

Oral and Written Composition . . . in the Junior High Grades

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Learning the twenty-six letters of the alphabet is one of the first accomplishments of a child at school. But learning to place these letters in their proper places so that they form words which convey ideas, is the work of a lifetime. To learn to formulate ideas and then to give expression to them by means of the spoken and written word is education itself.

We Christian teachers have a specific calling in this respect. The children we teach are Covenant children who must be equipped to discharge their covenant obligations and responsibilities. They are all destined to be leaders, some in a greater capacity than others, but all must someday take their places in home and church, leading in prayer, leading in Scripture reading, in discussing the Word of God, and in making the truth known to others.

For this reason it is important that the children in our schools be trained to give expression to their thoughts in a very clear and distinct fashion. The truths which we as churches confess must of necessity be stated in such a way that no room is left for any misinterpretation. It is so important when dealing with spiritual things that just the right word is chosen to give the right impression and to convey the right meaning. The truth must be stated concisely. Words are powerful because they are the wings of thought.

Therefore, one of the goals of Prot. Ref. education should be that the child may learn to express his ideas clearly both on paper and orally. First of all, he should learn to formulate his ideas clearly on paper. And then, he should be taught to express them audibly, distinctly, and without embarrassment.

How can the teacher work toward realizing this goal?

In the first place, a separate period in the curriculum for the teaching of the mechanics of oral and written composition and for giving practice in developing this art of self-expression is essential. Children must be made to see how variety in sentence structure, and how punctuation and proper grammar add to the interest and clarity of their compositions. They must be given much opportunity to develop their vocabulary so that the most illustrative word can be selected. They must be taught to be exact in their observations. They must learn to describe by comparison. They must learn to report facts accurately. For oral expression they must learn to enunciate clearly, to pronounce words correctly. They must learn to control the tone and pitch of their voices, using proper inflections and emphasis. They must learn to “think ahead” while they are on their feet.

Unless a definite time is set aside for teaching just these things, the danger is that they will not be taught at all. And unless we teach the basic speech and writing mechanics we have no reasonable right to expect favorable results.

In the second place, however, we all know that clarity in speaking and writing rests finally on the foundation of clear thinking. To develop clear thinking on the part of the pupils is every teacher's business in every subject of the curriculum. Certainly practice in developing oral and written self-expression should not be *limited* to any special period. On the grade school level it can and should be correlated with almost every subject. All it takes is an awareness of this particular goal on the part of the teacher. Many history, civics, and geography lessons lend themselves excellently to oral or written reports. Children love to feel responsible for a

paragraph or a page of the text and to tell the rest of the class what “their” part of the lesson is all about. The diet can be varied by encouraging the pupils to *debate* “slavery in the territories” instead of just questioning them on the subject. Most children are eager to join a round table discussion on almost any problem within their comprehension. In Bible memory work, the speaking choir is an excellent means of vocal expression for the timid and self-conscious pupils. They can lose themselves in the group while at the same time they receive valuable training in enunciation, inflection, timing, and emphasis.

In our daily oral recitations or on written tests, how often do we teachers insist on a concise communication on the part of our pupils? Too often we are only interested in knowing whether the pupil *knows* the answer and not whether he can express or explain the matter. Often their thinking is so vague that they cannot give clear explanations. It is our duty to force them to think clearly so that they can state their views with logical precision. If we do this we will be helping the pupil develop his thinking capacity as well as his ability to give expression to his thoughts.

The well-rounded Christian must be able to communicate his ideas so that God's name is glorified and God's people are strengthened in the truth. It is by means of the spoken and written word that we confess in both the church and the world that we belong to Christ who is the WORD of God.

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