

These remarks apply not only to the reading of the standard classes, but to that of the preparatories also. In the latter case teachers when taking the reading from the blackboard, as most of them I am pleased to say now do, should endeavour to avoid the word-by-word style that is commonly found, and should, before the close of the lesson, at least endeavour to have it read naturally—that is, with expression. I believe this plan would gradually introduce a feature which is at present not very conspicuous in the majority of the schools. It is important also that teachers should insist upon frequent pauses, which mark good reading. One commonly hears children quite ignoring the ordinary punctuation marks, showing clearly that their reading is accompanied with little or no thought of what they are reading about.

Careful attention to expression during the recitation of poetry, which is now taken in many schools, should also have a beneficial effect on the reading. Not many teachers avail themselves of silent reading as a means of affording pupils wider practice and of developing self-effort, self-reliance, and a love for reading. It is interesting to note, however, that the demand for library books is increasing yearly, and it is refreshing to find that in some cases the pupils are known to turn into Maori for the old people in the kainga the stories they read in their library books.

*Spelling.*—In this subject there is continued improvement, which is again most marked in the lower standards. Oral spelling is not now taken, and the old difficulties of “*p*” and “*b*,” which were considered to be insurmountable in the case of Maori children, have been overcome by the teaching of sounds and blackboard lessons in word-building given to the lower classes.

The difference in quality between the work of the lower classes and that of the higher is very marked. To overcome this, word-building sheets are being supplied, which should afford ample material for giving practice in word-building and spelling. It should be borne in mind, however, that spelling is largely a matter of the eye, and observation should be used as well as repetition.

Frequently one finds that the written composition is marred by bad spelling, and errors in spelling are not uncommon in transcription.

I feel that there is much to be done yet to secure the actual teaching of spelling throughout the school, but at the same time recognise that teachers have very little time at their disposal. In connection with the dictation, teachers generally are prone to two mistakes—first, the children do not receive any preparation beforehand in the piece they are to write; and, second, the phrases are repeated so frequently when the dictation is being given out that the children become confused. If they have had an opportunity to prepare the piece beforehand and they understand its meaning, there is no need for the teacher to repeat phrases; once should be enough.

*Writing.*—I consider the writing to be one of the weakest subjects in the schools. The slate-work, especially in the lowest classes, is very good, but the written work, both in the copybooks and the exercise-books, is very much in need of improvement. For the past two or three years blank copybooks have been in use in the schools. They were introduced with the object of securing more teaching in writing lessons. With very few exceptions, schools do not appear to have benefited; and, indeed, where the teacher himself does not write a good hand it is just possible that his inferior copies produce defective writing. I think it advisable, therefore, to restore the headline copybooks in those schools where the teachers find that the present arrangements do not conduce to good writing. In some schools the absence of any “writing drill” is very evident. The children hold their pens in any fashion, and sit in very awkward positions. In one school the position of the children was such as to render decent writing impossible.

The children of the lowest classes had better write their first copies in books with lead pencils, which are cleaner and easier of manipulation. Teachers should also be careful to analyse the letters into their elements; it is a mistake for children to have to write as their first lessons the letters as they occur in the alphabet.

It should be remembered also that the writing in the copy and exercise books cannot improve if the teacher allows slovenly and careless writing in other subjects of the school-work. The transcription, for instance, is often marred by careless mistakes, for which there seems to be no excuse whatever. During the writing lesson every line of writing should, if possible, be examined before the next is attempted. Where this is not possible, at least the errors should be marked and demonstrated.

In those schools where the writing is carefully taught one can see to what a high degree of excellence Maori children may attain in this subject.

*English.*—The work of the lower classes in English seems, generally speaking, to be more satisfactorily treated than that in the higher classes. In the former one finds still that teachers are not particular enough in insisting on the use by the children of complete sentences, and in immediately correcting and illustrating errors as soon as they are spoken. Hence there are some schools in which the pronouns are confused and the endings of the plural forms omitted, but they are not numerous. On the other hand, the quality of the written composition in the standard classes leaves much to be desired. Sentences are made without predicates; punctuation is neglected almost entirely, resulting in “breathless narration”; tenses are confused. I feel that much better work must be produced before one can say that the English in the upper classes is quite satisfactory. Of course, there are among the schools several notable exceptions, the most striking being the school at *Matihetihe*, a school in charge of a young Maori lady, and *Whakarewarewa*, where excellent work is done in this subject. The suggestion was made in last year’s report that teachers should keep for the information of the Inspector a list of the subjects in which lessons in composition have been given during the year. I have also recommended to teachers in the infant classes that they should keep note of the various words and ideas that have been taught to the children, and the teachers should endeavour to have a reasonable number of new words acquired in sentence-form every week.

But generally it seems quite evident that there is a neglect of blackboard lessons in composition—that, in short, there is not the amount of teaching in English language given in the standard classes that the importance of the subject demands.