

LET THEM WRITE

A monograph entitled **Balance the Basics: Let Them Write**, by Donald R. Graves of the University of New Hampshire, emphasizes that in the United States writing suffers because reading dominates elementary education as it does nowhere else in the world. Graves' supporting statistics are impressive: 1) for every dollar spent on teaching writing, \$100 or more are spent on teaching reading; 2) for every dollar spent on research in teaching writing, \$1,000 or more are spent on research in teaching reading; 3) NIE analysis of research in basic skills mentions "reading and mathematical skills," but does not mention writing skill as a requirement for "adequate functioning in society"; 4) among research articles in education in 1969, 5% were categorized under "reading," whereas those on writing were included in the category "other," which totaled less than 1% of all research undertaken; 5) teacher certification requirements promote this imbalance: most states require one or more courses in reading and additional courses in children's literature for elementary certification, whereas no states require writing courses; 6) sales of lined paper (on which children compose) have been steadily decreasing; sales of unlined ditto paper (on which children fill in blanks) have been climbing.

At the same time, Graves emphasizes the primary contribution of writing experience both to language learning and to learning in all subject areas. He quotes Donald Durrell, reading Professor Emeritus of Boston University, as saying, "Writing is active; it involves the child, and doing is important. Teachers make learning too passive. We have known for years the child's first urge is to write and not read and we haven't taken advantage of this fact. We have underestimated the **power** of the output languages like speaking and writing." Graves summarizes, "When students cannot write, they lose both a tool for expression and an important means of developing thinking and reading power as well."

The report is one of the "Papers on Research About Learning" series and is subtitled "A Report to the Ford Foundation." Dated February 1978, it is available from the Ford Foundation, 320 East 43 Street, New York 10017. Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 78-51898 (ISBN 0-916584-09-7).

