

LA DICTÉE MODIFIÉE: A NEW APPROACH TO TEACHING SPELLING

by

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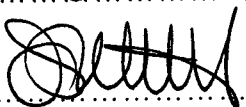
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ABSTRACT

The goal of this project was to design a method of teaching spelling that incorporated my beliefs about teaching and learning and the knowledge I gained throughout my Master's studies. I hoped to provide students with the skills to correctly spell high frequency words and the ability to apply these skills to new or unknown words. I also wanted to find out if students would apply these skills in various written projects. The project incorporated a variety of activities based on an explicit teaching of phonological awareness and grammar with a central focus on the *dictée modifiée* (Cogis, 2005). This approach moves the *dictée* from a method of evaluation to a method of teaching and learning. The project took a socio-cultural approach to learning where students worked with their peers and the teacher to construct meaning and reach new levels of understanding.

The project was carried out in a Grade 1/2 classroom throughout the school year. A variety of data was collected, including observational data, examples of *dictée* activities, and writing portfolios. The impact of this study in my classroom was enormous. I not only saw an improvement in my students' ability to correctly spell high frequency words and to apply spelling skills to new and unknown words, but I also observed a beginning understanding of the grammar and morphology of the French language. Most importantly, there was a change in attitude in my classroom towards spelling and writing. My students loved participating in the *dictée* activities and they all began to see themselves as capable writers.

I believe that this method of teaching spelling has even wider applications in that it could be easily adapted to any grade level or to a first language program.

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SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

This paper examines a different approach to teaching spelling in a primary French Immersion classroom. I begin by describing the context and objectives of the study, followed by a review of the research literature. An alternate method for teaching spelling, based on recent research, is proposed. Following this, I give a description of the study and examine the implications for practice. Finally the impact of the study in my classroom is discussed.

This project has come about as a result of my re-entry into the world of academia through my graduate studies at the University of British Columbia (UBC) and a desire to continue to grow as an educator. My goal has always been to find the best set of practices in order to ensure that my students reach their potential.

Context

I am a teacher of early French Immersion in an elementary school in a suburb of Vancouver, British Columbia. I am in my eleventh year of teaching and have a Grade 1/2 class with 12 Grade 1 students and 8 Grade 2 students. There is an even mix of boys and girls in the class, and the majority speak, English as a first language. The school serves a fairly homogenous clientele with respect to race and income. Parents of French Immersion students tend to have a post secondary education and take an interest in their child's education. In addition they often volunteer in the school and/or participate on the Parent Advisory Committee (Olson & Burns, 1983).

I am fortunate to work with a Francophone colleague who also teaches a Grade 1/2 class. We collaborate, discuss and reflect on our practice on a regular basis and adapt our teaching and our program according to the needs of our students. In addition, we share the teaching of certain

subjects: my colleague teaches Science and I teach Social Studies to both classes. She has been very open to all the ideas I have shared with her during my journey of learning at UBC.

As a student myself of French as a second language, I am sensitive to the experience of my students. I believe that it is extremely important for young children to be able to express their ideas and thoughts. It is, therefore, imperative that they develop the necessary vocabulary to enable them to express themselves orally and in the written word. Even more important, I want to share my love for the French language and learning with my students. I want them to be proud of their ability to communicate in a second language.

Problem

When I began teaching Grade 1, I followed the practice of the school and my colleagues for teaching spelling. This consisted of the ‘traditional method’ of handing out a list of words on Monday, doing some out of context activities during the week, such as spelling the words orally without looking at them or writing the words numerous times. The process culminated with a dictation of the words on Friday. However, I always felt ill at ease with this procedure because over the years I came to realize that this method did not work. Those students with a good memory were able to memorize and regurgitate the words on the *dictée* Friday morning but then never spelt them correctly again in their written work. In other words, there was no transfer of ability to other contexts. In addition, those students with poor memories only succeeded in feeling less and less competent each week. The whole procedure was becoming insupportable to me. It was in reading a quote by Yves Nadon (2007) that I was struck by the realization of why this method was such a problem for me:

L’étude de la langue ne doit pas servir à abaisser des élèves, à les humilier. La langue doit servir à élever, à consolider nos liens humains, à faire frémir et rire; elle ne devrait

jamais, comme c'est le cas depuis longtemps, faire sentir à un être humain qu'il n'est pas à la hauteur dans un groupe donné.

[The study of language should not serve to bring down students, to humiliate them.

Language should serve to lift up, to consolidate our human connections, to make us quiver and laugh; it must never, as has been the case for too long, make a human being feel that he is not at the height of a given group.] (p.83)

Teaching spelling in the traditional manner was causing some of my students to feel 'less than,' which was completely unacceptable to me and went against everything I believe about learning and teaching. I have had the experience of feeling humiliated by mistakes I have made in learning my second language and I will not allow my students to live such an experience through my teaching. I do not want them to ever feel belittled by their learning of French.

Objective

With this project I would like to find a different method of teaching spelling that incorporates what I know about teaching and learning through my classroom experience and what I have learned about second language learning and teaching through my graduate studies. I would like to give students the necessary tools to correctly spell the words that they use most frequently and to use them in the correct contexts. In addition, I hope that students will be able to apply their knowledge of words and sounds to new and unknown words. I envision accomplishing this through individual and group work with various activities based on an explicit teaching of phonological awareness and grammar. A central component of this program will be the *dictée modifiée* (Cogis, 2005). With this new twist on the *dictée* as a method of instruction rather than as an evaluation tool, I hope to empower students. As they gain confidence in their ability to spell French words they will see themselves as writers and,

hopefully, this skill will transfer to their other written work. Their second language will become, as it should, a tool of communication: a way to express their thoughts and feelings, a way to connect with others, and something that makes them a part of, not apart from, the francophone world.

To gain a better understanding of how to go about implanting this method of teaching spelling, I reviewed the literature related to spelling practices. In addition, I examined more recent research with regards to the writing process and the role of spelling in this process.

SECTION II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of the literature examines the role of spelling in the writing program with a focus on the traditional method of teaching spelling in French Immersion and the problems therein. An alternate method of teaching based on more recent research is proposed including a description of the benefits with regard to learning.

Role of Spelling in the Writing Program

It is human nature to want to communicate whether orally, through gestures or the written word. This review of the literature will focus on, perhaps, the most difficult form of communication, that of the written word. Teaching our students to write effectively is essential in order to help them convey their thoughts, ideas and dreams. However, writing is one of the most complex activities that students will engage in throughout their scholastic journey (Troia & Graham, 2003). The fact that French Immersion students are working in their second language creates an even greater challenge. Writing requires the employment of several cognitive, linguistic and even physical operations (Troia & Graham, 2003). According to Saddler and Graham (2007), “writers are described as accessing different kinds of knowledge as they

compose including knowledge about the writing topic, intended audience, genre, task, and linguistic demands” (p. 232). These researchers also stated that students become better writers with age and that explicit instruction that supports the development of this ability in young writers will lead to better results in writing. This opinion is equally supported by the work of Emilia Ferreiro who was a pioneer in research concerning the stages of development in young children’s writing (Cogis, 2005).

An essential part of the development of this writing ability is the development of spelling skills or, as it is called in French, *l’orthographe*. Studies have shown that spelling problems are a main contributor to lower writing quality and achievement in students’ written productions (Troia & Graham, 2003). It is, therefore, essential to find an effective method of teaching spelling. As Nadon (2007) notes, «On ne peut enseigner l’écriture sans consacrer du temps à l’orthographe» [We cannot teach writing without dedicating time to teaching spelling] (p.83). In order for our students’ written work to be legible and fluid we need to teach spelling, especially in immersion where students arrive with knowledge in their first language and a dearth of French vocabulary, and herein lies the challenge. In addition, spelling instruction is not at all straightforward, especially in French. Cogis (2005) remarked that, «l’orthographe du français est reconnue comme une des plus difficiles au monde» [French spelling is recognized as one of the most difficult in the world] (p.8). Throughout their scholastic journey students need to learn words and they need to observe and analyze them with the help of their teacher. Reading and writing alone will not help the majority of students to correctly spell words. Explicit teaching is also necessary (Nadon, 2007).

La dictée traditionnelle

The *dictée* has long been a staple in the teaching of the French language. Whether it be a dictation of a list of words, of a sentence, or of a short paragraph the *dictée* has primarily been used as a method of evaluation. Cogis (2005) notes that spelling has traditionally been taught in an isolated manner with set lessons, activity sheets, memorization of rules and exceptions, and a *dictée* followed by corrections. For many, the connection between writing and spelling is not made. Teachers find themselves correcting the same mistakes over and over and students find themselves becoming more frustrated and being left with feelings of inadequacy with regard to spelling. The problem seems to lie in the fact that the rules are mentioned almost as an aside and not taught in an explicit fashion in context. Nadon (2007) bemoans the fact that he continues to hear complaints about the lack of spelling ability in students, yet he very rarely hears ideas for helping them improve other than reverting to the *dictée*. In addition, common practice continues to consist of giving students a list of words with no apparent connection, organization, or common spelling structure. Over the last number of years researchers have agreed on the fact that the traditional method of teaching spelling with random lists of words, memorizing activities and *dictées* is not effective for the majority of students (Cogis, 2005; Nadeau & Fisher, 2005; Nadon, 2007; St-Laurent, 2002). Unfortunately, teachers continue to use *dictées* as a method of evaluation and are fixated on the outdated notion that only a good memory is necessary in order to be a proficient speller (Nadon, 2007). In my own experience, the transfer of skills from the *dictée* to written work is not made, even for students with a good memory who succeed in correctly spelling Monday's list of words on Friday's *dictée*. It is essential, therefore, to find a new vision of teaching and learning spelling based on what we know about how children learn as well as on more recent research into spelling acquisition.

La dictée modifiée

Troia and Graham (2003) suggest that an effective spelling program consists of four components:

First students need to be taught how to spell words they frequently use when writing.

Second, children need to learn how to generate plausible spellings for unknown words through explicit teaching of phonemic awareness, grapheme-phoneme correspondences, common spelling patterns and rules, and strategies for becoming spelling detectives.

Third, children need to know how to check and correct spelling miscues that occur using various aids and strategies. Fourth, children need to develop a sensible desire to spell correctly through teacher modeling and opportunities to display their work in public. (pp. 84-85)

It is equally important to keep in mind the developmental nature of spelling in young children and the social aspect of learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Cogis, 2005; Nadeau & Fisher, 2005; Nadon, 2007). This means that students pass through different stages in their acquisition of spelling and learn best with social interaction. However, it should be noted that this is not a simple matter of proceeding from one stage to the next in a linear matter. Students can flow between two stages and their development is affected by experience in reading (Nadon, 2007). Therefore it is important to know which stage students are in before deciding what to teach them. This is where a diagnostic *dictée* can be helpful in guiding instruction as opposed to ranking students.

Vygotsky's (1978) research into the social nature of learning led to the emergence of sociocultural theory which appeared in the 1990s. Vygotsky maintained that learners bring two different levels of development to learning: an actual level of development, which represents what the learner is able to do alone, and a potential level of development, which shows what a

learner is capable of with the help of an adult or more capable peers. Vygotsky termed the difference between these two developmental levels as the “Zone of Proximal Development” (ZPD). With the assistance of the adult or expert learner and more experienced peers, the learner is able to move through his or her ZPD to arrive at independent learning. The cognitive support that is provided by the more experienced partner and the resulting interaction which takes place between expert and novice is referred to as *scaffolding* (McCarthy & O’Keeffe, 2004; Shrum & Glisan, 2010). It should also be noted that interaction in the ZPD produces reciprocal learning, not simply transfer of knowledge from expert to novice (Shrum & Glisan, 2010). These authors state that sociocultural theory gives language teachers,

the impetus to develop a classroom setting in which learners collaborate with each other, receive scaffolded help from the teacher, work within their ZPDs, use mediational tools in order to make sense of the target language and progress in their language development, and creatively manage language resources they have at their disposal. (p. 30)

Furthermore, students need to be engaged in activities with an inductive approach; activities that give them the opportunity to observe, manipulate and analyse words and to reflect on written language in community (Nadon, 2007; St-Laurent, 2002). It is important that the program be specific yet flexible and that words be chosen with thought. It is much easier to learn the words when there is some connection between them or some common characteristic, such as sound (Nadon, 2007). Choosing words in this fashion fits with the recommendations of the explicit teaching of phonological awareness and the role of grammar in spelling (Cogis, 2005; Nadon, 2007). In addition, St-Laurent (2002) proposes that students need to play an active role, engaged in authentic tasks that explore language. She suggests teaching strategies to help students spell new or unknown words, including grapheme-phonetic correspondence, masculine-

feminine association, study of prefix, base, suffix and word families, rules of usage, using reference tools such as dictionaries and, finally, asking for help. This new vision of spelling instruction must also incorporate the notion of reflective learning where the *dictée* plays a role of teaching and learning as opposed to simply one of evaluation.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that affective variables influence success in second language learning. These include motivation, anxiety, personality and attitude. Learners have been shown to experience a greater degree of success if they are motivated, self confident and have a lower level of anxiety (Shrum & Glisan, 2010). Therefore, it is important to find a method of teaching spelling that motivates students without causing them undue stress.

In essence what is advocated is an integrative approach to teaching spelling, where students recognize the relationship between spelling and writing and where spelling is not viewed as a disconnected part of the writing process but as an integral part (Cogis, 2005).

A New Approach to Teaching Spelling

Involving children in learning to spell is the key to a new approach to teaching spelling. According to Nadon (2007) students must be helped to see the connection between words. A list of unrelated words, which has often been the traditional approach to spelling, does not help students to see patterns. I have chosen to use sounds to teach spelling patterns. This approach is based on the *Words Their Way* program (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2004) that advocates the study of words with different phonemes for the same sound. In using sounds to build reading and spelling skills, this program fits with the numerous research studies that emphasize the indispensable role of phonological awareness in reading acquisition (Bournot-Trites & Denizot, 2005; Chiang & Rvachew, 2007; Ecalle & Magnan, 2002; MacCoubrey,

Wade-Woolley, Klinger, & Kirby, 2004). These skills are particularly essential in the early grades of French Immersion.

The use of the *dictée du jour* and the *dictée de groupe* incorporates the idea of using the *dictée* as a teaching and learning tool instead of simply an evaluation tool. During the *dictée du jour* I dictate a sentence to the students which they write on a small white board. I then write all spellings suggested by the students for the sentence, on the chart paper and we go through the sentence together discussing students' choices of spelling as well as the role of different words in the sentence. As a group, we arrive at an agreement for the correct spelling of each word, crossing off the spellings that have been discarded. This procedure serves the dual purpose of allowing the teacher to have a window into students' knowledge about spelling and grammar while allowing students to verbalize their thinking. Through discussions and with the guidance of the teacher, students confront possible misconceptions and erroneous knowledge in order to make new connections and progress (Cogis & Brissaud, 2003; Nadeau & Fisher, 2005). With the *dictée de groupe*, students have the opportunity to work with peers in order to apply acquired knowledge in new ways. I have adapted Cogis' (2005) vision of the *dictée de groupe* by inviting students to work in small groups to create their own sentences using the tools available in the classroom. Students use personal dictionaries, class posters, word lists, and childrens' dictionaries, in addition to the knowledge they have gained through the *dictée du jour*, to negotiate with one another and write sentences. We then discuss the sentences together as a larger group and make any corrections that are necessary, allowing everyone to have input into the process. I choose to operate the *dictée de groupe* in this fashion because of the importance of having primary immersion students begin to write in French. Based on my experience, by working together as a community a lot of the stress is taken out of the writing process and the

children tend to take more risks and produce more creative and complex sentences. By then discussing their choices and analysing their own work they develop a deeper level of comprehension (Nadeau & Fisher, 2005).

An additional benefit of this spelling method is its implication for the study of the structure and syntax of the French language. It makes spelling an object of reflective observation and an entry into the study of grammar. Students are discussing grammar and solving spelling ‘problems’ in an authentic manner as opposed to memorizing rules out of context. This engagement of students in constructing new knowledge can only aid in the mastery of grammatical structures in addition to giving them the tools to become better spellers (Cogis & Brissaud, 2003).

Summary

In moving spelling from “teacher-oriented instruction” to “collaborative learning”, we are giving students a voice in the process of their second language acquisition. The *dictée du jour* and the *dictée de groupe* open up the cognitive world of students and allow both students and teachers to “plonger les mains dans le moteur, le cambouis et la pâte dont notre langue est (en partie) faite” [plunge their hands into the motor, the grease and the dough of which our language is (in part) made] (Cogis & Brissaud, 2003, p. 66). Perhaps, even more importantly, this method seems to engender more positive attitudes towards spelling and the study of the language. The *dictée* moves from being an object of anxiety and dread to being a tool for discussion and learning. It becomes an object that helps students to feel good about themselves and more confident in their abilities. In the end, is this not the goal for all learning?

SECTION III: THE STUDY

La dictée modifiée in action

The spelling program follows a cycle of approximately seven days with a set of activities for each sound being studied. The sound of the week to be studied is taken from the *Jolly Phonics Program* (Molzan & Lloyd, 2001) which we use to teach phonemic awareness as part of the reading program in our school. The sound and the graphemes that make up the sound are introduced along with examples of words that contain the sound for example, *o*, *au*, *eau*. The class reads the words together and we break the word into syllables and put it back together orally. The students then take their *cahier de sons* and go on a word search in the classroom for words containing the sound of the ‘week’. They are encouraged to look around the classroom at posters, on the walls, in dictionaries and in books for words that contain the sound and then write these words in their exercise books. The only rule is that they must be able to read and understand the word before they write it in their book, but they may ask for help.

The next day the students bring their *cahier de sons* to our group session and they read the words that they have found. The teacher adds the words to the lists as the student spells them. We then reread all the words, again breaking the words into syllables and putting them back together orally. Students receive an activity sheet with the words introduced by the teacher. They then play a game with these words, such as *Bingo*, *Tic-tac-toe*, *Memory* or a word sort for sounds transcribed by multiple graphemes, for example “o”. These ideas are based on suggestions found in the program *Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction* (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2004). For the word sort activity, students have a list of words containing the different graphemes for the sound and a table with columns for each possible grapheme. They cut the words into squares and must then sort the words into the

appropriate columns while reading and spelling each word. They can play this game by themselves or in competition with a partner to see who can sort the words most quickly. This activity helps the students to begin to assimilate the different ways of representing a particular sound. It can take more than one day to play this game and students keep their papers in their desks in order to play during their free time.

On the third day students are given a different activity sheet with exercises that work on phonological awareness, comprehension and grammar. These can include sentences with missing words where students have to insert the correct word into a sentence, mixed up sentences where students have to put the sentence in the correct order, or mystery words where the letters of the words are mixed up and students must put them into the right order. There are also activity sheets where words are misspelled and students must make corrections or where students must arrange words by the number of syllables. Students spend at least two days on these activity sheets.

The next step is the *dictée du jour* as described by Cogis (2005). The teacher dictates a sentence that the students write on individual erasable white boards. Then the teacher writes the sentence on the chart paper or blackboard, accepting all the ideas of the students. Next, the class discusses the ideas and analyses the sentence, guided by the teacher, in order to arrive at the correct response in eliminating the others. It is important to note here that it is essential to have the child who has given the incorrect spelling understand why the word was not correct before it is crossed off or erased. It is also essential to have each child explain his or her reasoning in spelling a word a certain way, because this can give a great deal of insight into the child's thinking and help the teacher to correct any misconceptions. Disagreement regarding a word provides a good opportunity for the teacher to model dictionary skills and to encourage students to look around the classroom for words in order to find the correct spelling. When the correct

version of the sentence has been transcribed, the students copy the sentence into their *cahier de phrases*.

The final step in this program is what I refer to as the *dictée du groupe* where the students work together in small groups to create their own sentences using words learned through in-class study or new words containing the sound of the week. Students are encouraged to use the tools of the classroom, such as posters, word walls, dictionaries, personal dictionaries, and so on, to create sentences that they all agree are correct. The students then share their sentences with the other teams, and, together with the teacher, they analyze and correct the sentences, if necessary, with appropriate explanations. The students then add these sentences to their *cahier de phrases*.

Although students may write their sentences for the *dictée du jour* into their exercise books right away, I find that they enjoy using the white boards to write out each sentence and I think that it gives a certain sense of freedom and relieves a sense of anxiety for some students. Likewise, I find that the students love to write their *dictée de groupe* sentences on the large chart paper with felt pens. It makes them feel like the teacher and they love to use special colours to emphasize the words containing the sound being studied.

This process can be adapted or adjusted according to the ability and needs of the students and, as stated, the length of the process will depend on the complexity of the sound being studied and the number of associated activities.

Timetable

The activities follow a cycle of approximately seven days for each sound to be studied.

Day 1: Phonological Awareness

- Introduction of sound to be studied and the associated graphemes
- Reading of words containing sound and identification of syllables

- Word search for new words containing sound

Day 2: Phonological Awareness and Word Patterns

- Addition of new words found by students and discussion of their meaning
- Word sort according to different graphemes for same sound or game of *Tic-Tac-Toe*, *Bingo* or *Memory* with the words to be studied

Day 3: Comprehension and Word Identification

- Activity sheet – insert the missing word into the sentence
- *Detective Game* – identify the mixed up word

Day 4: Grammar and Syllabic Awareness

- Activity sheet – put mixed up sentences into the correct order
- Syllable sort – sort words according to the number of syllables

Day 5: *La dictée du jour*

- Students write a sentence dictated by the teacher
- Teacher transcribes all suggestions onto chart paper
- Group discusses the suggestions together to arrive at the correct response
- Students write the correct sentence in their exercise books

Day 6: *La dictée de groupe* or sentence-writing in teams

- Students work in small groups to create their own sentences using words from the class list or new words containing the studied sound
- Students write their sentences on large chart paper using felt pens and the tools of the classroom

Day 7: Presentation of sentences

- Each group presents their sentences

- Sentences are analyzed in the same manner as for the *dictée du jour* in order to arrive at the correct spelling
- The students then write their sentences in their exercise books

Materials

The materials required are normally all part of the regular classroom supplies.

- Chart paper and felt pens
- Students' exercise books
- Small erasable white or chalk boards and erasable felt pens
- Activity sheets for each sound
- Word lists and sorting tables
- Game sheets for *Tic-tac-toe* and *Bingo*
- List of *dictée* sentences for *dictée du jour*

Assessment

The following is a list of assessment methods I used and information I gathered to measure students' progress in spelling.

- Pre-test, mid-point test and post-test of high frequency words containing sounds to be studied throughout the year, in order to assess students' ability and developmental level before and after the study.
- Sheets from *dictée du jour* and *dictée du groupe* activities
- *Cahier de français* containing activity sheets for sound of the week study
- Observational notes
- Portfolio of writing samples

- British Columbia Performance Standards for Writing (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2002). This is a performance-based assessment tool that provides a rubric, breaking writing into the four components of meaning, style, form and conventions. A performance range from “Not yet meeting expectations” to “Exceeding expectations” is given. This assessment encourages a criterion-referenced approach to evaluation and affords teachers, students and parents the ability to compare student performance to provincial standards.
 - Links to prescribed learning outcomes based on British Columbia Ministry of Education (1997) expectations as outlined in the *Ensemble des ressources intégrées: Français langue seconde – immersion maternelle à 7 année*.
 - Informal and formal reporting periods in order to share student progress with parents
- All these resources were used as part of the ongoing assessment and as a means of generating information related to student achievement for reporting purposes as well as to continue to guide instruction.

SECTION IV: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

In the first part of this paper I explained the context of my work, the problem I wished to explore, and my objective of finding a method of teaching spelling that empowered my students to become better spellers and writers. In the second section I discussed the traditional method of teaching spelling and reviewed the literature related to improved methods of teaching spelling. In the third section, I explained what this new vision of spelling instruction might look like in a primary classroom. In this section I will discuss the effect of this project on my practice and on my students' learning.

Impact on Practice

The impact of this project on my practice has been enormous. I stated in the beginning that I was not comfortable with the traditional method of teaching spelling and felt that it left some students feeling inadequate and belittled, which was unacceptable to me. I have now found a method of teaching spelling that reinforces what I believe about teaching and, more specifically, about second language teaching. I am sharing my love of language with my students and the components that make up language. In participating in the *dictée du jour* I have become a stronger teacher of grammar and spelling because I need to be creative in order to lead my students to discovery of the intricacies of the French language. In asking them questions about why they choose to spell a word a certain way, I have a window into their way of thinking. I can use this knowledge to analyze where they are in their learning journey and what steps I need to take to lead them to the next stage.

This method of involving students in their learning and providing scaffolding, rather than being a more impersonal imparting of information through a list of words and disassociated activities, culminating in a test of those words, has become something very personal and detailed. I am able to see more clearly what my students need and can change direction if necessary to give a short lesson on a specific point. I never thought that I would see the day when I would discuss the difference between the use of the *imparfait* and the *passé composé* with a group of seven-year olds! What is even more amazing is that the children understood the general idea of this concept because of the discussions we have already had throughout the year. This beginning comprehension of the grammar and morphology of the language has probably been the most unexpected aspect of teaching spelling in this fashion. Not only do I find that my students are spelling the high frequency words correctly, they are also beginning to discuss the

effects of number and gender on the spelling of words. For example, we had a sentence which contained the subject, “les papillons bleus”, and one of my students was able to express her reason for adding ‘s’ to ‘bleu’ because ‘les papillons’ meant that there was more than one butterfly and therefore ‘bleu’ had to be expressed as a plural as well. It should be noted that this conversation was also carried out in French. Not only are the students expanding their knowledge of written French, but they are also building their ability to discuss this knowledge in their second language. I would also like to note here that, where it is appropriate and applicable, I try to make connections to English, which is the first language of all my students, in order to solidify their understanding (Ortega, 2009).

I feel that teaching spelling using the *dictée modifiée* has made me a better teacher and has made me more aware of the process of teaching and of the details involved. It has helped me to use the knowledge that I have gained during my graduate studies and to ground my teaching in the most recent research.

Impact on Learning

The impact on learning with this method has been enormous. I have observed over the course of the year a general improvement in the spelling of my students. When we first began the *dictée du jour*, students gave me many more variations on most of the words in the sentence. Now I find that they all agree on the spelling of the high frequency words which are, for the majority, spelt correctly. The greatest variation comes in the spelling of the verb tense which is not surprising as subject verb agreement is a problem even for francophone students (Cogis, 2005), however, even here I am starting to see improvement. Recently a student made the comment, before I could even raise the question, that the subject was ‘ils’ (plural) so the verb ‘tomber’ needed to end in ‘ent’. I am also observing students begin to recognize when to spell

words in the plural or feminine form. Students are becoming more confident in their spelling of new and unknown words and often spell these words correctly with the first attempt or with very close approximations. They are certainly beginning to apply their knowledge of the sounds we have studied to words they hear.

Something that I had not observed in the past when teaching spelling, but I now find quite common with my students, is the use of dictionaries and classroom resources. The students make a point of using these tools for spelling, particularly when they are writing their sentences for the *dictée de groupe*. As the students became quite proficient with writing their sentences without any errors, I challenged them to write more sophisticated sentences including adjectives, adverbs and different verb tenses. They rose to the challenge and took great pride in their efforts. Again, this is something that I never observed in my former method of teaching spelling. I found that the students very rarely challenged themselves when writing sentences and were afraid to take risks. With the *dictée du groupe*, the students feel safer and are more willing to push themselves and each other to create dynamic sentences. They also have been given the tools and the confidence through the *dictée du jour* for creating these sentences.

Finally, I have noticed my students transferring what they have learned through the *dictée modifiée* method to their other writing. Even my weaker students make far fewer spelling errors in their journal and story writing. High frequency words, for the most part, are spelled correctly, along with a large number of other words. In addition, the quality of sentence structure and grammar in their writing has improved. Students are using present and past tense, as well as the imperfect, in their stories. They are trying to use more descriptive words, and I can see their personalities coming through in their writing as they have gained more confidence in expressing themselves.

Perhaps the most gratifying result of this project has been the shift in attitude of my students. They now see themselves as spellers and, more importantly, as writers. Just recently my Grade 2 students all expressed how writing was one of their favourite things at school. This is something that did not happen in the past because of the difficulty for a lot of primary students to express themselves in their second language. An announcement that we will be doing our *dictée du jour* or *dictée de groupe* is greeted with cheers. My Grade 1 students, with whom I have recently begun the *dictée du jour* activities, are just as enthusiastic. After finishing a *dictée*, one of my students asked if he could do his own *dictée du jour* with some classmates to “help them become better writers”. He proceeded to stand at the blackboard, dictate a sentence to a group of his peers, write down their suggestions for spelling as he has seen me do and determine the correct spelling for each word with much enthusiastic assistance. This is sociocultural theory in action! What a change from the past when only those students with good memories showed delight at the mention of a *dictée*.

SECTION V: CONCLUSION

I set out to discover during this process if I could find a method of teaching spelling with which I could feel comfortable and one that would provide my students with the necessary tools to spell words correctly. More specifically, I hoped to help students gain the skills to correctly spell words they use most frequently and to use them in the correct contexts. In addition, I hoped that students would begin to apply their knowledge of words and sounds to new and unknown words and that I would see a transferring of ability to other written work. I have found that the *dictée modifiée* method has answered these questions. I have seen my students become better spellers. They are able to correctly spell high frequency words at a much higher rate than I have

seen in the past. They are also applying the knowledge they have gained to new and unknown words and I have noticed a difference in the quality of their other written work. An added bonus of this method of teaching spelling has been the impact on my students' comprehension of the grammar and morphology of the French language. They are beginning to see the relationship between spelling and these other aspects of the language. Spelling is not a disconnected activity but, rather, an integrated part of language learning. Furthermore, my students have gained confidence in their own abilities. The *dictée* is not a reason for apprehension; it is an activity in which students participate with enjoyment, learning with and from their peers and teacher. They are encouraged to take risks in a safe environment and reach a new level of understanding and ability.

I now approach the teaching of *l'orthographe* with a lighter heart and the conviction that my students are being lifted up by their study of the language and that they feel connected to their peers and their teacher in this process. No child is feeling that he or she is not a part of the classroom community because of an inability to memorize a list of words. For me, this has been the greatest reward of this project.

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Appendix 1: Example of Word List for sound of week

Word List for ‘o, au, eau’

mot	mot	couteau	couteau
moto	moto	marteau	marteau
mauve	mauve	ciseau	ciseau
canot	canot	dauphin	dauphin
corbeau	corbeau	mauvais	mauvais

Appendix 2: Example of Bingo game sheet

BINGO

Appendix 3: Example of Word Sort Table

Mets les mots dans la bonne colonne.

au	o	eau

Appendix 4: Example of Word Sort List

Mots pour le triage

saute	domino	bateau	mot	aussi
beau	orage	dinosaure	chapeau	manteau
zéro	aucun	beaucoup	jaune	château
rose	gauche	orange	nouveau	école
vélo	épaule	sauvage	yo-yo	gâteau

Appendix 5: Example of Activity Sheets for sound of week

2ième année

Le son de la semaine o-au-eau

A-Ecris le mot qui manque.

beau	veau	manteau	autobus	automne
dauphins	météo	dominos	oranges	cadeau

1. J'ai fait un très _____ dessin.
2. Il m'a donné un _____ pour mon anniversaire.
3. Les feuilles changent de couleurs à l'_____.
4. Les _____ sont juteuses.
5. Ma mère m'a acheté un nouveau _____.

B-Mets les mots en ordre.

est	veau	petit	Le	le	vache.	de	la

en	L'autobus	retard.	est	arrivé

aux	Je	dominos	avec	joue	ami.	mon

mammifères.	dauphins	Les	sont	des

les	previsions	à la	Elle radio.	de la	écoute	météo

C-Trouve l'erreur dans les mots soulignés.

1. Il y a beeecoup de pluie atjourd'hui. _____
2. Je suis très contente de ton cadaou. _____
3. C'est lui qui a tout mangé le gâtuio. _____
4. Elle aime joué dans les feuilles à l'aatomne. _____
5. Marie joue aux daminis, puis elle range tout. _____

D-Qui suis-je?

-tmnaaue _____

-auoubts _____

-cdaaue _____

-auinhpd _____

E-Classe les mots.

1 syllabe

2 syllabes

3 syllabes

4 syllabes

Appendix 6: Exemples des phrases pour la dictée du jour

1. ou

Le hibou chasse la souris jusqu'au trou.

2. ch

Le chien court après le chat dans ma chambre.

3. qu

Je vois quatre canards qui caquettent.

4. oi

L'oiseau voit trois petits oisillons qui ont froid.

5. o-au-eau

Mon auto jaune est tombée dans l'eau.

6. f-ph

J'ai parlé au téléphone avec une petite fille qui a peur des fantômes.

7. on-om

Mon oncle et moi, donnons de la compote aux pommes au cochon.

8. an-am-en-em

Vendredi, les enfants et leurs mamans iront camper à Vancouver.

9. bl-cl-fl-gl-pl

Les papillons bleus butinent les fleurs blanches. La pluie tombe, ils se glissent sous une feuille.

10. Consonant + r

Le crocodile et le dragon mangent du fromage à côté du grand arbre brun. C'est vraiment impressionnant.

11. gn

Je vais à la montagne pour ramasser des champignons. J'y ai vu un orignal courir après un agneau.