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**A DESCRIPTION OF TEACHING SPELLING  
IN AN EXPERIENCE UNIT**

by

**HARRIET K. O'CONNER**

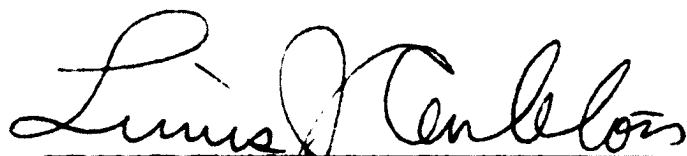
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requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education**


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**Approved by:**

  
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Dean, Graduate School

  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
The problem .....	1
Importance of the problem .....	1
Procedures.....	2
Delimitation of the problem .....	3
The community where the study was carried on .	3
Definitions .....	4
Experience unit .....	5
Class .....	5
Strip .....	5
II. RELATED READINGS .....	6
III. THE PROGRAM .....	13
IV. THE SPELLING PROGRAM.....	21
V. EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM .....	34
VI. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	40
Summary.....	40
Conclusions.....	41
Recommendations.....	42
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	43

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
I. Improvement Made in Spelling by Fifth Grade	
Pupils in Arlee, 1953-54 .....	35
II. Improvement Made in Spelling by Sixth Grade	
Pupils in Arlee, 1953-54 .....	36

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The problem. This paper describes a program set up for teaching spelling in conjunction with an experience unit and also attempts to evaluate this program. The effectiveness of the program was judged from the standpoints of (1) the degree of skill developed by the children; (2) the kinds of attitudes built up; and (3) the value of the relationship existing between spelling, penmanship, oral reading and a written vocabulary.

Importance of the problem. This problem was chosen for several reasons. For some time poor spelling, as evinced in the written work of both grade and high school students, has caused serious concern to both teachers and administrators over this country. Public criticism leveled against the spelling program of the school has increased this concern.

In the final analysis, the effects on the child are of course the prime consideration. Spelling is certainly a social asset, and it undoubtedly has a significant vocational value. In regard to this one author says:

It is your job to watch out for misspelled words and to spell words correctly, and most men like to leave these details to their secretary.

Look up words about whose spelling you are in doubt .  
. . . and master their spelling if it kills you.<sup>1</sup>

Another writer states his views more emphatically:

Correct spelling is even more important than correct punctuation since any but the most flagrant errors in punctuation may pass unnoticed, but business men are always unanimous in agreeing that a letter is not mailable if it contains a single misspelled word.<sup>2</sup>

Spelling also serves to some extent as a personality index.

These future values give added weight to those that are present when children are attending grade school. All written work is affected by good or poor spelling and school grades are usually improved if words are correctly spelled. It is certainly an incentive for better creative expression. The greatest value, however, will probably come out of the changed attitudes and habits of study in the child who develops this skill.

Procedures. This paper will describe the teaching of spelling by using the words that arose in the course of the children's daily work. No routine study of text lists was done except as reference or testing material and except for the specific "Demons" list. The teaching was definitely

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<sup>1</sup>Gladys Torson, The Art of Being a Successful Business Girl (New York: New Home Library, 1943), pp.48-49.

<sup>2</sup>Howard Douth, Secretarial Science (Chicago: Richard Irwin, Inc., 1942), p. 336.

individual, i.e., the child was started "where he was." The method of presentation of words for study included all pupils, regardless of level of achievement.

Delimitation of the problem. This problem will be concerned only with a spelling program as carried on in the fifth and sixth grades of the Arlee school.

The community where the study was carried on. Arlee, located on an Indian reservation in Lake County, is a community of perhaps two hundred and fifty people. Trains run through but do not stop in Arlee, hence transportation is by bus or private car. Two general stores, a cafe, two bars, a liquor store, a bus depot, a barber shop, two garages, and a post office make up the town. There is no movie theater but few children miss any change of program at St. Ignatius, ten miles away.

Two blocks off the main highway is the two-story school building that houses both grades and high school. Adjacent to the main building are the shop and hot lunch rooms. Most of the school population of about two hundred and sixty children are brought in from out-lying ranches by three busses that arrive at 8:30 A.M. and leave at 3:30 P.M. Enrollment in the fifth and sixth grade room for 1953-54 was thirty-seven, about twenty per cent of whom were of one-fourth, or over, Indian blood. All except one child ate



their lunches at the school; only three children lived close enough to walk to school.

The school building is well kept up. It has a satisfactory central heating system, drinking fountains, and clean, modern laboratories. The large gym serves also as the auditorium and music room. The playground is sufficiently large for the different age groups, and it is well equipped.

There are six elementary teachers whose rooms are on the ground floor, four high school teachers, and a superintendent who also teaches. The fifth and sixth graders occupy a large, well-lighted room whose windows look out over a large, neatly-kept lawn enclosed by hedge, trees and a fence. The room is well furnished with movable-type desks.

A P.T.A. has failed to attract parents, but a Parent-Teacher Conference plan tried for the first time in May, 1954, was very successful.

It is in this environment that the spelling program described in this paper was set up, carried on, and appraised.

Definitions. Since this paper will deal with a somewhat technical subject, the following definitions will be helpful to keep communication lines clear:

1. Experience unit. A unit of work that originates in some special interest of the group. It is planned,

developed, and evaluated by them in accordance with the purposes set up. It is also evaluated by the teacher to assure that it is serving the needs of the pupils and is not neglecting the traditional skills required for the grade.

2. Class- refers to the entire group.

3. Strip- refers to a six inch strip of paper on which children write any word with which they have spelling difficulties.

## CHAPTER II

### RELATED READINGS

The attempt to find up-to-date research material on the subject of spelling was disappointing. Most of the periodical articles dealt with one person's ideas of method or explained some device that had been found satisfactory. However, this is not because the subject is considered unimportant. Ernest Horn, in one of his 1954 bulletins, says:

Spelling ability is important even though spelling is one of the minor subjects of the curriculum. Spelling errors detract from the effectiveness of any written work. They are likely to bring penalties in compositions and tests written at school, especially in Grades IV-XII, as well as in college. They may be embarrassing even in person letters, and in business letters, particularly letters applying for work, they may be crucial. The advantages of good spelling ability and the disadvantages of poor spelling ability amply justify careful systematic planning for helping pupils learn to spell correctly.<sup>1</sup>

The attitude of the teacher toward spelling has a great influence on the way the pupils react. If the children can somehow make their own decisions, set up their own goals, and develop a conscious need for spelling correctly, the battle is practically won. There are other inferences too, and most agree, that "when spelling lessons are highly

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<sup>1</sup>Ernest Horn, Teaching Spelling, What Research Says to the Teacher, Bulletin 3, Department of Classroom Teachers, American Educational Research Association, (Washington, D.C. National Education Association, 1954), p. 3.

motivated and efficient, pupils develop an interest and conscientiousness in spelling in other curriculum areas."<sup>2</sup>

One research worker<sup>3</sup> experimented with two groups of first graders one of which had had early and direct instruction in reading, phonetic analysis and handwriting while the other's instruction had started later in the year. The groups were tested in spelling, reading, and visual and auditory perception, and the group with the early and direct training showed a significant gain over the others. He concluded, "There exists a constellation of skills which can be taught and which seem basic to success in the language arts at least in the primary grades."

Phonics is another area much discussed. Authorities today seem more in agreement in regard to its practicability. Horn says:

There is some evidence that instruction in phonics is more beneficial to spelling than to reading even though given in connection with the reading program . . . Even though the evidence is meager on some important matters, it seems to justify considerable emphasis upon phonics . . . Instruction in phonics should be regarded, however, as an aid to spelling rather than as a substitute for the systematic study of the words in the spelling list.<sup>4</sup>

An issue of the Elementary English Review carried an article comparing the teaching of spelling in a formal and in an experimental class. The achievement of the two groups

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>3</sup>David H. Russell, "A Diagnostic Study of Spelling Readiness," Journal of Educational Research, 37:276-83, December, 1943.

<sup>4</sup>Horn, op. cit., p. 24.

was about the same, except that the better readers showed four times as great a gain as the poorer ones. The experimental method was productive of additional outcomes through development of positive attitudes toward all the language areas and in the creation of a felt need for learning to spell. The author declared that the attitude of the teacher, too, was much better while using the experimental method.<sup>5</sup>

Incidental spelling was not approved except for that which might take place outside the regular spelling period. Most of the writers who mentioned the class period recommended about seventy-five minutes a week of intensive study.

Most of the authorities agreed that spelling should be correlated with other subjects in the curriculum. Horn makes the statement that

"correlations have been reported between spelling and reading nearly as high as those reported between intelligence and reading. . . . However, some students in the middle ranges of ability in reading are excellent at spelling while others spell very poorly."<sup>6</sup>

He thinks it essential that the work of the spelling period be effectively coordinated with what is done in other curricular areas. He has found that reading and written composition contribute the most, but that speech and handwriting are also influential. However, reading alone does

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<sup>5</sup>Carl Delacto, "Comparison of Two Methods of Teaching Spelling," Elementary English Review, 29:26-30, January, 1952.

<sup>6</sup>Horn, op. cit., pp. 10-11.

not teach spelling as the Demons are frequently and repeatedly read.

The sensory experiences the child gets with words in connection with units of English work are beneficial, because the more meanings a word has for him, the easier he spells it.

Kottmeyer, who is doing considerable research work in spelling at the present time, writes:

All skillful spellers have at least one skill in common - they all look at words not only discriminatingly, but also carefully. They note, often subconsciously, deviations in the visual form from the auditory form. Thus when they look at words, they look for similarities and for differences between the actual form and the expected form. . . . Unless associations between the printed symbol and the language sounds are made by a pupil, each word he learns to spell or to read becomes a specific learning problem.<sup>7</sup>

Walter Mason who is with the Research Division of the American Book Company says of spelling and meaning:

We learn to spell best those words we know most about. In a carefully planned spelling program even more attention will be directed to the meanings of words than to their form. For every activity on form there should be one on meaning."<sup>8</sup>

Hanna and Moore describing the change from spoken word to written symbol remind the reader that the written vocabulary is smaller than either the reading or speaking

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<sup>7</sup>William Kottmeyer and May Lambader, Spelling Magic, (St. Louis: Webster Publishing Company, 1951), In foreword of workbook.

<sup>8</sup>Walter Mason, The ABC Language Arts Bulletin, American Book Company Educational Research Service. Chicago: American Book Company, 1954. 4pp.

vocabulary, a difference that is characteristic of an essential developmental process. The child enters school with habits of speech well developed and we should make sure, at first, that he pronounces each word correctly and that he hears correctly sounds he speaks.

"Our early instructional programs should be so designed as to teach the child to hear and to analyze his speech in such a way as to facilitate the spelling of his speech."<sup>9</sup>

Horn explains the importance of handwriting as follows:

"Pupils who write legibly and with reasonable speed have an advantage in taking tests in spelling because they can write the words in the time allowed, are not penalized because of illegible letters, and can give their entire attention to spelling without being distracted by handwriting difficulties."<sup>10</sup>

He goes on to say that it is a rather acceptable practice to be lenient with emphasis of spelling in written work in the primary grades. He points out that it should be increasingly emphasized in the intermediate grades and beyond. He also believes the habit of proof-reading should be begun quite early in the grades. Most teachers feel that the way a child spells in his written work constitutes the proof of his learning.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Paul R. Hanna and James T. Moore, "Spelling - From Spoken to Written Symbol," Elementary School Journal, 53: 329-37, February, 1953.

<sup>10</sup>Horn, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>11</sup>Horn, loc. cit.

Not only Ernest Horn but Thomas Horn emphasizes the value of the self-corrected test. After experimenting with a controlled group, Thomas Horn stated that a corrected test alone will contribute 90 to 95 per cent of the achievement resulting from the combined effects of a pronunciation exercise, a corrected test, and study. He claims that in some cases this is sufficient for mastery or near mastery. He goes so far as to claim that it appears to be the most important single factor contributing to achievement in spelling.<sup>12</sup>

There are several books that will prove valuable to the teacher who needs help in word selection and placement. These books are listed in the Bibliography.

Walter Mason<sup>13</sup> lists ten words ("I", "you", "the", "and", "to", "a", "of", "in", and "we") as accounting for 25 per cent of all running words in writing of adults; another 100 words he lists as accounting for 65 per cent of them. Such studies should make it increasingly easy for teachers, by selecting wisely and drilling intelligently, to help the boys and girls under their care to learn to spell.

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<sup>12</sup>Thomas D. Horn, "The Effects of the Corrected Test on Learning to Spell," Elementary School Journal, 47:277-85, January, 1947.

<sup>13</sup>Walter M. Mason, "Automatic Spelling - A new Goal, A New Method, A New Product," The ABC Language Arts Bulletin, An American Book Company Educational Research Service. Vol. VI, No. 1 (New York: American Book Company, 1954).



Perhaps if Bulwer Lytton had gone to a modern school he might not have had the sentiments he did about spelling: "A more lying, roundabout, puzzle-headed delusion concocted by the fathers of falsehood than that with which we confuse the clear instincts of truth by our accursed system of spelling."

## CHAPTER III

### THE PROGRAM

The program used in this study did not consist wholly of experience units. When the interest of the children and the value of the suggested material coincided, a unit usually resulted. Some were quite short while others could have gone on indefinitely. Units were usually cut off while interest was high. At times when no unit was in progress, the problems were attacked from a more traditional approach. Following are some of the units worked out during the year:

1. The Constitution
2. A Trip to the Ocean
3. Our Piano
4. Polio
5. Workshop Manners.

The first unit came about when the children, interested in material they were collecting for Constitution Day, asked if they might plan a program. Permission was granted on condition they could organize the material into a form that would be pleasing to an audience. The Club leaders (the organization of the Club will be explained later) took charge at once and plans were formulated. In order that each child might participate, they voted to have a panel discussion.

Each group wrote the script for its part. Later, when they found that many of the parents could not attend the program, the pupils arranged to wire-record it and play it at the next P.T.A. meeting. This unit did not take in all of the subjects taught. Those not integrated were taken up in class periods regularly allotted for them.

The follow-up work was the writing of a Club Constitution patterned after the one studied. During the year pupils frequently contrasted the democratic principles brought out in the unit with ways the same problems were handled by other countries. While reading about the Russians, two groups representing Russia and the United States contrasted the two ideologies by cleverly dramatizing the Bill of Rights. By this means many of the abstract ideas of democracy became clearer to the children. The contributions of the poorest students were as valued as those of the brighter ones. Following is the program presented by the children:

Advancing the Colors

Flag Salute and Pledge of Allegiance

Song - "Star Spangled Banner"

Background (European by the 6th Grade; colonial by  
the 5th)

Short Sketches of People Actively Concerned

Song - "Yankee Doodle"

How the Constitution Was Written

State Legislature and National Congress Compared  
Song - "America"

Famous Pictures of Men and Events of that Period

Flags Used by Our Country

Song - "America the Beautiful"

Flag Etiquette Dramatized (rules had been posted)

Display of the U.N. Constitution (bare mention of  
purposes)

Other Constitutions Patterned after Ours

Origin of Songs used in Program

Song - "God Bless America".

The second unit began a few days later when a fifth grade girl announced she was staying home while her parents drove to Seattle to visit a brother at the University of Washington. She did not want to miss school. She was one of the brightest students in the room and her trip would undoubtedly be more beneficial to her than the lost school work. The teacher brought some road maps and the children began to plan a route that would take her to scenic, historical and scientific places of interest. They made a pictorial map to scale; they read about interesting things in Seattle; they looked to the marine life illustrations in Life Magazine and wondered what she might see near Seattle. They read about the tides and the big foreign ships that dock in Seattle. They figured the cost of such a trip if they were to stay at motels; they sent to the library for

a copy of Duncan Hines book<sup>1</sup> to guide them to the best eating places.

Of course, Emily did go and returned with a wonderful collection of shells, pictures, pamphlets, petrified wood. She gave them interesting descriptions of the many things she had seen. Here was a unit that offered perfect integration of all subject matter, and interest was still high when it was cut off.

Units were never forced. The teacher of this group had spotted the first unit for the year. Only a few feet beyond the main school building, on a part of the playground, a new shop building was in the final stage of construction when school opened. She was sure this would be unit material. The class talked about it. The teacher asked them leading questions, and sent them on exploratory trips. At no time, however, could she detect any thing beyond a very casual interest. They completely ignored the subject. It was used for many interesting arithmetic problems, but it never became a unit for this class.

The daily program of this class was divided into subject matter blocks and conformed to the regular school schedule. The set-up allowed the maximum flexibility. Opening, closing, and lunch hours were definitely set, but intermissions, and even assigned gym periods, could usually be changed if necessary, thanks to the understanding and cooperation of the superintendent. He expected a satisfactory

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<sup>1</sup>Duncan Hines, Adventures in Good Eating. Bowling Green, Kentucky: Adventures in Good Eating, Inc., 1941, 307 pp.

level of achievement but left the method of attaining that level to the discretion of the individual teacher.

To establish from the outset that the school room was primarily set up for serious work, the teacher suggested that it be called the "Workshop." The children were quite intrigued with the idea. The preliminary business of organizing it was not hurried. A brief outline of the way it was done is necessary to convey the general atmosphere or mood of the room.

The employer-employee relationship was discussed until the children understood that the parents and other tax-paying citizens were in reality the employers, and that it was their wishes that determined the school job that must be completed during the year. To see that this was done, these employers hired, elected, or appointed competent people to systematize the material needed and to carry out the work.

Employers need certain information about their employees: What is his name, age, sex, nationality? How does he plan to get to work? What is his health record? His past job record?

The employees (children) worked these answers out by filling in the enrollment blanks, making a summary graph of their past profiles, and by summarizing the health records after each was checked by the school nurse. They helped by getting the height and weight of everyone.

The responsibility of the superintendent to the school board, and back of it the parents, was discussed and the children asked him to visit the room and talk to them about his plans and explain any general rules he had set up. They established a very friendly relationship with him and always felt free to consult him on any matter.

The "take-home-pay" for the job was to be based on the degree of efficiency with which certain duties were carried out. One thing was made clear, however, that was that anyone who worked to the best of his ability would always receive fair wages. Anything above the minimum essentials would entitle the worker to a higher salary. The list worked out by the children follows:

1. Be on the job every day unless ill.
2. Be well groomed.
3. Be cheerful and act interested even when you are not. Be courteous.
4. Come equipped with the tools of your trade.
5. Know what tools are provided for your use and know how to use them.
6. Plan your work. Know exactly what you are to do each day.
7. Ask and re-ask intelligent questions about any procedures you do not thoroughly understand.
8. The teacher is paid to help you. Make use of the service.
9. Complete each job assignment neatly and on time.
10. Be alert and curious. If you find additional information, or a better way to do the work, report to the class.
11. Be ready to give and take constructive criticism.
12. Know the skills in which you are weak, and be responsible for practicing them. Sometimes working together helps.
13. You will be both a group leader and a group member. Practice at being equally good at both.
14. Be able to report at the end of each day something you have learned in each subject block.
15. Be dependable and trustworthy.

The workers then began to ask questions. They wanted to know exactly what would be expected of them in the way of work. This was settled by sending them to the office for a State Course of Study, having them study the minimum requirements for each subject, and providing them with a mimeographed copy of these to keep in their notebooks. Along with this, they listed the value to them of each study.

They wanted to know what tools would be furnished for the work, so these were looked over and a list posted in the room. Here is the list made:

1. Texts
2. Clock
3. Adjustable window shades
4. Bulletin boards
5. Green blackboards
6. Large library table
7. Playground and equipment
8. Gym and equipment
9. Art media and other supplies
10. Cupboards and files
11. High school library
12. Three reference volumes
13. Library books
14. Individual dictionaries
15. Excellent maps
16. Globe
17. Date line
18. Wire recorder
19. Social studies picture file
20. Science kit
21. Phonograph
22. Radio
23. Piano
24. Aquarium

What would be the most efficient way of learning the material required? They decided to form a Club. A president



from the sixth grade and a vice-president from the fifth were elected to hold office for a month. They decided to work in groups as they thought they could accomplish more work in a shorter time. Groups were to be changed frequently and leaders would act for one week. The choice of leaders was to be left largely in the hands of the teacher with the approval of the Club president.

The children were brought in on the planning of the daily program. Subject matter was grouped into time blocks that allowed maximum flexibility, but still provided a definite schedule for study and drill.

A large square of wrapping paper, blocked off to correspond to the program, was kept at the desk and, whenever special or additional study or drill was indicated, that item was written in the proper square and became the starting point of that particular period. If a group leader, or perhaps the child himself, noticed that he needed more work on the use of the apostrophe, he wrote in the proper square, "apostrophe." When the period opened the teacher would begin with, "I see someone would like to review the uses of the apostrophe." That might lead several others to decide they also would like some additional drill. Explanations would follow and some practice work would be assigned. If only one pupil needed the work, the teacher would either set a time when she could work with him individually, or assign the task to some one of the group.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SPELLING PROGRAM

A determination to experiment in teaching spelling had come about because the teacher, dissatisfied with the results of previous programs, had decided to try to locate and correct the weaknesses in former programs.

As soon as the school year began, the teacher, by observing, checked all obvious problem areas that might be related to the teaching of spelling. The following were noted:

1. The attitude toward spelling was very casual, and this carried over into other situations, i.e., compositions, posters. etc.
2. Penmanship was labored and illegible.
3. Children were slow in using reference material.
4. Pronunciation and word attack were poor in oral reading.
5. Vocabulary in all work was meager.
6. Visual and auditory acuity was not satisfactory.

The teacher felt that in order to make any new plans work, she would have to secure the cooperation of the children. This became more obvious when the first area of weakness selected for attack was seen to be "no interest in the subject." Plans were made to overcome this first basic weakness.

While the children were still "cold" they were given two tests (casually) so that the teacher would have some basis for comparison later in the year. Then a six inch strip of wrapping paper was tacked to the board where the children could reach it, and they were asked (also casually) to write on it every word they carelessly missed, and any that were marked "sp." on their written work. The "Strip" was continually emphasized by the teacher's calling attention to the number of words accumulating from every branch of study. The children, however, showed no chagrin or embarrassment, but rather, assumed an air of bravado or indifference, and were mildly amused and seemingly assured because they saw others could spell no better than they. At this point the teacher used a method she had never before employed. Grades in all written work were marked down sharply for misspelled words. The pupils began to worry about this development and they had a puzzled attitude as if to say, "This is bad! What am I going to do about it?" Some were quite dejected. They began to complain vocally of their lack of ability to spell and wondered what they could do about it. Another objective had been accomplished -- they were becoming aware of their deficiency, though they had not as yet perceived any great value in the subject itself.

A teacher-pupil conference was held in which an effort was made to discover what values the children could

find in spelling. Were they enough to warrant serious study, or should each pupil be just a little more careful? As the children figured out these values they were written on the board. The teacher asked if they would like to find out what other people thought about it. The class decided to let pairs of children interview a couple of high school students, an eighth grade student, and a business man. The question to be asked was, "Is it really necessary for fifth and sixth graders to learn how to spell? Will you think about it and then tomorrow tell me so that I may report back to our class?" Interest in spelling was rising.

The interviewers reported their conferences and additional values were recognized. The business man had been quite emphatic in listing the viewpoint of the employer as well as that of the employee. A local girl who was training to be a nurse, volunteered the information that she had been so seriously penalized for poor spelling that she had had to use her off-duty time to study. Remarks such as the following were reported: "You will have to do a lot of writing in high school, so you better learn how to spell"; "You'll get better grades"; "You can do your written work faster if you don't have to stop to think how to spell every word"; "Wish I had studied harder in the grades"; "It will help you a lot if you take typing"; and, "It might help you get a job." The parents reminded the children of the times in their ordinary duties when they needed to be good

spellers. They also brought up the point of pride -- "My mother said she was proud of me when I wrote a letter to Grandma and spelled all the words right"; "Dad said he would be ashamed of me if I didn't learn to spell better than some of the kids who graduated." The attitude toward spelling was changing. Not only were the children aware that they lacked the ability to spell, but they also had arrived at the conclusion that it was a skill that was worth working for. The next question they raised was how to acquire that ability.

The teacher suggested that they first analyze the methods they had been using to study spelling. Each one wrote down exactly how he studied this subject. The result was very discouraging to the teacher who thought she had teaching. Some wrote, "I just study." When pinned down with, "How?", they were blank. Some said (to the horror of the teacher), "I write my words fifty times each." The majority, it developed, spelled their words to each other until they made a perfect score. Not one had a well-thought out plan.

These first plans were filed in their notebooks. Then the school was "raided" for spelling texts and manuals as sources of suggested plans. The best spellers in the room and some from the upper grades made suggestions. Finally, working cooperatively, the class compiled a set of rules. Each pupil promised to follow them faithfully. No

mention was made at this time of the need for individual differences, as the teacher wanted the children to discover this for themselves.

The teacher knew that children study spelling in several different ways. Some use the kinaesthetic method, some the visual, some the auditory, and some a combination of the three. A child has a great advantage if he falls into the last class.

The teacher decided to give a test<sup>1</sup> to determine into which class each pupil fell. She explained the purpose of the test and the children were curious to find out how they could best learn to spell. Results showed that thirteen could use but one method -- seven preferred the visual, three the kinaesthetic, and three the auditory. The rest classified as follows: nine could use two methods, four could use three, while only four in the room did equally well in a combination of methods. Groups were formed on this basis. The children had learned that all do not learn in the same way, so each group rewrote its spelling plans. This experimenting was deliberately encouraged in the hopes it might motivate them to use it in other situations, and inculcate a more critical attitude toward all study habits.

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<sup>1</sup>Arthur I. Gates and David H. Russell, Diagnostic and Remedial Spelling Manual, Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, (New York: Columbia University, 1940), p. 22.

The next step was to correlate spelling with every subject. As each "Strip" was filled, the teacher removed it, examined the words, and placed them in subject matter categories. Naturally the language arts block carried the major load, but all subjects were significantly represented. The ordinary work of the classes was not increased, but rather, by correlation, the desired principles or skills were taken up from a different angle which served to fix them more firmly in the mind of the child, and spelling at the same time was made functional.

Looking over the observed errors, the teacher decided that penmanship might be the logical starting point. Each child was asked to copy as quickly as possible an easy paragraph. The class as a whole was very slow. An alphabet strip was tacked on the wall. Individual attention was given to each error. The children had trouble staying on the lines; small "b's" were made like "f's"; "United" was written "Vnited"; "m's" and "n's" were interchanged; "d's" looked like "cl's"; "o's" and "a's" were not sharply differentiated; "w's" and "v's", especially when followed by the letter "i" were incorrectly formed. A few minutes drill each day increased the speed and legibility to some extent, but even at the end of the year many were still below standard.

As the children worked with reference books, the teacher noticed that help was indicated in that quarter also.

She found that two pupils could not say the letters of the alphabet in order, and that two more needed too much time to do it. Few could indicate quickly the relative position of the letters in the alphabet, and all had trouble locating a word in the dictionary unless they already knew the spelling. Games and speed contests helped to overcome some of the handicaps here; drills on alphabetizing, and instruction on cross references helped. Group leaders took over the job of watching for the ones who needed this drilling. Interest was kept up by occasionally pitting groups against each other in speed contests. This kept the leaders alert to those who were apt to lose the contest for their special group.

During the oral reading period the teacher was curious to find out if there was any correlation between poor pronunciation and poor spelling. A little examining turned up some rather curious facts. Some poor spellers were spelling words just as they pronounced them. Correction of the pronunciation corrected the spelling. Some could not spell what they pronounced and others could not pronounce what they spelled. Some had no idea how to attack a new word. A phonics test discovered seven who were entirely confused with letter-sound combinations. These, of course, were given basic drills using the Readmore-Spellmore<sup>2</sup> devices. By this method and with very little supervision,

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<sup>2</sup>Fillmore, Nadine, Steps to Mastery of Words, Read-More Spell-More: Aurora, Illinois: Educational Service, 1951.



they were soon able to advance rapidly. Three of the group remained far below the class all year. However, these backward students were always included in the class instruction, with the hopes that they would absorb some information just from listening.

It seemed very possible that the general *laissez faire* attitude might have a great deal to do with poor oral reading and spelling. The children were not really seeing their words, just lazily scanning the lines enough to arrive at a hazy understanding of the contents. Had the scanning been well done, it would have been an asset; but done in such a haphazard fashion, it led only to misinformation. Special exercises were used all year to counteract this and to cultivate in each one a word consciousness. Words were studied and analyzed from many different angles. One exercise consisted of putting a word like "misunderstanding" on the board where all could examine it and ask questions that required critical examination to answer. "Spell the third syllable." "Think of another word that has that same syllable in it." "How many small words can you find?" If a word rather new to the class had been encountered in the reading, the teacher might ask on the following day, "How many remember what the word *parasol* looked like?" "Write it for me." Another device used consisted of writing a word slowly on the board. After it had been erased quickly, recall was sought by questions. Some days the teacher had the class

write only the beginning sounds, or the ending or a mid-syllable. Nonsense words were used to sharpen the auditory sense.

Originality of expression was always rewarded. Special attention was directed toward words well used. Very often the written work was found to be dull because of a meager vocabulary. Often the class took a poorly worded composition and worked it over to express the ideas the writer had intended to convey. The child then copied the new version and clipped it to his original one for his folder. Sometimes the teacher used such a paragraph for a dictated spelling lesson. The class took overworked words like "fine," "nine," "went," or "said," and tried to express as many different shades of meaning as possible. Word histories were interesting; one-word titles for pictures; posters of lovely words, quiet words, loud, sad, joyful, or kitchen words were made. Sentences on the bulletin board like, "Do you feed pigment to your pigs?" or "Would you like to meat your friends?" were favorites of the class. Another was figuring out the occasion when the words "kid," "pal," "youth," "Dick," "boy," "lad," and "youngster," might be properly used.

The "Strip" had no special significance. It was simply a handy place for the children to write their misspelled words. As soon as one "Strip" was filled, the teacher removed it and put up a fresh one. She placed the

words in subject matter categories for presentation at that period. For example, abbreviations were put on the "Strip" from the arithmetic class, so in that period the pupils found the table of abbreviations in the back of the text, looked it over, and learned the ones they needed at the time. The next time they needed one to label an arithmetic answer they knew where to look for it. Then, in social studies some more were discovered and these were added to the "Strip." Later, when an exercise on abbreviations was discovered in the English workbook, the children found they knew practically all of them. This served to correlate spelling and the other subjects, and gave more time for the spelling period.

The most common words missed (words of below grade level difficulty and local words) were presented first. The "Demons" were taken up a few at a time. Some words were grouped if they followed a certain pattern, as for example, the verb forms "coming," and "filled"; or possessive and plural forms. The teacher had the children write the group on the board, adding others until someone discovered the pattern and worked out the rule. That was copied in their notebooks with the list of words. In this way they learned many words by studying only a few. The teacher found that rules worked out inductively by the children were remembered much better than if the teacher had begun by stating the rule.

In the first presentation the teacher used the kinaesthetic, auditory and visual methods in order to accustom the children to different ways of studying. Only the pupils who had missed the word were held responsible for the spelling the first time. However, the same words were presented frequently as review exercises and, if a pupil missed them consistently, he added the words to his list.

The second drill was given only to the group who had missed this given word again. These children would re-examine it, figure out a scheme to help them remember it, and copy the device in their workbooks with the word.

After some time had elapsed, another test was given over these words and this time each child very carefully corrected his own test. The children found that if they did this thoroughly they would usually master all of the words they had missed.

The wire recorder, which the children learned to operate themselves, was very efficient in correcting poor enunciation. It was surprising how hard each child worked to correct his errors so he would sound as good as the best students on the play-back. This served to correct unnecessary pauses and "-er's," too.

Each child kept a notebook in which he jotted down anything he thought might help him learn to spell. One section contained his personal words; another was for rules he liked; one was for devices that he had worked out. An

important section was the one in which each wrote the rule he used for studying when that rule did not work, he wrote another until he was satisfied.

In brief, in summarizing Chapter IV, it should be noted that the spelling program developed into an interesting project due to the problems raised by the children in their efforts to work out an efficient study plan. Each was concerned with his particular problems and this called for the use of several diagnostic tests, some of which uncovered some unexpected problems.

All the pupils were instructed as one class when different phases of new or remedial work came up. From observation or by testing the achievement, the teacher helped the children break into groups for differentiated instruction. The few who were still having difficulty after participating in the group activities were tutored individually by the teacher and by their classmates. Each worked as far as possible from his own ability level, but regardless of this level, each one was always a part of the class for the duration of the study period.

A studied effort was made to tie spelling up with all the subjects, and the "blocked" program helped accent this aim. Word attack was studied from many different angles and the combination of the kinaesthetic, auditory, and visual methods served to acquaint the students with other possible ways to study words beside the one they were accustomed to

using. While there was not sufficient time to carry out all the work that should have been done, it seemed as if the time had been profitably spent, and that the children might progress noticeably in the future.

## CHAPTER V

### EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM

In the school where this spelling program was carried on, the administrative policy had been to give an achievement test to all pupils at the end of the eighth month of school. This served as one measure of the progress of each student for one school year. For example, if a student ranked 4.3 (fourth grade, third month) in May of 1953, and 6.1 in May of 1954, he would have gained 1.8 or the equivalent of one year and eight months in one year's time.

For use in this spelling unit two tests were given the students on the second and third days of school in September, 1953. From the pupils' average scores on these two tests and their spelling scores on the final school achievement given in May, 1954, the gain made by each child was computed.

Table I, p. 35, was prepared to show the relative mental ability of each child, his grades on the tests given, and his gain in grade points for the year, for the fifth grade. Table II, p. 36, shows the improvements for the sixth graders.

The expected yearly gain for each pupil was 1.0, but there were several who had been drifting along below grade level for a year or two. For example, about December Pupil

TABLE I

IMPROVEMENT MADE IN SPELLING BY FIFTH  
GRADE PUPILS IN ARLEE, 1953-54

Pupils	I.Q. <sup>1</sup>	A <sup>2</sup> Tests	B <sup>3</sup>	Average A & B	Final Test <sup>4</sup>	Gain
1	Average	4.4*	5.4	4.9	7.9	3.0
2	Average	4.8	5.3	5.1	8.2	3.1
3	Low	1.8	2.0	1.9	5.6	3.7
4	High	4.9	5.3	5.1	8.2	3.1
5	High	5.9	5.7	5.8	8.5	2.7
6	Average	5.1	3.4	4.3	7.3	3.0
7	Average	4.5	4.5	4.5	7.6	3.1
8	Average	5.1	4.5	4.8	8.5	3.7
9	Low	5.1	4.3	4.7	8.2	3.5
10	Low	1.0	1.0	1.0	4.5	3.5
11	Average	3.6	4.8	4.2	7.0	2.8
12	Average	2.3	1.7	2.0	6.1	4.1
Average Gain						3.3

\*All numbers refer to grade level,  
e.g., 4.4 refers to fourth year, fourth month.

<sup>1</sup>Otis Quick Scoring Mental Ability Test, Form Beta-A  
(New York: World Book Company, 1939).

<sup>2</sup>Morrison-McCall Spelling Scale for Grades 2 to 8,  
(New York: World Book Company, 1923), List 1.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., List 8.

<sup>4</sup>Coordinated Scales of Attainment, Educational Test  
Bureau, 5th and 6th Grades (Minneapolis: Educational Pub-  
lishers, Inc., 1950).



TABLE II

IMPROVEMENT MADE IN SPELLING BY SIXTH  
GRADE PUPILS IN ARLEE, 1953-54

Pupils	I.Q. <sup>5</sup>	Tests <sup>6</sup>	B <sup>7</sup>	Average A & B	Final <sup>8</sup> Test	Gain
13	Low	3.1*	4.5	3.8	7.4	1.6
14	Average	6.8	6.6	6.7	8.8	2.1
15	Low	4.7	4.0	4.4	7.3	2.9
16	Average	5.8	5.8	5.8	8.4	2.6
17	Low	3.3	4.2	3.8	6.5	2.7
18	Average	3.3	4.5	3.9	6.2	2.3
19	Average	5.8	6.2	6.1	8.2	2.1
20	High	7.3	7.3	7.3	8.8	1.5
21	Average	4.8	5.4	5.1	7.2	2.1
22	Average	5.6	4.9	5.2	8.2	3.0
23	Average	7.0	7.5	7.3	8.0	.7
24	Average	6.5	6.3	6.4	8.0	1.6
25	High	6.5	6.9	6.7	8.2	1.5
26	Average	4.0	2.1	3.2	6.9	3.7
27	Average	5.8	5.6	5.7	7.1	1.4
Average Gain						2.1

\*All numbers refer to grade level, e.g., 4.4 refers to fourth year, fourth month.

<sup>5</sup>Otis, op. cit.

<sup>6</sup>Morrison-McCall, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., List 8.

<sup>8</sup>Coordinated Scales, op. cit.

Number 15 suddenly began to improve rapidly. The teacher concluded, after much observation, that pupils 26, 6, and 11 would probably make similar gains during the following school year and would probably eventually reach the grade level of their group.

As can be seen by the tables, only Pupil Number 23 failed to make a gain of 1.0. Eighteen pupils were below grade level at the beginning of the year, and only five by the time the spring achievement test was given. Of these five, only Pupil Number 10 lagged more than one grade. However, the average fall grades were not a true picture of the ability of the group, as they represented the achievement at the very peak of their forgetfulness. They were not even "thinking spelling" when the tests were given. Had they taken them one week later, they would undoubtedly have made higher scores, and the gain would therefore have been somewhat less.

All this would seem to indicate that satisfactory results can be expected whether spelling is taught in the traditional manner using a textbook list of words, or in conjunction with an experience unit, using the words the children need in their school work.

The teacher felt that work in all school subjects had benefited from the interest in the spelling program,

possibly not as much in achievement as in the interest the children displayed in planning their work with definite goals in mind. They were serious in their attempts to satisfy the requirements set up by the State and, in the process, were gradually learning how to study.

Other results were more difficult to pin down. The teacher felt that the greatest value lay in the changed attitudes of the pupils. She thought it possible that the "workshop" idea had engendered a more serious consideration for the "jobs" to be completed in this school "business." This led the workers to take a more active part in diagnosing their problems and in going outside their group to look for solutions. They got actual experience in diagnosing, investigating, deciding, planning, trying out the plan, evaluating, replanning, and so on until they were satisfied they had devised a plan that would work. In this experimenting most of them learned something about evaluating themselves. They had found that cooperation with their group was desirable up to a certain point, but beyond that point had found that each must work individually to meet his own peculiar needs.

There were, of course, some weak points in the program. For one thing, too little time was spent on reviewing and developing phonic skills and legible penmanship. As a result, there was insufficient time to accomplish enough in the line of written work. That phase of applying spelling would have greatly strengthened the ability of the children.

Much more time should probably have been spent with the poorer students. With better planning it might have been possible to have delegated some of the remedial work to the brighter pupils without infringing too much on their time.

## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary. This study described a program set up for teaching spelling to the fifth and sixth graders of the Arlee School, in conjunction with an experience unit, and attempted to evaluate this program.

The problem was chosen for several reasons: (1) the poor spelling evinced in the written work of both grade and high school students; (2) public criticism leveled against the spelling program of the school; and, of prime concern, (3) the over-all effect on the child.

The program was carried out by enlisting the cooperation of the children, by trying to discover if any particular areas of the curriculum influenced the teaching of spelling, and by ascertaining whether certain undeveloped skills were basic stumbling blocks. Words were studied from the angles of interest, or word-consciousness, and of structure. Varied methods of presentation and devices furthered this aim. Each child was encouraged to build up a study pattern to fit his particular needs, to try out the plan faithfully, to evaluate it, and to re-plan and so on until he felt satisfied. The block system of subject matter was flexible and was conducive to the integration of spelling with all other subjects. Each child was a part of

the entire class for instructional purposes; then, individually or as one of a group, he progressed from his own achievement level.

Conclusions. Conclusions reached were as follows:

1. The children made at least normal gains in spelling achievement.
2. When children themselves became sufficiently interested to want to become good spellers, they showed definite gains in spelling.
3. As the children in this class developed a pride in good workmanship and became conscious of the value of applying their spelling skill to other subjects, significant carry-over values appeared.
4. Studying the words taken from all subject matter immediately useful to the children helped to develop spelling skill and emphasized in the children's minds the relationships that existed.
5. By carefully evaluating their methods of study, the children acquired valuable study habits.
6. Better creative writing appeared to result in proportion to the extent that spelling of ordinary words became automatic.
7. The children gained a feeling for the structure of words more quickly when they were able to use the kinaesthetic, auditory and visual methods of study.

Recommendations. The teacher recommends the following changes be made if this particular spelling program is to be used again:

1. The order of the program should be changed so that a deficiency in any basic skill can be remedied at once.
2. As the bulk of misspelled words are those of the lower grade levels, they should be studied as soon as they appear on the List, and the study continued until they are mastered.
3. The program blocks should be kept in front of the children at all times. If they are easily accessible, the children should be encouraged to jot down in the proper block items they wish explained. By so doing they are bringing out the relationship between the subjects.
4. Curriculum planning by the school staff would help equalize the work to be done each year through recommending the age at which desired skills could be taught most advantageously, and by indicating the amount of skill to be developed.

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