance I say that I should like to tell them about a scene which I hope that they may be able to see as I describe it. I begin by giving my point of view. After finishing the description I ask what stands out most distinctly. Several other points of view are presented and the children asked to suggest others, which are written upon the black-board. I then say that they may write a description from any point of view which they choose and that it may be the first page of the book. The work is beginning to appear possible as well as interesting. Some of the best themes are read the next day and also some descriptions from good literature. The imitative instinct comes to the foreground and some one asks, "May we write like that if we want to?" The descriptions are at first short and are written each day for perhaps eight days.

However, before the interest flags, I describe some person and they quickly transfer their attention to people. They recall descriptions of people which they have read and my suggestion that they make their people alive, is appreciated. The next step is to place a person in a scene, and many children at this point anticipate the work and introduce action; thus there is no abrupt transition between description and narration which follows.

With the narrative the work becomes more individual. Many children have, by this time, caught the spirit of creation and prefer to select their own topics. It is interesting to notice their method of development. Some children prefer to write incidents of their early childhood, some give the results of their observations and are even known to watch, clandestinely, children at play, for their material, while others write stories which are wholly imaginary. They are beginning to find all sorts of people interesting, and as the work goes on, I try to have them make each character about which they write, consistent; their material is never criticised from an ethical point of view, although the conversation that creeps in is not always choice. The work has grown, so that with some children the narration is so long that one story represents a week's work. They are somewhat loathe to leave narration, but the next step appeals to them when they learn what an autobiography is. I find that the children need a general outline for this work, and the writing of the complete essay requires several days. They have begun to be intensely interested in themselves, and they write with perfect freedom and fluency. It is always a pleasure to read these themes. Although they are perfectly willing to have their life histories made public I do not read any of them to the class, but they give me an insight into the heart of the child which is very helpful.

The author whose biography they now reproduce seems to them to be alive. Not only are they curious about his life but about his work and how he happened to write at all. They draw analogies between themselves and him and he becomes to them an inspiration and a model. Indeed I sometimes try the experiment of asking them to write an imitation of some description which they particularly like, and some of the results are good.

The children are now somewhat curious to study the work of some writer from a constructive point of view and the "Legend of Sleepy Hollow" furnishes adequate material for this purpose. It is interesting to know, that now, the story itself, does not so much appeal to them as the way each paragraph is built and the effect which it is meant to produce. The words themselves and their arrangement interest them. They pick out the topic, notice the sequence, and begin to have a feeling for the style in which the story is written. The confident assurance with which they take my suggestion that they write a criticism on the style of the author is equalled only by the candor of the criticism.

I utilize the constructive interest which has been awakened by teaching exposition. I begin by having each child describe clearly, the way by which he has made some article. Much originality is shown in the selection of subsequent work in ex-

position. Some children prefer to write about articles that they have made or seen made. Some describe a mental effort as, writing a theme or studying a reading lesson, while others theorize about what they would do under given circumstances in which their escape from some predicament involves some ingenuity.

The reason, which the work in exposition has helped to develop, is cultivated by teaching them simple argumentation. We develop the brief and both sides of the argument orally at first, and they begin to be wildly enthusiastic when they commence the written work. The questions chosen for debate are of special interest to them and I permit them the greatest freedom of expression. They soon discover that extravagant statements are not proof and modify their manner of their own accord. However, as they are allowed to choose the side upon which they write and the debates are read, they learn that oratory often affects the decision of the judges.

It is then perhaps permissible that they be given some notion of what an oration is, and after studying four or five orations they write simple speeches such as they might have occasion to give; as a welcoming speech or a farewell address.

An essay on an abstract subject naturally follows; and strangely enough, children like to express their views on Friendship, Patriotism, and Courage. It is of great interest to detect the high ideals which they possess. Some of the children, too, approach a kind of pleasing oratory, especially in the Patriotism essay.

But they hail with delight the next work. They are to write a real drama, one which might be played. The dramatic instinct is so strong in most children that the preparation for this work requires little development. However, they discover after an attempt, with possibly an adverse criticism from the class which is given and received in good spirit, that not only must the situation be chosen carefully, but that the characters are not real unless the writer is able to project himself into them. But after two or three attempts some of the dramas are not worse than those one sometimes sees staged.

The last work of the year is a short story. Their work with the drama has helped them to realize dramatic situations and they have produced some very successful short stories of perhaps four thousand words in which various writers have chosen effective situation, realized the characters, selected significant details, and made the story move toward the end, in a manner suggestive of good writing in the future.

Although the work required was confined to prose, many attempts at poetry were made. The idea of rhythm and meter, was developed and the children appreciated to a certain extent,

figures of speech, and figurative language. I encouraged them to write poetry, and fully seventy children handed me attempts at poetry which they wrote, as they expressed it, when they felt like it. Some of these productions were mere jingles, but perhaps twenty of them had some merit. The two which I reproduce rank among the twenty, although they are an average in that set.

THE LAKE.

Oh lake with waters long and wide !
And heavens darkest blue,
The boats along your surface glide,
Their circles are not few.

Your banks are fringed with dark green grass,
The long blades break your gloss ;
They seem to grow in one huge mass,
And near them grows the moss.

The branches of the willow trees
Reach down to your blue water,
You blow and bend like a small sea,
But gentler and softer.

Oh you look forth to the morrow !
You think of naught but joy,
You would have both joy and sorrow
If you were a small boy.

J. V. K. Age 13 yrs. 1906.

THE BROOKLET.

The babbling little brooklet,
Flows over hill and dale,
It's life is sweet contentment
With ne'er a storm or gale.

It sings a cheerful story,
In its own cheerful way.
Its simple little history
Is told from day to day.

The cat-tails grow within it,
The willow bends her head ;
The birds come down to drink it
And are sure of being fed.

It never is molested ;
It never does intrude,
Mother Nature taught it better
Than ever to be rude.

The frost, its only enemy
Comes once in every year,
And stops the babbling little brook
From its songs of cheer.

M. G. Age 12 yrs. 1906.

COMPOSITIONS IN FIFTH AND SIXTH GRADES.

SPRING'S ARRIVAL.

Girl, 11 yrs. Winter was going away, a pitiful and touching object to all but the scornful eye of Spring. His hair, long and snowy lay upon his throbbing breast like a great white cloud. His eyes were full of tears and dim. He was worn and bent with age and very feeble. Old winter carried on his back a load too heavy for his tired limbs to support, a huge pack of snow. On his head still glittered the icy crown, bright and beautiful in the sunlight. The old man staggered to the gate and blew helplessly at his candle which was now flickering, going out. As he opened the gate the candle was extinguished and fell from the shaking fingers. Then Mother Nature ever kind and always ready to receive him led him back to his home where he would be happy. . . . Spring came dancing in, his golden curls dancing about and his eyes sparkling like icicles. His tall form and broad strong body heaved with pride as he strode vainly through the year's garden. Now he laughed rudely and now, smiled the sweetest of smiles. Now he relapsed into thought and his face was like an angel's, while now he burst into a flood of tears only to grow joyous again. He pinched the crocus blossoms, then kissed them as tenderly as Mother Nature could. At last he caught sight of a buttercup. All haughtiness faded from his face and at that moment all things cried, "Welcome to Spring!"

A RAG DOLL'S EXPERIENCE.

Girl, 10 yrs. I feel rather tired and bent as I am a rag doll nine years in age. My hair was once a golden color and I had blue eyes and pink cheeks. When I was given to my mistress I had on a pink dress and a pink sunbonnet. I had pretty shoes and stockings and underclothes and many other clothes and I was taken very good care of until Dorothea's fox terrier came and bit me. I could not do anything until he had dropped me. He rolled his eyes and Dorothea said, "Bad dog!" He bit my leg and the cotton showed very plainly. Dorothea immediately sewed up my leg but it did not improve my feelings. My dress got very dirty and so she washed it. It has been washed many times and it has many tears in it. I am now in a new dress as I am going to a party. This one is a white one and it has got a pink sash. I have a new bonnet and some shoes and stockings. I am glad to say that I have got a new coat also. I am extremely happy to say that my legs are painted over. She was once left alone and so she quickly dressed me and called me, "Mother's pet."

I am now thought very much of because she broke her china doll and gave me all of her things.

But Alas! To-day is her birthday and she got her new china doll. She took off all of my new clothes and put them on her new doll.

THE WREN'S HOME.

Girl, 12 yrs. In the window sill of a house in the woods was a small box with a hole in the middle and this was the wren's home. It was a small box set there by a little boy who wished that some sweet songster would choose it for a home. One day when this little fellow was playing near the house he saw a wren who was carrying a feather in its mouth. He knew that it was building a nest somewhere and so he watched it. It flew straight to the small box where it laid the feather. It brought sticks and strings into the box and as it was flying about looking for other soft things its sharp eye fell on a ball of yarn lying

on the window sill. It took hold of it with its sharp claws and flew up to the box. It wound it around and around, in and out until the nest was soft and warm. Here it laid its little eggs and raised its young. And so often did the little boy go to see the nest that mother wren was not afraid and came back to the box year after year to raise her brood.

Original Story.

THE PIGS' QUARREL.

Boy, 11 yrs. Trouble was brewing between Mrs. Brown's pigs and Mrs. Lasalle's pigs. Although Mrs. Brown was the wife of the gravest Deacon in Summerdale and Mrs. Lasalle was the wife of the longest faced preacher in Summerdale, the two pigs entirely ignored this sacred fact. The trouble was because a rickety fence kept the two pigs apart and that Mrs. Lasalle's pig happened to have the more dinner than the other pig one sultry day at noon tide. Mrs. Brown's pig said with a grunt to the other:

"You need n't turn up your tail at me in that fashion because you are better fed than I. Just because you're the pig of the wife of the Summerdale preacher you need n't think you're the only pork in the world," a grunt.

The accused pig coolly retreats to a far off corner of his pen and noses around for some corn cobs to fill his well fed but piggish stomach with. When the accusing pig begins again:—

"Oh you crooked-tailed big-nosed grunting old thing you wont get out of it over there, because I'll knock the fence down and" a grunt "Whew but Ill find out how much pork there, is in you."

With these words he ran furiously sideways at the fence and slipped skinning his dirty fat back on the fence boards. Whereupon he rose, and walked with a baffled spirit to his favorite wailing place behind a big fallen stump. This gave the other pig courage and he came to the fence and said:—

"Remember you are as much of a pig as I—"

With these words the baffled pig charged furiously at the fence which he knocked over on the other pig's back. It began to squeal harder than the Thomas Orchestra can play. He soon crawled out and found that the wall of the other pig's pen which led into the garden was over. The two pigs scampered into the garden in blissful content, fast friends.

WHEN EVENING FALLS.

Girl, 12 yrs. When slowly evening's curtain falls, the baby's eyelids close, and mother lifts her gently up, and takes her to her crib.

As evening's shadow darkens, the cattle, lowing far away, across the hills, come back to home and rest.

When evening softly steals along, the sweet flowers close their tinted leaves, and dream of fairyland.

And when it hears eve's light footsteps, the rose-bud nestles close, and closes then its pretty eye, slumbering on its mother's breast.

When softly even approaches, the fairies skip from the vine, and up and down, the livelong night, they romp and dance with glee.

As the sun sees evening, far away, his yellow face turns red, and, with the crimson of his blushes, he tints the covers of his bed.

When evening falls, the world rests.

AN ACTUAL EXPERIENCE.

TRIALS OF A MOTHER WHOSE LITTLE GIRL HAS TO WRITE
A THEME EACH DAY.

Girl, 11 yrs. (Mother turning pancakes on the griddle.)

"Mama!"

No answer except the sizzling of the pancakes.

"Mama!"

Quiet reigns.

"Mama!"

"Well what is it?" (Impatiently.)

"What shall I write to-day?"

"I don't know and do not care what you write. Please don't talk to me while I'm working."

(Little girl gazes out of the window at the wet landscape mournfully.)

(Washing and wiping dishes after breakfast.)

"Mama!"

"Well!"

"I don't know what to write to-day."

"Never mind what you are going to write to-day. I want your mind solely on your dishes or you will break something. There! I told you so!" as a dish went clattering to the floor.

(Mother combing the child's hair.)

"Mama!"

"Write about a dog. Why don't you?" (said her mother knowing what was coming.)

"Every one writes about animals and its getting common.

"Why don't you write about the sunrise this morning?"

"Did n't see it."

(Clock strikes half past eight.)

"There, I'll be late if I don't start now," and whisked out leaving the mother tired and worn to begin the day's duties.