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Power over words

Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)

Primary School Studies — No. 7

POWER OVER WORDS

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

This is Number 7 in a series published by the ACER as a follow-up of a nation-wide Curriculum Survey. Some of the outstanding results of this Survey were published in 1951 in *English and Arithmetic for the Australian Child.* The present series of pamphlets is designed to lead to discussion of problems raised directly or indirectly by the Survey. They are written by a panel of writers drawn from all States. The authors are anonymous but include teachers, inspectors, lecturers in Teachers' Colleges, and members of University Departments of Education. Each author has been left free to express his own view-point, and the views expressed, and ideas expounded, are not necessarily those of the Council. The Discussion Brief enclosed with each pamphlet takes up other points of view and endeavours to centre discussion on some of the major issues touched on in the pamphlet.

The titles of the pamphlets are:

1. *The Approach to Reading.*
2. *The Individual Child.*
3. *Ends and Means in Arithmetic.*
4. *The Appraisal of Results.*
5. *Highways of Expression.*
6. *The Purposes of Teaching.*
7. *Power Over Words.*
8. *Children in Groups.*
9. *Priorities in the Primary School.*

In a true profession each practitioner
is at least a potential innovator.

POWER OVER WORDS

GROWTH OF VOCABULARIES

The rapid growth of vocabulary during infancy and pre-school years is the most remarkable feature of language development. Normally, rate of growth is closely associated with intelligence; differences between individuals and between groups of children in different communities are however more frequently due to home and environmental influence than to variations in learning capacity. For American children it is estimated (6)* that from 3 words acquired in the first year, the average spoken vocabulary rises in the second, fourth, and sixth years to 272, 1,540 and 2,562 words. The probable average for children entering infant schools in England at five plus is at least 2,000 words (8). In an investigation conducted by the ACER in Melbourne, stenographers recorded the speech of 24 pre-school children from a relatively poor area, during their play and other activities, in talking about pictures, and in responses to tests; a total of about 106,000 words included 2,700 different words (1).

Estimates of 700 to 800 words a year for the probable increase during compulsory school years in England (8), and Terman's (7) standards of 3,600, 7,200 and 9,000 words for vocabularies at mental ages of 8, 12, and 14, are based on dictionary samplings; they indicate the number of words probably known in meaning rather than used in expression.

At all stages we know the meaning of far more words than we use in speech or writing. 'Under modern methods of teaching and learning, children soon command more words for reading than for speaking. We must expect very slow development, with widening individual differences, when we set out to give children a mastery, in writing, of even the commonest words used meaningfully by pre-school children in their speech. Learning to write down words proceeds against baffling inconsistencies in sound-translation and word-structure. Children cannot rely on logical principles to guide them in dealing with variations found in many common words—as, for example, in *does, goes, rose, lose,* and *shoes.* Only to a limited degree can they be assisted by grouping words on the basis of common elements; for one sound may be represented by a variety of letters or letter combinations; the same letter in different words may represent different sounds, and in some words, 'silent' letters have no sound values at all.

These difficulties, sufficient in themselves to account for slow learning of words as words, are increased considerably when words are to

* Numbers in parentheses are those of references at the end of the text.

be recalled and spelt under ordinary writing conditions. Since it is only because of its value for writing that spelling is learnt, the degree of accuracy in such writing is the true measure of spelling ability.

Development of writing vocabulary may be assisted by encouraging children to write as they speak on topics they usually speak about. There is, however, a vast difference between the amounts of every-day practice of speaking, and of writing. Many words of high frequency in the ACER pre-school vocabulary will be used only occasionally in writing, and some will not be mastered for spelling until many years have passed—as, for example, *aeroplane, chimney, Christmas, different, scissors, tunnel, umbrella.* Growth in language and reading experience will increase the number of words a child can spell correctly, but to a far greater extent it will increase the number of words he is capable of using in speech. It is doubtful whether the great majority of senior high-school students, with well-developed language abilities, and with command in speaking and writing of 16,000 to 18,000 words, could spell as many as one-third of these with automatic accuracy in their free writing.

The need for careful adjustment of spelling requirements to normal possibilities is apparent. Some authorities suggest that children should master the words of permanent spelling value for writing in life outside the school. But *permanency of learning* can be expected only in material adjusted to children's levels of maturity, and to their own interests and experiences. At all stages spelling needs arise from, and words studied should provide for, current writing; words cannot be stored for remote occasions. The growth of language abilities and the widening of interests will be reflected in word-usage which will gradually approach adult standards; but many words included in courses based on adult writings are suited only to commercial or pre-vocational classes.

GROWTH OF POWER OVER WORDS

All Australian curricula suggest means of extending and of improving the quality of children's vocabularies through reading, expression, language activities, and formal lessons. Formal work is based on language or spelling lists, supplemented by words from a wide variety of sources. The range and difficulty of this material differ considerably between states. Nevertheless tests of word-knowledge used in its Curriculum Survey by the ACER did not reveal marked differences between children of comparable grades, and uniformly close relation was shown between scores and ages. The results appear to indicate what may always be expected, for the content of vocabulary is much less dependent on *formal learning*

based on prescribed courses than on that *informal and incidental learning* which proceeds day by day through reading, expression, and experiences with words in many language activities inside and outside the school.

Directed teaching is necessary to improve the balance and quality of vocabularies rather than to enlarge them. The methods and techniques used by Australian teachers may be broadly classified as practices in *specific teaching*, in which new or unfamiliar words, such as derivatives or synonyms, or phrases including appropriate words, not necessarily selected from current reading or expression, are items for drills or formal exercises; and *incidental teaching*, in which the same types of words or examples of usage are treated as opportunity arises in grade-reading in other school subjects, or before compositions are written.

Specific teaching may easily lead to separating teaching and learning from real language needs; children may show high accuracy when tested specifically on material that has been practised, but may fail to incorporate it intelligently in their expression. Incidental teaching has these advantages: (i) the need for teaching is apparent to pupils; (ii) it may be used in all subjects, and all should contribute to the improvement of English; and (iii) words or phrases discussed are not removed from their settings, and may be used meaningfully in context without delay. It is, however, seldom possible to allow much practice of items without interrupting the flow of the lesson; permanent gains are often made only by those children whose interest and desire to learn, enable them to benefit from a small amount of directed effort.

In this presumed weakness of incidental treatment there are highly important implications for teaching and learning in all their forms. Too frequently, aims are stated only in terms of material to be studied. Because economy and efficiency in learning are vitally dependent on favourable attitude and interest, the development of these should be a deliberate objective. They are, however, effects just as much as causes of success; if we want them to be developed, tasks and processes should be so adjusted to levels of ability that success is likely to be achieved. Another objective to be stressed is the development of purposeful habits of observation of words, and effective individual methods of learning. If left to their own devices, children often adopt wasteful methods, and do not centre effort on items to be mastered.

Incidental and informal learning, stimulated through wide and appropriately adjusted courses in reading, expression, and language activities, is the most powerful agency in the development of

children's power over words. Graded activity materials with 'read and do' exercises, word-games, puzzles, and self-testing devices motivate learning, give scope for initiative, reduce the amount of mechanical repetition, and allow for progress at individual rates. But even under the very favourable conditions of activity curricula with emphasis on experience in real situations, it is not possible to dispense with some form of directed teaching, testing to discover whether progress is being made, and formal learning for at least remedial purposes. These are auxiliaries to the major means of learning.

The weakness in commonly used methods lies in over-emphasizing specific teaching which, in many cases, is the most convenient means of overcoming difficulties in large classes. Perhaps in some classes too, it is used in the belief that learning is mainly a matter of linking separate items, each mastered through mechanical practice. The gaining of power over words is a growth process, and unless both teaching practices and materials are suited to levels of development, no worth-while growth will occur. The treatment of spelling serves as an example. Learning and memorizing words involves the unification of auditory, visual, and kinaesthetic processes; or looked at in another way, the ability to analyse words, to write letters accurately, and to recall them in correct sequence. Specific teaching should be deferred until development of reading vocabulary, and skill in phonic analysis and handwriting, provide an adequate basis for meeting these demands—probably until third grade or a mental age of about eight years. Skill in handwriting can be developed through many activities not requiring prescribed memory spelling. Although *formal* work may be deferred, *incidental learning* will proceed during early attempts in reading and all forms of language exercise; it may be stimulated by fostering pride in accuracy and habits of careful observation in all activities involving the writing and checking of words. When formal teaching begins, many words in the grade list will be already known. It is equally certain that words suited to the level of development of only a few children will be taught and practised. Often high scores will be shown in tests given soon after formal teaching, but recall tests will show a disheartening lack of permanency.

PLANNING COURSES IN SPELLING

The choice of the words to be taught is governed largely, in some schools almost entirely, by prescribed courses; but there is marked lack of agreement on what should be taught and on what is best suited to different ages or grades. Fewer than 1,000 of the 5,600

words in the spelling lists in use in Australia in 1950 were common to all states. By far the greater part of our requirements consists of selections from frequency lists compiled by research-workers in America; there are differences between these lists because of methods of tabulation, the extent to which they are based on adult or child usage, and whether the words occur in reading or writing. In stressing the need for thorough review of courses for spelling, as well as for some other subjects, the ACER report (2) suggests the need to determine minimum essentials for compulsory school years, so within learning capacities that complete mastery might be expected by at least 85 to 90 per cent of Australian children.

It may be assumed that 'minimum essentials' for spelling are words (i) found on extensive enquiry to be almost indispensable when children write on topics they desire to write about, and (ii) those suggested in accepted plans for development of their expressional abilities.

What would be discovered in such an enquiry was shown in the ACER investigation of pre-school vocabularies; of the total of about 106,000 words recorded, about 85 per cent consisted of only 460 words and their repetitions, and the remaining 15 per cent included about 2,250 different words. In Rinsland's (5) study, the most extensive ever made of children's written vocabularies, about six million words were found in 100,000 writing of pupils of grades 1 to 8 in 708 American cities. Of all words for grade 1, the 100 of highest frequency accounted for 63 per cent of total usage, 500 for 85 per cent, 1,000 for 92 per cent, and 2,000 for 98 per cent; the corresponding percentages for grade 8, covering about one million words, were 57, 77, 84, and 90. Horn (4) estimated that 100 words accounted for about 58 per cent of one million running words in adult writing and business correspondence; the approximate percentages for the first 1,000, 2,000, 3,000 and 4,000 words being 89, 95, 97 and 98 respectively.

As a result of many studies of word-usage it is claimed that by teaching 3,500 to 4,000 words, school can anticipate between 98 and 99 per cent of ordinary spelling needs. While there appears to be sound statistical basis for the claim, it appears also that so large a proportion of enormous totals of running words is made up of the first 1,000 most frequently used words that the selection of words for succeeding thousand-groups must be made with rapidly decreasing reliability. Ayres (3), who found that ten words accounted for about one-fourth of the running words he examined, 50 for about one-half, and his '1,000 commonest' for more than nine-tenths, doubted whether it would be possible to identify the 2,000 com-

monest words, since long before this point was reached the identity of the frequently used words varied according to the subject under consideration. It is among words beyond the first 2,000 that marked variations occur in recently published lists.

What is taught must obviously be considered separately by each school. If the treatment of spelling is intended to develop ability to spell automatically in written expression, a grade spelling course should, as far as possible, keep pace with growth of writing vocabularies within the grade. A teacher who would keep this in view must attempt the task of providing appropriate material for, perhaps, forty to fifty individuals showing variations in the degree to which automatic skill is, or may be, developed; in the content of vocabularies on entry to the grade; and in the rate at which new words are mastered. The demands of the courses now used in several states occupy time and effort that could be spent more profitably on grade and individual problems as disclosed in children's own writings, and result in the detachment of formal work from actual spelling requirements.

To reduce the material to what may reasonably be attempted under all conditions, and also to ensure reasonable reliability in selection, it is suggested that the minimum list contain not more than 2,000 words which, it may be assumed, will cover about 95 per cent of the material examined in any nation-wide survey of children's writing over the compulsory school years. These will occur frequently in children's reading and writing, and, normally, most of them would be learnt incidentally. An additional 1,500 words could be listed as a source of supplementary work for advanced children, and for the guidance of teachers in showing children what words mis-spelt in written work should be studied because of their general spelling value.

To the minimum list or 'core' of the formal work schools might add words of high local frequency; these will vary between agricultural, mining or other communities but should not include terms suited only to pre-vocational classes; in most cases not more than 100 such words will be selected.

Teachers are, of course, responsible for adjusting prescribed lists to the requirements and capacities of the children they teach and for relating formal work to grade spelling needs. A complete grade course might consist of the following.

(1) *Words learnt informally and individually through written expression.* By maintaining high standards of accuracy in written work children master words in their individual vocabularies and gain in power to spell automatically, in a variety of contexts, those

studied in formal lessons. They will use many 'commonest words' and others of high local frequency.

Particularly in middle grades, children will attempt to write many words they cannot spell. Insistence on the immediate study of all mis-spelt words will probably destroy their interest in both writing and spelling. In guiding them to what should be studied a teacher must be on guard against the tendency to select words without considering their general spelling value; some will be learnt in higher grades, and since the burden of spelling is apt to grow beyond capacity, many need not be studied at all.

Terms used in geography, nature study, and other subjects need not always be 'learnt by heart'; but if written at all they should be correct. Children in middle grades may copy from the teacher's reference lists, and in upper grades, compile and consult their own lists, and use dictionaries.

(2) *Words for formal teaching and learning.* The pronunciation meaning and usage of all words in a grade-list should be known before they are presented in formal lessons. The 'core' is the only pre-selected section for all children and may contain from 200 to 500 words according to grade. To this might be added words (i) from earlier lists; some persist in difficulty over several grades; (ii) from grade writings, with homonyms and anomalous forms listed in the context in which they occur; only those in general demand will be included; (iii) of high local frequency as used in the grade; (iv) derived from base words—as inflexions and plurals; some will be included in exercises in developing and applying a few rules for spelling; (v) supplementary to those in other sections for individuals and groups making satisfactory progress in general grade-work.

REQUIREMENTS IN THE TEACHING OF SPELLING

Generally, children entering school are relatively well equipped with vocabularies of meaning and speaking. The 500 words of highest frequency in their usage provide an adequate basis for early reading, language exercise, and practice of writing. With advance in grade the courses become more extensive, but always consist largely of 'commonest words'. Some children learn to spell many of these as a result of experiences with them, and will require specific study only as a minor aid; but for the great majority, dependence on incidental learning or processes in which spelling is a by-product will leave word-mastery to chance.

The processes for spelling and reading are not identical. Word-analysis for spelling retards ease and rapidity of reading in which

words are recognized through partial features; mis-spellings may be adequate for meaning and pronunciation. With most children, only common words read very frequently are mastered incidentally. Awareness of the general patterns of words, and a knowledge of their meaning, sufficient to identify them in reading, combined with a knowledge of word-structure gained through practice in writing, often result in substantial part-learning.

In many enquiries, mean grade scores in exploratory tests or pre-tests have shown that from 50 to 60 per cent of words suited to children's needs and abilities, and used meaningfully by them in speaking, can be spelt by most children before they are taught the words in formal lessons. An experiment conducted in Perth in 1949 showed that part-learning of some of the words mis-spelt had proceeded so far that little specific effort was required to complete the learning for recall over seven days. Pre-tests on words selected from Schonell's class-lists, but not presented in formal work prior to the experiment, were given to 2,147 children in 52 classes. In each class (2 to 6, approximately equivalent to grades 3 to 7 in other states) 20 words were written on the board and covered before the children assembled. After the test was given, the cover was removed, and children marked their own attempts. A word was pronounced after the teacher, spelt softly from the board, and then marked as right or wrong. Every child wrote one correction of each of his mis-spellings. Recall tests were given one day later, and again, seven days later. In pre-tests the advantage percentage scores of classes ranged from 46 to 61, and in the final tests from 77 to 84. It is evident that while there is need for formal study to ensure word-mastery much will be gained by stimulating incidental and informal learning.

If spelling were an end in itself its demands could be met through formal methods, and progress measured by scores in tests which allowed pupils to concentrate on word-structure. Its functioning in writing requires the combining of abilities in spelling with those involved in using words in units of expression, and the unifying of processes when the writer's effort is centred on presentation of ideas. Specific study, however effective for the learning of words as words, cannot meet these requirements. Investigators of error report that up to fifty per cent of words mis-spelt in composition are spelt correctly when writers centre attention on them. Some help may be given through carefully planned dictation of phrases containing words, homonyms, and anomalous forms in a variety of contexts, but accuracy in dictation will not indicate ability in automatic writing. Only by constant practice in written expression

will facility and accuracy be developed and the transfer to free writing be effected of what is learnt in the formal study of spelling

Development of abilities involved in acquiring a spelling vocabulary which will function in writing depends on a variety of physical, emotional, and intellectual factors which vary (in relative values and effectiveness) in and between individuals. No one method of teaching is the most suitable for all children, all grades, or all types of words. Some widely known research-workers doubt whether it is possible to devise satisfactory means of overcoming the difficulties that our spelling presents to children and teachers, and there is still uncertainty regarding the values of such commonly used practices as the grouping of words on a phonetic or other basis, and dictation. There are, however, certain *minimum essentials for all methods.* These are procedures which stimulate the growth of habits and skills that are common to the requirements of both informal and formal learning, and which best equip children for improving their spelling vocabularies through individual effort. It is, therefore, suggested that organization, conditions and methods should favour the growth of the following.

(1) *Favourable attitude to, and interest in spelling, promoting alertness and effort.* Through these affective influences children regard ability to spell as a desirable achievement, attend earnestly to spelling tasks, and take pains to effect improvement. They are stimulated when spelling is felt to have personal and social values—as in letters to parents, letters to children in the grade or other grades, or contributions to a story-book; and through the inclusion of co-operative partner and team activities in formal work.

Interest and desire to make progress are sustained by knowledge of improvement. Tasks should challenge effort, but be so suited to levels of maturity and experience that success and confidence may be gained. Graphical or other means may be used to show advance in scores. Children should be aware of and commended for improvement in marking, writing corrections, and for keeping neat and accurate spelling books.

(2) *Habits fundamental to efficient and economical learning.* Essentials include identification, meaning, pronunciation, and knowledge of the use of words. Pronunciation with careful voicing of syllables encourages auditory discrimination—as between *of, off; clothes, close*—but it is not a reliable guide in spelling. There are many words—as those with affixes — *-age, -ate, -ous, -tion, -ture*—for which accepted pronunciation differs from phonetic translation. Except for some classes of words—such as those containing syllables—*ar, er, ir, or, ur*—mispronunciation is a minor cause of error. The

tendency to rely on phonetic cues in the recall of words is a major cause; most mis-spellings are phonetically accurate.

For almost all children the demands of spelling are best met by combining visual perception with writing, which strengthens kin-aesthetic impressions. Exercise in slow and deliberate pronunciation or syllabication while words are examined visually, followed by pronouncing while writing, are much superior to mere pronunciation followed by oral spelling.

With growth in spelling experience a child who combines interest with efficient habits of word-observation develops an awareness of word-structure or 'spelling consciousness', and 'spelling power', that enable him to perceive differences between words and to detect error, to increase gains through incidental learning, and to benefit from formal study with a minimum of mechanical repetition.

(3) *Skill in applying efficient study techniques.*—Careful guidance and supervision are essential from the earliest grades to train children in procedures that make visual study and writing of words inescapable. Whenever words are copied, as in transcription, checking should be part of the exercise, and ample time should be allowed for it. When formal spellings begins, every child should be trained to mark his own work by comparing his attempts with the words in his list or on the board, writing in his own spelling book one correction of each word mis-spelt, and then a 'tick' against it to show that it has been checked. One word may appear a number of times; thus, the child discovers his own 'demons'. The writing of a word a large number of times is a penalty rather than a helpful means of learning; a child should regard failure to find mis-spellings, to write corrections in his book and to check them, as serious omissions. The teacher will, of course, see that conditions—guidance, allowance of time for scrutiny, and provisions of books, cards, or lists of words—favour the development of accuracy.

In middle grades, teacher-directed study, with all children following the teacher in the study of words of general difficulty, will train children in a technique on the following or similar lines.

Look at the word, pronounce it slowly and clearly, and spell it softly. Copy it, and spell it softly as you do so; check. Without looking at the copy, write it, and spell it softly as you do so. Compare with copy. Write the word again and check. Write it three times and check.

As confidence and reliability are gained the same technique may be used in individual study. In upper primary grades differences between individual vocabularies increase, and children must rely

increasingly on independent work. Their own spelling books become their self compiled text-books, and they appreciate the need for maintaining accuracy. Sections may be reserved for study lists of words wrong in tests and composition, for homonyms and anomalous forms always entered in context; for derivatives such as plurals and inflections, and examples of common prefixes and affixes; for spelling rules; and for special reference lists. The books may be used in (a) *individual work*—such as writing a special list of all words appearing more than once in the study list; placing words in alphabetic groups; writing phrases or sentences containing words for study lists and hononyms to be later given as partner-dictation; and (b) *partner activities* in testing from study lists, word-games, puzzles, and dictionary exercises. Corrections of words wrong in these tests are entered in study lists.

The ACER survey revealed that test-study procedure in which a pre-test is given without preliminary teaching and a child learns only the words he mis-spells, is not commonly used by Australian teachers. Study-test methods are much preferred; in these, teaching of words and practice by all children precede testing. Formal teaching may begin with a procedure in which testing is applied mainly for the guidance of the teacher. As children grow in spelling experience, and become reliable in individual learning, a test-study method may be introduced; its increased use after about age 10 will result in considerable saving in time, and will equip children to undertake independent work. Where a 'core' or other prescribed list is used in a school for several years, it should be possible to discover (a) words generally known or partly known through incidental learning, and suited for test-study procedure; (b) words involving difficulties making prior study advisable; and (c) words such as homonyms and anomalous forms; to be taught and practised in context. Trials may be made with words of the first groups (including, perhaps, such an experiment as that already outlined) with or without a preliminary exercise, which in its simplest form consists of reading and pronouncing words carefully before the test is given. Additional pre-treatment will reduce the study assignment, and this is advisable with slower groups. The evidence of many inquiries shows that teachers need not fear any injurious effects from pre-testing.

Systematic reviewing is an essential in any method of teaching. Particularly where they are presented in groups, words may be learnt for immediate recall with apparent ease. In a series of review tests some words right in one test may be wrong in another, without loss in total scores, and where the same words are mis-spelt the errors may not be identical—as *frend, freind,* and not *frend, frend.* This erratic spelling following the study of words is

generally more frequent than repetition of the same error; one of the causes is that in ordinary context words are associated with others in which the same or similar sounds are represented by different letters or letter combinations. Words are not learnt for all purposes until they can be spelt in any context. Reviewing should, therefore, include dictation of phrases or short sentences with the contexts increasing in difficulty—as, I suppose you were surprised. Were you wearing those shoes? The frequent dictation of sentences containing *there are, there have been, their cousin, on their way,* and other homonyms, in such contexts as are used in the grade, will reduce error, but will not provide fully for free writing. Review exercises might include types of self-applied tests checked in partner-work.

A procedure that results in high scores in dictation tests but low accuracy in written work is not fulfilling the purpose of the treatment of spelling; but since practice is required for the growth of automatic ability the immediate functioning of what is learnt in formal study should not be expected. Words must, of course, first be known as separate forms. Failure of individuals to reach predetermined standards, or to make normal progress in formal work, may arise from sensory or other defects requiring diagnosis and special treatment. General weakness in the grade may be due to lack of aptitude or interest, faulty study habits, defects in organization or supervision, or unsuitability of the course or rate at which it is presented. Search for the causes of 'carelessness' or 'disability' should, therefore, include examination of children's books, their accuracy in marking, and learning methods. It may be advisable to suspend the teaching of words, to engage in remedial practice, and to modify the grade course. We must bear in mind that a child who finds extreme difficulty with spelling will gain more by mastering a small vocabulary and acquiring some knowledge of how to learn, than by attempting words beyond his ability and capacity.

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POWER OVER WORDS

Primary School Studies No. 7

DISCUSSION BRIEF

1. 'The purpose of writing is communication. If the meaning of a word is clear in its context, communication is adequate, and it does not matter whether the word is spelled according to convention or not.' This argument is seriously advanced by exponents of reformed spelling. What is your opinion?

2. 'Formal teaching of spelling in schools perpetuates a number of antiquated forms which would long ago have been reduced to sensible phonetic forms had teachers not acquired a vested interest in their supposed "correct" way of spelling.' Can you think of some words to which this applies? How would you answer it?

3. The pamphlet has been concerned with power over words when written. This is only one aspect of such power. Which of the following best expresses the quality of a child's vocabulary?

(a) The number of words he can understand or use.

(b) The range and diversity of words actually used in speech.

(c) The variety of richness of meaning he can attach to a single word.

(d) The precision with which he can express his ideas in language.

(e) The ability to comprehend and use words of low frequency.

4. Little is said in this pamphlet about the 'hearing' vocabulary. Have you any views on the relative importance of the 'hearing', 'reading', 'speaking' and 'writing' vocabularies of children? Will your teaching be in any way affected by these views?

5. What differences do you encourage between the language used in oral and written communication? What are the criteria you use to distinguish between them?

6. What are the principal differences between the occasions when spoken communication and written communication are used? Do these differences justify us in holding back longer and more difficult words for later school years?

7. Should a child's vocabulary outrun his ability to distinguish shades of meaning implied in words used? e.g., should he use synonyms merely as alternatives?

8. Can a child be said to 'know the meaning' of a word if he cannot use it effectively in writing? Can you make any estimate of the words children would use in speech or writing if they were not held back by fear of mispronunciation or mis-spelling?

9. There are degress of mastery over meaning. How far would you go, with children say 8, 10 and 14 years old, in discussing the varieties of meaning of words such as STREAM, FAIR, WILL, HOME, CITIZEN, LOVE, COUNTRY?

10. Our degree of understanding of some words is very slight, although we recognize them and give them a vague meaning when we see them. Many words change in meaning in different contexts, or have slightly different meanings for different people. It is often salutary to ask children what they mean by such commonly used words as *good, bad, naughty*, or at later ages by *government, parliament, state, democracy*. How much time do you give to clarifying some of the general words used in the Spelling Lists?

11. If one thousand words account for ninety per cent. of our normal writing, do you agree that this thousand should be the hard core, or the minimum essentials for all children to attempt to master, and that any other words learnt should be dealt with incidentally, through the use of personal lists, dictionaries, etc?

12. When Victoria introduced a new Spelling List in 1950, based on a count of children's writing in Victorian schools, about 800 words in the old list were dropped and 900 new ones added. There was considerable alteration of the grade placement of words. The new list divides the words for a grade into three sections, based on frequency of use and importance. Is children's writing an adequate criterion for selection? If you think not, what additional criteria would you use, and how would you justify them?

13. What is the best way to train children to use a dictionary to help them to spell? Some teachers have found that it decreases a child's confidence in attacking a new word if he is encouraged to go to his dictionary too early. What has been your experience?

14. Spelling Lists are often used as a basis for general vocabulary work. This may seriously limit the development of 'reading' and 'hearing' vocabularies, or overload the Spelling List. Do you use the Spelling List in this way? Should it be supplemented by another list intended only for developing and 'understanding' vocabulary?

15. It is obvious that in vocabulary development as in all school work, provision must be made for individual differences. How can this be done?

(a) In spelling.

(b) In enlarging the comprehension vocabulary for
  (i) speech,
  (ii) reading.

16. Do you agree with the writer's stress on incidental and informal learning? Do you agree that because of gain made through such learning the increased use of test-study procedures after about age 10 will save a good deal of time?

17. If it is important for spelling to be correct in written expression, and if it is true that errors are fewer when attention is concentrated on spelling, how can you best combine the necessary spontaneity of expression with the conventional accuracy of spelling and sentence structure?

18. How often do you test the ability to incorporate a newly learnt word in a normal context? Is the commonly used spelling test, in which a sentence is dictated in which the word is incorporated, but only the chosen word is written down, a satisfactory test of ability to spell the word correctly in writing?

19. In a recent report the Scottish Education Department suggests that 'much of the time devoted to dictation could be more usefully employed in other ways'. Is dictation worthy of a place in the spelling programme? What are its functions and limitations?