

improvement might be effected in this important matter with little effort. Some time ago we were very much interested in the correspondence that had passed between the Maori children of one of our best schools and European children at school in Australia. We do not know whether the correspondence is kept up, but we certainly think the plan might be well adopted by our teachers—its benefits are obvious to every one.

*Arithmetic.*—The Department should have every reason to be satisfied with the work done in the preparatory classes in the majority of our schools, in many of which the degree of efficiency attained leaves little to be desired. The benefits arising from the teaching of infant children only such numbers as are within their comprehension, and from the large amount of oral work necessary in the lowest classes, are making themselves felt, and there is no doubt that when these children come to the standard classes their ability to grapple with the more difficult processes will be largely increased. For, after all, there is nothing in arithmetic but the four processes; beyond that it is merely a question of interpretation of language—a study in English.

Far too much stress is laid on “rules” in the higher classes, and this, combined with inadequate appreciation by the child of the language in which sums are stated, leads him into confusion. He can work with accuracy sums that are purely mechanical, but is puzzled if the questions are set in problem form; he cannot see how his “rules” apply. The oral exercises in the class-books afford teachers ample opportunity of inculcating the principles involved in steps of easy gradation by means of examples that can be worked mentally, but these exercises are frequently ignored in favour of the mere statement of a rule. Of course, the latter method is easier for the teacher; indeed, some teachers can teach simple interest in one lesson where we ourselves should take several.

It is important, too, that great attention should be paid to setting out clearly the several steps in the working of examples—a matter which is frequently reduced to a minimum, or omitted altogether.

In assigning marks in cases where, though the process is correct the answer may be wrong, the explanation of the steps is indispensable. In all cases of practical arithmetic, such as bills of accounts, neatness and style should count for much more than they do, and typical examples may well serve for exercises in transcription. In very few schools can one find attempts being made to make the work in arithmetic a matter of actual experience. Children learn the various tables, and talk of chains, miles, meters, and kilometers, but have had no opportunity of realising what these distances actually represent in connection with their own districts. The number of miles from one place to another is still in many places a matter of the staying-power or speed of your horse. “Good horse, two miles; bad horse, too far,” is the answer given in connection with distances as great as thirty miles. At one school the children have placed on the roadside pegs marking the mile and the kilometer, one on either side of the school, and both of these distances are by this means made real to them; but such laudable practices are by no means common. Actual measurements can easily be carried out even in the earliest classes, and no table should be committed to memory until its constituents have been made a matter of personal experience in the case of each pupil. Elaborate and expensive appliances are not necessary; the ingenious teacher will quickly find means to make such as he needs, or, better, get the children to make them. Thus, for example, a piece of wire, string, or rope can be marked off as a chain measure by means of which distances can be measured and areas computed by the children. Small bags of sand can be used to represent the different weights, and articles can be weighed. The principle thus laid down may be extended to all the tables with which the child is concerned during his school career, and thus the weights and measures would have connection with realities, and the tables would no longer be a string of mere words.

*Geography.*—A fair amount of progress has been made in this subject, though most of the schools are in the transition stage between the old and the new syllabus of work. There can be no doubt that the alteration has led the children to observe more carefully natural phenomena as they appear in the neighbourhood of the school. Few teachers have made satisfactory schemes of work, but have apparently followed rigidly the details of the syllabus without following its methods; they attempt too much, and have not time to teach it properly. Nor does it seem that in every case “direct observation furnishes the method of approach.” One or two lessons will suffice for the rough determination of the north and south line, the position of the sun at noon and similar phenomena. Models in sand or plasticine can easily be made by the children to illustrate the geographical features seen within a short distance of the school. In one school in the Hot Lakes district an excellent model in relief was exhibited showing the principal hot springs, the lakes, and the volcanic peaks. We have no doubt that such methods will become general as teachers appreciate their value, and the change is being made gradually.

With regard to the political geography, a programme of the work covered should be available on the examination-day. There is quite a large store of geographical matter contained in the reading-books and the *School Journal* from which such programmes can be formed.

*Sewing.*—This subject continues to be well taught throughout the schools, and the practical side of the work receives careful attention at the hands of the assistant teachers, whose efforts in this direction are worthy of every commendation. An increase has been made in the number of schools at which the use of the sewing-machine is taught, and a large amount of useful work is done thereby, the women in some places attending the class of instruction.

*Drawing and Handwork.*—Elementary manual training in some form or other is taken in nearly all schools, and the results achieved are on the whole very fair. Paper-work of various kinds is done in the infant classes, but there is not, so far, much correlation of handwork with drawing, and the work is therefore deprived of the greater part of its value. The opportunity it affords of giving practice in English is also neglected to a large extent. Under these circumstances handwork becomes neutral; the mere manipulation is of little or no value.

Exercises in cardboard furnish means of teaching measurement to scale, and thus have a special value, but want of exactness spoils much of the work. In plasticine modelling excellent work is to be found in many schools, reproductions of natural objects being faithfully done.