

*Alternative Step.* You may prefer to begin by sharing the results of the study reported in this article. Just get some of those announcements taken care of by bulletin and use a staff meeting for discussion of the observations. Such sharing can motivate a good exchange, including assertions that "It couldn't be happening here!"

*Alternative Two.* Perhaps you prefer to share the results reported here, along with the request that each teacher log his or her activities during spelling periods for a week. While their logs may remain their confidential property, discussion at a staff meeting can lead to group suggestions about how the teaching of spelling might be improved.

*Refinement.* If you want to mount a serious effort to improve the teaching of spelling in your school, you may want to share or have your teachers share the evidence on how spelling should be taught. Two more helpful references are Fitzsimmons and Loomer (1974) and Hillerich (1981). ■

#### References

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## Teaching Spelling: A Response to Hillerich

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Spelling as a school subject is somewhat of a paradox. It is perceived on the one hand by society as an important social value and symbol of literacy, and on the other hand by many educators as a subject warranting mod-

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est priority in the curriculum. Thus, Professor Hillerich's reminder to principals of their roles as instructional leaders and of their opportunity to extend that role to spelling deserves special commendation.

The research Hillerich reported and the implications he drew from that research are a welcome addition to the professional literature on spelling and underscore the critical part that teachers play in helping students gain understanding of and competence in the subjects they study. However, I wish to take issue with the mode of spelling instruction that he proposes. He infers that, for the most part, the "truth is all in" about spelling content and method. In fact, it is not.

Hillerich's concept of spelling instruction has its roots in late 19th and early 20th century views of spelling and in the scores of scholarly inquiries into spelling content and method carried out mainly in the first half of the present century. These views stemmed primarily from two sources: an emerging "science of education" in which instructional efficiency was a major goal; and a behaviorist orientation toward learning that was prevalent during this period (Hodges, 1977). Indeed, much of the evidence Hillerich cites paraphrases Horn's statement on the "Principles of Method in Teaching Spelling, as Derived from Scientific Investigation" published in 1919. In that statement, Horn noted that

Efficiency in teaching spelling is to be increased by a specific attack on the individual words to be learned. [This approach] is in line with the whole tendency in modern experimental education, a tendency which has been well outlined by Thorndike in his discussion of education as the formation of specific bonds (Horn, 1919, p. 56).

Others, in addition to Hillerich, have since reiterated this viewpoint (see, for example, the Fitzsimmons and Loomer reference in Hillerich's article. See also Allred, 1977). Namely, learning to spell is mainly a visual memory task; there are few reliable spelling generalizations; and drill is an effective teaching device in spelling. In sum, spelling study should, as Hillerich comments, "facilitate memorization of the spelling of [words]."

Other concepts of spelling, however, warrant study. They are rooted in current and emerging insights about the development of intellect generally and about the development of language in

particular. These insights reveal that learning is generally a developmental process in which learners actively participate in their own learning by searching for and constructing generalizations about entities and events in the world around them. Nowhere is this insight more revealing than in language development in which children's "errors" reveal their growing understanding of the structural relationships of language.

So it is with spelling. Truly significant research into the development of spelling ability by Read (1975), and more recently by Henderson and his associates (1980), demonstrates that learning to spell is integrally related to learning underlying concepts about words and their structural and semantic relationships, of which sound-letter relationships are only a part. Furthermore, these concepts grow more sophisticated over time in conjunction with developmental changes in cognition and with interaction with written language both in and out of school. What these researchers and others are showing is that there are underlying cognitive processes involved in learning to spell which are developmental in nature (Frith, 1980; Hodges, 1981a; Hodges, 1981b.)

Much more needs to be done in detailing the applications of these insights to instructional practice (Read and Hodges, in press). But as gaps are filled in our understanding of the nature and growth of spelling ability, we will be better able to design curricula and devise instructional methods that go far beyond the memorization of word lists and weekly testing, and engage students in active explorations of the nature of English spelling and its place in written communication.

Hillerich concludes his article with the justifiable advice that spelling programs can be refined when principals and supervisors make available to their staffs existing knowledge about spelling. I fully agree, but must add that this knowledge is far more extensive than he has indicated and that curricular refinement will need to take into account the emerging insights into both the nature of English spelling and of the learner. The references I have noted in this brief response are useful resources for putting into context the current state of knowledge concerning learning to spell. ■

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## A Response to Robert Hillerich

(continued from p. 617)

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### Hillerich Replies:

I'm surprised that Professor Hodges didn't discuss the omission of two concerns we both share: (1) the need for exploration of language—for pupils themselves to become "linguists" as they manipulate their language phonologically, morphologically, semantically, and syntactically; and (2) the role of poor letter formation as a contributor to "spelling errors."

Instead, his critique was based on two points. First, he implied that evidence from the turn of the century is outdated, even though it continues to mount and be supported today. He did not elaborate on the "other conceptions of spelling" (Hanna and others, 1971; Groff, 1979; most spelling programs of the past half century), which were, how-

ever, addressed in one of his own citations (Frith, 1980): "One might say that whilst average spellers spell by rule, good spellers spell by rote" (p. 247).

Hodges explains "other conceptions" in terms of current research on the development of spelling ability. Such research, though significant, seemed irrelevant in an article dealing with instructional method. Such findings are important in suggesting levels of development, from random spelling to the consideration of sounds in words. While these findings offer little guidance in terms of diagnostic value for skills instruction, they do reaffirm that "sound" spelling is not necessarily "correct" spelling (Hillerich, in press).

Certainly, we'll probably never be able to say "the truth is all in," yet practitioners must be guided by whatever "truth" is in to date.

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Frith, Uta, ed. *Cognitive Processes in Spelling*. London and New York: Academic Press, 1980.

Groff, Patrick. "Phonics for Spelling?" *The Elementary School Journal* 79 (May 1979): 269-275.

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Hillerich, Robert L. "Spelling: What Can Be Diagnosed?" *The Elementary School Journal*, in press.

### Book Reviews (continued from p. 623)

#### Handbook of Teacher Evaluation.

Jason Millman, editor.  
Beverly Hills, California:  
Sage Publications, Inc., 1981.

—Reviewed by John C. Daresh, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio.

It is refreshing to pick up a "handbook" that does not insult the reader with a series of exhortations concerning "how to do" something in all schools. This is particularly true when the subject is an issue as complex and sensitive as teacher evaluation.

Millman examines numerous aspects of teacher evaluation, from the use of student and peer assessment to the political context of formal evaluation strategies. Something remarkable in the individual chapters (featuring such

contributors as Robert Travers, Michael Scriven, John McNeil) is the sense of continuity.

Public school practitioners may question, though, the implication in a few chapters that the evaluation procedures are for use at the college or university level, but this is only a slight shortcoming, particularly if one assumes that teaching practices can and should be improved through systematic evaluation at all levels of schooling.

Available for \$27.50 from Sage Publications, Inc., 275 South Beverly Dr., Beverly Hills, CA 90212.

#### Don't Blame the Kids: The Trouble With America's Public Schools.

Gene I. Maeroff.  
New York:

McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1982.

—Reviewed by Arthur Steller, Shaker Heights City School District, Shaker Heights, Ohio.

Most critics of public schools wrap up educational problems in neat packages with ribbons of blame. Children have now become the latest scapegoats in the packages, and Gene Maeroff, an education writer for *The New York Times*, says that is akin to charging the victim with culpability. According to Maeroff, "The quality of schools depends on adults, not kids." In that statement he includes judges, politicians, parents, taxpayers, and many others.

Besides dispelling the notion that the trouble with America's public schools lies with the kids, Maeroff warns against the emergence of a "rationale failure." He says our efforts should be directed, instead, toward studying and cloning schools that have overcome the odds. Maeroff's book should be among this year's more popular works on education.

Available from McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1221 Ave. of the Americas, New York, NY 10020 for \$14.95.

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