

American Spelling Instruction: Retrospect and Prospect

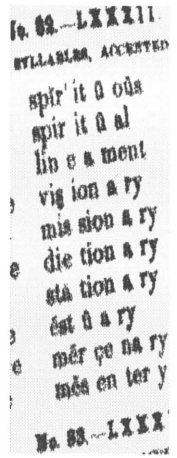
Richard E. Hodges

School of Education
University of Puget Sound
Tacoma, WA 98416-0220

Visible Language XXI, 2 (Spring 1987)

Richard E. Hodges, pp. 55-75

© Visible Language, Rhode Island School of Design
Providence, RI 02903



Spelling as a school subject provides a valuable mechanism for examining the history of curriculum making in the United States. The subject of spelling has had a secure place in the common school curriculum from colonial times to the present because of the importance attributed to correct spelling by the larger society. Once linked directly with reading instruction, the teaching of spelling emerged over time as a subject taught largely independent of other language instruction, with its form of presentation shaped by prevailing views of curriculum makers concerning the nature of English spelling and learning to spell, and subsequently also by the application of scientific method in curriculum development. Recent insights into the acquisition of spelling proficiency reveal, however, the inextricable relationship that spelling has in the development of written language ability in general and which, in turn, pose significant implications for the spelling curriculum.

Overview **T**he English aristocrat and political figure, Philip Dormer Stanhope, 4th Earl of Chesterfield (1694-1773), whose letters, written over a thirty-year period to his son, Philip, were meant to educate him in the art of being a gentleman, once admonished the young man to be mindful that

Orthography is so absolutely necessary for a man of letters ... that one false spelling may fix a ridicule upon him for the rest of his life I know a man of quality who never recovered [from] the ridicule of having spelled wholesome without the w (November 19, 1750) (Chesterfield, 1929).

The importance of correct spelling as a social marker has, among other reasons, resulted in spelling having a secure place in the school curriculum, with roots that are traceable to the beginnings of modern civilization in the Western world (Hodges, 1977). Over the centuries, students learning to spell for the most part have been taught that rote memorization of words was necessary for correct spelling, in the belief that the memorization of items, such as poems and difficult words, fostered mental discipline. Coupled with a widely-held impression that English spelling is largely bereft of “rules” for mapping letters to sounds, memorizing individual words has historically been regarded as the only safe route for spelling mastery. As a result, spelling instruction through the years has seldom strayed from its path down “memory lane.”

In this paper we shall trek briefly down the memory lane of American spelling instruction from colonial times to the present, focusing primarily on nineteenth to mid-twentieth century instructional practices. Our purposes are to place current and potential instructional practices in historical perspective and to show that the shape and texture of spelling instruction (or any other subject for that matter) are fabricated from views about the nature of content (English orthography), of learning, and of the learner.

In the Beginning: 18th and 19th Centuries **W**hile spelling is now commonly regarded as one of the minor language “arts” in the

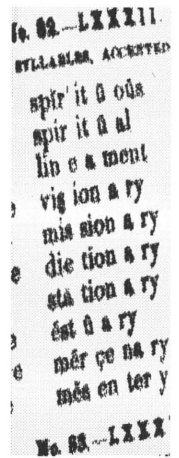
school curriculum, in the American colonies and in the early years of the nation it was a subject of much importance. Spelling books were the first instructional manuals to be placed in children's hands, from which they studied reading, spelling, arithmetic, geography, as well as moral teachings (Littlefield, 1965, pp. 102-3).

The omnibus spelling books of eighteenth century colonial America were published in England or reprinted in the colonies. As had been the practice for centuries, children learned both to read and spell from them by a mode of instruction called the "alphabet method," a method which, as a British authority of the era recounted, required that students "...Name the letters of a Word, divide them into distinct Syllables, and then join them together to read or Pronounce them aright" (Michael, 1970, p. 184).

Three areas of study occupied students' time. One of these areas was *orthography*, in which they learned the order and names of the large and small letters of the alphabet according to their classifications as consonants, vowels, and diphthongs; the speech sounds that each letter represented; various consonant and vowel letter combinations (such as *ab, eb, ib*); and ultimately, how to combine these syllables to form words, such as *qua-li-fi-ca-ti-on* . A second area of study was *spelling* , in which students learned to name the letters of words in their proper order and to divide the words into syllables according to specific rules. A third area of study, *orthoepy* (pronouncing words "aright"), was designed to insure the proper pronunciation of words.

With the colonies' independence from England, indigenous spelling books began to be printed which, at first, differed very little from their British counterparts. The first prolific American textbook writer was Noah Webster, who produced the famed "blue-back" speller, several dictionaries and grammars, and a U.S. history. Webster's speller fundamentally shaped the teaching of spelling for over a century, largely because of the sheer volume of its sales. Millions of copies were purchased for use in the schools and homes of nineteenth century America, and its popularity spurred the publication of scores of other spelling books, many of them outright imitations of the "blue-back" speller.

As the common school movement gained momentum in the early 1800s, school texts began to be published in other subjects, with a result that spelling books began to lose their omnibus character, becoming almost solely devoted to spelling. Stripped of their traditional role, many of these spellers were little more than lists of words arranged in tables according to the number of letters and syllables they contained. With rare exception, it was expected that these word





THE LITTLE SAWYER, FRANK LUCAS.

Mrs. Corbon kept a village school in the state of New-York. She had a noble mind and was a friend to all good children. One cold morning in the winter, a small boy came along, with a saw on his arm, and wanted this lady to hire him to saw wood. She said, one of her neighbours, a trusty man, would like to saw the wood, and she did not wish to hire any body else. "O dear," said the boy, "what shall I do?" "Why, little fellow," said she, "what is the matter?" He answered, "my father is blind, mother is sick, and I left my sister crying at home, for fear poor má will die."

TABLE XVII.

Plain words of five syllables, the chief accent on the second, and minor accent on the fourth.

In fù ri a ted	pro hìb it o ry
pro cu ra to ry	pre lim in a ry
pro pri e ta ry	pre par a to ry
au thèn ti ca ted	stip en di a ry
con tem po ra ry	sub sid i a ry
ex clam a to ry	vo cab u la ry
ex plan a to ry	vo lup tu a ry
ex tem po ra ry	ad mòn i to ry
he red it a ry	a poth e ca ry
in cen di a ry	con sol a to ry
in flam ma to ry	in vol un ta ry

The following words have the chief accent on the fourth syllable.

Ad min is trà tor	an ti sple nèt ic
ca lum ni a tor	cir cum fe ren ter
cir cum lo cu tor	di a pho ret ic
de nom in a tor	ex per i ment al
ne go ti a tor	hi er o glyph ic
a man u èn sis	su per a bun dant
an ti pa thet ic	su per in tend ent

I take care of them as well as I can, but they have nothing to eat. I want to work and get something for them." Mrs. Corbon had never seen this lad before, and did not know what his name was, till he told her: but she perceived he was a boy of uncommon goodness, because he was so kind to his parents and sister. He shivered very much with the cold; for he was but thinly drest, and his ear locks were white with frost. The lady asked him to come in and warm himself.

lists were to be memorized by means of constant oral repetition. Little attention was given to the meanings that the words conveyed, much less to their possible utility in writing.

Empirical studies of learning to spell would not fully emerge until the twentieth century. There was, however, a psychological basis of sorts to which some nineteenth century spelling-book makers could refer, a pseudotheory of mind called *phrenology*, the creation of a Viennese physician named Franz Joseph Gall (1758-1828). Proponents of phrenology, or "faculty psychology" as it was also known, believed that the mind had three sets of basic capacities or *faculties*. The first set concerned understanding, reason, or intellect; the second, feelings, desires, sensibilities, susceptibilities, tastes, or the "heart"; and the third, will, or volition (Butts and Cremin, 1953, pp. 177-78). It was also thought that the intellectual faculties were particularly capable of being trained, much like muscles are strengthened by exercise, and spelling was regarded as a subject that was amenable to memory training.

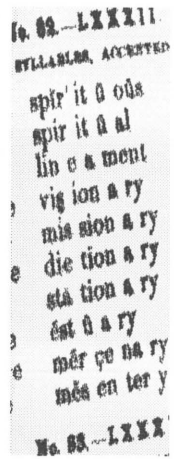
Voices were raised, however, in opposition to the alphabet method which most spelling books continued to use, and one of the more vociferous was that of Horace Mann (1796-1859) who, in 1837, became the first Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education. In its place, Mann proposed that students should be taught meaningful information. He was especially critical of schools

Figure 1.
The Analytical Spelling Book

William S. Cardell

(Philadelphia: Uriah Hunt, 1830)

This speller provides an example of the alphabet method as implemented in its later phase when students had progressed past forming two-, three-, and four-syllable words.



“requiring children to spell columns of words, few, if any of which, they can understand, and scarcely one of which they will have occasion to use for many years, if ever. To crowd their memories with such words ... is about as unwise as it would be to fill their stomachs with kinds of food, which we know they cannot digest, until they have attained adult age. The orthography of all common every-day words should first be thoroughly learned” (Mann, 1839, p. 359).

Meaningful reading and spelling instruction, Mann maintained, should begin with *words* that name familiar objects, not *letters* to which meaning cannot be related. The letters that compose the words, he contended, could be learned afterward. For, “When we wish to give to a child the idea of a new animal, we do not present successively the different parts of it — an eye, an ear, the nose, the mouth, the body, or a leg—we present the whole animal, as one object” (Mann, 1840, p. 14).

Equally important, Mann sought to advance the notion that spelling should not be regarded as an end in itself; rather, spelling should be seen as an integral part of the functional use of language. Within this perspective, Mann insisted that

The misuse of letters in the spelling of words is a comparatively venial offense; it seldom draws after it any serious consequences besides the reputation of illiteracy. But the

Rep-e-ti-tion, a recital; tautology; iteration.
 Sup-pu-ra-tion, the process of producing purulent matter.
 Hyp-o-chon-dri-ac, a person affected with melancholy.
 In-sip'id, tasteless; vapid; flat; dull; heavy.
 Fa-ce-tious, sportive; jocular; lively; gay; witty.
 Se-qua'cious, following; attendant; ductile; pliant.
 Em'per-or, the ruler of an empire; a monarch superior to a king.
 Em'pir-ic, a quack; a pretended or ignorant physician.
 Symp-to-matic'al, pertaining to symptoms; indicative.
 Ep-i-gram-matic'al, concise; pointed; poignant.
 Prob-lem-at'ic-al, questionable; uncertain; doubtful.
 Chol'er-ic, angry; irascible; easily irritated.
 Cor-ru-ga'tion, a wrinkling; contraction into wrinkles.
 An-ach'ro-nism, an error in computing time.
 Del-e-te'ri-ous, destructive; poisonous; injurious; pernicious.
 Par'si-mo-ny, covetousness; penuriousness; frugality.
 Ob-scen'i-ty, ribaldry; lewdness; unchaste actions.
 Ex-or-cism, the expulsion of evil spirits from persons or places.
 Ob-jur-ga'tion, a reproof; reprehension.
 Par'a-graph, a distinct part of a discourse or writing.
 In-tan-gi-ble, that cannot be touched; imperceptible to the touch.
 Pro-thon'o-ta-ry, the head registrar or notary.
 Pro-tract'or, a proloner; a delayer; a mathematical instrument.
 Im'mo-late, to sacrifice; to offer up; to kill.
 Pre-sent'i-ment, a previous notion or idea of something future.
 Be-reave'ment, deprivation; loss; act of bereaving.
 E-mol'i-ent, a warm external application; a softening medicine.
 E-mol'u-ment, profit; advantage; gain in general.
 Ver-nac'u-lar, native; belonging to the country of one's birth.

A-poc'ry-phal, not canonical; uncertain.
 Hy-poth'e-cate, to pawn; to give in pledge.
 Germ-in-a'tion, the act of sprouting; growth.
 Leg-er-de-main', sleight of hand; a juggler.
 Her'mit-age, the habitation of a hermit.
 Im-brogli'o, an intricate, complicated plot of a drama.
 Lym-phat'ic, a vessel which contains or conveys lymph.
 In-firm'a-ry, a residence for the sick; a hospital for the sick poor.
 Pe-riph'e-ry, the circumference of a curvilinear figure.
 Ge-om'e-try, the science of the relations of magnitude or quantity.
 Ve-loc'i-pede, a carriage moved by an impulse given to it by the rider's feet.
 Nau'se-ate, to loathe; to reject with disgust.
 Pa-la'tial, pertaining to a palace; magnificent.
 Mu'ci-lage, a slimy or viscous mass or body.
 Guill'o-tine, a machine used for beheading in France.
 Ped'es-tal, the basis of a pillar or statue.
 Car'ti-lage, a tough, elastic substance; gristle.
 Ap-pel'lative, pertaining to a common name.
 Com'mis-sa-ry, an officer who furnishes provisions and clothing to an army.
 Ther-mom'e-ter, an instrument for measuring variations of temperature.
 Te-mer'i-ty, rashness; extreme boldness.
 Ter'ri-to-ry, the extent of land within the bounds of any State.
 Oli-gar-chy, a government in the hands of a few persons; aristocracy.
 Cor'o-la-ry, a consequent truth; a conclusion.
 Scur'ril-ous, vile; coarse; abusive; opprobrious; reproachful.
 Cham'o-mile, a bitter plant, much used in medicine.
 Car'ni-val, a Catholic season of festivity, before Lent.
 Ter-res'tri-al, consisting of earth; earthly.

misuse or misapprehensions of language lead to errors of thought, or opinion and of conduct; and the laws of society and the laws of the land often punish them with the loss of character and the loss of property (Mann, 1840, p. 22).

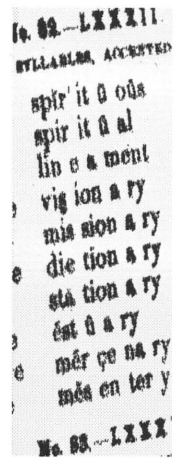
In 1843 Mann had gone to Europe to look at pedagogical practices that might be adapted to American education. He returned from abroad especially impressed by the Prussian school system and its application of the naturalistic pedagogy of the Swiss educational reformer, Johann Pestalozzi, who believed that learning involved all the senses and stemmed from children's interests, abilities, and temperaments. After observing a group of sixty six-year-olds undertake an exercise in which "there were elements of reading, spelling, writing, grammar, and drawing, interspersed with anecdotes and not a little general information," he came away even more convinced that the alphabet method had to be discarded (Mann, 1844; in Cohen, 1974, p. 1087).

While Mann believed in developing the power of the mental faculties, he also advocated the "Law of Association" as a learning principle applicable to spelling instruction, a principle bearing striking similarity to present-day practices of grouping words according to their phonic similarities. The Law of Association, he wrote, required words to be grouped according to common orthographic characteristics in which "eye, ear, and hand establish by frequent association the peculiar sequence of letters which spell each word," and which by

Figure 2.
Henderson's Test Words in English
Orthography

N. P. Henderson
(New York: Clark and Maynard, 1875)

This speller illustrates a later nineteenth century practice, found in numerous spellers, of simply providing lists of words and their definitions, a kind of quasi-dictionary devoid of other subject areas and the moral epithets found in earlier omnibus spelling books. Note the complexity and peripheral value of the listed words in terms of their everyday use.



recalling the spelling of any one word would elicit the spelling of all the others in the group (Mann, 1840, p. 39).

Changing views of spelling instruction were of little importance to the people in the villages, towns, and cities of mid-nineteenth century America, however. To them, spelling ability symbolized as it had in earlier generations more than a mere adeptness for spelling words correctly; it validated the American work-success ethic, that personal achievements are gained by hard work. As one product of nineteenth century schooling recalled,

The child cares no more in his heart about the arrangement of vowels and consonants in the orthography of words than he does of how many chips lie above one another at the school house woodpile. But he does care whether he is at the head or foot of his class (Butts and Cremin, 1953, p. 270).

Into the Twentieth Century **N**onetheless, views of education in general *were* changing as the push for a common school experience for all, at least through the elementary school years, was becoming a reality. But, with the growth of the common school, there also arose concerns about the quality and effectiveness of the education enterprise. One of those concerned was a New York pediatrician, Dr. Joseph M. Rice, who, in 1893, was among the first educational reformers to

REA, LIA, LIA, CAC, FALL, WRET; MIA, PEST, THRE; SOW; MIA, MATHS; LEYS;

No. 81.—LXXXI.

WORDS OF THREE SYLLABLES, ACCENTED ON THE SECOND.
THE LAST COLUMN IS LEFT UNMARKED.

re vông' e ful	in vènt' ive	in ac' tive
for gèt ful	per cèp tive	de fect ive
e vent ful	pre gûmp tive	ef fect ive
neg leet ful	eon sump tive	ob ject ive
dis grêt ful	de cèp tive	e lect ive
dis trust ful	as sèrt ive	ad he sive
sue cèss ful	a bôr tive	co he sive
an skill ful	dj' gèst ive	de ci sive
eol lèet ive	ex pul sive	cor ro sive
pros peet ive	eon pul sive	a bu sive
per speet ive	im pul sive	oon clu sive
eor reet ive	re pul sive	ex clu sive
in vee tive	de fèn sive	in clu sive
vin die tive	of fèn sive	e lu sive
af fliet ive	sub vër sive	de lu sive
at tràet ive	dis cår sive	al lu sive
dis tîget ive	ex eur sive	il lu sive
sub jûne tive	in eur sive	col lu sive
eon jûne tive	sue cèss ive	ob tru sive
in duet ive	ex cèss ive	in tru sive
pro duet ive	pro gress ive	pro tru sive
de strue tive	op press ive	e va sive
eon struet ive	ex press ive	per sua sive
in cèn tive	im press ive	as sua sive
re ten tive	sub mis sive	dis sua sive
at ten tive	per mis sive	un fad ing
pre vent ive	trans mis sive	un feel ing

We are apt to live forgetful of our continual dependence on the will of God.

We should not trust our lives to unskillful doctors or drunken sailors.

Washington was a successful general.

NOVA, SOR, WOLF, PLOT, MORN, OS; APLA, PYLE; KINE; SANK; SMO; GEAR.

A prospective view, means a view before us.

Perspective glasses are such as we look through, to see things at a distance. Telescopes are perspective glasses.

Rum, gin, brandy, and whisky are destructive enemies to mankind. They destroy more lives than wars, famine, and pestilence.

An attentive boy will improve in learning.

Putrid bodies emit an offensive smell.

The drunkard's course is progressive; he begins by drinking a little, and shortens his life by drinking to excess.

The sloth is an inactive, slow animal.

The President of the United States is elected once every four years. He is chosen by electors who are elected by people of the different States.

No. 82.—LXXXII.

WORDS OF FOUR SYLLABLES, ACCENTED ON THE FIRST.

jû' di ea tûre	spir' it ù oûs	cår' i ea tûre
èx pli ea tîve	spir it ù al	têm per a ture
pål li a tive	lin e a ment	lit er a ture
spée ù la tive	vig ion a ry	åg ri eul ture
còp ù la tive	mis sion a ry	hór ti eul ture
nom i na tive	die tion a ry	prés by ter y
op er a tive	stã tion a ry	des ul to ry
fig ù ra tive	èst ù a ry	próm on to ry
vég e tà tive	mér çè na ry	pér emp to ry
im i tà tive	més en ter y	eåg ù is try

No. 83.—LXXXIII.

WORDS OF THREE SYLLABLES, ACCENTED ON THE FIRST.

rèl' a tive	prim' i tive	åd' jee tive
åb la tive	pår ga tive	òb vi oûs
når ra tive	lèn i tive	èn vi ous
lax a tive	trån si tive	pér vi ous
èx ple tive	sén si tive	påt ù lous
neg a tive	sûb stan tive	pér il ous

bring the tools of scientific inquiry to bear upon the study of educational problems. As a part of his inquiry, Rice analyzed the spelling achievement of about 13,000 students and concluded that, regardless of educational methods used, a carefully chosen and graded list of useful words studied for a few minutes daily under the supervision of well-trained teachers would produce the most effective results (Rice, 1897).

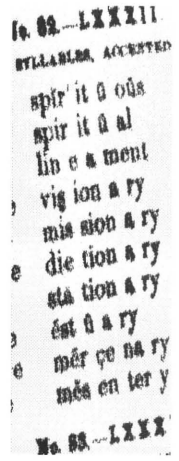
Rice's recommendations had less influence on traditional spelling practices at the turn of the century than he would have liked. A greater influence, instead, was the growing number of subjects that were being introduced into the school curriculum. There was simply no longer the time available in the school day to give spelling the attention and prominence it had previously received. As a consequence, spelling instruction declined in importance in the school curriculum during the first decade of the present century.

It would be erroneous to conclude, however, that spelling was less important an issue among educational scholars. In counterbalance to a decline of the status of spelling in school there was, during this period, a number of forces that had been developing in the latter years of the nineteenth century that were to influence the spelling curriculum. For one, the use of the scientific method to attack educational problems became a dominant force in the study of schooling; and, as Rice had done, other investigators began to apply the tools of scientific

Figure 3.
The Elementary Spelling Book

Noah Webster
(New York: American Book Company, 1880;
facsimile copy, American Book Company, n. d.)

This edition of Webster's speller illustrates that the omnibus speller still held sway late into the nineteenth century.



inquiry to the study of spelling. For another, the child study movement gained strength and thereby stimulated a debate over the issue of whether children's needs and interests or preparation for adult life in the larger society should guide the development of the common school curriculum.

Echoing Horace Mann's dictum that the school program should relate to children's interests, B.C. Gregory, a Massachusetts school superintendent, advocated that students' *own* words should be the source of spelling study. By doing so, he claimed, children's powers rather than weaknesses would be emphasized, thereby lessening comparisons of their spelling errors to adult standards. In keeping with this spirit, Gregory further proposed that "We should not be so fond of the blue pencil, but when we mark [compositions], mark the words written *correctly* [emphasis added], and then the blue will be on the page and not in the child" (Gregory, 1907-1908).

In contrast to Superintendent Gregory's sentiments were others who believed that schooling was intended to prepare students for participation in adult society. Proponents of this view were aware, however, that schools no longer had the time to teach all the knowledge and skills that were needed for participation in life in the larger society. They contended that careful selections had to be made to insure that the essential aspects of a subject were to be taught. There thus was developed the *principle of social utility* which mandated that what-

38	THIRD GRADE				THIRD GRADE				39
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24		
desk	draw	dull	eyes	flying	goes	hope	kick		
candy	cards	cents	drink	drove	games	drinking	gives		
towns	trick	wants	woods	blocks	books	brings	comes		
letters	pulling	sisters	sixteen	slipped	strong	turning	brothers		
stamps	such	taking	talks	please	pocket	pole	porch		
track	wild	yourself	eight	row	saved	sew	shade		
anything	April	asked	asleep	sometime	sugar	taken	talking		
begin	Christmas	basket	church	twenty	use	washed	weak		
chair	cloth	coal	corner	afraid	almost	badly	because		
died	egg	evening	everything	change	chicken	coffee	color		
fix	floor	grandma	great	fence	fifteen	file	heard		
hole	hundred	jump	lace	lesson	cool	living	lunch		
loved	matter	mean	meet	paint	painted	penny	people		
nor	nose	number	orange	saving	shame	sheet	sight		
party	pencil	pillow	planted	turn	used	wagon	wanted		

	Standard Number Right					Standard Number Right			
II. 5	II. 5	II. 5	II. 5		II. 4	II. 4	II. 4	II. 4	
III. 9	III. 9	III. 9	III. 9	III. 4	III. 8	III. 8	III. 8	III. 8	
IV. 12	IV. 12	IV. 12	IV. 12	IV. 11	IV. 11	IV. 11	IV. 11	IV. 11	

ever is taught in school must be of importance outside of school. For the spelling curriculum, this principle became the catalyst for searches to identify the optimal set of words needed for written communication in the larger society.

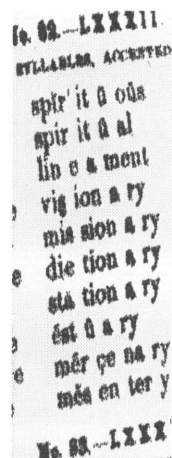
Supporting the social utility principle was the rise of behaviorist psychology in the early decades of this century, with habit formation replacing mental discipline in a theory of learning. Together, the social utility principle and behaviorism further focused attention on individual words as appropriate objects of spelling study, the former providing a rationale for selecting words, and the latter a process for students to learn them.

The determination of words for spelling study according to their frequency of use in writing is largely a twentieth century phenomenon, although the approach was anticipated over 300 years earlier by Richard Mulcaster who, in his famed *Elementarie of 1582*, prepared a table of some 8,000 words "as maie easilie direct our generall writing" (Mulcaster, 1970, p. 164). Literally hundreds of published and unpublished studies of English word frequencies have been undertaken in this century, with researchers who have been interested in spelling usually examining one of several sources to determine a definitive word list. The principal sources for these studies have included: 1) adult business and personal correspondence (e.g., Chancellor, 1910; Ayres, 1913); 2) children's compositions and letters

Figure 4.
Lippincott's New Horn-Ashbaugh Speller

Ernest Horn and Ernest J. Ashbaugh
(Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1926)

This illustration from Horn's and Ashbaugh's speller typifies the practice of selecting and presenting spelling words solely on the basis of their frequency of use and utility in writing. Note the numerous instances of plural noun forms and verb tense forms that are presented without their corresponding base words.



(e.g., Jones, 1913; Bauer, 1916; Fitzgerald, 1934); 3) free association—subjects write all the words they can think of in a stated period of time (e.g., Dolch, 1927); 4) determining most frequently misspelled words (e.g., Fitzgerald, 1952); 5) comparing words found in other lists (e.g., Foran, 1930). Using this approach, Foran determined that the optimal word list contained 3,800 words, the *median* number of words found in thirteen spellers!

Three kinds of word lists were developed as outcomes of these studies: 1) adult-based word lists, in support of the position that schooling should prepare students for participation in an adult world (e.g., Horn, 1926); 2) child-based word lists, in support of the position that children's needs and interests should form the basis of their schooling (e.g., Jones, 1913; Fitzgerald, 1934); and 3) combined word lists built from both adult and child writing, on the grounds that both students' current and future needs should be addressed in school (e.g., Buckingham and Dolch, 1936; Greene, 1954).

To what extent was there agreement among publishers of spelling programs concerning the basis of their respective word lists? Not much. An evaluation of word list sources of seventeen spelling series being considered for adoption by the California State Curriculum Committee in 1935 revealed that two were based on adult writing, five were based on children's writing, eight used combined word lists, and two were based on the authors' own judgments. There was also a

succeed
 false
 afford
 former
 gloomy
 mistake
 celebrate
 Christian
 thirsty
 victory
 leader
 grieve
 easily
 defeat
 imagine
 narrow
 intention



Washington gave up his former intention of trying to hold New York. He could not afford to lose, so he did not make the mistake of fighting General Howe. He knew the British leader could easily defeat his little army. Howe chased him across New Jersey.

But Washington got his army safely across the Delaware River at Trenton. It was the most difficult and gloomy time of the war, as one can well imagine. But Washington did not stop to sorrow and grieve. Howe's thirsty Hessians, sure of the next day's success, stopped to celebrate Christmas Eve with bottle and song.

The Christian holiday did not keep Washington from trying a daring plan. In a driving sleet storm, he moved 2,300 men across the river. Without one false move, he stormed the town and took a thousand prisoners in a badly needed victory for the Americans.

Review Words **guilty** **mighty** **healthy**

Studying Your Words

1. Do your work for the first day in the usual way.
2. Adjectives are words that say something about nouns. We can change some nouns into adjectives by adding **y**. **Gloom** and **thirst** are nouns. Change them to adjectives by adding **y**.
3. The review words are adjectives which end in **y**. Write them and write the nouns from which they come.
4. Write **easy**. Change **y** to **i** and add the **-ly** suffix.

5. Write the words from the story for the blanks.
Washington gave up his ' ___ ' of holding New York. He could not ' ___ ' to lose. Fighting Howe would have been a ' ___ '. Washington knew that the British ' ___ ' could ' ___ ' his army.
When Washington landed at Trenton, it was a most difficult and ' ___ ' time, as one can well ' ___ '. But he did not ' ___ ' and ' ___ ' Howe's ' ___ ' Hessians, sure of ' ___ ', stopped to ' ___ ' Christmas Eve.
6. Write antonyms for **failure** and **true**.
7. Write the word for one who follows the religion of Christ.
8. Write the words that are formed from these root words: **easy**, **gloom**, **intend**, **thirst**.
9. Write synonyms for **error** and **wrong**.
10. Follow the usual steps for the third, fourth, and fifth days.

For pupils who know their spelling words: Look up Hessians in your encyclopedia. Who were they and what were they doing in America?

Dictionary Helps

Notice the double consonants.

• **afford** (ə'fɔrd') Have the money, time, or strength: Can we afford a new car? We cannot afford to waste time.



False fact

• **false** (fə'ls) 1. Not true, wrong: A false answer. 2. Lying: A false witness. 3. Not loyal: A false friend. 4. Not real: False teeth.

This is the long air sound.

• **gloomy** (glu:m'i) Dark; dim; sad: A gloomy forest; a gloomy look.

Notice the stem vowel and the **y**.

• **grieve** (griv) 1. Feel grief: I grieve for my dead brother. 2. Cause someone to feel grief: He grieves his mother with his bad habits.

Here is the stem vowel again.

• **intention** (in'ten'shən) Determination to act in a certain way: Our intention is to visit our friends.

Notice that both stem vowels are doubled.

• **success** (sək'ses') 1. Wished-for ending: Success usually comes from hard work. 2. A person or thing that succeeds: The play was a success.

similar lack of agreement concerning the *number* of words a spelling program should include, with the *number* of words presented in the seventeen series ranging from a low of 2,800 words in one series to over 8,000 in another (Waterman and Melbo, 1935).

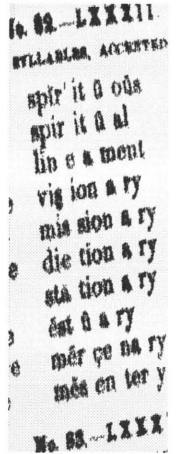
Selecting words for a spelling program is only one part of a publisher's task, however. The words must also be organized and properly placed in the respective grades. To accomplish this task, Paul McKee offered three plans of attack: 1) a "logical" plan (based on the nature of the subject) in which words would be distributed through the grades from the "simplest" to the most "complex" spellings; 2) a "psychological" plan (based on the nature of the learner) in which words would be selected according to children's abilities, needs, and interests in the respective grades; and 3) a "sociological" plan (based on the needs of the writer in the larger society) in which words would be distributed through the grades according to their frequency of use, with the most commonly used words relegated to the early grades (McKee, 1939).

To what extent, then, did textbook publishers agree on the organization and placement of words in their spelling programs? Use of the scientific method in curriculum development to the contrary, spelling programs varied widely in their word selection and gradation despite the fact that there was a considerable overlap of words contained in adult, child, and combined word lists. Erich Selke, for example, examined ten spelling series and found that, out of the 4,000+

Figure 5.
The New Spelling Goals

May D. Lambader and William Kottmeyer
(St. Louis: Webster Publishing Company, 1955)
By permission of the author.

This 1950s speller is illustrative of the practice of the time of presenting list words in short "themes," on the grounds that their use in context reinforced for students their meanings and utility, and also in the belief that the themes fostered students' interest in and motivation to learn the list words.



different words they contained, only 1,080 words were common to the ten programs, and then with only *three* words placed at the same grade level (Selke, 1929).

Eight years later, Carl Wise compared twenty spelling programs for word placement agreement by grade level. He found 13,641 different words in the ten series, with only fifty-four words in common to five or more texts at the same grade level (Wise, 1934).

The most dramatic disparity among publishers of spelling books with respect to the grade placement of list words was that reported by Emmett Betts who found unanimous agreement on the grade placement of only *one* word (the second grade word, *long*) out of 8,645 different words when he compared seventeen spelling series published between 1934-1938 (Betts, 1940). Nine years later when Betts, using the same procedure, examined eight spelling programs that had been published since 1939, he found that the situation had only slightly improved since his earlier analysis, this time finding agreement on the grade placement of sixty-five words (mostly in the lower grades) out of a total of 8,652 different words. However, only four hundred eighty-three words were found to be in common to all eight programs irrespective of grade placement (Betts, 1949).

A more recent comparison of this nature was made in 1965 by Wilbur Ames who analyzed the selection and grade placement of words in

j is often spelled *j*, *dge*, or *g* followed by *e* or *i*. A rare spelling is *gg*.

Say each word. Hear *j*. Notice how the sound is spelled.

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. <i>joke</i> | 11. <i>ledge</i> |
| 2. <i>judge</i> | 12. <i>damage</i> |
| 3. <i>edge</i> | 13. <i>cottage</i> |
| 4. <i>pledge</i> | 14. <i>baggage</i> |
| 5. <i>bridge</i> | 15. <i>average</i> |
| 6. <i>village</i> | 16. <i>beverage</i> |
| 7. <i>package</i> | 17. <i>gesture</i> |
| 8. <i>language</i> | 18. <i>margin</i> |
| 9. <i>danger</i> | 19. <i>rigid</i> |
| 10. <i>engine</i> | 20. <i>exaggerate</i> |

1. Write the words with *j*/ spelled

j (2 words)

dge (5 words)

g followed by *e* or *i* (13 words)

gg (1 word)

2. Write three list words that begin with *j*.

3. Write any list word that ends in each syllable.

a. *j-er*

b. *j-in*

c. *rat*

d. *id*

88

PRACTICE

1. Write the words formed from:

a. *joke* + *ing*

b. *pledge* + *ed*

c. *village* + *er*

d. *package* + *ing*

e. *damage* + *ed*

f. *average* + *ing*

2. Write list words to complete the sentences.

a. Try not to ___ him too harshly.

b. Don't walk on the ___ of the road.

c. A ___ was built over that highway.

d. She spoke the Spanish ___ fluently.

e. Jay's scores were far above ___.

f. Please don't write in the ___ of the page.

3. Some words have more than one meaning. Write a list word that can be used twice in each sentence.

a. The ___ will ___ the contest for us.

b. Can you play ___ while sitting on a ___?

c. Try to ___ your way to the ___ of the crowd.

4. Write list words that are synonyms for these words.

a. *peril* or *risk*

b. *small, simple house*

c. *bodily movement*

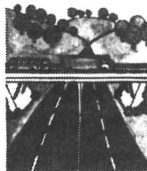
d. *liquid for drinking*

e. *stiff or firm*

f. *overstate*

Three words in the paragraph are written as plurals but should be singular possessives. Find the mistakes and write the words correctly.

The villages judge drove her car across the new bridge. Suddenly the judges car stopped. Much to her dismay, the engines power had failed.



seven spellers published between 1955 and 1960. Ames calculated that, while the spellers contained an average of 3,209 words in grades two through eight, they included 6,043 different words, with but 1,283 in common to the seven series. Moreover, only the second grade word lists had even a modest amount of agreement, twenty-five percent. Some words, Ames found, were presented as much as five grades apart (the word *alone*, for example, was located in grade 3 in two programs, in grade 5 in two programs, and grades 4, 6, and 8 in the remaining programs. Related words sometimes suffered the same fate; for example, in one series *teacher* was found in third grade and *teachers* in sixth grade) (Ames, 1965).

It is ironic as well as unfortunate that, in the quest for efficiency in spelling instruction, such discrepancies resulted. For, as Ames had adroitly observed, by focusing on specific words placed according to frequency of use, important connections among obviously related words had become obscured.

Spelling Instruction at Midcentury **V**isually, spelling books at midtwentieth century looked much different than their ancestors a century earlier. Yet views of the nature of English spelling itself and how words should be learned had not changed very much at all. Rote memorization still remained the cornerstone of spelling instruction, largely due to a perennial distrust of the capricious nature of English

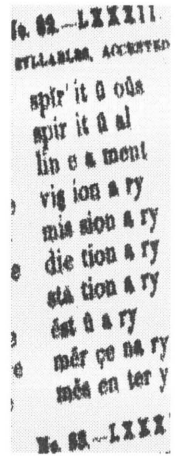
Figure 6.

Silver Burdett Spelling Grade 5

(Morristown, N. J.: Silver Burdett Company, 1986)

By permission of the publisher.

This speller illustrates the wide-spread current practice of listing words according to selected orthographic principles. Note that it directs students to derive other forms of the base words they are studying in the lesson as well as calling their attention to other aspects of the list words, such as their meanings and historical origins.



orthography. At midcentury, the key question concerning spelling instruction still centered on the concept of *generalizability* in learning to spell.

One of the foremost educational researchers, Ernest Horn, had doggedly insisted that spelling instruction should focus on helping students secure mastery of individual words needed in writing rather than to learn orthographic rules that were of limited and questionable utility. Horn, for example, had once claimed that *circumference* could be spelled 396,900,000 ways by using the spellings of identical or similar sounds in words likely to be known by sixth-grade children (Horn, 1929).

There were others, however, who claimed that English spelling was not as errant as it appeared. Among the advocates of this view was Paul Hanna who, with James T. Moore Jr., examined the sound-letter patterns in 3,000 words common to several spelling series. They found, by their method of analysis, that about eighty percent of the sounds of which the words were comprised had predictable spellings (Hanna and Moore, 1953), a conclusion which was later tersely rejected by Horn (Horn, 1957).

1960 and Beyond In reviewing the controversy, D.M. Bennett, an Australian researcher, neatly placed the issue in a proper perspec-

tive when he observed that “the real question is not how ‘regular’ English spelling is, but how far the degree of regularity which undoubtedly does exist can be utilized to improve spelling ability” (Bennett, 1967, p. 71). It is in the context of Bennett’s observation that recent and current understandings of English spelling and learning to spell and their consequences for the spelling curriculum can be reviewed. Two lines of evidence have served to alter present views about spelling instruction.

First, linguists (e.g. Venezky, 1970; Chomsky and Halle, 1968) and educators drawing upon linguistic science (e.g. Hanna et al., 1966; Hodges, 1972) confronted conventional wisdom with evidence to support a description of English orthography that, on balance, is more predictable than commonly believed. Their studies revealed that, at deeper and more complex levels than simple relationships between sounds and letters, English spelling possesses numerous graphic patterns which extend throughout the English lexicon. In turn, these findings gave credence to the possibility that spelling instruction could be systematically organized to aid students in gaining knowledge about the English writing system, knowledge which, in turn, can be utilized in the development of spelling skills. Indeed, an examination of the major spelling programs presently in use reveals that most include instructional elements in which words are studied for their common spelling and structural patterns.

Second, much headway has been made by investigators of written language acquisition in describing the intellectual processes that are involved in learning to spell. (See, for example, Read and Hodges, 1982, for a review of this work). Their findings demonstrate that the proper study of spelling requires that students be placed in much more active roles in learning to spell than the traditional use of rote memorization of word lists has allowed (Hodges, 1981, 1982; Henderson, 1985).

A fuller description of what children *do* in learning to spell and the implications for spelling instruction of current insights into the spelling acquisition process is beyond the scope of this paper. But some pertinent observations nevertheless can be made.

First, children’s spelling attempts need to be seen in terms of *their* frames of reference about English spelling, not those of adults. In contrast to earlier discussed views, the available evidence documents that children make *qualitatively* different judgments about English spelling than adults do; children are not miniature adults who deviate from expected norms. Learning to spell follows a developmental course.

Second, spelling development involves learning, over time, about *words* and their semantic, phonological, and structural relationships in connection with their uses in written language. Learning to spell is one aspect of general written language and proceeds in relation to the amount and richness of students' experiences with writing.

Third, learning to spell is a "holistic" endeavor, in which an interplay of audition, vision, and tactile/muscular senses are involved, though not equally so by all individuals. Learning to spell is a multisensory process which is tempered by individual learning differences.

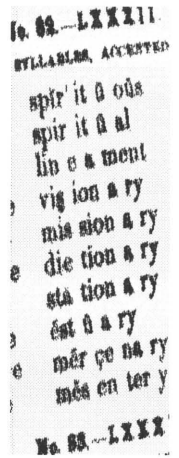
Fourth, spelling errors are "windows" through which the astute teacher can observe a student's growth in spelling ability. Like errors in children's oral language, most spelling errors reveal attempts to apply known information to words that are unknown or of which the writer is unsure. Spelling errors are rarely random in an individual's writing.

There are, of course, gaps remaining to be filled in our understanding of the nature and development of spelling ability, especially with respect to the continuity of learning throughout one's writing lifetime. But present descriptions of learning to spell do force a careful reexamination of the traditional view in which *habits* rather than *knowledge* were believed to form the base of spelling instruction. An increasing awareness of the active role that is played by students, young and old alike, in developing their spelling skills, coupled with a renewed awareness that the proper focus of spelling study concerns *words* and their uses in writing, raises profound questions about the appropriate context of spelling instruction in the language arts curriculum.

This observation is hardly new. Over fifty years ago, the eminent scholar-educator, Edgar Dale, cogently restated the perennial challenge to spelling instruction which Horace Mann had voiced a century before when he said,

Curriculum makers must avoid the current mistake of emphasizing as the goal of spelling instruction the correct arrangement of letters in some 3,500 words. Instead, correct spelling must be seen as an aid in the attainment of the crucial objective which all language arts share, namely, the skillful communication of significant experience....(Dale, 1933, p. 148).

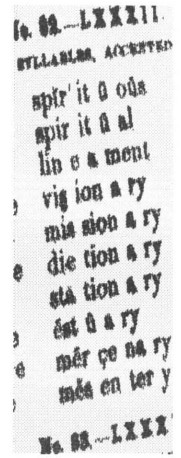
Our brief historical journey has attempted to remind us, as does Dale's sage counsel, that curriculum makers should not lose sight of the ends of spelling instruction in the course of looking at its means.



References

- Ames, Wilbur C. 1965. "A Comparison of Spelling Textbooks," *Elementary English*, 42, 146-150, 214.
- Ayres, Leonard P. 1913. *The Spelling Vocabularies of Personal and Business Letters*. New York: Russell Sage Foundations.
- Bauer, Nicholas. 1916. *The New Orleans Public School Spelling List*.
- Bennett, D.M. 1967. *New Methods and Materials in Spelling: A Critical Analysis*. Victoria, Australia: Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Betts, Emmett A. 1940. *A Spelling Vocabulary Study*. New York: American Book Company.
- 1949. *A Second Spelling Vocabulary Study: Grade Placement in Eight Recent Spellers*. New York; American Book Company.
- Buckingham, B.R. and Dolch, E.W. 1936. *A Combined Word List* . Boston: Ginn.
- Butts, R. Freeman and Cremin, Lawrence A. 1953. *A History of Education in America* . New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Chancellor, W.E. 1910. "Spelling: 1000 Words." *Journal of Education*, 71, 488-489, 522, 545-546, 573, 578, 607-608
- Chesterfield, Philip Dormer Stanhope. 1929. *Letters of Lord Chesterfield to His Son*. London & Toronto: Dent & Sons. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co.
- Chomsky, Noam and Halle, Morris. 1968. *The Sound Pattern of English*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.
- Dale, Edgar. 1933. "The Curriculum in Spelling." *Educational Research Bulletin*, 12, 148-156.
- Dolch, Edward W. 1927. "Grade Vocabularies." *Journal of Educational Research*, 16, 16-26.
- Fitzgerald, James A. 1934. "The Vocabulary of Children's Letters Written in Life Outside of School." *The Elementary School Journal*, 34, 358-370.
- 1952. "Spelling Words Difficult for Children in Grades II-VI." *The Elementary School Journal*, 53, 221-228.

- Foran, Thomas G. 1930. "The Spelling Vocabulary." *Catholic Educational Review*, 28, 587-600.
- Greene, Harry A. 1954. *The New Iowa Spelling Scale*. Iowa City, Iowa: State University of Iowa.
- Gregory, B.C. 1907-08. "The Rationale of Spelling." *The Elementary School Teacher*, 8, 40-55.
- Hanna, Paul R. and Moore, James T. Jr. 1953. "Spelling — From Spoken Word to Written Symbol." *The Elementary School Journal*, 53., 329-337.
- Hanna, Paul R., Hanna, Jean S., Hodges, Richard E., and Rudorf, Erwin H. 1966. *Phoneme-Grapheme Correspondences as Cues to Spelling Improvement*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Henderson, Edmund. 1985. *Teaching Spelling*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Hodges, Richard E. 1972. "Theoretical Frameworks of English Orthography," *Elementary English*, 49, 1089-1097, 1105.
- 1977. "In Adam's Fall: A Brief History of Spelling Instruction in the United States." In *Reading and Writing Instruction in the United States: Historical Trends*. H. Alan Robinson, ed. Urbana, Ill. and Newark, Del.: ERIC/International Reading Association.
- 1981. *Learning to Spell*. Urbana, Ill.: ERIC/National Council of Teachers of English.
- 1982. *Improving Spelling and Vocabulary in the Secondary School*. Urbana, Ill.: ERIC/National Council of Teachers of English.
- Horn, Ernest. 1926. "A Basic Writing Vocabulary: 10,000 Words Most Commonly Used in Writing." *University of Iowa Monographs in Education*, No. 4. Iowa City, Iowa: College of Education, University of Iowa.
- 1929. "A Source of Confusion in Spelling." *Journal of Educational Research*, 19, 47-55.
- 1957. "Phonetics and Spelling". *The Elementary School Journal*, 57, 424-432.



- Jones, W.F. 1913. *Concrete Investigation of the Materials of English Spelling*. Vermillion, South Dakota: University of South Dakota.
- Littleford, George E. 1965. *Early Schools and School-Books of New England*. New York: Russell & Russell (First published in 1904).
- Mann, Horace. 1839. "Spelling." *The Common School Journal*. 1, 353-361.
- 1840. "Lecture on the Best Mode of Preparing and Using Spelling Books." In *Lectures on Education*. Boston: Marsh, Copen, Lyon, and Webb.
- 1844. "Seventh Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board." In *Education in the United States: A Documentary History*, Vol. 2, ed. Sol Cohen, pp. 1083-1094. New York: Random House, 1974.
- McKee, Paul. 1939. *Language in the Elementary School: Composition, Spelling, and Writing*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Michael, Ian. 1970. *English Grammatical Categories and the Tradition to 1800*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Mulcaster, Richard. 1970. *The First Part of the Elementary, 1582*. Menston, England: The Scolar Press.
- Read, Charles and Hodges, Richard E. 1982. "Spelling." In *Encyclopedia of Educational Research*. 5th ed., ed. Harold Mitzel. New York: Macmillan.
- Rice, J.M. 1897. "The Futility of the Spelling Grind." *The Forum*. 23, 409-419.
- Selke, Erich. 1929. "A Study of the Vocabulary in Ten Spellers." *The Elementary School Journal*. 29, 767-770.
- Venezky, Richard L. 1970. *The Structure of English Orthography*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Waterman, Ivan R. and Melbo, Irving R. 1935. "Evaluation of Spelling Textbooks." *The Elementary School Journal*, 16, 44-52.
- Wise, Carl T. 1934. "Selection and Gradation of Words in Spelling." *The Elementary School Journal*, 34, 754-766.