

SEQUENTIAL COMPOSITION FOR THE
INTERMEDIATE GRADES OF CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA

by

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THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITION OF TERMS

At the beginning of the 1966-67 school year, the language arts consultant of the Cedar Rapids Community School District revealed some very astounding news. A survey had taken place and the language arts consultant disclosed the fact the Cedar Rapids intermediate teachers on a system wide basis were averaging one composition assignment a month.

Viewing the fact that Cedar Rapids had won the National Pacemaker Award in educational excellence the previous year, the consultant engaged herself in the task of correcting this situation. She soon discovered that only four out of all the language arts teachers in the twenty-eight elementary schools had received formal training in the teaching of composition. Great strides are being taken to promote interest and reduce complacency in an area of the schools' curriculum that is so vitally important. As pointed out by Johnson, "A society in an age of automation, complex human relationships, and rapid change and innovation requires literate members who use writing skills fluently and clearly in a variety of forms."¹

In view of the circumstances in Cedar Rapids, the language arts consultant established a curriculum committee

¹Lois V. Johnson, "Children's Writing in Three Forms of Composition," Elementary English, 44:265, March, 1967.

comprised of two elementary and three junior high school teachers. The ultimate goal of this group was to develop a syllabus that would assist the teachers in their consideration of sequential composition in their classroom.

Applegate sums up the situation very well considering composition as a critical aspect of the total language arts program. She contends:

Except for the reading field, the language arts program especially needs overhauling right now; it's as patchy as a hobo costume at a masquerade. There's a little bit of everything in it, put together in a haphazard manner unworthy of the careful planning needed by a space age.²

The Problem

Statement of the problem. The objectives of this research were to: (1) report the modes of composition; (2) recognize background, purpose, material, and structure as essential elements of sequential composition; (3) recognize evaluation procedures of composition assignments; (4) report current attempts of recognizing literature as a source of composition assignments, and (5) review literature for an approach to such a program of sequential composition.

Purposes and need for the study. More demands are being made of junior and senior high school students to have acquired the basic elements of sequential composition during

²Mauree Applegate, Easy In English (Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson and Company, 1960), p. 5.

their elementary schooling experiences. As a result, the skillful teaching of composition in grades one through six is of great importance. A definite need for sequential composition at the intermediate level was in evidence as the review of literature was performed for the purpose of writing this report. Most sources focused their attention on the junior and senior high school levels. Through modification, writing experiences can be planned for intermediate aged children to meet and surpass their level of performance.

Children begin to compose in the primary grades by the use of oral and written procedures. Johnson states:

Children begin to use several forms of both oral and written language early in their school careers. Throughout the primary grades there are experiences with stories, reports, and descriptions as, at the same time, the children gain independence in expressing themselves in writing.³

The primary pupils soon move along to the intermediate years of their elementary school experience. As in a departmentalized setting, the student soon recognizes the subject-oriented teacher. Time becomes a vital concern of many intermediate classroom teachers and time is an essential component of composition. Anderson states, "It takes more than a permissive classroom climate and a teacher interested in children to produce worthy written work in the intermediate classroom. First of all, writing takes time."⁴

³ Johnson, loc. cit.

⁴ Paul S. Anderson, Language Skills in Elementary Education (New York: Macmillan Company, 1964), p. 336.

Pupils differ in their abilities and capacities for writing. Children in any grade are at widely different stages of development concerning their individual reading ability. To promote maximum growth in reading, the girls and boys are placed in an especially assigned basal reader. In recognizing individual differences, the source of literature for composition assignments may become the children's basal readers.

Children differ in every possible respect; therefore, a genuine knowledge of the children's social, cultural, and historical backgrounds should be understood by the classroom teacher to help insure optimum success in their writing experiences. Jenkins says:

It is essential that we be aware of the differences among children that are due to their endowment, for these innate differences are the keystone on which a child's development will be built.⁵

The important issues confronting the intermediate teacher are those of recognizing the modes of composition and recognizing the basic elements of sequential composition.

Applegate states:

Men cannot live well together in one world until they learn how to "walk in one another's shoes." They must not only know facts about each other but must learn to crawl into each other's hearts and get the feel of one another's problems.⁶

⁵Gladys Gardner Jenkins, Helen S. Shacter, and William W. Baur, These Are Your Children (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1966), p. 12.

⁶Applegate, op. cit., p. 16.

Writing can afford the student this opportunity through his desire, attitude, skill, and basic understanding of written composition.

Definitions of Terms

Sequential composition. Sequential composition is the order in which the writing experiences are planned for a given group of children by their teacher. The design of the writing program is constructed as the teacher recognizes the strengths and weaknesses of his students. The sequence of a writing program is based on the judgement of the individual teacher.

Audience. The audience is predetermined by the writer and is the person or group of people for which the composition is written. The consideration of a specified audience assists the writer in his organization and choice of words.

Basal reader. A basal reader is the one reading book, or a series of books, that has been assigned a student to promote optimum growth at his known level of ability.

Thematic unit. A thematic unit is the division of a basal reader in which all the stories are related in respect to a proposed theme.

Linguistics. Linguistics is the study of our language and how we use it.

Common reading. A common reading is a piece of

literature that is read by all members of a classroom and is usually under the guidance of the teacher.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

A survey of library materials was conducted at the Kansas State University Library, Manhattan, Kansas. Practical application of the prescribed composition program during the 1966-67 school year proved to be very beneficial in the total outcome of this report. The author of this report worked very closely with the Cedar Rapids, Iowa language arts consultant and four outstanding teachers in curriculum construction of sequential composition.

Limits of the Study

This study was limited to the public financed schools of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, grades four, five, and six.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The task of the intermediate language arts teacher is twofold. First, he must teach the children how to write. Second, he must offer the children the opportunity to write.

Hach reported that:

Learning to write by writing is a half-truth at best. Most students would not learn to write well if they wrote every day on anything that they wished and had no particular motivation, no well-developed sequence of writing assignments, no directed discussion of writing theory, and no evaluation except the so-called "mechanics" and marginal notations of a few unexplained judgement phrases like "weak opening sentence," "awkward sentence," and "underdeveloped

paragraph." Students would probably become fluent in putting words on paper, a skill desirable in itself, of course, but they would not develop into disciplined writers of a variety of composition. In short, they would not become competent writers.⁷

More emphasis is being placed on the premise that composition must be taught as a discipline. The acquisition of specific skills is essential in written composition.

Hach states:

Most pupils of average or better than average intelligence can learn to write reasonably well if given the kind of program and training that the schools have a responsibility to give them. At least they can learn to write various forms of simple narration and exposition, the kinds of writing nearly everyone needs. Yet how many of our high school graduates are competent writers of narration and exposition? Even many good students write poorly, according to colleges and universities, including those with highly selective entrance requirements. If, after twelve or thirteen years of education, students of college calibre are graduated without the ability to write well, the schools have failed in one of their most important tasks.⁸

Presented in the following pages are specific areas of consideration essential to sequential composition at the intermediate level.

Modes of Composition

There are basically four areas of concentration that need to be stressed at the intermediate level. These areas are: (1) exposition, (2) narration, (3) description, and (4) persuasion. At the conclusion of the sixth grade, boys

⁷Clarence W. Hach, "Needed: A Sequential Program in Composition," English Journal, 49:538, November, 1960.

⁸Ibid.

and girls are expected to differentiate between these modes and recognize the role of each in purposeful writing.

Exposition. Stegner relates the following paragraph as a form of expository writing:

All levels of education in Africa are dependent upon one another, as they are everywhere in the world. It is impossible to strengthen college education if the students sent on by the high schools are ill prepared. And it is obviously impossible ever to increase the size of the universities if the high schools do not produce enough graduates. A shortage of high schools is one of Africa's greatest educational problems, and at its heart is a serious lack of qualified teachers.

The primary purpose of this paragraph was to explain or inform. Exposition, like in all other forms of writing, is seldom used all by itself. To explain something, you often have to describe it.

Stegner relates:

Exposition or the kind of writing which explains, often tries to answer one or more of the following questions.

1. What is it? (a mail order catalog)
2. What is it meant to do or be used for? (a book of etiquette)
3. How well does it fulfill its intended function? (a report card)
4. When did it happen or when did it exist? (an accident report)
5. How did it come to be this way? (a note from home explaining an absence)
6. How is it put together? (a cook book)
7. How does it work? (a manual for operating a lathe)
8. What does it mean? (an editorial)

⁹Wallace E. Stegner, Edwin H. Sauer, and Jane Rummel, Modern Composition Book 1 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1964), p. 11.

9. What is its worth? (an advertisement)
 10. What is its importance? (a museum guidebook)¹⁰

Once the writer has decided on which one of the ten questions his composition will seek to answer, he will develop an outline. This approach will give meaning to his work and he is more apt to write with a definite purpose in mind. By deciding what materials are essential and which ones are not, in his outline, the composer will limit his topic properly and stress only the most important details.

Narration. When telling a story or giving an account of an experience, the most common form of writing is narration.

Stegner relates the following experience:

Bob ran to the door and opened it to find a stranger standing there, not his grandfather as he expected. Before he could stop himself, he said, "Hi, Grandad." The stranger, who could not have been more than 25 years old, looked puzzled, then laughed. "Well, not quite yet, sonny," he said. "I'm the Fuller Brush man."¹¹

In narration, the order in which things happen must be clear and correct. There can be no possibility of the audience becoming confused as a time sequence is presented in narrative writing. A chronological listing of the incidents that will take place in the story assist the writer in seeing the beginning and ending of the story.

Finally, a narrative is interesting if it does more than merely tell what happened. It is important for the audience

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 20.

¹¹ Stegner, op. cit., p. 11.

to know how the writer or main character felt. Many descriptive details are essential to increase the interest of a paragraph.

Description. Sometimes a writer will want to describe a person, a place, or a thing in a completely factual way.

Stegner relates the following paragraph in his identification of a place:

One of the most pleasing attractions in modern America is the fresh fruit and vegetable counter in a supermarket. At any time of the year a shopper can find nearly every fruit and vegetable which is grown anywhere on earth. Piles of all kinds of apples are in one section, oranges, tangerines and lemons in another; berries, cherries and grapes abound, and there are melons even when you can see snow through the window. Rare and unusual vegetables are side by side with common ones. You can touch a potato with one hand and an artichoke with the other.¹²

When a composer does this kind of writing he must be accurate and exact, for he is writing for a very practical reason and a poor description would be worthless. The composer cannot afford to overlook any feature of the person, place or thing; in short, he must make his description complete.

All writing is done in one of two ways. The composition will be presented factually or imaginatively.

Stegner describes the two aspects of descriptive writing in this way:

Good imaginative description starts with selection.

¹²Ibid., pp. 11-12.

We do not try to include all the details, but only those which create the effect we want, as a painter selects.

Remember that factual description is like a photograph, while imaginative description is like a painting.¹³

Persuasion. Persuasion nearly always depends for its effect on clear exposition of the facts, examples and reasons that support the opinion. As stated by Stegner:

Writing which presents an opinion usually follows a simple plan.

1. It states an opinion.
2. It presents fact, examples, and reasons to support the opinion.
3. It summarizes the opinion.¹⁴

Writing persuasion demands that a writer write fairly and clearly. To write fairly, it is essential that what you say is accurate and it must provide all the necessary facts to allow your reader to judge for himself whether or not he agrees with you.

Stegner relates the following persuasive paragraph:

Driver education should begin in the junior high school even though students there are not old enough to qualify for a driver's license. The sooner a boy or girl learns the principles of safe driving and traffic regulation, the sooner he will be able to look out for himself in the modern world with its millions of cars on the streets and highways.¹⁵

Each of the four paragraphs presented on the preceding pages are different in three important ways: (1) they differ

¹³Stegner, op. cit., p. 19.

¹⁴Stegner, op. cit., p. 22.

¹⁵Stegner, op. cit., p. 12.

in subject or idea; (2) because of their differing ideas, each paragraph has a differing purpose; and, (3) each paragraph is arranged differently so as to carry out this purpose.

Very often, a single composition will contain combinations of the four modes previously identified. It is easy and often necessary to combine narrative with description, or description with exposition, or exposition with persuasion. Good writing uses a variety of methods.

On an occasion, the author of this report contacted Mr. Terry Ley, English department head of a senior high school in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. It was interesting to find out that Mr. Ley stresses two basic elements of composition with his sophomore English students: (1) necessity for substantiation of generalization, and (2) developing a sense of organization.

It was evident to the author of this report that sixth grade girls and boys can perform in these capacities. The degree of sophistication in which they performed may not have been as elevated as sophomores, but they did experience success in these two elements.

Elements of Thought for Written Composition

Certain elements of thought are basic and need to be stressed at the intermediate level. When a working knowledge of these elements has been established firmly in the student's mind, he begins to write with a more genuine purpose. Many of the considerations presented in the following pages are a result of a National Defense Education Act institute in

English conducted on the Iowa State University campus during the summer of 1966.

Background. Three concerns of a language arts teacher are the: (1) social, (2) cultural, and (3) historical backgrounds of his pupils. Since children are expected to write from their experiences, the teacher must acquaint himself with these three aspects.

The social backgrounds of a group of children within a classroom may vary greatly. The teacher must consider these variances carefully as he plans the writing program for his students. The cultural background of a student may very well affect his success in relating his experiences in a written composition. A student relates his experiences within the realm of his endowment.

As the historical background of the student is considered by the teacher, it should be substantiated that students have had previous experiences in writing. Girls and boys in the primary grades do write, but the extent must be known to the intermediate teacher.

Members of the Commission on the English Curriculum state:

Since children's interest and their thirst for information expand faster than their ability to read, write, and spell, much of their most valuable work is done orally in the primary grades. They can provide the ideas for written material if the teacher will

guide their thinking and act as scribe in recording it.¹⁶

It has been established earlier in this report that children use oral and written procedures in composition during their primary schooling experiences. The understanding of the social, cultural, and historical background of the students on the part of the teacher has been cited in terms of the larger text.

In recognizing the background of the individual student in the classroom, an understanding of his knowledge is of primary importance. His knowledge limits him and he must know the material with which he wants to deal. The teacher must be alert and recognize empty verbalizing. The background of the writer includes his motive, or need to communicate and also his self-interest. The writer must be interested in his topic to communicate well.

An understanding of the background of the audience is extremely important to the writer. The writer must be familiar with the knowledge level of his audience. The audience is either favorable or unfavorable, so the student must recognize the audience's predispositions to write effectively. The physical situation of the audience must be known to avoid competing diversions. In order to communicate on a functional

¹⁶Commission on the English Curriculum, Language Arts for Today's Children (New York: Appleton-Century-Croft, Inc., 1954), pp. 33-31.

basis, the audience must be given intense consideration. A student must have a particular audience in mind each time he attempts to relate his thoughts in written communication.

There are certain immediate limitations that are to be associated with the background. The mode of composition that the pupil is to utilize in his assignment must be clearly understood. The length of the composition and the time to complete it must be clearly stated by the teacher.

Purpose. The purpose of a written composition is included in the subject. A story about water skiing, in general, lacks purpose. A narrative-descriptive paragraph explaining safety measures and the excitement associated with water skiing contains purpose.

An expository paragraph could be written to explain a process or how to ski. A persuasive paragraph might be included to change an attitude about water skiing, or the purpose might be to persuade someone to go skiing. The purpose is clearly stated in each of the preceding instances, giving meaning to the writing.

The purpose begins with a distinct thesis statement or proposition. Then, through one or a combination of the four modes of composition, the pupil tries to develop a desirable response from his audience. These desirable responses may include: feeling, understanding, belief, action, or evaluation.

The evaluation of purpose in a composition depends largely

on the assignment. If the teacher develops the purpose for the student, the question then becomes, how well has he carried this purpose out? If the student develops his own purpose, there are two questions that should be asked. Has he made the purpose clear? And, has he carried out that purpose? The student will limit his topic to a more meaningful unit if he has a thorough understanding of the importance of recognizing a purpose in his writing.

Material. There are various sources that should be considered in the gathering of material for a written composition. The most common source of material for an intermediate aged child is his own previous personal experience. All writing should evolve from the student's past experience, and some experiences must be initiated by the teacher. Initiated experiences include planned observations, planned listening, and planned reading.

The types of materials gathered by a student should include: examples, facts, statistics, statements by authorities, and subjective reports. Subjective reports are from sources other than authorities. Students must learn to be very selective in their gathering of materials. Their material must exemplify relevance, specificity of details, accuracy, and authoritativeness. Pupils should be able to recognize the assessment of conflicting evidence and be able to distinguish fact from opinion.

The vocabulary used by girls and boys varies with their

ability to write. The development of vocabulary begins in the home as an infant. It continues to develop as the pupil gains new experiences. A passive vocabulary is experiencing words in context and not knowing exactly what they mean. An active vocabulary is made up of words that the writer can actually use. The teacher must know where the student is in the development of his vocabulary, and vocabulary development must take place in context. If a pupil develops a new word into the context of his composition, he is more likely to retain its meaning.

Definition is recognized as a part of material. Definition attempts to establish boundaries for a word or phrase. A lexical, or simple definition comes straight from the dictionary. An extended definition involves the process of describing the meaning of a word without the use of a dictionary. The student's experiences play a significant role in the development of an extended definition.

Structure. There are many basic principles of written composition that the writer associates with structure. The first aspect is the arrangement or general organization of the composition. An analysis type of arrangement requires the writer to gather the material, sift it, and then develop an outline. Deductive and inductive organization will lead to good arrangement of composition. Cause to effect and effect to cause are ways to achieve overall structure in composition writing.

Proportion and emphasis need to be stressed concerning the structure of the composition. Intermediate students are

able to identify strong and weak endings in a piece of literature. This skill needs to be carried over into their written composition. Proportion and emphasis refers to the amount of space given the end, the beginning, and the middle of a composition.

Titling is a valuable weapon of structure. It engages the interest of the audience. The title of a composition catches the reader's eye, excites interest, raises questions to be asked, and gives a clue to the subject matter. Titling is a skill that needs to be developed in written composition.

Strong beginnings and endings are essential in writing. In a thesis statement, the content is indicated and the audience becomes interested. Another method of developing a strong beginning is to present a question to the audience. If deductive methods are used in the overall arrangement, a repeating of the thesis statement is effective to produce a desirable ending. Inductive arrangement automatically ends up with the thesis statement. In narrative writing, the closing sentence may complete an action or imply further action.

Transitions play an important role in determining the overall effect of the composition on the audience. Transitions serve three major purposes:

1. They serve as a psychological aid to the reader.
(shows him that he is moving through a structure)
2. Transitions demonstrate coherence. (provides clues to the outline underlying the structure)

3. Transitions provide a stylistic device. (degree of formality)

Transitions assist the writer in promoting continuity in the structure of his composition.

The handling of bi-polar materials in the total structure of a composition simply implies the recognition of two separate subjects which the writer wishes to discuss in the same composition. The organization in such a composition can become very difficult for an intermediate aged child. An example of such a situation might require the pupil to compare and contrast a Collie and a Saint Bernard. One approach would be to describe each dog separately and then write a summary at the end. Another possibility would be to consider the ears of each dog and move through the structure in this manner. A summary may still be utilized in this type of structure to achieve the overall effect in the assignment. While the student is developing language concepts through the elements of written composition, it is essential that the teacher should plan evaluative measures and instruction in mechanics.

Planning for Instruction in Mechanics

One of the most challenging and yet most important tasks of the teacher of composition is that of relating instruction in mechanics to the actual needs of the class. Teachers disagree concerning the appropriate time to teach specific items of mechanics, the particular items to be taught, and the group or individual form of instruction; however, almost all teachers

agreed that some approach is essential. The trail and error approach with different methods has led the author of this report to advocate a multi-attack plan for teaching intermediate pupils. Basic to this plan is the individual error record shown in Figure 1. Having established the practice of maintaining a record of errors for the composition work during the year, the teacher has a guide for determining the type of instruction that should accompany the writing course. By using this record of errors and adopting a variety of techniques for teaching mechanics, one should be able to provide both group and individual instruction that will improve competency without sacrificing time or interest.

The most individualized type of instruction, of course, is that which deals with the specific errors that a given student has made. The record of errors sheet makes use of references to the grammar or mechanics textbook, and with a group of students who are conscientious and consistent in their use of this self-help, few additional assignments should be necessary. The real proof of the effectiveness of this technique is the elimination of errors from subsequent compositions. The teacher can check the individual record of errors horizontally after each composition has been returned and the errors recorded. If progress is satisfactory, this self-administered instructional program is simple and effective.

In every group of students, however, there are those who lack motivation or self-discipline to follow a self-help plan. For those who do not show a definite pattern of

Compositions

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
										agreement subject and verb
										and--too many ands
										awk--awkward construction or sound-- re-write clarity
										frag--fragments
										illeg-illegible
										run-together
										slang
										sp--spelling error
										ww--wrong word or phrase for this context
										^-- omitted word or words
										<i>P</i> --indent for new paragraph
										no <i>P</i> --do not indent for new paragraph
										w--wordiness
										t--change of tense
										pr--pronoun error
										Use your style sheet for correcting these errors: ffi--failed to follow instructions under form for written work

Individual Error Record

FIGURE 1

improvement, the teacher should plan individual and small group assignments. The individual assignments may be worked out through a personal conference with the student. Specific reading and drill, written exercises, programmed texts, paired work with another student, or small-group instruction may be needed. Each teacher will find ways that suit him best, but the important thing is that the plan works.

In general, intermediate students are likely to need group instruction with problems that occur frequently. To avoid the errors that may result from haphazard planning, one should make a tabulation of the class errors to use as a guideline for whole-group instruction. The areas of greatest need should then be readily apparent. Textbook exercises, of course, are available. For a more effective and personalized approach, however, a variety of original materials may be developed with the pupil's compositions. For example, one might select compositions which illustrate both errors and correct usage for use on the opaque projector. Duplicated copies may be distributed to check recognition of errors and the student's skill in correcting errors. Transparencies for use on the overhead projector combine the advantages of a visual aid and opportunities to correct the error while the transparency is before the class. Short periods of large-group drill prove effective in making correct choices more automatic.

This plan reverses the time-honored procedure of allotting all class time to group instruction and giving only perfunctory attention to individual problems. It frees the

teacher from hours of checking exercises for errors and gives him more contact with the students. It makes provision for individual differences in a way that is meaningful.

Evaluation Procedures of Written Composition

Three important criteria to consider in a learning activity through composition are: (1) the making of a good assignment, (2) carrying out the assignment, and (3) the evaluation of the assignment. The latter of these criteria will be considered in the following pages.

Before the intermediate teacher sets up his evaluative procedure, it is important that he ask the following pertinent questions:

1. Did all the students clearly understand the assignment?
2. Did the students receive sufficient motivation?
3. Did I allow adequate time for the execution of the composition?

Evaluation of a composition is basically communication between the student and the teacher. There are generally four elements of a composition assignment that the language arts teacher takes into consideration. The first element would be the thought that goes into the composition. The thought or degree of conscientious application on the part of the student may include: the neatness of the paper, the legibility of the handwriting, and the organization and originality of the composition. The second element would include all the grammar

essentials such as: subject-verb agreement, comparisons, sentence structure would be the main consideration here. The third element would account for good usage throughout the composition. The final element in evaluation would deal with the proper mechanics utilized in the development of the assignment.

Students should be given the opportunity of assisting the teacher in the evaluation of usage, grammar, and mechanics from time to time. A student may be asked to read a classmate's paper orally before the group to attain the evaluative purpose. A student should be given the opportunity to present his own composition before the group on many occasions. This may occur either before or after evaluative procedures have taken place.

Proper proofreading techniques can often lead to the discovery of errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics. When proofread, the composition is often re-read in a subconscious state of mind, so that many of the mistakes are left in. A few solutions to this problem are:

1. In checking for spelling errors, stop and look at every word.
2. Pronounce the words in your throat, or use a pencil and touch every word. (This tends to slow you down.)
3. Read the composition word by word backwards.
4. Have another person read your paper aloud to you.

This will improve the style of the composition, too

5. Keep a warning sheet that contains a list of the words you have misspelled in previous work.

This seems a big order to fill, but intermediate girls and boys who are properly motivated can appreciate the procedures in proofreading previously cited.

The teacher, as the student's audience, owes it to the student to read through the entire composition without the use of a red pencil. There is a possibility of a break in communication as the teacher utilizes his red pencil. After the teacher has read the composition in its entirety, he can then go back to look at the structure and concentrate on the aspects that have been stressed in previous lessons.

In grading, the author of this report has experienced more success in the assessment of numerical values related to each element of the composition rather than assigning a letter grade to the overall effort of the student. Through the process of numerical assessment, it is easier to keep an account of the student's growth in each of the respective elements. With this form of grading, the student can afford to concentrate on his individual progress rather than being associated with in terms of a particular letter grade.

Literature as a Source of Composition

Research in child development has contributed knowledge about children which provides guideposts for selecting books. These same guideposts assist the classroom teachers in making wise and practical decisions in determining what children are interested in writing about.

Huck states:

Children are not miniature adults, but individuals with their own rights, needs, interests, and capacities. This concept suggests a need for a body of literature capturing the wonders, humor, and disappointments of childhood.¹⁷

As intermediate children mature, their experiences become more varied. Their needs to associate themselves with other people becomes more demanding and this association can be partly achieved through literature. Literature can provide opportunities for vicarious experience through identifying oneself with the story characters and their experiences.

A close inspection of guides for ages and stages of development will assist the teacher in recognizing some of the basic needs of intermediate children. Huck relates a format that describes some characteristic growth patterns, suggests implications for selection and use of books and provides examples of suitable books for stages of development:

CHARACTERISTICS - Rate of physical development varies widely. Rapid growth precedes beginning of puberty. Girls about two years ahead of boys in development.

IMPLICATIONS - Continued differentiation in reading preferences. Guide understanding of growth process and help children meet personal problems.

EXAMPLES - Sperry, Call It Courage; Sawyer, Maggie Rose, Her Birthday Christmas; Garfield, Follow My Leader; Sorenson, Miracles on Maple Hill.

¹⁷Charlotte S. Huck and Doris A. Young, Children's Literature in the Elementary School (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1961), p. 4.

CHARACTERISTICS - Understanding and accepting the sex role is a developmental task of this period.

IMPLICATIONS - Books may provide impetus for discussion and identification with others meeting this task.

EXAMPLES - Brink, Caddie Woodlawn; Steele, The Lone Hunt; Edmunds, Two Log Crossings.¹⁸

A thorough understanding of a child's taste for literature provides the foundation needed to promote meaningful writing situations.

Stegner states:

There are many reasons for reading, but the principal purpose in reading literature--stories, poems, plays, essays, biographies--is to receive pleasure. Though literature often contains profound truths about life, we go to it chiefly for enjoyment.¹⁹

Since the reading of literature is to provide enjoyment, the reader may wonder why he is asked to write about it from time to time. The answer is very simple. Reading is a developmental process that has to be improved through practice. No one starts out reading at top skill. As you read, you start out with simple things and progress year by year with more difficult pieces of literature. Your reading ability will probably improve as long as you read. Writing about literature helps us to clarify the thoughts which the reading provokes in us. Stegner writes:

Writing about what you read is a means of improving your reading ability, for when you write about a piece of literature you have to take a sharp look at it; you

¹⁸Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁹Wallace E. Stegner and others, Modern Composition Book 3 (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1964), p. 116.

have to analyse and evaluate it in ways that reading alone cannot accomplish. A writing exercise sharpens your perceptions and understanding and requires that you organize and state your thoughts and feelings about what you have read.²⁰

Writing about literature, therefore, is a combination of improving our reading ability and is a means of increasing the pleasures we get from reading. There are many forms of reading that an intermediate aged child acquaints himself with. During the course of his schooling experiences, he may come into contact with stories, biographies, plays, and poems, to mention a few.

The primary source of a child's reading experience in the intermediate grades is his basal reader. A child's basal reader is the one reading book, of a series of books, that has been assigned to him to promote optimum development on a systematic basis.

The Cedar Rapids Community School District is incorporating into its intermediate reading program the newly revised Scott-Foresman series at the beginning of the 1967-68 school year. Due to the problem concerning the amount of composition being taught at the intermediate level in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, the author of this report has examined the potential of Cavalcades²¹ as a source of written composition. Cavalcades is designed to meet the needs of the top reading group in the sixth

²⁰Ibid., pp. 116-117.

²¹Helen M. Robinson and others, Cavalcades Guidebook (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1965), pp. 3-65.

grade. The attention will be directed toward the first theme-unit, "This World of Men."

UNIT ONE: "This World of Men" - Diversity of Cultures

Selections in this unit reflect the diversity of cultures around the world. Although the situations are related to specific places, the actions and reactions of the people who deal with them are those of people everywhere: learning discretion, learning to accept new ways, finding a common interest with someone who is different, fulfilling a bargain. Each selection contributes in its own way to youngster's understanding of themselves and others by suggesting universals in human problems and aspirations.

STORY NUMBER ONE - "Henry Has An Idea": pp. 9-18

Statement of the Problem - Why is the perceiving of relationships of principle important to daily living?

Extended Interpretation -

Summarize the ideas of the story.

Focus attention on various aspects of the problem and its solution.

Analyze relationships.

Identify character traits.

Show elements of humor in the story.

Think and Do Book: p. 2. (Workbook)

Word Study - (Linguistics)

Review how words come into our language.

Discuss derivations in context - root words, prefixes, and suffixes.

Use context to determine the meaning of words.

Review glossary and dictionary skills.

Think and Do Book: p. 3.

Composition -

Since it is the first week of school, assign a short composition that can be used for evaluative purposes to determine the assigning of future composition assignments.

1. In-class (The first composition will be written in the classroom.)
2. Audience: Your sixth grade teacher.
3. Purpose: By use of specific detail, present the reasons why you are sitting in this classroom today.
4. Length: About 200-300 words.
5. Due: At the end of the class period.
6. Problem: The first composition is a short explanation of why you are in school. Obviously, in a short paper you cannot explain all the views concerning the reason you attend school. In your choice of detail you will want to avoid such generalizations as "My parents sent me." You should develop some organization in your paper in terms of mentioning the most important reason you are in school on to the least important reason you are attending school. Remember to proofread your paper before handing it in.

Oral Communication -

Study conversation, reading, and discussion skills.

Make lists of rules for good speech habits.

Establish the oral atmosphere for the year.

Listening -

Study ideas for good listening habits.

Individualized Spelling -

Free Reading -

Distribute book lists that accompany the

first unit in the reading book.

Stress the importance of free reading.

Help students make their selections for free reading.

STORY NUMBER TWO - "The Singing Cave": pp. 19-33

Statement of the Problem - Personal experiences often have a larger social significance.

Extended Interpretation -

Identify the story setting.

Present ideas which will connect storm and singing sound.

Identify motives and attitudes of the characters.

Recognize the author's use of language to create a mood.

Think and Do Book: p. 6.

Word Study - (Linguistics)

Extensive practice in the use of the glossary and dictionary.

Determine appropriate usage of words.

Learn to use guide words in context.

Interpret pronunciation symbols.

Study abbreviations.

Composition -

The girls and boys should have exhibited their skills in written composition and through evaluative procedures, the teacher should have an idea of each individual pupil's ability to write effectively. Review the elements of an expository composition.

1. In-class.
2. Audience: Your mother and father.
3. Purpose: Through persuasion, try to convince your parents to buy you a new bicycle or some toy that you have wanted for a long time. Note, you are writing for your parents in this composition.
4. Length: One paragraph.
5. Due: Before the class goes to lunch.
6. Problem: Your first composition was an explanation (exposition) of why you are in school. In your second composition you are going to use persuasion. Please try to recall how the boy in the story attempted to persuade his grandfather to let him keep the gaming board. Many thoughts entered his mind as to why he should keep the board. Your task is to persuade your parents to buy you a new bike or a new toy. Again, avoid any generalizations so that you can present a strong case in your favor. Develop an appropriate title and through good organization, relate your most convincing reason to your least convincing reason. Develop a strong beginning and and strong ending.

Oral Communication -

Read "High Tide" to the students. (Poem)

Oral interpretation of the poem.

Relate to the previous story.

Discuss imagery conveyed.

Listening -

Read additional sea poetry to the class.

Individualized Spelling -

Free Reading -

Continue helping students with their selections.

List additional stories and poems about the sea.

Make suggestions for reading about the Vikings.

National Geographic Magazine

Compton's Encyclopedia

American Neighbors

Life World Library

STORY NUMBER THREE - "A Thread of Understanding":
pp. 35-46.
"Japanese Haiku": p. 47.

Statement of the Problem - Why is common understanding in our multicultural world important?

Extended Interpretation -

Anticipate the theme of story from title.

Note techniques used by the author in developing theme.

Identify techniques used to create mood.

Note awareness of the feelings between characters.

Show the sequence of relationships.

Note and recall details.

Think and Do Book: p. 7.

Discuss the sensory images in the Haiku selections.

Compare the ideas in the separate poems.

Discuss the author's attitude.

Examine the content.

Study the poetic structure.

Word Study - (Linguistics)

Derive meaning of words from context of story.

Use glossary.

Comprehend word meanings from various clues.

Review spelling patterns by sound clues.

Think and Do Book: p. 8.

Oral Communication -

Reading of Haiku and discussion

Composition -

1. Out-of-class.
2. Audience: A classmate
3. Purpose: By use of specific detail, describe a wonder of nature that you consider especially beautiful and that you would like to share with a classmate.
4. Length: About 300 words.
5. Due: Wednesday morning.
6. Problem: Even though there was a language barrier that seemed to separate Celia and Sumiko's grandfather, they practiced another means of communication. A common appreciation for something beautiful and simple may be the start of a wonderful friendship. Be specific in your organization and share a natural treasure with one of your friends by using good descriptive words. When you have completed your composition, allow your friend to read it. Have him read it a second time to assist you in proofreading. The ultimate goal is to communicate.

Listening -

Introduce and read other Japanese poetry.

Have the class tap out the five-seven-five rhythm of syllabication that is usually associated with Japanese Haiku.

Individualized Spelling -

Free Reading -

Check for poor reading habits - eye movement, posture, and lip reading.

List additional stories, poems, and books about Japan.

Cricket Songs: Japanese Haiku
by Harry Belm

STORY NUMBER FOUR - "A Gift from Allah": pp. 48-62.

Statement of the Problem - Are common feelings toward a thing or a happening different because of where we live?

Extended Interpretation -

Interpret the meaning of the title.

Recall details of Berber life.

Correlate ideas from the text and the Think and Do Book.

Identify universal emotional reactions.

Examine the feelings of the characters.

Think and Do Book: pp. 10-11, 12.

Word Study - (Linguistics)

Study relationships of word classes.

Present prefixes that carry negative meaning.

Composition -

1. Out-of-class.
2. Audience: Your classmates.
3. Purpose: By use of specific detail, narrate an incident in your life that you think your classmates would enjoy hearing about.
4. Length: About 300 words.
5. Due: Tomorrow morning.
6. Problem: Driss' experience in capturing the snake was certainly worth telling his sister. He probably listed the main events and recalled the details all the way back to the village. You are being called upon to narrate a memorable experience in your life. Be sure to take the time to give adequate planning to your topic. List the main events and recall the details as though they were just happening. In your organization, select a good title and present your details in the order in which they occurred. Do a good job of proofreading. You will read your narrative to your class.

Oral Communication -

Read play "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," prepare and dramatize.

Oral evaluation of book from free reading.

Listening -

Listen to other selections from Arabian Nights.

Individualized Spelling -

Free Reading -

List additional stories and poems about Arabian countries.

The four modes of composition have been applied to the first seven selections of the first thematic unit of Calvalcades. Teachers in grades four and five might examine the possibility of treating Ventures and Vistas in the same manner. Obviously, the children could not learn the modes this rapidly. They were introduced as such for the purpose of writing this report.

The four most important aspects being stressed in each of the composition assignments were: (1) writing for a particular audience; (2) writing with a definite purpose in mind; (3) stressing good organization, and (4) relating from the student's own personal experience. These considerations are certainly necessary in order to communicate in a meaningful manner. The degree of ingenuity that is required of language arts teachers to meet these requirements in composition, is in the realm of most teachers' ability. This approach can be used with other forms of literature that the girls and boys come into contact with. Literature certainly appears to be a motivating force and source of written composition, if the teacher will provide the amount of planning needed to incorporate it in his classroom.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It was the purpose of this study to: (1) report the modes of composition; (2) recognize background, purpose, material, and structure as essential elements of sequential composition; (3) recognize evaluation procedures of composition

assignments; (4) report current attempts of recognizing literature as a source of composition assignments, and (5) review literature for an approach to such a program of sequential composition.

Summary

For this study, the literature disclosed some aspects of sequential composition that an intermediate classroom teacher should familiarize himself with. Most basic to the intermediate language arts teacher, is a thorough understanding of the four modes of composition. One of the following: (1) description, (2) narration, (3) exposition, or (4) persuasion is generally applied to a child's composition. It is up to the classroom teacher to carry the child's writing experience one step further by assisting the child in recognizing which mode he is using and for what purpose.

A child can at best relate his thoughts through his past personal experiences in the form of writing. In order to establish purposeful writing situations, the teacher is expected to know something about the social, cultural, and historical backgrounds of his pupils. The background of the individual writer should be recognized in terms of knowledge, motive, and self-interest concerning the topic he has selected to write about. When a child writes, he is expected to write for a particular audience. An understanding of the audience's background in respect to their knowledge of what you are writing about is essential. The ability to foresee the audience's

reaction as being favorable or unfavorable should influence the writer's choice of words and the manner in which he organizes his composition.

Every composition must have a definite purpose that is clearly stated in the form of a thesis statement or proposition. A clearly stated purpose is essential to both the writer and his audience.

When gathering material for the purpose of writing, the most common source is the writer's previous personal experience. The language arts teacher may organize planned listening, planned observation, and planned reading to represent the source of material for a written composition. The girls and boys need to be acquainted with various types of materials such as: facts, examples, statistics, and statements by authorities as they gather material for the purpose of writing. In the selection of material, pupils need to recognize relevance, accuracy, and authoritativeness of the material. Two forms of definition are to be associated with the material that goes into a composition. The two forms of definition are simple and extended. A simple definition simply requires the use of a dictionary definition. An extended definition is related directly to the writer's experience in determining the meaning of a word or phrase.

Certain elements of structure need to be stressed at the intermediate level to assist the students with the overall organization of their composition. These elements are: arrangement, proportion, titling, beginnings and endings,

transitions, and the handling of bi-polar materials.

The evaluation of written composition includes the teacher finding something good to say about each composition he receives from his students. The teacher should read through the composition in its entirety, so the communication is not broken. After this initial reading, the teacher can go back and look for particular items that were stressed in the assignment of the composition. The pupils may assist the teacher in reading through a classmate's composition to look for errors related to punctuation, grammar, and usage. The opaque and overhead projectors are useful in situations where the total class is involved in a learning experience related to writing. An individual error record is a useful instrument for the teacher in keeping track of the individual student's progress in grammar, usage, and punctuation. It also serves as a valuable instrument for the student that is conscientious enough to keep his own personal record of errors made in previous compositions.

Through an inspection of Cavalcades, a sixth grade basal reader, literature appeared to be a source of composition assignments. By reading a poem, article, or story, intermediate aged girls and boys can relate their experiences in connection with the literary characters.

This study was particularly concerned with the review of literature which showed possibilities for sequential composition in the intermediate grades of Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Conclusion

It is concluded that sequential composition needs to be developed in the intermediate classrooms of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. A review of literature contends that there are elements of composition that can be introduced at the intermediate level.

Most of the materials available for teaching composition are related to the junior and senior high school levels. There is a need for more studies and trials before concrete and definitive statements can be made concerning sequential composition as an instructional approach at the intermediate level. In the meantime, it is concluded that it would be desirable for teachers to follow a flexible program in hopes of attaining sound end results. By implementing this approach, new insights may be forthcoming. Through cooperative effort of classroom endeavor, a program of intermediate sequential composition in the Cedar Rapids Community School District may become a reality.

Recommendations

As a result of this study, the author recommends that:

1. The language arts teachers of fourth, fifth, and sixth grade give serious consideration to the implementation of sequential composition in their classrooms.
2. Intermediate language arts teachers consider their children's basal readers as a source of composition assignments.

3. More intermediate language arts teachers in the Cedar Rapids Community School District attain a professional background in composition by enrolling in a course of study to achieve this end.

4. More materials be written for the intermediate level aimed toward composition to assist the teacher in developing a more desirable attitude in respect to recognizing composition as being one of the important aspects of the total curriculum.

The literature suggested that girls and boys write from their personal experiences in the intermediate grades. The audience should be an important consideration in sequential composition.

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SEQUENTIAL COMPOSITION FOR THE
INTERMEDIATE GRADES OF CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA

by

JOHN FREDRICK CHRISTENSON

B. S., Winona State College, 1962

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

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The purpose of this study was to acquaint the writer with the various aspects that make up a sequential composition program at the intermediate level. The review of the literature revealed that most of the authorities associated with written composition are directing their efforts toward the junior and senior high school levels.

The report resulted from the author's participation in a curriculum study during the 1966-67 school year. The language arts consultant of the Cedar Rapids Community School District reported that intermediate language arts teachers were averaging one composition assignment a month. It was soon discovered that only four out of all the intermediate language arts teachers had received formal training in the teaching of composition. A curriculum committee was organized and this group was made up of two elementary teachers and three junior high school teachers. The ultimate goal of this committee was to develop a syllabus centered about sequential composition and have it at the disposal of the Cedar Rapids intermediate teachers by the beginning of the 1967-68 school year. Besides the curriculum study, information for the writing of this report was gathered from current educational literature.

One objective of this study was to report the modes of composition: (1) narration; (2) description; (3) exposition, and (4) persuasion. The review of literature recognizes:

(1) background; (2) purpose; (3) material, and (4) structure as essential elements of intermediate sequential composition. Planning for the instruction of mechanics and evaluation procedures of composition assignments were cited in the text of the report. The review of literature attempts to recognize literature as a source of composition assignments. Special emphasis is placed on two areas throughout the report: (1) the student must write from his past personal experiences, and (2) the student must learn that it is essential to consider a specific audience when attempting to communicate through composition.

As a result of this study, it was recommended that intermediate language arts teachers give serious consideration to the implementation of sequential composition in their classroom. It was also recommended that intermediate language arts teachers in the Cedar Rapids Community School District attain a professional background in composition by enrolling in a course of study to become more proficient in this area.