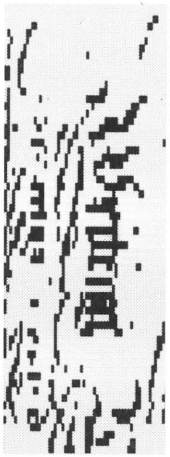
Then and Now: Readers Learning to Write

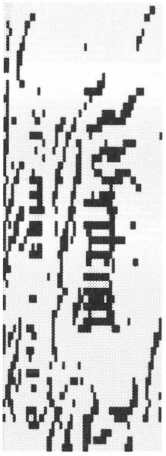
Guest editor: E. Jennifer Monaghan



He that in Writing would improve
Must first with Writing fall in Love.

Excerpt from "The Writing Master's Invitation and Instruction," penned by John Molineux, aged 11, at the South Writing School, Boston, 1765 (Manuscript in the penmanship collection at the Houghton Library, Harvard University).

Introduction



Until the early 1970s, writing research received a great deal less attention than reading research. This has been true of the history of writing instruction as well. When Alvina Burrows looked for sources on that topic only ten years ago, she found little available (1977). It was in the hope of making a modest contribution toward redressing this imbalance that the History of Reading Special Interest Group (SIG) of the International Reading Association put together, in 1986, a symposium on the history of writing instruction. Titled "Then and Now: Readers Writing in the Elementary Classroom," the symposium was presented in Philadelphia at the 1986 annual convention of the International Reading Association. Four of the five essays published here are revisions of papers presented at that time.

Our thanks are due to several persons whose names do not appear in the following pages: to Donald H. Graves, The University of New Hampshire, and Susan B. Neuman, Eastern Connecticut State University, who were helpful in suggesting speakers for the symposium; to Susan Sowers, then at Hamden-Sydney College, who was one of our presenters but who was unable to submit an essay to this volume; and to Richard L. Venezky, University of Delaware, who chaired the symposium.

At first glance, the essays published in this issue of *Visible Language* seem to have very little in common. The term "writing" does not even have the same meaning in all five essays. In the context of the curriculum of Boston's eighteenth century writing schools, discussed in my own essay, "writing" meant penmanship. Richard Hodges shows us another interpretation of writing — as correct spelling — in his account of the evolution of spelling instruction over time. The last three contributors focus on writing as communication. Barbara Donsky looks at textbooks that taught composition between 1900 and

1959, and demonstrates a consistent decline in prescriptions of tasks directly related to writing. Anne Campbell discusses some of the results of testing writing nationally, as she presents data on fourth-grade children's ability to write persuasively, imaginatively, or informatively between 1974 and 1984, as assessed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Nancy Mavrogenes traces the development of composition instruction and provides a comprehensive review of recent research on emergent literacy.

Moreover, the time periods covered by these essays differ considerably: the issue spans three centuries. The first of the Boston writing schools mentioned in my own essay opened in 1684; at the other end of the time scale, most of the research summarized by Mavrogenes was conducted within the last decade.

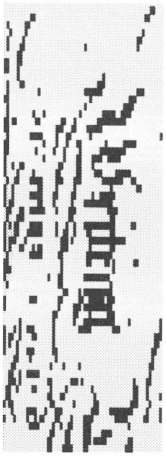
There is also a startling change portrayed in these essays in educators' views of the *content* of writing instruction. In the colonial writing school, it was assumed not only that writing meant handwriting, but that students were to learn it by copying models set them by their instructors. Pedagogy was so focused on form — the beauty and clarity of the student's script — that the student was not asked to contribute to the content. In contrast, as Mavrogenes shows us, recent research on the emergent literacy of kindergarten children reveals that they write to communicate, even though they have mastered few, if any, of the conventions associated with the written language such as letter formation or spelling. Moreover, their instructors value this content and deliberately defer attention to form until later. The contrast in a change of emphasis from "product" to "process" could hardly be more stark.

Yet diverse as these essays are, there are similarities that shine at intervals like metallic threads through the fabric of three centuries of writing instruction. Indeed, there are themes — they might also be called morals — that run through several essays.

The first moral, surely, is that we still have much to learn about successfully teaching children how to write. Whether writing is viewed as spelling, or handwriting, or grammar, or communication, or all of these together, none of us can be complacent about the findings reported in Campbell's study. In the decade assessed, children improved only slightly in their ability to write imaginatively, while their skill at informational and persuasive writing remained stationary, or even declined.

Secondly, as Hodges shows, theory plays a crucial role in pedagogical practice. The prevailing theory in the first half of the twentieth century, behaviorist psychology, lent support to those who wanted to

select spelling words according to their frequency, on the basis of the "social utility" principle. This led to spelling books that contained lists of words chosen only for their supposed frequency,not for any morphemic similarity. The change in the theory of language acquisition from a behavioral to a psycholinguistic viewpoint has tremendous implications for pedagogy; Mavrogenes reviews these for kindergarteners. This change is already reflected in some spelling textbooks: for almost the first time in sixty years, spelling words are being grouped — once again — on morphemic principles, not those of frequency.



It is also clear that no child becomes good at writing without practice. The lovely penmanship of the Boston boys in the eighteenth century was the result of extensive practice on that skill alone. If our nine-year-olds do not have the beautiful handwriting of a John Molineux, it is because we do not allocate as much classroom time to penmanship as did the colonial writing masters — nor should we, I hasten to add! In the first sixty years of the twentieth century, composition textbooks mandated fewer and fewer activities directly connected with writing, as Donsky documents. (She suggests that there is a direct correlation between this decrease in practice and the well-known decline in children's writing skills nationwide.) The research presented by Mavrogenes shows that today (except in those few classrooms which allow children's literacy to "emerge"), children in the average American classroom are rarely being asked to write, and their own teachers do not write either. Both Donsky and Mavrogenes urge us to allow children to write more often. Campbell asks us to give children increased practice in writing persuasive and informative prose.

As Hodges reminds us, however, not all practice makes perfect. When Joseph M. Rice, a New York pediatrician, studied the spelling achievement of 13,000 students, he concluded that the best results were obtained if pupils studied spelling words for only a few minutes a day, rather than drilling for hours on end. Practice alone is not enough, we can conclude: it must be meaningful in some sense to be productive.

The child's intellect, in other words, must be engaged. The thrust of recent research into the acquisition of literacy has suggested more forcefully than ever, as Hodges and Mavrogenes disclose, that all aspects of writing — even spelling, which used to be considered merely an exercise in rote memorization — have a cognitive base, and are rooted in the learning of language itself. Learning to write follows a developmental course, and we must not assume that children view the written language in the same way that adults do.

Moreover, the child's intellect can only be harnessed to the task of learning to read and write if his or her emotions are engaged as well.

Even the eighteenth century writing masters knew this: "He that in writing would improve, / Must first with writing fall in love." As for the contemporary classroom, however, Mavrogenes has characterized much of the instruction occurring there as generating writing which "holds no personal meaning. It becomes a mere mechanical task which is rewarded if it is neat and completed." She summarizes suggestions for providing an environment that fosters children's writing.

Another lesson to be learned from these essays is the importance of modeling as an instructional technique. It was used by the colonial writing masters, and by the writers of early twentieth century textbooks on composition — those "memory gems" that Donsky describes. It is being used today in the context of emergent literacy, as we can see from teachers' glosses in Mavrogenes' illustrations (where the teacher has written "plant eater" for Richard's "pat eat").

In fact, in our bias in favor of the present, educators have overlooked the lessons from the past. As Donsky reminds us, many of the aspects of writing instruction that are hailed today as part of writing reform (peer teaching, for instance) were advocated by educators working within the progressive movement early in the twentieth century. The past has much to teach us, and we forget its lessons at our peril.

The role of the instructor is the last of the threads that shine through the five essays. Much to our surprise, at the International Reading Association's symposium, the paper that aroused the most discussion, some of it heated, was that by Anne Campbell. Many in the audience felt that testing children's writing in some sense produced false results. The proponents of the "emergent literacy" approach, in particular, viewed testing, which prizes correct form, as inimical to children's developmental mastery of writing, where "miscues" are to be viewed developmentally as "windows" onto the child's own view of language, rather than as "errors."

The debate — and here I voice my own opinion — should perhaps center more on the role of instruction itself than on the role of testing. For what we still need to discover, as writing instructors, is the balance between timely intervention in the child's writing on the one hand, and leaving the child well enough alone, on the other. Surely, if there is one lesson to take away from this issue of *Visible Language,* it is that the role of the teacher has not become irrelevant.

References

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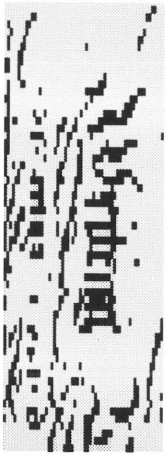

Readers Writing: The Curriculum of the Writing Schools of Eighteenth Century Boston

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Housed at the Houghton Library, Harvard University, is a collection of 188 single-page manuscripts penned between 1748 and 1782 by 117 boys at Boston's three eighteenth century writing schools. Because of reduplication, there are only 106 different texts on the 188 manuscripts. This collection formed the basis for a reconstruction of the form and content of the writing school curriculum. The source for two-thirds of the pieces longer than a single sentence was George Bickham's Universal Penman *(1743). At a time when writing was equated with penmanship, school progress was measured in terms of mastering successive scripts, beginning with the round hand. The 106 different texts copied by the boys, when analyzed for their content, were found to portray the secularism, rationalism, optimism, and materialism of the eighteenth century.*

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Writing instruction in colonial America barely figures in modern discussions of colonial education. Because formal schooling is only one aspect of education as broadly conceived by Lawrence Cremin in his *American Education: The Colonial Experience,* writing instruction receives merely a brief mention there (1970, pp. 185, 503-4). A publication on colonial writing by the late Ray Nash, who was by far our greatest authority on early penmanship, was only printed in a limited edition, and many good libraries do not own a copy (Nash, 1959). Moreover, only a handful of articles on colonial penmanship has appeared in journal articles over the past twenty years (e.g. Stryker-Rodda, 1980; Weiser, 1981; Yeandle, 1980).

Nonetheless, writing instruction offered at a writing school (which was often the living quarters of the writing master) was a landmark on the colonial educational landscape. Its importance in the eighteenth century may be gauged from the fact that there were three writing schools in Boston (itself a hub of educational activity), from 1720 on, when Boston's third writing school was opened. In contrast, Boston founded only two Latin grammar schools.

By focusing on manuscripts penned by boys in Boston's three writing schools, the present paper takes a close look at writing instruction in the eighteenth century, at least as it was offered in Boston. The paper seeks to reconstruct the curriculum of the Boston writing school, asking what was taught there and in what sequence. The essay begins with an overview of the sources used for the study, continues by setting the writing schools of Boston in their historical context, and closes by examining the extant products of the schools in some detail, both for their form and content.

Sources An investigation into the curriculum of the Boston writing schools is possible because of the preservation of a remarkable collection of manuscripts penned at those schools, housed at Houghton Library, Harvard University.

The Houghton Library Penmanship Collection offers an unusual chance to see exactly what was occurring in the school setting. Textbooks are often used as bases for inferences on curricular matters,

but the inferences have to be based on various assumptions that we can never quite prove: that the textbook was read in its entirety, for example. Here, with the boys' own work, we have a window onto the actual products of school instruction. This collection formed the major basis for my inferences on the curriculum, and is discussed in detail below.

Writing at a Boston writing school is also mentioned in a schoolgirl's diary: Anna Green Winslow attended the South Writing School in 1771 at the age of eleven, as a private pupil (Earle, 1970). Additional sources were a reminiscence by Daniel Colesworthy, whose father was taught by John Tileston at the North Writing School (Colesworthy, 1887), Robert Seybolt's collection of primary source material on Boston schoolmasters (Seybolt, 1928), and the Boston colonial town records (Boston, 1881, 1885, 1886).

The Historical Context Writing instruction in the colonial period was virtually synonymous with penmanship instruction (Monaghan and Saul, 1987, p. 88). Clear penmanship, which was one of the aims of this instruction, was a career skill. At a period when reading and writing were still being taught separately (Monaghan, 1988), someone who worked the land may have been able to read, but did not need to know how to write. In contrast, a boy who planned on pursuing a ministerial career needed to be fully literate. But writing was also an essential commercial skill, useful in any activity that required record-keeping and accounting.

The gender bias implicit in the word "penmanship" is no accident: men were responsible for teaching writing. Women, on the other hand, were considered qualified to teach reading, which was patently believed by colonial Americans to be the easier of the two literacy skills to impart (Monaghan, 1988). Those who were responsible for teaching the young at Boston's writing schools were all male (Seybolt, 1928).

Boston early became famous for its town-funded educational system — for which only boys were eligible. It solicited the services of its first schoolmaster in 1635, only seven months after the town records begin. (According to Nash, the master concerned was a professional scrivener [1959, p.9].) Boston's first free Latin grammar school was opened the following year, and a second free grammar school (called the North Grammar School) was added in 1712 (Seybolt, 1928, p. 135). At them, boys were taught Latin, Greek, and even some Hebrew (Middlekauf, 1963).

The responsibilities of the grammar schoolmaster, however, did not,

ideally, include writing instruction. This was a specialty for which a different kind of training was required — an apprenticeship to a writing master. So the town, in 1666, employed a Daniel Hinchman to assist the grammar schoolmaster and to "teach Childere to wright" (Boston, 1881, p. 30).

Throughout the colonial period there were also private writing masters in Boston. Between 1636 and 1776 we know of twenty men who taught writing there privately (Seybolt, 1928). There were undoubtedly other writing instructors among the many additional private teachers whose specialty we do not know.

Samuel Granger was just one of many entrepreneurs in Boston who was given permission by the selectmen (the town's executive committee) in 1720 to teach "writeing, Logick & Merchants Acco[un]ts" (Boston, 1885, p. 65). As Granger's job description suggests, writing instruction was tied closely to arithmetic instruction (Cremin, 1970, p. 503). Until the 1680s, however, a Boston boy could only obtain these valuable commercial skills at the town's expense if he were attending Boston's one grammar school (which, as we have seen, made provisions for the teaching of writing). Then, in 1682, the townspeople of Boston decided that there should be an alternative to the college-oriented education of the grammar school, and asked the town to open and finance a writing school. Accordingly, the town voted that "one or more Free Schooles" should be devoted solely to the "teachinge of Children to write & Cypher [do arithmetic] within this towne" (Boston, 1881, p. 158).

Two years later, in 1684, the first writing master was hired by the town (Boston, 1881, p. 171). This first "free" writing school was later known as the Writing School in Queen Street, to distinguish it from the North Writing School, which opened in 1700. The second grammar school that opened in 1712 redressed the balance between academics and commerce, but the town put its final stamp of approval upon commercial education when the third and last writing school, known as the South Writing School, was created in 1720 (Nash, 1959, p. 8).

There were, then, by 1720, a total of five free schools offering two alternate forms of education in Boston. Both grammar and writing schools admitted boys only, at the age of seven. School attendance was required for six days a week, Sunday being the lone day off. The grammar school boys probably attended their own schools from seven to eleven, and again from one to four or five. From eleven to twelve, and from five to six, they would visit the writing school (Nash, 1959, p. 10). Those boys who attended the writing schools but

not the grammar schools were presumably there from early in the morning. Girls could only be taught by the town-funded writing masters as private pupils at times when the boys were not in school.

Students were supposed to know how to read before they entered the writing school. The writing schools did not, however, ignore reading instruction altogether: some more advanced reading instruction, or perhaps just practice, was offered there as well. In 1719, the year before the third and last writing school was opened, the town meeting issued a set of instructions to the writing masters, perhaps as an attempt to clarify the curriculum. Scholars were obliged to read, morning and evening, "A Portion of Gods Word," and the masters were to be sure that "proper Seasons be Stated & Sett a part for the Encourageing of good Spelling." In addition, the town required morning and evening prayers, and catechizing (teaching the boys the catechism) on Saturdays (Boston, 1885, p. 53).

Nonetheless, the writing master was not expected to stoop to offering elementary reading instruction. An incident involving John Proctor makes this clear. Proctor was master of the North Writing School from 1731 to 1743. In 1741, he was summoned before the selectmen to answer what seems to have been a parental complaint: he was accused of having refused to admit boys from "Families of low circumstances" to his school. Proctor replied that he had "refus'd none of the Inhabitants Children but such as could not read in the Psalter" (Boston, 1886, p. 288). This response seemed to be satisfactory, as it was reproduced in the selectmen's report without apparently provoking adverse comment. (Obviously, the Psalter — the Book of Psalms — was serving as a kind of minimum competency test of reading ability, at a time when the reading curriculum entailed a primer, the Psalter, and then the Bible.)

The boys would remain in either the grammar or writing school until the age of fourteen or fifteen, when the grammar school boys would normally go on to Harvard College, while the graduates of the writing schools would look for a job in such fields as bookkeeping. At a time when all records were handwritten, there was plenty of opportunity for clerks in Boston, which remained a key port for the eastern seaboard throughout the entire colonial period. The writing school was also a preparation for a position higher than that of a clerk: an aspiring merchant might travel this route.

During the thirty-four year period from 1748 to 1782 covered by the Houghton Library penmanship collection, only nine writing masters taught at the three schools. The Writing School in Queen Street had two masters in charge simultaneously. Samuel Holyoke (who was

there from 1733 to 1767) was assisted in 1753 first by Samuel Holbrook, who resigned a year later, then by John Proctor Jr., son of the Proctor who had turned boys away from the North Writing School. Zechariah Hicks presided at the North Writing School from 1743 to 1761, whereupon he was succeeded by John Tileston. At the South Writing School, Abiah Holbrook Jr. was master from 1743 until his death in 1769. After a few unsatisfactory months under the tutelage of someone else, the school was entrusted to Abiah's brother Samuel, who taught there until 1775, when the disruption of daily life caused by the war caused him to leave Boston temporarily (Seybolt, 1928).

Abiah Holbrook Jr., born in 1718, is the most famous of all the Boston writing masters. A fifth generation American and the son of a kegmaker, he made his way rapidly through the town system. He was first apprenticed to, then usher (assistant) to John Proctor Sr. at the North Writing School, before succeeding to the mastership of the South School in 1743. His great treasure, bequeathed to Harvard College, is his "Writing Master's Amusement," a manuscript book exhibiting a dazzling array of old scripts (Nash, 1953). Each page features a huge letter of the alphabet, together with scriptural texts penned in black, blue, red and green, and enclosed in decorative borders.[1]

John Tileston, at the North Writing School, taught there for an astonishing fifty-eight years, from 1761 to 1819. He was famous for his punishments. He had fallen into a fire as a child, and his right hand was crippled and disfigured as a result. However, it could still hold a quill pen. It had also lost all sensation. Tileston would use it, therefore, as Colesworthy remembered it, as an instrument of discipline "which would have done no discredit to the beak of a bald eagle" (Colesworthy, 1887, p. 45).

The writing instrument used in the schools was the quill pen (Daniels, 1980, p. 312). Tileston's diary reveals many occasions when the masters borrowed quill pens from each other, in quantities of one or two thousand at a time (Colesworthy, 1887, p. 72). With over two hundred boys at each school (we know, at least, that in 1755 there were two hundred and sixteen boys at the North, and two hundred and thirty-seven at the South Writing School [Nash, 1959, p. 16]), quill consumption was high. Pencils were, as discussed below, also used.

The Houghton Library Penmanship Collection The collection of manuscripts from the three writing schools of eighteenth cen-

tury Boston is housed at the Houghton Library, Harvard University.[2] It consists of one hundred eighty-eight manuscripts, penned by one hundred and seventeen boys (if we can assume that the four unsigned manuscripts were each the product of a different boy). One outsized manuscript, signed Abiah Holbrook, is probably the work of the master of the South Writing School. The dates of the pieces range from 1748 to 1782. It is obviously a collection of the students' best work, which would have been exhibited to the town "Visitors" — representatives of the town of Boston who visited each school in June, at the end of the school year, to take a look at what the boys had been doing.

Even a cursory look at the collection reveals that fine penmanship (or what today we would call calligraphy) was the major focus of the exhibition. The boys' "pieces," penned on large single sheets of paper usually measuring at least eight by twelve inches, display a wide variety of what the eighteenth century called "hands" (scripts). These range from the eighteenth century business script known as the round hand, through round text (simply an outsize version of the round hand), to several gothic hands (those "old English" forms that are still familiar to us today from their appearance on newspaper mastheads or diplomas).

The range of talent displayed in the pieces is considerable. Some, clearly from the hands of relative beginners, present a one-line sentence repeated six times (as in figure 1). At the other end of the scale are pieces exhibiting seven or more different scripts (as in figure 6). Because the exhibition was also an opportunity for the writing master to display his skill, the master would contribute decorative elements (Nash, 1959, p. 16). One problem, therefore, is that of distinguishing the student's work from the master's — or perhaps the usher's — on any particular piece.

The actual content of the texts derived from various sources; a complete discussion of these lies beyond the scope of this paper. Many pieces were inspired by models in books on penmanship. None of these was a colonial product: all copybooks were imported from England.[3] Writing masters would have no doubt owned several of these imported books on penmanship: Abiah Holbrook Jr., for one, had over twenty such books in his own personal collection (Nash, 1959, pp. 18-19). The Boston boys might have made their copies from pages in one of these books, but it is much more likely that their source was their master's own representation of a piece. In this connection, the unusually large size of Holbrook's own manuscript, his 1769 "A Wise man avoids," suggests that it was intended to be

a model.

A 1743 publication by George Bickham, *The Universal Penman,* was a major source of models for all three writing schools. Of the one hundred and six different *texts* (as opposed to the 188 individual pieces) in the collection, forty-six (43%) can be found in Bickham's book. Because so many of the texts appear more than once, the proportion of actual pieces is higher: one hundred and four out of one hundred and eighty-eight pieces (55%). If we subtract the twenty-five single-sentence pieces, the proportion of the collection that owes its content to Bickham's book rises to sixty-four per cent.[4]

The Universal Penman was a compilation of the work of the best penmen in England, who sent their model pieces to Bickham to engrave along with his own. It actually took Bickham eight years to complete the book, and he sent it to purchasers in parts over the years (Bickham, 1954, introd.). His book therefore reflects the 1730s as well as the 1740s: several pieces are dated in the 1730s. The impact of *The Universal Penman* on the Houghton Collection may be gauged from the figures: the texts of figures 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7 can all be found in Bickham (ibid., pp. 33, 19, 37, 78, 116).

Since copying was the prime learning technique, it is surprising that there are not more identical manuscripts. (As just noted, the collection consists of 106 different texts penned on 188 pieces.) Some seventy-four texts appear only once, seventeen appear twice, and the remaining fifteen texts are reduplicated from three to fourteen times (Appendix I). The most popular single text in the collection is the very complex showcase production, "A Wise man avoids..." (figure 6). (It does not appear in Bickham.) Yet despite the large number of pieces for which the wording is identical, no two penned by different boys are exactly alike. Youth's creativity, and the boys' inspired decorative swirls (or those of their master), render each manuscript unique.

Table 1.
Number and Percentage of Manuscripts by Decade

	Number	Percentage (rounded)
1740s	3	2
1750s	38	20
1760s	69	37
1770s	31	16
1780s	1	1
undated	46	24
Total	188	100

The authors of all but four of the one hundred and eighty-eight manuscripts have revealed themselves, usually by writing their names (both first and last names) followed by the Latin "scripsit" ("wrote this"). In addition, many boys also identified which school they belonged to, their age, and the date. The identification is by no means consistent, however, and the entire collection resembles, at first sight, a puzzle with far too many of the pieces missing.

Each of the three Boston writing schools is represented: there are ten manuscripts that indicate that they were penned at the Queen Street Writing School, twenty from the North Writing School, and fifty-nine from the South Writing School. The remaining ninety-nine do not include the name of their school. Some of the unidentified manuscripts may well have come from the North Writing School, as at least one name — that of Joseph Skillin — appears both as the author of a manuscript with no location and of one that names the North Writing School. But there is not enough evidence to do more than hazard a guess that many of the manuscripts giving no location may have been the products of the North Writing School.

There is much more evidence on the date at which these pieces were composed. All but forty-six manuscripts identify the year that they were written; three give us the month as well — May or June. (This supports the suggestion that these are exhibition pieces, displayed for the official June visitation.) The spread in years, however, is uneven.

In addition, forty boys reveal how old they were at the time that they completed a particular piece. The ages actually identified on the pieces range from John Molineux, who disclosed that he was nine (figure 2), to John Fenno, who declared himself to be fourteen. Fortunately, however, some boys (John Molineux, for example) reveal both their age *and* a date on at least one piece. From this, it is possible to infer dates and ages for their other compositions. The ascertainable age range then turns out to be from nine years to sixteen: John Fenno was the oldest at sixteen, when, in 1768, he penned his second version of "A Wise man avoids."

For someone like myself, who was trying to figure out the order of the curriculum, the most helpful pieces were those that came from the hand of the same boy over a period of time. Out of the entire collection, fifteen boys contributed two pieces each, and another fifteen contributed three or more pieces. Of those who penned four or more, Benjamin Hurd did not identify the school he was attending when he completed four pieces in 1751 and 1752. John Allen wrote four undated pieces at the North Writing School. The other prolific writers

were all at the South Writing School. William Harris wrote five pieces in 1757 and 1759, and John Gray five in 1763, while Abiah Holbrook — a pupil with the same name as his master — penned five manuscripts between 1766 and 1770. John Molineux and Samuel Fenno were the authors of seven manuscripts each, all of them dated in the 1760s. Samuel's older brother John Fenno is represented in the collection by a handsome thirteen pieces, ranging from when he was twelve, in 1764, to sixteen years old, in 1768.

John Fenno's many works should in theory have offered the most insights. Ironically, they did not: he was just too good, too young. He was one of Abiah Holbrook Jr.'s star pupils, who in 1767, when he was fifteen years old, penned the title page for Holbrook's "Writing Master's Amusement." John's talent is confirmed by the fact that he went on to become an usher to Abiah's brother Samuel Holbrook in the South Writing School, probably when Samuel became master there upon Abiah's death in 1769 (Seybolt, 1928, pp. 148, 154-55).

Of all the boys, William Palfrey, author of only three pieces, and John Molineux proved to be the most helpful to my detective work. On June 17, 1748, William Palfrey completed his "Quiet minds commonly enjoy much Content," carefully copied six times from the model at the top of the page (figure 1). In 1751, he produced a none-too-well-written poem that began "Truth is the Band [sic] of Union." In 1754, he wrote the elaborate "A Wise man avoids" in a dazzling array of scripts (figure 6). The six years between William's first and last manuscript is the longest time span for any student represented in the collection. Thanks to William, we can tell that it could take a student that length of time to move from the most elementary of the pieces preserved in the collection to the most complex. William does not, however, reveal his age on any of his manuscripts, so we must look elsewhere for clues on that, and for the intermediate steps in the curriculum.

One approach to figuring out the sequence of penmanship instruction was to look at the difficulty of the pieces. It seemed logical to suppose that instruction would proceed from easy to difficult, from simpler scripts to more complex ones. It also seemed a fair guess that students would be taught one script at a time, and become fairly adept at that before they began another. The work of John Molineux, in particular, supports this hypothesis.

The Curriculum: General Comments The boys used both pencil and ink to complete their copies. Pencil marks are clearly visible on the one unfinished piece in the collection as well as on

several others. Just as calligraphers usually do today, the students sketched the text in pencil before executing it in ink.

The rectangular manuscripts are positioned either horizontally or vertically. There seems to have been a progression: the beginner started with a horizontal text, which allowed his immature handwriting to extend the full length of the paper, as he copied a single sentence. At a certain point in the writer's education, the paper was turned upright so that he now had to fit his text into a narrower space. A poem was typically copied at this stage, perhaps partly because a poem fits easily onto a vertical page, as its lines are of similar length. Finally, the paper would be restored to its horizontal position. This time, however, the writer would be required to fit the text (now a set of pithy sentences) into small, carefully defined, geometric shapes: ovals or flattened octagons. The movement was toward ever greater control over spacing the material.

A couple of distinctions emerge that relate to the date at which a piece was penned. The early manuscripts are inclined to be decorated by birds (as in figure 1, dated 1748), the later by lines and decorative squiggles (as in figure 3, 1765). While the rule is not hard and fast (John Fenno, for instance, added birds to one of his versions of "A Wise man avoids," in 1767), there are twenty pieces displaying birds dated 1757 or earlier, as opposed to only three in the 1760s, two in the 1770s, and none on the sole 1780s piece. Moreover, the earlier manuscripts seem to favor horizontally-turned paper even for writing poems. William Palfrey's 1751 poem on "Truth," complete with birds, was one of these. My assumption, therefore, in the absence of a date, is that a poem on horizontally-turned paper, adorned with birds, was penned in the 1750s. There are, incidentally, no examples of birds gracing vertical paper, no doubt for the practical reason that birds take up room: there is not enough space for them as a border for a vertical page.

Another difference that emerges as time passes is in the use of color. More boys used red ink, in addition to black, than did not: it appears on one hundred and four manuscripts. There is a definite tendency for red ink to be used on the later pieces. Not one of the thirty-six manuscripts dated 1757 or earlier has red ink. It first appears on three out of five 1759 manuscripts. In the 1760s, however, only eleven of the dated pieces are *not* embellished with red, only two in the 1770s, and none in the 1780s. In addition, a third color, blue, occurs on eleven pieces penned by seven boys — one of whom was taught at the Queen Street School, while the others were all at the South Writing School. Two other manuscripts, again written by

South School boys, have gray or green. The earliest of the third color pieces is 1763. Here the influence of the master may be apparent: Abiah Holbrook Jr. was master during the time most of the pieces were penned, and his affection for color was pronounced. He used blue as well as red on his own outsized piece.

The sole Queen Street representative, William Read Miller, was allowed to use blue at the tender age of eleven. None of the South Writing School boys, however, was younger than thirteen when he first added blue. Moreover, John Gray penned "How to get riches" twice in 1763, but had a birthday between the two pieces, as he identifies himself as thirteen on one and fourteen on the other. It is the fourteen-year-old version that has the added blue ink. Similarly, John Fenno wrote the poem "Painting" in 1764 without blue, and again in 1765 with blue. It seems that being allowed to use a third color was a privilege, and perhaps an added motivation for repeating a piece.

Discovering the order of the curriculum is not made any easier by the fact that, as just noted, boys often executed the same piece twice. John Molineux, for instance, penned his piece "Virtue" twice in the same year. One gets the definite impression from John Fenno's work that Holbrook ran out of texts to assign to him. Eight of Fenno's manuscripts are two copies each of four different texts, including the "Writing Master's Invitation" (1764 and 1766) and "A Wise man avoids" (1767 and 1768).

That these schoolboys' manuscripts are so easy for us to read today is a tribute not only to the talent of their authors, but to the triumph of the eighteenth-century round hand. The "secretary" script of the seventeenth century had been routed by this new hand, which was the script of English commerce. Valued for its clarity, it was, on both sides of the Atlantic, the form taught as a "good clerkly hand" (Whalley, 1982, p. 243). As Britain's commerce became supreme, the English round hand was adopted by other European countries, along with England's trade practices (Nesbitt, 1957, p. 114).

The boys' writing displays features that are characteristic of the period: capitalized nouns, certain abbreviations (such as "acco:ts), the use of "ye" for "the," and of course the f-like *s* in the middle of words or as the first of a repeated *s*.

The Curriculum: Form Students at the three writing schools progressed in their studies, it appears, by systematically mastering one script after another as they copied and recopied models set for them by their masters. Interestingly, while so many of the texts they

reproduced can be found verbatim in Bickham's 1743 *Universal Penman,* and while the layout is almost always the same, the scripts they used are not necessarily identical to those in Bickham. The Boston boys' versions of "The Writing Master's Invitation," for example, look at first glance as if they are perfect copies of the piece penned by the writing master Joseph Champion and engraved by Bickham (figure 4.). On each manuscript, however, the Bostonians have used round hand in place of the Italian hand in Champion's model. This lends support to the assumption that boys were copying a model adapted by their masters from *The Universal Penman* or some other penmanship book rather than from the book itself.

The stages below are inferred from the evidence. When students' ages are documented for a particular piece or group of pieces, a median age is provided, along with a note on the number of manuscripts from which this information has been derived. Ages given in square brackets are estimates. The age at which students began to learn a new script would in any case vary with their individual skill. The nomenclature used for the scripts has been borrowed (from Bickham 1954, pp.210-11.)

While the manuscripts reproduced in figures 1 to 6 were in reality penned by three different boys, they may be viewed as representing the developmental stages in the acquisition of penmanship of a single boy, over the course of some six years.

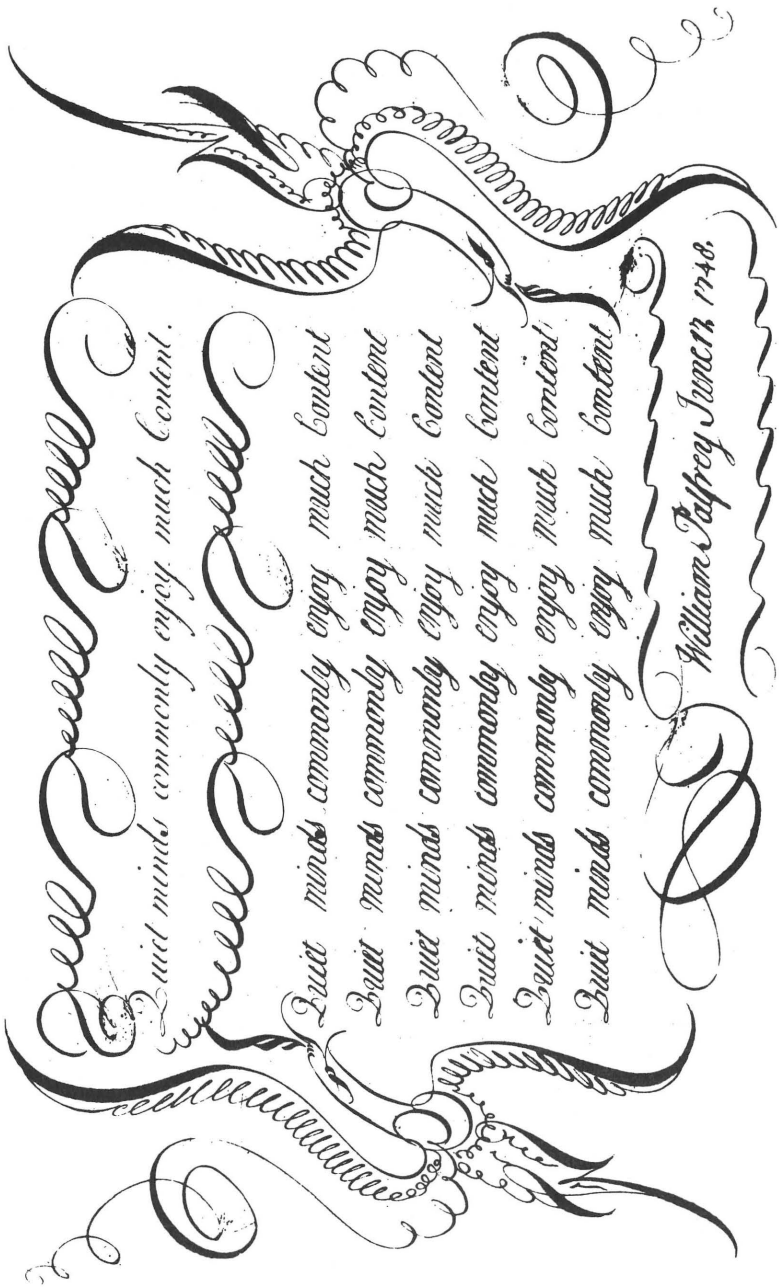
First Script: Round Hand Out of forty-nine manuscripts written in round hand alone, only two mention their authors' ages. None of the twenty-five one-sentence pieces discloses an age.

I: One Sentence. [Ages 7-8].

Figure 1. "Quiet minds commonly enjoy much Content." This is plainly one of those beginner's pieces on which the student copied six times (or, more rarely, four times) a sentence set for him by the master. Here, in William Palfrey's contribution of 1748, there is a marked contrast between William's immature handwriting and the skilled penmanship of his master at the top of the page. If William penned his 1754 "A Wise man avoids," at the age of thirteen or fourteen (see below), he would have been seven or eight years old when he penned "Quiet minds."

There are some two dozen pieces in the collection similar to William's early effort, and none is later than 1757. All of them have decorative elements extraneous to the words: many of these, as in William's case, represent birds. These "strikings" and "flourishes," as they were called, display a virtuosity far in excess of any then available to young William, and were undoubtedly penned by the master himself. They seem to indicate a graceful way for the master to add elegance and luster to a fairly elementary contribution.

Figure 1.
Quiet minds commonly enjoy much Content. William Palfrey, June 17, 1748.



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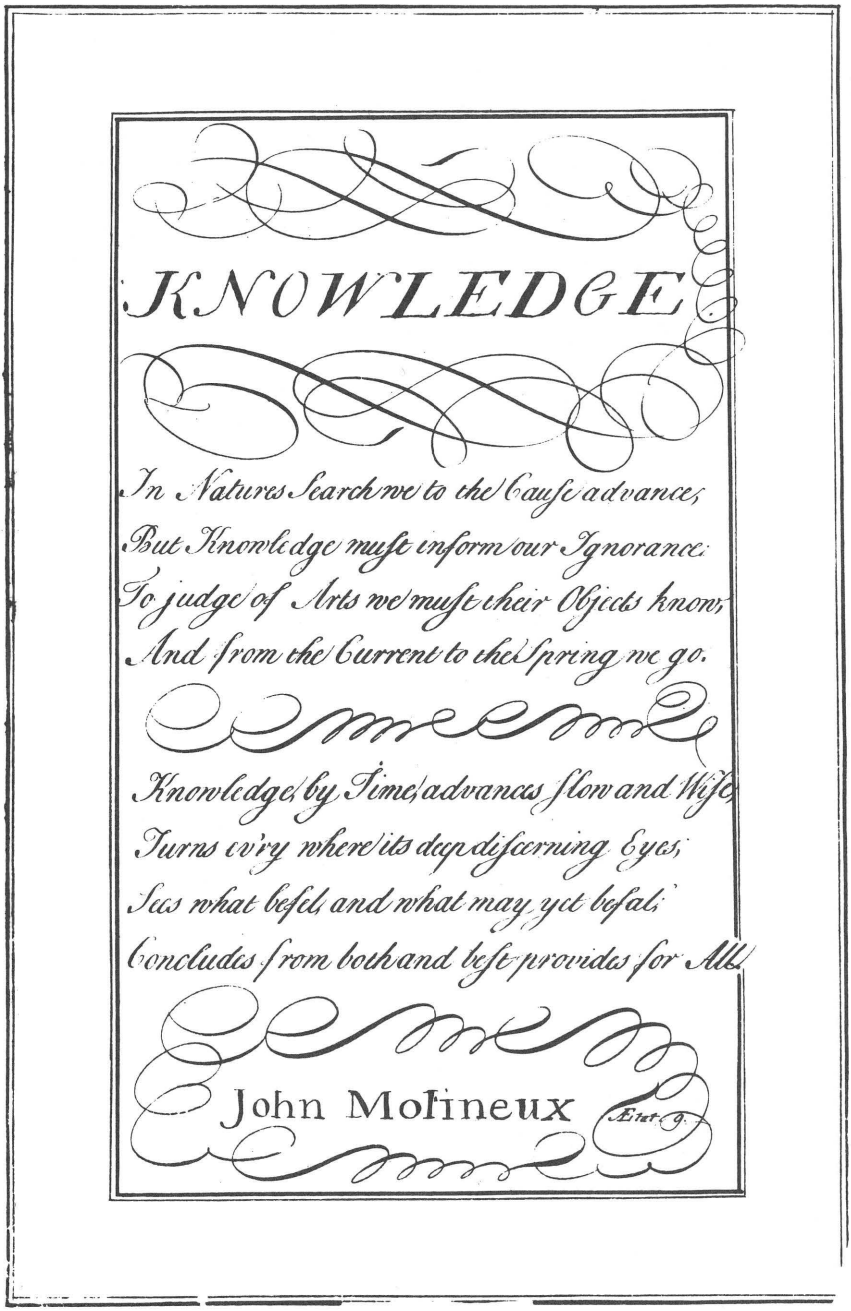
II: Paragraph or Poem. [Ages 9-10].

Figure 2. "Knowledge." The next progression was for the learner to write an entire text, usually a poem, in round hand. John Molineux, aged nine in 1763, is our example: he was one of the two authors of the round-hand only group of pieces to reveal his age. The other author was eleven. The title of his "Knowledge" and his signature are in red. His uneasy signature, in a script known as "roman print," is an example of a foray into a second script that did not entail genuinely mastering it. So, too, is his title in "italic print."
We also gain, from John's work, a glimpse of the order of composition. It is clear that the words were penned before the enclosing lines were inked in. We can see, in John's text, the logic behind this sequence: on the bottom right-hand side, his words have overflowed his margin. If he had inked in the line first, he would have been in trouble. As it is, he simply left a gap, and continued his ruling below the words.

Figure 2.
Knowledge. John Molineux, [1763], age 9 [South Writing School].



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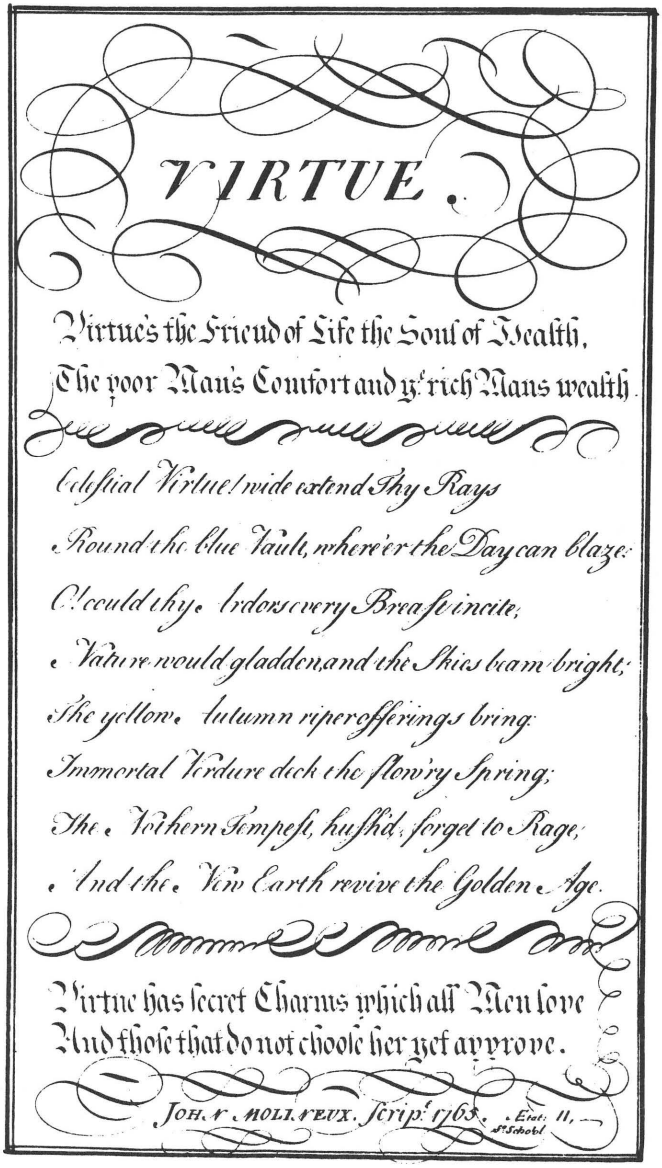
Second Script: Gothic I (German Text). [Ages 11-12]. Documented median age for 21 two-script pieces: 12. Age range: 10-15.

Figure 3. "Virtue." The next stage was to add another script. About fifty pieces in the collection are written in two scripts, and they range in date from 1753 to 1782. Of these, twenty-one reveal the age of their authors: a span from ten to fifteen years old, with a median age of twelve. In virtually every case, the new script is the gothic script named "German text." John Molineux is again our example. His production at the age of eleven, in 1765, on the topic of "Virtue," clearly displays the new gothic script (penned in red ink) that he has added to his repertoire. Note that his signature is now in a capitalized italic (italic print).

Figure 3.
Virtue. John Molineux, 1765, age 11, South Writing School.



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Third Script: Roman Print or Italic Print [Age 13]. Documented median age for this piece from 5 pieces out of 5: 13. Age range: 12-14.

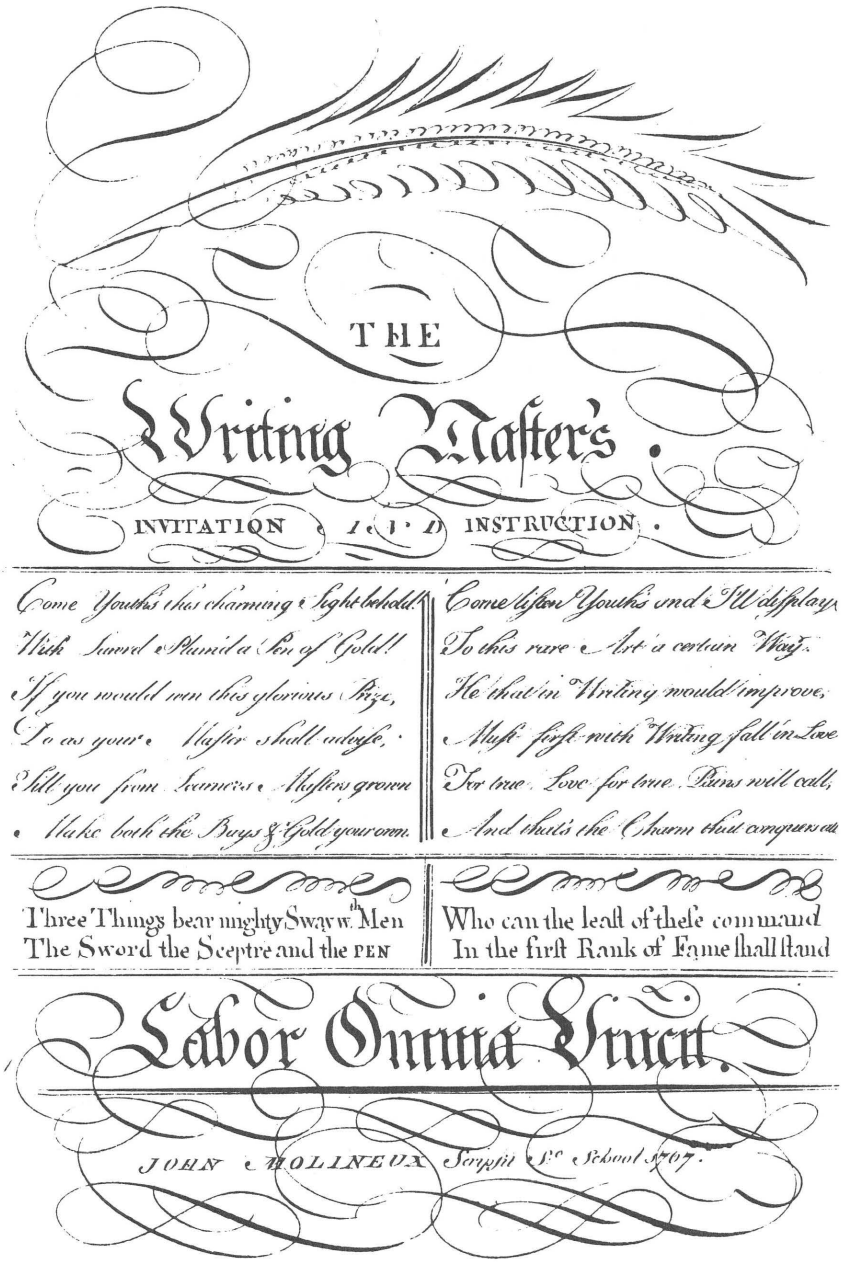
Figure 4. "The Writing Master's Invitation." The next step was to add yet another script. At the age of thirteen, John penned a classic piece, "The Writing Master's Invitation and Instruction." His new script, again penned in red, is the roman print that he had essayed at the age of nine as a signature. His round hand is now smaller and more mature. Here his signature is in italic, as in the previous piece.

Despite the showy quality of "The Writing Master's Invitation," it was less demanding, technically, than it appears at first sight. The only gothic letters are in the wording of the title and the "Labor Omnia Vincit" ("Work conquers all"); otherwise the piece is in round hand or a fairly straightforward roman. As noted earlier, there are five examples of this in the collection. Of these, four are from John Molineux's school, the South Writing School, and the fifth from the North. In three of the four South School examples, the decorative element at the top of the page is the beautifully executed quill pen seen on John's manuscript. If this is not the work of Abiah Holbrook Jr., but of John himself — and indeed, there are some telltale smudges on the strikings at the bottom of the page — it nonetheless shows the influence of a particular school and schoolmaster.

Another three-script piece (although it could also be performed in two) was the popular "Reputation and the Credit of the Merchant." The bulk of its text was confined to two squashed octagonals, set one above the other, into which the students placed the words. Its popularity may have stemmed in part from these geometric shapes. It must have been useful practice for the showcase pieces like "A Wise man avoids," where the wording had to be fitted into numerous geometric shapes.

Fourth Script: Italic Print or Roman Print [Age 13].

Figure 4.
The Writing Master's Invitation and Instruction. John Molineux, [age 13], 1767, South Writing School.



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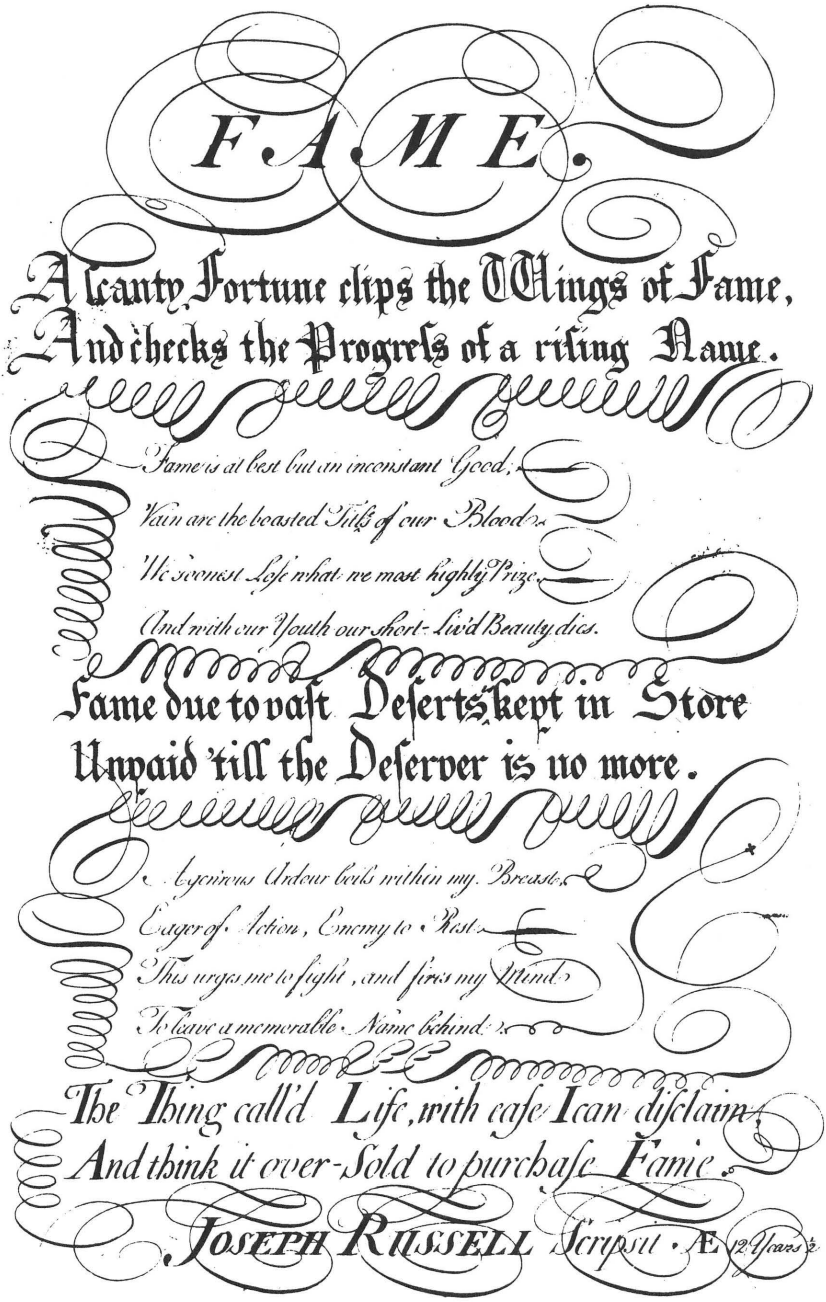
Fifth Script: Gothic II (Old English Print). [Ages 13-14]. Documented median age for this piece from 4 pieces out of 7: 13 1/2. Age range: 12 1/2-15.

Figure 5. "Fame." The piece reproduced here, an undated work penned by Joseph Russell at the age of twelve and a half, was probably executed in the late 1750s or early 1760s: the decoration looks a little fussy, and there is no red ink. (By giving his age with such precision, Joseph may have been pointing out to his audience that he was unusually young to have produced such a piece.) His contribution is chosen for its very clear presentation of the two kinds of gothic, which to the uninformed eye could pass as the same script. The easiest way to distinguish them is to look at the lower case *a*. The first gothic learned, in the center of the page, is the German text used by John Molineux in his "Virtue": it has a "manuscript" *a*. The second gothic script, old English print at the top of the page, has a lowercase *a* that looks like a modern printed *a*. The capital *F*'s in "A scanty Fortune clips the Wings of Fame" (the top line), are also noticeably more elaborate than the *F* in "Fame due to vast Deserts ..." (the middle line). (The fact that the letters in old English print are formed almost entirely by successive straight penstrokes presumably makes it a more difficult script to master than the curved strokes of German text.)

The piece titled "Fame" was ideally suited for exhibiting four scripts, although it presupposed mastery of five. All of the seven examples of "Fame" in the collection are identical in their texts. All have four scripts, but these are not identical. The format of the piece is the same: the five sentences follow an *a, b, c, b, d* format, with the second and fourth maxims always penned in round hand. The others are like a Chinese menu: you have to choose one of the two gothic scripts from menu A for the first sentence; then you may take any two from menu B: a roman, an italic, or the other gothic. Joseph's sentences run, from the top of the page: gothic II (old English print), round hand, gothic I (German text), round hand, italic.

Figure 5.
Fame. Joseph Russell, age 12 1/2.



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Fifth Script and Over. [Ages 13-16]. Documented median age for this piece from 8 pieces out of 14: 13 1/2. Age range: 12-16.

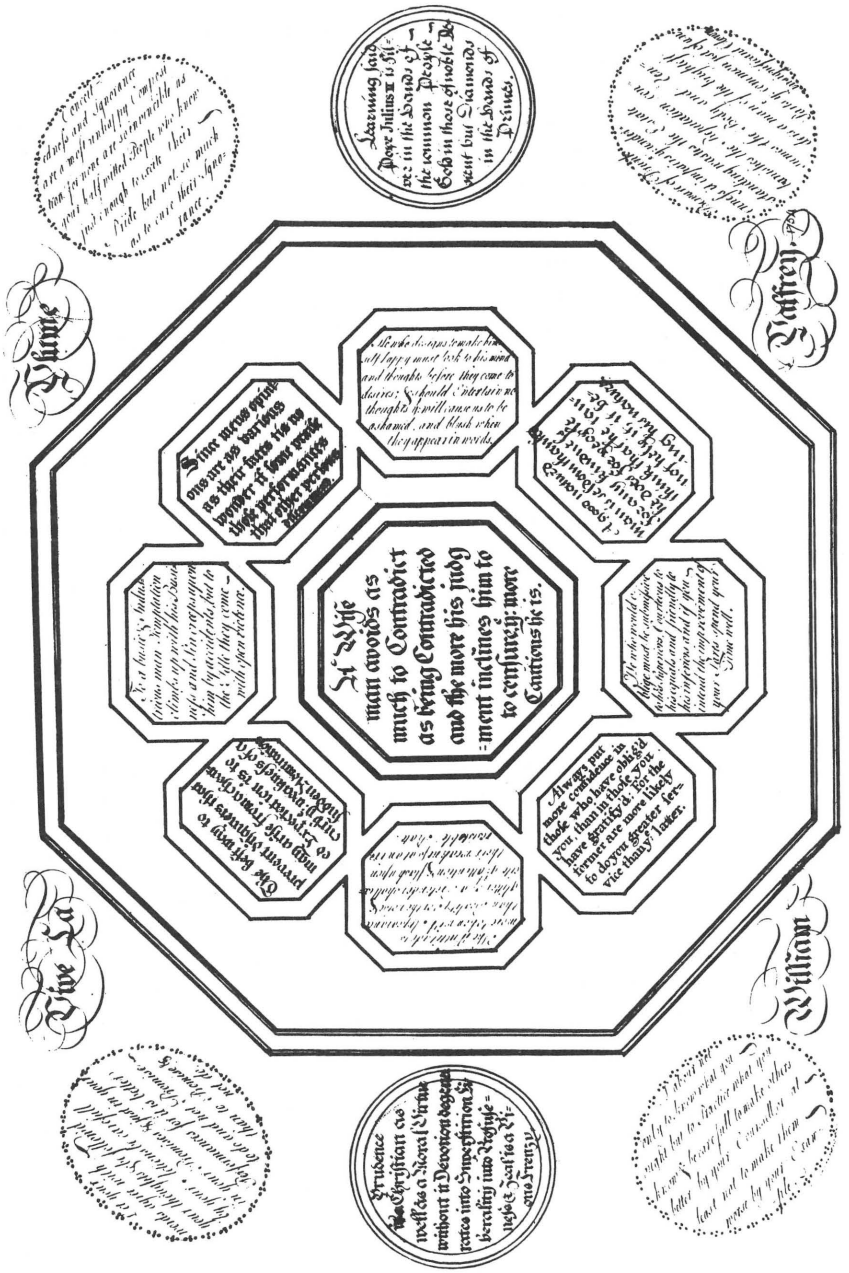
Figure 6. "A Wise man avoids..." Shown here is the classic showpiece for five scripts or more, the octagonal "A Wise man avoids." (It is one of the pieces that have no predecessor in *The Universal Penman.*) William Palfrey was probably thirteen or fourteen years old when he penned this masterly version in 1754. By any standards, it is a dazzling effort.

The basic structure of "A Wise man avoids as much to Contradict as being Contradicted" (the sentiment in its central octagon) is similar in all its fourteen manifestations in the collection. The "showy" scripts are likely to face each other, in pairs, across the central octagon. The most usual format is to have, therefore, four different scripts, twice each, in the surrounding octagons, while the center octagon exhibits the fifth script, the easier gothic. William's scripts, circling his German text in the central octagon, from "noon," clockwise, are: round hand, gothic II (old English print), Italian, square text, round hand, roman print, Italian, gothic I (German text).

As the octagonal design leaves a sizable space on each side of the page, it provides additional opportunities to show off. Some students drew giant alphabetical letters; a few were like John Fenno, who drew birds on each side of his 1767 piece, thereby producing a design so full of swirling movement that he actually spoiled it. William Palfrey was content with sober circles and ovals, enclosing yet more scripts.

"A Wise man avoids" affords us a further opportunity of evaluating the constancy of the curriculum over the thirty-four years covered by collection. The example penned by William in 1754 is the earliest of the fourteen. The thirteen others are dated between 1763 and 1772. Each of the writing schools is represented — the Queen Street School once, the North twice, and the South nine times. (Two of the manuscripts do not reveal their school affiliation.) Of the eight manuscripts that include the age of their author, the median age is thirteen and a half, with the range from twelve years old to sixteen. The former piece is one executed by Samuel Fenno, who was as precociously gifted as his brother John. The latter is John Fenno's second attempt, dated 1768 — in a contribution toned down from his exuberant and overdone performance of the year before.

Figure 6.
A Wise man avoids . . . William Palfrey, 1754.



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Bookkeeping This last figure reveals something of what the boys might use their calligraphy for, once they left school.

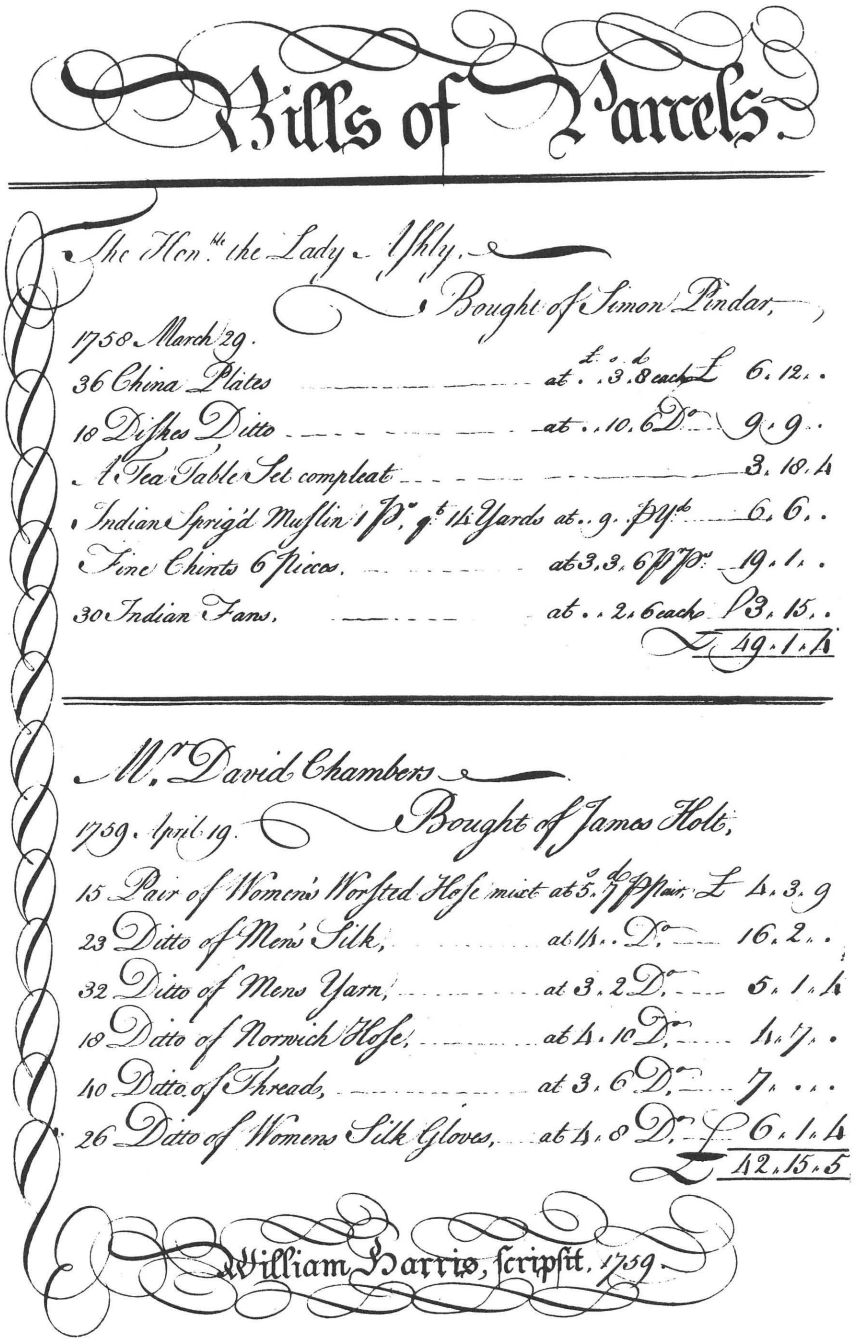
Figure 7. "Bills of Parcels" The two scripts are round hand, for the text and figures, while the decorative title is in the simpler of the gothic scripts. As we have seen, boys were using these two scripts as early as the age of ten and as late as fifteen. Mastering round hand and the introductory gothic may have been the minimum standard which a boy had to reach in order to be considered trained for the world of work.

Summary The median ages for each script, then, as documented in detail above, run as follows: round hand (paragraph/poem): age ten (data from only two boys); gothic I (German text): age twelve; roman print: age thirteen; gothic II (old English print): age thirteen and a half; five scripts and over placed in geometrical shapes: age thirteen and a half. This evidence supports the hypothesis that the curriculum consisted of a series of scripts that students mastered in succession. Every student would have begun a new script, of course, by repeatedly penning the individual letters of that alphabet — a stage too elementary ever to appear in the exhibition pieces.

While the wide age range even for a single piece shows that boys progressed according to their skill, not their age, it is nonetheless possible to reconstruct the tempo of the writing school curriculum. The first script a student would learn, at the age of seven, was round hand; the most elementary level (after individual letters) was a sentence copied six times (figure 1). By the age of nine or ten, the student would be skilled enough to write poems or paragraphs in round hand, perhaps using (but not really mastering) italic or roman print for his title or signature (figure 2). At the age of eleven or twelve, he would tackle his second script, the first and simpler of two gothic scripts, German text (figure 3). Growth in skill seems to have accelerated now, for some boys. The next year the student would add a third (and then fourth) script, roman print (figure 4) and italic print. If he had the ability, at the age of thirteen or fourteen he would master a fifth script, the more difficult gothic known as old English print (figure 5). Not too long thereafter, by now an accomplished penman, he would add other scripts, up to perhaps eight. By this time, his control over spacing his text was so secure that he was able to write in small geometric spaces (figure 6).

The pieces signed by John Fenno support this curricular sequence.

Figure 7.
Bills of Parcels. William Harris, 1759.



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John first penned "Painting" (like "Virtue," a two-script piece) at the age of twelve; "The Writing Master's Invitation," also at twelve; "How to get Riches" in five scripts at fourteen; "Fame" (using the second gothic script, old English print) at fifteen, and "A Wise man avoids" at fifteen.

We can also assume that by the time a given learner penned an exhibition piece (other than the single sentence of figure 1), he would have progressed in his mastery of a script well beyond the level of mere copying. Models such as those in *The Universal Penman,* therefore, were as useful for their exhibition of a text as for a script.

Job-Related Training Whether, in fact, a training in the more fanciful scripts was the most practical pedagogical approach in a vocational school is open to question: speed was being sacrificed to presentation. Yet speed would be highly valued on a job. Later writers on penmanship would castigate the proponents of the "old system" for ignoring this reality. There were three qualities desirable in writing, claimed B.F. Foster in 1835: legibility, expedition, and beauty. However, "the pupil, who is taught by the old system, attains *legibility* to perfection, while the writing is executed slowly — *beauty* of character, to a surprising degree — and of EXPEDITION, not even the name." Foster attributed this to the technique of the old system, which required the student to write with his fingers alone, resting his arm on the paper to do so, then lifting and repositioning it for the next portion of his writing. Later, when the former student "enters the counting-house, he is told that it will never answer to write so slow. He then, usually, sacrifices all to expedition, and, nine times out of ten, his writing degenerates into a mere scrawl." This happened, according to Foster, not only to those who were not particularly skilled penmen, but also to those whose writing was "when they finished their education, the admiration of all" (Foster, 1835, pp.39-42).

The content of the Houghton Library penmanship collection as a whole stands in marked contrast, in its exclusion of job-related pieces, to the content of George Bickham's *Universal Penman,* which had provided models for so many pieces in the collection. Bickham had devoted almost half his pages to practical examples of bookkeeping and correspondence. The fact that there are only two pieces in the entire Boston collection that portray accounts (figure 7 and one other) surely reflects a strong statement by the Boston writing masters in favor of beauty and legibility over mere utility.

The Curriculum: Content All cultures monitor the content

of materials designed to instruct children. Texts for the teaching of literacy have been especially subject to scrutiny. Contemporary scholars have analyzed the messages conveyed to children by texts used for reading instruction in colonial America (e.g. Smith, 1968), but texts used in writing instruction have not received comparable attention. Now, however, the extensive Houghton Library penmanship collection allows us to look at the content of the models that children were required to copy.

The assumption made throughout this essay has been that the pieces that appear in the Houghton Library collection were copies of a model — rather than original compositions written by the boys themselves. (The one incontrovertible exception, Thomas Cartwright's 1764 contribution, is discussed below.) In the case of those many instances where we find multiple exemplars of the same text, there can be no doubt that they were copies. This is particularly striking when a particular piece was penned in different schools at different decades.

There are, it is true, a large number of pieces which appear only once and which have no counterpart in *The Universal Penman.* It is at least conceivable that some of these were the creations of the boys themselves. Nonetheless, given that the accepted pedagogy for imparting penmanship was to have the student copy a model, it seems unlikely. It is assumed in this essay, then, that the boys who signed their names to these pieces were acknowledging their responsibility for the penmanship (except for certain embellishments, as noted earlier), but were not laying claims to the authorship of the content.

The collection, therefore, has to be approached with some care. First, the date at which a piece was penned is rarely the date at which the original of the text was composed. In teaching reading, textbooks were used over a remarkably long span of time: the *New England Primer,* first published at the end of the seventeenth century, was reissued over the entire span of the eighteenth century. The same situation prevailed in penmanship instruction: the same models were assigned to students repeatedly over the decades. One piece in the collection, "Reputation and the Credit of the Merchant," appears seven times at intervals from 1757 to 1782. It had previously appeared in George Bickham's *Universal Penman* in 1743 (Bickham, 1954, p. 137). As noted earlier, texts in Bickham's book account for sixty-four per cent of all the pieces in the Houghton Library collection, if we exclude the one-sentence pieces. In fact, a Bickham predecessor can generally be assumed for the pieces discussed below, unless noted otherwise. Many texts, in short, were no doubt assigned to

students because the master had a copy of Bickham's book.

Moreover, the writing master's selection of a particular model for a student was dictated by several considerations other than those of content. Individual pieces, as we have seen, were chosen because they traditionally exhibited a given number of scripts, and so were only useful for pupils at a certain stage of their handwriting education. Moreover, a one-sentence piece may have provided practice on a particular letter. "Commendation commonly animates the ingenious," for example, looks as if it is good practice for the letters *c, m* and *n*. Just as it would be unwise to infer an American love for animals from the typist's sentence "the quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog," so, too, inferences based on the content of the penmanship collection must be made with some caution.[5]

Nonetheless, the material selected — whatever its antiquity, and whatever the pedagogical considerations — was considered suitable fare for the young at the moment in time when it was assigned to a student by a writing master. It is, therefore, important to examine the thrust of the messages being aimed at the young writers through the texts they were copying. From this, we can obtain some important clues on the world view of the second half of the eighteenth century.

The one hundred and six texts penned on the one hundred and eighty-eight manuscripts of the Houghton Library collection were grouped into broad categories according to their content — as judged from their titles, or, in the absence of a title, the general tenor of the piece. Ten categories emerged.

1. *Religion.* Those pieces that either had the word "religion" in their title, or devoted the major portion of the piece to some kind of religious statement, fell into this category.

2. *Moral or Ethical.* This rather general category included any material that seemed either to hold up a value to the writer/reader (like "Virtue") or to prescribe a course of conduct that was relevant to character formation. The pieces reproduced in figures 1, 3, 5, and 6 all fall into this category.

3. *Business /Commerce /Money.* This category included all those pieces where the emphasis was on trade or making money. ("Sound not a trumpet in your own commendation" was therefore categorized as *"Moral"*, but "Money commands many Enjoyments" was classified as *"Business"*).

4. *Political.* This was a category for any pieces that focused on

rulers or governors and the ruled or governed.

5. *Aesthetic.* A fifth homogeneous group encompassed pieces that related to a work of art, whether to its creation or to the finished product. Pieces on sculpture and music came under this rubric.

6. *Penmanship / Writing.* A fair number of pieces specifically referred to the art of teaching or learning handwriting (e.g. figure 4).

7. *Education.* Besides those pieces that included the word "education" in their title, works that addressed parents were categorized as educational.

8. *Intellectual.* This category included pieces that focused on the products of education (rather than on the process, as in the preceding category), such as knowledge itself (figure 2).

9. *Bookkeeping.* The two pieces in this category were samples of the kind of work that boys would be doing once they had left school (figure 7).

10. *Other.* Two pieces seemed to fall into none of the other categories.

The numbers and percentages of pieces that fall within each content category are as follows:

Table 2.
Number and Percentage of Manuscripts in Each Content Category

	Number	Percentage (rounded)	Examples
Moral/Ethical	80	43	figures 1, 3, 5, 6
Business/Commerce	28	15	
Aesthetic	17	9	
Penmanship/Writing	17	9	figure 4
Political	14	7	
Intellectual	12	6	figure 2
Religion	9	5	
Education	7	4	
Bookkeeping	2	1	figure 7
Other	2	1	
Totals	188	100	

While each category is discussed in greater detail below, the fact that strikes one immediately is the small proportion of religious content.

This is not to suggest that there is no underlying assumption of religion: the word "God" turns up now and again within a piece. Nonetheless, the general secularity of the content should give pause to those who would judge the mindset of the later eighteenth century largely from the contents of the *New England Primer.*

An analysis of the content of the single-sentence one-script pieces, of which there are twenty-five, is a useful point of departure. In the first place, it was easy to decide upon the category to which one lone sentence should be allocated. Second, as these pieces are among the earliest in the collection, they provided evidence on content that was considered appropriate in the 1750s. As is the case with the collection overall, the moral category contains the largest number of pieces (17 pieces or 68%), while the religious category contains a somewhat larger proportion (three pieces or 12%) than does the collection as a whole. Business (money) receives as much attention as religion (three pieces), and there is one piece each classified under education and penmanship.

The high proportion of moral content is partly a function of form: the sentences (copied four to six times) either offer a crisp maxim in the declarative mode, or else make a pronouncement in the imperative form. The net result, if one reads them one after another, is a set of instructions issued to the young for their comportment. The general tenor may be summarized as follows: Be extremely careful in choosing your friends. Conduct yourself modestly, and do not get an inflated opinion of yourself if honors should come your way. You may work for rewards such as praise or money (other, that is, than for the joy of work itself). Money is useful. Education will improve you. Honor God.

A sampling of the sentences that give rise to this summary runs like this: "You may learn to know men by their company." "Better to be alone than in bad company." "Flattering friends are worse than enemies." "Nothing more recommends a Youth than Modesty." "Sound not a trumpet in your own commendation." "The hope of reward sweetens Labour." "Commendation commonly animates the ingenious." "Money commands many enjoyments." "Education is that which makes the man." "Admire, adore and praise, the God that guides thy ways."

The next point worthy of note is the societal aspect of the texts. Virtually all of them address someone who is involved with other people, in work or at leisure, in a social activity. These are not maxims aimed at the spiritual strivings of the lonely soul. If they are not quite tips on how to make friends and influence people (that would be

going too far), they are certainly guidelines for functioning smoothly and successfully in the real world. The single sentence piece illustrated here, William Palfrey's "Quiet minds commonly enjoy much Content" (figure 1) is therefore not particularly typical of the rest. The most ethical of the instructions — in the sense that it mentions the subjects of good and evil — is "Lamentation and mourning are the companions of vice." In sum, these sentences tell the writer how to get ahead without also getting in trouble.

Many of the same themes appear in the collection as a whole. They are, it will be argued, the embodiment of an eighteenth century rationalism that would find its full voice in the precepts of the Enlightenment.

Religion Religion, in the nine manuscripts in this category, appears not so much as a belief in an omnipotent God as an exhortation to love thy neighbor, and as a useful instrument for social control. The most "religious" texts are the three one-sentence pieces written in the 1750s, discussed above. There are also two elaborate showcase pieces which feature a central octagon proclaiming "All praise honor glory and adoration." Most of the other examples, however, treat religion much as other texts treat virtue. Samuel Hill, in an undated piece titled "Religion," declares that "The commands of Heaven ... are nothing else but Exhortations to Love and directions for social Happiness." Stephen Greenleaf hails religion blandly as "gentle Piety." William Irvett, in 1751, urges that homage be paid to "pure Religion ... That she may keep thy Soul from harm secure, and turn thy Footsteps from the Harlots door." The ninth and last manuscript appears to be one of the few in the collection that identifies religious belief in Boston, supposedly the seat of Puritanism, as specifically Christian: it is a 1764 piece by John Fenno, titled "The Nativity of Christ."

Moral/Ethical It is significant that the eighty pieces devoted to ethical topics, such as John Molineux's "Virtue" (figure 3), are mostly devoid of any religious references. The emphasis in the very large number of texts that were classified as moral is on man's social relationships.

The company one keeps continues to be important. Friendship, for instance, is a key concept. Five pieces in the collection relate to friendship; three of them ("A friend should always like a friend indite") are identical. William Allen, in 1748, wrote,

Tell me ye knowing and discerning Few

Where I may find a Friend who's firm and true
Who dares stand by me when in deep distress,
And then his love and Friendship most express.

The worldliness embedded in the texts is remarkable. Ambition is encouraged, but in an ambivalent way. Eight identical texts are devoted to "Fame" (figure 5). The first stanza suggests that having an inadequate supply of money hinders one from becoming well known ("A scanty Fortune clips the Wings of Fame"). The second decries fame as an "inconstant Good." The last stanza, however, claims that one's life is a small price to pay for it. This popular text seems to be an agglomeration of maxims on fame, and was no doubt often chosen because of its capacity to exhibit four kinds of script. Nonetheless, it reveals a fascination with a worldly desire for a reputation.

Even in the midst of worldly success, however, pride and ostentation are still to be eschewed. One elaborate piece presents a central octagon surrounded by eight ovals; in the central place of honor is inscribed, "Beware of vain glory, for an Accomplish'd man conceals vulgar advantages, as a Modest Woman hides her Beauty under a negligent Dress." Another, simpler, piece, titled "Pride," characterizes pride as the worst of "all the Causes which conspire to blind."

The quality promoted most often, however, is not self-depreciation but prudence. The moderating tendencies of religion are noted in one of the octagons in the collection's most popular piece, "A Wise man avoids" (figure 6). "Prudence is a Christian as well as a Moral Virtue," we are informed. Without it, "Devotion degenerates into Superstition Liberality into Profuseness & Zeal is a pious Frenzy." Excess is, in short, frowned upon. "The Golden Mean" is the title of two pieces (written in 1751 and 1769). A middle road of caution is best: "A Wise man avoids as much to Contradict as being Contradicted and the more his judgment inclines him to censure, ye [the] more Cautious he is" (figure 6).

Other pieces focus on what people say. Truthfulness is a virtue. William Palfrey, in his 1751 piece not reproduced here, called truth "the Band of Union, and the Basis of Human Happiness. Without this Virtue there's no Relyance upon Language ... if Perfidious thou at once be found / Thy words tho' true, like to Untruth will sound." Similarly, John Vinal in 1753 exhorts us, in a piece called "Swearing," "Don't bind yourself to what you cannot do."

Business/Commerce/Money Several of the twenty-eight pieces in this category straddle the dividing line between morality

and business. Five pieces are titled "Human Prudence"; two of these, significantly, are subtitled "or, How to get Riches." The first precept runs, "In things of moment on thy self depend." The advice is on the lines of Thomas Stanley's 1769 piece, penned at the Queen Street School, which, under the title "How to get Riches," informs us that "The Art of growing Rich consists very much in Thrift." At the same school, William Read Miller wrote in 1774 that "it is imprudent to put Man's whole Fortune at the Hazard of any one Prospect."

Some of the maxims fall under our modern-day notion of business ethics. Over and above the notion that you will regret it if you don't work hard ("Idleness brings men to want," wrote Benjamin Hurd in 1751) is a set of rules on how to behave in a business context. "Reputation and the Credit of the Merchant," a Bickham piece that has seven exemplars in the collection, is one instance.

> *Good name in Man or Woman,*
> *Is the immediate Jewel of our Souls.*
> *Who steals my Purse steals Trash...*
> *But he that filches from me my Good Name,*
>
> *...makes me Poor indeed.*

The title makes it clear that it is not one's reputation in general, but a business relationship, that is the focus of interest here.

The second part of the text is even more explicit on the theme of the extreme importance of sustaining confidence in oneself in the business world. It reiterates the importance of truthfulness, or at least, of monitoring what one says:

> *How careful ought a Man to be in his Language of a Merchant. It may possibly be in the Power of a very shallow Creature to lay the Ruins of the best Family in the most opulent City; and the more so the more highly the Merchant deserves of his Country: that is to say, the further he places his Wealth out of his hands, to draw home that of another Climate.*

In other words, the bigger the importer/exporter you are, the more careful you have to be of your reputation. (This, incidentally, was no idle advice in an era when so much business, both domestic and international, was conducted on credit.)

Other pieces related to business have no moral content at all. Instead, they praise commerce. "Merchants of great Benefit to the Publick" is the title of Andrew Cunningham's manuscript, penned at the South Writing School in 1774. Merchants, according to Andrew's

pen, promote international understanding and prosperity. "They knit Mankind together in a mutual Intercourse of good Offices, distribute the Gifts of Nature, find Work for the Poor, add Wealth to the Rich & Magnificence to the Great." British merchants are specifically mentioned for their foreign trade: "They vend our Goods and bring us Riches too."

A text titled "How to get Riches, Humbly Inscrib'd to the British Nation," takes this theme a step further and attributes a civilizing influence to commerce. It is a popular piece that appears no fewer than ten times, perhaps partly because it allowed a none-too-experienced writer to venture into two new scripts for only a few words (gothic for "How to get Riches" and "British Nation"; italic for "Humbly inscrib'd"). The piece exhudes what, in another context, we would term imperialism.

> *Thro' various climes & to each distant Pole*
> *In happy Tides let active Commerce rowl [sic]...*
> *Let Britain's Ships export an Annual Fleece*
> *Richer than Argos brought to ancient Greece*
> *Returning Lad'n with the Shining Stores*
> *Which lye profuse on either India's Shores.*
>
> *...In Worlds unknown to plant Britannia's pow'r*
> *Nations yet wild by precepts to reclaim*
> *And teach 'em Arms, & Arts in Britain's name.*

Political The fourteen political pieces focus heavily on the topic of liberty. Apart from one fleeting reference to "princely order," only two pieces mention royalty, and both were penned in the 1750s. One, dated 1757, mentions the duty of the subject ("Kings are to command and subjects to obey"). The other, written by Peter Roberts in 1755, talks about the British throne and the kings "youthful George, and lawrel'd William." In contrast, ten of the other political pieces include the word "liberty" in their titles and/or opening lines, and emphasize that the duty of government is to protect the governed. Liberty is hailed as a "goddess," and a much penned sentiment is that "The Love of Liberty with Life is giv'n." Liberty is directly linked to Britain in a piece which appears in 1757 and again in 1767, titled "On the British Nation": after apostrophizing Liberty as a goddess, it continues, "From British Laws our choicest Blessings come." These sentiments, all to be found in Bickham's *Universal Penman* of 1743, convey the message that ordinary citizens on both sides of the Atlantic were believed to have, by the 1740s, what would later be termed "unalienable Rights."

One piece is certainly appropriate for its own decade. In 1774, James Thwing of the Queen Street School, aged eleven, in a piece subtitled "Considerations on the destructive Spirit of Arbitrary Power" proclaims that the good of the governed is the sole end of government, and that when the interests of a people are not pursued, then "we know what Opinion the people will have of their Governors." (There is no model for this in Bickham's book.) Whatever their source, these sentiments are certainly apt for the revolutionary era.

Aesthetic The seventeen pieces categorized as "Aesthetic" involve eight on painting, five on sculpture (all of them titled "The Grecian Carver"), and four on music. (All the texts can be found in *The Universal Penman.*) Music is credited (by Thomas Cartwright, in 1766) with a soothing effect: it alone "can bind / The wandering sense & calm the troubled mind." The general approach of these pieces, however, is that man has become more skillful at the arts over time. A piece titled "Painting," executed seven times in the collection from 1764 on, gives us an idea of the content. (John Molineux was one of those who penned it, at the age of thirteen.) It was a useful two-script piece which in a sense portrays the triumph of form over content: even to an adult with a knowledge of European art, it is barely intelligible. It can have made no sense at all to a thirteen-year-old. John Leach penned the following, undated, version:

Painting

In Ancient Times, when Painting first began,
A Pen, or Chalk, thus imitated Man.
Long time the Sister Arts in Iron Sleep,
A heavy Sabbath did supinely keep:
At length in Raphal's [sic] age at once they rise,
Stretch all their Limbs, & open all their Eyes.
Thence rose the Roman & the Lombard line,
One Colour'd best, and one did best Design.
Raphael's, like Homer's, was the nobler Part,
But Titan's [sic] Painting look'd like Virgil's Art.
By slow Degrees the Painting Art advanc'd,
As Man grew polish'd Picture was inhanc'd.

Penmanship/Writing Seventeen pieces are on penmanship or writing. (They might have been categorized as educational, but for the fact that they emphasize the art of writing.) Their general tenor is aptly summarized by the sole single-sentence representative in

this category: Benjamin Holmes' 1751 "Command your hand by care and pains."

Five of the pieces are "The Writing Master's Invitation and Instruction" (figure 4). This paean in praise of the art of writing was a public relations piece aimed at glorifying the writing master's profession. "Who can the least of these [the sword, sceptre or pen] command, / In the first Rank of Fame shall stand" was a self-serving pronouncement in a profession that certainly took itself seriously. The poem does strike one true note on the importance of motivation: "He that in Writing would improve, / Must first with Writing fall in Love. / For true Love for true Pains will call..."

Other pieces praise the invention of writing for its ability to transcend both space and time. As Richard Checkley put it, in his 1773 North Writing School piece titled "On the Art of Writing," thanks to the invention of writing, "With the hard Laws of distance we dispense." One piece, however, (by James Greaton, undated), looks at penmanship from the point of view of the learner, and rather disarmingly renounces perfection. Credit is to be given to the writer for effort:

> *Whoever thinks a faultless piece to see*
> *Thinks what ne'er was, nor is, nor e'er shall be.*
> *In ev'ry work regard the witers [sic] End*
> *Since none can compass more than they intend.*
> *And if the means be just, the conduct true,*
> *Applause in spight of trivial faults is due.*

(Perhaps predictably, this is not a text found in *The Universal Penman.* None of the writing masters assembled there would have admitted to any flaws in their productions at all.)

Intellectual Twelve pieces were classified under the heading "intellectual." To be well-informed is good for the character. Peter Roberts informs us in his 1755 manuscript that "Learning makes a good Man better" and that it is the "temperance of Youth." Another unsigned piece calls it an "ornament to Youth." Knowledge is "a golden key," claimed Benjamin Hurd in 1751. Other texts, with titles like "Criticism," "Wit," and "Study," seem to put a value on intellectual sophistication. A popular piece which appears three times in the collection promotes the notion that, in learning at least, moderation is not a desideratum. Shallow information is hazardous. "A little learning is a dangerous thing. / Drink deep or taste not the Pierian Spring," wrote Joseph Deoster in 1757.

Two pieces named "Knowledge," both to be dated 1763, promote the message that mankind is making steady progress in scientific understanding. "In Nature's Search we to the Cause advance," and "Knowledge, by Time, advances slow and Wise," wrote John Molineux at the age of nine (figure 2). Knowledge can guide us in making decisions by looking to the past and the future: it "Sees what befel, and what may yet befal, / Concludes from both and best provides for All." It enables us, in short, to control our own destinies.

Education The seven educational pieces are of particular interest. Their overall impact is that parents must begin, in education, as they mean to go on. Education means instilling good habits, while bad habits, once formed, are hard to eradicate. They echo a 1751 piece by William Millar (included in the "Moral" category), which pointed out that "Ill Custom by Degrees to Habits rise." In a 1751 manuscript called "Education," we are told that "All Youth, set right at first, with Ease go on." Children are pliable, according to William Hish in 1766: they are like "tender oziers" (willow branches) or "softened wax"; and

> *'Tis Education forms the tender mind.*
> *Just as the Twig is bent, the Trees inclin'd.*

Some other pieces address the costs of a private education. While these Boston boys were receiving their education at the town's expense, this was not the case generally in writing schools, and this was reflected in one poem. As Elias Thomas wrote (undated):

> *Next unto God, dear Parents I address*
> *Myself to you, in humble Thankfulness*
> *For all your Care and Charge on me bestow'd*
> *The means of Learning unto me allow'd:*
> *Go on I pray, and let me still presue [sic]*
> *The Golden Arts the Vulgar never knew.*

(This was a poem that Anna Green Winslow, whose family did indeed have to pay for her instruction, copied at the South Writing School in 1771. She confided to her diary at one point that she had promised to be *"very good all day."* One of her efforts in that direction was to transcribe this poem from her school copybook into her diary [Earle, 1970, p. 47]).

Finally, there is a poem which combines a depreciation of the writer's efforts with a pitch for continued parental financial support. Houghton Perkins penned this undated commentary on his own efforts. (Because his piece is adorned with birds instead of ruled lines,

it was probably executed in the 1750s.)

These Honour'd Parents are but small Effects
Of your true Love and manifold Respects:
These few unpolish'd Lines cannot express,
The Thousandth part of my due Thankfulness
For your last Favours: Yet if these you grace
With Acceptation, I in Writing's Race
Shall run more swift by that Encouragement,
And in due time, some nobler Piece present.

Out of all the one hundred and six texts in the Houghton Library collection, there is only one that was unarguably a contemporary composition, composed for a particular occasion. It is the most engaging piece in the entire collection. Its content (complete with a wonderful double-entendre in its closing words) suggests, to me at least, that it is the creation of the boy who signed it. Thomas Cartwright penned this in the North Writing School at the age of thirteen, dating it June 1764 — the end of the school year, when the town visitors came for their annual visitation.

To the much Honoured VISITORS of
the FREE-SCHOOLS.
With Joy our Eyes do meet the Dawn,
That ushers in th'auspicious Day,
When You, the Encouragers of the Pen,
The annual Visit stoop to pay.
Accept our humble Offerings, Sirs!
Accept it once more we entreat,
Your pupils, This, fresh Life shall give
And Joy diffuse through every Seat.

It is pleasing to think that crusty old John Tileston allowed this much creativity among his students.

One last piece that falls under this rubric is noteworthy because it mentions mothers. The overwhelmingly male content of these pieces is hardly to be wondered at, given that these were boys' commercial schools, to which girls could only come privately, at their own expense. Mentions of women in any guise are few and far between. (When they do occur, they are not necessarily flattering, as one reference to "the harlot's door" indicates.) Benjamin Wheeler's 1772 South School poem, titled "To a Female Parent," is therefore of particular interest. (It is not found in Bickham's book.) Its general point is that although mothers are naturally entranced by the beauty and brilliance of their male offspring, they must harden their hearts and exercise restraint for the boys' own good.

Conversing with your sprightly boys
Your eyes have spoke a mother's joys;
With what delight I've heard you quote
Their sayings in imperfect note!
I grant in body and in mind,
Nature appears profusely kind,
Trust not to that. Act you yo[u]r part:
Imprint just morals on their heart.
Impartially their talents scan:
Just education forms the man.

Bookkeeping Only two pieces in the collection, as we noted earlier, give us any idea of the kind of work that the boys would meet in the real world of work after the writing school. Both of them are derived from models in Bickham's *Universal Penman* (figure 7).

Other Two pieces seemed not to fit any of the categories above. One is in the form of a letter by "Theodorick, King of the Goths." It might have been categorized as "intellectual," as it praises his translator for making works in Greek accessible to the Romans. The other, titled "Fear," is one of the few that refers to human emotions. Some of the pieces (classified as "Moral" because of their general content) do mention emotion: one 1751 piece, for instance, is named "Envy and Detraction." And perhaps an argument could be made for including "Pride" in a category for emotions. But, by and large, human passions do not figure much in the overall picture. When they do, they are emotions with a public reference. Envy, for example, denotes a feeling aroused by the sight of another person's possessions, while detraction suggests a public belittlement of someone else. Interpersonal emotions, such as jealousy or even love, seem not to appear at all. In this connection, it is significant that the topic of marriage does not occur either, even though there were several texts in Bickham on both love and marriage. The worldliness of these Boston pieces is once again evident.

Conclusion As noted earlier, almost two-thirds of all the manuscripts (aside from the single-sentence pieces) derive from models at least as old as the 1730s or 1740s, when they were penned by English writing masters for George Bickham's *Universal Penman.* These texts were copied over and over again in the writing schools of Boston during the second half of the eighteenth century. It is no wonder, then, that the messages conveyed by the manuscripts in the Houghton Library penmanship collection are so consistent over such

a long period of time.

Notwithstanding their high proportion of moral content, the texts exhude the secularism, rationalism, optimism, and materialism of the eighteenth century. At the individual level, man is worldly, not spiritual. As far as religion is concerned, not one piece speaks of Christian themes such as Christ's redemption of sinners. Rather, religion is to be esteemed for its civilizing influence. Man is also a social creature, who is affected by the company he keeps, and who must exercise moderation in his dealings with others and in his business affairs. Already present in these texts is the later notion, which would become standard in the early nineteenth century, that education shapes character by molding it rather than by rooting out its evil propensities. Moreover the learner can make strides by diligence. Practice makes perfect.

At the national level (because these texts derived from British models), Britain is still the writer's nation, not America. Vigorous commerce, conducted in British ships, is of value to all. On the other hand, government has certain obligations to the individual, and the theme of liberty is a recurrent one.

At a universal level, a belief in man's ability to control his own destiny is visible in these texts. Slowly but surely, mankind is advancing in knowledge and skill. It is not too fanciful to suggest that, just as the boys were expected to improve their skill in penmanship by self-disciplined practice, they were expected to make progress in the real world as well. Their future was bright.

Postscript The Houghton Library penmanship collection has provided a wealth of material on the form and content of the curriculum of the three writing schools of eighteenth century Boston. The limitations of the collection, however, as a guide to the whole curriculum need to be stated clearly. There is a very large difference between the number of boys who produced the pieces in the collection and the actual number of boys enrolled in the schools over the thirty-four years. In the year 1755, for instance, as noted earlier, we know the enrollment figures for two of the three writing schools: over four hundred and fifty boys. In contrast, there are only two manuscripts in the collection that bear that date.

The collection, then, tells part of the story — for the boys undoubtedly produced one hundred and eighty-eight pieces over the course of thirty-four years — but not the whole story. The fact that the manuscripts were specially selected for exhibition to the school visitors skews the collection in favor of the best pieces. We are left to guess at

all the work the boys undertook in school that the writing masters thought unworthy of exhibition. It must be remembered that the writing schools were commercial training schools which were substituting education for the much more familiar colonial route of apprenticeship. The writing masters surely focused more on the real world than the collection leads us to believe.

There is missing information on all the three Rs. We already know that the curriculum was supposed to include some advanced reading. As discussed earlier, the selectmen had stipulated that some time was to be spent, in the writing schools, on reading the Bible and on spelling.

Even in penmanship, there are gaps at the initial stages. The collection does not give us any glimpses of the protracted practice on letter formation that we know preceded any penning of connected prose. Nor does it show us any of the work done by boys who never managed to write very well, let alone beautifully.

As far as composition is concerned, the collection surely reflects reality: the boys did not compose the texts, except on the rarest of occasions. Nonetheless, further research might reveal that boys were occasionally asked to compose poems. The possibility has to be left open for now.

Even more important, the collection shows none of the commercial arithmetic that the boys were presumably doing. The two pieces categorized as "bookkeeping" were actually penmanship pieces, not practice in addition, as they came straight from the pages of the *Universal Penman.* The boys could not have spent all their school hours on penmanship; the strain on the hand would have been too great — especially if we believe those who criticized the "old system." They must have devoted far more attention to commercial arithmetic — double entry bookkeeping, for instance — than the collection ever suggests. The instruction presented in George Fisher's *Instructor* (1786) is presumably a reasonable guide to some of this missing curriculum. Further archival research will no doubt provide more information: an arithmetic copybook, for instance, penned by a boy known to have been enrolled in one of the writing schools, would be illuminating.

Obtaining a complete picture of the curriculum from the Houghton Library penmanship collection is therefore not possible. Nonetheless, it brings us closer to understanding both the form and content of the curriculum of the writing schools of eighteenth century Boston than any sources examined by scholars up to this date.

Notes

1 MS, Abiah Holbrook, "The Writing Master's Amusement," Houghton Library, Harvard University.

2 MSS, "Miscellaneous Specimens of American Calligraphy," Houghton Library, Harvard University.

3 George Fisher's *The American Instructor,* published in the American colonies from 1748 on with slight changes of title, is sometimes called the first American copybook. However, it has only a few pages of scripts, and was in fact a self-instructional manual that offered a range of subjects (Fisher, 1786).

4 There were 13 Bickham texts out of the 15 in the collection (See Appendix I) that appear three or more times (totaling 62 pieces); nine Bickham texts of the 17 that appear twice each (18 pieces); and 24 of the 74 pieces that appear once only (24 pieces). These total 46 out of 106 different texts, or 104 out of 188 pieces. Subtracting the 25 single-sentence pieces from the total leaves Bickham appearing in 104 of 163 pieces, or 64%.

5 I am indebted to Leila F. Monaghan for this observation.

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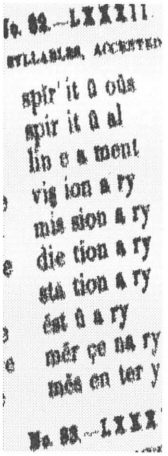
Appendix 1.
Frequency of Occurence of Manuscripts with Identical Texts, Presence in Bickham (1743), and Content Category

Key to **Content** Category

Aesthetic	A
Business / Commerce / Money	B
Intelectual	I
Moral / Ethical	M
Penmanship / Writing	Pen
Political	Pol

	Title	No.	In Bickham?	Content
	A Wise man avoids . . . (figure 6)	14	no	M
	How to get Riches, humbly inscrib'd . . .	10	yes	B
	Fame: Ascanty Fortune . . . (figure 5)	7	yes	M
	Painting: in ancient times when Painting . . .	7	yes	A
	Reputation and the credit of the Merchant	7	yes	B
	The Grecian Carver	5	yes	A
	The Writing Master's Invitation (figure 4)	5	yes	Pen
	Beware of vain glory . . .	4	no	M
	Friendship: a friend should always like a friend . . .	3	yes	M
	Human Prudence, or, How to get Riches	3	yes	B
	Learning: How pleasant and how sweet . . .	3	yes	I
	Liberty: O despicable state . . .	3	yes	Pol
	Liberty: O Liberty! Thou Goddess . . .	3	yes	Pol
	Virtue: Virtue's the Friend of Life . . . (figure 3)	3	yes	Pol
subtotal	15 texts (3 to 14 each, above)	80		
	17 texts (2 each)	34		
	74 texts (1 each)	74		
Total	106 texts	108	pieces	

American Spelling Instruction: Retrospect and Prospect



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Richard E. Hodges, pp. 55-75

Spelling as a school subject provides a valuable mechanism for examining the history of curriculum making in the United States. The subject of spelling has had a secure place in the common school curriculum from colonial times to the present because of the importance attributed to correct spelling by the larger society. Once linked directly with reading instruction, the teaching of spelling emerged over time as a subject taught largely independent of other language instruction, with its form of presentation shaped by prevailing views of curriculum makers concerning the nature of English spelling and learning to spell, and subsequently also by the application of scientific method in curriculum development. Recent insights into the acquisition of spelling proficiency reveal, however, the inextricable relationship that spelling has in the development of written language ability in general and which, in turn, pose significant implications for the spelling curriculum.

Overview The English aristocrat and political figure, Philip Dormer Stanhope, 4th Earl of Chesterfield (1694-1773), whose letters, written over a thirty-year period to his son, Philip, were meant to educate him in the art of being a gentleman, once admonished the young man to be mindful that

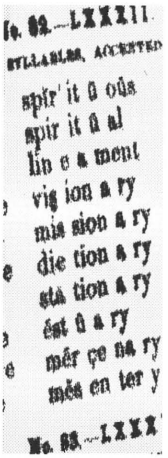
> *Orthography is so absolutely necessary for a man of letters ... that one false spelling may fix a ridicule upon him for the rest of his life .... I know a man of quality who never recovered [from] the ridicule of having spelled wholesome without the* w *(November 19, 1750) (Chesterfield, 1929).*

The importance of correct spelling as a social marker has, among other reasons, resulted in spelling having a secure place in the school curriculum, with roots that are traceable to the beginnings of modern civilization in the Western world (Hodges, 1977). Over the centuries, students learning to spell for the most part have been taught that rote memorization of words was necessary for correct spelling, in the belief that the memorization of items, such as poems and difficult words, fostered mental discipline. Coupled with a widely-held impression that English spelling is largely bereft of "rules" for mapping letters to sounds, memorizing individual words has historically been regarded as the only safe route for spelling mastery. As a result, spelling instruction through the years has seldom strayed from its path down "memory lane."

In this paper we shall trek briefly down the memory lane of American spelling instruction from colonial times to the present, focusing primarily on nineteenth to mid-twentieth century instructional practices. Our purposes are to place current and potential instructional practices in historical perspective and to show that the shape and texture of spelling instruction (or any other subject for that matter) are fabricated from views about the nature of content (English orthography), of learning, and of the learner.

In the Beginning: 18th and 19th Centuries While spelling is now commonly regarded as one of the minor language "arts" in the

school curriculum, in the American colonies and in the early years of the nation it was a subject of much importance. Spelling books were the first instructional manuals to be placed in children's hands, from which they studied reading, spelling, arithmetic, geography, as well as moral teachings (Littlefield, 1965, pp. 102-3).



The omnibus spelling books of eighteenth century colonial America were published in England or reprinted in the colonies. As had been the practice for centuries, children learned both to read and spell from them by a mode of instruction called the "alphabet method," a method which, as a British authority of the era recounted, required that students "...Name the letters of a Word, divide them into distinct Syllables, and then join them together to read or Pronounce them aright" (Michael, 1970, p. 184).

Three areas of study occupied students' time. One of these areas was *orthography,* in which they learned the order and names of the large and small letters of the alphabet according to their classifications as consonants, vowels, and diphthongs; the speech sounds that each letter represented; various consonant and vowel letter combinations (such as *ab, eb, ib*); and ultimately, how to combine these syllables to form words, such as *qua-li-fi-ca-ti-on* . A second area of study was *spelling* , in which students learned to name the letters of words in their proper order and to divide the words into syllables according to specific rules. A third area of study, *orthoepy* (pronouncing words "aright"), was designed to insure the proper pronunciation of words.

With the colonies' independence from England, indigenous spelling books began to be printed which, at first, differed very little from their British counterparts. The first prolific American textbook writer was Noah Webster, who produced the famed "blue-back" speller, several dictionaries and grammars, and a U.S. history. Webster's speller fundamentally shaped the teaching of spelling for over a century, largely because of the sheer volume of its sales. Millions of copies were purchased for use in the schools and homes of nineteenth century America, and its popularity spurred the publication of scores of other spelling books, many of them outright imitations of the "blue-back" speller.

As the common school movement gained momentum in the early 1800s, school texts began to be published in other subjects, with a result that spelling books began to lose their omnibus character, becoming almost solely devoted to spelling. Stripped of their traditional role, many of these spellers were little more than lists of words arranged in tables according to the number of letters and syllables they contained. With rare exception, it was expected that these word

(67)

THE LITTLE SAWYER, FRANK LUCAS.

Mrs. CORBON kept a village school in the state of New-York. She had a noble mind and was a friend to all good children. One cold morning in the winter, a small boy came along, with a saw on his arm, and wanted this lady to hire him to saw wood. She said, one of her neighbours, a trusty man, would like to saw the wood, and she did not wish to hire any body else.

" O dear," said the boy, " what shall I do?" " Why, little fellow," said she, " what is the matter?" He answered, " my father is blind, mother is sick, and I left my sister crying at home, for fear poor ma will die."

(68)

TABLE XVII.

Plain words of five syllables, the chief accent on the second, and minor accent on the fourth.

In fu ri a ted	pro hib it o ry
pro cu ra to ry	pre lim in a ry
pro pri e ta ry	pre par a to ry
au then ti ca ted	stip en di a ry
con tem po ra ry	sub sid i a ry
ex clam a to ry	vo cab u la ry
ex plan a to ry	vo lup tu a ry
ex tem po ra ry	ad mon i to ry
he red it a ry	a poth e ca ry
in cen di a ry	con sol a to ry
in flam ma to ry	in vol un ta ry

The following words have the chief accent on the fourth syllable.

Ad min is tra tor	an ti sple net ic
ca lum ni a tor	cir cum fe ren ter
cir cum lo cu tor	di a pho ret ic
de nom in a tor	ex per i ment al
ne go ti a tor	hi er o glyph ic
a man u en sis	su per a bun dant
an ti pa thet ic	su per in tend ent

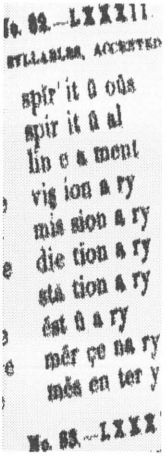
I take care of them as well as I can, but they have nothing to eat. I want to work and get something for them." Mrs. Corbon had never seen this lad before, and did not know what his name was, till he told her: but she perceived he was a boy of uncommon goodness, because he was so kind to his parents and sister. He shivered very much with the cold; for he was but thinly drest, and his ear locks were white with frost. The lady asked him to come in and warm himself.

lists were to be memorized by means of constant oral repetition. Little attention was given to the meanings that the words conveyed, much less to their possible utility in writing.

Empirical studies of learning to spell would not fully emerge until the twentieth century. There was, however, a psychological basis of sorts to which some nineteenth century spelling-book makers could refer, a pseudotheory of mind called *phrenology* , the creation of a Viennese physician named Franz Joseph Gall (1758-1828). Proponents of phrenology, or "faculty psychology" as it was also known, believed that the mind had three sets of basic capacities or *faculties* . The first set concerned understanding, reason, or intellect; the second, feelings, desires, sensibilities, susceptibilities, tastes, or the "heart"; and the third, will, or volition (Butts and Cremin, 1953, pp. 177-78). It was also thought that the intellectual faculties were particularly capable of being trained, much like muscles are strengthened by exercise, and spelling was regarded as a subject that was amenable to memory training.

Voices were raised, however, in opposition to the alphabet method which most spelling books continued to use, and one of the more vociferous was that of Horace Mann (1796-1859) who, in 1837, became the first Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education. In its place, Mann proposed that students should be taught meaningful information. He was especially critical of schools

Figure 1.
The Analytical Spelling Book
William S. Cardell
(Philadelphia: Uriah Hunt, 1830)



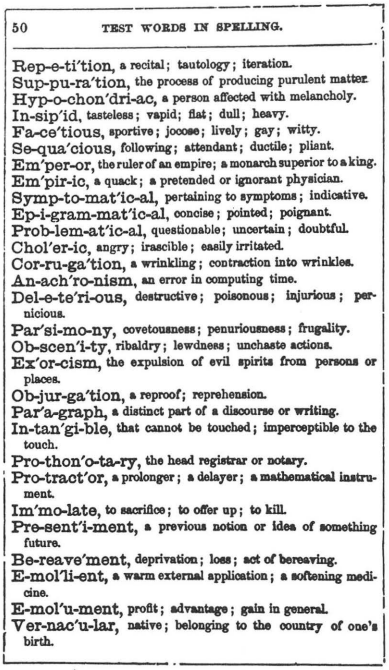
This speller provides an example of the alphabet method as implemented in its later phase when students had progressed past forming two-, three-, and four-syllable words.

> *"requiring children to spell columns of words, few, if any of which, they can understand, and scarcely one of which they will have occasion to use for many years, if ever. To crowd their memories with such words ... is about as unwise as it would be to fill their stomachs with kinds of food, which we know they cannot digest, until they have attained adult age. The orthography of all common every-day words should first be thoroughly learned"* (Mann, 1839, p. 359).

Meaningful reading and spelling instruction, Mann maintained, should begin with *words* that name familiar objects, not *letters* to which meaning cannot be related. The letters that compose the words, he contended, could be learned afterward. For, "When we wish to give to a child the idea of a new animal, we do not present successively the different parts of it — an eye, an ear, the nose, the mouth, the body, or a leg—we present the whole animal, as one object" (Mann, 1840, p. 14).

Equally important, Mann sought to advance the notion that spelling should not be regarded as an end in itself; rather, spelling should be seen as an integral part of the functional use of language. Within this perspective, Mann insisted that

> *The misuse of letters in the spelling of words is a comparatively venial offense; it seldom draws after it any serious consequences besides the reputation of illiteracy. But the*



50 TEST WORDS IN SPELLING.

Rep-e-ti'tion, a recital; tautology; iteration.
Sup-pu-ra'tion, the process of producing purulent matter.
Hyp-o-chon'dri-ac, a person affected with melancholy.
In-sip'id, tasteless; vapid; flat; dull; heavy.
Fa-ce'tious, sportive; jocose; lively; gay; witty.
Se-qua'cious, following; attendant; ductile; pliant.
Em'per-or, the ruler of an empire; a monarch superior to a king.
Em'pir-ic, a quack; a pretended or ignorant physician.
Symp-to-mat'ic-al, pertaining to symptoms; indicative.
Ep-i-gram-mat'ic-al, concise; pointed; poignant.
Prob-lem-at'ic-al, questionable; uncertain; doubtful.
Chol'er-ic, angry; irascible; easily irritated.
Cor-ru-ga'tion, a wrinkling; contraction into wrinkles.
An-ach'ro-nism, an error in computing time.
Del-e-te'ri-ous, destructive; poisonous; injurious; pernicious.
Par'si-mo-ny, covetousness; penuriousness; frugality.
Ob-scen'i-ty, ribaldry; lewdness; unchaste actions.
Ex'or-cism, the expulsion of evil spirits from persons or places.
Ob-jur-ga'tion, a reproof; reprehension.
Par'a-graph, a distinct part of a discourse or writing.
In-tan'gi-ble, that cannot be touched; imperceptible to the touch.
Pro-thon'o-ta-ry, the head registrar or notary.
Pro-tract'or, a prolonger; a delayer; a mathematical instrument.
Im'mo-late, to sacrifice; to offer up; to kill.
Pre-sent'i-ment, a previous notion or idea of something future.
Be-reave'ment, deprivation; loss; act of bereaving.
E-mol'li-ent, a warm external application; a softening medicine.
E-mol'u-ment, profit; advantage; gain in general.
Ver-nac'u-lar, native; belonging to the country of one's birth.

TEST WORDS IN SPELLING. 51

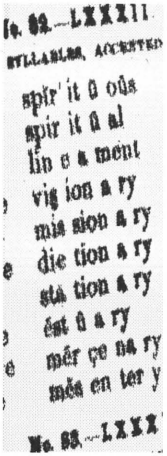
A-poc'ry-phal, not canonical; uncertain.
Hy-poth'e-cate, to pawn; to give in pledge.
Germ-in-a'tion, the act of sprouting; growth.
Leg-er-de-main', sleight of hand; a juggle.
Her'mit-age, the habitation of a hermit.
Im-brogl'io, an intricate, complicated plot of a drama.
Lym-phat'ic, a vessel which contains or conveys lymph.
In-firm'a-ry, a residence for the sick; a hospital for the sick poor.
Pe-riph'e-ry, the circumference of a curvilinear figure.
Ge-om'e-try, the science of the relations of magnitude or quantity.
Ve-loc'i-pede, a carriage moved by an impulse given to it by the rider's feet.
Nau'se-ate, to loathe; to reject with disgust.
Pa-la'tial, pertaining to a palace; magnificent.
Mu'ci-lage, a slimy or viscous mass or body.
Guil'lo-tine, a machine used for beheading in France.
Ped'es-tal, the basis of a pillar or statue.
Car'ti-lage, a tough, elastic substance; gristle.
Ap-pel'la-tive, pertaining to a common name.
Com'mis-sa-ry, an officer who furnishes provisions and clothing to an army.
Ther-mom'e-ter, an instrument for measuring variations of temperature.
Te-mer'i-ty, rashness; extreme boldness.
Ter'ri-to-ry, the extent of land within the bounds of any State.
Ol'i-garch-y, a government in the hands of a few persons; aristocracy.
Cor'ol-la-ry, a consequent truth; a conclusion.
Scur'ril-ous, vile; coarse; abusive; opprobrious; reproachful.
Cham'o-mile, a bitter plant, much used in medicine.
Car'ni-val, a Catholic season of festivity, before Lent.
Ter-res'tri-al, consisting of earth; earthly.

misuse or misapprehensions of language lead to errors of thought, or opinion and of conduct; and the laws of society and the laws of the land often punish them with the loss of character and the loss of property (Mann, 1840, p. 22).

In 1843 Mann had gone to Europe to look at pedagogical practices that might be adapted to American education. He returned from abroad especially impressed by the Prussian school system and its application of the naturalistic pedagogy of the Swiss educational reformer, Johann Pestalozzi, who believed that learning involved all the senses and stemmed from children's interests, abilities, and temperaments. After observing a group of sixty six-year-olds undertake an exercise in which "there were elements of reading, spelling, writing, grammar, and drawing, interspersed with anecdotes and not a little general information," he came away even more convinced that the alphabet method had to be discarded (Mann, 1844; in Cohen, 1974, p. 1087).

While Mann believed in developing the power of the mental faculties, he also advocated the "Law of Association" as a learning principle applicable to spelling instruction, a principle bearing striking similarity to present-day practices of grouping words according to their phonic similarities. The Law of Association, he wrote, required words to be grouped according to common orthographic characteristics in which "eye, ear, and hand .... establish by frequent association the peculiar sequence of letters which spell each word," and which by

Figure 2.
Henderson's Test Words in English Orthography
N. P. Henderson
(New York: Clark and Maynard, 1875)



This speller illustrates a later nineteenth century practice, found in numerous spellers, of simply providing lists of words and their definitions, a kind of quasi-dictionary devoid of other subject areas and the moral epithets found in earlier omnibus spelling books. Note the complexity and peripheral value of the listed words in terms of their everyday use.

recalling the spelling of any one word would elicit the spelling of all the others in the group (Mann, 1840, p. 39).

Changing views of spelling instruction were of little importance to the people in the villages, towns, and cities of mid-nineteenth century America, however. To them, spelling ability symbolized as it had in earlier generations more than a mere adeptness for spelling words correctly; it validated the American work-success ethic, that personal achievements are gained by hard work. As one product of nineteenth century schooling recalled,

> *The child cares no more in his heart about the arrangement of vowels and consonants in the orthography of words than he does of how many chips lie above one another at the school house woodpile. But he does care whether he is at the head or foot of his class* (Butts and Cremin, 1953, p. 270).

Into the Twentieth Century Nonetheless, views of education in general *were* changing as the push for a common school experience for all, at least through the elementary school years, was becoming a reality. But, with the growth of the common school, there also arose concerns about the quality and effectiveness of the education enterprise. One of those concerned was a New York pediatrician, Dr. Joseph M. Rice, who, in 1893, was among the first educational reformers to

66 THE ELEMENTARY

BÄR, LÀST, CÂRE, FALL, WHAT; HĒR, PREY, THÊRE; GĔT; BĪRD, MARÏNE; LINK;

No. 81.—LXXXI.

WORDS OF THREE SYLLABLES, ACCENTED ON THE SECOND. THE LAST COLUMN IS LEFT UNMARKED.

re vĕnġe′ fụl	in vĕnt′ ĭve	in ac′ tive
for ḡet ful	per çep tive	de fect ive
e vent ful	pre gŭmp tive	ef fect ive
neg leet ful	eon sump tive	ob ject ive
dis gŭst ful	de çĕp tive	e lect ive
dis trust ful	as sẽrt ive	ad he sive
sue çĕss ful	a bôr tive	co he sive
un skĭll ful	dĭ ġĕst ive	de ci sive
eol lĕet ĭve	ex pŭl sive	cor ro sive
pros peet ive	eom pul sive	a bu sive
per speet ive	im pul sive	con clu sive
eor reet ive	re pul sive	ex clu sive
in vee tive	de fĕn sive	in clu sive
vin dĭe tive	of fen sive	e lu sive
af fliet ive	sub vẽr sive	de lu sive
at trăet ive	dis eûr sive	al lu sive
dis tĭnet ive	ex eur sive	il lu sive
sub jŭne tive	in eur sive	col lu sive
eon june tive	sue çĕss ive	ob tru sive
in duet ive	ex çess ive	in tru sive
pro duet ive	pro gress ive	pro tru sive
de strue tive	op press ive	e va sive
eon struet ive	ex press ive	per sua sive
in çĕn tive	im press ive	as sua sive
re ten tive	sub mĭs sive	dis sua sive
at ten tive	per mis sive	un fad ing
pre vent ive	trans mis sive	un feel ing

We are apt to live forgetful of our continual dependence on the will of God.

We should not trust our lives to unskillful doctors or drunken sailors.

Washington was a successful general.

SPELLING BOOK. 67

MOVE, SÒN, WOLF, FŎŎT, MŌŌN, ÔR; RULE, PULL; EXIST; C=K; G=J; S=Z; CH=SH.

A prospective view, means a view before us.

Perspective glasses are such as we look through, to see things at a distance. Telescopes are perspective glasses.

Rum, gin, brandy, and whisky are destructive enemies to mankind. They destroy more lives than wars, famine, and pestilence.

An attentive boy will improve in learning.

Putrid bodies emit an offensive smell.

The drunkard's course is progressive; he begins by drinking a little, and shortens his life by drinking to excess.

The slōth is an inactive, slow animal.

The President of the United States is elected once every four years. He is chosen by electors who are elected by people of the different States.

No. 82.—LXXXII.

WORDS OF FOUR SYLLABLES, ACCENTED ON THE FIRST.

jū′ di ea tūre	spĭr′ it ū oŭs	eăr′ i ea tūre
ĕx pli ea tĭve	spir it ū al	tĕm per a ture
păl li a tive	lin e a ment	lĭt er a ture
spĕe ū la tive	viș ion a ry	ăg ri eul ture
eŏp ū la tive	mis sion a ry	hôr ti eul ture
nom i na tive	die tion a ry	prĕs by ter y
op er a tive	stā tion a ry	des ul to ry
fĭg ū ra tive	ĕst ū a ry	prŏm on to ry
vĕġ e tā tive	mẽr çe na ry	pĕr emp to ry
ĭm i tā tive	mĕs en ter y	eăș ū is try

No. 83.—LXXXIII.

WORDS OF THREE SYLLABLES, ACCENTED ON THE FIRST.

rĕl′ a tĭve	prĭm′ i tĭve	ăd′ jee tĭve
ăb la tive	pûr ga tive	ŏb vi oŭs
năr ra tive	lĕn i tive	ĕn vi ous
lax a tive	trăn si tive	pẽr vi ous
ĕx ple tive	sĕn si tive	păt ū lous
neg a tive	sŭb stan tive	pĕr il ous

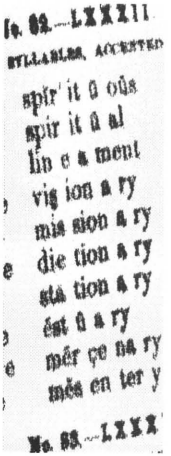
bring the tools of scientific inquiry to bear upon the study of educational problems. As a part of his inquiry, Rice analyzed the spelling achievement of about 13,000 students and concluded that, regardless of educational methods used, a carefully chosen and graded list of useful words studied for a few minutes daily under the supervision of well-trained teachers would produce the most effective results (Rice, 1897).

Rice's recommendations had less influence on traditional spelling practices at the turn of the century than he would have liked. A greater influence, instead, was the growing number of subjects that were being introduced into the school curriculum. There was simply no longer the time available in the school day to give spelling the attention and prominence it had previously received. As a consequence, spelling instruction declined in importance in the school curriculum during the first decade of the present century.

It would be erroneous to conclude, however, that spelling was less important an issue among educational scholars. In counterbalance to a decline of the status of spelling in school there was, during this period, a number of forces that had been developing in the latter years of the nineteenth century that were to influence the spelling curriculum. For one, the use of the scientific method to attack educational problems became a dominant force in the study of schooling; and, as Rice had done, other investigators began to apply the tools of scientific

Figure 3.
The Elementary Spelling Book
Noah Webster
(New York: American Book Company, 1880;
facsimile copy, American Book Company, n. d.)

This edition of Webster's speller illustrates that the omnibus speller still held sway late into the nineteenth century.



inquiry to the study of spelling. For another, the child study movement gained strength and thereby stimulated a debate over the issue of whether children's needs and interests or preparation for adult life in the larger society should guide the development of the common school curriculum.

Echoing Horace Mann's dictum that the school program should relate to children's interests, B.C. Gregory, a Massachusetts school superintendent, advocated that students' *own* words should be the source of spelling study. By doing so, he claimed, children's powers rather than weaknesses would be emphasized, thereby lessening comparisons of their spelling errors to adult standards. In keeping with this spirit, Gregory further proposed that "We should not be so fond of the blue pencil, but when we mark [compositions], mark the words written *correctly* [emphasis added], and then the blue will be on the page and not in the child" (Gregory, 1907-1908).

In contrast to Superintendent Gregory's sentiments were others who believed that schooling was intended to prepare students for participation in adult society. Proponents of this view were aware, however, that schools no longer had the time to teach all the knowledge and skills that were needed for participation in life in the larger society. They contended that careful selections had to be made to insure that the essential aspects of a subject were to be taught. There thus was developed the *principle of social utility* which mandated that what-

17	18	19	20
desk	draw	dull	eyes
candy	cards	cents	drink
towns	trick	wants	woods
letters	pulling	sisters	sixteen
stamps	such	taking	talks
track	wild	yourself	eight
anything	April	asked	asleep
begin	Christmas	basket	church
chair	cloth	coal	corner
died	egg	evening	everything
fix	floor	grandma	great
hole	hundred	jump	lace
loved	matter	mean	meet
nor	nose	number	orange
party	pencil	pillow	planted
	Standard Number Right		
II. 5 III. 9 IV. 12	II. 5 III. 9 IV. 12	II. 5 III. 9 IV. 12	II. 5 III. 9 IV. 12

21	22	23	24
flying	goes	hope	kick
drove	games	drinking	gives
blocks	books	brings	comes
slipped	strong	turning	brothers
please	pocket	pole	porch
row	saved	sew	shade
sometime	sugar	taken	talking
twenty	use	washed	weak
afraid	almost	badly	because
change	chicken	coffee	color
fence	fifteen	file	heard
lesson	cool	living	lunch
paint	painted	penny	people
saving	shame	sheet	sight
turn	used	wagon	wanted
	Standard Number Right		
II. 4 III. 8 IV. 11	II. 4 III. 8 IV. 11	II. 4 III. 8 IV. 11	II. 4 III. 8 IV. 11

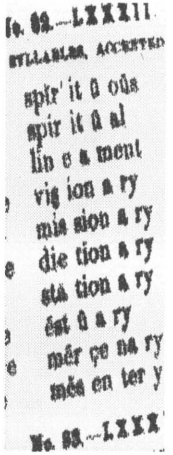
ever is taught in school must be of importance outside of school. For the spelling curriculum, this principle became the catalyst for searches to identify the optimal set of words needed for written communication in the larger society.

Supporting the social utility principle was the rise of behaviorist psychology in the early decades of this century, with habit formation replacing mental discipline in a theory of learning. Together, the social utility principle and behaviorism further focused attention on individual words as appropriate objects of spelling study, the former providing a rationale for selecting words, and the latter a process for students to learn them.

The determination of words for spelling study according to their frequency of use in writing is largely a twentieth century phenomenon, although the approach was anticipated over 300 years earlier by Richard Mulcaster who, in his famed *Elementarie of 1582*, prepared a table of some 8,000 words "as maie easilie direct our generall writing" (Mulcaster, 1970, p. 164). Literally hundreds of published and unpublished studies of English word frequencies have been undertaken in this century, with researchers who have been interested in spelling usually examining one of several sources to determine a definitive word list. The principal sources for these studies have included: 1) adult business and personal correspondence (e.g., Chancellor, 1910; Ayres, 1913); 2) children's compositions and letters

Figure 4.
Lippincott's New Horn-Ashbaugh Speller
Ernest Horn and Ernest J. Ashbaugh
(Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1926)

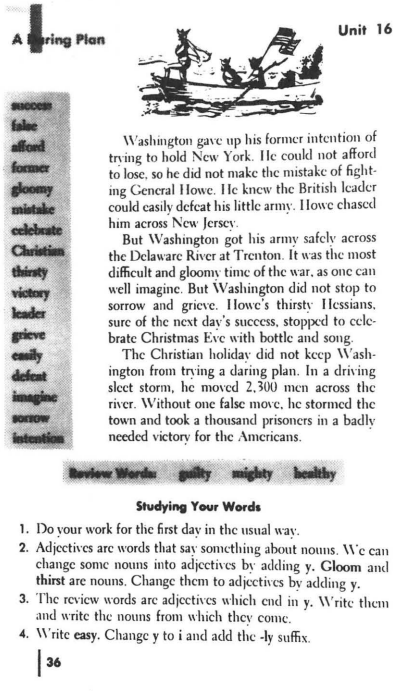
This illustration from Horn's and Ashbaugh's speller typifies the practice of selecting and presenting spelling words solely on the basis of their frequency of use and utility in writing. Note the numerous instances of plural noun forms and verb tense forms that are presented withour their corresponding base words.



(e.g., Jones, 1913; Bauer, 1916; Fitzgerald, 1934); 3) free association —subjects write all the words they can think of in a stated period of time (e.g., Dolch, 1927); 4) determining most frequently misspelled words (e.g., Fitzgerald, 1952); 5) comparing words found in other lists (e.g., Foran, 1930). Using this approach, Foran determined that the optimal word list contained 3,800 words, the *median* number of words found in thirteen spellers!

Three kinds of word lists were developed as outcomes of these studies: 1) adult-based word lists, in support of the position that schooling should prepare students for participation in an adult world (e.g., Horn, 1926); 2) child-based word lists, in support of the position that children's needs and interests should form the basis of their schooling (e.g., Jones, 1913; Fitzgerald, 1934); and 3) combined word lists built from both adult and child writing, on the grounds that both students' current and future needs should be addressed in school (e.g., Buckingham and Dolch, 1936; Greene, 1954).

To what extent was there agreement among publishers of spelling programs concerning the basis of their respective word lists? Not much. An evaluation of word list sources of seventeen spelling series being considered for adoption by the California State Curriculum Committee in 1935 revealed that two were based on adult writing, five were based on children's writing, eight used combined word lists, and two were based on the authors' own judgments. There was also a



A [illegible]ring Plan

Unit 16

success
false
afford
former
gloomy
mistake
celebrate
Christian
thirsty
victory
leader
grieve
easily
defeat
imagine
sorrow
intention

Washington gave up his former intention of trying to hold New York. He could not afford to lose, so he did not make the mistake of fighting General Howe. He knew the British leader could easily defeat his little army. Howe chased him across New Jersey.

But Washington got his army safely across the Delaware River at Trenton. It was the most difficult and gloomy time of the war, as one can well imagine. But Washington did not stop to sorrow and grieve. Howe's thirsty Hessians, sure of the next day's success, stopped to celebrate Christmas Eve with bottle and song.

The Christian holiday did not keep Washington from trying a daring plan. In a driving sleet storm, he moved 2,300 men across the river. Without one false move, he stormed the town and took a thousand prisoners in a badly needed victory for the Americans.

Review Words guilty mighty healthy

Studying Your Words

1. Do your work for the first day in the usual way.
2. Adjectives are words that say something about nouns. We can change some nouns into adjectives by adding **y. Gloom** and **thirst** are nouns. Change them to adjectives by adding y.
3. The review words are adjectives which end in y. Write them and write the nouns from which they come.
4. Write **easy.** Change y to i and add the -ly suffix.

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5. Write the words from the story for the blanks.

   Washington gave up his [1] __ [2] __ of holding New York. He could not [3] __ to lose. Fighting Howe would have been a [4] __. Washington knew that the British [5] __ could [6] __ [7] __ his army.

   When Washington landed at Trenton, it was a most difficult and [8] __ time, as one can well [9] __. But he did not [10] __ and [11] __. Howe's [12] __ Hessians, sure of [13] __, stopped to [14] __ Christmas Eve.
6. Write antonyms for **failure** and **true.**
7. Write the word for one who follows the religion of Christ.
8. Write the words that are formed from these root words: **easy, gloom, intend, thirst.**
9. Write synonyms for **error** and **wrong.**
10. Follow the usual steps for the third, fourth, and fifth days.

For pupils who know their spelling words. Look up Hessians in your encyclopedia. Who were they and what were they doing in America?

Dictionary Helps

Notice the doubled consonant.

• **afford** (ə fôrd′) Have the money, time, or strength: Can we *afford* a new car? We cannot *afford* to waste time.

False face

• **false** (fôls) 1. Not true; wrong: A *false* answer. 2. Lying: A *false* witness. 3. Not loyal: A *false* friend. 4. Not real: *False* teeth.

This is the long oo sound.

• **gloomy** (glo͞om′ē) Dark; dim; sad: A *gloomy* forest; a *gloomy* look.

Notice the silent vowels i and e.

• **grieve** (grēv) 1. Feel grief: I *grieve* for my dead brother. 2. Cause someone to feel grief: He *grieves* his mother with his bad habits.

Here is the silent vowel again.

• **intention** (in ten′shən) Determination to act in a certain way: Our *intention* is to visit our friends.

Notice that both consonants are doubled.

• **success** (sək sĕs′) 1. Wished-for ending: *Success* usually comes from hard work. 2. A person or thing that succeeds: The play was a *success.*

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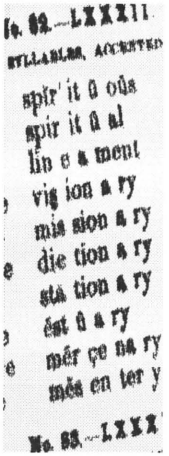
similar lack of agreement concerning the *number* of words a spelling program should include, with the *number* of words presented in the seventeen series ranging from a low of 2,800 words in one series to over 8,000 in another (Waterman and Melbo, 1935).

Selecting words for a spelling program is only one part of a publisher's task, however. The words must also be organized and properly placed in the respective grades. To accomplish this task, Paul McKee offered three plans of attack: 1) a *"logical"* plan (based on the nature of the subject) in which words would be distributed through the grades from the "simplest" to the most "complex" spellings; 2) a *"psychological"* plan (based on the nature of the learner) in which words would be selected according to children's abilities, needs, and interests in the respective grades; and 3) a *"sociological"* plan (based on the needs of the writer in the larger society) in which words would be distributed through the grades according to their frequency of use, with the most commonly used words relegated to the early grades (McKee, 1939).

To what extent, then, did textbook publishers agree on the organization and placement of words in their spelling programs? Use of the scientific method in curriculum development to the contrary, spelling programs varied widely in their word selection and gradation despite the fact that there was a considerable overlap of words contained in adult, child, and combined word lists. Erich Selke, for example, examined ten spelling series and found that, out of the 4,000+

Figure 5.
The New Spelling Goals
May D. Lambader and William Kottmeyer
(St. Louis: Webster Publishing Company, 1955)
By permission of the author.



This 1950s speller is illustrative of the practice of the time of presenting list words in short "themes," on the grounds that their use in context reinforced for students their meanings and utility, and also in the belief that the themes fostered students' interest in and motivation to learn the list words.

different words they contained, only 1,080 words were common to the ten programs, and then with only *three* words placed at the same grade level (Selke, 1929).

Eight years later, Carl Wise compared twenty spelling programs for word placement agreement by grade level. He found 13,641 different words in the ten series, with only fifty-four words in common to five or more texts at the same grade level (Wise, 1934).

The most dramatic disparity among publishers of spelling books with respect to the grade placement of list words was that reported by Emmett Betts who found unanimous agreement on the grade placement of only *one* word (the second grade word, *long*) out of 8,645 different words when he compared seventeen spelling series published between 1934-1938 (Betts, 1940). Nine years later when Betts, using the same procedure, examined eight spelling programs that had been published since 1939, he found that the situation had only slightly improved since his earlier analysis, this time finding agreement on the grade placement of sixty-five words (mostly in the lower grades) out of a total of 8,652 different words. However, only four hundred eighty-three words were found to be in common to all eight programs irrespective of grade placement (Betts, 1949).

A more recent comparison of this nature was made in 1965 by Wilbur Ames who analyzed the selection and grade placement of words in

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j is often spelled *j*, *dge*, or *g* followed by *e* or *i*. A rare spelling is *gg*.

Say each word. Hear j. Notice how the sound is spelled.

1. joke
2. judge
3. edge
4. pledge
5. bridge
6. village
7. package
8. language
9. danger
10. engine
11. ledge
12. damage
13. cottage
14. baggage
15. average
16. beverage
17. gesture
18. margin
19. rigid
20. exaggerate

1. Write the words with /j/ spelled
   j (2 words)
   dge (5 words)
   g followed by e or i (13 words)
   gg (1 word)
2. Write three list words that begin with j.
3. Write any list word that ends in each syllable.
   a. jər b. jən c. rāt d. id

PRACTICE

1. Write the words formed from:
   a. joke + ing
   b. pledge + ed
   c. village + er
   d. package + ing
   e. damage + ed
   f. average + ing

2. Write list words to complete the sentences.
   a. Try not to ___ him too harshly.
   b. Don't walk on the ___ of the road.
   c. A ___ was built over that highway.
   d. She spoke the Spanish ___ fluently.
   e. Jay's scores were far above ___.
   f. Please don't write in the ___ of the page.
3. Some words have more than one meaning. Write a list word that can be used twice in each sentence.
   a. The ___ will ___ the contest for us.
   b. Can you play ___ while sitting on a ___?
   c. Try to ___ your way to the ___ of the crowd.
4. Write list words that are synonyms for these words.
   a. peril or risk
   b. small, simple house
   c. bodily movement
   d. liquid for drinking
   e. stiff or firm
   f. overstate

Three words in the paragraph are written as plurals but should be singular possessives. Find the mistakes and write the words correctly.

The villages judge drove her car across the new bridge. Suddenly the judges car stopped. Much to her dismay, the engines power had failed.

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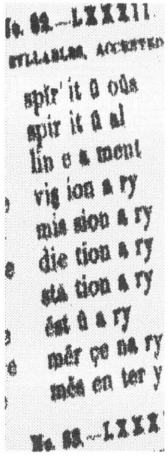
seven spellers published between 1955 and 1960. Ames calculated that, while the spellers contained an average of 3,209 words in grades two through eight, they included 6,043 different words, with but 1,283 in common to the seven series. Moreover, only the second grade word lists had even a modest amount of agreement, twenty-five percent. Some words, Ames found, were presented as much as five grades apart (the word *alone*, for example, was located in grade 3 in two programs, in grade 5 in two programs, and grades 4, 6, and 8 in the remaining programs. Related words sometimes suffered the same fate; for example, in one series *teacher* was found in third grade and *teachers* in sixth grade) (Ames, 1965).

It is ironic as well as unfortunate that, in the quest for efficiency in spelling instruction, such discrepancies resulted. For, as Ames had adroitly observed, by focusing on specific words placed according to frequency of use, important connections among obviously related words had become obscured.

Spelling Instruction at Midcentury Visually, spelling books at midtwentieth century looked much different than their ancestors a century earlier. Yet views of the nature of English spelling itself and how words should be learned had not changed very much at all. Rote memorization still remained the cornerstone of spelling instruction, largely due to a perennial distrust of the capricious nature of English

Figure 6.
Silver Burdett Spelling Grade 5
(Morristown, N. J.: Silver Burdett Company, 1986)
By permission of the publisher.

This speller illustrates the wide-spread current practice of listing words according to selected orthographic principles. Note that it directs students to derive other forms of the base words they are studying in the lesson as well as calling their attention to other aspects of the list words, such as their meanings and historical origins.



orthography. At midcentury, the key question concerning spelling instruction still centered on the concept of *generalizability* in learning to spell.

One of the foremost educational researchers, Ernest Horn, had doggedly insisted that spelling instruction should focus on helping students secure mastery of individual words needed in writing rather than to learn orthographic rules that were of limited and questionable utility. Horn, for example, had once claimed that *circumference* could be spelled 396,900,000 ways by using the spellings of identical or similar sounds in words likely to be known by sixth-grade children (Horn, 1929).

There were others, however, who claimed that English spelling was not as errant as it appeared. Among the advocates of this view was Paul Hanna who, with James T. Moore Jr., examined the sound-letter patterns in 3,000 words common to several spelling series. They found, by their method of analysis, that about eighty percent of the sounds of which the words were comprised had predictable spellings (Hanna and Moore, 1953), a conclusion which was later tersely rejected by Horn (Horn, 1957).

1960 and Beyond In reviewing the controversy, D.M. Bennett, an Australian researcher, neatly placed the issue in a proper perspec-

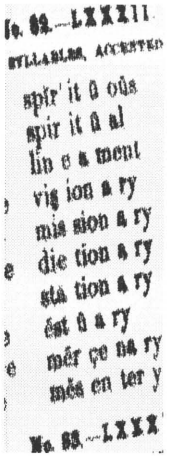
tive when he observed that "the real question is not how 'regular' English spelling is, but how far the degree of regularity which undoubtedly does exist can be utilized to improve spelling ability" (Bennett, 1967, p. 71). It is in the context of Bennett's observation that recent and current understandings of English spelling and learning to spell and their consequences for the spelling curriculum can be reviewed. Two lines of evidence have served to alter present views about spelling instruction.

First, linguists (e.g. Venezky, 1970; Chomsky and Halle, 1968) and educators drawing upon linguistic science (e.g. Hanna et al., 1966; Hodges, 1972) confronted conventional wisdom with evidence to support a description of English orthography that, on balance, is more predictable than commonly believed. Their studies revealed that, at deeper and more complex levels than simple relationships between sounds and letters, English spelling possesses numerous graphic patterns which extend throughout the English lexicon. In turn, these findings gave credence to the possibility that spelling instruction could be systematically organized to aid students in gaining knowledge about the English writing system, knowledge which, in turn, can be utilized in the development of spelling skills. Indeed, an examination of the major spelling programs presently in use reveals that most include instructional elements in which words are studied for their common spelling and structural patterns.

Second, much headway has been made by investigators of written language acquisition in describing the intellectual processes that are involved in learning to spell. (See, for example, Read and Hodges, 1982, for a review of this work). Their findings demonstrate that the proper study of spelling requires that students be placed in much more active roles in learning to spell than the traditional use of rote memorization of word lists has allowed (Hodges, 1981, 1982; Henderson, 1985).

A fuller description of what children *do* in learning to spell and the implications for spelling instruction of current insights into the spelling acquisition process is beyond the scope of this paper. But some pertinent observations nevertheless can be made.

First, children's spelling attempts need to be seen in terms of *their* frames of reference about English spelling, not those of adults. In contrast to earlier discussed views, the available evidence documents that children make *qualitatively* different judgments about English spelling than adults do; children are not miniature adults who deviate from expected norms. Learning to spell follows a develop mental course.



Second, spelling development involves learning, over time, about *words* and their semantic, phonological, and structural relationships in connection with their uses in written language. Learning to spell is one aspect of general written language and proceeds in relation to the amount and richness of students' experiences with writing.

Third, learning to spell is a "holistic" endeavor, in which an interplay of audition, vision, and tactile/muscular senses are involved, though not equally so by all individuals. Learning to spell is a multisensory process which is tempered by individual learning differences.

Fourth, spelling errors are "windows" through which the astute teacher can observe a student's growth in spelling ability. Like errors in children's oral language, most spelling errors reveal attempts to apply known information to words that are unknown or of which the writer is unsure. Spelling errors are rarely random in an individual's writing.

There are, of course, gaps remaining to be filled in our understanding of the nature and development of spelling ability, especially with respect to the continuity of learning throughout one's writing lifetime. But present descriptions of learning to spell do force a careful reexamination of the traditional view in which *habits* rather than *knowledge* were believed to form the base of spelling instruction. An increasing awareness of the active role that is played by students, young and old alike, in developing their spelling skills, coupled with a renewed awareness that the proper focus of spelling study concerns *words* and their uses in writing, raises profound questions about the appropriate context of spelling instruction in the language arts curriculum.

This observation is hardly new. Over fifty years ago, the eminent scholar-educator, Edgar Dale, cogently restated the perennial challenge to spelling instruction which Horace Mann had voiced a century before when he said,

> *Curriculum makers must avoid the current mistake of emphasizing as the goal of spelling instruction the correct arrangement of letters in some 3,500 words. Instead, correct spelling must be seen as an aid in the attainment of the crucial objective which all language arts share, namely, the skillful communication of significant experience....*(Dale, 1933, p. 148).

Our brief historical journey has attempted to remind us, as does Dale's sage counsel, that curriculum makers should not lose sight of the ends of spelling instruction in the course of looking at its means.

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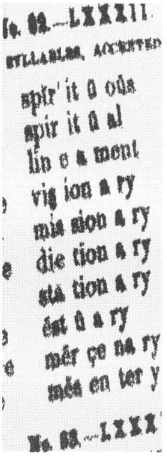

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No. 82.—LXXXII
SYLLABLES, ACCENTED
spĭr' it ŭ oŭs
spir it ŭ al
lin e a ment
vĭş ion a ry
mis sion a ry
die tion a ry
sta tion a ry
ést ŭ a ry
mér çe na ry
més en ter y
No. 83.—LXXX

Writing as Praxis 1900-1959

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Visible Language XXI, 2 (Spring 1987)
Barbara von Bracht Donsky, pp. 77-91

This study of elementary school textbooks published between 1900 and 1959 investigates trends in writing instruction. In order to determine whether quantitative changes in the frequency and types of assignments had occurred over this timespan, the sixty-year interval was divided into three roughly equal periods: period A included textbooks published between 1900 and1917; period B, 1918 and 1935; and period C, 1936 and 1959. All textbooks tasks were allocated into one of twelve categories such as grammar, letter writing, or narrative and expository writing. Generally speaking, the results of trend analysis indicate an increased emphasis on oral language tasks throughout the period, with a concomitant decrease in the amount of time spent on writing tasks. Moreover, it is clear that current enthusiasm for the idea of writing-as-process has antecedents in earlier textbooks on American writing instruction. Teachers have long understood the demands and nature of the writing process, but have yet to commit themselves to the implications, namely, that the one indispensable prerequisite for good writing is increased amounts of time spent on the task.

Over the last decade, as unprecedented numbers of researchers and teachers have attempted to come to grips with the essential nature of writing instruction, their efforts have produced a change in the language used to describe the process and, ostensibly, in its theoretical foundations. Researchers, intent upon revealing the stop-and-start, stretching forward and curling back nature of the art of writing, have produced a literature of such daunting proportions that classroom teachers feel hard-pressed to keep abreast of the outpouring of recommendations (Check et al., 1985). Much ado has been made of writing "process"; nary a glance given to "products." One result has been that after the usages of the last two thousand years, the tradition-laden term composition instruction has been supplanted by the upstart term writing instruction, one seemingly more in keeping with our information processing age.

Teaching writing as a "process" has meant concentrating on the message and relegating worries over the mechanics to a later stage. By definition "process" entails a series of actions to be taken, stages to be worked through before the "product," the completed piece of writing, can be forged. Terms such as brainstorming, rough drafts, revising and editing have become the buzzwords of the day. The implication — that writing requires effort over extended periods of time — cannot be faulted. Yet, questions as to the validity and authenticity of the writing revolution remain unanswered. Had educators throughout the twentieth century truly considered only the "products," as alleged, that is, the mechanics of composition? If so, how did they avoid dealing with the generative stages? What goals did they set for themselves along the way? What tasks did they assign their students?

The Textbook As Time Capsule To explore such questions and retrieve information relevant to writing instruction and its classroom context, a retrospective study of elementary school English textbooks published between 1900 and 1959 was completed. In hopes of discerning shifting educational priorities, a trend analysis of the data required the following steps:

(1) Apportioning the investigative period, 1900 to 1959, into three roughly equal intervals: period A, 1900 to 1917; period B, 1918 to 1935; and period C, 1936 to 1959;

(2) Selecting nine separate series of English language textbooks that had been designated for use at the elementary school level, with a total of three series representative of each of the above-mentioned periods;

(3) Formulating a categorical framework that allowed for tabulation and allocation of tasks described in the textbooks into one of twelve categories; and

(4) Performing a trend analysis for each of the twelve categories to test: (a) whether significant changes had occurred over time for any of the twelve instructional categories; and (b) whether those differences could be described by either linear or quadratic trends. The level of probability was established *a priori* at the level p.<10; that is, significant differences were those whose likelihood of occurrence by chance was less than one in ten.

With respect to content analysis, the following aspects of English instruction were evaluated and tabulated:

(1) modeling — that is the use of literary selections for student emulation and edification;

(2) oral language exercises directly linked to writing activities;

(3) oral language exercises not linked to writing activities;

(4) vocabulary development tasks;

(5) exercises in forming sentences;

(6) exercises in forming paragraphs;

(7) letter writing tasks;

(8) narrative and expository writing;

(9) writing poetry and dramatic skits;

(10) tasks related to grammar and the mechanics of writing;

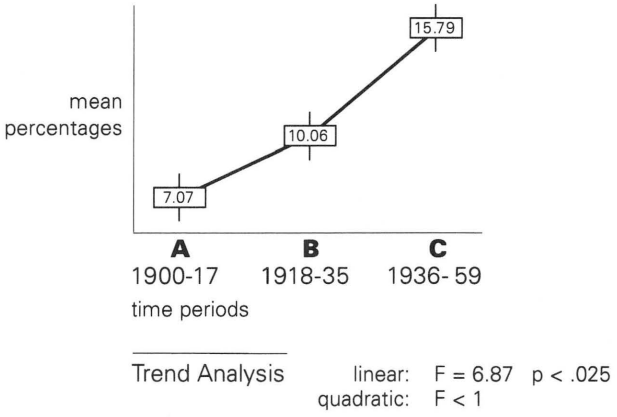
(11) study skills; and

(12) a residual category for unclassifiable material such as suggested field trips and artistic projects.

Trend analysis revealed an increased emphasis throughout the sixty-year period on oral language. Textbooks published between 1900 and 1917 (period A) integrated speaking and writing tasks far more completely than did those published during the later periods.

In general, textbook tasks related to the written word — modeling exercises, letter writing, and narrative and expository writing — fell from favor, with textbook authors recommending fewer and fewer writing assignments. On the other hand, oral language activities were much in vogue, with authors calling for committee work, socialized revision of compositions, discussion groups, and parliamentary councils. As shown in figure 1, the trend in the data reflected by the mean percentage of textbook tasks related to oral language activities, was best described by an ascending linear function ($F = 6.87$, $p<.025$). Whereas only seven per cent of tasks in textbook series published between 1900 and 1917 involved oral language unrelated to follow-up activities of a written nature, by period C, 1936 to 1959, the allotment of such tasks had more than doubled, reaching nearly sixteen per cent.

Figure 1.
Trend analysis of oral language tasks unrelated to writing assignements, category 3.



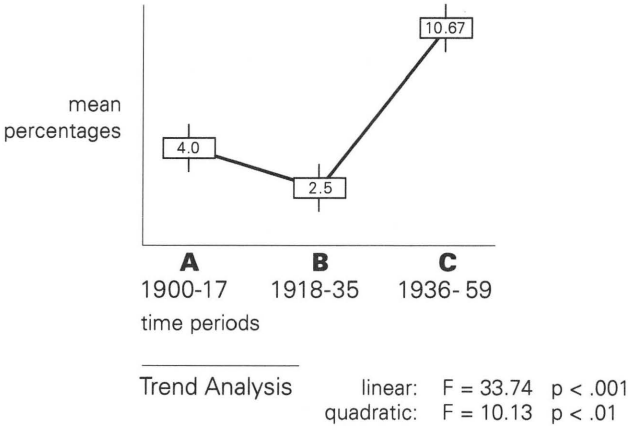
This heightened interest in oral language was a direct result of teachers' and publishers' concerns for the state of the nation as well as the state of what was commonly referred to as the mother tongue, the English language (Donsky, 1984, p. 118). As the public school system expanded to embrace millions of foreign-born children reaching these shores during the early decades of the twentieth century, in addition to millions of first-generation American children for whom English was not the language spoken at home, teachers increasingly emphasized oral language tasks to assure, in part, the preservation of the English language, but also to assure that by learning to speak English their students would be able to participate fully in the

American experience and way of life.

Despite recent articles to the contrary (e.g. Giroux and McLaren, 1986, pp. 213-38), the American educational enterprise has had a long history of tailoring schoolwork to fit the needs of a democratic society and of educating civic-minded citizens ready to assume roles in the economic, political, and social life of the nation. Moreover, forces other than immigration and industrialization have altered school curricula: technological innovations, such as the introduction of the telephone and the radio into the vast majority of American households by the 1920s, placed a premium on the spoken word.

Another aspect of the language arts curriculum analyzed within the study, one that clearly showed educators' concerns for the needs of business and commerce, was the study skills factor (figure 2) which included activities such as outlining, notetaking, alphabetizing, and paraphrasing. Trend analysis revealed that both linear ($F = 33.74$, $p<.001$) and quadratic ($F = 10.13$, $p<.01$) functions were significant, with the ascendant linear function best describing the trend over time. Increased attention given these tasks between periods B and C were due in great measure to the authors' awareness of economic and cultural concerns including the Stock Market Crash of '29 and the Great Depression of the 1930s.

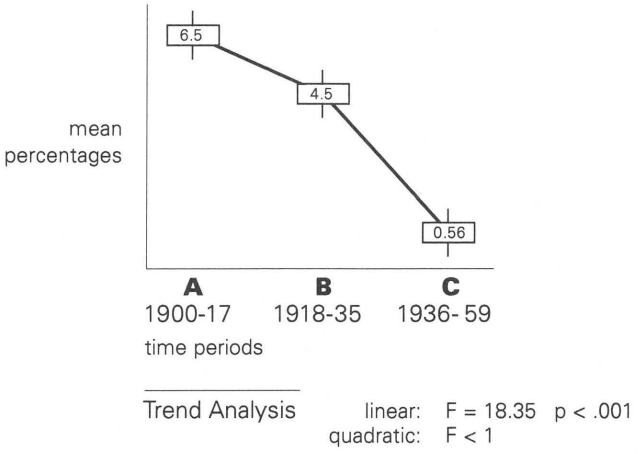
Figure 2.
Trend analysis of study skills factor, category 11.



On the other hand, a number of skill-building tasks were losing favor as authors attempted to revamp and modernize courses of study. Losers included those oral language tasks directly followed by writ-

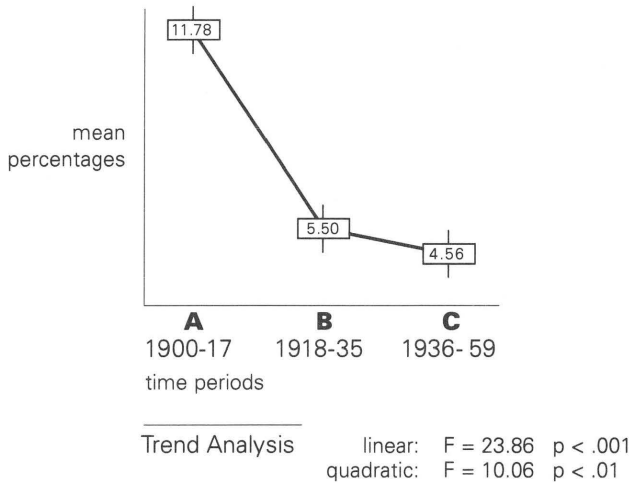
ing assignments (category 2, figure 3), for which a descending linear function ($F = 18.35$, $p<.001$) was significant.

Figure 3.
Trend analysis of oral language tasks linked to writing assignements, category 2.



For modeling tasks (category 1, figure 4) calling for the reading of literary pieces in preparation for writing assignments, both the linear ($F = 23.86$, $p<.001$) and quadratic ($F = 10.06$, $p<.01$) functions were significant with the descendant linear function best describing the trend over the sixty-year investigative period. Modeling, as a

Figure 4.
Trend analysis of modeling factor, category 1.



teaching strategy, declined significantly as an integral component of the language arts program with a greater decline witnessed between periods A and B than between periods B and C. The lessened attention given this category is of particular interest since modeling techniques — that is, patterning student writing on standard forms or styles — have historical precedents going back to the students' manuals of the Middle Ages which contained forms for all occasions, though primarily forms to be used when writing home for more money (Haskins, 1963, p.76), a seemingly perennial student preoccupation!

A typical modeling task is exemplified by figure 5, taken from Huber Gray Buehler's *Modern English Lessons* (1902, pp. 88-89). The reading, memorizing and discussion of the selection was typically followed by a writing assignment. Noteworthy is the author's injunction to memorize the piece, a requirement that would be heard less and less frequently as the century wore on. The memorization of material, a venerable learning strategy that probably reached its apotheosis during the golden age of ancient Greece, continued its

Figure 5.
Illustration from Huber Gray Buehler's *Modern English Lessons*, 1902.

Section XXVII. LITERATURE STUDY.

Commit the following poem to memory:

THE WATER LILY.

Fair little ship with a hundred sails,
Spread abroad your cargo of gold;
One would think you had come from the East,
Because of the spices you hold!

But you rock here at anchor from morning to night,
With a fleet of green skiffs in your wake,
And I see the long cables by which you draw up
Your spices and gold from the lake.

—*S. J. Day.*

69. Interpretation.

What does the poet call the Water Lily? Which part of the flower does she call "a hundred sails"? What is the "cargo of gold"? What are the "spices" which the "fair little ship" brings to us? How is the little ship anchored?

Have you ever gathered water lilies from a

boat? How do the "green skiffs" and the "long cables" interfere with a rower's oars? How does the little ship get its cargo of spices and gold?

70. Oral Exercise.

Without using its name, describe some flower in as interesting a way as you can, and see whether your classmates can tell from your description what flower it is.

71. Written Exercises.

a. Write a group of sentences answering the questions in the Interpretation, Section 69.

b. Write sentences describing some flower, without using its name. Make the sentences as interesting as you can. Read your description in class, and see whether your classmates can tell from your description what flower it is.

c. Copy or write from dictation the following group of sentences:

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They toil not, neither do they spin. Yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

d. Learn the following sentences, and then write them from memory:

(1) We all do fade as a leaf.

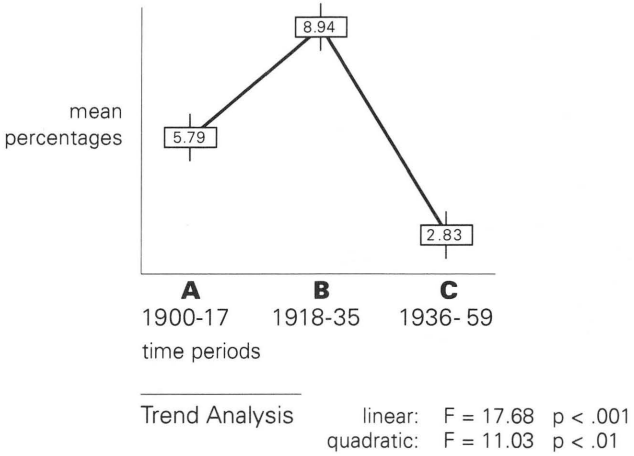
(2) Nothing is impossible to a willing heart.—*Thomas Heywood.*

(3) A penny saved is a penny got.—*Henry Fielding.*

uninterrupted decline hastened by twentieth-century technological advances.

As for narrative and expository writing tasks (category 8, figure 6), the descending linear function ($F = 17.68$, $p<.001$) best described the trend over time, but it should be noted that the quadratic function ($F = 11.03$, $p<.01$) was likewise statistically significant though less powerful. The data, reflecting an increase in narrative and expository writing assignments between periods A and B, followed by a more marked decrease between periods B and C, demonstrated a growing interest in the child-centered curriculum and a greater awareness of the importance of using the child's own language patterns. This movement was to be subsequently reversed in part by the difficult economic situation resulting from the Great Depression and the exigencies of the Second World War.

Figure 6.
Trend analysis of narrative and expository writing, category 8.



Another twentieth century casualty, one closely allied to memorization, was the use of "memory gems," bits and pieces of prose and poetry liberally sprinkled throughout textbooks, as were these in *Modern English Lessons* (Buehler, 1902, p. 90)

> *Memory Gems.*
>
> *Howe'er it be, it seems to me*
> *T'is only noble to be good.*
> *Kind hearts are more than coronets,*
> *And simple faith than Norman blood.*
>
> —Alfred Tennyson.

Memory gems, in this case lines from Tennyson, were considered of inestimable value in forming character, developing sensibility, and instilling an appreciation of the beauties of the natural world and of the English language. Moreover, these gems were intended to provide a common core of knowledge, as well as intellectual stimulation and spiritual sustenance.


TERATURE STUDY.
poem to memory:
THE LILY.

Even a lesson on the most commonplace of rules — as in the case of the humble apostrophe — was regarded as an opportunity to expose students to lofty sentiments and fine expression (Buehler, 1902, p. 98). For one exercise, Browning's immortal lines provided the focal point for a discussion on whether the apostrophe marked possession or contraction:

The year's at the spring,
And day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hillside's dew-pearled;
The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn;
God's in his heaven—
All's right with the world.

—Robert Browning.

The class was then enjoined to copy the following sentences, and to point out the contractions and possessives:

(1) *Don't cross a bridge till you come to it.*
(2) *An honest man's the noblest work of God.*
(3) *Wasn't that a dainty dish to set before the king?*
(4) *Variety's the very spice of life* — William Cowper.

No opportunity was to be squandered. Every effort was to be made to awaken untutored ears to the recognition of the force and majesty of the English language and to the creation of a literary classroom environment. As the years passed textbook publishers, citing social and economic pressures, departed more and more from the time-honored practice of including literary models as modeling exercises; memory gems disappeared from the nation's textbooks, as did the injunctions for memorizing them. All three aspects — modeling, memory gems, and memorizing — suffered parallel declines dwindling to a point where mentions of them appeared rarely, if at all, in English textbooks.

In short, these trends reflected an anti-writing bias with fewer and fewer textbook assignments related to the written word: pedagogical prejudices had shifted in favor of experience-based curricula, and

opposition had intensified towards any tasks pertaining to memorizing, rote learning, or study for study's sake.

Clearly, in retrospect, the period 1900 to 1917 can be seen as the high water mark for interest in the written word. After that, the inexorable forces of immigration, urbanization, and industrialization turned the tide in favor of oral language tasks. Yet, such quantitative data does little to answer those questions initially raised about product-versus-process teaching: one may understand that historical forces shaped curricula, with fewer and fewer writing assignments appearing in textbooks, yet such an understanding says little about the manner in which authors presented writing instruction.

Messages From the Past Deciphered Over the past decade, a great deal of attention has been focused on the symbiotic nature of reading and writing instruction; yet these same insights have been expressed by authors throughout the entire century. In a 1912 edition of Everyday English, Franklin Baker and Ashley Thorndike, professors at Teachers College, Columbia University, spoke forcibly of the need for total integration of all reading, writing, and oral language instruction. Their philosophy was that writing was meant to be read. If student writing was dull and blundering, it was due to a lack of ideas. To remedy any such likelihood, ideas were to be stimulated through listening, speaking, and reading, and then clarified through writing (Baker and Thorndike, 1912, p. 12). None of these processes was viewed as an end in itself, but rather as a means of fostering the growth of the cognitive processes and developing the students' ability to apply information under new circumstances.

During this same period authors other than Baker and Thorndike spoke of learning to read through writing and of learning to write through reading: James Hosic, a professor at Teachers College and a prime mover of both the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and its prestigious *English Journal*, and C. Lauron Hooper, a principal of the John W. Cook School in Chicago, joined forces in decrying the mere word pronouncing that passed for reading. As authors of the *American Language Series*, published by Rand McNally in 1932, they suggested that the antidote for poor reading was to be found in the composition class, and that writing instruction provided the best opportunity for training children to read, understand, and act upon those understandings (Hosic and Hooper, 1932, pp. xv-xvi).

By 1912 time spent on composition instruction nearly equaled that spent on arithmetic, geography, and history combined. Educators

obviously believed that one learned to write by writing *often*. Over seventy years later, similar counsel on the necessity of writing often recently surfaced in a compilation of research about teaching and learning published by the Department of Education (U.S. Department of Education, 1986, p. 27). In addition to frequent writing practice, the authors recommended teaching writing as a process involving brainstorming, composing, revising, and editing. Shades of Baker and Thorndike and 1912! In a sense, the report summarized what some researchers and educators have tirelessly expounded, not only for the last decade, but also throughout the past century: writing instruction requires attention to prewriting activities, rough drafts, revising, and editing. Moreover, it requires practice, practice, and more practice.

Stepping back into history we find these same ideas discussed in textbooks published fifty, sixty, and seventy years ago. At the turn-of-the-century, eminent authorities such as Huber Gray Buehler, headmaster of the Hotchkiss School in Connecticut, emphasized that children needed opportunities for thinking about and exploring their interests in preparation for writing. Artwork, drawing, and painting were to be used as springboards for writing, with poetry, fable, story, and biography brought in to stimulate the child's imagination (Baker and Thorndike, 1912, pp. vi-vii). Prior planning, brainstorming, selection of topics, and even "musing" were all considered part-and-parcel of the writing process (Buehler, 1902, p. vii).

Once first draft writing was underway, peer conferences were the order of the day. By the 1920s, textbooks regularly suggested that students read each other's stories, question each other's ideas, and tell what they liked or didn't understand about them (Pearson and Kirchway, 1929, p. 49). Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, peer teaching remained central to writing instruction, although the practice fell into disuse in later years. According to Goodlad, Professor of Education and former Dean of the Graduate School of Education, University of California at Los Angeles, the near total neglect of peer teaching in the 1980s represents a singular blind spot in American schooling (Goodlad, 1984, p. 110). Clearly, it wasn't always so.

For along with prewriting activities, rough drafts, and peer teaching, a practice known as "socialized revision" was dear to the hearts of educators during the 1920s and 1930s. The procedure involved writing a sample or class composition on the board and then having the class revise, augment, correct, and rewrite it. The chalkboard was considered the appropriate place to point out errors and to present minilessons. Teachers were cautioned, time and again, to keep their

pens out of the red ink bottles for fear of discouraging students' efforts.

Other concepts associated with writing-as-process surfaced. Language arts series in the 1950s contained suggestions that students maintain journals in which to record ideas, jot down notes for future pieces of writing, and keep track of new vocabulary. There were recommendations for daily writing periods as well as caveats to the effect that writing was not a one-shot deal:

> *Make the story as long or as short as you wish. Take as many weeks as you need to complete it, but always every school day, add something new to the story, or polish and improve it, until you are ready to read it to your classmates* (Burleson, Burleson and Cash, 1952, p. 243).

It appears that teaching writing with a process orientation was a familiar teaching strategy long before Emig, Graves, Calkins, Elbow, and a host of others took to the hustings (Emig, 1971; Graves, 1983; Calkins, 1986; and Elbow, 1981). It is an educational concept that can be thoroughly documented in English textbooks written throughout this entire century — rather a sobering thought. What then are we to make of the current brouhaha over process-versus-product teaching?

To begin with, the term "process" entered the research literature in force around the mid-1970s, just as computers were entering the nation's classrooms and information processing technology was transforming the entire mode of communication throughout the nation. The magnitude of these changes was reflected by the emerging vocabulary: word-processing, computer-conferencing, electronic mail, on-line information searching, text-processing, and indexing were all indicative of the instantaneous, ongoing nature of a computer-driven, information processing revolution — a revolution every bit as radical as that ushered in by Gutenberg's invention of movable type in the mid-1400s. Understandably, by the 1980s, one no longer spoke of "compostion instruction," but of "writing process", for the term "composition" smacked of static conditions, denoted fixed products, and suggested little in the way of change; on the other hand, the term "writing process," with the emphasis on process, far better conveyed the vicissitudes of the electronic culture while offering an impression of developmental vitality.

As Christopher Lasch indicated in *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, Americans in the 1980s have rather short memories, and although we may pay lip-

service to the past, our eyes are firmly fixed on the future; consequently, we suffer from a sense of historical discontinuity in which the past holds out little guidance (1979, p. xviii). Inevitably, speculations about, for example, the symbiotic relationship of reading and writing, or the concept of teaching writing as "process" not "product," appear novel and untried each time they reappear on the educational horizon when, in fact, the only thing that's new is the vocabulary. The ideas have been around for at least one hundred years.

Good teachers have always been interested in the growth of students as readers/writers/speakers/and listeners. Problems as they exist today with students' writing (and thinking) skills will not admit of easy solution simply because we approach writing instruction using a process orientation, unless by the use of the term process the need to write frequently is implied. The data from the study "Trends in Written Composition Instruction in Elementary School Textbooks, 1900-1959" (Donsky, 1984) are clear: no matter in what manner we have been approaching writing instruction, we have been doing so with less and less frequency and with devastating consequences. Anne Campbell's article in this issue indicates that forty-four per cent of nine-year-olds nationwide were incapable (in 1979 and again in 1984) of completing an informatory writing task at even a minimally satisfactory level (Campbell, figure 7, this issue). After many years of hearing why Johnny can't read (Flesch, 1955), it is now becoming obvious that Johnny can't write; moreover, this year, as mathematics scores for eighth grade students in the second international mathematics assessment put the United States in thirteenth place, trailing virtually every other industrialized nation on earth, we have been informed that Johnny can't do 'rithmetic either (U.S. Department of Education, 1986, pp. 28-31).

What then is the solution? The answer, as suggested by the data, points to the amount of time spent on task; in effect, children learn what we teach, but learning takes time. Before writing (and thinking) skills can be improved, far more time has to be allocated to writing instruction and not simply to instruction given within the confines of the English class. To promote writing skills, writing assignments must transverse the curriculum, reaching across the content areas and thereby providing a common thread linking all disciplines and integrating all curricular knowledge. Teachers must be clear as to their goals, certain of their priorities, and united in their efforts. Given such attitudes and commitment, we can begin to turn around the rather dismal state of contemporary education, especially with respect to writing instruction. We must listen to the voices of our eminent forebears, those outstanding educators and authors who

have long understood the nature of writing instruction, who tailored activities for students in keeping with their philosophies, and who offered sound, if thus far unheeded, advice in the distinguished textbooks they published throughout the twentieth century.

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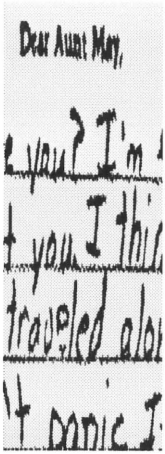
Fourth Grade Writing Achievement and Instruction, 1974-1984: NAEP's Report Card



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Visible Language XXI, 2 (Spring 1987)
Anne Campbell, pp. 93-109

The National Assessment of Educational Progress reports its trend results for the writing achievement of 9-year-old students from 1974-1984. The results are based on writing exercises which were administered using identical administration procedures in at least two of three assessments. The nationally representative sample of responses was scored using two methods, primary trait scoring (task accomplishment) and holistic scoring (fluency). Three types of tasks were given to the students, persuasive, imaginative, and informative. Performance on the persuasive task was somewhat less successful in 1984 than in 1979. Nine-year-olds showed steady improvement from 1974 to 1984 in their ability to write in response to an imaginative task. Improvement on the informative task was very slight. The results for various subgroups reveal that Hispanics made the greatest improvement.

Adapted from *Writing Trends Across the Decade*, 1974-84
by Arthur N. Applebee, Judith A. Langer, and Ina V. S. Mullis

How well do 9-year-old students write as compared to ten years ago? Do they do better at one kind of writing than another? How well are minority students writing? These are some of the questions addressed in the writing report from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).[1]

NAEP is an ongoing, congressionally-mandated project established to conduct national surveys of the educational attainments of young Americans. Its primary goal is to determine and report the status and trends over time in educational achievement. NAEP was initiated in 1969 to obtain comprehensive and dependable national educational achievement data in a uniform, scientific manner. Today, NAEP remains the only regularly conducted national survey of educational achievement at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

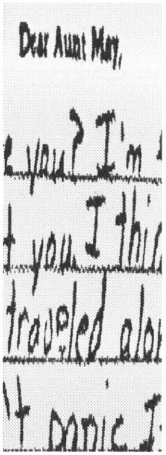
Since 1969, NAEP has assessed 9-year-olds, 13-year-olds, and 17-year-olds. In 1983, NAEP began sampling students by grade as well as by age. In addition, NAEP periodically samples young adults. The subject areas assessed have included reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies, as well as citizenship, literature, art, music, and career development. Assessments were conducted annually through 1980 and have been conducted biennially since then. All subjects except career development have been reassessed to determine trends in achievement over time. To date, NAEP has assessed approximately 1,300,000 young Americans. The students sampled are selected so that their assessment results may be generalized to the entire national population.

The trend results reported here are based on three assessments of writing achievement, from 1974 to 1984. These assessments took place during the 1973-74, 1978-79, and 1983-84 school years. (For convenience, each will be referred to by the last half of the school year in which it occurred.) The results are based on writing exercises which were administered using identical administration procedures in at least two of the three assessments. Thus, the discussion of trends in writing performance is limited to a rather small data set of three to five writing tasks.

The writing tasks were designed to reflect the differing purposes for which people write at home, at school, and in the community. These purposes have been categorized as informative, persuasive, and

1 A copy of the complete writing report is availabel from NAEP, CN 6710, Princeton, NJ 08541-6710

imaginative. Informational writing is used to share knowledge and convey messages, instructions, and ideas. It can involve reporting or retelling events as well as analyzing and examining concepts. Persuasive writing attempts to bring about some change or action by influencing others. It may entail advising, convincing, or refuting. Literary or imaginative writing provides a special way of sharing experiences and understanding the world. It finds expression in a variety of forms, such as stories, poems, plays, or song lyrics. The literary motive is also evident when language breaks conventional patterns.



Scoring The exercises discussed in this report were evaluated using two procedures: primary trait scoring and holistic scoring. For each procedure, raters scored all 9-year-old papers collected from the two or three different assessments at the same time. Also each kind of scoring was done by a different group of raters.

Primary trait scoring (task accomplishment) focuses on how successfully each response accomplishes the rhetorical task specified by the writing prompt. It involves isolating particular features essential to accomplishing the task and then developing criteria for various levels of performance based on those features. Papers were rated against these performance criteria rather than in terms of relative quality within the population sampled.

For the exercises reported here, five levels of proficiency were defined for each task: **unrateable**, **unsatisfactory**, **minimal**, **adequate**, and **elaborated**. **Unrateable** responses included those that were blank, off task, unreadable, or "I don't know." Across tasks, **unsatisfactory** responses were those that failed to reflect a basic understanding of the informative, persuasive, or imaginative purpose of the writing. **Minimal** responses recognized the elements needed to complete the task but were not managed well enough to ensure the intended effect of the writing that resulted. **Adequate** responses included those features critical to accomplishing the underlying purpose; responses scored as adequate are likely to have the intended effect. **Elaborated** responses went beyond the merely adequate, reflecting the higher level of coherence and elaboration that is highly desirable, if not absolutely necessary.

The trend items assessed in 1983-84 were also scored holistically to provide an estimate of the overall, relative fluency of the writing. When rating holistically, the readers concentrate on their general impression of a writing sample relative to the other papers they have read. Holistic scoring is sensitive to a range of different skills,

including organization, quality of content, grammar, usage, spelling, punctuation, and the choice of words, but its ratings are based on overall impressions.

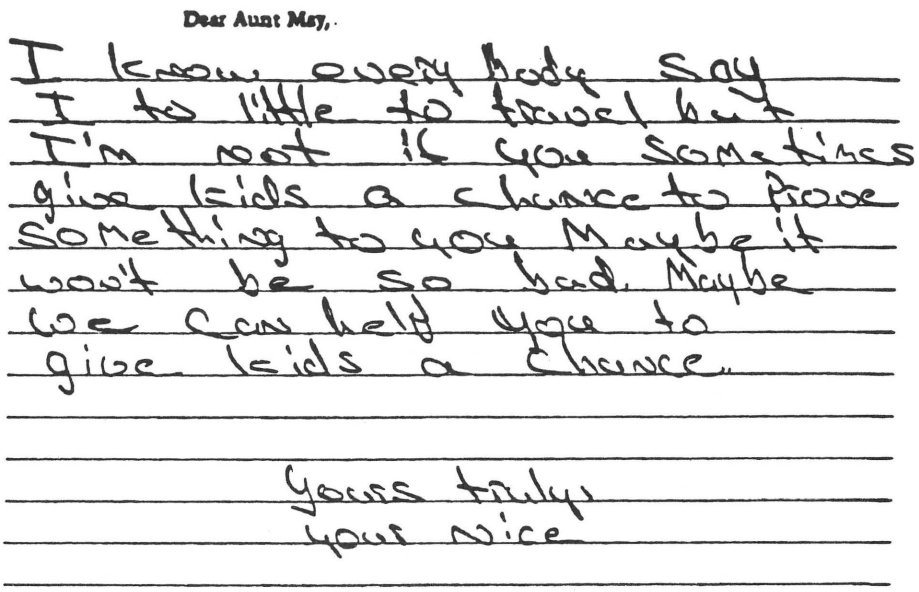
Guidelines for the holistic scoring (fluency) were developed by the chief readers and table leaders — all of whom were experienced holistic readers — who began by surveying the pool of papers for each task and selecting examples representing six levels of proficiency for that task (a seventh level was routinely used for blank or unrateable papers). Levels 1-3 were used for bottom-half papers, and levels 4-6 for top-half papers. Chief readers used the sample papers to train readers first to decide whether papers were "top half" or "bottom half" and then to make finer distinctions. In general, holistic scoring produces a roughly normal distribution of scores for the total sample of papers, with scores equally distributed around the center of the scale. The results of this process indicate students' levels of fluency.

The purpose of NAEP's holistic evaluation was to detect changes in writing performance for each task. Thus, papers written in response to a particular writing task by 9-year-olds in the two or three assessments of writing including that task were randomly mixed together and rated relative to each other. The differences in performance reported between assessment years are a direct result of that comparative process.

Trends in Persuasive Writing, 1979-1984 At age 9, students were asked to write a persuasive letter to their Aunt May to convince her that they were old enough to travel alone so that they could go to visit her. To accomplish this task effectively, students had to take a stand and support it with some appropriate reasons.

Unsatisfactory. Writers who performed unsatisfactorily on this task failed to take a stand or took a stand but did not support it with any concrete reasons. In the letter in figure 1, for example, the writer offers only the global appeal to "give kids a chance" without providing any reasons to believe that such a chance would be worth taking.

Figure 1. Unsatisfactory Response.

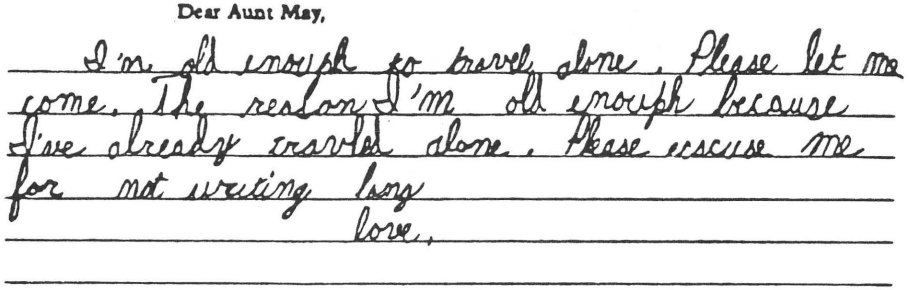

Dear Aunt May,

I know every body say
I to little to travel but
I'm not if you sometimes
give kids a chance to prove
something to you Maybe it
won't be so bad. Maybe
we can help you to
give kids a chance.

Yours truly
your nice

Minimal. In order to achieve at least a minimal level, the writers needed to clearly take a stand and support it with at least one reason that was appropriate to their point of view. The result could be quite short, as in the letter in figure 2.

Figure 2. Minimal Response.

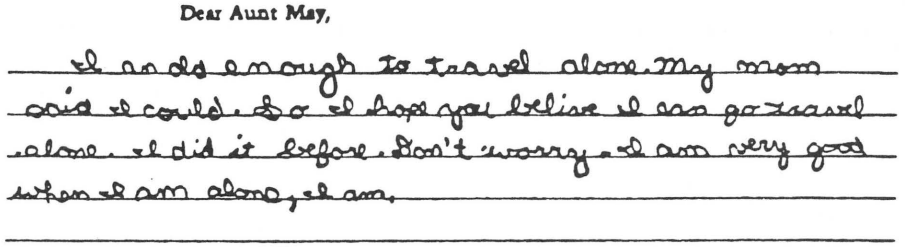

Dear Aunt May,

I'm old enough to travel alone. Please let me
come. The reason I'm old enough because
I've already traveled alone. Please excuse me
for not writing long
love,

Adequate. Performance at an adequate level required the writer to take a clear stand and support it with a brief argument or at least two appropriate reasons. Responses at this level, if not eloquent, seem to have at least a chance of persuading the reader to agree to the writer's

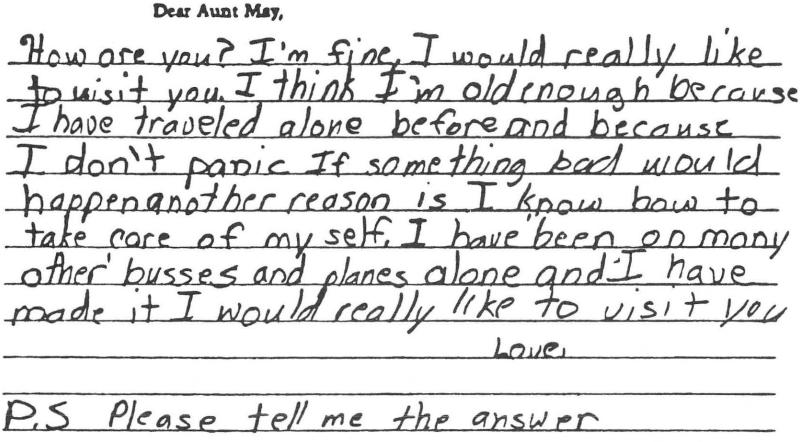
request, as in the response in figure 3.

Figure 3. Adequate Response.



Elaborated. Writers who went beyond the merely adequate offered an extended argument or an interrelated list of reasons to support their stand. The paper in figure 4 was rated as elaborated because of its interrelated list of reasons.

Figure 4. Elaborated Response.

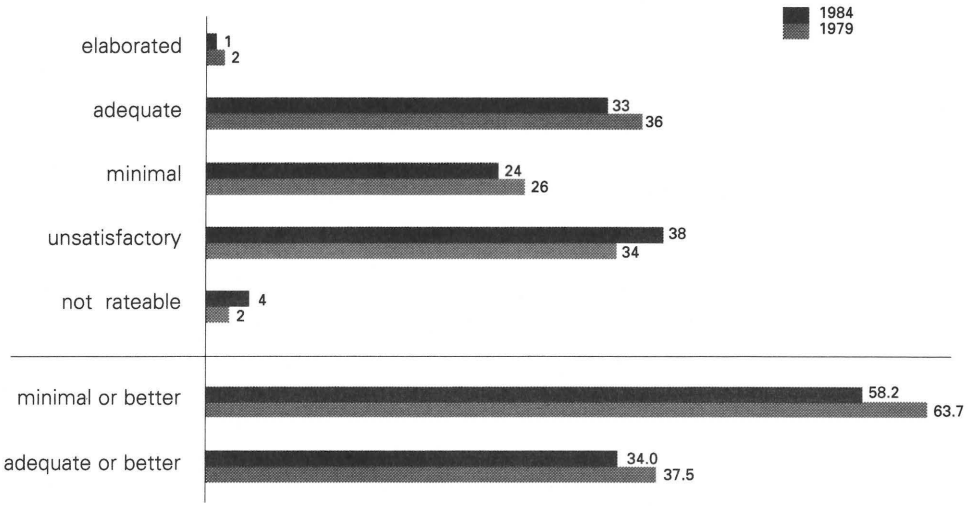


Changes in Persuasive Writing, 1979-1984 In 1984, one-third of the 9-year-olds wrote an adequately supported persuasive letter, and another one-fourth wrote a minimally supported letter that indicated at least an understanding of the task. However, as shown in figure 5 performance on this task was somewhat less successful in 1984 than in 1979: whereas sixty-four percent attained the minimal level or better in 1979, this percentage dropped to fifty-eight percent in 1984. Although these decreases in effectiveness were small, they were accompanied by parallel and significant drops in overall fluency

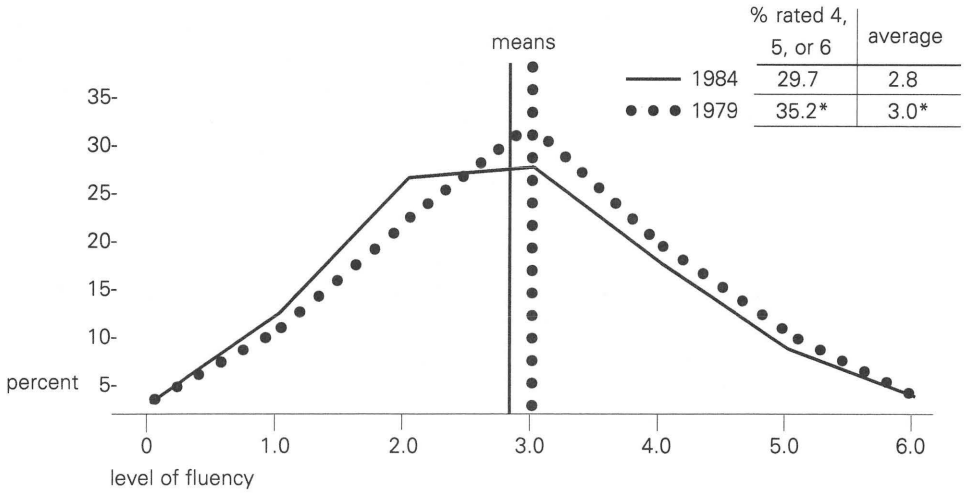
as judged by holistic ratings on this task, both in the percentage of better papers and in the average level of performance.

Figure 5.
Two Views of Persuasive Writing Achievement of 9-Year-Olds, 1979-84.
(Aunt May: Persuasive Letter)

Percentage of Students at Each Level of Task Accomplishment



Percentage of Students at Each Level of Fluency



*Statistically significant differences from 1984 at the .05 level

Trends in Imaginative Writing, 1974-1984 The exercise used to measure trends in performance in imaginative writing since 1974 was based on a picture of a box with a hole in it and an eye peeking through the opening. The prompt asked students to imagine themselves in the picture and then to describe the scene and how they felt about what was going on around them. They were encouraged to make their description "lively and interesting."

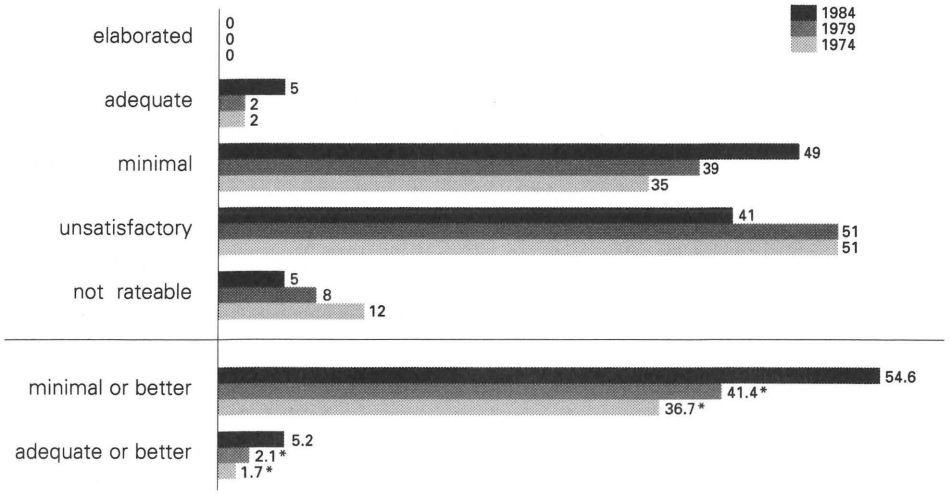
In order to accomplish their task successfully, students had to suggest the situation or imaginative world in which they found themselves and to reveal their attitudes through description of that situation. Writers who provided **unsatisfactory** papers left the situation undefined; if they mentioned attitudes toward this situation at all, these attitudes were unmotivated and unjustified. Writers who were rated **minimally** successful in accomplishing this task defined the situation or presented feelings and reactions but did not do both. They reflected a grasp of the imaginative character of the task but were unable to carry through with it. Writers whose performance was **adequate** defined a clear situation and provided a clear expression of attitudes and feelings. At this level of performance, their attitudes and feelings were presented in a fashion that was consistent and appropriate to the situation, although redundancy, vagueness, or abruptness may have been present. Writers who were most successful at this task developed a clear consistent situation and **elaborated** on the attitudes and feelings that were aroused within it.

The Hole in the Box task was administered in 1974, 1979, and 1984. Trends in performance for 9-year-olds are displayed in figure 6. Across that period, 9-year-olds showed a steady improvement in their ability to enter into and elaborate upon the imaginary situation. In 1974, only thirty-seven percent of the responses were rated as minimal or better; this rose to forty-one percent in 1979 and fifty-five percent by 1984. Even in 1984, however, only five percent of the responses were rated as adequate and essentially none as elaborated.

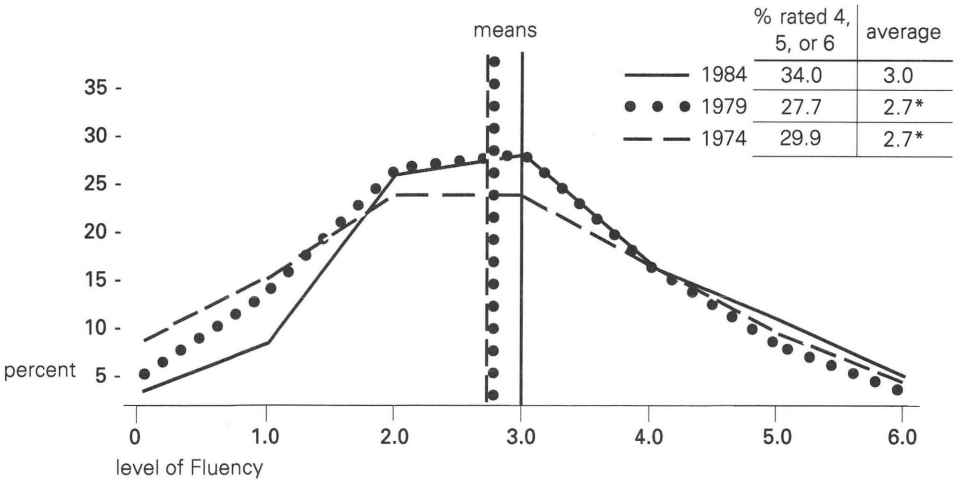
When measured by holistic ratings, overall fluency in response to this task also increased between 1974 and 1984, although the increases were less consistent and less dramatic. Mean scores (on a scale of 0 to 6) were 2.7 in 1974 and 1979, rising to 3.0 in 1984. Significant improvements were concentrated among the very poorest scores: the percentages of papers at the low end of the distribution fell from twenty-three percent in 1974 to twelve percent in 1984.

Figure 6.
Two Views of Imaginative Writing Achievement of 9-Year-Olds, 1974-84.
(Hole in the Box: Imaginative Description)

Percentage of Students at Each Level of Task Accomplishment



Percentage of Students at Each Level of Fluency



*Statistically significant differences from 1984 at the .05 level. No significance test is reported when the proportion of students is either >95% or <5%.

Trends in Informative Writing, 1979-1984 The informative writing task presented students with a reprint of a surrealistic painting by Salvadore Dali and asked them to describe it for a friend who had never seen it so that the friend could visualize the picture.

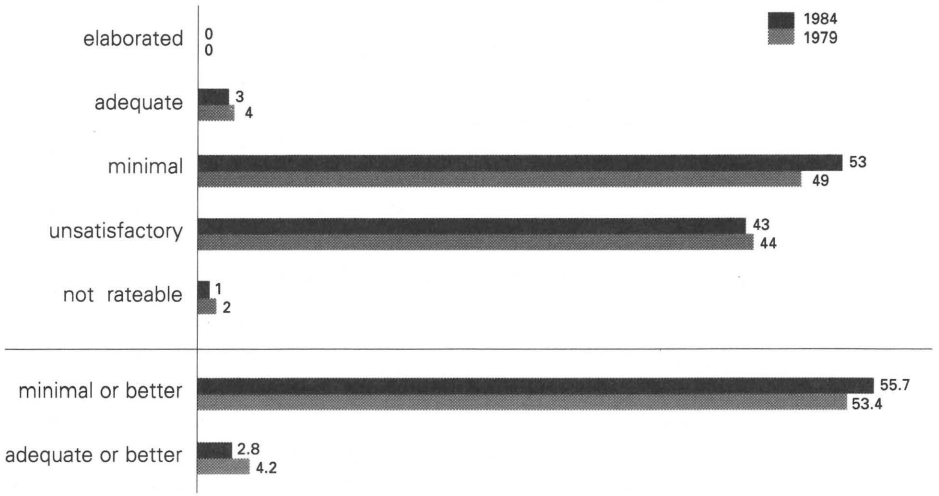
In order to accomplish this writing task successfully, students needed to select, organize, and present the details of the painting and to convey them in terms of the whole painting. Writers who responded **unsatisfactorily** to this task provided only the barest information, misinformation, or disjointed details so that the information did not fit. At the **minimal** level of performance, writers provided some details but in unrelated ways. They created no organizational framework for the reader to use to visualize how the various parts of the picture might fit together. To perform at the **adequate** level, writers needed to describe and interrelate most of the details in the picture and to present the details within an organizing framework. Writers presented **elaborated** papers when they wrote an extended description within a cohesive framework — spatial, formal, thematic, metaphoric, or narrative — to provide a context for the reader.

As figure 7 indicates, in 1984 over half of the 9-year-olds wrote minimal descriptions of the painting, with only three percent writing adequate papers. Although students wrote more papers that were at least at the minimal level in 1984 than in 1979, the changes in students' levels of performance were slight. No students in this younger age group presented an elaborated description.

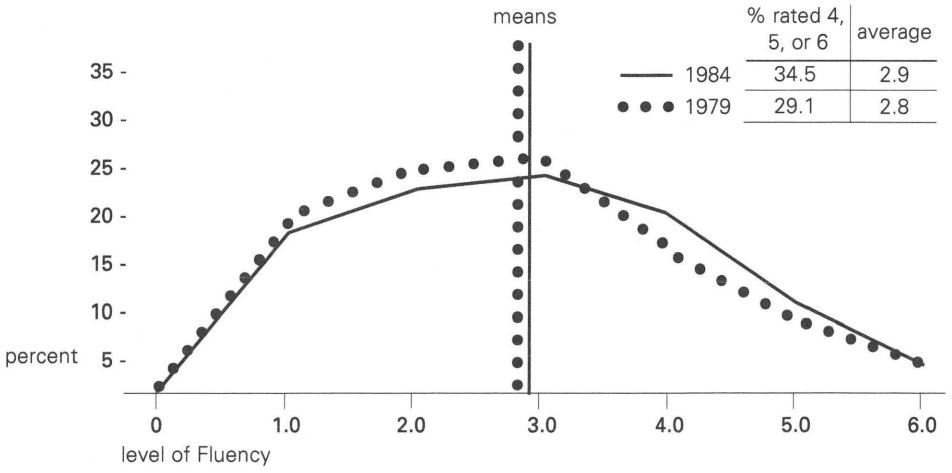
There was also a slight improvement in overall fluency as measured by holistic ratings on this task. The distribution shifted slightly up the scale, with five percent more students writing better papers (4, 5, or 6 on the fluency scale) in 1984 as compared with 1979. However, as with the results for level of task accomplishment, changes in fluency were relatively slight.

Figure 7.
Two Views of Informative Writing Achievement of 9-Year-Olds, 1979-84.
(Dali: Descriptive Report)

Percentage of Students at Each Level of Task Accomplishment



Percentage of Students at Each Level of Fluency



	% rated 4, 5, or 6	average
1984	34.5	2.9
1979	29.1	2.8

No statistically significant difference from 1984 at the .05 level.

Summary of Trends in Writing Achievement Across the Decade, 1974-1984

To provide a sense of the kinds of changes that have taken place in 9-year-old students' writing achievement, the discussion will turn to the results for writing tasks that were included on more than one assessment. This includes results for tasks already discussed.

In order to report trends in writing achievement as accurately as possible, the data presented are confined to instances where: 1) the identical writing task was administered to the same age level in two or three assessments; 2) the task was administered in each assessment in the same way (using a paced audiotaped procedure in which each task was read to the students); and 3) responses collected in more than one assessment were evaluated at the same time by the same readers, using both the primary trait and holistic scoring methods.

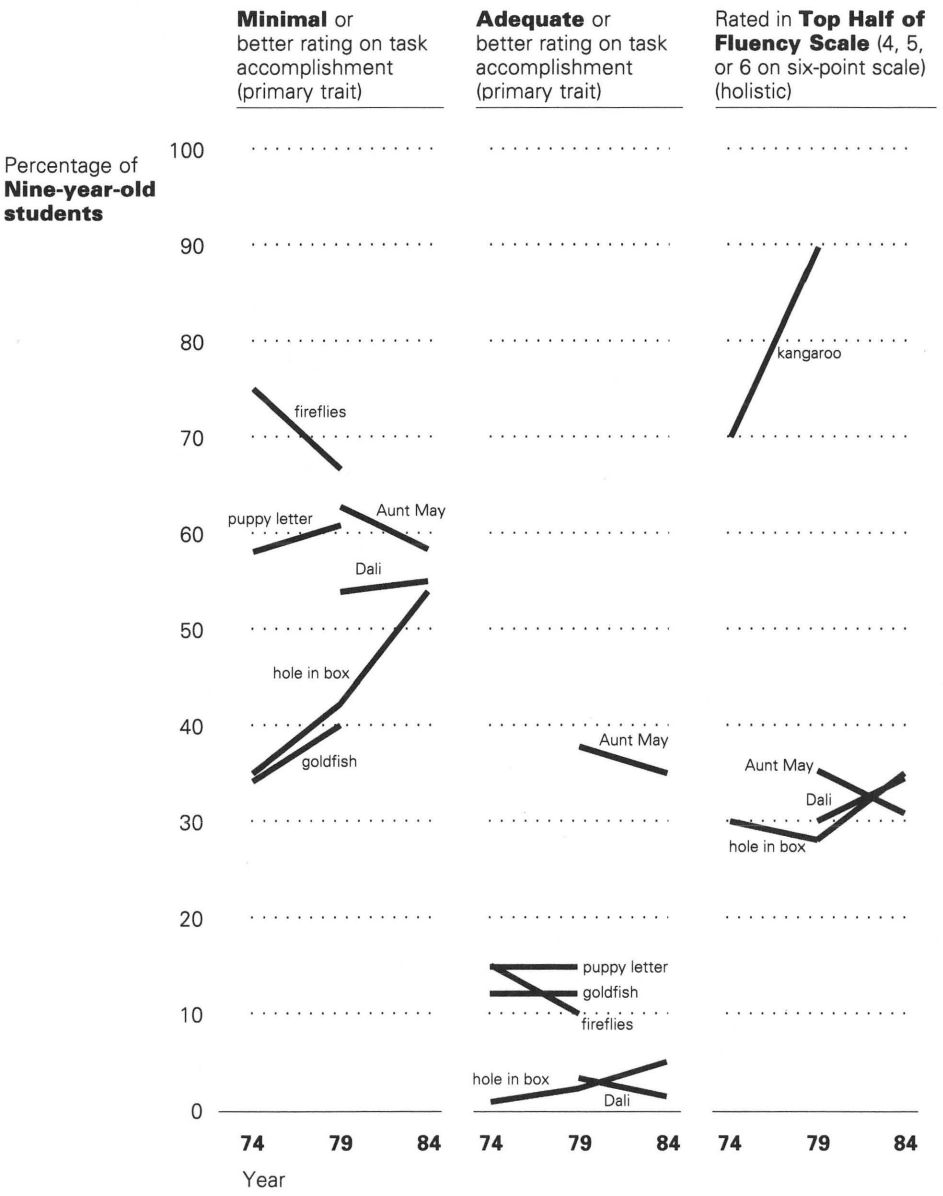
At age 9, four procedurally identical tasks were used to measure changes in writing achievement from 1974 to 1979; three procedurally identical tasks were used to measure changes from 1979 to 1984. One of these tasks was also included in the 1974 assessment and provides a direct link from assessment to assessment over the decade. These tasks represent the three types of writing assessed, informative, persuasive, and imaginative. For both figures 8 and 9, the informative task is "Dali." The persuasive tasks include "Puppy Letter," which asked students to write a letter convincing the landlord that they should get to keep a puppy, and "Aunt May." The imaginative tasks are "Fireflies," which directed students to write a story about a picture of a girl trying to catch fireflies; "Goldfish," which asked students to imagine what it would be like to be something besides a person, such as a goldfish, airplane, horse, or a tree; "Kangaroo," which had students write about a picture of a kangaroo jumping over a fence; and "Hole in the Box."

Figure 8 summarizes the trends of 9-year-old students from 1974-1984 on informative, persuasive, and imaginative tasks which were rated for both task accomplishment and writing fluency. The first set of results (Panel 1) shows trends in the percentage of papers at the minimal level or better in task accomplishment; this percentage includes all students who wrote minimal, adequate, and elaborated levels combined. The second representation (Panel 2) shows trends in the percentage of students achieving at the adequate level or better; it is the total percentage writing at the adequate and elaborated levels combined. Thus the first view depicts students' progress in moving from unsatisfactory performance to at least some minimal or basic level of performance. The second view depicts progress toward

responses rated at the adequate level or better.

The third view of trends in writing achievement presented for age 9 reflects the proportion of students in each assessment rated at the three highest levels on the fluency scale. Panel 3 shows global changes in writing performance from assessment year to assessment year.

Figure 8.



The 9-year-olds showed different trends in achievement on different writing tasks across the last decade. During the first five years of the decade (1974-79), the proportion of students reaching at least the minimal level showed slight increases on three of the writing tasks (two imaginative and one persuasive), but a decrease on a third imaginative task. Proportions of adequate or better performance on the same tasks remained relatively stable, but with a decline on the same imaginative task that showed the decrease at the minimal level. Fluency scores for the two tasks for which data are available for 1974 to 1979 moved in opposite directions.

During the second five-year period (1979 to 1984), there was a sharp increase in minimal performance on the imaginative task (describe an imaginary situation based on a picture), accompanied by a slight increase at the adequate level on the same task. The informative task (describe a painting) introduced in 1979 showed a slight increase at the minimal level accompanied by a very slight decrease at the adequate level. For persuasive writing, there was a slight increase at the minimal level from 1974 to 1979, followed by a decrease from 1979 to 1984 in performance on the persuasive task introduced in the 1979 assessment.

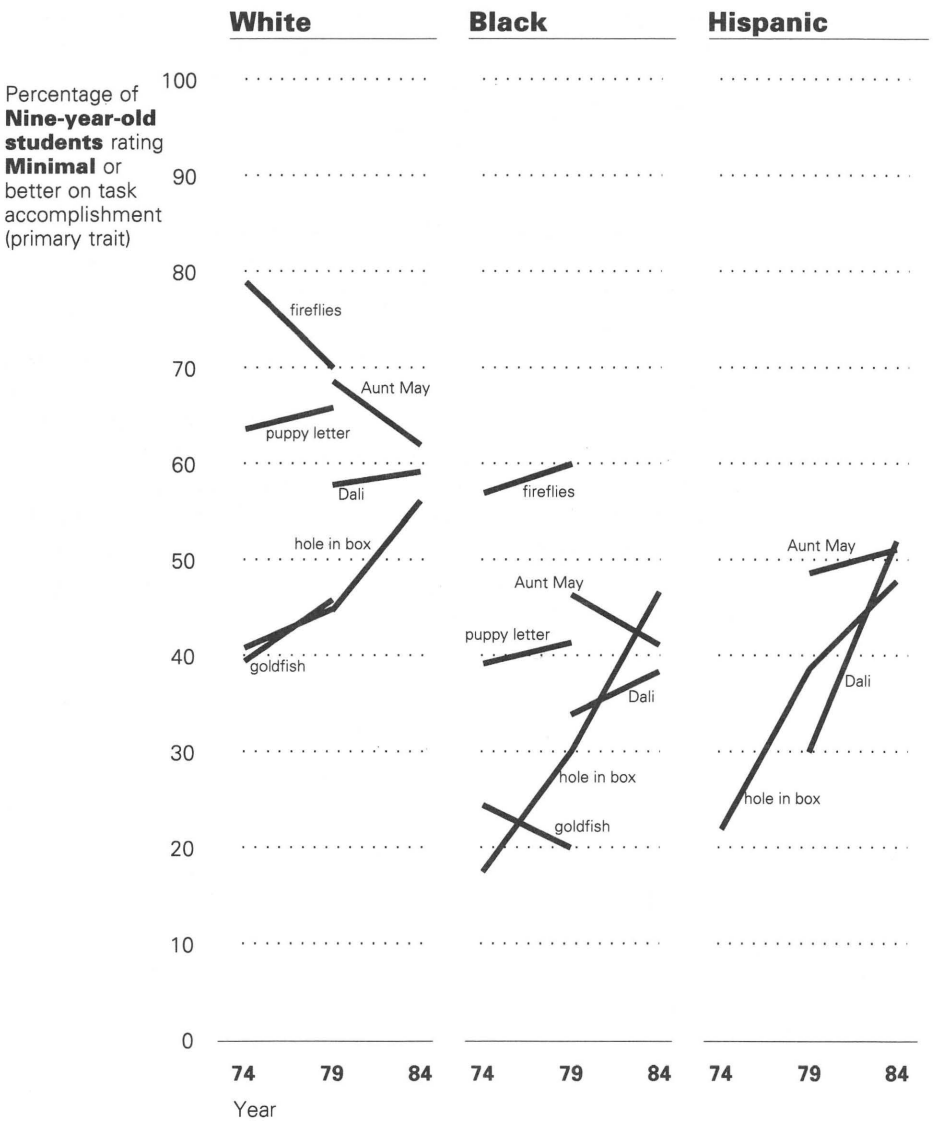
On balance, the writing performance of 9-year-olds was relatively stable from 1974 to 1979. Performance decreased on the persuasive task from 1979 to 1984, while informative writing skills remained about the same. Imaginative writing performance improved during that same period.

Subgroups An understanding of the state of writing achievement of 9-year-olds is incomplete without attention to the diverse subgroups that comprise the nation. Do trends in the writing performance for particular subgroups parallel or help explain trends for the nation as a whole?

Performance of Black, Hispanic, and White Students All three writing assessments have examined the performance of Black students; for trend results on items included in the 1984 assessment, results are also available for Hispanic populations. For each assessment, the performance of the age group has been compared with that of their White age-mates.

Figure 9 depicts trends in writing performance for Black, Hispanic, and White students. The data shown are for percentages of students writing papers rated as minimal or better on task accomplishment for informative, persuasive, and imaginative tasks. As with the national

Figure 9.

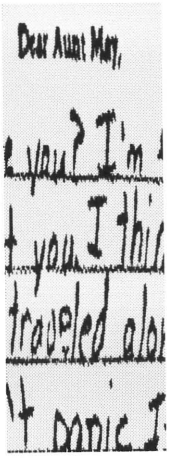


results, the percentage of students writing papers rated as adequate or better was substantially lower for each of the three subgroups on each task.

Great differences appeared at age nine. White 9-year-old students showed mixed patterns of performance over time, whereas the per-

formance of Hispanic 9-year-olds improved on all three writing tasks analyzed in 1984. In fact, in 1984 only the Hispanic 9-year-olds showed improvement on the persuasive tasks. Black 9-year-olds also showed comparatively more improvement than their White age-mates from 1974 to 1979, but trends in the achievement of these two groups were very similar from 1979 to 1984.

Reflections on Trends in Writing Achievement In summary, between 1974 and 1984, improvements at age 9 occurred on the imaginative writing task, although proficiency on informative and persuasive tasks remained relatively stable or even declined. This pattern may reflect the instructional emphasis in elementary schools: it may be that younger children are more likely to be asked to write creatively. However, this emphasis is too limited; elementary school children need to be engaged in informative and persuasive writing tasks appropriate to their levels of knowledge and interests. To move beyond the current levels of achievement, a more systematic program may be needed -- one focused more directly on the variety of different kinds of writing students need to learn to do and spanning a wider range of levels of complexity.


Dear Aunt May,

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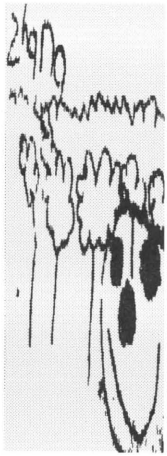
Young Children Composing Then and Now: Recent Research on Emergent Literacy



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Visible Language XXI, 2 (Spring 1987)
Nancy A. Mavrogenes, pp. 111-137

This study traces the development of composition in the elementary school from the nineteenth century to the present. Evolving slowly from an emphasis on copying and correctness, writing by young children is seen today as a crucial component of emerging literacy. Researchers are observing preschoolers and kindergartners as they write, interviewing them and their parents, and giving them special tasks and tests in order to find out what they know about print and how they should be instructed in composition. The focus is on process rather than product and from "inside out" rather than "outside in." The recent research is reviewed as to what young children know about reading and writing, how their writing develops, how they learn, and how to develop their writing capacities. The recommendation is to allow young children to write freely and to emphasize meaning, not mechanics. The advantages of young children composing are summarized, and the schools' traditional neglect of composition at the preschool and primary levels is examined. Finally, suggestions are made for improving the situation and encouraging the writing skills of young children as they emerge into literate users of their language.

Writing is said to be the best and most excellent ... teacher of oratory; and not without reason, ... since all the arguments relating to the subject on which we write ... will present themselves, and occur to us, while we examine and contemplate it in the full light of our intellect; and all the thought and words which are the most expressive of their kind must of necessity come under and submit to the keenness of our judgment while writing; and a fair arrangement and collocation of the words is effected by writing

(Cicero *De Oratore Book I,* xxxiii, 55 B.C., in Monroe, 1902).

Children, you are engaged in recording what happens out*(side) of you. Its advantage is to make you feel and remember what* effect *all outward events, and your action on what is outward, may have on your inward state of mind. I hope you will soon write the thoughts and feelings that come up from your soul about these things*

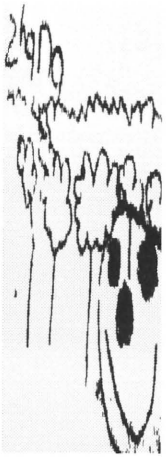
(Bronson Alcott in the 1830s directing his students to begin each day with journal writing, quoted in Jackson, 1986, p. 602).

The study of composition should be commenced at a very early *age, as soon, indeed, as the learner can read and write with tolerable accuracy*

(Pinneo, 1864, preface).

Proficiency in athletics does not come by studying rules printed in books devoted to athletic sports or by listening to lectures on throwing curves and the like, but by practice. ... It is only through similar, daily, and incessant practice that the degree of facility in writing the mother tongue is acquired, which always enables the student or adult to use it as a tool in his work. This is the crux of school composition. Nothing but plenty of writing, and particularly nonformal or extemporaneous writing, as in the daily work of the school under a moderate tension of criticism, will transmute the pupils' specific skill into formal skill

(The Harvard Committee on Composition, 1892, quoted in Jackson, 1986, p. 605).



The Nineteenth Century Throughout the centuries, the rare few have understood the varied virtues of composition, even for young children. However, as early as the mid 1800s professional educators (county school superintendents, elementary language arts specialists, and Henry Barnard, the first U.S. Commissioner of Education) were deploring the fact that composition was the most neglected and most faultily conducted branch of education in the common schools (Jackson, 1986). Instruction for "composing" consisted solely of copying the teacher's words or other models and working endlessly on handwriting, spelling, and grammar exercises (Burrows, 1977). Elementary teachers had only meager resources available and very little formal training (Jackson, 1986). The nineteenth century approach to teaching went back to Plato and Aristotle: knowledge is inborn, from these basic inborn truths one deduces particular knowledge, and mental exercise is the means by which this process is activated. Therefore, the same old curriculum was taught by rote learning and memorization in the name of mental discipline or faculty psychology (Mossman, 1924; Rugg, 1926).

At the same time, humanistic forces were also on the move in education. Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, and Johann Herbart in Europe had all turned education to focus on the child, not the curriculum. Their ideas had been brought back to the United States from the mid-eighteenth century on, through their books, by Americans who had studied abroad, and by immigrants from Europe who came to this country. Herbartianism, particularly, in the 1890s offered teachers and teacher educators practical ideas on the psychology of learning and the nature of children. Verbalizing or expression was seen as important for children as a means of organizing subject matter through comparison, contrast, and generalization. According to the Herbartians, writing should be used throughout instruction so that children could consolidate their thinking (Mavrogenes, 1985, pp. 53-54, 59-60). In addition, from 1837 on, when he became secretary to the Massachusetts Board of Education, Horace Mann had been promoting whole-word reading in order to bring meaning and interest into education (Hodges, this issue).

Other ideas were taking root around the turn of the century. Freudian

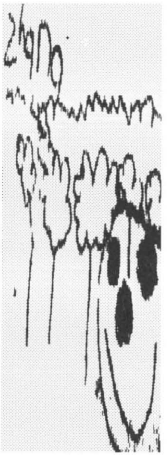
psychology was replacing the concept of the "sinful child" with the concept of the "sensual child" and the development of a healthy personality (Elkind, 1986). The Child Study Movement was stressing the importance of the child. John Dewey and Francis Parker, by connecting school with real life, were laying the foundations of Progressive Education (Cremin, 1964). For Parker, writing was an important means of expression which the child should undertake as soon as possible after entering school. Conditions of learning should be natural like those in learning to speak, writing should be taught as thought, and all writing should be read by the pupils (Parker, 1884, 1894). Dewey considered the first step of written expression, at the earliest stages of the child's growth in school, as the incidental use of written symbols as forms of social expression — as a way to share interesting experiences (Mayhew and Edwards, 1966).

The Early Twentieth Century During the early twentieth century change came slowly. In 1912, at the second convention of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), an elementary section first met to decry "The Reign of Red Ink." What little writing was taught in elementary schools was chiefly from the point of view of correction of errors, not enjoyment or mental growth (Hook, 1986). Although much writing research was conducted in the 1920s under the stimulus of the scientific/measurement movement in education, it consisted primarily of counting: length and number of sentences, number of words, and number of different words (Burrows, 1977).

Influenced by Dewey and Parker and reflecting the views of teachers who chaired active committees of the NCTE, Hatfield's *An Experience Curriculum in English* in 1935 recommended that writing about personal experiences begin in first grade. Experiences in observing, imagining, and reflecting would support such writing (Burrows, 1977). Researchers of the time — Alois Legrun in Germany and Gertrude Hildreth in the U.S., for instance — were not merely counting but were beginning to describe and categorize children's writing. They found a developmental sequence in this writing and also that young children have some knowledge about writing. L.B. Ames and F. L. Ilg carried this type of work into the 1940s (DeFord, 1980; Goodman, 1985).

An important force in education in the first half of the twentieth century has been behaviorism, which replaced mental discipline with habit formation in the theory of learning (Hodges, this issue). This theory of child development emphasized mastery of small steps at a time, lists of skills written in "behavioral" terms and organized in

sequences from simple to more complex, with rewards or good marks for mastery of the skills. Writing became divided into discrete behaviors such as "recognizes upper and lower case letters," "prints name," "demonstrates left to right progression," and "writes upper and lower case letters" (Hatch and Freeman, 1986). However, more holistic points of view connected with young children were also finding expression. Researchers such as Lou LaBrant, Mildred Templin, Dora V. Smith, and Dorothea A. McCarthy were from the 1920s to the 1950s finding that infants' language incorporates purpose and meaning, thus underscoring the significance of a child's earliest language (Loban, 1986). In the 1950s Elsa Barnouw and Arthur Swan portrayed writing as a way of expressing oneself either by arranging letters in a design or writing ideas (Dyson, 1985a). In 1957 an elementary teacher who had been an important part of *An Experience Curriculum* even became president of NCTE (Hogan, 1986).



The 1960s In October 1957 the Russians launched their first Sputnik, an event which focused extensive criticism on American education. One result for the field of English was the organization of the national research project called Project English and the inclusion of English in the National Defense Education Act (NDEA). Project English, which explored curriculum development, linked children's writing to emulation of literary models (Burrows, 1977), gave a greater role to linguistics, fostered greater use of the inductive method, and became the prototype for federally sponsored programs in the teaching of English. The summer institutes created under the NDEA led to little or no experimenting with new ways of teaching. Neither of these initiatives had a revolutionary effect on the teaching of composition (Jenkins, 1986).

However, other changes were occurring in the 1960s which affected all of education. The civil rights movement of that era focused attention on the unequal schooling of minorities and the poor preparation of those groups for school. Academic education during the early years assumed great importance and led to the concept of the "competent infant." Jerome Bruner and Benjamin Bloom provided the foundation for this concept by claiming that children can learn any subject matter at any age and that children attain half their intellectual ability by the age of four. At the same time social and economic forces were creating changes. Divorce rates were rising and more women were entering the work force leading to pressure for more early childhood care. All these conditions, reinforced by the prevalent theory of behaviorism, resulted in the first grade curriculum being pushed back to kindergarten

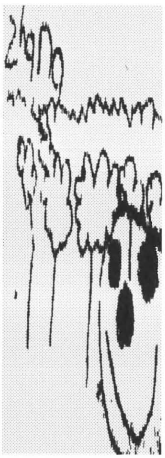
or earlier, a phenomenon still plaguing the schools and preventing young children's natural development (Elkind, 1986; Hatch and Freeman, 1986).

In the area of composition, the outpouring of federal funds after Sputnik did lead to some interesting developments. Ruth Strickland (1962), Roy O'Donnell (1967), Walter Loban (1976), and Kellogg Hunt (1965) began to collect children's language, focusing on the syntactic complexity of sentences as defined by Hunt's famous "T-unit," an independent clause with all of its modifiers. Their studies revealed growth in children's oral and written language productivity and complexity and added to knowledge about the wide range of capabilities in writing. They were, however, still quantitative rather than qualitative and did not yet provide detailed accounts of children's behavior as they write (Burrows, 1977; Loban, 1986; Whiteman, 1980). But this kind of research, along with the important work of Noam Chomsky in generative and transformational grammar, did lead to the downfall of traditional grammar in connection with the teaching of written composition (Smith, 1986).

In addition, the Anglo-American Seminar at Dartmouth in 1966 encouraged a freer atmosphere for writing (Burrows, 1977) and was a forerunner to the process approaches that began with the 1970s. Interest was also increasing in linguistics, language acquisition, and cognitive psychology with its models of teaching as interactive, process-oriented, and developmental. Vygotsky and Piaget were being translated and reinterpreted (Squire, 1986). Piaget's premise was that children build up knowledge through interaction with their environment, constantly constructing and reinventing their own organization of knowledge, testing hypotheses and generating new rules (Clay, 1982; Teale, 1982). Vygotsky saw writing as social interaction, resulting from children's experiences in their everyday environment, and also as a direct link with children's ability to symbolize, beginning with first-order symbolism wherein representations of meaning arbitrarily denote objects or events (Dyson, 1982a; Hayes and Cherrington, 1985; Teale, 1982). Dolores Durkin's case studies of children who learn to read and write before they enter school reinforced the developmental nature of literacy and saw children's independent writing as crucial to such attainment (Dyson, 1982b; Long et al., 1982). The acquisition of writing was beginning to be seen from "inside out," not from "outside in," with the active learner the focus of interest (Ferreiro, 1978).

The 1970s The 1970s brought an "explosion of knowledge about young children's involvement in constructing their own writing sys-

tems" (Goodman, 1985, p.6). Charles Read's investigations of preschoolers' invented spellings revealed that children as young as three have formed logical abstract principles which reflect an underlying linguistic competence (Hiebert, 1981; Long et al., 1982; King and Rentel, 1979; Sulzby and Teale, 1985). Carol Chomsky (1979) saw such spellings as closely connected with reading proficiency. Kenneth Goodman (1969) and Frank Smith (1971) also based their psycholinguistic theory of reading on the innate knowledge a child has of language. Marie Clay (1975) studied children's first explorations of the conventions of writing and found certain principles utilized in these productions of print: concepts such as directionality, recurrence, and message. Donald Graves presented a detailed case study of writing at the second-grade level, focusing particularly on one boy who revealed "a complex and illuminating picture of writing growth, both cognitive and affective" (Burrows, 1977, p. 39).



Evidence was accumulating that preschoolers have some knowledge of letter names, some understanding of what reading involves, and some ability to give meaning to print (Hiebert, 1981). Early scribbling began to be seen as a natural beginning to both writing and reading (Dyson, 1982a). By the late 1970s and early 1980s the acquisition of written language was understood as a complex process involving learning of writing's perceptual features, symbolic nature, structural characteristics, discursive procedures, sociocognitive nature, and functional properties (Dyson, 1982b). Writing was seen as involving more than forming letters — the need for sustained talk as a prelude to writing and representation of story structure in memory, for instance (King and Rentel, 1979). Strides were being made in examining the processes and components of writing and in defining its many variables and developmental stages (Burrows, 1977; Calkins, 1983).

Current Research in Composition Today more research on composition is going on in American universities than ever before (Burrows, 1977). Since 1980 this research has become more relevant to classroom practice, with more collaboration between teachers and researchers. Government education agencies, too, are beginning to pay increased attention to writing instruction. Writing programs were first funded in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1980, and state departments of education are starting to give more emphasis to writing instruction in their curriculum guidelines. Some commercial publishers also are beginning to reflect current research on teaching writing (Shaw, 1985).

This "current writing revolution ... emphasizes that writing shares

many characteristics of the social, playful, and expressive activities of early childhood" (Dyson, 1985a, p. 13). It describes child behavior in a holistic way, asking what, how, when, and why young children write and how the nature of their behavior changes. It sees writing as exploratory play which enables children to understand how writing works and the way that graphics relate to spoken messages (Dyson, 1985a). Finding out what young children know about language is difficult because it is often hidden. Researchers must infer what children know from what they do (Read, 1980). They must devise specially constructed tasks and tests, observe and listen to children as they write, interview children and their parents, and focus on the *process* instead of the product. In such a manner recent researchers have found out a great deal about emergent literacy, about young children and composition.

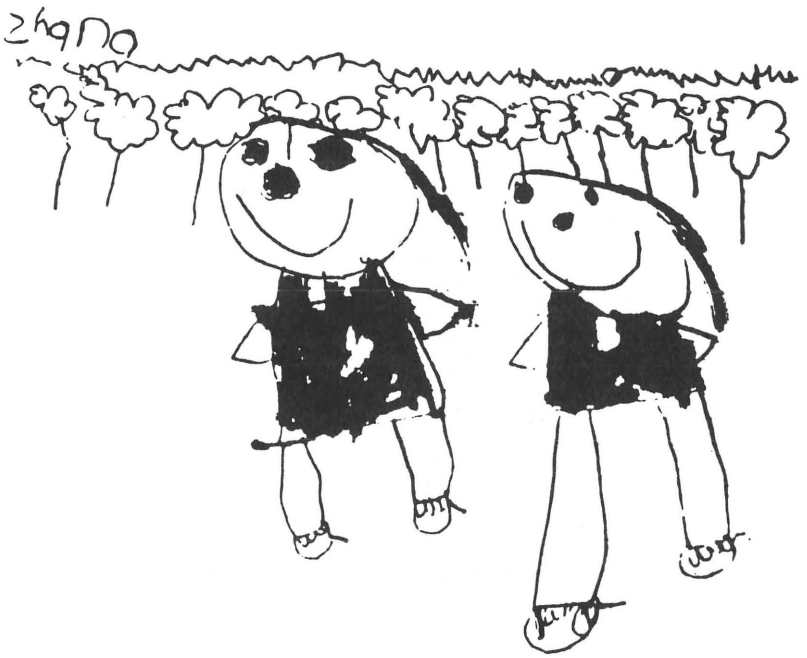
What Young Children Know About Print First of all, young children are able to use their environment to make sense of writing, to understand that a "McDonald's" sign identifies its premises. Sometimes in this process they make word-to-word correspondences between written and spoken language and sometimes they make meaningful errors (Hiebert, 1978). In her review of recent research projects, Yetta Goodman (1986) found that sixty percent of the subjects from age three through kindergarten could read environmental print when it was embedded in context. In the case of three-year-olds, almost all were able to identify names of common objects with full contextual support and almost three-quarters of their responses identified print as the source of the message (Long et al., 1982). Young children also understand the purposes of print and expect it to be meaningful, realizing that writing is functional and purposeful and that it communicates ideas and feelings (Klein and Schickedanz, 1980; Wiseman and Watson, 1980). They know what books are, that they are to be read, and how to turn pages (Goodman, 1986), although three-year-olds do not have the concept of letters and words in regard to books (Long et al., 1982). Young children even have some metalinguistic awareness about written language, that is, they can talk about language and how it works (Goodman, 1986).

In addition, preschoolers from both illiterate and highly literate families have some knowledge of what reading and writing involve: linearity, directionality, spacing, sequencing, patterns, forms, repetitions, uniformity of size and shape (Clay, 1982; DeFord, 1980; Wiseman and Watson, 1980). They play with pencils and felt-tip markers, writing on scraps of paper or the wall, not necessarily producing perfect letters or words but always seriously expressing meaning

(Goodman, 1986). Even many three-year-olds can write letters or symbol-like forms, can differentiate writing from drawing, and can recognize their own names (Long et al., 1982). Preschoolers are aware of print, associating letters with things and people (Hiebert, 1981). Most of all, they are eager to write, wanting to act like grown-ups or older children, to make sense of their ideas, and to communicate with others (Dyson, 1985a; Hipple, 1985; Ward, 1985).

The Development of the Writing Process As children actively and naturally experiment with language, they gradually become aware of symbols, sounds, and meanings. At first they may see print as drawing, forming letters to directly represent people or objects, with no idea of representing speech (Dyson, 1985b; Ferreiro, 1978). They may scribble, either randomly or guiding the lines into certain patterns which gradually acquire the characteristics of print in order to be read (Dyson, 1982a). Children may first form letters and decide later on a message, exhibiting a growing awareness of the alphabetic nature of the writing system (Dyson, 1985b). Sometimes single letters represent words, or random letters are strung together with or without spaces separating them (Wiseman and Watson, 1980).

Figure 1.



Names or numbers may be written over and over again, labels around the room copied, beginning consonants followed by random letters (Dyson, 1981; Hipple, 1985; Wiseman and Watson, 1980). In time spaces are put between words, some punctuation is used (correctly or incorrectly), idiosyncratic spellings are invented to represent speech sounds with letters. These invented spellings are different from traditional spelling but they contain common patterns and are remarkably phonetic (Dyson, 1985b; Wiseman and Watson, 1980). By this time content and language are becoming more sophisticated and children are sharing their work with classmates and showing interest in their neighbors' writing (Hipple, 1985).

The writing of the kindergartners in figures 1-6 portrays this developmental writing process. Figure 1 by Zhana, an advanced four-year-old just entering kindergarten, reveals that this girl has internalized the knowledge that writing is continuous, repetitious, and composed of forms of uniform size and shape. Both the "scribbling" and the row of flowers are carefully formed in terms of these discoveries. Shreeta, another four-year-old at the beginning of kindergarten, has in figure 2 differentiated between drawing and writing. She has also formulated a very rudimentary story in connection with her "writing": "This is a lady. The lady is cutting the pumpkin. These are cats, dogs, and squirrels." Figures 1 and 2 are from government-funded all-day kindergartens for educationally disadvantaged children in a large Midwestern city.

Figures 3 and 4 are from the same city mid-year in a kindergarten

Figure 2.

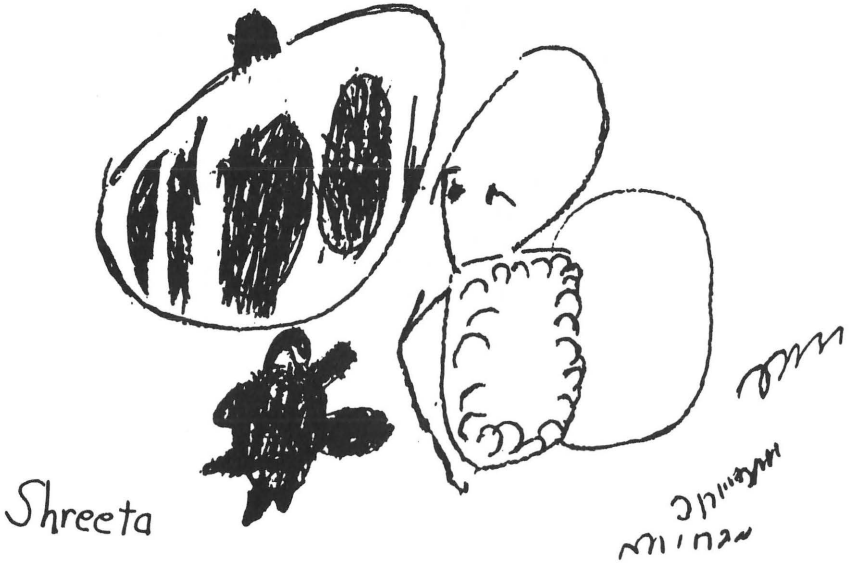
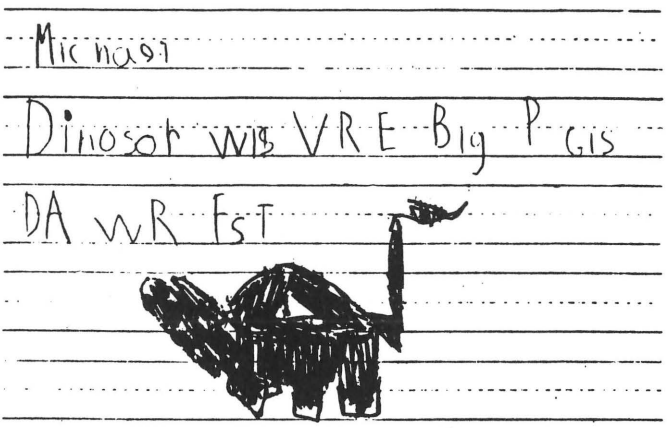
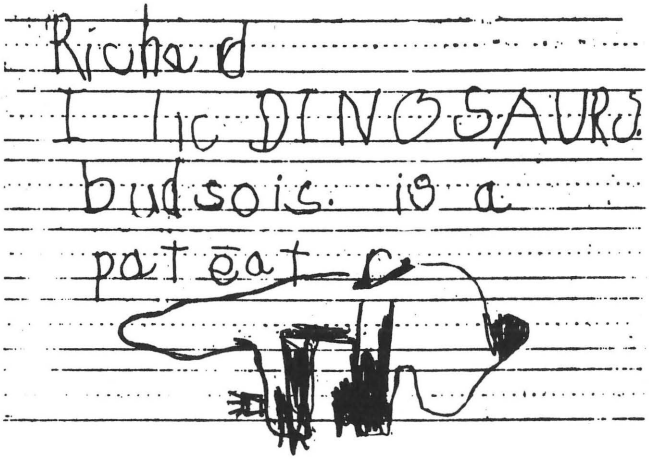


Figure 3.



dinosaur was very big because they were fast

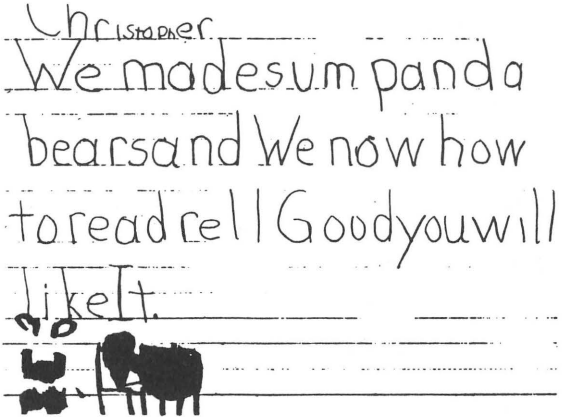
Figure 4.



I like dinosaurs brontosaurus is a plant eater

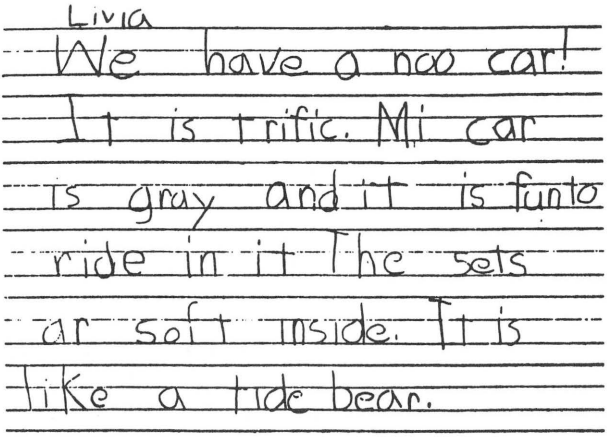
class composed of children from a slightly higher socioeconomic level. This class wrote freely once a week. Both boys are beginning to spell phonetically; they are understanding the relationship between speech and print to a degree that the girls have not yet reached. They also have reasonably good control of letter forms. Richard (figure 4) is even experimenting with periods, getting one right and one wrong. Figures 5 and 6 are from the end of the year in this same class. Christopher's spelling and letter forms are good (figure 5), but he has not yet learned to put spaces between words nor to use periods except at the end of the

Figure 5.



We made some panda bears and we know how to read real good you will like it.

Figure 6.

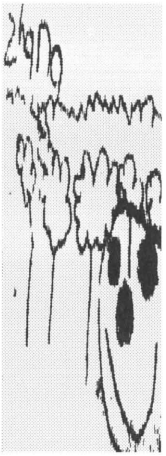


The seats are soft inside. It is like a teddy bear.

whole. Livia, on the other hand, is well on her way to becoming an interesting and fluent writer (figure 6). Her spelling is good in all five sentences, she understands the use of periods and exclamation points, and her simile shows a mind extending itself to comparisons.

This developmental process, as the research (Ferreiro, 1978; Goodman, 1986) and these figures indicate, seems to be a universal phenomenon, true of all socioeconomic, racial, and linguistic groups. Lower-class children might develop more slowly but they follow the same pattern. Another point to make is that the evolution of young

children's writing is not always linear or predictable. Reversions or regressions can take place for any child if an old rule interferes with adult-like performance, if a previously mastered element is temporarily lost while a new element is being added, or if a high emotional content is affecting the writing (Donnelly and Stevens, 1980; Hipple, 1985). Regressions, in fact, can often signal growth in a new and different area (Harste and Burke, 1980). Also, there may be individual differences between children, who can approach writing and develop their skills in markedly different ways. One child might be creative and metaphorical, dealing more with feelings than thoughts; another might be strictly logical and move forward in a straight line instead of in circles with occasional regressions (Donnelly and Stevens, 1980; Hiebert, 1981). In general, however, in a kindergarten where children are allowed to write freely and regularly, growth will be demonstrated: compositions will grow longer, spelling and punctuation will more closely resemble adult conventions, greater referential cohesion will appear, content and language will become more sophisticated and more complex (Donnelly and Stevens, 1980; Hipple, 1985). A final point about this developmental process is that talking is an integral part of beginning writing. It exchanges ideas, elaborates on meaning, seeks information, helps in evaluation, assists in the encoding of words, and gives vent to feelings of exhilaration or frustration (Dyson, 1981; Smith, 1981).



How Children Learn "Children do not seem to gain information about print in a uniform, linear sequence" (Hiebert, 1981, p. 256). They do not investigate a single piece of new information until it is exhausted, but repeatedly cycle through the pieces, learning new things with each encounter and continually returning to old pieces (Clem and Feathers, 1986). Literacy learning goes on in all areas at once; children learn in a holistic manner about written language's purposes, processes, and graphic details, although all children may not attend equally to all aspects (Dyson, 1984). Just as they learn to talk, children observe print in their environments and see people using this print for various purposes. They see the alphabet on television; they thumb through books and magazines; they receive (or see family members receive) birthday cards, invitations, and letters; they notice signs in the streets and in stores; they see family members use writing to make lists, fill out checks, or fulfill school assignments (Clay, 1982; Harste and Burke, 1980; Hiebert, 1981; Mason, 1980). They experiment and begin putting pencils to paper themselves. "As hypotheses are formulated and rejected or accepted, children discover more effective ways to discriminate and remember letters and words" (Mason, 1980, p. 222).

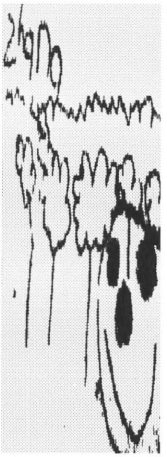
Between the ages of three and five knowledge increases significantly, with three to four being an especially active time for print-related learning (Goodman, 1986; Hiebert, 1981). "The child develops a model, a world view, rules about the features of written language in situational contexts. In other words, the child is developing a schema about these phenomena" (Goodman, 1986, p. 14). In this complex process children use all their cognitive and linguistic capacities. "In order to understand the writing system which society has forged for them children must reinvent writing and thereby make it their own" (Ferreiro, 1978, p. 39).

How To Develop Young Children's Writing Capacities What the researchers recommend in order to help young writers improve their composition skills is to teach reading and writing together, so that the two processes positively influence each other (Gambrell, 1985), and to begin such learning early, in kindergarten or even preschool, certainly by first grade (Friedman, 1985). Quiet talking should be encouraged while children write (Hipple, 1985). Tasks should be open-ended in order to encourage free writing and exploration. Even if the children cannot systematically encode their own messages, they are in free writing given opportunities to plan their messages and produce appropriate-appearing graphics (Dyson, 1984). In such writing children write however they are able. The concern is with meaning, not spelling or punctuation. As children read and write more, and have messages written to them, they will internalize the conventions (Dyson, 1985b; Gambrell, 1985; Milz, 1980; Wiseman and Watson, 1980), as figures 1-6 show.

Personal journals are particularly effective for language development and student interest. In these, children write about what's happening to them and about class activities; sometimes they include fantasy and make up stories. They both communicate ideas and deal with their own feelings. If their names and the dates are placed on each page and all writing for each child collected in a folder, then progress can be shown to both the children themselves and their parents (Clay, 1982; Hipple, 1985; Ward, 1985; Wiseman and Watson, 1980). Teachers can respond to these journals in writing, thereby concretely conveying the idea that writing is communication and also along the way developing personal relationships with the students (Gambrell, 1985; Milz, 1980).

As children become more proficient writers and are regularly read to, they form story schemata and begin writing and "publishing" stories for class members to read. If they are asked, teachers spell words and

demonstrate how to form letters (Klein and Schickedanz, 1980). Mailboxes in the room encourage letter writing by both students and teachers (Milz, 1980). When teachers answer children's letters and journals, they may be learning to write along with their students, always writing functionally and with a purpose, being patient and flexible in order to follow the children's leads, sensitive to personal and emotional issues, interested in children's writing activities and responsive to them. Sometimes teachers should model writing for the children by means of language experience activities, writing captions for pictures, recording events on a calendar, constructing lists with the children (Hipple, 1985; Klein and Schickedanz, 1980; Rhodes, 1981; Smith, 1981; Wiseman and Watson, 1980). After she had read and reread nursery rhymes to her class, one teacher had the children then write these out. As they did so, they began talking about writing and noticing their neighbor's work, wondering why their word for "mother" had two letters and another child's had five (Hall, 1985).



A crucial component for young children's writing is a willing supportive audience, composed of teacher, aide, classmates, parents, siblings, or community members (DeFord, 1980; Golden, 1980; Smith, 1981). Even if the writing is only "scribbling," it is still called writing and read to an audience. If teachers are asked to read such writing, they might have to ask the authors to read it first and then read it back (Hipple, 1985; Rhodes, 1981). An author's chair has been used for all reading to the class — by teacher or students. After the volunteers have read their writing, the audience responds by clapping and saying what they like. After such praise has made the author feel good, then the class asks questions in order to improve logic or fill in gaps. Such an activity naturally incorporates all aspects of language — writing, reading, listening, and talking as well as critical thinking (Blackburn, 1984; Graves, 1983; Graves and Hansen, 1983; Hansen, 1983; Hipple, 1985; Hubbard, 1985). By sharing writing proudly and concentrating on meaning, children come to see the relationship between print and reading, and the concept of audience is made concrete.

Another crucial component for emergent literacy is a rich and meaningful print environment. Adult and child authored books must be everywhere in the classroom, not just neatly displayed for effect but readily available for use. Teachers must read to children every day and write to and along with the children. Letters to and from authors should be displayed. Labels, newspapers, and magazines should be around the classroom. Pens, pencils, felt-tip markers, crayons, and paper should be readily available at all times, not only for the writing period but also for children who are finished with assigned activities

(Anderson et al., 1985; Milz, 1980; Wiseman and Watson, 1980). Local authors and journalists might be asked to class to share their enjoyment of writing (Smith, 1981).

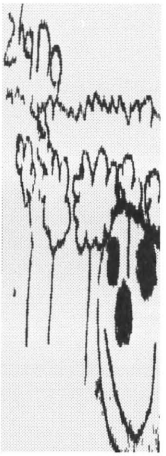
Advantages of Young Children Composing The data from this recent research on emergent literacy show that knowing the names of letters and how to form them is only one kind of concept and skill which young children need to know in order to read and write.

> *These data suggest that instructional programs which concentrate on letter naming as the critical reading* [and writing] *readiness skill are employing an overly narrow emphasis, at best. Children's early print awareness incorporates a broad range of concepts and skills, and it is therefore not surprising that instruction which considers only one aspect of this process is not entirely successful* (Hiebert, 1981, p. 256).

If children understand the writing system, they must be able to do more than name letters and utter sounds; they must actively construct the system (Wiseman and Watson, 1980). The kind of instruction recommended by these recent researchers — free writing with plenty of opportunity for individual exploration — makes provision for children doing just that. Young children allowed to write freely produce at the letter, word, and sentence levels and learn numerous principles: that the same elements can be repeated in word patterns; that these elements can change position, form, and order; that words move in a certain accepted direction; that messages can be made with different arrangements of known words and letters; that differences exist between the elements (Wiseman and Watson, 1980). Children writing freely learn the function of print, the organizational scaffolding of a story, the relationship between the text and their world, sound to spelling patterns, new language options, a range of writing forms, and how to select an idea to write about and then make that idea visible. They generate and test hypotheses and learn to orchestrate pragmatics (the rules of language relative to a particular context), semantics (saying what is meant), syntax (the smooth flow of the message), and graphics (representing the message) (Clay, 1982; Dyson, 1981; Harste and Burke, 1980). They learn to plan, revise, and consider their audience (Jaggar et al., 1986). As children themselves say, they learn to write by observing and participating in the writing process; then they practice, check, and begin writing again (Dinan and Dyson, 1980).

Free writing for young children has other advantages. Children's self-

concepts improve as they discover what they know and that they can communicate this. Teachers learn more about their students (Hipple, 1985). As they learn what their children know about writing, they can teach diagnostically and prescriptively. Teachers also will be exhilarated when they watch their children refine their budding language skills (Dinan and Dyson, 1980). Furthermore, children continue learning in the informal way they began long before entering school (Richgels, 1986). They are placed in control of their own learning and generate their own interest and enthusiasm. Their natural interest in and ability to explore their world is taken advantage of and developed (Clem and Feathers, 1986). Another benefit of free writing for young children has to do with the private speech that children engage in as they write. Research has shown that such "talking to oneself" helps facilitate thinking, integrate language with thought, and control actions. This talking peaks in children between the ages of four and seven (Berk, 1986). Because its importance is now understood, teachers should not discourage it but allow it, as this recent research on emergent literacy has suggested. Finally, learning to write through self-directed activities provides for natural learning in the same way that children learn to talk (Klein and Schickedanz, 1980). By experimenting and taking chances, children gradually understand conventional rules (Rhodes, 1981). As they learn how to form letters and convey meaning through writing, they come to understand how written language functions as a symbol system (Dyson, 1984).



Teachers who allow young children to "write their own way," instead of bringing the first grade curriculum down into kindergarten, will find their children learning in a developmentally appropriate manner. They will find that children's writing supports their reading and oral language development (Clay, 1982). As children read and reread their writing, matching talk and text, they help their composition skills and also learn to read (Sulzby and Teale, 1985). As they explore writing, "through their own actions, children come to realize that the precise arrangement (writing) of the pieces (linguistic/graphic symbols) is necessary if the desired whole (the read message) is to be realized — that is, children establish connections between reading, writing, and language" (Dyson, 1982b, p. 838). One recent experimental group of urban kindergarteners who had been exposed to an encoding or writing approach to reading scored twenty percentile points higher than the control group on a standardized reading test (Martin, 1984).

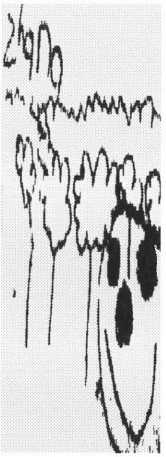
Teachers must understand that children are born capable of writing at least as well as they talk (Smith, 1981). If they learn to write fluently by writing freely and to make their own discoveries about

written language, the teaching of writing will be greatly enhanced (Whiteman, 1980). The recent issuance of position papers by a host of professional organizations underscores the urgency of this kind of improvement. These groups have all incorporated the research on emergent literacy in their guidelines: the International Reading Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, the Association for Childhood Education International, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the Texas Association for the Education of Young Children, and the Chicago AEYC Commission on Child Development and Elementary Schooling (International Reading Association, 1986; Sulzby and Teale, 1985).

Schools' Neglect of Writing Several recent observational studies have documented the kind of writing instruction that goes on in elementary schools. At the kindergarten level, one study reported that in twenty-eight hours of observing eight classes in a large Midwestern city, only one and a half hours of any kind of writing instruction was seen, and that was all copying — copying numbers, letters, names, or the "Morning Story" (Mavrogenes and Hagemann, 1986). Another study concluded that most of the forces affecting writing instruction at the elementary level impede, rather than aid, the efforts of teachers to teach writing. States do not require writing to be taught. State curriculum guidelines often give writing a low priority and offer only vague guidelines of little help to teachers planning a writing program. The commonly used national achievement tests measure only mechanics such as spelling, punctuation, and grammar, not composing. Language arts textbooks also predominantly address skills in mechanics; if there is a chapter on "writing," it is placed last. Up until recently few graduate courses treated elementary composition. Relatively few articles in educational journals have dealt specifically with methods of teaching composition in the elementary school (Shaw, 1985).

Bridge and Hiebert (1985) conducted observations for three days in each of six classrooms in two schools and found that first, third, and fifth grade students spent an average of about fifteen percent of their time on some type of writing activity, with the percentages ranging from ten percent in first grade to twenty percent in third grade. This writing encompassed all subject areas and consisted mostly of transcription (copying), paraphrasing, and handwriting. Few assignments required students to write more than one sentence. Only one teacher provided students with some help in prewriting and revision.

Teachers reported that they most often required students to fill in blanks in workbooks, to copy from the board, to practice handwriting of individual letters and words, and to write spelling words and sentences. According to their ratings of their teacher education programs, teachers did not feel well prepared to teach writing. They also only rarely wrote themselves, and then they wrote lesson plans, lists, and letters. Language arts textbooks focused on copying and mechanics. Students seldom composed discourse-level texts, rarely wrote for a real audience, and were not stimulated to relate writing to ongoing activities in the classroom or in their lives. In short, a great gap was found between current writing instruction practices in elementary schools and the practices recommended by researchers.



Furthermore, states require course work in reading for elementary teachers but nothing in writing theory and practice. Teachers feel undertrained in writing. They do not know terms related to writing research, names of writing authorities, or names of professional writing journals (Walmsley, 1980). A recently reported analysis of sixty-one kindergarten report cards in the state of Ohio (Hatch and Freeman, 1986) revealed a strong academic emphasis in those classes, especially in the kinds of reading skills found in all basal series. Although there appeared to be some recognition of the importance of expressive oral language, expressive written language was evaluated in only one case and there was little awareness of a holistic language-centered approach to literacy. The theoretical orientation of most report cards was the old behaviorism, not more recent orientations which might reflect a developmental or interactive view.

Some reasons for such a state of writing instruction at the elementary level have already been implied: teaching toward tests which do not evaluate composition, the lack of emphasis on composition in textbooks, and the lack of training of teachers. In addition, it might be remembered that schools have been focusing on reading, where research has been fifty to one hundred years ahead of writing research (Whiteman, 1980). One possible cause for such a difference in a reading as opposed to a writing focus is that the field of writing has never had a "giant" of the stature of William S. Gray to professionalize it and bring it to the level of classroom teachers (Mavrogenes, 1985). Another reason for schools' neglect of writing might lie with the American public, as expressed by William Jenkins (1986, p. 556):

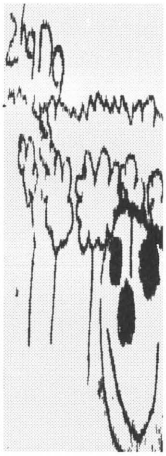
> *To a considerable degree, the absence of dramatic changes seems related to public attitudes toward teaching and schooling, which tend to insist that education be conservative, basically unchanged and unchanging, with a focus on*

basic and practical skills. ...Society is not looking for radical and costly education innovations, and teachers, mindful of restricted budgets and declining school enrollments, often are more concerned with job security than with change.

The lack of change in writing instruction is unfortunate since the recent research has shown that the usual instruction is unnatural and contrary to children's developmental learning. Such instruction reflects basic misconceptions about the nature of writing and the manner in which proficient writers write. It provides for no feelings of pleasure, for no fluency, for no creation of thoughts or reflection or a possibility of revision (Smith, 1981). If writing instruction is only copying or filling in blanks, children then see writing as puzzle-solving, not problem-solving (Clay, 1982). This kind of writing holds no personal meaning; it becomes a mere mechanical task which is rewarded if it is neat and completed. The results are a focus on letter forms, not meaning or the referents represented, and eventually a loss of confidence and a reluctance to write (Dyson, 1984). The goal is error-free performance, not fluency or self-direction and self-discovery. The teacher is in control at all times, carefully pointing out all errors, assuming that children are unable to make their own decisions, positive that children know nothing about writing, making children doubt their abilities. "In no instance — and our data has been collected from high, middle, and low socioeconomic statuses, black and white, boys and girls, small town and urban inner-city — would the assumptions underlying [the usual school writing] instruction [be] appropriate ones from which to operate instructionally" (Harste and Burke, 1980).

What is Needed Various kinds of suggestions have been made about what is needed to improve writing instruction for young children. Researchers have posed questions in new and extended areas. For instance, more information is needed about composing processes, developmental stages, and the effect of language variation on learning to write (Whiteman, 1980). Other profitable areas of investigation might be motivation for writing, the relation of oral language to writing (Burrows, 1977), writing and literacy in children younger than three and older than five or six (Hiebert, 1981), and writing within the growth of early symbolism across a variety of modes (Dyson, 1982a). Stotsky's review (1983) of research on reading/writing relationships makes numerous suggestions for further research, such as the traits of good readers/poor writers and poor readers/good writers, the changing relationships between reading and writing at various developmental levels, and better measures for lexical growth in writing. The fact

that Stotsky's review contains no studies at the kindergarten or preschool levels indicates a need, as Dyson (1982b) has noted. There must also be cooperation between researchers and teachers, for the latter foster literacy progress while researchers only observe and reflect on it (Dyson, 1982b).



The sources for improvement go beyond researchers. States should require teachers at all levels to have credit hours in writing instruction, similar to the requirements for reading (Walmsly, 1980). Teachers must seek out such instruction, educate themselves by joining professional societies and reading professional journals, and develop their own programs based on what they learn. School districts and the academic community must demand appropriate textbook materials and refuse to purchase inappropriate ones (Shaw, 1985). Teacher educators must inform teachers about the recent research on emergent literacy at both the preservice and inservice levels and help them respect the ways that young children learn written language. School programs and approaches to the teaching of reading and writing must change (Goodman, 1986). Teachers must learn to observe their students and follow their leads, to see them "from inside out" instead of "from outside in," in Ferreiro's words (1978, p. 25). As the recent research has shown, if children are allowed to learn about writing in a rich and meaningful print environment, with varied opportunities for individual exploration and a willing and supportive audience, they will then plunge in and examine and investigate, exploring "writing as a means of learning about writing" (DeFord, 1980, p. 162). Not unimportantly, such learning will promote fluency and a positive attitude toward writing, as well as much practice, so that the kinds of problems that show up on the National Assessments of Educational Progress — "awkward" sentences and "incoherent" paragraphs — will begin to disappear and "national concern about the quality of writing in this country" will be alleviated (Whiteman, 1980, p. 150).

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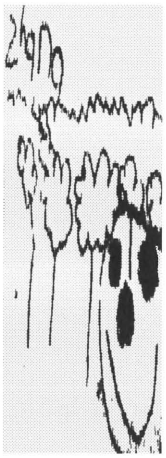

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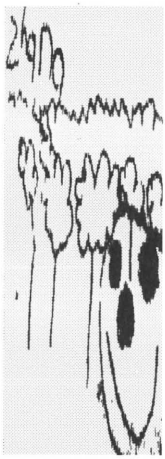

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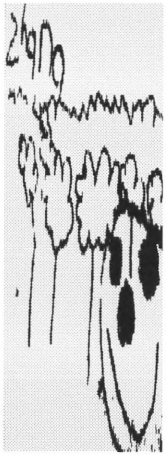

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