A STUDY OF CHILDREN'S INTERESTS IN WORDS

JACK FRYMIER, Senior Fellow, Phi Delta Kappa International

People in America are concerned about their children, and about what their children learn in school. Historically, societies have created schools to transmit the cultural heritage, to educate the members of society for the betterment of that society, and to help members of society become better producers and consumers of the culture. Historically, in other words, the aims of education have been broadly defined.

Today, the aims of education are more narrowly focused Wise succinctly makes the point:

In the drive to make educational institutions accountable, goals have become narrow, selective, and minimal. That which is measurable is preferred to that which is unmeasurable.... The goals which are receiving current attention view education instrumentally—not as an end in itself but as preparation for life, especially for the world of work. Elementary schools are to develop in students the basic skills—reading and arithmetic—at the level minimally necessary to function effectively in society.

Wise presses his argument still further by developing the concept of "hyper-rationalization":

Concerning the weighing of means and ends, we shall say that rationalization occurs when the relationship between means and ends is known, when the ends are attainable given the means, or when the means are reasonable given the ends. When the relationship between means and ends is not known and bureaucratic rationalization persists, we shall say that we are witnessing the phenomenon of hyperrationalization— that is, an effort to rationalize beyond the bounds of knowledge. This involves imposing means which do not result in the attainment of ends, or the setting of ends which cannot be attained, given the available means—imposing unproven techniques on the one hand, and setting unrealistic expectations on the other [italics added].

Wise's description of hyperrationalizing of the school is set forth as a description of the policy-making processes that affect the schools. At another

2Ibid., p. 65.
level, though, the concept seems applicable as a heuristic in looking at the particulars within a school. For example, curriculum materials embody both ends and means of education: objectives are specified, and substantive content is employed as a means of achieving those objectives.

One purpose of this paper is to examine the Macmillan *Spelling* books in terms of the concept of "hyperrationalization," and, in the process, explicate the assumptions and beliefs that are implicit in the *Spelling* books. The study will be accomplished through an investigation of children's interests in the words and concepts in the spellers.

**THE PROBLEM**

Most people feel that it is important for young people to learn to spell correctly. Given the attention that spelling is generally accorded, one might conclude that many people are actually more interested in helping children learn to spell correctly than they are in helping children learn to think carefully and creatively. Recent developments in computer programs now enable people to accomplish perfect spelling without "knowing how" to spell, for example. Perhaps the emphasis on spelling will not be as important in the years ahead as some think it is today.

Be that as it may, the Macmillan *Spelling* series makes the point that it "develops spelling mastery with step-by-step lesson plans." And many schools use the Macmillan books for spelling. But what is the theoretical rationale of spelling as a part of the curriculum for children in schools?

Curriculum theorists assert that the purposes of schooling—the aims of the school—stem primarily from three sources: the nature of the academic disciplines, the nature of society, and the nature of the individual.

Herrick argues, however, that in actual practice the different sources are drawn upon in varying degrees. Some curriculum developers are "preoccupied" with the academic disciplines. Others are "preoccupied" with societal considerations. Still others are "preoccupied" with both the nature and the nurture of the individual learner.

These different perspectives actually represent different value positions—different basic philosophies—about what goals are important for schools to help children achieve.

When the concerns of the scholar, the demands of society, and the needs of the individual intersect precisely, the goals of schooling are crystal clear and acceptable to all. When there is disjuncture among these three perspec-

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tives, disputes and difficulties develop regarding the purposes of schooling
and what the goals and objectives of schools really ought to be.

As said before, one objective of this paper is to examine the Macmillan
Spelling books in terms of the concept of "hyperrationalization" as described
by Wise. A second objective is to study children's interest in different words
that are used—explicitly and implicitly—in the Macmillan spellers. A third
objective is to explore the relationship of "hyperrationalization" and "interests"
as those concepts apply to curriculum materials and learning in the early
years of elementary school.

Stated in question form, these three objectives might be phrased like
this:

1. Is the Macmillan Spelling series an example of hyperrationalization in
the curriculum?

2. Are children interested in the words the Spelling series requires them
to master?

3. What is the relationship of the assumptions implicit in the Spelling
series to the interests children have in learning about these words?

THE PROCEDURES

In an effort to answer the first question—Is the Macmillan Spelling series
an example of hyperrationalization in the curriculum?—the basic concepts,
logic, and assumptions in the series were identified and examined.

In an effort to answer the second question—Are children interested in
the words the Spelling series requires them to master?—instruments were
developed to assess young people's interests in words that are used in the
spellers.

In an effort to answer the third question—What is the relationship of the
assumptions implicit in the Spelling series to the interests children have in
learning about these words?—the data generated about the second question
were held alongside the concepts, logic, and assumptions identified in the
first question and examined thoughtfully.

A further description of these procedures is outlined in more detail
below.

Examining the spellers. For the purposes of this study, the Level 2 and
Level 3 Spelling books of the Macmillan series were examined. A study of the
general organization of the books was undertaken; then a detailed analysis of
the assumptions and logic implicit in both the content and the organization
of the content was initiated. The number of words, the nature of the exercises
involved, and the purpose and structure of the spelling books were studied.6

Assessing children's interests in words. In an attempt to assess students'
interests in words, two forms of a simple, one-page questionnaire were devel-

6Carl B. Smith and Julie Small, Spelling Level 2, and Carl B. Smith and Barbara Elder Weller,
developed. The instrument was titled "Which Words Interest You?" One form was developed for use with youngsters in grade two, and another form was developed for use with students in grade three. (The original intention was to ask first grade students to respond to an instrument developed for that grade level. After administering the scale to several groups of first grade students, it was decided that the scale was inappropriate for use at that level.)

"Which Words Interest You?" (Fig. 1) included directions, which the regular classroom teacher read aloud to the students. On the back of that same sheet of paper were three lists of 40 words arranged in pairs, 20 pairs in each list, making a total of 120 words to which students were asked to respond.

Of the 120 words on the scale, 60 were words chosen arbitrarily (i.e., the third and seventh word listed in each of 30 lessons) from the words included in the speller as "new words" that children are expected to learn to spell correctly. These 60 words are included in the speller in an explicit way that requires the students to try to learn to spell each word correctly. For the purpose of this study, these explicit words are called the "Spelling Words."

The other 60 words on the scale were words that are used in an implicit way in the speller. That is, in the speller a picture of something is portrayed that the student must look at, identify, and label with a word that the student already knows in order to respond appropriately to various exercises in the speller. These 60 words, each of which was ultimately matched with one of

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**Fig. 1. Directions for Instrument Used in the Study**

**WHICH WORDS INTEREST YOU?**

People have different interests. Some people like music. Other people are interested in games. Still other people are interested in books or cars or clothes.

What kind of words interests you? Look at the example below. There are two words arranged together in a pair.

Look at the two words in each pair. Draw a circle around the one word that interests you most.

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computer   winter
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In a minute you will turn your paper over. On the other side you will find three lists of pairs of words. The lists will look like this:

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List One    List Two    List Three
music      glasses    dog    now    pencil    car
snow       movie      when   swing  hard     green
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Before you begin, let's practice on the words above. Look at the two words in each pair. Draw a circle around the one word in each pair that interests you most. Go ahead. Practice on the words above.

Remember: Which words interest you most?

When you have finished, turn your paper over and begin.
the 60 Spelling Words described above, were represented in the speller only by a picture. However, since the spelling textbook requires the student to be able to use the words to describe whatever is represented in the pictures as a means of responding correctly to the learning tasks, it seems reasonable to presume that the words are included in the textbook, even though they are used in an implicit rather than explicit way. For the purposes of this study, these implicit words are called "Other Words."

The directions on the questionnaire were simple.

- Look at the two words in each pair.
- Draw a circle around the one word that interests you most.

Each of the 60 pairs of words included on the scale included one Spelling Word that was part of the spelling curriculum and one Other Word that the student was expected to infer from looking at a picture as a requisite for answering a question in the textbook. Half of the Spelling Words were on the left, and the other half were on the right.

Since all of the Other Words are implied in the text and refer to objects, they are nouns, by definition. Many of these Other Words are long, multiple-syllable, and (if they had been printed, which they were not) visually complex. Most of the Spelling Words are short, single-syllable, and visually simple.

The one-page questionnaire, therefore, includes 120 words drawn from the Macmillan Spelling books arranged in such a way that each of the 60 Spelling Words is paired with one of the 60 Other Words that is implicit in the speller, and students are asked: Which word interests you most?

The questionnaire is scored by tallying the number of Spelling Words each student circles and the number of Other Words that each student circles. This results in two separate scores. Since there are 60 pairs of words to which the student is asked to respond (i.e., 60 items), the two scores must total 60 points. For example, scores could run from a low of "0" to a high of "60" on each subscale, but scores of 22 and 38 would be more typical.

Reliability. Reliability of the "Which Words Interest You?" scales was determined by analyzing these responses of 100 second grade students and 100 third grade students to the instruments in terms of odd and even items. The split-half reliability coefficients were as follows:

- Grade Two: .88
- Grade Three: .79

These values seem sufficient to suggest that the instrument is reasonably reliable, at least for purposes of this exploratory study.

The Sample. All of the second and third grade students in five elementary schools in a large urban school district were asked by their regular classroom teacher to respond to the questionnaire. Students were directed not to put their names on the paper.

The teacher read the front page instructions aloud to them while the students worked their way through the examples. The youngsters then turned
the paper over and completed the questionnaire, reading silently through the pairs of words. It took most students about 10 to 15 minutes to respond to the questionnaire.

All together, usable responses from 285 second grade students and 288 third grade students were collected. "Usable responses" were papers in which the students had responded to all 60 items, but circled only one of the two words on each item. If students did not respond to every item, or if they circled both words on any one or more items, the entire paper was excluded.

RESULTS

The Nature of the Spellers

For the purposes of this study, only the Level 2 and Level 3 Macmillan *Spelling* books were examined. There is some variation, but the general organizational structure of the spellers is fairly constant. There are 36 lessons, each lesson requires four pages, and each lesson follows a "develop, practice, apply, then review and extend" rationale. Further, each lesson emphasizes one or two phonetic sounds. Lesson 11, for example, in the Level 2 books, emphasizes the "long e" sound. At the top of the page it says,

Hear the /e/ in (picture of a bee)
/\e/ is spelled e

Down the left-hand side of the page are listed ten "new" words:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>see</th>
<th>keep</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>seen</td>
<td>seem</td>
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<tr>
<td>feet</td>
<td>need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deep</td>
<td>week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feed</td>
<td>feel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Below that are listed three challenge words:

tree  
sleep  
sweet

Thirteen questions are listed below these instructions:

Read the words. Listen for the sound of /e/.
Then write the words.
1. It begins like (picture of a duck) deep
2. It begins like (picture of a kite)
3. It begins like (picture of a seal)
4. It begins like (picture of a fan)
5. It begins like (picture of the sun)
6. It begins like (picture of a feather)
7. It begins like (picture of the numeral "6")
8. It begins like (picture of a fish)
9. It begins like (picture of a walrus)
10. It begins like (picture of a bird's nest)
Implicit in this page of the speller are a number of assumptions. First, there are ten "new" words that the student is expected to learn. Since there are 36 lessons in the book, that means that each student is actually expected to learn to spell about 360 words correctly during one year of instruction. In fact, 355 words are listed in the "Spelling Dictionary" at the back of the book.

A second assumption seems to be that learning about words in phonetic groupings is more important than learning what the words mean as a way of helping children learn to spell. The meaning of words is included in the speller, of course, but at the back of the book in the "Spelling Dictionary." The entire emphasis on each instructional page is how words sound. Furthermore, repetition of the same sound, over and over, is assumed to be worthwhile. At no point in the four pages devoted to each lesson is an understanding of the meaning of the spelling words either emphasized or required.

A third assumption is that children who use this book will have a reasonably well-developed "speaking" vocabulary and be able to say words that are fairly long and involved. The words they are expected to spell, however, are short, visually simple, but sometimes difficult to comprehend.

For example, question numbers six and nine say:

6. It begins like (picture of a feather)
9. It begins like (picture of a walrus)

Students are expected to "know" what a feather is and to be able to say the word "feather" aloud. However, they must immediately forget "feather" as an idea and focus on the initial sound made when one pronounces the word "feather"; the "f" sound. Since three different words in the list begin with the letter "f"—feet, feed, feel—students are expected to search the list until they find one of those three words, and then write that word down. The same logic applies to the way "walrus" is used in the text.

In other words, the meaning in the picture actually seems to get in the way of learning how to spell with these curriculum materials.

Continuing the analysis, both "feather" and "walrus" are fairly complex words, visually, compared to "feed," "feet," "feel," or "week" as words. Cognitively, however, both "feather" and "walrus" are easier to comprehend than "feel" or "week," because "feather" and "walrus" are nouns, and nouns refer to something that exists in reality—a person, place, or thing. In fact, every exercise in the book presumes that children will know and understand words that refer to people, places, and things.

Furthermore, the exercises require children to be able to retrieve from memory experiences about people, places, and things that can only be described with words—including how to pronounce the words and what they actually mean—that are typically long, multiple-syllable, and visually complex.
The words that children are expected to learn to spell, however, are often words that do not have an obvious referent in reality; they are not nouns. Visually, the words are simple, but cognitively they are more difficult to comprehend. Most of the Spelling Words that children are expected to learn to spell in the Level 2 book, for example, are three to five letters in length, single-syllable, and less than half are nouns. The remaining words are generally verbs, adjectives, or adverbs.

For instance, "seem," "need," and "feel" are words that students are expected to learn to spell in Lesson 11, but these words are not nouns, and there is no specific referent in reality to which the youngsters can make a direct tie between the word and the reality.

As a further illustration, consider the list of words in Lesson 26:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>the</th>
<th>cheek</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>chin</td>
<td>that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>then</td>
<td>chase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chip</td>
<td>than</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>this</td>
<td>them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many of the words in this list are conceptually elusive; the words are difficult to understand, even though they are fairly simple visually. Only a few of the words are nouns, and several are not defined in the "Spelling Dictionary" at the end of the speller, but simply illustrated. For example:

- than A cow is bigger than a rabbit.
- that That girl won the prize.
- then The play ended and then the curtain went down.
- this This house is ten years old.

In Lesson 21, the pictures in the exercises—which require students to recognize a reality, know what Other Word refers to that reality, and know how to pronounce that word aloud—presume that children can cope with "spaghetti," "spider," "strawberry," and "steam" from a boiling kettle in order to accomplish the phonetic exercises involved in spelling words "spin," "spoke," "stick," and "step." All of the Other Words that youngsters are expected to know how to pronounce and what the words mean are longer, more complex visually, more difficult to pronounce, and always nouns. The words the students are expected to learn to spell are shorter, more difficult to grasp conceptually, and less meaningful.

Macmillan publishes a Scope and Sequence booklet, which outlines the details of the Spelling series. This kind of outline is common among publishers, it explicates the "hoped for" ends to be achieved if teachers use the Spelling series as a means of helping children learn to spell.7

Figure 2 is a reproduction of one of the 12 pages outlining the scope and sequence of the Spelling series. Many inferences might be made from a study.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consonants</th>
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<th>LEVEL 2</th>
<th>LEVEL 3</th>
<th>LEVEL 4</th>
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<td>f: 2,5</td>
<td>f: 74-77, 94,97</td>
<td>f: 122-125, 142,145</td>
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<td>/g/ as in game</td>
<td>g: 9,10,36, 37,38,41, 47,48</td>
<td>g: 3,4</td>
<td>g: 38-41, 47,49</td>
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<tr>
<td>/h/ as in bot</td>
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<td>h: 2</td>
<td>wh: 78-81, 94,97</td>
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<td>j: 32,33, 46,48</td>
<td>j: 3</td>
<td>j,g: 38-41, 47,49</td>
<td>j,g,dg: 34-37, 47,49</td>
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<td>/k/ as in kit</td>
<td>c: 7,13,32, 33,46,48</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Consonants**

- **/s/ as in box**
- **/v/ as in lid**
- **/m/ as in man**
- **/n/ as in nest**
- **/p/ as in pail**
- **/l/ as in ride**
of such a page, but the most obvious inference relates to the phonetic emphasis of the curriculum materials as the prime criterion for selecting curriculum content (i.e., words that children are expected to learn to spell). No consideration is given to meaning as a way of helping children learn about words and how to spell them.

As described above, though, every exercise in the speller requires the student to know the meaning of a word that can be inferred from a picture of an object as a way of accomplishing a specific learning task precisely. However, that meaning is then used only in an incidental manner to get the student to complete the task correctly (i.e., "It begins like . . ."). Knowing what words mean is central to accomplishing the exercise in the Macmillan Spelling series, but meaning is not important in terms of what is actually learned. As the King of Siam might say, "'Tis a puzzlement!"

The "preoccupation" of the curriculum developer of the Spelling series was with the nature of the academic discipline, rather than with the nature of society or the nature of the learner. Society wants young people to learn to spell, of course, and most students also want to learn to spell words correctly, but emphasizing phonics to the complete exclusion of personal meaning may represent an uneven and perhaps undue emphasis of the scholar's concerns. If the subject matter is not interesting to the students, it may not make much difference how it squares with the scholar's scheme of things.

The Assessment of Students' Interests

Before comparing children's interests in the Spelling Words and the Other Words in the Macmillan Spelling books, Levels 2 and 3, suppose we compare the nature of the two sets of words selected for inclusion in the two "Which Words Interest You?" questionnaires. Recall that the Spelling Words were selected arbitrarily by identifying the third and seventh word in 30 lessons in both the Level 2 and the Level 3 books. Actually, these two samples represent about one sixth of the words that children are expected to learn to spell during each of those two years of school.

Recall, also, that the Other Words were derived from pictures in the spellers that children were expected to use in certain exercises associated with using the spellers. No specific effort was made to "control" which words were included in the questionnaires, so the descriptive data below simply reflect the character of the words that finally came to be included. Since the reason for including words in the scales in the first place was to determine which words were interesting to children, no tests of the statistical significance between mean number of syllables or letters in the two groups of words seemed appropriate. The concern was to understand.

Table 1 shows the average number of syllables in both the Spelling Words and the Other Words on the two forms of the questionnaire.
It is apparent from these data that the Spelling Words tended to be one-syllable words, whereas the Other Words that were paired with those words tended to have two syllables.

Table 2 lists the average number of letters per word, in both the Spelling Words and the Other Words, on the questionnaires.

Again, it is apparent that the Spelling Words are shorter than the Other Words with which they were paired on the questionnaires.

Each word included in the questionnaires was also classified according to the type or class of word involved (i.e., parts of speech). Some of the words, of course, could be classified more than one way, so the most applicable classification (i.e., that which seemed to be implied in the way in which the word was used in the speller) was chosen. Table 3 presents the results of this analysis.

Less than half of the Spelling Words on the two forms of the questionnaires were nouns, between 25 and 38 percent were verbs, and the remaining words were other types. Since the Scope and Sequence document maintains that the Spelling series teaches 95 percent of the most frequently used words based on a 1982 computer research study of 15,000 actual student writing samples, that may explain the distribution. All of the Other Words that were implicit in the spellers—those that were derived from the pictures of objects to which children were expected to respond—were nouns.
How did the children actually respond to the words that were on the "Which Words Interest You?" scale? Table 4 lists the mean number of Spelling Words and Other Words selected by 285 second grade students and 288 third grade students as the words that interest them most.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Spelling Words</th>
<th>Other Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>22.94</td>
<td>7.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>19.91</td>
<td>6.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students in both the second and third grades consistently selected many more Other Words than Spelling Words on the scale.

The second graders chose, on the average, 22.94 Spelling Words from the 60 such words on the instrument, but they indicated their preference for 37.06 Other Words on the scale. The "t" value of 14.89 indicates that the difference between those mean scores is very significant statistically, beyond the .001 level of confidence.

The third graders chose, on the average, 19.91 Spelling Words from the 60 such words on the instrument, but they indicated their preference for 40.09 Other Words on the scale. The "t" value of 25.25 indicates that the difference between those mean scores is very significant statistically, beyond the .001 level of confidence.

Such dramatic differences in mean scores of children to the Spelling Words and Other Words on the instrument suggest that there must be certain characteristics of the one group of words that make those words more interesting to the students involved. We have already determined that the words differ in length, the number of syllables involved, and in terms of the type or class of words that compose the two groups.

In some of the pairs of words, however, the words are similar in terms of class; they are all nouns. That is, 45 percent of the Spelling Words on the second grade form were nouns, and 55 percent of the words were not nouns. On the third grade instrument, 38 percent of the Spelling Words were nouns, and 62 percent of the words were not nouns.

The 45 percent of second grade words that were nouns and the 38 percent of third grade words that were nouns, by definition, were paired with other nouns. Suppose we press the comparison still further and look at how many Spelling Words that were nouns were chosen in comparison to Other Words that were nouns. Such a comparison should make the distinction regarding length of words and number of syllables more meaningful. Table 5 presents those data.
What is apparent from these data is that the difference between mean scores of second grade students who expressed interest in Spelling Words and Other Words that were nouns was not significant statistically. The students chose Spelling Words and Other Words in almost exactly the same proportion, even though the Other Words were longer, contained more syllables, and were generally more complex.

At the third grade level, students actually indicated more interest in the Other Words than the Spelling Words that were nouns, even though the Other Words were longer, contained more syllables, and were generally more complex. The difference was significant statistically, beyond the .01 level of confidence.

**CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

Three questions were posed in this research:

1. Is the Macmillan *Spelling* series an example of hyperrationalization in the curriculum?
2. Are children interested in the words the *Spelling* series requires them to master?
3. What is the relationship of the assumptions implicit in the *Spelling* series to the interests children have in learning about these words?

Assuming that it is possible to extend Wise’s concept of “hyperrationalization” to make it applicable to curriculum in some reasonable way, the answer to the first question seems to be “yes.”

Assuming that the instrument used to assess children’s interests in words in this study is reasonably valid, the answer to the second question is a categorical “no.”

The answer to the third question is explored in more detail below.

*Hyperrationalization of the curriculum.* Wise devotes an entire book to the concept of hyperrationalization in the schools. *Legislated Learning* is an analysis of policies, laws, and events that were designed to improve the schools, and the actual results that followed.

...central authorities devise educational policy designed either to promote equity or to increase productivity in the schools. The concepts and tools upon which they rely to achieve these objectives are resulting in further and excessive rationalization of the operation of our schools..."8

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At first glance, hyperrationalization as a concept may not seem to apply to curriculum development or curriculum materials in the schools. At another level, however, the concept seems to fit precisely.

Textbook selection, for example, is essentially a political process that occurs within the bureaucratic structure of schools and that has apparent rationality, but which often "involves imposing means which do not result in the attainment of ends." 9

For example, textbook selection typically occurs within a framework such as the following.

- A rotating cycle for selecting books is set.
- Responsibility is assigned.
- People are identified.
- Committees are appointed.
- Criteria are developed.
- Materials are requested.
- Presentations are made.
- Criticisms are received.
- Discussions are held.
- Decisions are made.

On the surface, the rationality of such an operation seems both reasonable and defensible. What often occurs in practice, however, is that the "logic of the process" is assumed, and what happens "inside the process" negates the intentions of the logic. The result is that curriculum materials of poor quality are often adopted, but such decisions are almost never acknowledged.

Consider a hypothetical example. Why is it necessary to have a rotating cycle for selecting textbooks? Several reasons come forth: books wear out; information becomes outdated; even allocations of monies over time; and teachers get tired of using the same materials year after year. Other reasons could be identified. The point is that once the decision has been made to have a rotating cycle for selecting textbooks (language arts this year, mathematics next year, etc.), that decision tends not to be questioned. It is assumed to be correct. The reasons that went into the initial decision to rotate textbook adoption may or may not be relevant any given year, but the decision still holds.

Pressing the analysis still further, what seems to happen is that the essential "political" nature of textbook selection as a process is seldom acknowledged, and often denied. Anyone who has been involved in textbook selection, though, knows that criticism will be forthcoming if certain groups are not represented in the adoption process. The assumption is made that participation in the process is defensible, in and of itself, for political reasons, whether or not the quality of the decision about textbooks is improved.

9Ibid., p 65.
As a result of this "political" process, the criteria that get established tend to appear at two levels—explicit and implicit—and neither set of criteria is completely defensible, except in political terms.

For example, questions such as the following get raised in relation to the criterion question:

- Are blacks adequately represented in the pictures?
- Are women shown in nonconventional roles?
- Will certain religious groups be offended?
- Will specific pressure groups feel upset?
- Is there evidence that other schools are using this?
- Are the book and our curriculum guide correlated?

Consider, as an analogy, the criteria that the Pure Food and Drug Administration uses for determining whether drugs should be made available to consumers.

1. Is it helpful?
2. Is it harmful?

By law, the answer to the first question must be positive, and the answer to the second question must be negative. And both questions must be answered.

Suppose we had a similar set of criteria for selecting textbooks and other curriculum materials:

1. Is this textbook helpful? That is, does it help children learn what is intended? Will the materials facilitate learning in the hoped-for direction?
2. Is this textbook harmful? That is, does it lead to the development of "negative" learnings (e.g., dislike of reading, low motivation, etc.)?

The problem is that once a school district starts the process of textbook adoption, questions such as the two above tend not to get top priority. Instead, questions such as the following tend to dominate:

- Do we have adequate representation on the committee?
- Has every critic had a chance to be heard?
- Did we follow the procedures we said we would follow?
- Are we within budgetary constraints?
- Will we get any "flak" if we adopt this book?

Following what appears to be a highly rational, deliberate, thoughtful process is presumed to lead to good decisions regarding the nature of the curriculum materials that will be used in schools. Because the process has been set forth in rational terms, explicated in detail, and followed meticulously, it is assumed that the decisions made are good decisions. And because the process is embedded within the bureaucratic structure, with so many persons participating and so many checkpoints along the way, it is also assumed, implicitly, of course, that the process also validates the decision. In other words, people are reluctant to admit that—putting in that much effort and that much time, with so many people participating—the decision may not be a good decision.
Given the apparent rationality of the process, the time and energy involved, the number of people who participated, and the agonizing that went into the decision making, people naturally conclude that “we made the right decision.”

Whether the curriculum materials are helpful or harmful was hardly considered, and will, in fact, probably never be known. Leaning on the elaborateness of the explicated process justifies the conclusion, whether warranted or not. That clearly seems to be what Wise refers to as “hyperrationalization.”

Now, suppose we return to a consideration of the *Scope and Sequence* document by Macmillan referred to earlier.

Textbook publishers are caught between the demands of the marketplace, the demands of the classroom teacher, the demands of the scholar, and the demands of society. To cope with these conflicting forces, publishers develop their own bureaucratic mechanisms for processing the competing claims in ways that will serve their own purposes. They could hardly do otherwise.

Editorially, publishers must devise structures and processes and materials that will assure consideration of their product. The *Scope and Sequence* document that accompanies the Macmillan *Spelling* series is an example of such material that was produced within the structure and according to the processes of the publisher.

*Scope and Sequence* is only 13 pages long, but each page is an elaborate portrayal of the precise positioning of discrete elements of specific aspects of words that are thought to be important in helping children learn to spell.

For example, the long /a/, as in “ape,” appears in:
- Level 1 a-e: 94–97, 110, 113
- Level 2 a-e: 34–37, 47, 49; ai-ay: 38–41, 47, 49
- Level 3 a-e, ai, ay: 14–17, 23, 25
- Level 4 a-e, ai, ay: 10–13, 23, 25
- Level 5 a-e, ai, ay, eigh: 26–29, 46, 49
- Level 6 a, a-e, ai, ay, eigh: 26–29, 46, 49

Consider another illustration. Adding -ing, -ed, -er, -est, -y appears in:
- Level 2 -ed: 65, 72, 96, 120, 144
  -ing: 85, 96, 120, 144
- Level 3 -ing, -ed: 5, 24, 48, 96
  -er: 133
  -y,-er: 21, 24, 48, 96, 120, 144

What is reflected in these examples is “an effort to rationalize beyond the bounds of knowledge,” Wise’s description of “hyperrationalization.” In one sense, the information described above is knowledge; knowledge that is useful to the scholar and lexicographer. It is not particularly useful in helping children learn to spell, but the elaborateness of the explication exudes rationality—it seems to embody the essence of scientific fact and scholarship—to the point that persons on textbook selection committees are impressed:

*This must be a good textbook. Anyone who has this kind of information about spelling words must know what he or she is doing. I am not sure whether children...*
need that kind of detailed information about words in order to learn to spell, but this author must be very knowledgeable. Furthermore, no one will complain if we adopt a book that emphasizes basics and scholarship this way. We won't get any complaints from minority groups. The high school teachers cannot say that we are not trying to teach the basic skills. It must be all right. I'll vote for this kind of book.

What seems to happen in the creation and adoption of textbooks for the schools is that publishers hyperrationalize and school districts hyperrationalize—all in the name of trying to produce and select the very best curriculum materials for students in the schools.

In other words, this analysis suggests that developing and selecting textbooks may very well involve “imposing means which do not result in the attainment of ends” desired. However, it is also important to recognize that the overt manifestation of rationality in both the process and the materials actually contributes to the illusion of “good thinking” and “good materials,” seducing participants into the belief that what they are doing is in the best interests of all involved.

What is missing in the process is good data—Do students really learn more? Better? Faster? Retain it longer? Like the learning? Want to continue to learn?—regarding attainment of the ends desired. Lacking good data, the participants in the process—publishers and educators alike—assume that the detailed attention to logic and facts (inside the materials) and sequence and participation (in the selection process) will automatically lead to the “right” decision. There is no evidence, in fact, that such assumptions are defensible, and, given the general downturn of achievement scores among students over the past decade, considerable evidence exists that the processes and materials now being used are inappropriate. Regardless of how “logical” and “rational” they seem to be, the processes and the materials are “not working.” That is what hyperrationalization is all about.

Obviously, rationality and logic and scholarship are important—terribly important. Specifying ends to be achieved and means to achieve those ends is also important—terribly important. Obsessive attention to inappropriate particulars of the ends or means, however, seems to ignore the real world of schools and schooling.

It is one thing to specify detailed instructions regarding content, sequence, process, and the like, and quite another to try to implement those detailed instructions in a classroom with 30 or so real, live, walking, talking, squirming, scooting youngsters. Planners and developers can think that they are going to improve the quality of the educational effort with their detailed attention to particulars, but if teachers and others are unable to implement the details in relation to the reality of diverse student abilities or interests or needs, then the best of intentions fall by the wayside.

Needless to say, the problem is not that teachers are not competent, capable people. The problem is simply that rationalizing beyond that which is reasonable—and reasonableness is always a function of the specifics of the
real world, not the specifics on a piece of paper—will not result in the attainment of ends desired. Hyperrationalization can occur and does occur. It apparently occurred when the Macmillan *Spelling* series was developed, and when school systems adopted it across the nation.

"But if students will complete this spelling program," some people say, "they will do well on standardized achievement tests." Such a statement may or may not be true, of course, but suppose we examine one standardized test that many school districts use to measure achievement of second and third graders every school year. How is achievement in spelling determined? What do students have to know? What kinds of items are on the achievement battery to which they will have to respond?

Many schools assess growth in academic achievement by testing all students, every year, with the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS). The ITBS, Level 8, Form 7 Battery is used to measure achievement of second grade students. Students are asked to respond to 29 items in the "Spelling" section. Each item includes three words, one of which is misspelled. In other words, a total of 87 words are displayed on one piece of paper, 29 of which are misspelled. The student is asked to find the misspelled words.

Most of the misspelled words on the ITBS would "sound right" if pronounced according to the spelling of the items on the test. The following words, for example, are included on the instrument as misspelled words:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>howse</th>
<th>puzzel</th>
<th>sayne</th>
<th>hunderd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wurid</td>
<td>mettal</td>
<td>mooved</td>
<td>fifth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chooze</td>
<td>jaket</td>
<td>winck</td>
<td>gradeful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>warying</td>
<td>sidwalk</td>
<td>drooped</td>
<td>mountans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suich</td>
<td>becide</td>
<td>tickets</td>
<td>froges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coffey</td>
<td>sanwich</td>
<td>pride</td>
<td>reasan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several observations might be made about such a listing. First, visual rather than auditory discrimination will be helpful to students attempting to identify words that are not spelled properly. The Macmillan *Spelling* series, of course, requires students to pronounce words aloud in order to learn how the words are spelled. Second, note also the length of words, number of syllables, and types of words that are included in the ITBS. Most of the words are long, multiple-syllable, visually complex, and nouns. For example, some of the properly spelled words that are included on the scale are listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>number</th>
<th>bean</th>
<th>dog</th>
<th>whispered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>balloon</td>
<td>chest</td>
<td>bridge</td>
<td>forget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>water</td>
<td>tractor</td>
<td>shop</td>
<td>together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>breakfast</td>
<td>candle</td>
<td>today</td>
<td>twenty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anyone</td>
<td>secret</td>
<td>fur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>built</td>
<td>people</td>
<td>camp</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is little similarity between these words on the test of academic achievement and the words that students are taught in the Macmillan spellers. It may
be that the skills acquired in the Macmillan program enable youngsters to identify words that are not spelled correctly, but, on the surface at least, there is almost no relationship between what is taught and what is tested in the second grade.

In grade three, students are tested with Level 9, Form 7 of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills. The "spelling" test in that booklet includes 30 questions, each with five options, one of which is "no mistakes." There are 120 words listed.

Again, the requirement of students is to see errors such as those listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mowth</th>
<th>agan</th>
<th>rogh</th>
<th>naem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>blu</td>
<td>poket</td>
<td>extra</td>
<td>britest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stov</td>
<td>egssact</td>
<td>raing</td>
<td>watter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>think</td>
<td>nife</td>
<td>cloth</td>
<td>talkt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lievs</td>
<td>holoday</td>
<td>rane</td>
<td>ideer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phonetically, these words will "sound" correct, but students must detect errors through visual perception.

The words that are spelled correctly include such words as the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>slow</th>
<th>silver</th>
<th>cube</th>
<th>posters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dump</td>
<td>spoon</td>
<td>gather</td>
<td>patch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wild</td>
<td>lump</td>
<td>elm</td>
<td>comb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pain</td>
<td>nation</td>
<td>free</td>
<td>jaws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>either</td>
<td>candy</td>
<td>list</td>
<td>empty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although precise comparisons were not undertaken, the words on this form of the ITBS appear to have fewer letters, fewer syllables, and to include fewer nouns than those on the second grade test.

The issue being explored here is one of purpose and relevance. Assuming that students "buy into" the stated goal of a school district "to raise achievement scores," is there a relationship between what is taught and what is tested? In other words, suppose we assume for a moment that the words in the Macmillan speller are relevant and interesting to students in the classroom (even though the evidence against that proposition is overwhelming), will the experience and practice of learning to spell by studying the words in the Spelling series help the students?

Perhaps. However, the analysis here suggests that students are asked to deal with very different ways and use different kinds of skills when they learn to spell from when they are tested for achievement in spelling.

Children's interest and learning. The data in this study suggest that children were not interested in the words in the Macmillan Spelling series. The 573 students who participated in this study were clearly interested in words that are longer, more complex visually, and more relevant than the words listed in the speller. So what?

How important is "interest" in children's learning? Can teachers and others concerned with helping youngsters learn to spell pay too much atten
tion to students’ interests? What is the relationship of interest to student motivation? What is the relationship of interest to student achievement? Is it better to have:

- good spellers who are interested in words,
- good spellers who are not interested in words,
- poor spellers who are interested in words, or
- poor spellers who are not interested in words?

There would probably be general agreement that the first goal listed above would be most preferred and the last goal least preferred. However, there probably would not be agreement regarding the preferability of goals two and three. In fact, there is no general agreement regarding the relative importance of interest and achievement in school. All things considered, both are felt to be worthwhile, but if people are asked to indicate which of the two goals should be given priority, disagreement emerges. In this way, the issue is joined.

Some persons feel that effort is important in learning, whether the experience is interesting or not. Dewey explored the relationship of interest and effort more than half a century ago.

Interest is first active, projective, or propulsive. We *take* interest. To be interested in any matter is to be actively concerned with it. Mere feeling regarding a subject may be static or inert, but the interest is dynamic. Second, it is objective. We say a man has many interests to care for or look after. ... Interest does not end simply in itself, as bare feelings may, but is embodied in an object of regard. Third, interest is personal; it signifies a direct concern; a recognition of something at stake, something whose outcome is important for the individual.

The root idea of the term seems to be that of being engaged, engrossed, or entirely taken up with some activity because of its recognized worth. The etymology of the term *inter-esse*, "to be between," points in the same direction. Interest marks the annihilation of the distance between the person and the materials and result of his action; it is the sign of their organic union.10

Dewey argued against effort, for its own sake, in the following way.

It is psychologically impossible to call forth any activity without some interest. The theory of effort simply substitutes one interest for another. It substitutes the impure interest of fear of the teacher or hope of future reward for pure interest in the material presented. The type of character induced is that illustrated by Emerson at the beginning of his essays on *Compensation*, when he holds up the current doctrine of compensation as implying that, if you only sacrifice yourself enough now, you will be permitted to indulge yourself a great deal more in the future; or, if you are only good now (goodness consisting in attention to what is uninteresting) you will have, at some future time, a great many more pleasing interests—may then be bad.

While the theory of effort is always holding up to us a strong, vigorous character as the outcome of its method of education, practically we do not get such a character. We get either the narrow, bigoted man who is obstinate and irresponsible save in the

line of his own preconceived aims and beliefs, or else a character dull, mechanical, unalert, because the vital juice of spontaneous interest has been squeezed out.\(^{11}\)

Hart criticizes the emphasis on rationality for its own sake. Without speaking directly to the idea of "interest," he assumes that something such as "intuition" or "heuristic modes of thought" will enable people to learn what they need to know in order to function effectively in the real world outside the school:

In recent years, it seems to me, greater acceptance has developed of what may be called intuitive or heuristic modes of thought. Still, practically everyone has to go through long years of formal education, and most better jobs require certain credentials, awarded primarily for conforming to whatever the educational institutions may demand. As a result we all tend to suffer from the most stupendous, organized, incessant brainwashing of all: the obsession formal education has with rational and logical processes, heavily dependent on verbalization. ... The great bulk of human brainpower suffers suppression and disparagement because of this witless, pompous, pretentious emphasis on largely nonproductive but respectable artificial modes of thought, kept dominant with reptilian tenacity.\(^{12}\)

Graves approaches the problem through a review of the research related to spelling. Quoting Leo Cohen, he says:

Children spell better when they are using language with a purpose; when they are using the response meaning and word study exercises. Students spelled less well when preparatory exercises stressed homophones, attention to affixes and inflectional endings, silent letters, initial consonants and blends, phonetic respellings, and vowels ... For eighty-one words spelled correctly (at the .05 significance level) seventy-two were spelled best by the word usage pattern, while only nine were favored by the word study.\(^{13}\)

Graves went on to compare the changes in spellers over recent years, then concluded:

Rather than remove spelling books from the marketplace, publishers have filled the vacuum with exercises related to handwriting, synonyms, word origins, and other language arts skill areas. Such exercises may be useful, but why must it be implied that they contribute to spelling?

On the encouraging side is the increase in word usage and response to meaning activities for children. In the light of history of research in spelling and the Cohen study, more usage activities are needed.\(^{14}\)

Horn describes a project in which youngsters learned to spell 25 words each day, more than ten times as many words per day as the Macmillan spelling series requires, but the rationale was a "test, then study" rather than "study,

\(^{11}\)Ibid., pp. 2-3
\(^{13}\)Donald H. Graves, "Spelling Texts and Structural Analysis Methods," as reprinted in Spelling, ed. Walter B. Barbe (Columbus: Zaner-Bloser, Inc., 1982), p. 31
\(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 33.
The emphasis built on strengths rather than areas of weakness.

Perhaps Mark Twain was right when he wrote:

> The trouble is not with the spelling; it goes deeper than that; it is with the alphabet. There is but one way to scientifically and adequately reform the orthography, and that is by reforming the alphabet, then the orthography will reform itself. What is needed is that each letter of the alphabet shall have a perfectly definite sound, and that this sound shall never be changed or modified without the addition of an accent, or other visible sign, to indicate precisely and exactly the nature of the modification. The Germans have this kind of an alphabet. Every letter of it has a perfectly definite sound, and when that sound is modified an umlaut or other sign is added to indicate the precise shade of the modification. The several values of the German letters can be learned by the ordinary child in a few days, and after that, for ninety years, that child can always correctly spell any German word it hears, without ever having been taught to do it by another person, or being obliged to apply to a spelling book for help. But the English alphabet is pure insanity. It can hardly spell any word in the language with any large degree of certainty.

Twain was trying to be humorous, of course, but in some ways there seems to be a negative relationship in spelling books between the rational approach and students' interest, or even interest in a subject matter area.

Interest and meaningfulness seem related, somehow; a joining together of that which is close and that which is significant.

It is difficult to believe that requiring a student to experience something that is uninteresting and meaningless can ever be as useful for learning as something that is interesting and meaningful. When educational experiences "make sense" to learners—when information is something to which students can attribute significance—interest can be both aroused and sustained. When educational experiences do not "make sense" to learners—when information is something to which students cannot attribute significance—interest can neither be aroused nor sustained.

The importance of meaning in learning is seldom argued about in principle, though it is often contested in practice, but generally under another banner.

Chall dealt with the issue in _The Great Debate_, but the middle ground solution that she proposed—a balance between emphasis on phonics and whole-word approach in teaching reading—seems difficult to achieve. The phonic emphasis appears to emerge as the "effort" theory, as described by Dewey, whereas the whole-word approach emerges as the theory of "interest."

The Macmillan *Spelling* series undoubtedly emphasized the "effort" rather than "interest" theory, and it ignores the data that Bettelheim and Zelan report about how boring the practice of learning decoding skills is for youngsters.18

Could it be that, in their concern to do the very best they can for students in the schools, publishers and educators alike are caught up in the bureaucratization of curriculum to the point that programs are seen as more important than people? That is, is the emphasis on *programs*—which, by definition, are single solutions—an inappropriate and ineffective way to comprehend and respond to the multiple realities of individual differences that exist among both students and teachers in the schools?

JACK FRYMIER is Senior Fellow, Phi Delta Kappa International, Eighth and Union Ave., Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402.

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Characteristic of his classic *Children of Crisis* and some 25 other books, sociologist Coles explores and interprets the political and moral being of children with great facility and elegance. The deepest feelings, insights, and actual voices of children speak to readers from varying origins, cultural backgrounds, and age levels on profound moral and political matters. From these books, a decade in the making, we can learn much from the experience and insight of children. Of special interest are children’s perspectives on the threat of nuclear war.

—William H. Schubert


A collection of essays on scholarly aspects of clinical supervision, its historical genesis (Robert H. Anderson), beyond technique to its essence (Noreen B. Garman), to its theoretical bases (Thomas J. Sergiovanni), its collaborative, reflective, and critical modes (W. John Smyth), an analysis of technical, interpretive, and critical approaches (John A. Retallick), taking a situational attitude toward teaching, focusing on it as intellectual acts, and researching clinical supervision (Brent Kilbourn), and ending with practical questions on introducing a clinical supervision program (Lee Goldsberry).

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