Prue Wallis Myers

Handwriting in English Education

Presented here are some significant questions concerning the state of handwriting in infant and primary schools in England, and some possible answers to these questions. The ramifications may apply not only to English schools but schools of other countries as well. During the 1960s and 1970s in particular, handwriting became a forgotten craft in the schools, but improving the standards for both teachers and children is an important task that deserves attention and continuing concern in our fast-moving world.

Why is it that the standard of handwriting today is so poor? Why has the subject lost favour in the schools? It does not take a great deal of intelligence to master the skill of handwriting, but perhaps the knowledge of *how* to do it is missing. Can we retrieve this know-how before it is too late?

These questions represent some of the main concerns of this article. It begins by looking back to the mid-nineteenth century when children were given instruction in writing rather than taught how to write. Then it traces the changes that have taken place in English schools since that time—changes not only in the style of handwriting but also in the ways of teaching it, influenced by educational pioneers like Marion Richardson.

Perhaps the greatest change in the attitude toward the teaching of handwriting was the introduction of creative writing. When this filtered down to the infant schools, the story the child wrote in his own words became so important that the mechanics of writing were almost overlooked. Obviously, too little consideration was given to the basic teaching and practice of handwriting itself.

The latter part of this article describes briefly what needs to be done in the early stages of handwriting education to improve present standards.

Copperplate Handwriting

When in 1839 Her Majesty's Inspectors

began to visit the church schools, to ensure

Copperplate handwriting.

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wise expenditure of the early state grants, they would have seen children using the handwriting style known as Copperplate

This style was naturally extended into the elementary board schools, erected after the Education Act of 1870. We may imagine those teachers writing copy on the blackboard while rows of pupils sat silently and watched with open-mouthed awe. The teacher wrote flowingly with never a squeak from the chalk, which was lifted off the board only at the end of the word. At other times, the children laboured over their copybooks, filling in on the dotted line the letters, each beginning from the base with a hairline. First they used chalk and slates; then they progressed to the spluttering steel nibs, which either tamed the pupils to their ways or spoiled their attitude towards craftsmanship. Meanwhile, the teacher strode up and down between the rows, correcting the tool-hold as well as the posture and the angle of the pen, which had to point towards the right shoulder and which was always held in the right hand—left-handers were forbidden. Firm pressure on the downstroke broadened the line of a letter, and light pressure on the upstroke reduced the nib to its original point. The teacher knew how to instruct in penmanship, and in spite of threats, fears, and tears, many children learned Copperplate handwriting thoroughly and took pride in their achievement. A great deal of skill was passed on until concern for speed carried the competence away.

Civil Service Round Hand

The Civil Service Round Hand, a direct descendant of Copperplate, became popular in English schools about 1900 through the use of Vere-Foster copybooks. This writing sloped less to the right than did the original Copperplate; it had shorter descenders but retained the loops (Figure 1). Much of the written work achieved in schools was either copied from handwriting on the board or dictated by the teacher. There was plenty of time for daily concentration on the acquisition of handwriting skill. The main subjects in most of the schools were the three Rs, and writing was an easily recognised yardstick of standards.

Mrs. Bridges' Handwriting Manual

Publication of *A New Handwriting for Teachers* in 1898 by Mrs. M. M. Bridges, wife of the poet laureate, included examples of her own italic hand (Figure 2) as well as those of Michelangelo. The manual was influential in reviving interest in Medieval and Renaissance hands, which were later to rival the Copperplate style.

My dear Father,
The School and other examinations are now over, and I am first in Arithmetic, and second in History. I have also got the first prize for Writing.
The Holidays begin on Thursday, and though I like School I am only too glad to be returning home, and am longing to see you all again.

Figure 1. Civil Service Round Hand (Fairbank, 1949).

Come & sit under my stone pine that murmurs so honey sweet as it bends to the soft western breeze; & lo this honey dropping fountain, where I bring sweet sleep, playing on my lonely reeds—

Figure 2. Mrs. Bridges' hand. Part of a page of *A New Handwriting for Teachers* by Mrs. M. M. Bridges (Fairbank, 1949).

Print-Script Writing

By the end of the century, with the spread of infant education, there seems to have been concern among teachers that the initial pencil-and-slate alphabet should resemble more closely the printed model from which children learned to read. In 1913 Edward Johnston gave an address on penmanship at the London County Council Teachers annual conference. In making suggestions for an ideal course on the teaching of handwriting, he stated that his Foundational Hand would make a good model and that it would develop into a fluent hand.* The Foundational Hand was Johnston's version of the Roman alphabet as used in the ninth and tenth centuries with its later italic developments (Figure 3).

This suggestion gave ideas to the teachers, and before the end of the year two London schools were experimenting on these lines. From these experiments the ball and stick model—or Print-Script—was evolved.

Print-Script handwriting.

Johnston, however, did not wish it to be thought that he was directly responsible for the Print-Script characters, since he was not consulted in the experiments. He referred to these letters as "rather formless skeletons of Roman lower case." What he did advocate, however, was the use of the broad nib as soon as children were able to use it. (Robin Tanner was later to encourage the use of the broad nib in English schools.)

Robin Tanner—Educationalist and Craftsman

Robin Tanner, as a very successful 32-year-old teacher, was invited to join His Majesty's Inspectorate in 1935. The recently published Hadow Reports had welcomed the new approach to art and craft education, but it was Tanner as an inspector with enthusiasm for these subjects and belief in their educational value who was largely responsible for raising standards in handwriting craft. In *Lettering for Children* he advocated adapting infants' school script to form a simple running hand (Figure 4). He believed that "the stiff pen with the broad end is the only possible tool with which to make true lettering,"

*Extract from Johnston's address as reproduced in *Tributes to Edward Johnston Calligrapher,* privately printed by permission of the Society of Scribes and Illuminators at Maidstone College of Art in 1984 and quoted by Alfred Fairbank.

and that "every child has control of two forms of writing: (a) a cursive hand, based on traditional writing, for general use; (b) a parallel formal book hand, in which both capitals and lower-case letters are more finely finished." Examples of Tanner's pupils' writing make clear that these are based on a rounded letter proportion, no doubt reflecting the influence of Johnston's Foundational Hand.

gaudere autem
quod nomina
vestra scripta

Figure 3. Foundation Hand of Edward Johnston, which he adapted from the tenth-century Winchester hand (Fairbank, 1949).

The squirrel sputters up
the powdered oak,
And, with the courage
which his fears collect,
He hisses fierce, half
malice and half glee,

Figure 4. Writing by a 12-year-old student of Robin Tanner (Tanner, 1969).

Marion Richardson Writing

It was left, however, to another educational pioneer to develop the cursive element in handwriting and to introduce a method of teaching it that was deliberately child-centered—a method that was to influence the whole attitude toward the teaching of such skills as handwriting. This breakthrough came to England after the First World War from pioneers like Friedrich Froebel and Maria Montessori, through whose influence the pupil was to be released from imposed instruction and, instead, introduced to child-centered teaching. In 1930 Marion Richardson became a London County Council Inspector, and in 1935 published *Writing and Writing Patterns*, a series of books which soon became popular throughout the country. She was herself taught manuscript writing by a pupil of Edward Johnston after first learning to write a joined Copperplate hand. The greatest influence on her new method came through watching the children's spontaneous movements when drawing and making patterns that she had introduced into the schools. She says that it was the children themselves who gave her the new way of teaching handwriting.

She based her alphabet model upon the natural movements of the child. This involved the zigzag, the looped line, the bouncing arch, the downstroke and left-to-right horizontal line, the continuous figure of eight with its clockwise and anti-clockwise loops, and so on (Figure 5). But she did not include the controlled scribble line that is the hand's most natural flow line and from which the cursive form of Roman lower-case letters have been traditionally written and joined together (Figure 6). Instead, she based some of her letter forms on the Copperplate hand of her childhood. Her alphabet developed as shown in Figure 7. She meant her writing to be a foundation from which a mature style could develop. But looking back, we see adults retaining her somewhat sprawling, round English hand—so different from the forward-sloping handwriting on the Continent or that of the United States, for example.

Many of Marion Richardson's practical points on teaching handwriting could well be applied today, so advanced was she for her time. For example: she said that handwriting should try to keep pace in some measure with the child's flow of thought. She stressed the importance of giving the child a running hand for ordinary, everyday writing. (Did she realise then what need there would be for speedy communication in the future?) She anticipated the creative element, which was to become so strong a force in education, and she encouraged children to invent their own patterns. Children were no longer confined to desks; whole classes could stand at easels to paint patterns on large sheets of paper. Creative writing had not yet emerged—only creative patterns. There were still sentences to be copied from the board, so the children were able to watch the teacher's writing performance, and they carefully imitated it. She recommended that the child write at a sloping board of

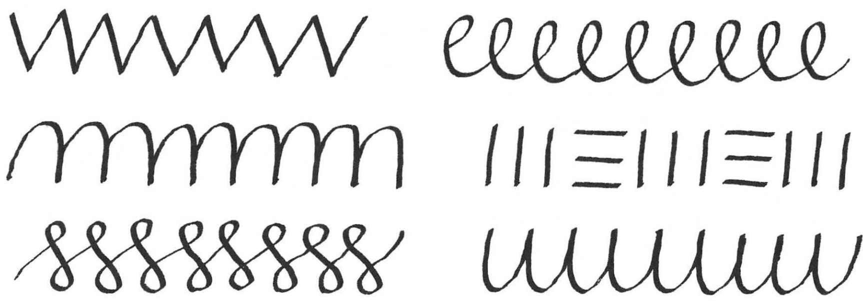


Figure 5. Marion Richardson's patterns based on the natural movements of the child's hand.

Figure 6. The controlled scribble line, the hand's most natural flow line, and the basis for the cursive form of traditional Roman lowercase letters.

Figure 7. Letter forms of Marion Richardson some of which were based upon Copperplate handwriting.

about 30°. Teachers welcomed this approach; it was sufficiently child-centered, and it was authentic. The Marion Richardson pattern books are still being used in schools today, nearly half a century later.

There was only one element wrong with her scheme, but it was a crucial one. It concerned the model itself—a hybrid. Some of the letter forms were poor adaptations of the Roman alphabet. These were linked by a wide curve to which these letters were rhythmically related. The wide curve, however, is something the scribe avoids in a cursive hand. He knows to compress his letters and to steepen his ligatures at speed so that the tops of letter shapes—from which legibility comes—are preserved. Only in this way can the anti-clockwise pull of the hand and the clockwise up-and-over push (which makes arch-shaped letters) be described without the thumb-pulled line dominating. Then the manipulation is likely to be taken over by the thumb instead of the steering first finger. But Marion Richardson was a painter and designer rather than a scribe. If she had watched the coordinated movements of the scribe more closely, as well as the natural movements of the child, she would have known how to adapt her pattern scheme to fit the needs of handwriting, and she might have chosen the Alfred Fairbank model instead.

Alfred Fairbank—The Italic Hand

Alfred Fairbank and Marion Richardson's paths did cross, but they did not overlap sufficiently for them to cooperate on an alphabet model. Fairbank produced his first handwriting copybooks in 1926. He sold these to friends in the Society of Scribes and Illuminators for six pence each. Later he became secretary of the Society and read his paper, The Teaching of Handwriting, at a meeting of educationalists at the Royal Society of Arts. In 1932 his *Handwriting Manual* and *Woodside Writing Cards* were published. Then followed the *Dryad Writing Cards* as a model for a group of schools in Barking, Essex, where the director of education himself, Joseph Compton, sat in the classes to give lessons in Italic.

In 1952 the Society for Italic Handwriting was formed. Enthusiasm for italic handwriting grew rapidly. Adults from different walks of life became interested in reforming their own handwriting. Alec Hay, chief inspector for the London County Council, was interviewed on BBC television

Italic handwriting.

about this new handwriting that was rapidly spreading from London over the country—but not without criticism from within education. Cries went up: 'It all looks alike — there's no room for individual personality in this handwriting!'

In response, Will Carter, the printer and type designer, and Wilfred Blunt, teacher and author, gathered samples of italic handwriting from scribes and friends and produced *Examples of Everyday Cursive*. This together with Blunt's *Sweet Roman Hand*, did a great deal to show the wide variety of hand that might develop, once away from Copperplate. One of the most beautiful of these examples is by Irene Wellington, whose copybooks were brought out in 1957 and quickly sold out.

Ministry of Education Handbook

Handwriting appeared to be in a healthy state in the schools according to the Ministry's 1959 *Handbook on Primary Education*, chapter XIV, written by Robin Tanner. The chapter decries Print-Script, since it required a child to learn to write all over again after the infant stage. Tanner points out (p. 252) that: "any fears the teacher may have that the children's ability to read the printed word might be hindered, because they do not 'print' but 'write,' are groundless. It would certainly seem that children's power to recognize, within the range of accepted variations, the essential shapes of the Roman alphabet is far greater than was once recognised."

Many of the points presented in the *Handbook* remain good advice today: the need for good examples of handwriting to show children, the need for handwriting to be fluent to keep pace with the child's flow of thought, the

need for a light grip on the tool and the angle which it should be held. There is also technical advice for teachers about helping left-handers. An oversight is evident where the teacher is decribed as writing simple sentences beneath the child's drawing that the child may copy. The report does not explain what went on previously to enable the child to copy the correct direction of each letter form. Was it taken for granted in those days that Marion Richardson patterns would painlessly produce the letters of the alphabet? This omission was to become more serious in the pressurized days to come.

Beacon Writing

Charlotte Stone, art lecturer at Froebel Educational Institute, worked with Fairbank and Winifred Hooper, a primary head, to produce the *Beacon Writing Scheme* (which accompanied Beacon Readers). This course began with an oval skeleton model without ligatures (Figure 8) that teachers could use when they wrote the first sentences under the child's own drawing. It was a great improvement on the ball and stick letters, but there was still the difficulty of changing the drawn skeleton letters into the cursive written ones with their ligatures added. Could they be added without changing the rhythmic movement in the letter? And where did the letter end and the ligature begin? Clearly, Beacon writing necessitated a slowing up and relearning process at the very time when the child needed to be gaining fluency. Although the Beacon skeleton model had a forward slope and might be considered cursive, it failed to become a standard infant model—partly because Marion Richardson writing had preceded it and partly because the scheme went unnoticed in the rush of events in the late fifties and early sixties.

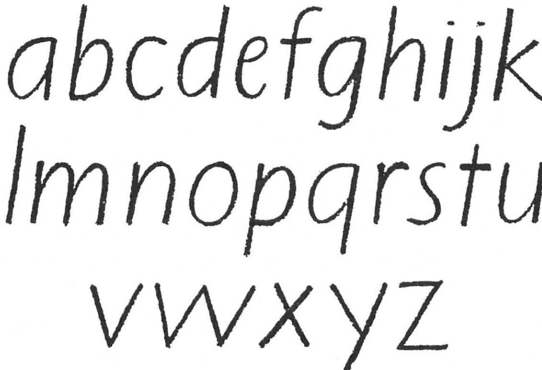


Figure 8. Beacon alphabet (Fairbank, 1949).

Nelson Handwriting

In the early 1960s Thomas Nelson and Sons brought out their schemes for teaching handwriting in primary and infant schools. The Nelson handwriting model for infants based on the oval proportion, was an improvement on the ball and stick Print-Script, but its static, drawn letters even when joined leave a model that lacks easy flow (Figure 9). The ovals seem unrelated to the pointed zigzags that form the basic movement. Fairbank's Beacon model, also based on oval proportions, is superior to the Nelson model in that it retains the cursive element of letter forms based on hand movements—though many thought the two styles identical. The Nelson method, fully researched, was produced not by teachers or scribes but by an educationalist, a scientist, and a consultant. Their aim was to help teachers to become knowledgeable about the mechanics and psychological and pedagogical principles of handwriting. But when all was said and done (and not enough was done because of the overcrowded curriculum), handwriting is described in the Nelson series as a "tool subject [whose] prime function [is] to meet the needs of other subjects."

Shifts in Teaching Reading and Writing

In the 1960s everything seemed to be happening at once in the educational world. There were more children to teach, more teachers to train, more schools and colleges to be built and at the same time more and more knowledge was pouring into the schools making every subject expand beyond containable proportions. The specialists could not even keep pace with the changing horizons of their own specialisms, let alone primary teachers con-

Figure 9. Nelson method (Inglis & Connell, 1962).

cerned with every subject. It was a time of tremendous growth, development and change in the curricular but also in methods of teaching and learning. Psychology was changing the whole attitude of how the child learns. The emphasis was on children learning rather than teachers teaching, and this tended to produce a situation where children found out more for themselves. In many cases they more or less taught themselves to write.

With all these changes it was no wonder that the three Rs came under fire. Reading schemes were reviewed and revised. The Look and Say method emphasised visualising the general shape of the whole word and even of the sentence as the most effective way of learning to read. Charlotte Stone's 1962 article in the *Journal of the Society for Italic Handwriting*, "Teaching Infants to Write," made a clear case for delaying the teaching of writing until the teaching of reading was well under way—that is, until the child has broken down sentences into words, and words into letters, and is then equipped for word-building. We now know that the child is ready to write by imitation and repetition *before* the word-building stage in reading and that the two skills are not necessarily closely correlated. The delay in teaching writing was disastrous: it meant children wrote letters, often in their own unorthodox ways, before they were taught the right way—a practice difficult to alter at a later stage.

We read in the *Nelson Infant Teachers' Manual* (1964): "It is now commonly accepted that instruction in writing should begin with the writing of whole words, phrases, or sentences rather than letters or elements of letters." But how can sentences be written until the child has learnt how to make letter shapes? (It seems like starting back to front!)

Handwriting was thought of at the early infant stage as the clue which relates talking with reading. The young child watched his teacher "write his talk." She does this in his drawing book under his picture, which he describes to her. Then, while she attends to the next child, he takes the book away, sits down and tries to imitate the peculiar thing he saw his teacher doing—those queer marks he saw her making. But he cannot remember how the symbols were made, for she went too quickly and made too many at once. So first he uses his eyes to register a mark, then he uses his pencil to try to represent it, by pulling the pencil round and about, sometimes making lines grow up from the bottom. He plays a kind of matching game as he copies, but something else happens. As the letter shapes recur, he finds himself repeating certain gymnastics with his pencil, until the eye dictates directly through the mind to the hand how to respond when he sees a certain letter to copy. Thus, writing habits are being acquired by eye, mind, and hand, before the child has been directly taught how to make letters. This is the wrong way round, for it is the movements that make the letter-shapes. When the teacher comes round later to inspect the child's work, the marks representing the let-

ters are hardly legible, but she points to her copy and says "Can you read what it says?" The child either remembers what he said or he is actually reading, or he remains dumb, or he makes up something to please the teacher. She continues to play the role of interpreter, translating spoken works into written symbols until the day when he realises that there is a visual form of communication to match his verbal one. In this way, handwriting is being used to help the child to write his talk. This new "subject" was developing at the same time and was called Creative Writing.

Adults were now accepting "child art" as a visual expression in its own right, with symbols appropriate to different stages of development awareness. So why not start "child writing" as a valid form of expression at a much earlier age? The child begins to be able to convert his own thinking into symbols, writing down his own words instead of copying those made by his teacher. But here there is trouble: not only is the child having to clarify and collect his thoughts into a limited vocabulary, but he is also having to grapple with a newly learnt code of communication—the making of letters that combine to spell words. All but impossible demands were being placed on both teachers and children.

The marvelous thing was, however, that children were making up their own stories and producing pages of "writing" at top infant stage (seven years). As soon as they wanted to write, they made letters higgledy-piggledy all along, since they had not yet learnt alignment (Figure 10). Surprisingly teachers became used to deciphering their efforts, for legibility is concerned with ex-

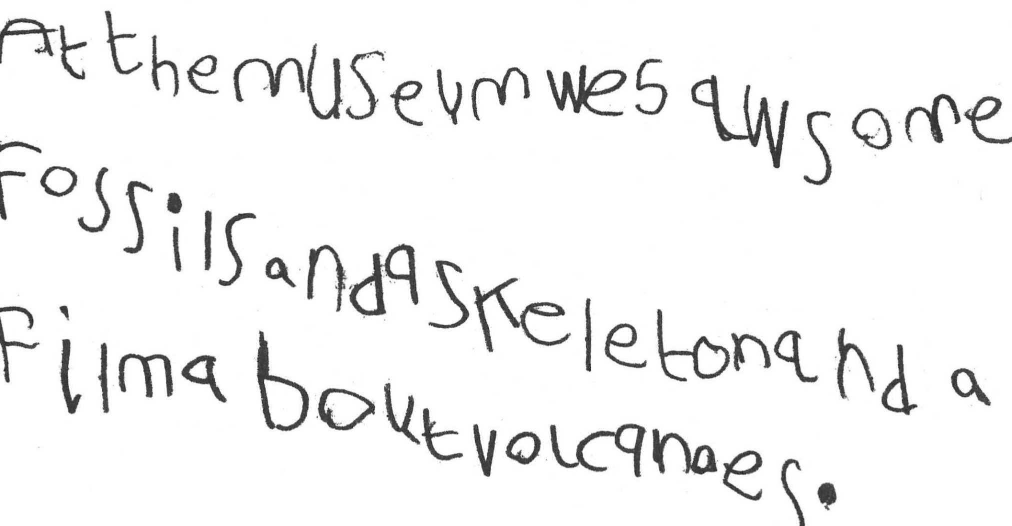


Figure 10. Creative writing (6 year old).

pectancy and familiarity. With so many language needs to be met, there was little time here for correcting letter formation or spacing. And even the least successful examples might be displayed as a means of encouraging the individual child.

The Plowden Report

In 1963 the Plowden Committee was formed to look into the changing patterns of primary education. The Society for Italic Handwriting seized this chance and, with Lady Plowden's agreement, a memorandum on the teaching of handwriting and the advantages of the Italic style was prepared. It stated that Italic does not deteriorate with speed as do other styles, provided it has been well taught and the right movements have become habitual. It suggested that teachers' training colleges should include lessons on handwriting, given by properly trained teachers. It recommended research into the teaching of handwriting in schools.

The section on children's writing finds little space for handwriting but a great deal of space for writing content. It includes the statement: "Schools which make a feature of good handwriting, often in the Italic mode and sometimes in other styles, lose nothing in the freedom and imaginative quality of children's writing and can gain in other ways." This suggests, at least, that the good advice given in the 1959 Ministry of Education Report was being carried out in some schools. The Plowden Report infers that children learn the difficult process of writing by dictating to teachers, gradually copying their writing, and then expanding a vocabulary and word-building system so as to be able to write for themselves. The method describing how children would initially be taught to make their letters is omitted. Handwriting as a subject does not appear in the index.

The Forgotten Craft in the 1960s and 1970s

The ergonomics of writing were forgotten in the effort to change the image of the school as a formal institution into an informal community centre. The old sloping desks had been replaced by flat formica-topped tables round which children sat in groups to work, often with too little individual space (Figure 11). They needed sloping support for their arms, suitable surfaces on which to write, and the best tools for developing manipulation—needs that were largely ignored. In some schools there were no blackboards, and in others only white boards with slippery surfaces, which of course undervalued any demonstration of handwriting. Yet in other craft subjects, efforts were made to provide children with the special equipment and tools they needed. In some primary schools writing corners with pens and ink and original examples of calligraphy helped to give children a standard towards which to work. But these corners tended to be identified only as areas for a display in connection with topic work.

The Bullock Report

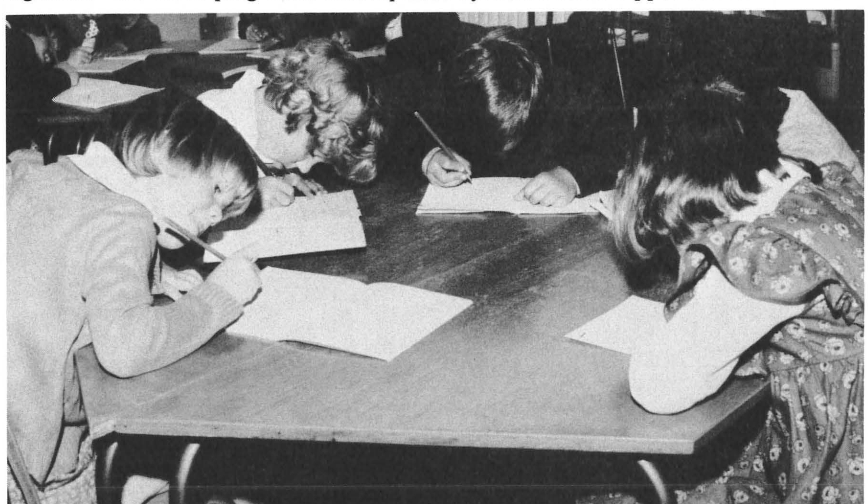
The Society for Italic Handwriting again tried to influence the Bullock Report published by the Department of Education and Science in 1975. However, in the two pages of the report that deal with handwriting (out of six hundred pages) we read of the same recurring problems: first use of Print-Script and later confusion of cursive styles at the junior stage where the child is required to change habits of movement instead of developing fluency in one particular style. Unfortunately, the report leaves it to each school to choose; but in fact schools could not implement one particular style, in view of the variety of the teachers' handwriting.

The report did, however, offer an important clue about relating handwriting practice with certain groups of letters commonly used in the English language: "The child can progress to letter groups with a variety of ligatures again in common use, such as 'tion,' 'ous,' 'ttle,' 'ough.' Practice with these not only helps to develop speed but has the advantage of reinforcing common spelling patterns. In the course of all this, children should also be made aware of the rhythmic stresses of writing patterns and the affinity of letter forms which lead to a harmony of style."

The 1980s

The low standard in handwriting generally and the difficulty that children find in learning to manipulate the tools they use are evidence enough to show the need for strengthening handwriting as a subject in the curriculum. But how can we justify the time? And where do we begin?

Figure 11. The old sloping desks were replaced by flat Formica-topped tables.



We now know what happens if we plunge children in at the deep end and expect them to write properly with a minimal amount of direct tuition. Most rise to the occasion and find a way to do it, but it is usually an awkward way, and this alone prevents their writing legibly at speed later on. Handwriting has become an unnecessarily difficult skill because of the lack of informed teaching at the appropriate time. It does not just come right as the child develops, because certain neuromechanisms are set up that need changing and are difficult to change without willing cooperation, time, and practice. So often the conscientious teacher has to concentrate on remedial help to alter bad habits instead of developing good ones. It is this that makes the subject of handwriting so unrewarding for teachers.

The final section of this article suggests a new approach to the teaching of handwriting, founded on more than five years' study of children's handwriting movements based on their manipulative development in relation to equipment and tools. This research has also been deliberately related to language demands, particularly in the early, formative stages of education.

Techniques of Writing: The Solution

In the last analysis the difficulty of choosing which style to follow is no longer the crucial problem. It is, rather, a matter of teachers realising the fundamental rhythms of hand movements that produce handwriting. The hand moves rapidly from left to right in a slightly forward down-up movement. With rhythm, the movement develops curves at top or bottom (Figure 12) from which most letters can be constructed on a kind of grid, which helps the onward flow of writing. This is the easiest way as well as the traditional

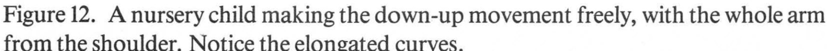
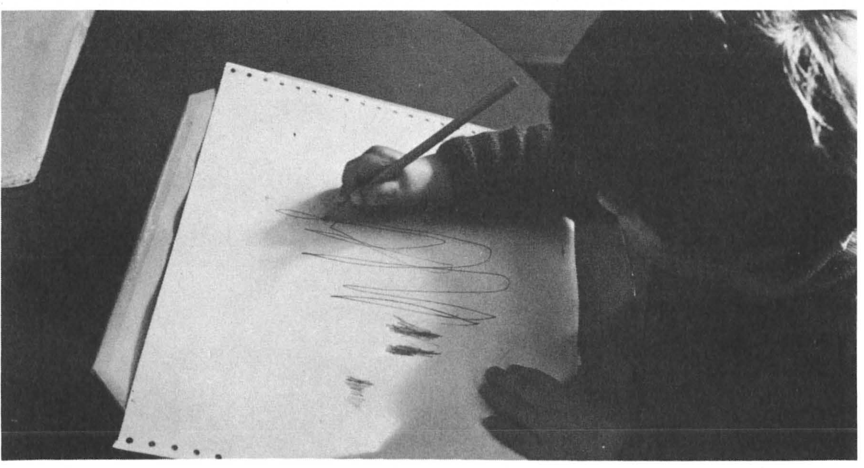


Figure 12. A nursery child making the down-up movement freely, with the whole arm from the shoulder. Notice the elongated curves.

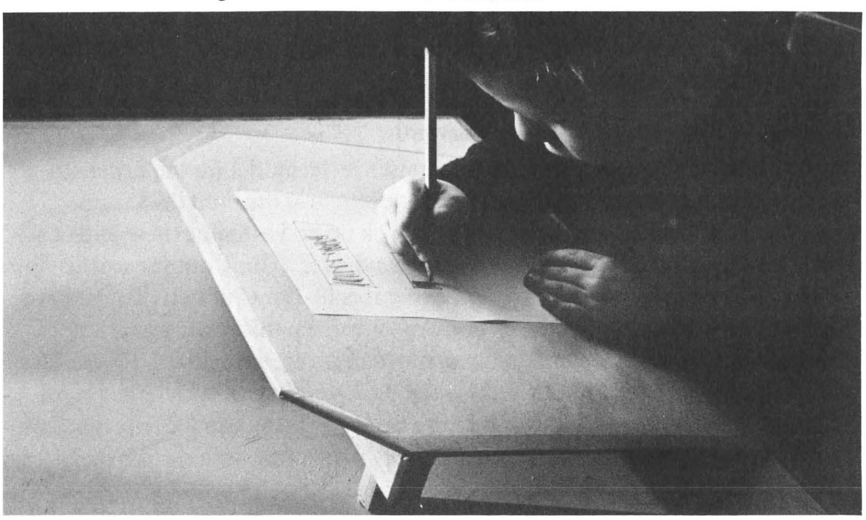


way of adapting Roman letters to fit natural hand movements (Figure 13). With skilful manipulation, the right-hander's first finger eventually steers the down-up movement, helped by the upward swivel of the wrist, with the forearm relaxed and supportive behind it (Figure 14). The left-hander does not have the helping wrist movement, and must rely on finger manipulation; but

Figure 13. Roman letters adapted to fit natural hand movements.

ma mb mc md me mf
mg mh mi mj mk ml
mm mn mo mp mq
mr ms mt mu mv mw
mx my mz

Figure 14. A reception child trying to control the down-up movement within a space. Notice the steering finger in front of the thumb, and the sloping board supporting hand and arm at an angle of about 45° to the horizontal.



the end of the pen, pointing towards the elbow, acts as a rudder that coordinates hand and arm (Figure 15). In both cases the writing tool can function like an extended finger in complete coordination with hand and arm.

Many people, however, write on a looped grid, producing a wide, pulled curve at the base of the letters (Figure 16). This could be associated with the Marion Richardson type of writing. It is often made by a dominant pulling in and releasing of the thumb, with the first finger bent back. The thumb moves independently from the fingers, hand, wrist, and arm, so it can control movement without support of other members. This means that it can write when the hand is in tension, or when the arm and hand lie on a flat surface, or where there is restricted space. But this way of writing deteriorates with speed: it becomes impossible to describe the tops of letters adequately because of this wide pull around at the base. Since legibility depends on identifying the tops of letters, this is a serious loss—the n must become a u, for example. When the pulled movement dominates, the writer cannot change direction without breaking the flow, and this slows up the general movement from left to right. The writing is therefore less legible, more jerky, and, encouraged by modern tools, the loop tends to run through the bottom of letters that begin from the right top, thus confusing identity even more (Figure 17). It can be seen that a model based on a compressed oval proportion adapts to hand movements better than one based on rounded proportions.

We should have moved beyond selecting a style to teach children in school. What we have to do is to teach them to write legibly and fast in order to communicate in the best possible way. For this to work, there must be one way of writing that is introduced from the beginning—a model that stands up to speed and will develop into a mature personal style. We have this model: it is the compressed Roman alphabet made with the broad pen, joined through the natural down-up movement of hand and arm with the steering first finger in command.

Teaching Handwriting: The Way Forward

From the teaching angle, little children must see the model we want them to write. They must feel round these pen-made letters in the right directions, trace them and draw them in the salt tray, pick up and examine these letters made on a large scale, learn to match them and later to look out for words written with these letters as appropriate (Figures 18-19). Children then become familiar with the written model by copying only from this version and not from printed letter forms, until habitual movements are established (Figure 20). At first they will have a generalised idea of the letter shapes, which they learn to make through movement; but with the well-shaped pen-made letters before them, they will gradually learn their specific shapes. Research reveals that children between three and six years are more aware of letter shapes than at

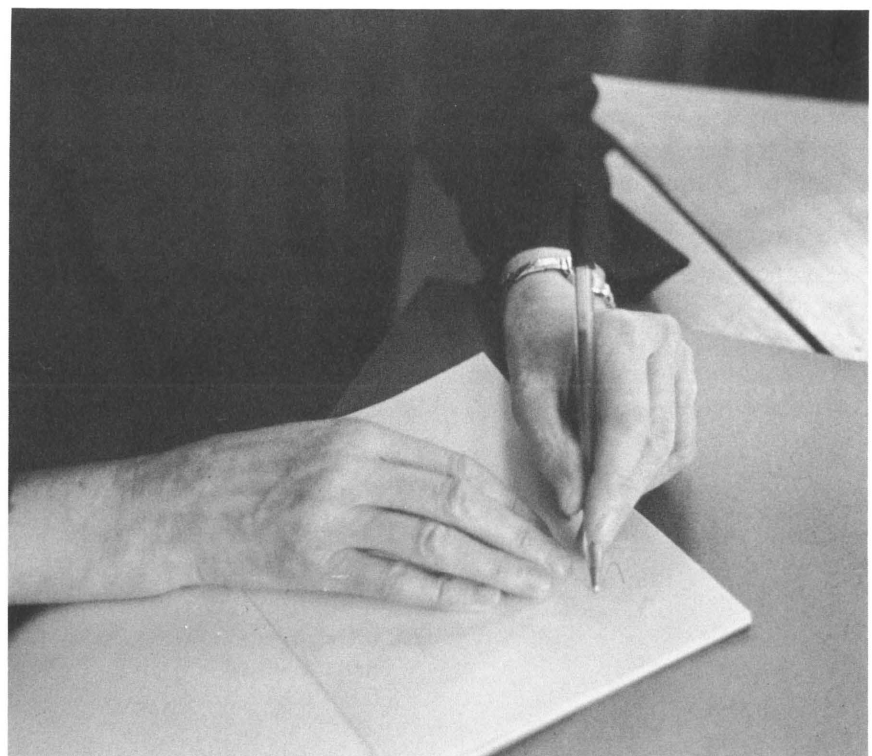


Figure 15. The left-hander writing.

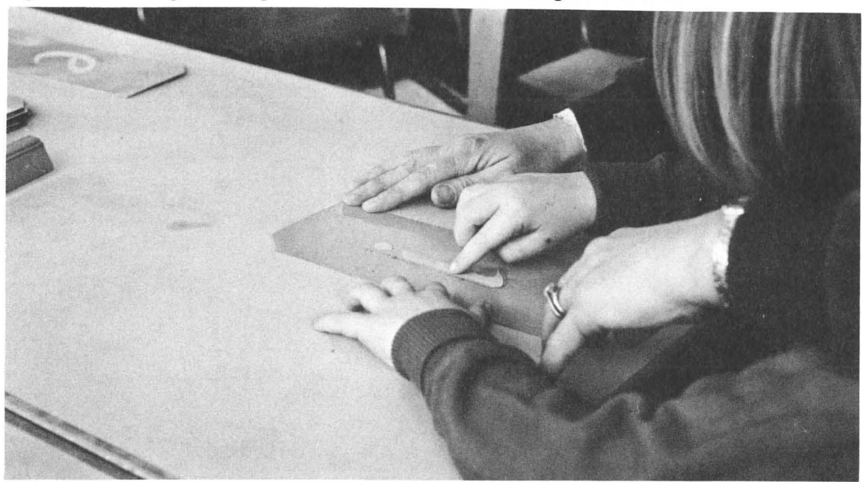
Figure 16. A looped "grid" makes a wide, pulled curve at the base of letters.

Figure 17. Loops running throughout the bottom of the letters make this writing difficult to read.

a later stage. At this age they are identifying letters for the first time, looking at their shapes for their own sakes; later they will be mainly seeing them associated with meaning. We should not change the model to suit the child; he or she gradually adapts to it.

The teacher should make letter shapes very slowly before the children. She should incorporate handwriting lessons and handwriting practice with

Figure 18. Feeling around pen-made letter forms in the right direction.



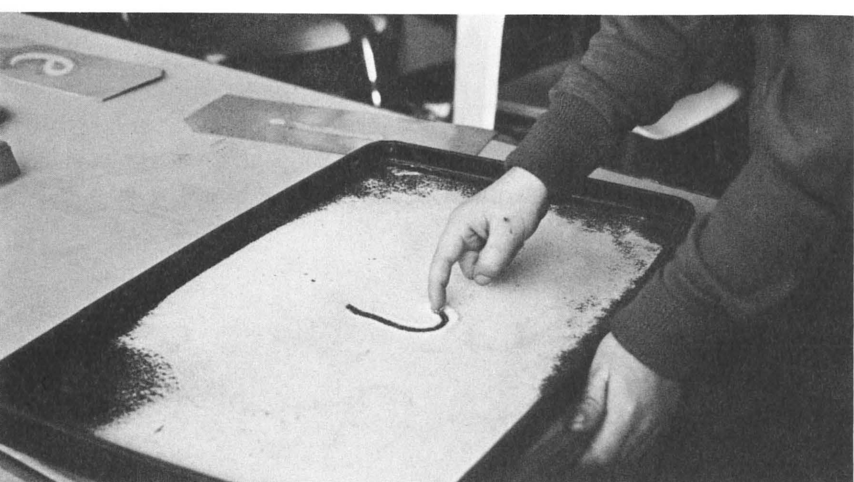
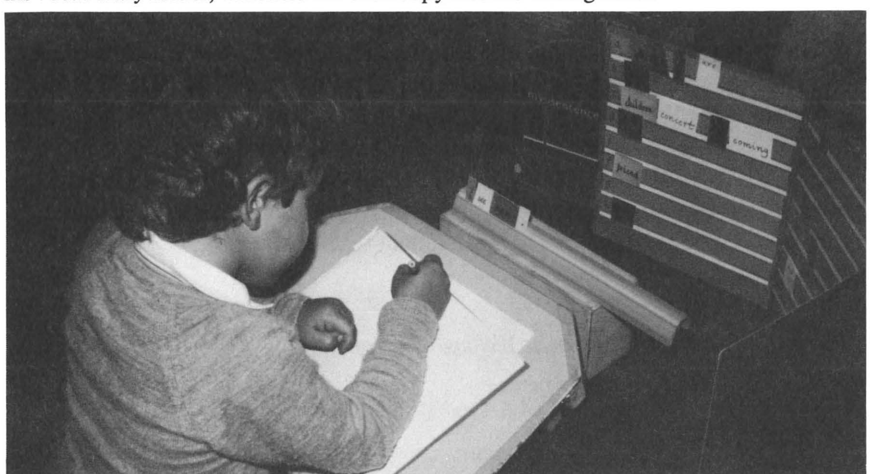


Figure 19. A first-term reception child, with little previous experience at mark making, drawing letter forms in the salt tray.

the learning of new vocabulary and spelling patterns. Developing knowledge of spelling patterns will gradually give children the means of organizing ideas for themselves and thus relieving the demands of the teacher. The child learns to adapt to a joined hand in a meaningful way rather than suddenly doing joined writing at a certain stage of schooling. This has proved successful, for example, at Sandilands Infant School, Manchester (Figure 21),

Figure 20. The reception child building his own sentence from handwritten words in his vocabulary folder, which he will then copy into his writing book.



the houses had flat roofs and
steps up to the roofs mary was
on a journey she was on a donkey
mary was going to have a bady
They came to an inn but it was

Figure 21. A seven-year-old's "free" writing from Sandilands Infant School, Manchester. There still seems to be a confusion between the letters *b* and *d*.

where Mrs. M. McCulloch and her staff have been gradually working out the scheme, with the Irene Wellington copybooks as a model (Figure 22). It has also proved successful at St. John's Wood County Primary School, Longridge, Knutsford, Cheshire, where Mr. P. Ansell and his staff have been putting the scheme into practice in a similar way. Thus, we have practical proof that handwriting lessons can play a vital part in the language development programme (as the Bullock Report suggests).

At a later period this same handwriting model could become a satisfying craft when the child is introduced to the pen—particularly, at first, to the chisel-edged pen which must be held at a certain angle. This model will reinforce the proper manipulation, once the child's hand has developed. It will allow him to hold the pen up on the knuckle of the first finger instead of down along the thumb. The pen produces thick and thin lines, adding in terest to letter forms and stimulating a new approach to handwriting itself. The same model also lends itself to speedy note-taking or to the carefully written job application letter. But first the writer must learn control through pen-made letter forms. No other instrument teaches the hand to discipline itself like the pen.

Figure 22. Sample from the *Irene Wellington Copy Book.*

a one continuous stroke

b one stroke

b or *b*

Slide the pen on its edge
and pull it to feel its full width on the paper.

This thin sliding line is used in writing for joining letters

a a a ai ai ai ai ai ai a

Practise these movements with the pen.

i o i o i o i o   m~m~m~ mimi ~ uuu ~ uuu

b b b b   baa baa boa bob bui bui bu

b b b b   bai bai bma bma bmbmbm

The use of one model throughout the learning stages need not preclude the pupil's developing their own hand later. Indeed, with so many machines about we tend to respect individual characteristics in the adult's hand more so than neatly made copies of a particular style. It is, in fact, at the late primary and early secondary stages that pupils like to imitate aspects of adult hands in the search for their own individual style, and this is a natural development. A variety of well-formed handwriting samples could be displayed with advantage for these middle-year pupils. This is quite different from teaching another system of habit movements through planting one style upon another and trying to alter a pupil's way of writing at a stage when a great deal of handwriting is being demanded.

These proposals suggest establishing a way of moving to write initially and then developing this without interruption, so that the pupils are better able to introduce their own individual preferences without disturbing basic movement rhythms. This new scheme provides a way forward. The results may take time, but they will ensure that the teaching of handwriting is kept in the curriculum, where it will be more rewarding to teach and more satisfying to perform.

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The examples of Copperplate, Print-Script, and Italic handwriting are from the hand of Gunnlaugur S E Briem.