

# Spelling Reform Anthology edited by Newell W. Tune

## §17. Psychology Applied to Spelling

This section dwells on the psychological effects of difficulties in and ability to learn to read and spell.

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[Spelling Reform Anthology §17.1 pp228,229 in the printed version]

[Spelling Progress Bulletin October 1961 pp10,11 in the printed version]

### 1. How Our Spelling Damages the Mind, by Frederick A. Fernald, Ph. D.

Learning to read the English language is one of the worst mind-stunting processes that has ever formed a part of the education of any people. Its evil influence arises from the partly phonetic, partly lawless character of English spelling. Altho each letter represents some sound oftener than any other, there is hardly a letter in the alphabet that does not represent more than one sound, and hardly a sound in the language that is not represented in several ways, while many words are written with as many silent letters as significant ones. Frequently, there is nothing in a word to indicate in which of these ways its component sounds are represented, nothing in the written group of letters to show which sounds they stand for, and which of them, if any, are silent, so that a learner can never be sure of pronouncing rightly an English word that he has not heard spoken, nor of spelling correctly one that he has never seen written. The spelling of almost every word must be learned by sheer force of memory. In this work the pupil's reasoning powers cannot be utilized, but must be subdued, while his memory is sadly overworked. In the affairs of the child's daily life, the logical following of rules is rewarded; in learning to read, it brings him only bewilderment and discomforture. He is taught that *b-o-n-e* stands for *bōn* (not *bo-ne*), and *t-o-n-e* for *tōn*, but also that *d-o-n-e* stands for *dun*, that *g-o-n-e* spells *gawn*, *m-o-v-e* spells *moov*, and *b-r-o-n-z-e* is *bronz*. Now when he comes in reading to another similar word, as *none*, he has no means of telling whether to call it *non*, *nun*, *noon*, or *non*; he can only took up at the teacher and wait to be told. The influence of the spelling class quickly drives him to *repress any inclination to reason*, and he quickly gives himself up to a blind following of authority. Few children learn English spelling without getting the pernicious notion that cramming is better than thinking, and that common sense is a

*treacherous guide*. The child who can take what he is told without asking why, who can repeat a rule without troubling himself about its meaning, gets along best. On the other hand, the child who has difficulty in learning to spell, may have to suppress his logical faculties. For while he is constantly trying to spell according to some principle, some rule, and of course, coming to grief. Thus a boy who had long been at the foot of his spelling class, was one day given the word *ghost*, and, making a desperate attempt at analogy, (with *roast*), spelled it *goast*. Thus bringing shouts of laughter from his fellow students, he said, with clenched fist and tearful eyes, "You needn't laugh; you all spell homlier 'n that!" Thus, so much attention is given to spelling that children get false ideas of its importance.

The *spelling*, or graphic representation, becomes to them *the word*, while the *spoken word* is called the pronunciation, and is only thought of as an appendage. They learn to despise the poor speller, a prejudice which is never out-grown, and above all they become so absorbed in the manipulation of words that they have little chance to grasp the significance of the ideas for which the words were intended to stand.

If our notation of numbers were as irregular as our notation of speech, so that the numbers from 40 to 45, for instance, should be written as follows: 40, 741, 420, 43, 414, 225; and if no one could tell at sight whether a number like 7,243,812 contained several figures which were "silent," or had exceptional values, who can doubt that the study of arithmetic, instead of being a valuable discipline, would be mere enervating drudgery? If it were proposed that children should learn a style of writing music which gave different values to the same characters, similarly placed, in different pieces and added a host of "silent" notes, the evils of learning such a system would be plainly seen. Yet many people who have forgotten their own sufferings in the spelling class cannot see that children are so very much perplexed in learning to spell, or perhaps maintain that the struggle involved "is good for them."

"I know," says Max Muller, "there are persons who can defend anything, and who hold that it is due to this very discipline that the English character is what it is; that it retains respect for authority; that it does not require a reason for everything; and that it does not admit that inconceivable is therefore impossible. Even English orthodoxy has been traced back to that hidden source, because a child once accustomed to believe that *t-h-o-u-g-h* is *tho*, and that *through* is *thru*, would afterwards believe anything. It may be so; still I doubt whether even such objects would justify such means." Lord Lytton said, "A more lying, roundabout, puzzle-headed delusion than that by which we confuse the clear instincts of truth in our accursed system of spelling was never concocted by the father of falsehood. . . How can a system of education flourish that begins by so monstrous a falsehood, which the sense of hearing suffices to contradict?"

Here is a chief cause of the incapacity for thinking which college students bring into the science laboratories. This irrational process, taken up when the child enters school, occupying a large share of his time, and continuing for six or eight years, has a powerful influence in shaping his plastic mind. When at last he is allowed to take up the study of nature, at the wrong end of his school career, what wonder that he sits with folded hands, waiting to be told facts to commit to memory, that he cannot realize what a law or rule is, and does not know to use his reason in

deducing the answer to a problem? Rational education will never flourish as it should till a reformation in the reaching of reading and spelling has been accomplished. Furthermore, Mr. J. H. Gladstone, member of the English School Board for London, has computed the number of hours spent by children in learning to read and spell English to be 2,320, while, in gaining an equal knowledge of their native tongue, Italian children spend only 945 hours. The difference amounts to nearly two school years, and shows under what a disadvantage English-speaking children labor. Can anyone believe that 4,923,451, or 13.4% of our population over ten years of age would be illiterate if learning to read were not so formidable task? (These are government statistics of 1885; now it is a little higher due to the influx of foreigners and the apathy of the public). In Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland and some German states there are hardly any illiterates. Compare their systems of spelling.

The most striking testimony to the irregularity of our spelling is the adoption by many teachers of a sort of Chinese mode of teaching reading. (Now it is called the whole word method!) The children are not taught that the letters represent constituent sounds of words, but they learn to recognize each group of letters as an arbitrary compound symbol standing for a word. This is more of a dead drag on the memory than even the A-B-C method, and if it could be completely carried out, would be a vastly longer process. The effect on the mind is certainly not good. Minds *do* have a saturation point.

"But what can be done," will be asked, "shall our children grow up without learning to spell?" No, but the memorizing of these anomalies and contradictions can be, at least, put off till the pupil's minds are in little danger of being perverted by it. Enough of the enormous amount of time spent on this drugery can be saved to make possible the introduction of the study of *things* into the primary schools, and many of the one hundred millions of dollars which we spend each year for public education can be turned to imparting real knowledge instead of the mere tools of knowledge. These ends may be attained by the use of phonetic spelling as an introduction to the customary spelling. Children *can* and *do* learn to read English, spelled phonetically, in a very few lessons, and then learn the traditional spelling so quickly afterward that much less time is required for the whole process than is commonly devoted to memorizing the current spelling alone. Classes taught to read this way, in Massachusetts, so early as 1851, proved the advantage of the method to the satisfaction of that able educator, Dr. Horace Mann, and the method has been successfully employed in many places in this country and in the British Isles. The following extract from a letter written by Mr. Wm. Colbourne, manager of the Dorset Bank, at Sturminster, England, furnishes a special example:

"My little Sidney, who is now a few months more than four years old, will read any phonetic book without the slightest hesitation; the hardest names or the longest words in the Old or New Testament form no obstacle to him. And how long do you think it took me - for I am his teacher - to impart to him this power? Why, something less than *eight hours!* You may believe it or not as you like, but I am confident that not more than that amount of time was spent on him, and that it was in snatches of five minutes at a time, while tea was getting ready. I know you will be inclined to say, 'All that is very well, but what is the use of reading phonetic books? He is still far off, and may be farther, from reading conventional books! But in this you are mistaken. Take another example: His

next elder brother, a boy of six years, has had a phonetic education so far. What is the consequence? Why, reading in the first stage was so delightful and easy a thing, for him that he taught *himself* to read regular spelling, and it would be a difficult matter to find one boy in twenty, of a corresponding age, who could read half so well as he can in any book. Again my oldest boy has written more phonetic shorthand and longhand, perhaps, than any boy of his age (eleven years) in the kingdom; and no one, I dare say, has had less to do with that absurdity of absurdities, the spelling book! He is now at a first rate school in Wiltshire, and in the half-year preceding Christmas he carried off the prize for *orthography* in a contest for boys, some of them his senior by years!"

Mrs. E. B. Burnz, of New York, says, in regard to her experience in Nashville, soon after the Civil War, "The phonetic teaching in the Fisk School, as elsewhere, proved all cavil that with phonetic books as much could be accomplished in four months in teaching to read, as by a full year by the common method. And, moreover, it showed that there is no difficulty experienced by children in passing from the phonetic to ordinary printed books. After going through the phonetic primer and First and Second Reader, the children passed at once into the Second Reader in common print, and from the phonetic Gospel into the common New Testament." Successful experiments in common schools are on record in sufficient numbers to prove the practicability of the method.

I am not unaware of the efforts being made to replace the current spelling by a phonetic system for all purposes, but that is a matter quite distinct from the subject of this article; and all who believe that the orderly and vigorous development of the mental faculties should be the chief aim in education, whether they favor or oppose the idea of spelling reform, should work together for the spread of the phonetic method of teaching reading.

*(Editor's note: Away back in 1885, before even the oldest of our present teachers were born, we have a plea for that very technique in the teaching of reading, in which 24 English primary schools started out this Fall, under the aegis of London University and Sir James Pitman, and others. Even at the time that this article appeared in the Popular Science Monthly, the technique was not new, but tried and tested, dating back not only in England but in our own country to as early as 1851. To the time, that is to say, of the early childhood of the great-great-grand-parents of the six year olds who, thruout the length and breadth of our land we are now "readying" for that damage to their minds that this article describes.*

Will this new English experiment wake us up? Over *there* it has the wholehearted backing of the major teaching organizations. What is the attitude of *ours*? So far it is complete silence! (Probably due to the scepticism in the closed minds of our hierarchy of education).

[Spelling Reform Anthology §17.2 pp229-231 in the printed version]  
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Spring 1977 pp16-18 in the printed version]

## 2. The Three F's of Education – Frustration, Fear, Failure! by Harvie Barnard\*

\*SR-1 used. (Spelling reform, first step)

What's gone wrong with our three basics of education - Readin', Riting an' Rithmetic? Quite a lot, but why, and how?

Interlined with the time-honored 3 R's we've had another trio, the 3 F's, and in too great a percentage of our young pupils these 3 F's have spelled disaster-flunk and dropout. And after that, what? Usually delinquency, followed by the inevitable effort to "make a living," a deviate conduct, or more simply, crime and criminality in all its terrifying and destructive aspects.

We are well acquainted with the consequences of academic failure, and few who have given eny thot or study to the problem of deviant social behavior - criminality in all its grotesque forms - would dispute the facts of experience which indicate that a well-defined chain of events lead to anti-social or deviant behavior, in a word, "crime."

If we are to examine the initial difficulties inherent in lerning, our observations would begin with the child shortly after birth. Altho this has been attempted and is being done in isolated instances, the practical problems of educating each child are usually not apparent until the child enters the public school program, which would be kindergarten, first grade, or, in more fortunate circumstances, "preschool", "early school," or eny similar plan for getting the lerning process started "as soon as possible.

In situations where there is neither preschool or kindergarten, teachers are frequently faced with a difficult teaching and lerning condition described as "lack of rediness," which can and often does lead to serious later problems both for the child and the teacher. It is at this specific point, the start of the structured or class system of instruction, that the "Three Fs of Education" may take root and develop to the detriment of the child and to the tragic loss to society, as well as to the individual concerned.

The first and beginning stage in the chain of events leading to deviant behavior is FRUSTRATION. Without attempting to outline all the situations, causes and conditions leading to frustrations - which will certainly vary with the individual - it would be reasonable to agree that *situations which cause confusion* in the consciousness or mind of the child are likely to result in a frustration condition.

There are an almost infinite number of situations which way and do cause confusion and/or frustration for the child or for anyone. In the case of the young pupil, such situations are redily predictable, and thus should be avoidable. The trained and experienced teacher, whether the subject be mathematics, composition, or reading, knows the obstacles, hurdles, and road blocks to lerning in the subject being taught. It is this knowledge of probable confusion as well as the subject matter, which enables the instructor to develop a lerning situation while avoiding frustration of the student or of eny group of students.

Without going into the specific detail of any one subject, (for the moment), it would be helpful to understand and to agree that certain principles of instruction be observed. The material to be presented must be - for the beginner at least - not only within the comprehension of the pupil, but also simple, short, obvious, and in small bits. As more bits and segments of information are added, each additional bit should in some manner agree with, or relate to, or "square" with what has already been taught, thus reinforcing the learning process. To use an adult term, the facts must be consistent and logical, and they must fit together to form a reasonable "picture." If the facts or bits of information or data are consistent, logical and reasonable, they will be accepted and are more likely to be remembered and "learned" than if they are illogical, inconsistent, or unreasonable. It is precisely those bits of input which are *not* logical or consistent which cause confusion because they dissociate the item being learned from previous items learned. (How many times have you asked yourself, "is it 'i' before e, or i after e?") And unless a prompt and reasonable correction or explanation is provided which successfully clarifies an illogical fact or situation, the pupil remains confused. And if confusion is heaped upon confusion, as in the case of presenting new information more rapidly than it can be assimilated (added to and fitted into the established "picture" or set of data), then we have FRUSTRATION, which is a condition of virtual hopelessness as far, as any further learning is concerned. Thus, when a pupil arrives at a frustration situation, he cannot proceed. So when his learning process is roadblocked, cut off, thwarted or harmed, there will be an inevitable consequence - the *first stage of which is FEAR!*

Fear, the 2nd F of the three F's of education, takes many forms and produces a varied and unpredictable array of reactions. To the individual, such reactions are altogether terrifying and often uncontrollable. To the teacher, who may not be fully aware of the psychological problem which has developed, the pupil may appear to be withdrawn, dull, mischievous, troublesome, perhaps what the teacher considers "unreachable." At this point some form of psychological rescue is imperative - but is often missing. An experienced, perceptive, and pupil oriented teacher will recognize and appreciate the urgency of the situation - provided there are not too many causes of frustration going on all at the same time. But if - and the situation is not at all uncommon - there are large classes, (too large to be adequately handled by one teacher), little Jonny is not going to get the rescue when he needs it most.

The pupil's fear then proceeds into a veritable nightmare of secondary reactions. We then have the "disturbed" child, and when this condition becomes repetitive or continuous we have a certain and truly tragic result - FAILURE! There's not too much that can be said about failure, except that it is altogether too commonplace, and that it should never be permitted to happen. Perhaps this is the reason that so many students are "passed," when in fact they are failing, or have failed, and the educational system is trying to *cover up its failures* by ignoring the truth and by clumsily attempting to deceive the failing pupil. But the child is NOT deceived - even though his parents may be. He suffers and his teachers suffer. If he is able to read at all, it is with great difficulty - slowly and laboriously - with little or no comprehension.

Our academic failure may be buoyed up and sustained by various non-academic interests - sports, band, orchestra, choral groups, social events, school politics, and perhaps by some success in manual arts - shop work or art - or possibly mechanical drawing or graphics. But in those subjects which depend to a large extent on reading - which includes all courses leading to college level studies or any branch of any profession - our non-reader or semi-literate pupil is not doing passable work and is getting by on D's, minimal standards and a policy which sees, "Nobody flunks - we can't afford to have dropouts roaming the streets getting into trouble. It's better for the taxpayers that the teachers be babysitters and keep these failures in school rather than in jails or "reform schools."

But in spite of the best efforts of teachers and of the administrators, some quit, a few have to be "transferred" to other facilities, and others mysteriously disappear from the academic scene. Once in a while some phenomenal youngster finds himself a job, takes his work seriously, digs in and by sheer personal effort becomes self-taught and eventually overcomes his past failures. These are the exceptions, the stand-outs, the fellows who didn't quite fit in - to the academic pattern of life but who somehow fought off their frustrations, fears and early defeats. But despite the very few who are able to overcome - to beat the statistics and disprove the rule - there are an overwhelming majority of those succumbing to the three F's who wind up as drop-outs, delinquents and social deviants. It is an established statistical fact that approximately two thirds of our delinquent young people are functionally illiterate and have gone the 3 F route. Also it is the sad truth that from 50% to 80% of our convicts are in this same category.

In summary, the inescapable conclusion is that belonging with frustration in the early years, those who fall under the depressing spell of failure - academic or otherwise - are immeasurably handicapped and are almost certain to drift or become dragged into deviant behavior of one kind or another. This is simply a kind way of saying that failure to be able to compete in the job market - legitimate work, that is - leads more or less directly to illegal work or crime. And so, where the 3 F's take precedence over the 3 R's, regardless of when or where the failure begins - at home, (preschool), in the early grades, or later in the academic program, the ultimate result is substantially the same.

At this point in our logic it should be fairly obvious that our problem in education is to plan and organize the subject matter in all areas of instruction so as to avoid confusion and frustration. In many areas this has already been accomplished, notably in the sciences and in the manual arts. Obvious weaknesses still remain in certain sections of communication, particularly in reading, in writing, and in clarity of verbal expression - speech. These deficiencies relate to, and indeed constitute a reflection of the capacity for logical thought. To communicate clearly, it is necessary to think clearly, and again, this capacity requires mastery of the 3 R's and avoidance of the 3 F's.

Learning to communicate well, or at all, implies learning to think - to think logically, honestly, and toward some objective or purpose. This involves the use of language, whether employed verbally - in spoken expression - or in written-in symbols or some form of script - or within the mind, in the imagination. But the idea or concept which is to be communicated cannot be conveyed from one mind to another without the use of some audible, visible, or tactile means, and this calls for language, and language requires the use of some medium of expression which in its simplest form could be called "words." The use of words, whether spoken, written, or sent as some form of electronic or vibrational signal becomes our means of transmitting the language we choose to use.

Learning the use of the ABC's - or perhaps some other alphabet," while at the same time avoiding the 3 F's, becomes the primary object of education, and when educators learn how best to accomplish this, perhaps our educational processes will improve. A fairly straightforward and unsophisticated procedure for approaching and progressing toward a solution (perhaps we should say 'a prudent choice'), has been developed, put into practice on a limited yet fairly extensive scale, and will be proposed in a later discussion.

*[Spelling Reform Anthology §17.3 p231 in the printed version]*  
*[Spelling Progress Bulletin Spring 1977 p16 in the printed version]*

### **3. What is Reading? an Answer, by Harvie Barnard\***

Written in SR-1\*

\*Tacoma, Wa.

\**Note:* In "SR-1" we write 'e' for the clear "short" vowel sound as in 'bet', regardless of present usage. (As in *eny, meny, redy, sed, and stedy*). These simple changes in spelling involve about 300 commonly used words.

Not long ago I was blest with a very unusual experience, an opportunity to "beard a lion in his den." The "lion" was a supervisor and "Director of Reading" in a large and affluently administered school district in a typical medium sized American city.

Following a rather devious and round-about circumvention of the topic at hand, "reading" I finally succeeded in maneuvering the conversation to the subject of "reading problems." This eventually led to, "What is Reading?" When this definitely pertinent question was approached, there was a slight pause, whereupon the good Director somewhat pontificately selected a fresh piece of chalk, rolled his well-padded chair across to the chalkboard, and proceeded to write two words in a rather scrawly penmanship.

These precious words were, "Analysis", and "Synthesis." The good Doctor then glanced rather condescendingly in my direction as if to say, "You'll never really understand this," and then proceeded with an involved explanation. I confess, it truly was all gobbledegook to me, and quite frankly I did not follow the elucidation nor the blizzard of psycholinguistic verbiage which gushed forth. When, after a few minutes he realized that. I was well snowed, he smiled triumphantly and remarked, "As you can plainly see, reading is an extremely complicated, involved, and complex mental process. It would require hours to make this clear to you, and I doubt if we have time for all that."

I nodded agreement, but ventured a comment of my own. I sed, "You might be surprised to know that I can give you a very understandable definition of reading in just one (1) word, or, if you prefer, in one brief and redily understood sentence." And then, while he was deciding whether or not to throw me out of his office, or call the janitor to do it for him, I ventured the secret word. The word was VISUALIZATION! "Yes," I added, "just a clear mental picture obtained from a combination of symbols - words - which have been established in the memory of the reader as an image, or a "visualization."

"Will you please say that agen?" he asked, rather incredulously. I obliged, adding, "That's why all the children's spellers and readers, from the McGuffey readers on, as well as most of the better children's dictionaries, are very liberally sprinkled with illustrations, pictures, drawings illustrating the words being used, spelled, defined or restated (respelled) in fonetic English."

When I said "Fonetic English," the gentleman seemed to regain his composure. He grinned somewhat benignly - perhaps a little devilishly - as if getting all set up to nail me to the nearest wall, and gave forth with what was intended to be the coup-de-grace; "So, you are one of those Simplified Spelling guys?"

It appeared that he had me well cornered, and in the panic of sheer self-defence confessed that perhaps I was that kind of a "nut" - along with a considerable number of fairly well known people, including Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens), George Bernard Shaw, T. R. Roosevelt, Sir James Pitman, Dr. Wm. D. Whitney, and more recently John Henry Martin, Abraham Tauber, John Downing, Godfrey Dewey, Harry Lindgren, Ben D. Wood, Helen Bonnema, William J. Reed, Maurice Harrison, Wilbur J. Kupfrian, Emmett A. Betts, Ph.D, LL. D., to name a few.

"Furthermore," I added, "are you aware that in Australia the public schools have already started using the first stages of spelling reform, known as SR-1, and that the teachers as well as the students have received these simplifications with real enthusiasm?" My friend admitted that he'd never heard of anyone actually using simplified spelling, nor did he know that one of Mark Twain's most engaging essays was on that very subject. I'm sure he'd heard of Australia, but certainly had no idea of what was going on down there in the area of education. (But truly, he had earned his academic degrees, and what more can a fellow do, or get, except hold down a job and not "rock the boat?")

And so, following a slight pause I was asked, "Has anything been published in this thing you call "SR-1"?", I was mightily pleased to be able to state with prideful assurance that, "Yes, there was at least one book printed in that kind of simplified spelling," and I promised to loan him my only copy, which I did.

That was about six months ago. Having received no response, I recently wrote, asking if he had been able to read and comprehend the book. (The spelling was very difficult and complicated - just like this.)

(Please see note below.)

The book I loaned him was L. J. J. Nye's *Escape to Elysium*, (a novel), and I've not heard (or should it be heard?), from him since. And so, I suppose I can struggle with my own conclusions. Perhaps he read it and didn't like the story; perhaps the spelling was too difficult - or too simple - or maybe book-burning has come back again?

So . . . "What is Reading?" Do you get the picture, the idea, the image? Some do, some don't, many will, and others won't. But if you do, my friend, that is VISUALIZATION, which is the essence of reading.

*[Spelling Reform Anthology §17.4 pp232-234. in the printed version]*

*[Point VII is not in the Tune anthology.]*

*[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1978 pp2-5 in the printed version]*

[Ayb Citron: see Journals, Newsletters, Bulletins.]

#### **4. English Orthography: a Case of Psychological Child Abuse, by Abraham Citron, Ph. D.\***

\*Dept. of Educ. Sociology, Wayne State Univ, Detroit, Mi,

\*SR 1 used (Spelling reform, first step), see section V, p. 4.

At the portals of education we have laid, not a highway, but a labyrinth.

Brainwashed as we are, we do not perceive our spelling as difficult, irrational, deceptive, inconsistent, clumsy, frustrating and wasteful; but it is and especially so to children.

Our spelling devours hours of study for years, squanders teachers' energy, blocks and frustrates children, renders writing more onerous and reading more difficult, strings out our words and inflates every cost of written communication. Our child-defeating spelling is one of the basic sources of academic discouragement and failure, aiding in the transformation of many children into psychological or physical dropouts.

The large majority of elementary and high school students in this country are either very poor, poor or mediocre spellers; the big majority of adults are no better. Millions of student hours are spent on spelling, millions of dollars are spent in teaching time, yet results are quite poor. Most students dislike spelling, many students abhor it.

Make no mistake about it, spelling is inextricably interactive with reading; our inconsistent spelling contributes greatly to reading difficulties.

Our culture is based on words and on power over words; our instructional system is built almost entirely of words. Every other power and expansion in academics comes through mastery of words. Even the artist, mathematician, musician, athlete finds his or her career stunted without power over words. Our system moves on words, runs on words, exists on and in words. At the narrow base of this immense system are 26 letters which we combine into hundreds of thousands of written words.

Much depends, therefore, on how we combine these letters. Note that we are working with an alphabet not at all designed for the sounds of English, but borrowed from the Romans, who had designed it to express the sounds of Latin. At the outset we are stuck with only 26 letters to express 41 (some say 44) phonemes of spoken English.

A second difficulty which has been gathering on our word system over centuries is that letters have been combined into words according to differing schemes at different times, letters have been stuck on just to justify lines of print, spellings have been borrowed from other languages. We have changed the sound of letters, we have changed the way we pronounced words while the spelling has often congealed on the old form. All this and more has evolved over centuries in haphazard ways.

The result is that we have inherited an orthographic system full of inconsistencies, irrationalities, quirks, exceptions and disorganization. And because, by the time we have become adults, we are

accustomed to it, we unthinkingly force this "system" on our children.

We double-cross children in hundreds of ways as they struggle to master our unnecessarily difficult word forms.

We teach children a hard 'c' as in 'cat,' 'can,' 'candy,' and then double-cross them with words such as 'certain,' 'center,' 'cement.' In a word such as 'cease,' the first 's' sound is expressed with a 'c,' the second with an 's'; in 'civic,' two different sounds are expressed with 'c.' Observe what a complicated mess we make with 'necessary.' We teach children to sound 'k' as in 'kick,' 'kid,' 'klan,' and then confront them with 'knee,' 'knob,' 'knife,' etc. Further, if hard 'c' and 'k' are sounded alike, why do we need them both? We teach children 'p' as in 'poor,' 'put,' 'push,' then force them to handle 'photo,' 'phrase,' 'pneumonia,' etc.

We cross up children with our miserable 'ie' and 'ei' combinations as in 'believe' and 'receive'; and the "i before e" rule is little help since the exceptions are nearly as numerous as the examples. With 'craze' and 'haze' we use a 'z', but to express the same sound in 'please' and 'tease' we use an 's.' We cross up the kids by spelling 'lease' with an 's' and then 'fleece,' the same sound, with a 'c.' In both these words, the vowel has the same sound but in one we express it with a double 'e' and in the other with 'ea.'

We force children to drag along outmoded and useless 'ough' forms in words such as 'through,' 'bough,' 'plough,' 'though,' ; and useless 'gh's in a host of words such as 'light,' 'might,' 'bright,' 'night,' etc. Our spelling is literally laced with these inconsistent and meaningless forms outmoded in the long, long ago.

Godfrey Dewey, a lifelong student of our orthographical system, found that for the 41 distinguishable sounds of our spoken language (phonemes), there are 561 spellings currently used. The 26 letters of our alphabet are pronounced in 92 ways. Also we have 132 sets of two letters (digraphs) such as 'th,' 'ch,' 'ie,' 'ea,' etc., and for these we use 260 pronunciations. [\[1\]](#)

What would happen in our educational system with numbers if we told children that a 2 was two except when it had the value of 4 or 7? Or take a more extreme example: what would happen to children if we used red lights for 'stop' only some of the time and green lights for 'stop' some of the time? Such examples highlight the cruciality of consistency in basic education. Yet we throw orthographic inconsistencies at children all the time and wonder why so many\* find our written system difficult. [\[2\]](#)

## II A Small Experiment

A seven word list was submitted to 621 sixth graders distributed in 9 schools and 20 classes in the metropolitan Detroit area, Nov., Dec., 1974. The words, in traditional and approximately phonemic form, were as follows:

<i>traditional spelling</i>	<i>approx. phonemic spelling</i>
believe	beleev
height	hyt
photograph	forograf
receive	reseev
through	thru
tongue	tung
weigh	wa

In each class the traditional list was analyzed and discussed for seven minutes, then written to dictation; then the phonemic list was analyzed, discussed for seven minutes and written to dictation.

On the traditional list 1481 words were misspelled as against\* 764 on the phonemic forms. This is an error reduction of 48%. Such a result would occur by chance less than one time in a thousand. The number of perfectly spelled lists jumped from 192 (31%) traditional to 332 (53%) phonemic. The poorest spellers, those who missed 3 or more words on the traditional list, numbered 248 or 39%; but on the phonemic list they were reduced to 109 or only 17%.

There is no question but that there is Hawthorne effect in these results; the students were playing an interesting game. (They were told at the outset that this experiment had nothing to do with their grades in spelling.) Even so, the phonemic forms were new to them, many were quite familiar with the traditional spellings before the tests, and exposure to the new forms was only seven minutes. They were enabled to do so well so quickly because they were familiar with the sounds of the letters of the alphabet, and, following the sound of the word, they could fit the letters needed. Any teacher who deals with spelling will report that children often fail back upon "instinctive" spelling, spelling the way a word sounds to them. These sixth graders were excited to find that they could spell "instinctively" and it would be "right."

### **III Reliability, Reliability, Reliability**

Children learn most of the things they need to know, without formal training. If we look at the way they learn it "naturally" we see that, given motivation, they learn things most quickly and easily if they can rely on an environmental response, if they can discern a pattern that does not fail them.

Learning to walk is a complex matter, but doubtless one reason it is achievable is that the child can depend on the forces of gravity, distribution of weight and balance, which are constant. The child is rewarded every time balance is maintained and taught by a tumble when balance is lost. The child feels balance being maintained or being lost.

Learning to talk is enormously complex, but again surely one reason it is achievable is that certain sounds are always associated with certain objects, actions, ideas. The spoken word 'mother,' or 'mamma,' or 'ma' always means a given person in a given role, as does 'pa.' The spoken syllable 'milk' always means milk, 'jump' means jump and so on. The sounds are reliable hence learnable. We have little trouble teaching children to tell time because we are consistent on the differing jobs of the clock hands, and we are consistent on the numbers and their positions on the clock face. Learning always involves perception of a pattern - the simpler and more reliable the pattern, the quicker the learning.

A basic principle of all learning is that children need a perceived reliable and integrated world as a basis for learning. All aspects of socialization, including necessary skills, are much more readily acquired if the child has the confident feeling of being in a reliable, secure and therefore a trusted world. Such a world is integrated in that one aspect of experience builds into or reinforces another. For example, learning to walk builds into learning to run, which builds into participation in (social interaction) children's games requiring running. This means that learning to talk will build into learning to write and read. In an integrated world, writing and reading should be as closely and as naturally as possible linked to speaking.

The principle of reliability does not mean that a child never be surprised or shocked or puzzled or

discouraged. It does not require a world of monotony. But it does require a regularity of pattern in the skills crucial to the culture.

#### **IV From the Natural to the Less Natural (By Making the Less Natural More Natural)**

Speech is primordial. Children speak as naturally as they walk and almost as naturally as they breathe.

Speech is so natural that we often fail to note that it is built on abstraction and on symbolization. In speech we endow vocal sounds with meaning, we clothe sounds with life, with human experience. In other words, speech, which appears so natural, really combines the sound apparatus of homo sapiens with a contrived system of symbolization. To make a sound is at one level of the natural; to contrive a system of meanings and assign given meanings to given sounds is a different level of the natural. If this can be done with sound, can we come closer to it in our written symbols?

These sounds, as received by the ear or voiced by the organs of speech, become an intimate part of our being. We do not experience them (usually) as sounds at all but as direct meanings. So much a part of us do they become that we get to feel the syllable 'dog' is inherently doggy and that water could hardly be called anything else. We cleave to our native tongue and dialect and feel that our speech must be the language meant by the universe.

Thus, the world over, all people speak, but only some cultures develop a written language; and in the cultures which do develop written forms, only some of the people learn them. It is necessary to conclude that speech is primordial and on a level of naturalness denied to written forms. Homo sapiens takes to speech like a duck to water but it takes effort and sustained discipline to learn to read. (Some children learn to read unaided or with very little assistance but they are quite exceptional.)

It is true that we have not tried to raise children from infancy using only written language for communication. Were we to do this we might find that written forms too can become very intimate and "natural." But the facts remain that we always find humankind with speech, that written forms arise only in some cultures and only at some points in the development of those cultures, that all people speak but only those specially trained read and write.

We are thus drawn to the idea, often repeated in the study of reading, that the greatest difficulty in leading children from speech to writing and reading is the gap between a natural activity and one more abstract, less natural, more artificial. If this approach is correct, we should hypothesize that the more natural the written forms can be made to be, the more easily children will learn to write and to read. What does "natural" mean in this context? This again is an hypothesis, but I take it to include the following qualities: (a) as close as possible to the forms of speech, (b) as simple as possible, (c) experienced so early (3, 4, 5 years of age) and so often and so normally as to be taken as a part of the natural world of the child, (d) directly related to the sounds of speech, (e) reliable, always related in the same way to the same sounds.

Social scientists often speak of "internalization" of attitudes, values, points of view, roles. By this they mean an individual has made his or her own possession, an aspect of behavior modeled in the social environment. In this way, mention has been made of the magnificent way children make

the sounds of native speech their own down to the last intonation. Learning (or socialization) has been remarked to occur when some aspect of the world is emotionally assimilated (internalized) into the self. Freud, Piaget, Rogers, Montessori, Maslow, among many others, have noted an emotional internalization theory of socialization and of learning. That which is learned becomes a part of the self; if we "grasp" or "understand" something, an idea or relationship, it in some way has become a part of us. To learn means a flowing of the psyche into the world and a flowing of an aspect of the world into the self, which is a way of describing experience.

And if the sounds of speech are "natural" because they are so early and so thoroughly absorbed into the self, then we can make the written forms more "natural" by making them early more familiar, more friendly, more supportive, more a natural part of the child's environment. We should make the cultural arrangements to cause children to induct into their hearts with familiarity, friendship and delight the letters of the alphabet. (A child who knows his or her letters as friends, tried and true, as animated pals, as companions - a child who knows their shapes, voices, characters, quirks - a child, in short, who has adopted the 26 friends, is ready to follow them into writing and reading. Such a child feels they are a part of the natural world. "These letters are mine." just as a child develops favoritism for certain numbers, so may feelings of positive or negative valence be developed for letters. A child who feels "Good ole' A" and "Bad ole' Z" is more ready to write and to read than a child who feels next to nothing for the letters. In these cases a non-preferred letter is neither fearsome nor overlooked, but constitutes a doleful and friendly imperfection like the Cowardly Lion. )

Cultural arrangements should be made such as nursery schools with parental involvement, children's TV programs, children's product advertising, toy emphasis, kindergarten and first and second grade emphasis. (Children should be able to experience the alphabetical letters not only pictorially, but with personalities as dolls, puppets, pillows, blocks, cut-outs, cartoon characters, crackers, cookies, cereal nuggets, etc. At an early age, children should be taught to arrange and read block letters making up their names, later to feel and draw and manipulate them in many ways.)

The next step is crucial, for as the letters are used to build words, each letter must remain true to itself, true to its sound. This reliability will enable the children to see and hear and feel how letters are put together to form words. And in "understanding" this they will be more able to assimilate and adopt (take into themselves) the words. [\[3\]](#)

Just as reliability of sound to object is crucial in learning to speak, so the reliability of grapheme (letter) to phoneme (sound) is crucial in learning to write and to read.

In an alphabetical system, a written word is a collection of letters directing a reader (speaker) to produce certain sounds. A written word is exactly like a brief musical score, only the instrument playing the score is not a violin or piano but human breath as formed by vocal chords, palate, cheeks, tongue, teeth and lips. Observe a perfectly spelled word, (our lexicon still has many of them), such as 'tip.' Here the speaker is directed to combine a 'T' a short 'I' sound, and a 'P' sound in that order - three distinct sounds (phonemes) and three letters (graphemes) exactly corresponding to the sounds required. This is the basic plan of an alphabetical system. Over the centuries our orthography has strayed from this basic plan. We need desperately, for the sake of our children in a complex, symbolic, technological culture, to return to it.

Will a child who learns to read by sounding the words aloud or silently be limited to always going from the print to the sound and thence to the meaning? Not at all. (Very few of us, as a matter of course, realize we only hear sounds when we hear speech; we go directly to meaning.) Altho some readers move their lips or imaginatively hear the sound before they can get to meaning, the vast majority of readers learn to go directly from the written symbol to meaning. Many readers, for example, can read much faster than they can speak. [4] With all reading there may be some residual cerebral activity corresponding to speech activity, but if there is, it doesn't slow us up or interfere. Once the words are ours, the phrases begin to hang together and soon, if the notion takes us, we can soar over the printed page, skimming several times faster than speaking.

This means that the phonemic construction of a word, to maximize its naturalness and ease of learning, in no way limits its symbolic function. 'Thru' can mean everything that 'through' can and still be much easier to learn and to use. 'Hed' can signify everything that 'head' can signify; 'lit' is just as small as 'little' and much more sensible; 'niṭ' (dots on both ends to signify long 'i') is just as dark as 'night,' etc.

## **V Step by Step Reform**

It should be emphasized that with our 26 letters it is impossible to spell many of our words perfectly phonemically. Lack of perfection, however, should not stop us from making the vast improvements which are quite possible. For example, the Australian Teachers Federation has recommended Spelling Reform One (SR-1) which is to spell every word with a short 'e' sound with an 'e'; thus 'bread' becomes 'bred,' 'head' becomes 'bed,' 'friend' becomes 'frend.' 'said' becomes 'sed,' etc. This change affects only 120 out of the most commonly used 25,000 words of our lexicon and thus would be rather easily assimilated. Through a series of such steps, say one every four years for 40 years, we could, while reducing the shock and displacement of change, revolutionize our spelling. A second change, for example, might be to change all 'ph's pronounced as 'f' to 'f'; thus 'telephone' would become 'telefone.' [5] A third change might be to drop all silent consonants such as the 'k' in 'knee,' [6] the 'l' in 'could,' 'would,' 'should"; the 'p' in 'pneumatic,' etc.

## **VI Our Present System Constitutes Psychic Child Abuse**

What is being insisted upon here is nothing other than we have all said repeatedly over the years as a basis for the education of children. We have said, "Don't lie to children." The position here pit forward is that our orthography is deceptive - it is one lie after another and hence it constitutes, not education, but psychic child abuse. Unnecessarily difficult and confusing word forms which many children fail, are not helping them to "grow"- it is not "educating" them - it is child abuse.

It is no less abuse because the system is administered in the name of knowledge and culture, or because it is enshrined in tradition. It is no less abuse because the forms come down to us wrapped in the prestige of "English literature:' It is no less abuse because the system is standard throughout the land or because we all participate in it, nor because it is curricularized and blessed with the authority of every school board of every state. It is no less abuse because children cannot manage the perspective or the courage to cry out specifically against it. It is abuse because it traps children in needless drudgery and frustration, detracts from their feelings of success and of

adequacy, defies and negates their sense of logic, robs many of them of love of written forms, and forces them over a course which many fail.

## VII For the children, we should have the courage to change

Why haven't we long ago shifted to a consistent phonemic spelling which was and is the intent of our alphabetic system? Despite high sounding "lexical" and etymological rationalizations, the real reason is that we are used to the forms and do not want to undergo the inconvenience of change. As one graduate student put it, "I've learned to operate in one system and I'll be damned if I'll learn another."

But tremendous educational and monetary benefits could be reaped through such a change. Before we opt for costly pie-in-the-sky gimmicks, we should reform our child-defeating spelling. Simplified spelling could be the most fundamental and far-reaching educational innovation since the introduction of the common school.

- [1] Godfrey Dewey, *English Spelling: Roadblock to Reading*. Teachers College Press, New York, 1971, p. 6.
- [2] It is well known that experimental psychologists have induced apathy and behavioral breakdown in rats by training them in behavior leading to reward (food) and then switching the reward to punishment.
- [3] E. J. Gibson, A. Pick, H. Osser, M. Hammond, "The Role of Grapheme-Phoneme Correspondence in the Perception of Words." *Amer. Jour. of Psychology*, 1962, v. 75, p. 554-570. "The results of this experiment demonstrate that a letter group with a high spelling-to-sound correlation is reproduced more accurately than an equivalent letter group with a low spelling-to-sound correlation. ('Vuns' was reproduced more accurately than 'nsuv,' 'besks' more accurately than 'skseb,' etc.) "Practically, this result suggests strongly that the proper unit for analyzing the process of reading is not the alphabetical letter but *the spelling pattern which has an invariant relationship with a phonemic pattern*. This may be of great importance for children's learning to read and write." (emphasis mine.)
- [4] With the aid of strongly literate family and peer environments, letter cleverness, special interests or strong motivation, most of our children learn to operate at some level of efficiency in our present system. But millions of our children are discouraged and turned away by its difficulty, irrationality and unnaturalness.
- [5] Since in an honest orthography, all 'o's would be long, the eventual spelling of 'telephone' would be 'telefon.'
- [6] Some silent initial consonants cannot be dropped without other changes in spelling. For example, *know*, *knew*, and others such as *knot* become homographs when the silent initial letter is dropped. In many words with *gh*, this digraph cannot be dropped unless another way is used to indicate the vowel sound.

*[Spelling Reform Anthology §17.5 p235 in the printed version]*  
*[Spelling Progress Bulletin Spring 1981 p20 in the printed version]*

## **5. A Letter to Grandpa, by Timmie A. Dropout\***

\*Harvie Barnard, Tacoma, Wa.

Dear Gramps:

In your last letter you asked me why I wanted to kwit school, and so I'll tell you why. At first I reely liked skool becaus I liked our teecher who liked all us kids. She red stories to us about peepl who did things that kids like to do - like Ben Franklin and how he discoverd lectricity with his kite. And so we all wanted to lern to reed books. Well, Miss Rule had lots of good picher books for us to look at and lern words from the pichers. Then I had the idea that if I had a book just like the wun Miss Rule was reeding to us, we cuud reed along with the teecher. So we tried it on the class and it worked just fine and pretty soon I cuud reed the same stories that we were lissening to. So we lerned lots of noo words every day and skool was reel fun. Miss Rule was reely a neet teacher!

But then they gave us tests and sum of us were put in a class for "speshuls." I gess becaus we were reeding so much and getting books from the liberry which wer for older kids. Our noo class had a man teecher hoo was called a sikologist - a Doktor Rider. He had sum noo rules and sed we wer supposed to start riting and that we must lern basics before we started reeding books about things we wanted to reed about.

Then we took mor tests wich they calld IQ's and wer supposed to tell how brite yoo wer. The 'I' was for interests, or sumthing like that, and the 'Q' was for what they calld a kwoshunt. What ever that is.

Enyhow, Doktor Rider sed we must lern the basics wich wer the 3 R's, and that was when the trubl started. He sed we wern't supposed to be reeding jusy enything - which was what we liked, but that we must follo a basic 3 R program, Reeding, Riting and Rithmetic. We must lern the 3 Rs all at wunse, which the Principal sed was the noo plan wich the Board or sumbody sed was the way we must lern to reed and get educated.

Well, enyhow we had sum reely brite kids in our class and everybody began to laff when Dr. Rider rote on the blackboard. He rote, "Writing, Arithmetic, and Reading." I thot that was so funny I laffed out loud, and he sed, "Tim, what's so funny; what is there to laff about?" And I sed, "It's not the 3 Rs, it's 'W A R' insted! " Then Dr. Rider sort of stared at the words on the board, and kind of coffed, and looked reel mad and grumpy - and the kids thot he was going to paddle sumbody, but he didn't.

My best frend Jorge, who is a very brite kid, put up his hand and sed, "If 'R' is for Writing, and 'R' is for Arithmetic, why did he use the letters 'W' and 'A' when we are supposed to be lerning the 3Rs, and besides it sure sounds like '3Rs', so why change it to sumthing we don't reely say?"

Dr. Rider didn't anser Jorge's kwestion, but sed we cuud rite stories about things we liked to do, so we dropt the 3Rs for a while and tried riting the way the words make sens to us. But after we tried that, wich the kids thot was reely neet, Dr. Rider sed sumthing about fonics had spoilt us and that we wuud hav to start over, and maybe we had better work on rithmetic for a chanj. So I lernt how to use all the numbers to tell how much, how meny, how far, how long and about muney, and that was reely interesting, and very eezy too. We didn't hav to lern eny speshul rules or exepshuns. Jorj sed it made good sens to him, and all the kids got As on the rithmetic tests.

But then we had trubl agen when the teecher sed that when we rote about numbers of things the names of the numbers must be spelt like "one, two, three four." Rite away Jorj - hoo is always getting us into trubl - sed he thot it wuud be better if the numbers wer spelt "wun, too, three, fore, . . ." and rite away all the kids agreed with Jorj - wich must hav bin very bad, jujing by the look on Dr. Rider's face.

And we cuud tell that he didn't like what Jorj sed, but finely he sed that maybe - just maybe - Jorj mite hav a good idea for wuns. But when we came to spelling 8, there was trubl agen. This was becaus we all thot Jorj was rite when he spelt 8 "ate" insted of "eight." I asked what the "gh" was for, and why not just "eit," wich wud save letters and sound mor like "ate" and still stand for 8?

Dr. Rider told us then that saving time, or making things ezier to lern or to rite wasn't the idea enyhow, but that we'd go bak to riting numbers like numbers insted of names, wich made sens, and so the kids wer happy about that!

So then we stopt rithmetic and went bak to reeding and riting. But sins all the class cuud reed pritty well alredy, we started riting. Dr. Rider explained that riting was supposed to be mostly communicashun, and that communicashun was the most important thing he was trying to teech us. Then we notised that sumthing was chanjing, espeshully when he sed that it seemd that we wuud make better progress if the class went bak to fonics, wich we did, and everybody was happy for a while.

We began riting about things all kids liked, such as cars and airplanes, and rocket ships, and baseball and sokker, and everywun was having fun, and enjoying skool mor than we ever did before. Even Dr. Rider seemd happy, and he sed we kids wer reely lerning to communicate, and that fonics was probably the best way to go! But he sed we'd better lern the rite way to pronouns words so when we spelt them like they sounded they'd be spelt correctly, so we worked on correct speech for a while.

Just when we thot everything was going to be alrite, all hell broke loose when we had a visitor from the skool offis hoo sed we wuud hav a spelling bee! That did it! The first word I got was 'thru,' and I spelt it just like it is, and got dropt out. But I wasn't the only dum wun, becaus nobody cuud spell words like enuf, or coff, or thot, or ruff, or even tuff. Pritty soom the man from the offis had us all down, and he was awful mad, and sed we wer all a bunch of "dum bunnies", and that Dr. Rider wuud hav to begin all over to teech us to spell rite wright, and not rong wrong.

Our teecher sed there wer too meny inconsistencies and too meny silent letters in our English spelling and that we wer lerning much fasterwith fonics and that we wer alredy making good progress in communication. He also sed that we wer lerning to think and to express our thots with originality and without hangups over spelling.

It sounded to us that Dr. Rider had wun the argument, but we wer rong, I gess, becaus he didn't cum bakk after that spelling bee. My mom sed they told the P.T.A. that he got sent bakk to a teachers' college sumplase, and my dad was pritty mad and sed he'd like to run for the skool bored. Enyhow he probably got fired becaus we got a noo teecher and started reeding about Dick and Jane running and jumping and riding a bus and playing going to the grocery store, wich was too much baby stuff for me and didn't make much sens to enybody. So they put us all bakk with the kids hoo wer just lerning to reed and rite the wright way, and it sure was a dum class we got into.

And so, grandpa, that is when I decided I had enuff education and decided I wuud rather kwit skool than stay in that dum baby class. Besides, I now hate skool, and when I feel like reeding I can go to the liberry and reed enything I want. Sum of the words are spelt a littl different, but not enuff to make much differens. So far I hav red Tom Saywer and Swiss Family Robinson and I think I'll reed Trezure Iskand next. A lot of the spelling is stranj but I gess I can liv with it. My frend Jorj sez he thinks he'll kwit too. He sez his dad is tauking about sending him to a privit skool, and maybe we can both get sent ther together, but if they hav spelling bees at that skool we'll probably run away. What wuud yoo do? Yoor loving grandsun, Timmy.

P.S. My berthday is next week and my mother sez maybe I shuud hav a dicshunary. Does a dicshunary teech yoo to think? Dr. Rider had wun at skool but the kids cuudn't use it. But mom thinks I cuud teech myself a lot of interesting words if I had wun, wich wood be a lot better than having spelling bees in that dum bunny class at skool!

*[Spelling Reform Anthology §17.6 p236 in the printed version]*  
*[Spelling Progress Bulletin Spring 1982 p2 in the printed version]*

## **6. Grandpa's reply to Timmie A. Dropout by Harvie Barnard**

Dear Timmie

Thanks for writing to tell me about your school experiences. I think it's wonderful that you've made such good progress with your reading in spite of all that spelling bee nonsense. How do you like the Treasure Island story? Its one of the best!

But I'm disappointed to hear that you're thinking of quitting school. What does mother and dad think about that? Of course I can understand why you don't enjoy or care for the Dick and Jane running and jumping stuff. Apparently they're still teaching the same kind of "kid stuff" that we were bored with when I was your age.

Still, I wouldn't agree that you should quit school just because of that "dum bunny" spelling bee business. You'll just have to lern that lots of words are spelt in strange ways, and that kids have had to lern what they call "sight words" where the spelling has no connection with the sound of the word or the sound of the letters.

It's surely a shame that you lost your Dr. Rider who was teaching you to use fonetic spelling. Maybe if he goes back to college to study education he'll be able to teach those college people some things they ought to know about teaching kids.

If your father decides to send you to a private school perhaps he'd better check to see what kind of a program they have before he sends you there. If they have spelling bees perhaps you'd be just as happy to stay in public school where you are. It might be a good idea for you to talk things over with Jorje's dad to see what can be done to arrange a reading program which would be fun insted of nonsense.

I certainly agree with your mother that you should have a good dictionary for your birthday. A dictionary doesn't teach you to think, but it does help in lots of ways. I remember a good teacher I had who used to say, "A dictionary is a wonderful thing - if you will lern to use it." I use one for nearly every letter I write. I went to grade school 70 years ago, and there are still lots of words I'm not sure about, so I hav to use my dictionary, not only to check up on my spelling but to find fonetic spellings which tell me how words should be pronounced. Besides that, I very often hav to find the best word to use to explain what I am trying to say. And there's another interesting thing about using a dictionary -each time I use one I discover some other words that I've often wondered about, but never used because I wasn't sure how the words were spelt, or what they ment, and you could sometimes find words which were much better than the ones you were planning to use. Yes, Tim, I'm sure you ought to hav a dictionary and I'm going to see to it that you get a really good one, and not a paperback either, but one which will get you thru grade school and help start you off right in high school.

But don't quit yet! You might get lucky and get a better teacher next term! And I think I'll talk with your dad about private school. If you're reading Mark Twain and Robert Louis Stevenson I should think you're reddy for 4th grade, and maybe more. So let's quit talking about quitting school. Besides, I'm sending you some new books that should be a lot more interesting than Dick and Jane. And please write agen soon. I want to hear more about how you do in school.

With love, Gramps.

[Spelling Reform Anthology §17.7 p236 in the printed version]  
[Spelling Progress Bulletin June 1963 p19 in the printed version]

## 7. Under the SPELL of English, by Arthur Bennett

Would you like to be Carnegie's heir,  
With never a worry or ceir?  
That most of us would is well understould.  
One who would not would surely be reir,

When one makes a hole in eight  
It's a very sad story to reight  
Bad work with the putter and he will mutter  
"I'll correct that at some leighter deight."

Once there was an infantry colonel  
Who fought where the blitz was infoonel  
Want to know the result? You'd better consult  
The obituary writ in the Jolonel.

The groom advanced down the aisle  
With a smaisle he thought to begaisle  
The crowd into thinking he wasn't shrinking  
But was scared to death all the whaisle.

A poem is writ word by word;  
May be lofty, or may be absord,  
May picture the sea, or a bord wild and frea,  
Or tell of hope long deford.

Sent in by Mrs. Ethel Hook, Palm Springs, Calif.

[Spelling Reform Anthology §17.8 p236 in the printed version]  
[Spelling Progress Bulletin ???]

## 8. From "Out on a Limrick" by Bennett Cerf, (Harper & Bros. 1960)

A fellow they call Aloysius  
Of his wife and a gent grew suspysius  
    And as quick as a wink  
    Found the two by the sink  
But they only were doing the dysius.

A gent with a drooping mustache  
Chewed some hair out while eating his hache  
    The phrases profane  
    He shrieked in his pain  
We shall represent here with a dache.

If a fellow is a regular guy  
He'll aim for marks way up huy  
He'll push to the top of the hill, witha will  
Never pausing to loiter or suy.

When Kayak and Seabiscuit raced  
They were urged to move and make haced  
But for humans to hurry, speed up or worry  
Would be breaking the rules of good taced.

What causes a horsie to neigh,  
And what causes a donkey to breigh?  
Is it because of their diet they shatter our  
quiet  
Or for pride in their vocal displeigh?

To fly a plane over the ocean  
Is possibly not a bad nocean.  
Such a perilous flight will turn out all right  
If you are able to keep up the mocean.

Look back at the deeds you have done,  
Take stock of your griefs and your fone.  
Can you really feel pride and frankly decide  
You approve of the race you have rone?

There was a young girl in the choir  
Whose voice went up hoir and hoir,  
    Till one Sunday night  
    It vanished from sight  
And turned up next day in the spoir.

A handsome young gent down in Fla.  
Collapsed in hospital ca.  
    A young nurse from Me.  
    Sought to banish his pe.  
And shot him. Now what could be ha.?

[Spelling Reform Anthology §17.9 p237 in the printed version]  
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Spring 1971 p16 in the printed version]

## 9. What Must We Change? by Gil Stevenson\*

\*Visiting Assist. Professor for Linguistics, English Dept., Univ. of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyo.

It hardly need be argued that English spelling is in a dreadful mess and that its irregularities handicap not only foreigners learning our language, but our own children in learning to read. The problem has been documented, thoroly and eloquently, in the pages of this magazine, and innumerable alternatives to the present orthography, most of them having some merit, have been proposed in this journal and elsewhere.

One objection to the changeover to phonemic spelling with an augmented alphabet is that our present typewriters and printing equipment would have to be junked. Don't worry about it: Every few years most of them are junked anyway, and those which aren't can be modified to add the new symbols. And what of the vast body of literature in conventional spelling? Don't worry about that either: Not many books have a useful life of more than ten years, and even editions of the classics are constantly being replaced. We may read books written one or two hundred years ago, but the editions of them we read were probably published recently. There would be some stress and hardship in the changeover, of course, just as there is now in England with the changeover to a decimal currency, and the forthcoming change in 1972-73 to the Metric System. But that doesn't mean that the change isn't both feasible and worth making.

What should we change *to*? It should be a system that differs no more from the present alphabet than is necessary to make it truly phonemic. The transition *from* traditional orthography should be as easy as the transition *to* it is for children who begin with Pitman's i.t.a. In fact, since there will be *some* material around in T.O. for a long time, even those brought up with the new system should be able to learn reading in T.O. with ease. We could do a lot worse than simply adopt Pitman's i.t.a. system, since it meets these requirements and is already widely and successfully used. But let us have nothing to do with "simplified spelling" which is neither fish nor fowl; it has neither the virtues claimed for traditional orthography nor the virtues of a linguistically sound phonemic spelling.

Another difficulty mentioned by some of us, including myself, [\[1\]](#) comes from the fact that English-speaking people pronounce our language differently in different parts of the country. Since a phonetic alphabet would represent the sounds of the language as it is spoken, the question arises: Spoken by whom? Whose version of English speech would our phonemic alphabet represent?

Brenda M. Johns [\[2\]](#) listed as "one of the points that may be worrying you," the fact that "People who speak differently will spell differently." Then she asked the question upon whose answer, I feel, the success of our endeavors depends: "Will this really matter? . . . Spelling should not be regarded as fixed and holy. It should be allowed to evolve according to universal changes in pronunciation. . . Don't be pedantic; tolerate the writer's spelling just as you do his speech."

So accustomed are we to the rigid standards laid down by Samuel Johnson and his successors that in proposed spelling reform, we think the same way. We want to replace one rigid standard with another. Not only is it almost impossible to decide what the new standard should be, but by virtue of *being* a standard, it would in time become as impractical and confusing as the one we have now. Once again, the language would gradually evolve and its spelling would not.

What, then, must we change? Our system of spelling, of course. But more important than that, we *must change our ATTITUDE about spelling*. In fact, if we were to change nothing but that, English spelling would become a lot more sensible all by itself and our alphabeteers could find some other way of amusing themselves.

But would it be practical to just give people a sensible alphabet and let them write as they speak? Wouldn't such tolerance and flexibility on the part of the 3 or 4 hundred million people who speak English lead to chaos? I think not. As Brenda Johns pointed out, these people understand each other's speech, so why shouldn't they understand each other's writing?

But what of the poor lexicographer? How would he cope with it? Well, although Anglo-Saxon and Middle English were spelled as they were spoken, and spelling varied from one author to another, the variations weren't enough to keep present-day students from reading these languages or scholars from compiling dictionaries of them.

Our misgivings vanish when we consider what it is, in modern English pronunciation, that actually varies. English consonants are remarkably stable throughout, the vast range of national and regional dialects. Almost all of the differences are in the pronunciation of vowels. But if you will study the figures that Godfrey Dewey compiled for the frequency with which the various phonemes are used, [\[3\]](#) you will find that the much more stable consonant phonemes make up about two thirds of our language. *Variations in pronunciation are variations in only about one third of our speech*. And, if you are concerned for the lexicographer, just count the pages in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* devoted to words beginning with vowel phonemes, as against the number devoted to words beginning with consonants, and you will see that the latter outnumber the former by six to one.

*Let spelling vary!* It will and should vary from one part of the English-speaking world to another, and change with time as the language does. I honestly believe that the resulting spelling deviations would be too minor to impede communication at all. The last thing we need is a phonemic Sam Johnson. What needs changing is not just our spelling but our whole conception of what we use an alphabet for. Until we can change that, we will never be able to change anything else. And if we can change it, we may not have to change anything else!

## References

- [1] "Phonemic Spelling, a Linguistic Dilemma," SPB, vol. III, #3, October, 1963. See also "Why Johnny Could Read," SPB, vol. III. no. 4, December, 1963.
- [2] "The Key to Better Education," SPB, vol. VII, no. 2, Summer, 1967.
- [3] Godfrey Dewey's findings are summarized in *Speech and Hearing in Communication*, by Harvey Fletcher, pub. D. Van Nostrand Co., New York, 1953. The results of a similar but much smaller study by myself correlate very closely with Dewey's.