

1969

A Comparison of Contract-Spelling with the Regular Textbook Method for Spelling Instruction at Frontier Junior High School Moses Lake, Washington

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A COMPARISON OF CONTRACT-SPELLING WITH THE REGULAR
TEXTBOOK METHOD FOR SPELLING INSTRUCTION
AT FRONTIER JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL
MOSES LAKE, WASHINGTON

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty
Central Washington State College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education

by
Maxine M. Smith

July, 1969

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to her husband and family for their help and patience in seeing this work completed.

To Dr. John Davis for his guidance and direction and to Dr. Byron De Shaw and Mr. Darwin Goodey for their assistance in completing this thesis, many thanks.

Mentioned should be my typist, Alice Lou Schomer, and all of the eighth grade students from Frontier Junior High School in Moses Lake, who participated in this experiment.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Educators have become increasingly conscious of the need for a program of instruction that enables each student to progress at his own maximum rate of speed, in his own way, to the fulfillment of his potential abilities. Many materials and devices have been developed to be used toward this goal. Although, there has been a great deal of study and research in the development of spelling lists and scales, there has been little research on individualized instruction in the area of spelling.

Spelling is a major skill in written communication, and pupils vary in factors that influence spelling ability. To meet this variation in ability there is need for a new curriculum and/or new method of instruction to facilitate the learning of spelling by each individual.

Contract spelling, a method of assignment and instruction related to the personal spelling needs of each student could serve as a basis for the individualizing of spelling instruction. A comparison of this method with the regular textbook method might prove valuable.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this experiment is to compare the teacher-pupil-study contract method with the regular textbook method of spelling instruction. This experiment is concerned with the spelling achievement of students and for motivation and mastery in spelling at the junior high school level.

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis was assumed. The achievement of pupils whose spelling assignments were determined in pupil-teacher study contracts would show no significant improvement over the achievement of pupils who followed the regular assignments in the spelling textbooks.

Need for the Study

Spelling skills are taught at the junior high school level. Students at this grade level need new motivation to develop the desire for mastery in this area. The method of assignment and practice in spelling textbooks remains nearly the same from at least the fourth grade through the eighth grade. A new method of assignment and practice could stimulate new interest in

spelling and may improve student achievement. It is, therefore, worthy of research.

If it is found that the contract method of assignment of individualized spelling instruction has advantages over the regular textbook method it should be recommended for use in the junior high school language arts program. On the other hand, if no advantage exists, the method should not be considered for total inclusion in the program, but rather used for varying the instruction of spelling at the junior high level.

Limitations

This study was limited by such factors as the following:

1. The study was limited to the population of one school.

2. The study was limited to only one grade of this school.

3. The study was limited to one experimenter and one experimental group.

4. The study was limited in that it covered only a one year period.

II. DEFINITION OF TERMS

Contract Spelling

A method of spelling assignment in which four lists of words of varying difficulty was used in making assignments.

Each student selected from the lists those words nearest his spelling ability. Each student signed a contract listing those words, as many as he wished to attempt to spell in one week, and gave a copy of this list to the investigator. The words were studied by regular methods and dictated from a tape recorder.

Spelling Word-box

A small individual box in which each student kept words misspelled in either daily work or weekly spelling contracts, correctly spelled and in alphabetical order.

Bonus Words

Extra words that could be contracted for if a student had correctly spelled all of the words from his contract on the pretest.

Contract

A written agreement each student had with the investigator listing words the student would attempt to learn to spell for a given week.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

I. SUMMARY OF LIBRARY READING

Individualizing instruction is not new. Many dedicated teachers throughout history have attempted to develop the one-to-one relationship now called individualization. In earlier times, this relationship was achieved through tutoring. This situation could not remain because the number of students in schools in relation to the number of teachers available to teach them had become out of proportion. When the common school with its education for all was created, it was no longer possible to keep a one-to-one ratio. The group instruction, which is economically more sound, has failed to meet the needs of all students. It cannot provide as adequately for the individual differences of each student.

Preston Search and Fredrick Burk were among the first to advocate individualized instruction, rather than the usual assignments for all from one textbook method. Their idea has gained strength as the progressive type of education has progressed. In recent years the development and growth in the area of psychology has brought newer and better means of testing. It is now possible

to make a fairly accurate estimate of abilities and achievement of students. This has made it possible to evaluate the needs of each individual student and to attempt to meet each student's needs personally. This is the basic psychology behind individualized instruction in any area.

Carleton W. Washburne, and others, in the 1920's, developed the Winnetka technique of individualizing instruction. Their plan included one-half day of individual instruction and one-half day of regular activities. Under this plan each student was required to learn a required number of skills before he could move on to the next level of learning, but it was possible to do this in varying amounts of time. Rather than spend the day instructing the group, the teacher in this program could spend most of his time moving among the students helping each as he was needed.

The Dalton plan, another form of individualized instruction, allowed the student to allot his own time and help plan his own instruction using a method of individual contracts. In this program the student became responsible for getting his work completed according to plan, and for seeking help when he met with difficulties.

There has been some well known work done on individualization of instruction as a whole and more on just the individualization of instruction of reading, but there is very little literature on the individualization of spelling instruction specifically. Dr. Jette Fern Grant, Berkley, California, has included a section of her doctoral dissertation on the individualization of spelling instruction by means of teacher-pupil contracts. This incorporates the work of several people in the field of individualized instruction and added Dr. Grant's own variations, such as the development of the "word-box", to it.

II. SELECTION OF WORDS FOR INSTRUCTION

Arthur I. Gates' (9) book A List of Spelling Difficulties in 3876 Words shows the "hard spots", common misspellings, average spelling grade-placement, and comprehension grade-rating of each word. The complete book is written with these statistics in a column form. This book, however, was written in 1937 and does not include many words currently in our speaking and writing vocabulary.

A Measure Scale for Ability in Spelling by Leonard Ayers (1) is also outdated. It was published

in 1915, but the author's discussion of problems in scale making are still of value.

To be both valid and convenient, a scale for measuring attainment in spelling should consist of a series of groups of words so arranged that all of the words in each group are of equal spelling difficulty, and with the groups so arranged that the step in spelling difficulty from one group to the next higher group will be equal to any other step on the scale from one group to the next higher group.

The trend now is to include in each group many words of varying difficulty if these words are necessary to the students' vocabulary in other subjects and are knowledgeable to him.

III. INDIVIDUALIZATION OF INSTRUCTION

Walter B. Barbe (2:7-8) in the introduction to his book, Educators Guide to Personalized Reading Instruction says:

It has long been recognized that the most effective method of teaching a child usually is to teach him individually. This is a sound procedure from both a psychological and an educational point of view. There is no threat to the child's ego by his failure to learn so he does not hesitate to ask questions; instruction can be at the child's level without making any particular issue about whether he is ahead of where he should be or whether he is below it, responses can be praised immediately . . .

Goodlad and Anderson (11:210) in The Non-graded Elementary School are concerned with how to provide for the individual differences. Providing for individual

differences has not yet been solved but the non-graded school is one of the current trends in education that hopes to help solve the problem.

Learners of widely differing capacities and attainments proceed at varying rates of speed along curricular threads running the entire length of the school's program. Learning now becomes a longitudinal or developmental process, each child proceeding irregularly, but never according to the prearranged stop-and-go barriers. Each learner achieves his own unique insights as he proceeds.

IV. INDIVIDUALIZATION OF SPELLING INSTRUCTION

Dr. Grant (12:149), in her dissertation (June, 1964) stated:

Each child enjoyed the competition in contract spelling because he was able to compete with students of similar ability, and he felt that he had a fair chance to succeed. At the same time he gained a sense of security from participating in a joint enterprise. He not only gloried in his own achievement, he was also thrilled by achievement of his group and his class, because he had contributed to that achievement. As a result of these successes, many children who had formerly disliked spelling developed a very positive attitude toward this subject. They discovered that they could learn spelling and they took long spelling lists home to prove to their parents or guardians what they could do.

Edward Eisman (7:529-538) experimented with individualized spelling instruction in 1963. He worked on this project during a three year period. It was a program where the experimental groups were allowed to take as many words each week as they could learn, and to progress

at their own rate of speed. The control group followed a regular weekly lesson plan in the California state adopted speller.

He concluded:

At the end of three years, the students in the individualized program were working on an average from .8 to 1.5 grades higher in spelling than students in the Group Program. The individualized program achieved relatively greater success with students in the third grade than with older students.

Helen W. Vann (25:113) in her article for Grade Teacher, "Tailoring Their Spelling Words with Tape", explains the need for auditory imagery as well as visual imagery for some students.

For children who do not learn easily through visual imagery the tape recorder provides an invaluable opportunity for development of auditory imagery.

As a teacher who has used the tape recorder for three years, I have found it to be a tremendous motivating factor to children and indispensable in providing a truly individualized program in spelling.

Virgil E. Herrick (14:178-179) discusses individualization in spelling instruction in his book, The Elementary School.

Greater concern is being shown for the individualization of instruction in all spelling programs. Adjustments are often made in methods used, difficulty level of words to be learned, the number of words to be learned, and the amount of time spent on spelling. Good spellers, for example, are excused from spelling lessons, or are encouraged to engage in enrichment or supplementary activities involving the use of spelling words for the week.

Although spelling instruction still emphasizes visual impressions, auditory and kinesthetic experiences are also included in present teaching methods.

In organizing for instruction in individualized programs the above quotations are the attitude of most authors on the subject. Many other authorities read confirmed this opinion.

V. SUMMARY OF REVIEW OF RESEARCH

It was necessary to review three related materials to understand the development of an individualized spelling program.

First, it was necessary to understand how spelling word lists were developed and what methods could be used for a good selection of words at a given grade level. Second, it was necessary to understand ways in which individualization could be achieved. Third, it was necessary to review other experiments in individualizing spelling instruction specifically.

The review of literature pertaining directly to the specific topic of individualized spelling instruction was very limited, therefore, reference to words to be included in spelling instruction, methods of individualization, and individualization of spelling instruction specifically have all been included in this chapter.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURES

This research, "A Comparison of Contract-spelling With the Regular Textbook Method for Spelling Instruction at Frontier Junior High School, Moses Lake, Washington", was started in October, 1968, and continued until May, 1969. All research was done in the one school by the investigator.

I. CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

There were two groups of twenty-five students each for spelling instruction, picked at random by counselors and principals from the population of Frontier Junior High School, Moses Lake, Washington. One of these classes, the control group had the regular assignments from their spelling textbook and one, the experimental group, engaged in a contract for an unspecified number of words from a list arranged by the experimenter.

Both groups were pre-tested and post-tested. Achievement tests were used and all tests were given by the same test administrator, the investigator.

A pre-test was administered to determine the spelling level of each student. The Iowa Test of Basic Skills achievement test for spelling, form one (the

type was determined by those used in the district) was administered to all students in both classrooms involved in this study, both the control group and the experimental group.

Four sub-groups were established within the experimental group. The students were assigned to sub-groups on the basis of grade level scores from the pre-test.

Grouping--Twenty-Five Students

<u>Number of Students</u>	<u>Spelling Level</u>
5	Grade 9 equivalency
10	Grade 8 equivalency
5	Grade 7 equivalency
5	Grade 5 equivalency

Each student in the experimental group signed a contract listing words chosen from a selected list and filed it with the teacher.

A tape recorder was used as a means of dictating words to the experimental group so that the words were given to all of one group of students in the experimental class at one time with the students selecting from the dictated words those words that appeared on their own individual contracts. Four tapes were available with the list for one level on each tape.

II. PLAN FOR INSTRUCTION

The basic plan for spelling instruction in the experimental group was (1) formal instruction for each group using regular textbooks, and (2) a program of instruction aimed directly at each student's personal spelling needs. The plan called for direct teacher instruction on spelling rules and skills with one group each day, while the other three groups worked independently.

The following procedure was used for instructing each spelling group during a five day cycle:

First Day

The words in a new lesson were introduced by the teacher and each student in the group could select at random and contract for the number of words which he believed he could learn during a week from the weekly list. At the same time the group chairman recorded the sum of the individual contracts as the total contract for his group.

Second Day

Each student had an opportunity to study his spelling words alone, or with a spelling partner.

Third Day

All students in the group were given a practice test on the tape recorder. All of the words in the spelling lesson were recorded on the tape, but those who had contracted for fewer than the total number of words stopped writing when they had spelled the words in their respective contracts.

At the conclusion of the test, each student put his pencil inside his desk and took out a colored pencil. Then, as the words were spelled on the tape recorder, he listened and checked the spelling of each word on his paper, letter by letter. When this was done, he checked the words again by comparing them with the words in his spelling book or prepared list. All necessary changes were made with the colored pencils. This immediate correction and reinforcement was assumed to be of value in reducing the number of misspelled words on the final test.

Fourth Day

Each student studied his spelling words alone, or with a spelling partner, giving special attention to words which he had missed on the practice test.

Fifth Day

All students in the group were given a final test on the tape recorder. At the conclusion of this test,

each student checked the words on his paper with the list in his speller or word list. Then he turned the paper in to the teacher. When his spelling score was confirmed, it was credited to his contract.

The words in the spelling lesson which the student had not learned, and/or for which he had not contracted, were written on slips of paper and filed in his alphabetical word file. These became a part of his accumulation of words which he must learn before advancing to the next spelling level.

Each student kept a graphic record of his achievement. At the end of the five-day period, after each member of the group had completed his own record, the totals of the group were recorded.

Teacher-Pupil Contract

I _____ wish to contract for the following words for the week _____ to _____.

- | | |
|-----|-----|
| 1. | 11. |
| 2. | 12. |
| 3. | 13. |
| 4. | 14. |
| 5. | 15. |
| 6. | 16. |
| 7. | 17. |
| 8. | 18. |
| 9. | 19. |
| 10. | 20. |

Each sub-group started or contracted for their words on a different day of the week so that the teacher could spend a day of instruction with each group separately. Only on one day of each week did the teacher work directly with any one group, and the tape recorder was used by only two groups a day.

After all groups had completed their assignments and recorded it personally and by groups, it was then totaled for the whole class. Thus, every word every student learned was a contribution to himself, the group to which he belonged and to the whole class. This

acted as motivation for the students to help each other in every way possible.

This method of assignment also gave the willing and able student an opportunity to learn extra words if he completed his contract on the practice test. The "bonus words" were given to those students who fulfilled their obligation by completing their contracts in the practice test. The "bonus words" made it possible for the student, his group, and the class to exceed their contracts. This was added motivation for students to study harder for the practice test and provided spelling words for all students for the full week.

The contract method of spelling was individualized, but it became even more personally individualized with the use of word boxes. This was where each student's individual needs were found and from this list he was required to learn and spell words correctly three times before he could remove the word from the box. He could, at any time, have another student help him with these words or hear him say them but he was required to spell them correctly to the teacher three times.

The self-correction, filing of words in alphabetical order, learning to spell their words correctly

and independently, and helping others in order to help all was not the teacher's responsibility.

III. CONTROL GROUP ASSIGNMENTS

The control group continued to do the regular lessons from an eighth grade spelling series. No unusual method of procedure was applied in this class. Assignments were made at the beginning of each week.

Post-testing

At the end of the experiment the experimental group and the control group were again tested, using the same Iowa Test of Basic Skills, Form one, used at the beginning of the experiment.

The raw data were compiled from the test scores of the experimental and the control groups. Through the use of the t-test, the difference between the mean scores for the groups was analyzed for statistically significant difference.

CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The control and the experimental groups were tested in early October, 1968, and again in early May, 1969, for spelling ability. The test used was the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, form one. The two groups were compared by grade scores.

The results of the October testing revealed that the control group had a mean grade score of 8.28 and the experimental group had a mean score of 8.32. This is a difference of .04 in favor of the experimental group. Using Fishers' t-test to compare the two groups resulted in a score of .05 which was not significant.

The testing procedure was repeated at the end of May, 1969. At that time the mean grade score for the control group was 9.54 for an increase of 1.26 over the October score. The May testing results of the experimental group showed that the mean grade score for the group was 10.10 years. This was an increase of 1.78 years.

When the two groups were compared for a significant difference, again using the Fishers' t-test, it was found that the difference was .66, which is not significant.

Even though the results were not statistically significant, it should be noted that the experimental group did show a gain over the control group. That gain amounting to .52 of a school year. This gain, however, may have been due to chance. (See Table I for results.)

TABLE I
RESULTS OF THE PRE-TEST AND POST-TESTS,
IOWA TEST OF BASIC SKILLS, FORM I

	Control group	Experimental group	Mean	Significance at .05 level of confidence
Pre-test	8.28	8.32	.04	No
Post-test	9.54	10.10	.56	No
Net gain	1.26	1.78		

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. SUMMARY

The original and stated purpose of this study was to determine if the teacher-pupil contract method of spelling assignment had any significant advantages over the conventional method of spelling assignment in motivating eighth grade students to greater achievement in spelling. This experiment was conducted at Frontier Junior High School, Moses Lake, Washington, between the months of October, 1968, and May, 1969, using twenty-five students each in the control and in the experimental groups. It was felt that the advantages, if any existed, would appear as gains or losses when measured and subjected to statistical analysis.

The control group made a grade level gain of 1.26 as compared to the experimental group grade level gain of 1.78.

The data revealed small but positive gains, but not statistically significant gains, in favor of the experimental group. To determine if these gains were significant the investigator subjected the differences to a statistical analysis, test formula known as Fishers'

t-test for testing differences between uncorrelated means. The degree of difference was not at the .01, or .05, level and was judged to be statistically insignificant.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the findings and conclusions a number of questions of related interest remain unanswered. The following recommendations, therefore, appear appropriate:

1. A similar study should be made over a longer period of time and using a larger sampling.
2. It is recommended that an investigator wishing to duplicate this study make a more detailed analysis of the following:
 - a. A comparison of spelling improvement by chronological age.
 - b. A comparison of spelling improvement of each individual sub-group within the experimental group to determine level gains.
 - c. An individual comparison of spelling improvement of those students whose achievement was sub-standard in other subjects.
3. It is recommended, because of a short pilot study done by this investigator at a lower grade level, that a similar study should be conducted in the intermediate grades.
4. It is recommended that the teacher-pupil contract method of assignment be used to vary the method of spelling assignment at the junior high school level.

5. It is recommended that these findings be made available to classroom teachers and administrators to encourage more experimentation in the area of spelling, an area this investigator found lacking in available material.

III. CONCLUSIONS

It should be noted that the students in the experiment were picked at random by counselors and principals. Different results may have developed if the classes had been balanced in relation to the ability of the students. Other limiting factors were the duration of the experiment, the grade level of students participating, the small sampling used, and the confinement of the study to only one school.

The results of this study show that there are no definite advantages in favor of the teacher-pupil contract method of spelling assignment. On the basis of this study no definite advantages with regard to spelling improvement was shown and the null hypothesis was accepted.

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