

**THE SENTENCE METHOD OF
TEACHING READING,
WRITING AND SPELLING:
A MANUAL FOR TEACHERS**

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The Sentence Method of Teaching Reading, Writing and Spelling: A Manual for Teachers by
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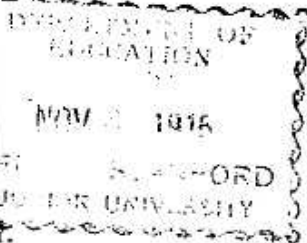
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SENTENCE METHOD
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A MANUAL FOR TEACHERS

—BY—
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FORMER PRINCIPAL STATE NORMAL SCHOOL, FREDU, NEB.

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PREFACE

In his experience as teacher and superintendent of schools, it became evident to the author, many years ago, that there was something fundamentally wrong in the ordinary methods of teaching reading, writing, and spelling. Viewed from the standpoint of economy, the result bore no just ratio to the time and effort devoted to these branches; and viewed from the stand-point of education, the first years of instruction seemed imperfect and unsatisfactory. This conviction, which he shared with many teachers throughout the country, led to examination and experiment.

In 1858 the phonetic system was introduced into the schools of Syracuse, N. Y., and for a time it was thought that the true method of teaching children to read had been discovered. After a trial of five years, however, it was seen that while pupils learned to read by this method in much less time than usual, and attained a high state of excellence in articulation, their reading was nearly as mechanical as be-

fore, and few of them became good spellers. The two systems of analysis, phonic and graphic, had so little in common that permanent confusion was produced in the mind.

The word method, next tried, was much more productive of good results than any that had preceded it; yet by this method words were treated as units, independent of sentences, and reading almost of necessity became a series of independent pronunciations, perpetuating the mechanical results of the old methods.

These experiments and their result led to further investigation, especially in the line of psychology. From a close observation of the action of the mind, and of the relations of language to thought, it was seen that the unit of thinking is a thought, and therefore that the unit of expression is a sentence. The obvious deduction was, that the sentence ought to be made the basis of reading.

In 1870 a series of experiments was instituted in the schools of Binghamton, N. Y., to subject this theory to a practical test. The results far exceeded expectation in the direct teaching of reading, spelling, and writing; and led to other results in awakening mind and in influencing conduct which were

unexpected and gratifying. It is safe to assume that the problem how to teach these branches successfully has been solved.

This little manual is substantially a record of the plans adopted, and of the principles involved in these experiments at Binghamton. It is published with the hope that it may prove a help to those who have no time or opportunity for original experiment, and an incentive to further investigation in this direction.

The author hereby expresses his obligations to his friend James Johonnot, for valuable assistance in the final preparation of this work. The large experience of this gentleman as an educator, and his sound judgment in all matters of education, were constantly laid under contribution when this problem was worked out.

COUNCIL BLUFFS, IOWA, January 1, 1881.

INTRODUCTION

Goethe says, "Let no man think he can conquer the errors of his youth. If he has grown up in enviable freedom, surrounded by beautiful and worthy objects; if his masters have taught him what he first ought to know for more easily comprehending what follows; if his first operations have been so guided that, without altering his habits, he can more easily accomplish what is excellent in the future; then such a one will lead a purer, a more perfect and happier life than another man who has wasted his youth in opposition and error."

This statement is an admirable summary of our most advanced ideas concerning education. In our educational processes we have but to ascertain the manner and order in the use of intellectual faculties and power in performing real life work, and then guide and direct the study of the youth, that they may acquire the use of their powers in the same manner and order.

Some years since, while engaged in a business

that brought me in contact with large numbers of literary, business, and professional men, I instituted a series of inquiries in regard to their habits of reading, writing, and spelling. From the answers received several items of interest were evolved.

First, Spelling. My question was "When in doubt in regard to the spelling of a word, how do you assure yourself?" The answer, in substance, was, "I write the word, and when it looks right, I assume it is correct." Upon further questioning, they were unanimous in the statement that they had adopted this method as a necessity after they had left school and entered upon the active duties of life. Only three or four, out of some hundreds questioned, thought of the word as they had learned it from the spelling book, and these were teachers.

Second, Reading. In regard to reading I found that most of those who had learned to read in school were slow readers, pronouncing the word mentally, if not aloud. Many found it difficult to take in the author's meaning without pronouncing the words audibly. On the other hand, those who had learned to read at an early period before attending school, and many of whom could not remember the time they could not read, were rapid readers. Their eye

would pass over the page with little or no consciousness of the words, and they would take in the thought of the author much more rapidly than if the words were pronounced. These persons had acquired the art of reading without conscious effort on their part or on the part of others. Such persons could always spell, and they were able to detect a misspelled word in the most rapid reading. They were also usually fluent writers.

Third, Penmanship. The results of observation and inquiry in regard to penmanship were equally interesting. Persons who do much of original composition are seldom good penmen. I have never found a person who composed in the hand taught and practised in school. Most who practised some one of the conventional systems for years in schools, abandoned it when called upon to perform real work, only to acquire a hand ugly in appearance, and difficult to decipher.

The conclusions drawn from these facts are :—

First. That the methods in spelling and penmanship, upon which so much time and labor have been bestowed in the school, are laid aside the moment the student enters upon the active duties of life; and that for the performance of these duties