

**THE TEACHING OF SPELLING: A
CRITICAL STUDY OF RECENT
TENDENCIES IN METHOD.
VOL.XII. NOVEMBER, 1911. NO.5.
[PP.259-330]**

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A critical study of recent tendencies in method

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	i
OUTLINE	4
I. THE NEED TO STUDY OUR INSTRUCTION IN SPELLING	9
II. THE CHANGED STATUS OF SPELLING	12
III. THE RELATION OF SPELLING TO OTHER SCHOOL SUBJECTS	17
IV. THE SELECTION OF SPELLING MATERIALS	20
V. THE GRADING AND CLASSIFICATION OF WORDS	25
VI. ASSOCIATING MEANING, PRONUNCIATION, AND SPELLING	29
VII. TEACHING THE MEANING OF WORDS	34
VIII. TEACHING THE PRONUNCIATION OF WORDS	38
IX. TEACHING THE ORDER OF LETTERS	43
X. DEVELOPING THE INDEPENDENT POWER OF THE PUPIL	52
XI. TESTING SPELLING	60
XII. THE CORRECTION OF MISSPELLINGS	64
XIII. THE QUANTITY OF FORMAL INSTRUCTION	69

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PREFACE

The purpose of this study is to present a survey of contemporaneous tendencies in the teaching of spelling. It is a summary of the situation in which the elementary teacher finds himself, with some explanation of the forces, traditional and radical, which have moulded it. No attempt is made to deal with every controversy or problem; space would not permit. Merely the more important factors have been analyzed, for these establish the structure of our difficulties. When these are understood the lesser problems find a ready explanation.

Our traditions are frequently very insistent. Often a single mode of teaching will completely subordinate other supplemental means. No less dominating is reform, with its passion for the particular idea to which it has attached itself. The result is that teachers standing in the midst of many practical pressures, are not always able to comprehend the situation as a whole, to view each particular tendency in its relative place and complete setting. This review is designed to offer the necessary perspective. It outlines the major controversies, traces their recent evolution, and gives some critical estimate of their worth.

The whole effort of the study is to study a live situation, for institutional customs have an active moulding power. Lay a wide reform upon the school, and the result will always be somewhat disappointing to the reformer. The tradition upon which reform has been laid is not static; it has force and modifies every new idea. There are lines of most and least

resistance in every institution and these must be taken into account in any progressive policy, for history is not the past devitalized at the present; it is the future in germ and about to be projected. For this reason, the historical method is used throughout. Nothing illuminates the present as an understanding of immediately preceding situations. Any basic interpretation of to-day's practices is dependent upon a comprehension of yesterday's.

If the basic method emphasized is historical, the critical method of the philosopher of education has been everywhere superimposed. For mere facts must be evaluated, expressed in terms of their significance for the school's purposes and given a relative worth in the whole scheme of teaching methods. Hence modern sociology and psychology, and the other studies from which education gains its partial scientific criticisms and sanctions, have offered standards for measuring the worth of classroom teaching. And then, too, the philosophy of education, just because it views education as a whole from norms erected by its own situation, reveals many inconsistencies, over-emphases, and false relations, readily perceived if the elements of the situation are seen in their total setting. Hence the study goes beyond a simple historical tracing of particular methods and a descriptive statement of the manner in which these are operative in the present. It is constructive in that it suggests the particular function of each method and the manner in which these are to supplement each other in the whole work of instructing children in spelling.

Inevitably the gaps in our knowledge are revealed. Not all the experience we have can interpret the whole story. The empirical discoveries of the teacher, presented in pedagogical tradition, and the criticisms of the analyst, stated in current theory, fall short of completeness. There is need of a more minute and accurate evaluation of teaching methods which only the experimentalists in teaching can give us. For them this study will have worth. It will point the issues which are of practical concern and suggest the definite bits of truth which must be known before we can progress rationally. It is far better that the educational psychologist and the comparative experimentalist in teaching study the issues which are real

to the professional teachers. His results will then be more readily heeded by the great masses of teachers, for the facts revealed by his inquiries will be eagerly received and applied.

It is hoped, therefore, that the monograph here presented will assist in the improvement of our methods of teaching spelling: (1) directly, by giving a wider comprehension of the tendencies now effective in our spelling situation; and (2) indirectly, by suggesting a series of practical problems that require the scientific contributions of the experimentalists in teaching.

H. S.]

OUTLINE

	PAGE
I. THE NEED TO STUDY OUR INSTRUCTION IN SPELLING	9
1. Our Sensitiveness to Spelling Defects	9
2. Resulting Complexity of Methods	10
3. The Need of Evaluation	10
4. A Preliminary Survey of Present Methods	11
II. THE CHANGED STATUS OF SPELLING	12
1. Teaching Subordinates Testing	12
2. Prevention Supplements Correction	13
3. Vital Instruction Supersedes Formal Work	14
4. Change in the Type of Motivation	14
5. Spelling Reflects General Educational Progress	15
III. THE RELATION OF SPELLING TO OTHER SCHOOL SUBJECTS	17
1. The Early Connection of Reading and Spelling	17
2. Its Influence	17
3. Spelling as a Separate Subject	18
4. The Movement for Correlation	18
5. The Present Relationship	19
IV. THE SELECTION OF SPELLING MATERIALS	20
1. The Importance of the Text-Book	20
2. The Influence of the Earliest Spellers	20
3. Books Based on Classroom Trial	21
4. The Need of Investigating Adult Vocabularies	22
5. Supplementary Spelling Lists	22
6. Grade Lists	22
7. Class Lists	23
8. Personal Lists	23
V. THE GRADING AND CLASSIFICATION OF WORDS	25
1. Grading by Number of Syllables	25
2. New Bases of Classification	26
3. Classification by Structure	26
4. Classifications by Meaning or Use	27
5. Classifications upon Both Bases	27

VI. ASSOCIATING MEANING, PRONUNCIATION AND SPELLING	29
1. The Three Factors to be Associated	29
2. Formal Work Neglects Meanings	30
3. The Newer Methods Correct this Neglect	30
4. Inadequate Presentation of Essential Factors	30
5. The Need of Skepticism as to Special Methods	32
6. The Proper Sequence of Association	32
7. The Method of Multiple Association	33
VII. TEACHING THE MEANING OF WORDS	34
1. Dependence of Early Methods upon an Oral Vocabulary	34
2. Causes Operating to Force Content into the Spelling Period	34
3. The More Recent Attempts to Give Meanings to Words	35
VIII. TEACHING THE PRONUNCIATION OF WORDS	38
1. How the Problem of Pronunciation Enters	38
2. The Artificial Intimacy between Pronunciation and Spelling	38
3. Restoring the Natural Relation between Pronunciation and Meaning	39
4. Three Modes of Getting Pronunciation	40
5. The Emphasis of Progressive Practice	40
6. Some Specific Reforms	40
7. The Case of the Phonogram	41
8. Advantages of the Phonogram	41
IX. TEACHING THE ORDER OF LETTERS	43
1. The Central Problem in Spelling	43
2. Its Isolation Made Spelling Formal	43
3. Reform Has Succeeded Mainly through Attacking this Isolation	44
4. The Special Technique of Mastering the Order of Letters	44
5. Oral Spelling	44
6. The Emphasis on Sound Elements	45
7. Phonetic Translation Arises from Oral Spelling	45
8. The Method of Phonetic Translation	46
9. Its Defective Assumption of Pronunciation	46
10. The Probability of Inaccurate Translation	47
11. The Breakdown of Translation in Irregular Spellings	47
12. The Long Concealment of These Defects	47
13. Copying	48