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THE PROCESS OF COMPOSITION

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The personal writing of children in English class is considered in the light of recent research on creative processes. It calls for divergent rather than convergent thinking, and a task-oriented rather than ego-oriented approach towards the work. Writing done in the classroom has evident advantages over that done at home. The most effective way of stimulating good writing will vary with the age, the sex and the individuality of the child. The moment of starting to write is fraught with particular difficulties, which may be lessened by the use of 'synectics' technique.

INTRODUCTION

While teachers are repeating the daily grind of the classroom a great deal of research is in progress into matters relevant to the teaching situation. But between research and teaching a great gulf is set which is seldom bridged. Both research and teaching suffer from this isolation: research becomes too academic and selects its projects more for their experimental feasibility than for their relevance, while teaching comes to rely too exclusively on haphazard, subjective, empirical methods, and misses the stimulus of systematic experimentation.

Clearly the mere communication of research findings to teachers is not enough to change educational practice. The task of relating the results of research to classroom practice is long and tortuous (21). But it is worth attempting, and in this paper such an attempt will be made with reference to the English writing of secondary school boys and girls between the ages of 11 and 15 years. The weekly business of setting written work to a class is a familiar task for the teacher. Can it be eased or illuminated in any way by psychological or educational research? In fact, there are findings and hypotheses which are relevant to this task, though not all are of equal value. Some are statements of theory which are stimulating but not experimentally supported in detail. Others are findings from particular pieces of research which can be linked with the broader theories. The aim of the article is to stimulate some reflection on this business of setting written work, on what teachers are doing in it, and on what it involves for schoolchildren.

Before broaching the subject, one can usefully ask: how does the English teacher see himself? The teacher of English can play any one of a number of roles, many of them explored entertainingly and perceptively by Dr

A. Wilkinson (23). He can see himself as *Grendel's Mother*, the guardian of the word-hoard, handing on the great treasure of literature as a heritage which 'enshrines the values of people'; determined to give his pupils the very best, but not always reflecting on whether they are ready for it. He can see himself as the *Sergeant-Major*, putting his charges through incessant exercises and drill (there is a book called *Keep Fit exercises in English*), fond of the word 'discipline' in describing his work. Again, he can see himself as *Sigmund Freud*, reading the deeper, darker currents of his pupils' unconscious in their outpourings on 'Spring' or 'My Life by a Threepenny Bit'. No teacher has illustrated the possibilities—and also the hazards—of this approach better than David Holbrook (12, 13). Or the teacher can see himself as *Group Psychotherapist*, who sets his charges to act out their problems by their interaction in group work in class. Therapeutic drama of this sort has come a long way since J. L. Moreno introduced it for psychiatric purposes thirty years ago (19). In American high schools it is a normal drama technique.

Or a teacher of English may play the role of *Actor-Manager*, showing the pupils how to bring a play to life, and spending class-time giving stage-directions. Yet again, he may see himself as *Printer's Reader*, and spend the best hours of each evening in proof correction of exercise-books and the best of his intelligence in devising a code of correction-signs which will highlight and penalise every least error in the text. Or he may see himself simply as *Teacher*, with some emphasis on really teaching them something, i.e. facts and memory lessons, so that they 'really know' something.

All these roles and analogies have their strengths and their limitations. Even the best approaches can be caricatured into seeming silly. But an awareness of such roles can be very valuable, enabling the teacher to see his own work imaginatively.

CHILDREN'S PERSONAL WRITING

The teaching task under discussion here is a fairly specific one: to enable children to express themselves in writing. Clearly there are other fields of verbal self-expression, notably oral work in class, which must precede work in written self-expression and must continue alongside it; and of course a child should not attempt long written work until he has gained sufficient physical skill at handwriting to prevent undue fatigue. These do not concern us here; neither does the other type of written work which one might call practical writing which involves things such as composing reports, writing specimen letters on given themes, or answering specific

factual questions. Here we are primarily concerned with the type of writing in which the child expresses personal reflections and ideas.

Personal, as distinct from practical writing, has been part of school work almost as long as there have been schools in Europe. The reasons justifying its place in the curriculum have if anything become more cogent and clear with time. Psycholinguists have shown the interdependence of thought and language and the extent to which intellectual growth may be linked with linguistic development (cf. 3). Teachers like Holbrook (12) have pointed out the benefits which even the marginally literate can gain from quiet reflection on their own experience and the written expression of their reflections. The long rhetorical tradition in classical and grammar-school education, still vital today (5), aimed at producing masters of clear, forceful and elegant language by means of written and spoken self-expression. One of the most attractive of recent English textbooks, by Clements, Dixon and Stratta (7), provides a sort of Rhetoric for the urban comprehensive school. It uses personal writing to promote not merely the intellectual but also the personal development of the pupils.

The sort of mental activity involved in written self-expression can be seen in two ways: as divergent rather than convergent thinking; and as task-oriented rather than ego-oriented work.

In their efforts to categorise, identify and examine the various types of mental behaviour, psychologists have distinguished between convergent and divergent thinking.* The former starts from a problem and converges on the one right answer; this is the sort of thinking looked for in most school examinations. The children are given some evidence and they know that there is one right answer; the other answers are wrong. Their mental activity consists in 'converging' on this one predetermined right answer. Intelligence tests normally measure a person's skill in convergent thinking. But there is another type of thinking which can be identified and, after a fashion, measured: in which a problem is posed to which there is no one right answer, and the child is asked to spread himself and suggest a variety of possible solutions, or to use his imagination. This is called divergent thinking. A high ability in convergent thinking does not necessarily go with a high ability in divergent thinking, or vice versa.

Of all the work that children do at school, that which most commonly calls for divergent thinking is the writing of English. Here they are asked to produce, to create. Almost all other tasks call for problem-solving or for the reproduction of memorised material. Psychologically the task of essay-writing is unlike anything else that is done at school, except some artistic work. Creative work, and divergent thinking, clearly presuppose

*The distinction was first made by Spearman, but has achieved its currency mainly through the work of Guilford (11).

some convergent thinking, some learning of right answers, such as the accepted meaning of words and the use of punctuation; but they are still different skills, and the one does not guarantee the existence of the other.

It is useful also to look at the way in which a boy is involved in his writing. He should be task-oriented, that is, he should be more preoccupied with the task and the topic of writing than with the repercussions of the work on himself. Children tend to see all school tasks in an ego-oriented way. Problems may present themselves to the child as threats of failure. 'For next Monday I have to produce three pages on "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever"—and God help me if I don't produce it'. For someone striving in this way to come up with a successful solution, to avert this threat from himself, the tendency is to clutch frantically for the most immediate superficial solution as a balm to anxiety, to throw up something banal and borrowed which will minimally meet the case. There is no other school task in which ego-orientation of this sort is so disastrous as in personal writing. Unless the boy can become interested, if not absorbed, in what he is writing about, the whole task becomes a meaningless ritual. But to induce such task-orientation is an art in itself.

WRITING AT HOME

Since the writing of English is a rather special task, the atmosphere in which it takes place is clearly important. But if all written work is done at home, the teacher has no control over the atmosphere of work. He wants to put the boys in a mood in which their minds are moving over the topic and ideas are occurring to them. Boys may be able to induce this mood at home, but it is less than probable. They will have to drag themselves away to their work, perhaps to another room if they are fortunate, perhaps to a corner of a room where a television set or a radio is entertaining the rest of the family. There are children, it is true, who prefer to work against a background of noise or music. This is a matter of individual choice. But it is not a preference common to all children, or even to all city children; nor is it true that noise of itself helps the work even of those who like it.

Even for children who appear to work better against a background of noise, the noise should be strictly background. Studies of the effects of 'Music while you work' are relevant here (17). If noise or background music is wanted, it should not be positively relaxing, like Hawaian guitars. Vocalists are distracting; and good marches and pop music of the last eight or nine years set the feet itching. Least damage will probably be done by light classical music or out-dated modern music with a fairly quick tempo.

If it is possible to let children do their writing in class, then there are many reasons to commend this course. First, one can prepare them for their writing. Spearman has warned us, and it is clear to any teacher, that a lapse of time is needed for any complex mental process to get going. We tell children to think before they write, but we know how easily thinking can break down into despair about the task, or dissolve into day-dreaming. The most effective way of helping children is not by shortening the time of preparation, but by feeding their imaginations and sustaining their wavering concentration by means of provocative questions or discussions. The teacher has to launch their minds onto the topic without straight-jacketing thought or imagination.

Naturally children would rather write in class than at home. They are working 'in the firm's time' instead of their own, there is an atmosphere of recollection and absorption which they may not have at home, and the preparatory discussion of the topic is fresh in their minds. Naturally, too, they try to protract the introductory discussion as far as possible, and when they are told to start writing, there are usually two or three minutes of resistance and further questions. Then, quite suddenly, peace falls on the class to last for perhaps thirty minutes, broken only by the subdued chuckle of a boy savouring his own creation. The practice of writing in class may create real problems for teachers with a full course which demands much class-work, as distinct from work that can be done at home; and teaching is the art of the possible, in circumstances that are always less than ideal. But there are few tasks in which the right classroom atmosphere can be so valuable as personal writing. Indeed it is worth starting written work in class even if it cannot be finished there. The momentum from the first paragraphs written in a congenial atmosphere will carry over into homework.

THE STIMULUS TO WRITING

To ask about the stimulus to children's writing is to raise the whole question of the purpose of such writing, and the different skills it is hoped to develop in children as they grow older. These purposes and skills are as varied as the teacher's roles in the English class. Some see the weekly work as an exercise in spelling, punctuation and grammar; some as a means of appreciating better—or at least reading more carefully—the literary texts under study; some as a training in clear, constructive thinking about a clearly defined topic; some as a piece of self-expression for its own sake; some as a means of discerning the deep unconscious processes at work in the child; and most teachers will allow some validity and some place to each of these objectives, or to a mixture of them.

The phrase 'creative writing' has achieved a far wider currency than its vagueness deserves. Paul Witty has defined it as 'composition in which the child is free to select his subject matter and to determine the form and length in which his writing will appear' (24, p. vi). There is some value in occasionally throwing the ball entirely into the child's court, and seeing what will result; but normally it is better to define the task in at least a minimal way. Most English teachers will have experimented with non-verbal stimuli for writing: presenting the children with pieces of music (cf. 13) or mere noises; with paintings, or mere blobs of colour with anything that will be sufficiently evocative to stir associations and launch them on a piece of imaginative writing without formal restraints; a stimulus that will not give the children any notion of an expected or desired response, and will therefore leave the initiative with them.*

This approach has been found useful with children inhibited by other methods of composition, and often strikes out ideas and images of great beauty or bizarreness, especially when the stock responses have been worked through. If the boy is really involved, unconscious processes will certainly be at work, and his writing can become a means of resolving conflicts and tensions, of objectifying and coming to terms with anxieties and hopes under conditions of safety, and of interpreting his experience. David Holbrook's (12) account of work with his secondary modern children illustrates this approach, and illustrates too the dangers of an excessive preoccupation with the unconscious meaning of children's writing.

The teacher who starts to experiment with free writing of this sort, and with the use of non-verbal stimuli, will soon find what Freud found when he started his technique of free association (16). It is a learned skill; it does not come easily. There are bogus forms of free writing. Children are wise enough to learn what their teacher wants to see, and if we find city-bred children producing rhapsodic pieces on lambs, shepherds and rippling brooks, it is worth asking just how spontaneous and free these are, and whether they may be the echo of some model praised by teacher. From an early age children have been trained in convergent thinking. It has been an assumption in many classrooms that every school-task can be done in one right way and that teacher knows it; that good work is work which conforms closest to the model or instructions given by the teacher, and that it should be evaluated by teacher in terms of conformity to the model. Even compositions tend to be judged successful by the extent to which they escape the red pencils of the *Printer's Reader*, the extent to which the grammar, punctuation and spelling are 'right'.

So one can encounter some resistance among children to work which is by definition divergent; to which there is no one right answer; for which

*Further suggestions are provided by James (15) and Pym (20).

the stimulus is completely unstructured and there is no indication of 'what teacher wants us to write'. They are loath to admit that their work may have interest and value precisely because it is entirely their own. Clinicians speak of the disturbed children they meet who can see no goodness in themselves or anything they produce, and who obsessively strive to gain control of their environment by stubborn and minute conformity to prescribed models (8). Schoolchildren can be educated to a state analogous to this obsessive concern with prescriptions. They may fail to develop any internal locus of evaluation. Their work is a response to authority, a task imposed, and tends to obey the classroom laws of reinforcement ('I write what the teacher likes and praises') rather than the self-satisfying criteria of creative work, in which the crucial approval comes from the author ('God looked at his work and saw that it was good').

ESSAY-TOPICS

Individual differences

Twenty years ago C. M. Fleming, writing on research and the school curriculum, noted: 'The first tasks of the teacher of expression are therefore now generally admitted to be to put pupils into situations in which they have something to say and to provide them with a motive for desiring to say it' (9, p. 72).

This may seem a very facile formula to the teacher who faces an unwilling class week after week and tries to put the children into a situation in which they have something to say, and give them some other motive for saying it than the fear of sanctions. One way out is to say: 'This week you can write about anything you like'. Boys are more ready than girls to use this sort of freedom; and both boys and girls prefer to be left free to develop and treat a given topic as they think best. But in every class some children will show anxiety and helplessness when they are given no topic whatsoever to work on, and everything is left to their own initiative. In practice the English teacher has to use some ingenuity to discover a stimulating, suggestive topic, and to launch each pupil on a personal and spontaneous treatment of it.

The question of topics for compositions has attracted much research, largely because it is of such importance for examinations. It has been well established how unreliable the marking of essays is (22). A boy's or girl's performance in writing varies from one occasion to another, depending on mood and motivation, and on the topic set. The same boy writing about two different topics may achieve two very different scores, even when the topics are both of the same type (e.g. both narrative, or both

descriptive) and seem to have similar appeal. Any one marker will most likely show inconsistency in two markings of the same essay, and two different markers scoring the same essay may show very considerable disagreement, no matter what system they follow. Essays, however, for good reasons, continue to be set in examinations, and normally a choice of topics is offered. Just what unreliabilities and injustices this may involve deserves serious consideration.

What is known about the reaction of children to essay titles may be summarized briefly:

(i) In any examination, for children of almost any age, a set of titles will have very unequal appeal for the candidates.
(ii) A boy's choice from an array of topics is related to his essay-writing ability; the less able will choose titles requiring less imagination.
(iii) Most children do not show any consistent preference as regards the type of topic they choose or write well on. Over a series of choices, a child will not consistently choose one category of topic (e.g., descriptive, narrative, imaginative, explanatory), but his choice of category will vary with the specific content of the topic itself.
(iv) Descriptive titles seem to promise the best indication of a gift for personal writing; narrative titles are the weakest indicators (4).

Sex differences

There is a predictable pattern in the preferences of boys and girls for different titles. The sex-differences grow more clear-cut with the years. Girls are more ready to tackle romantic topics, to describe their ideal husband, to explore the emotional side of courtship, either in personal description or in stories. Boys differ from girls in choosing topics involving some measure of violence (2). In the early teens, violence is closer to the thoughts of boys than of girls, and more obtrusive in their writing. Moreover, while girls are more ready to attempt descriptive compositions, boys tend to turn any composition into narrative. During the early teens too, there is the greatest developmental gap between boys and girls of the same age. In both emotional and physical development, a fourteen-year-old girl may be one and a half or two years ahead of a boy of the same age, and this discrepancy will create problems particularly in English class. Coeducation, like streaming, setting, group methods, bilingualism, comprehensive schools, large schools, small schools, or any other educational method or system, is not simply a good thing or simply a bad thing. It is a mixed blessing, with advantages and disadvantages. Educational

decisions about this or any other system must consist, not in blandly assuming that a certain system is in every way the best, but in carefully assessing whether its advantages more than compensate for the price that must undoubtedly be paid for it. For coeducation, part of the price must be paid in the English class. The point has been spelled out by J. Patrick Creber, for many years the highly successful head of the English Department in a Birmingham comprehensive school:

> Our work at the early secondary stage may well be hampered by coeducational organisation. For the education of the emotions—which is what we are now concerned with—the attempt to teach both boys and girls together, on the grounds of chronological parity, will never succeed entirely. When one tries, with a class of thirteen-year-olds to choose material equally interesting to both boys and girls, one often succeeds in interesting neither (7, p. 73).

Age differences

If different topics appeal to different sexes, there are still more definite contrasts between different age-groups in their preferences. Here we are in the area of children's development, an area that has been incessantly explored, but inadequately mapped, partly because development is a function of the culture and schooling of the child, not merely of the genes.

Jean Piaget's studies of development may offer a useful pattern here. Piaget considers development in adolescence under two headings: the transformations of thought and the assumption of adult roles (14). Adolescents become capable of what he calls 'formal operations' in thought, that is, they can use hypothetical reasoning based on a logic of all possible combinations, and they can perform controlled experimentation. Reasoning enters the stage of controlled possibilities. The adolescent can hypothesise a world other than that which he knows; he can master the complex business of seeing one event from two contrasting points of view.

While he is developing these intellectual skills, he is also beginning to think of himself as the equal of adults, and to judge them on the same plane as himself. He is beginning to think of his future work in society; and in planning this, he often has the idea of changing society, of shaping it closer to his heart's desire. He sees the real world as only one in the total set of possible combinations or circumstances. The adolescent's utopianism reflects this development; it springs from the drive to organise a life programme and from a partly egocentric phantasy of reshaping the world, a delight in playing with the possible, the ideal. As he grows older and knocks against the real world, the adolescent is repeatedly made to

realise that there are points of view other than his own. There is a continual refocussing of perspectives in order to be more objective. Just as an infant learns about solid objects by seeing them and feeling them from several sides, thus adding to the two-dimensional evidence of his eyes, so an adolescent learns about society by bumping into other points of view and other interests, by multiplying his perspectives on society and realising that his own point of view is only partial. This is true, of course, only of those who grow up. Some people never learn.

How does this affect the teacher of English? It suggests a reason for the progression in essay-topics which is adopted by many teachers, leading them from topics which sharpen the eyes and ears of young children (corresponding to Piaget's stage of 'concrete reasoning') to topics that demand increasing insight into other people's reactions (involving a multiplication of perspectives), and finally to more discursive topics that tax the adolescents' developing power for complex reasoning.

Boys especially show a steadily-increasing tendency to treat any topic discursively as they grow through the teens (2). This can have lamentable effects on their language. They may develop a taste for opening or closing quotations. A quotation, any quotation, tends to have a lapidary quality which few children can attain by their own invention and which serves to clinch a piece of writing like a key-stone. But a fourteen-year-old's repertoire of quotations is so thin that his use of one is likely to lower the level of his writing and reduce what is authentically personal to the commonplace and platitudinous. 'All good things must come to an end'. 'We learn by our mistakes'. 'Tomorrow is another day'.

There are other developmental patterns besides this tendency towards discursiveness. Children show an increasing capacity to give shape to their experience and to unify an account of something that has happened to them. Their experience acquires more depth, becomes more interior. They gain more access to their own emotions. A twelve-year-old narrates in terms of external action. A sixteen-year-old is capable of savouring an experience in depth.

Adolescents grow towards a sense of their own identity, but are still in the groping stage between the clearly-defined role of childhood and the clearly-defined role of adulthood (8). The last fifteen years have seen the commercial definition of the role of adolescence, with its own clothes, style and sub-culture. However obnoxious some of its manifestations may seem, it does offer a pattern, a mask, to the uncertain boy or girl, an accepted and assured style of life while he or she watches and judges the adult world and learns or rejects its skills. The adolescent is growing more self-conscious and self-critical. This means that some of the incentives which produce good work in younger children, such as hearing their

efforts read out in class, may produce only embarrassment and resentment in older pupils.

As children grow in capacity to unify a theme, the final product becomes more important to them. This is true in both painting and writing (2, 18). A ten-year-old, if interested, will find a great delight in the mere process of painting or writing. As he grows older, he becomes more preoccupied with the final product, which he learns to view as a whole. For this reason he is more upset by interruption of his task, and more anxious to return to an unfinished task, than is the younger child. What psychologists call the *Zeigarnik* effect—the unsatisfied itch left in the mind by a task begun and not ended—becomes more pronounced as the child grows older.

TAKING UP THE PEN

The moment that a child faces the task of writing a composition or poem is of peculiar interest in the study of children's thinking. In almost every other school-task a method is laid out for him. In language study he is confronted by a text to be translated or by work involving dictionaries or grammars. In mathematics and science the problem is usually defined and he has been taught a method for tackling it. In history and geography he must first be the master of a body of facts. But in writing English the method and the material cannot be prescribed or given to him. No matter how the task is defined, whether he is asked to fill three pages on a topic, or to write his reactions to a sensory stimulus, both the material he presents and the order and method of its presentation are matters for his own invention. It is a case of production rather than reproduction or problem-solving. A similar situation arises where science is taught by the heuristic method, but here the problem is generally defined with some precision, and the pupil's invention is confined to the discovery of a law or a principle from material which has been structured to lead to the discovery.

It is not surprising that the beginning of a composition is described by children as one of the major difficulties of writing. It is a finding of projective psychology (1) that the less clearly defined a task, the more anxiety it provokes; and no school-task is less clearly defined than the beginning of a composition.

In one piece of research (2), Dublin children were asked to complete the sentence: 'When I try to begin a composition . . .'. Many of the responses vividly document the anxiety felt by children of all ages at this moment. The most common single response was a confession of helplessness: 'My mind goes blank. I can't think of anything to say. My brain goes dry. I'm at a loss for words'.

Many experience not blankness but muddle: 'I cannot think straight. I get all mixed up, in a mess'. Others, clearly experiencing the whole task as a threat, 'think how terrible it will turn out to be . . . wish it was finished . . . dread the thought'. And they describe every nuance of distressful states: 'I get irritable, bad-tempered, disheartened. I think Oh! I get fed up. I despair. I start cursing. I am always in a bad mood. I moan'. With others, psychosomatic symptoms appear: 'I feel sick, my head goes round and round. I get a headache. I feel like tearing my hair out. I faint'. And they see nature too conspiring against them in a sort of pathetic fallacy: 'My pen breaks, runs dry. I blot my copy'.

A smaller number of children find their way out of this distressing situation by voluntary or involuntary distractions: 'I feel very tired. I go to sleep. I get restless. I find myself thinking of other subjects. My mind wanders to what I could be doing if I had no composition'. One boy was more precise: 'When I try to begin a composition . . . I remember there is a cake in the pantry'.

Some children (about five per cent of the total sample) mention some physical action as their first move towards a solution. 'I go up to my room, sit down, eat something, and *think*. I put myself into a good mood by taking a glass of lemonade. I first write the title, then play the piano. I open the copy. I stare at the ceiling. I chew my pen'. Those who depend on physical conditions for creative work have venerable antecedents. Freud worked best when chain-smoking cheroots, Zola by artificial light, Kipling when using the blackest ink. Kant's capacity for concentration was partly dependent on the sight of a certain tower from his window—so much so that he cut down some trees that threatened to obscure the view. Dr Johnson required the sound of a purring cat, the smell of orange peel and the stimulus of plenty of tea for his writing, and Schiller composed best in the odour of decomposing apples. The boy who needed lemonade was relatively temperate in his demands.

SYNECTICS TECHNIQUE

Can anything be done to ease this painful start to the task of writing? The research into creative thinking has thrown up one approach which may be helpful. W. J. Gordon (10) claims to identify certain specific and reproducible mental processes, which he calls synectic mechanisms, which are tools to initiate the motion of creative process and sustain and renew it. These mechanisms are designed (a) to make the strange familiar, and (b) to make the familiar strange. In other words, when tackling a task which calls for inventiveness and imagination, one should first become thoroughly familiar with all the facets of this strange problem, and when

that is done, turn around and try to see it from some radically new angle, that is, make the familiar strange. The systematic attempt to see the problem in a fresh light is calculated to put the problem-solver on the track of untried and unconventional solutions.

It is in dealing with the latter process, that of making the familiar strange, that Gordon offers some suggestions which are clearly relevant to the task of personal writing:

> The attempt to make the familiar strange involves several different methods of achieving an intentionally naive or apparently 'out of focus' look at some aspect of the known world. And this look can transpose both our usual ways of perceiving and our usual expectations about how we or the world will behave. The experience of sustaining this condition can provoke anxiety and insecurity. But maintaining the familiar as strange is fundamental to disciplined creativity. All problems present themselves to the mind as threats of failure. For someone striving to win in terms of a successful solution, this threat evokes a mass response in which the most immediate superficial solution is clutched frantically as a balm to anxiety. This is consistent with the natural impulse to master the strange by making it familiar. Yet if we are to perceive all the implications and possibilities of the new, we must risk at least temporary ambiguity and disorder. Human beings are heirs to a legacy of frozen words and ways of perceiving which wrap their work in comfortable familiarity. This protective legacy must be disowned. A new viewpoint depends on the capacity to risk and to understand the mechanisms by which the mind can make tolerable the temporary ambiguity implicit in risking (10, p. 35).

Synectics technique, devised as a brain-storming assault on engineering problems, has its application in the setting of compositions. Start with material which is familiar to the children, either from personal experience or from study; and help them to see this familiar thing with fresh eyes, to make it strange, for instance, to see a match in Croke Park through the eyes of an uninitiated visiting Martian. This latter process demands a pause before writing, a pause which provokes anxiety. One is waiting for inspiration and unsure whether it will come. There is a strong temptation to abandon the wait and launch into a banal approach, to narrow the field of search by elaborating the obvious. Those who are willing to defer this narrowing action, to live with their uncertainty and flirt for a while with apparent irrelevancies, will be more imaginative and productive in their solutions.

This exploration has gone far enough when it has reached the stage of suggesting techniques for creative work. To spark off the originality of children is the most intuitive and unprescribable art of the teacher, an art that has its springs, not in new categories like divergent and convergent thinking, nor in the facts and findings of others, but in his experience with children, reflection on that experience, and constant recourse to his own creative imagination.

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