

METHODS AND STRATEGIES USED TO ENHANCE CORRECT WRITING

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Abstract: *Writing is one of the fundamental acquisitions of any 1st grader. It represents the shift from the status of "illiterate" to "literate"; learning to write is the foundation of a child's thinking. It enhances the acquisition of knowledge, communication skills, writing being also an important aspect as writing is in close connection to reading. This study is an attempt to clarify certain issues related to the implementation of efficient methods used to develop correct writing skills, to the explanation of some methodological uncertainties starting with the communicative-functional model used in learning Romanian. The experiment focused on the manner the 1st graders enhance writing.*

Key words: *writing, methods, strategies, competence*

1. Stages in learning correct writing

1.1. The pre-literate stage. The pre-literate stage prepares pupils for writing. The contents and the capacities of this stage are: writing graphic elements practiced in preschool education aligned with the requirements of primary education; writing new graphic elements.

Before studying the training of the above-mentioned capabilities, we identified the left-handed pupils or those who only tend to write with the left hand. These children are allowed to write with their left hand, so that they develop freely and naturally, respecting their anatomic-morphological and psychic constitution⁴³. Preparing pupils for writing involves the formation of the following correct skills: correct body posture in the desk and during writing; keeping the pencil and pen correctly in the hand; keeping the correct notebook and body position; executing the necessary movements for writing graphic elements and letters. The correct position in the desk used for writing activities requires: to stand straight, without leaning the chest on the desk; keeping a distance of 3-4 cm between the chest and the desk; high seat; straight back position with shoulders at the same height; the forearms on the desk, the right hand for writing, the left hand for support; the distance between the eyes and the book or notebook is about 30 cm; the light source comes from the left.

Explanation and demonstration were important in order for pupils to have the correct position in the desk. We warned pupils about the consequences of a wrong position in the desk – spine deformation. Correct position of the fingers and the pen: the pen should be held between the fingers: thumb, middle finger and pointer, light without tightening it. We explained tactfully, demonstrated them and corrected the pupils who do not hold the pen correctly. In order to keep the pen correctly, I prepared a variety of exercises to relax the small muscles of my hand: tightening and loosening fingers, moving fingers (plouă, ninge, stoarcem rufe, cântăm la pian”, and singing the song „Ne jucăm, noi ne jucăm”). Notebook and body posture have to be constantly corrected.

⁴³ Anton Ilica, *Metodica limbii române*, Editura Universității „Aurel Vlaicu”, Arad, 2005, p. 58.

In the pre-literate stage, pupils face different situations that are meant to prepare them for writing letters: drawing simple forms: tree, flowers, apple, mug, etc; drawing, writing graphic elements: ovals, semi ovals, sticks, hooks, etc..

The stages of a lesson in the pre-literate stage are:

- Intuition of graphic elements;
- Modelling the graphic element (wire, plasticine);
- Teacher`s model writing on the board;
- Writing in the air, on the board, in the palm (with the pen closed);
- Writing the graphic element on the board;
- Writing in the notebooks (three times);
- Checking writing;
- Going on with the writing;
- Drawing after the written graphic element;
- Writing graphic elements after dictation.

In practicing the writing of graphic elements, we take into account the age of young pupils who have just started kindergarten and get tired quickly, get bored, feel the need for movement, and therefore we should combine the writing of preparatory graphic elements with movement and play. In other words, pupils write by playing and play by writing. In this respect, they are encouraged to draw, for example, a "robot" using the graphic elements studied, to mold plasticine flowers (based on the graphic elements studied), to take part in the "most hard-working team" contest (cutting and gluing of graphic elements to complete a drawing). Knowing the particularities of the pre-literate period is essential because the way the objectives have been achieved influences the learning of writing as well as the reading during the literate period.

1.2. The literate period. The literate period extends until the end of the 1st grade. It is a fundamental stage in learning writing because now is the time when pupils learn how to write letters, words and sentences. Learning writing and reading at this stage is conducted through special activities based on the textbook, using the following didactic moments:

- teaching sounds and corresponding letters, reading words;
- reading sentences and whole texts;
- writing letters, words, sentences;
- linking the entire reading and writing activity to speech development activities⁴⁴

The contents and the aimed capacities in the literate period are the following:

- letter intuition and writing;
- integrating letters into word;
- writing the alphabet;
- writing words and sentences.

Learning writing is a more complicated process than reading because „writing requires besides knowledge of letters, phonetics and complex combinations of phonetic and graphic elements also their graphic, correctly and easily handwritten reproduction”⁴⁵

Based on these needs sprung from learning writing:

- the pupil is careful when associating the sound with the corresponding letter and marks correctly the elements and the letters;

⁴⁴ Anton Ilica (coord), *Didactica învățării limbii române și a lecturii în învățământul primar*, Editura Universității “Aurel Vlaicu”, Arad, 2007, p.94.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p.96.

- the pupil pauses when writing letters, the connections between them, raises the pen and makes discontinuous movements;
- the pupil writes unevenly, with tilting and different font sizes;
- the pupil writes slowly, with many useless movements.

Correct notebook position, appropriate use of the pen, proper coordination of hand movement, the association of sounds with the letter or the group of letters in writing letters or groups of letters are very important in the enhancement of correct writing.

Writing activities should be correlated with reading activities to engage pupils in the activity, to prevent boredom and monotony in the learning process.

The stages of a reading and writing integrated lesson were:

Lesson I

- selecting sentences;
- sentence analysis (words, syllables, sounds);
- pronunciations of the new sound;
- examples of words with the new sound;
- presenting the capital letter on various supports;
- intuition of the illustration;
- reading groups of words;
- intuition of the handwritten letter;
- writing the handwritten letter in the notebook:
 - model writing the letter on the board and explaining every hand movement,
 - pupils write the letter on the board,
 - writing the letter in the air, on the desk, in the palm (with the pen closed),
 - writing preparatory exercises (hand muscles warm up),
 - writing the letter 3-4 times,
 - checking the written letters,
 - going on with writing letters.

Writing words

Lesson II

-
- Reading the text;
- Copying exercises,
- transcription of sentences;
- Speech development
- exercises;
- dictation.

The teacher's role is extremely important in teaching writing. Besides guiding the pupils in learning how to write letters, words and sentences, teachers also have to correct their writing mistakes as they occur to prevent bad writing habits.

1.3. The post-literate stage. The post-literate stage takes place throughout the 2nd grade. During this stage, pupils practice the writing skills acquired in the literate stage at a higher level of complexity. In the post-literate stage, pupils work at text level. Such activities involve decoding the text, understanding its content, text reception, practicing speech acts. As the curriculum for the post-literate stage does not allocate special classes for writing, pupils can be trained to develop their writing skills during reading classes (according to interdisciplinary vision): „It would be good if during reading and writing lessons in the post-

literate period, teachers alternated writing with reading to create a balance between one activity and the other”⁴⁶.

We want to highlight the contents and capacities specific to this stage:

- copying handwritten small and capital letters;
- copying words and sentences;
- transcription of letters and words;
- transcription of poems and parts of texts;
- dictation;
- auto-dictation.

In the post-literate stage, writing involves some specific elements: keeping the correct position at the writing table; keeping the pen and notebook correctly; transcribing texts, writing the letters, words, sentences correctly; writing by dictation: words, sentences, short texts; the auto-dictation of learnt poems; the creation of words and sentences by pupils, the auditory control of words by whispering the terms the pupils write. Through these exercises, pupils begin to automate their writing. The right writing skills are acquired through copying, transcribing, dictation exercises. Pupils can be stimulated during the post-literate stage to solve writing exercises such as copying an idea, writing the answer to a question, deciphering crosswords, transforming direct speech into indirect speech. Also, in the writing process, it is intended to observe the correct spelling and punctuation rules. Writing during the post-literate stage is done on Type II notebooks and various texts are used in lexical, orthographic and punctuation, using continuous writing by copying, transcription, dictation.

1.4. Improving the process of writing is closely related to the following types of writing: copying, transcribing, dictating, self-reading, homework writing. Copying, transcription and dictation are exercises that underlie the correct writing skills.

Copying is the imitation of writing a hand model. Before copying, pupils are reminded of the correct writing position and attention is drawn to compliance with graphic rules. The initial form of copying is a mechanical one, the pupils copy mechanically, "drawing the letters"; trying to write as beautiful as possible, they literally copy the text. From mechanical form, copying evolves to self-dictation. Children read the words and then dictate them. In copying conditions, due to the reduced number of handwritten texts in the textbook, teachers use handwritten boards or can write the forms on the blackboard. Copying ends with self-checking by re-reading each word and making the necessary corrections.

Transcription is the handwriting of a written text in print letters. Transcription is a more complex process than copying. Transcribing does not mean to imitate, but involves reading the word, memorizing it, and converting it into handwriting. Transcription involves: reading and understanding the word, phonetic analysis, composing words and sentences from the letters of the alphabet, checking the order of words and syllables. The quality of transcription is to be understood in terms of: graphic and aesthetic aspect, spelling, rhythm and timing, writing speed. Verification of transcription is done by reading it aloud and comparing the handwriting with printed text. Transcription exercises contribute to the formation of a reading field of at least one word, the formation of correct writing, the accentuation of the consciousness of reading and writing.

⁴⁶ Ioan Șerdean, *Didactica limbii și literaturii române în școala primară*, Editura Aramis, București, 2002, p.129.

Writing homework is an exercise meant to practice writing at home, individually without being under the teacher's incidence. The 1st graders should not be burdened with homework precisely because they need teacher guidance as much as possible and must strive for individual work without being "pushed from behind".

A more complex exercise than transcription and copying, **dictation** involves writing without a model (handwritten or printed) Thus, pupils will have to link the auditory image of sounds, words, sentences and texts to the graphic image. Dictation involves: listening, memorizing, understanding, writing and repetition. Dictation exercises can be of two types⁴⁷: dictation with prior explanations to prevent mistakes; dictation without prior explanation (control). The following will be dictated: letters, syllables, words and sentences. Dictation implies a clear, correct pronunciation by the teacher in a suitable rhythm with proper intonation and the exclusion of jamming elements (steps, noise, music, etc.).

The stages of dictation:

- reading of what is going to be dictated;
- repletion with the purpose of memorizing;
- re-reading/dictation according to logical units;
- writing by the pupils;
- self-assessment by checking correct spelling
- teacher's assessment;
- teacher's remarks (grading).

Self-dictation demands the pupil's full attention, who does not see or hear the text as when performing copying, transcription or dictation, but must dictate him/herself out of memory. Due to its complexity, self-dictation is rarely used in the 1st grade and more in the following years, especially as a result of memorizing poems or a piece of prose.

2. Research methodology

2.1. The objectives of experimental research

We want to present a synthesis of writing in the 1st grade because writing is an essential activity for 1st grade pupils and for any individual. There is a interdependent relationship between writing and reading as learning a letter is anticipated by learning the corresponding sound, and writing the letters involves reinforcement of that sound, helping the student to distinguish it better during reading. In learning writing, the phonetic method, the analytical-synthetic method has positive effects just like the global method, by selecting and using the educational means that play a role in the ascending evolution of learning writing and the use of improvement measures for a quick and efficient acquisition of writing with minimal effort.

Conducting the experiment

We have started from the following hypothesis in our experiment:

Work hypothesis: If writing is one of the most important acquisitions of a first grade children, then the teacher's constant concern should be directed towards identifying the most appropriate strategies for learning writing. Pupils may experience various learning difficulties. Then the teacher identifies and adopts the appropriate measures to overcome them; The more independent learning activities, the methods and the techniques are, the more and more effective writing becomes.

The research objectives are: O1- to adopt the correct writing posture; O2- to hold the pen correctly in their hands; O3- to write letters, syllables, words and sentences correctly; O4- to copy correctly words and sentences; O5- to transcribe correctly words and sentences;

⁴⁷ Ibidem, p.184.

O6- to write correctly letters, words and sentences after dictation; O8- to write correct sentences with the given words; O9- to put the words in the correct order to form sentences.

The experiment was applied throughout the 1st and 2nd semester (September to March) and consisted of the following stages:

- **stage I: initial evaluation** (information on the skills and abilities that children have when coming to te kindergarten, their family background) – 2 weeks;
- **stage II: conducting the experiment** (using different methods and techniques to teach correct and efficient writing) - 5 months;
- **stage III: final evaluation** (pupils' final results);
- **stage IV: processing data** (result analysis, comparison between the results of experimental and control class) - 2 weeks.

The place where the experiment took place was Primary School.

The sample consisted of 40 1st graders with ages between 6-7, 20 in the experimental group and 20 in the control group.

The content sample is represented by the requirements of learning writing in the 1st grade, the reference point being the school curriculum for the Romanian language.

Initial evaluation (20.09-1.10). In order to acquire a correct and effective writing, we started from assessing the capacities and skills with which children come into from the kindergarten. Initial assessment has a major role in learning writing, because in this way we are aware of the pupil's level of training.

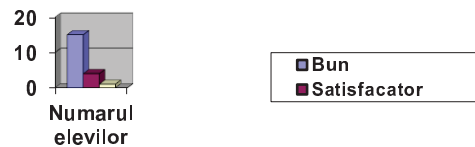
After the initial evaluation that was made using conversation, systematic observation and writing, we found out the following:

The results above are highlighted in the following charts:

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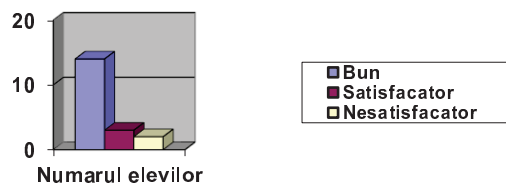
Initial evaluation. Experimental group

| No | Results | No of pupils |
|----|----------------|--------------|
| 1. | Good | 15 |
| 2. | Satisfactory | 4 |
| 3. | Unsatisfactory | 1 |



Initial evaluation. Control group

| No | Results | No of pupils |
|----|----------------|--------------|
| 1. | Good | 14 |
| 2. | Satisfactory | 3 |
| 3. | Unsatisfactory | 3 |



The results of the initial evaluation revealed by the above table highlight the importance of the kindergarten. From the experimental class, 5 pupils did not attend the kindergarten at all, which was also revealed by the results of the initial evaluation, and in the control class 7 pupils had fluctuating frequency.

Applying the experiment

After the initial evaluation, we have conducted the experiment throughout the pre-literate stage (acquiring graphic elements that prepare writing) and a part from the literate stage (learning to write letters, binding letters into words and then sentences).

The experiment consists of two stages:

-1st stage (typical for the pre-literate stage) aimed the acquisition of writing preparatory graphic elements;
 -2nd stage (typical for a part of the literate stage) aimed the learning of correct writing of letters, words, sentences.

Stage I. The starting point of this stage are the results of the initial evaluation. As a consequence of not having the correct position when writing (eyes too close to the notebook), the incorrect holding of the pen (grasping it with the whole hand), the inability to orientate in the notebook space with most pupils (they did not attend kindergarten regularly or not at all), the first step of the experiment refers to the learning of the above-mentioned aspects. In this respect, we used methods such as: explanation, demonstration, exercise-game, conversation, observation, and as materials: pen, colored pencils, cartoons, type I notebooks, drawing sheets, worksheets, whiteboard, chalk, etc. These elements continue to be practiced during the second period of the experiment, which, in addition to the above mentioned elements, was aimed at acquiring the correct writing of the graphic elements that prepare pupil to write letters (the oblique line on one and two spaces, the baton, the loop, the hook, the oval, the node), sticking to the lines of the notebook.

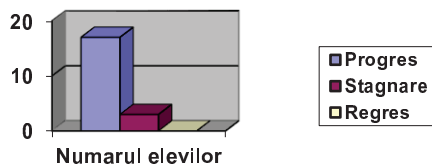
We used methods such as: explanation, demonstration, exercise, conversation, observation, modeling, and materials like: type I notebooks, pencils colored pen, pen, cartoons, drawing sheets, plasticine, watercolors, coated paper, scissors, glue, wire to teach pupils correct and clean writing of preparatory elements. Students have been assigned not only to write preparatory graphics, but also to model, cut, paste, draw.

Stage I ended with an evaluation which aimed the correct body position, correctness in holding the pen, the ability to write within the copybook limits, correct repetition of graphic elements, correct writing of graphic elements after dictation. The results can be highlighted as follows:

Experimental class

The final evaluation results from the 1st stage are highlighted by the following charts:
Final evaluation results – stage II

| No | Results | No of pupils |
|----|------------|--------------|
| 1. | Progress | 17 |
| 2. | Stagnation | 3 |
| 3. | Regression | 0 |



Control class

| No | Results | No of pupils |
|----|------------|--------------|
| 1. | Progress | 14 |
| 2. | Stagnation | 3 |
| 3. | Regression | 2 |



The evaluation system referred to the following descriptors:

- VG** – correct writing of graphic elements in the copybook by repetition and dictation;
- G** – correct writing of graphic elements within the limits of the copybook with errors at writing after dictation;
- S** – some errors in terms of writing within the copybook limits and errors at repetition and writing graphic elements after dictation.

2nd stage involves a part of the literate stage and aimed to learn writing letters, words, sentences. We have identified some substages in learning how to write letters words and sentence. We grouped letters into 4-5 groups of letters and ended this stage with an evaluation.

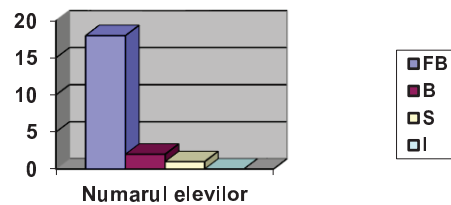
- Substages:
- I- letters from **a** to **U**;
 - II- letters from **i** to **O**;
 - III-letters from **c** to **L**;
 - IV-letters from the group **ce** to letter **S**;
 - V- letters from **p** to group **Ci**;
 - VI – letters from **d** to **â**;
 - VII-letters from **b** to group **Ge**.

The evaluation tests at the end of each sub-stage followed the correct reproduction capacity of a letter according to the given model, with correct alignment in the spaces and the line of the notebook; copying, transcribing words and sentences, writing the words and sentences after the dictation. Representative in this sense are the evaluation tests at the end of the learning units **Cu alai de frunze moarte** and **Ca un roi de fluturi albi**.

Unit: **Cu alai de frunze moarte**

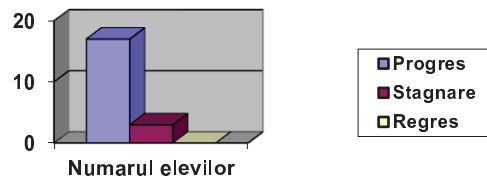
Experimental class

| No | Final score | No of pupils |
|----|-------------|--------------|
| 1. | VG | 18 |
| 2. | G | 2 |
| 3. | S | 1 |
| 4. | I | 0 |



Control class

| No | Results | No of pupils |
|----|------------|--------------|
| 1. | Progress | 17 |
| 2. | Stagnation | 3 |
| 3. | Regression | 0 |

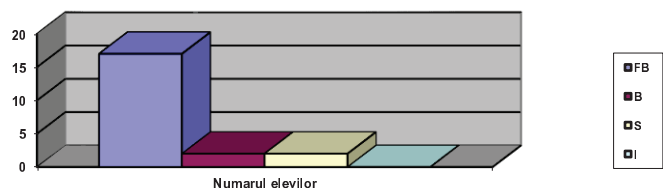


Unit: *Ca un roi de fluturi albi*

Statistics based on final scores

Experimental class

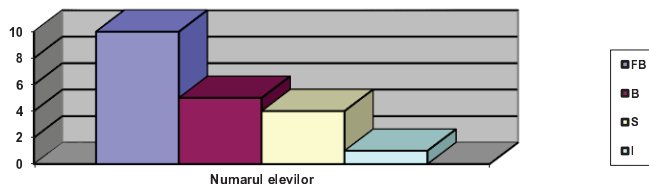
| No | Final score | No of pupils |
|----|-------------|--------------|
| 1. | FB | 16 |
| 2. | B | 2 |
| 3. | S | 2 |
| 4. | I | 0 |



Control class

| No | Final score | No of pupils |
|----|-------------|--------------|
|----|-------------|--------------|

| | | pupils |
|----|----|--------|
| 1. | VG | 10 |
| 2. | G | 5 |
| 3. | S | 4 |
| 4. | I | 1 |

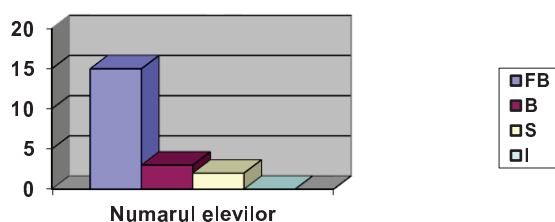


Unit: *Școlărei și școlărițe*

Experimental class

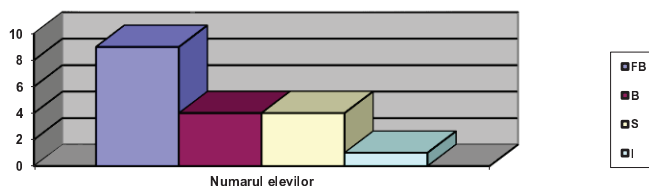
Statistics after final evaluation

| No | Final score | No of pupils |
|----|-------------|--------------|
| 1. | VG | 15 |
| 2. | G | 3 |
| 3. | S | 2 |
| 4. | I | 0 |



Control class

| No | Final score | No of pupils |
|----|-------------|--------------|
| 1. | FB | 9 |
| 2. | B | 4 |
| 3. | S | 4 |
| 4. | I | 1 |



Thus, at the unit, **Au ruginit frunzele** we used as teaching methods: phonetic method, analytic-synthetic, explanation, demonstration, conversation, exercise-game, problematization, modeling with emphasis on the phonetic method, analytic-synthetic; and as materials: special notebook, type I notebook, large alphabet, letters, alphabet, chips, pictures, pen, cards, worksheets; the main place being occupied by the alphabet.

At the learning unit, **Ca un roi de fluturi albi** the methods used were: phonetic method, analytic-syntactic method, global method, explanation, demonstration, exercise, conversation, modeling, problem-solving; the focus being on the global method. The materials were the same with emphasis on the large alphabet.

At the unit **Vine, vine primăvara**, the emphasis we placed on the phonetic, analytical and synthetic method as well as on the global one, and as materials we used a variety of charts (the association of word and image or sentence and image, ordering words in a sentence, associating handwriting with the typed form and vice versa, filling the blanks, writing sentences based on images or using given words) adapted to the students' abilities. Thus, the better students received evaluation sheets according to their level, and the weaker ones received worksheets adapted to their maximum level.

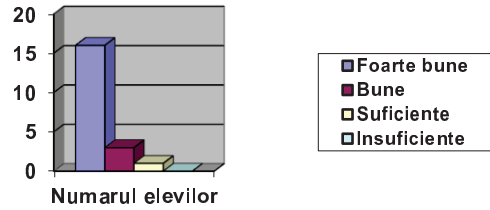
III.4. Analysis and interpretation of experiment data

We observe the following after carefully analysing the pupils' scores:

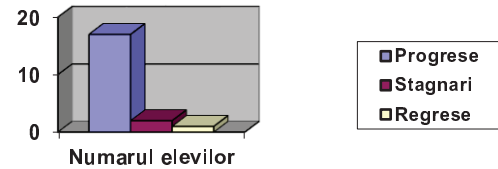
Experimental class

| No | Results | No of pupils |
|----|-----------|--------------|
| | Very good | 16 |

| | | |
|----|--------------|---|
| 1. | | |
| 2. | Good | 3 |
| 3. | Sufficient | 1 |
| 4. | Insufficient | 0 |



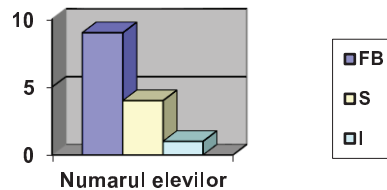
| No | Evolution | No of pupils |
|----|------------|--------------|
| 1. | Progress | 17 |
| 2. | Stagnation | 3 |
| 3. | Regression | 0 |



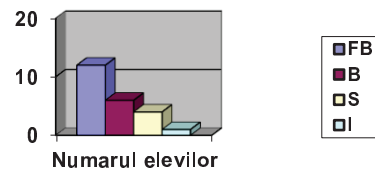
- We observe that there are 16 pupils with very good results; 3 pupils with good results; 1 pupil with weak (sufficient) results; 17 pupils with progress, 0 pupils with regression and 3 pupils with stagnation.
- The results of the control class are as follows:

Final statistics– control class

| No | Scores | No of pupils |
|----|--------|--------------|
| 1. | VG | 8 |
| 2. | G | 4 |
| 3. | S | 5 |
| 4. | I | 3 |



| No | Evolution | No of pupils |
|----|------------|--------------|
| 1. | Progress | 12 |
| 2. | Stagnation | 5 |
| 3. | Regression | 3 |



We notice that the results are weaker than the ones scored by the experimental class. The reasons for this difference are: the passive family background of most pupils, poor school attendance, impossibility to obtain all required materials, individual alphabetizer, pen, notebooks (major financial shortcomings).

III.5. Conclusions

The experiment, its results and the possibility of comparing them induces us the idea that learning to write implies a continuous search of methods and their adaptation to our educational needs. In learning writing, the concerns should aim the children's progress. Therefore, we had to assess constantly the children's progress and diagnose the level reached by pupils in order to make effective corrections and improvements. Students can be enrolled at the age of six without any risk of "sacrificing" their childhood, but writing is an extremely complex skill that is easy to learn if well motivated. Under the conditions of this competition between handwriting and computerized writing, a certain retention of calligraphic writing is not excluded. The quality of being aesthetic and correct provides writing with a new quality,

literacy. Writing is the prerequisite for making progress on the path of knowledge (the accumulation of new information), again coming in direct relationship with reading. Due to the obvious importance of writing, a careful analysis of the writing process is required.

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