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An Investigation to Determine If the Study of Shorthand Affects a Student's Spelling Ability

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BUSINESS
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AN INVESTIGATION TO DETERMINE IF THE STUDY
OF SHORTHAND AFFECTS A STUDENT'S
SPELLING ABILITY

Lette

A Research Plan
Presented to
Mr. Ralph Ford
Ouachita Baptist University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
Honors Special Studies
(H 491)

by
Susan Ann Todd
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TITLE

AN INVESTIGATION TO DETERMINE IF THE STUDY OF SHORTHAND AFFECTS A STUDENT'S SPELLING ABILITY

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Every business educator is aware that the spelling ability of beginning office workers is often criticized. There are several articles in the professional publications suggesting techniques used by teachers to cope with the problem, but most teachers leave to elementary and English teachers the task to develop this skill. Too frequently teachers overlook spelling and grammatical errors made by students because these are by-products of a more important goal which they are trying to reach.

The increased demand for a better trained office worker necessitates an examination of the spelling ability of business education students. It is important to know whether there are weaknesses and, if possible, the causes of these difficulties.

THE PROBLEM

For years, secretarial students have been saying, "I used to spell very well, but then I took shorthand."¹ They believe that the phonetic study of the English language with the use of symbols makes them unsure of the actual longhand spelling of a word.

As long as students maintain this idea, they have a convenient scapegoat to excuse their poor spelling. If they felt that the opposite were true--that shorthand study led to improved spelling--attitudes toward shorthand study in general would be different, and other changes might result.

Statement of the Problem

This will be an experimental investigation to determine if the study of shorthand produces a change in a student's spelling ability.

All students enrolled in senior English in the Cleburne County Public Schools will be given four identical one-hundred word spelling tests. The first test will be administered the first week of school and the others administered at the end of the first nine weeks, at the end of the first semester, and at the end of the year respectively.

The students will not know that this investigation has any relationship with shorthand. After the first test,

¹Junne Wood Jensen and Barry T. Jensen, "Do Shorthand Students Become Poor Spellers?" Business Education World, XXXVIII (February, 1958), 27.

the shorthand and non-shorthand students will be paired according to spelling ability.

Significance of the Problem

There is a widespread belief today that poor spelling is a major educational problem. Employers often criticize the schools for the poor spelling of business education students. It is not uncommon for faculty members to complain about the poor spelling of the students on essay tests and other required papers. Even the students themselves will admit that they are poor spellers. Whether this is true or not, it remains that the success of the educational process is partially evaluated on the students' ability to spell correctly.²

Business education students are expected to have a proficiency in spelling; and, therefore, it is important to determine the extent of the weaknesses in spelling, causes for poor spelling, and ways in which schools can produce better spellers.

Limitations of the Problem

This investigation will be limited to those students who are enrolled in senior English in the Cleburne County Public Schools: Concord, Heber Springs, Quitman, West Side, and Wilburn.

²Otto Kolpack, "The Effects of the Teaching of Shorthand on Spelling Ability," National Business Education Quarterly, XXXI (October, 1962), 37.

Since these spelling tests will be unannounced, it will be impossible to control the number of students absent. To alleviate this problem, each student in each group will be ranked and paired according to spelling ability, and only the papers of the paired students involved in the investigation will be scored and recorded after the initial test. If a student in the experimental group is absent for a test, the score of his partner in the control group will not be counted. This will help keep the two groups as equal in ability as possible when computing averages.

Definition of Terms

Special terms used in this investigation are defined as follows:

Ability. A student's spelling ability is determined by his power to complete a spelling test successfully.³

Business education. Business education refers to the "area of education which develops skills, attitudes, and understandings essential for the successful direction of business relationships."⁴

³Carter V. Good (ed.), Dictionary of Education (2d ed.; New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1959), p. 1.

⁴Ibid., pp. 70-71.

Recall test. A recall test "stimulates the student to write the word as he thinks it should be spelled."⁵

Recognition test. A recognition test "includes a short definition for each item and four possible spellings of it."⁶

Study. The study of shorthand refers to the "application of the mind to shorthand theory and speed development."⁷

⁵Barry T. Jensen and Junne W. Jensen, "Shorthand Study and Spelling Abilities," The Journal of Educational Psychology, XXXVI (February, 1965), 113.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Good, op. cit., p. 530.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

That there is an apparent deficiency today in spelling cannot be denied. Whether the problem is more acute today than formerly is controversial. The large increase in business activity in the last decade has brought a demand from the employer for a better office worker.

The blame for lack of spelling ability on the part of the office workers has been directed at the teaching process, administration, and the employer himself. Teachers don't agree upon the teaching of spelling in the shorthand class. Some teachers believe there is neither time nor place in shorthand for teaching spelling and leave it up to the teacher of English. At the other extreme are those teachers who believe the shorthand students are very poor spellers; consequently, they must spend some time on spelling every day.⁸

One of the biggest difficulties in accelerating the teaching of spelling is the students' deficiency in recognizing the pronunciation of words. To attain mastery of the

⁸Julia Pennock, "Shall We Teach Grammar in the Shorthand Class?" Business Education Forum, XVII (October, 1962), 17.

skill, students must have a desire to improve their spelling; and it requires intensive work.⁹

Spelling is an annoyance that creates an unfavorable impression of the writer. Spelling trouble is distracting to the writer himself and tends to limit his vocabulary and weaken his writing. Most spelling mistakes, however, occur in everyday words like love, believe, and occurred; and most poor spellers do not make a variety of mistakes but the same mistakes over and over.¹⁰

There is no need to offer a separate spelling course when it can be incorporated into all subjects with very little effort on the instructor's part. Offering spelling as a vital aspect of every course on the secondary school and college levels can do much toward reducing a basic skill deficiency. The course content will prove more meaningful to the students. Inasmuch as written expression is basically a part of every course, it is unnecessary that a given course bear the spelling label to embrace the spelling objective.¹¹

The secretaries who are being criticized for their spelling deficiency have another reply which is nearly

⁹Hilda McNally, "Teaching Spelling As A Separate Subject," Catholic Business Education Review, XI (February, 1960), 33.

¹⁰Sister Thomas Joseph, "Improving Spelling Through the Big Four," Catholic Business Education Review, XI (February, 1960), 42.

¹¹Vernon W. Stone, "Every Course Is A Spelling Course," The Balance Sheet, XXXXII (October, 1960), 60.

universal. They say that they used to be good spellers until they took shorthand. Junne W. Jensen says that this is a scapegoat used by students who were deficient in spelling before they took shorthand.¹²

Shorthand texts emphasize spelling so much that even though only cursory attention is given to the subject as such by the teacher, the students are made aware of spelling and proper English usage. This fact in itself might make the students blame shorthand study for loss of spelling skill. This is the first time, perhaps, that many of them are really concerned about their spelling ability and realize that they have spelling deficiencies.¹³

James L. Mursell compiled psychological evidence that shorthand is not harmful to spelling by stating that they are two different skills. Negative transfer, whereby acquisition of one knowledge will decrease another, does not exist here as there is not clash between shorthand and spelling. He also states that the shorthand learner must come to identify and respond to the phonetic components of language, but in spelling it is largely a matter of the eye. He believes that

¹²Junne Wood Jensen, "An Investigation of the Effect of the Study of Shorthand on Spelling," Psychological Abstracts, XXXIII (June, 1959), 671.

¹³Junne Wood Jensen and Barry T. Jensen, "Do Shorthand Students Become Poor Spellers?" Business Education World, XXXVIII (February, 1958), 33.

spelling is a certain kind of skilled noticing and that there is a tendency for good readers to be good spellers.¹⁴

A recognition test consisting of forty-eight multiple-choice items was administered to high school students at the beginning and near the end of the ~~first~~ year of study of shorthand by Barry T. Jensen and Junne W. Jensen. A control group of non-shorthand students taking the same required course in English took the same tests at the same times. It was determined that the study of shorthand does not necessarily have a negative effect upon spelling ability.¹⁵

Louis A. Leslie wrote in Business Education World ". . . There is no scientific evidence whatsoever to show that shorthand has a bad effect on spelling."¹⁶ In the same article, he suggested that if shorthand students were given a spelling test at the beginning of the year, then retested at the end of the year, they would make about the same total numbers of spelling errors.¹⁷

¹⁴Otto Kolpack, "The Effects of the Teaching of Shorthand on Spelling Ability," National Business Education Quarterly, XXXI (October, 1962), 37.

¹⁵Barry T. Jensen and Junne W. Jensen, "Shorthand Study and Spelling Abilities," The Journal of Educational Psychology, XXXXVI (February, 1965), 115.

¹⁶Junne Wood Jensen and Barry T. Jensen, op. cit., p. 27.

¹⁷Ibid.

Kolpack concluded from the results obtained in his study of shorthand and spelling ability that the increased spelling proficiency by all students is probably a result of a year's study in high school and thus a greater facility of the English language. It seems to indicate that students may not be as poor in spelling as criticized to be. The scores obtained by shorthand pupils indicate that their proficiency in spelling is as good as any student in high school.¹⁸

Edwin Moran calls our attention to the false idea that studying shorthand practically ruins a student's spelling ability in the following statement:

For the most part, I think the idea is something that students themselves bring into the beginning shorthand class from the outside--the outside being a conversation overheard at home, or perhaps a friend's opinion when he or she took shorthand in high school. In many cases, it is never even discussed with the shorthand teacher, and the student continues his courses in shorthand with this idea in the back of his mind. Somehow I feel that this setting starts off any attention to spelling on the wrong foot!¹⁹

Mr. Moran challenges business teachers to convince students that studying shorthand can make them better spellers. His suggestion is to introduce spelling from the early days of oral transcription by occasionally ending a student's recitation by asking for the spelling of a particular word. This is an introductory step to make students

¹⁸Kolpack, op. cit., p. 14.

¹⁹Edwin F. Moran, "Teaching Spelling Through Transcription," Catholic Business Education Review, XI (February, 1960), 37.

spelling conscious. Another suggestion is to select words from a transcript or a letter from a lesson that will follow and use these words as shorthand warm-up drills, or a direct dictation before transcription, or as material for tabulations.²⁰

²⁰Ibid., p. 38.

Chapter 3

QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

The purpose of this investigation is to determine if the study of shorthand produces a change in a student's spelling ability. The conclusions will be based on the scores made on the four spelling tests that will be administered to the population. Answers to the following questions will be sought.

1. Do the charges made by shorthand students that the study of shorthand was the cause of their poor spelling have any merit?
2. Does the study of shorthand make students better spellers?
3. Is there a basis for the criticism that high school graduates who majored in business education are poor spellers?

Chapter 4

PROCEDURE

The preliminary steps in selecting a problem and gathering background information have already been taken. Following are plans for steps to be taken in carrying out the investigation.

Design

The experimental design will be used in this investigation. The students enrolled in senior English classes in the Cleburne County Public Schools will be given a series of spelling tests to determine if the study of shorthand produces a change in a student's spelling ability. The mean scores made on the tests will be used in analyzing the problem.

Sample

The population for this investigation includes all the students enrolled in senior English in the Cleburne County Public Schools: Concord, Heber Springs, Wilburn, West Side, and Quitman. The entire population will be included in the experimental investigation.

The experimental group will include those students who are enrolled in senior English and shorthand. The

control group will include non-shorthand students who are comparable to the experimental group in spelling ability according to scores made on the first spelling test. The entire population will be tested so that students used in the research investigation cannot be distinguished from the other students.

Methods

The initial spelling test of one-hundred words, included in the appendix, will be administered to each member of the population the first week of school before the students have any shorthand. The second test, consisting of the same one-hundred words, will be administered at the end of the first nine-week period when the shorthand students will be midway through the study of shorthand theory. The third test will be administered at the end of the first semester when the shorthand students will finish the study of shorthand theory. The fourth identical test will be administered at the end of the year when the shorthand students are concerned with speed.

The experimental and control groups will be equated on the basis of the scores on the first test. Each shorthand student will be matched with a student not taking shorthand with as close a score as possible.

The spelling tests will be dictated to the students by the regular classroom teacher according to the following plan: Pronounce each word, use it in a sentence, and

pronounce it a second time. The aim of the spelling test is to invite recall rather than word recognition.

The spelling list of one-hundred words was compiled from sources that contain words frequently used in business letters. Words were randomly selected from NONA's list of the most misspelled words in business and Remington Rand's five-hundred most frequently misspelled words.²¹

The students will not know the purpose of the tests nor which students are involved in the investigation; only that it is a research project. Students' tests papers will be scored by the researcher and will not be returned. The students will not be told to expect another test so that if they look a word up, it will be only to satisfy a natural curiosity.

Duration of Study

This investigation is designed to be completed within a twelve-month period. The first spelling test will be administered the first week of the school term and the last spelling test administered the final week; therefore, the data will be collected in nine months. This will allow three months for analyzing the data, for making recommendations, and for preparing the written report.

²¹Edward A. Perkins, "Develop Good Spellers With This Transcription Plan," Business Education World, XXXXI (May, 1961), 23.

Analysis

By giving a test at the beginning of the school year to all students who are enrolled in senior English and then equating the shorthand students with non-shorthand students of equal ability, it will be possible to compare the proficiency in spelling ability on successive tests.

It will be possible to determine whether the spelling ability of shorthand students compares favorable with the rest of the population. Another outcome will be to compare the rate of increased spelling proficiency of shorthand and non-shorthand students. If the non-shorthand students gain in spelling ability over the shorthand students, it might be reasoned that the study of shorthand may have some harmful effects. If the shorthand students increase at the same rate as the non-shorthand students, one can assume that the study has neither a harmful nor a beneficial effect. Also, if the rate of increase in spelling proficiency is greater for the shorthand students, one might suppose that the study of shorthand actually improves the spelling ability of students.

Tables will be used to compare the mean test scores made by the shorthand and non-shorthand groups on each spelling test.

Printing

Copies of this investigation will be made. They will be made available to the schools, the instructors, and any other interested persons.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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APPENDIX

SPELLING TEST

The following underscored words are to be dictated in the following manner: Pronounce the word once, read it in the sentence, and then pronounce it again.

Give the students adequate time, but do not wait on the extremely slow students. Do not give the students a hint as to the correct spelling of any word.

1. The man had a prosperous business.
2. They wore loose clothing.
3. The project was for the welfare of the town.
4. February is the shortest month.
5. John's birthday was on the ninth day of June.
6. Try not to misspell any of these words.
7. Aspirin gives relief from pain.
8. It is wise to budget your savings.
9. We will separate the books on Monday.
10. Safety in driving is a necessity.
11. They will adopt a new procedure for handling invoices.
12. The management of the business was very good.
13. Typing is essential in this day and age.
14. The advertisement was not properly worded.
15. The program was especially interesting.
16. Experience is necessary in any business.
17. The bookkeeper was very neat.
18. The calendar was badly torn.

19. The description of the man was very clear.
20. An extension of the building was very necessary.
21. The man gave a justifiable reason for his action.
22. A ledger is a book of accounts.
23. She will soon be ninety years old.
24. I will concede my defeat in an hour.
25. You must not interfere with his plans.
26. He handed me a pamphlet as I passed him.
27. The superintendent has many responsibilities.
28. Everyone should have some leisure time.
29. Who is the new tenant in your house?
30. The error was not too noticeable.
31. He is an old acquaintance of mine.
32. She will be eligible for a pension soon.
33. I hope I shall not disappoint you.
34. He used very poor judgment in the matter.
35. He is about to receive his license as a barber.
36. A canceled check is an excellent receipt.
37. That store does a tremendous volume of business.
38. The factory personnel receive many benefits.
39. I am planning to open a new restaurant next month.
40. He said it was all right with him.
41. They spent several years on foreign soil.
42. The army uniforms proved to be very serviceable.
43. Proper maintenance is essential for top performance in a car.
44. I am very susceptible to sunburn.

45. The lawyer insisted on preferring charges against the man.
46. We need more men in the teaching profession.
47. She canceled her appointment.
48. There is a giant sale on wearing apparel.
49. I did not mean to embarrass you.
50. I will guarantee safe return of your child.