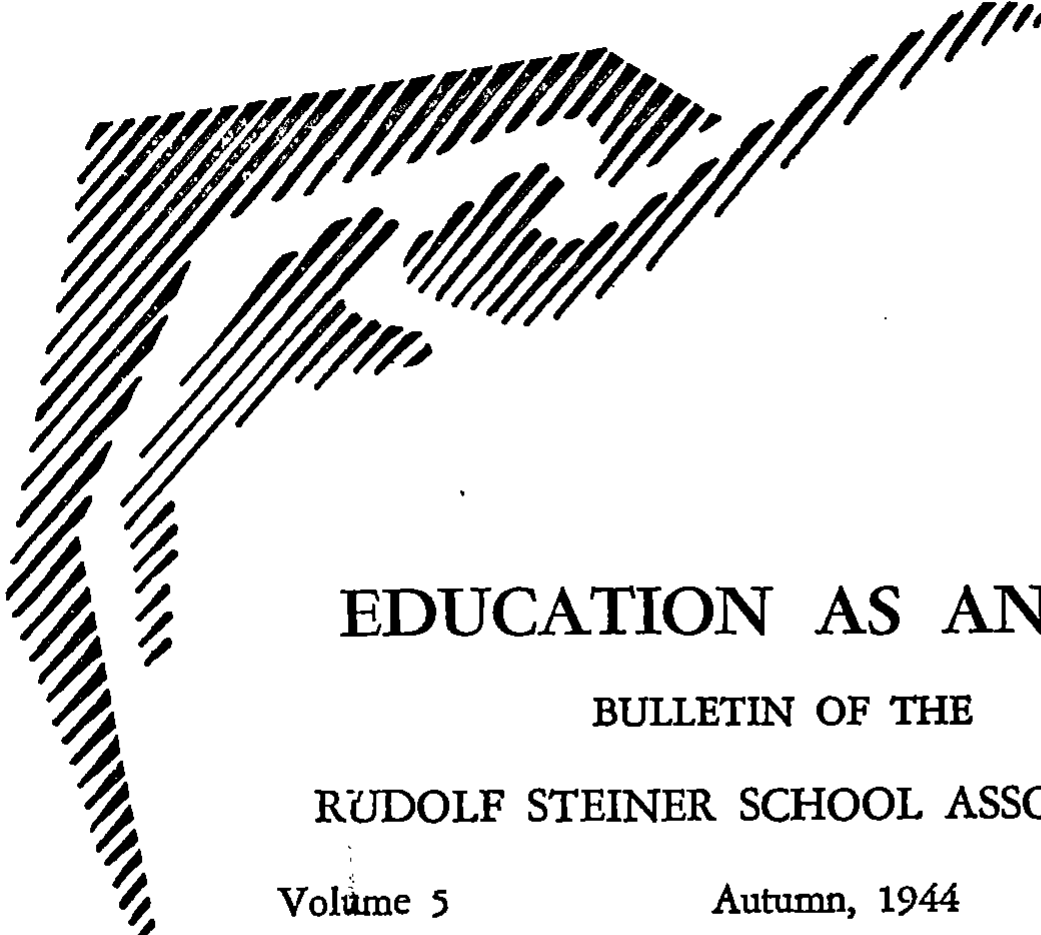




EDUCATION AS AN ART

BULLETIN OF THE RUDOLF STEINER SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

Volume 5

Autumn, 1944

No. 3

MEETING THE PROBLEM OF THE DOUBLE CONSONANT IN READING

Every teacher of a first and second grade has experienced a wide range of abilities in reading, and the varying age levels at which this "reading readiness" appears. In both private and public school systems there is a growing recognition that some children neither can, nor should be expected to, read in the first grade, or even in the second: that there are many factors in the child's physical and psychic life which seem to be related to the time when reading from the printed page should be introduced.

The Rudolf Steiner school does not leave this to chance. It deliberately postpones the moment of reading, preparing the way by drawing, leading to writing, and then to the reading of one's own writing. This publication has already carried many articles relevant to these first steps. In the Steiner pedagogy there is a well formulated and scientific basis for the progression from drawing to the writing of letters. Likewise the next step which involves the combining of consonants with vowels follows easily. In my own first class, the various sounds of the vowels (we used 12, including diphthongs) were woven, by sequence (A, E, I, O, U) into a poem which the children learned to recite. The children progressed through the first part of the second grade undifferentiated for the most part in their ability to sound a consonant and a vowel together "in one breath," although those who were more musical, or who had a keener ear for pitch, always seemed more secure and delighted with this new ability. Sometimes each child impersonated an audible vowel or consonant sound. The vowels, who "had wings" for their "singing sound" flew about the consonants "whisper sounds" until it flashed upon one or the other that a "singing sound" could also give wings to a "whisper sound", and together they could fly about the room as a duality. For example, an "E" could sing around an "H" or a "B" or a "W" until a shout of "HE" sent them hand in hand flying about the room.

Then came the rude awakening for teacher and pupil—the double consonants appeared. One can not find in the most elementary ABC book, or primer, material which can evade this problem for long, and produce anything more full of suspense than "A cat sat on a mat." True it is that, by some mysterious and uncommunicated art, some children "just learn to read." The most dramatic experience of this in my class was with a boy, the youngest in his class (barely seven). I invited him to the park one afternoon as a visitor in a recreational group I was supervising. He asked to take his new primer along, and in between swings on a bar, and a bit of socializing, he would ask me to read a single word for him now and then. At the end of the afternoon, he said, "Would you like to hear me read?" To my amazement, he read a complete story with more than a little expression in it. The miracle had happened. He was delighted, but I was no wiser.

With the others I had to work systematically over a period for the same results. By the end of the second year, my fears were confirmed, that all were not going to accept the peculiarities of English spelling without a struggle, or indeed, were not going to make an effort to venture out into the wider reading world from their comfortable and phonetically logical "rat", and "bed" and "run."

For these, and for all the class, I made a special study of the double consonant sounds, and wove them into two little rhymes. They are presented here, not as poetry, but as a creative effort to enter into a child's situation and bring him to a more fluent, rhythmical and colorful experience with the materials with which he is working.

However far from the height of English poetry these efforts may be, it is important to recognize the very rewarding results that came from their use. I began to realize how very stimulating these efforts of the teacher are to the children. It not only confronts them with the opportunity of learning in a new and fresh way, and gives the teacher also a refreshing change of method, but another important element seemed to be present. A new will effort, an appreciation which engendered new energies seemed to arise as a kind of response and answer for that which I had created for them. They know and love good poetry, but they delved into every sentence to find the treasures of new sounds which I had hidden for them. They took a special delight in copying these poems from the board, insisting that I write in bold type "BY MISS DILLINGHAM."

As an illustration of these efforts, I include here the poems I made. They carry few repetitions of the double consonant sound and include all 27 combinations which I found their second grade reading material, and the simpler books they tried to read, to contain.

A LULLABY FOR A DUTCH BABY

This poem is in honor of a new Dutch baby which had recently come into the household of one of the children. We spoke the first part and sang the last lines.

O sleep, sweetest baby,
Dear baby, don't cry,
I'll sing you a silvery soft lullaby
Of fairies a-dancing.

They whirl and they twirl,
 The dew they have strung
 Into garlands of pearl.
 They prance and they trip,
 They skip o'er the green,
 With a mantle of rosebuds
 They cover their queen.
 In the darkest of Holland's
 Dark banks now they hide,
 And scatter their laughter
 Through hushed countryside.
 Sh, lu lu, sh sh lu lu
 La le li lo lu,
 La le li lo lu,
 Sh, lu lu, sh sh lu lu,
 La le li lo lu la . . . a . . . a . . .

SEA POEM

White clouds are flying over the sea,
 Blue waves are breaking upon the white shore,
 Children shout gayly in frolicsome play,
 Of dragons, and whales, and fairy sea-lore.
 First twinkling starlight now shines in the gloom,
 And children all turn to their candle-lit homes,
 Slowly the moon spreads her silvery gleam
 O'er blue sky, green marshes, grey fog and dark stone.

Thelma Dillingham

LANGUAGES

1st through 6th Grade

Languages in the Lower School can be fun. If they are not taught intellectually children will love them and never develop that fear of not being able to master a foreign tongue.

The first step is to familiarize the pupils with the new sounds. We choose the most natural way for the child: the way of song and poetry. Through experience I have found that children should have little difficulty in reproducing foreign sounds. If they do, it is, because they have not heard them correctly. So, in class we begin by learning "how to listen". We make a game of it. Every child puts his head down on his desk and "uses his ears only". I sing one or two lines of the song, or recite a line or two of the poem we are about to learn. The class is perfectly quiet while it is repeated slowly and distinctly several times. Usually after the third or fourth repetition one of the children raises a hand and wants to try it. The rest of the group listens heads still down. If we all agree that it sounded like the teacher's—the head stays up. Each child gets his turn and it is always a great achievement when all heads are up and we can do it together. Children like repetition and they never tire of the game.

Then of course we talk about our song, or poem, in its own language; that builds up our vocabulary and leads us on to conversation. If you choose a song like: "SAVEZ-VOUS PLANTER LES CHOUX?" or "BRUDERCHEN, KOMM TANZ MIT MIR" you will most probably go from hands, feet, nose which are mentioned, on to the other parts of your body and then to their various activities. What fun it is for the children to act out the verbs, first alone and then together. One can enlarge on the word "CHOUX" and speak about the various vegetables, the plants, etc. Thus, out of every little song, or poem, you can develop another field; go on "another excursion", as the children have named it. In that way the language becomes for them a living experience.

In the first three years we do not use books. At the end of the fourth year comes the great moment of starting "our own Reader". And a great moment it is indeed! Children like to have a record of what they have learned. Proudly they print their songs and poems with colored pencils and illustrate them. It is at this time also that we start our vocabulary list, naming an object in French or German. The children draw a small picture of it in their book and put the word under it. Of course we often make mistakes, too. Can you imagine the fun when they find out that perhaps they have put a bird in place of a tree. Can they forget these words easily after having worked with them so vividly?

In the fifth grade we make the transition from poetry to prose and become conscious of spelling. We try using our vocabulary in short compositions about the seasons, plants, animals, etc. In German, we work out some of the fables together. They are short and well known to the children. The sentences are written on the board as the group thinks them out. When the story is finished each child chooses a colored chalk (the color must be named in the language we are studying at the time). Each color represents a different sound. The story is read slowly and distinctly. Gleefully the children step up to the board to underline "their sound". It was in one of these lessons in French that one little boy called out excitedly: "The sound O can be written in three different ways", and then pointed out the O — EAU — AU. He did not have to rely on a fact presented by the teacher out of a book. He had made his own discovery about spelling and will not forget it easily. Another child pointed out, in a German lesson, the fact that words after "DER — DIE — DAS" are capitalized. That called for the explanation of the noun which I gave as simply as possible. Such experiences awaken the consciousness of the individual child and also stimulate the power of observation in the group. There grows a feeling of working together which eliminates disciplinary troubles.

At the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth year the children begin asking questions about grammar. "Why is it LES FLEURS and LA FLEUR?", or "Why are the endings different in IL PORTE and ILS PORTENT?" With a little help and suggestion they often find the answers themselves. If you are fortunate enough to teach both French and German to the same group of children you can answer these questions for both languages at once, thus tying them up together and forming a "whole" picture in the child's mind. Children have a definite feeling for languages. Here is an example: In the sixth grade we met the expression "UNE BALLE ROUGE." One child thought it ever so queer to say "a ball red". There was a discussion about it, but no answer was found immediately. So we put an object on the table to

find out in which order we observe things. The first thought was "a *book*", the second one "a *blue book*". After that experience no explanation was necessary. One child merely said: "The French just have not changed to our way yet".

An excellent method of stimulating and improving conversation is the giving of plays. Then the children actually live in the language. We chose two fairy-tales: "Le Petit Chaper on-Rouge" and "Schneewittchen und die sieben Zwerge". Both stories are well known and much loved by the children. We heard them several times in French and German, until we were familiar with the vocabulary. Then we began dramatizing them. Everyone helped work out the dialogue so that each child in the group had a speaking part. The class decided on the various players, and their judgment of each child's ability was astounding. They did not show any favoritism, but merely assigned the most difficult parts to the more talented ones. Helping each other with the costumes, memorizing the parts together and having the fun of giving the play together, developed a friendly feeling toward each other, a sense of belonging in the group.

Ann Friedl

HOW THE SEEDS ARE SCATTERED

A NATURE STORY FOR THE FIRST OR SECOND GRADE

"The child only begins to realize himself as a being apart from the outer world between the ninth and tenth years. Hence, when he first comes to school, we must make all outer things appear living. We should speak of the plants as holding converse with us and with each other in such a way that the child's outlook on Nature and man is filled with imagination. The plants, the trees, the clouds all speak to him, and at this age he must feel no separation between himself and this living outer world." — Rudolf Steiner, *The New Art of Education*.

All summer long the flowers had gladdened the earth with their lovely colors and delicate perfumes. The bees had sipped their sweet juices, and by a wonderful magic had transformed this nectar into delicious honey. This they stored away in the tiny, six-sided cells of their hive to provide food for the long winter months when they could find no blossoms in meadow or garden. The butterflies, too, had visited their cousins the flowers and had tasted the sweet nectar from the bright flower-cups. Little children had gathered the lovely blossoms and made gay flower-crowns which they wore on their heads, dancing around in the green meadows and playing that they were fairies, and that one—a lovely golden-haired child—was the fairy queen herself!

But soon the sun sent his fire fairies to take the gold and scarlet color from the sunset sky and paint the maples and the oaks and the tulip trees. Cold winds began to blow, the blossoms were shrivelled up, and their lovely bright petals dropped to the ground. But inside, in the heart of each flower, the tiny seeds had been growing bigger and bigger each day, and now they were all lying crowded together in their little cradles and eager to burst out into the beautiful, bright world which the birds had told them about, — for you know

the birds are great travelers and have seen and heard many strange and wonderful things.

But the trees and flowers were anxious about their seed children, for they wanted them to get a good start in the world. If they all fell to the ground near the mother tree or plant, they would be crowded together and have no room in which to grow and spread their leaves, so as to catch the sun's warm rays and the cooling dews and rains. An old Oak Tree, with huge trunk and great spreading branches, was talking over this matter with his neighbor, the Maple Tree. Meanwhile a little Wren, who had made her nest in a hollow of the Oak Tree, overheard their conversation and, hopping onto a great branch, she said:

"Why not ask the fairies to help your little seed children to get a start in the world?"

That was a bright idea! So the great Oak Tree sent the Wren to call together the fairies of earth and air and fire and water. Now the fairies are friends of the trees and flowers and help them to grow. When they heard the Wren's message they all came flying quickly to the old Oak Tree to see what he wanted of them. When they heard what was troubling him, "Oh, but that will not be so difficult!" they said; "we will gladly help you."

And then the Sylphs—fairies who live in the air and fly hither and thither on their gauzy wings—spoke up:

"We will make wings like ours for the seed children. Then they can fly freely over the meadows and across the brooks until each one finds the place that he likes best to grow in."

So the Sylphs made tiny pairs of wings and fastened them to the Maple and Ash and Elm seeds. Soon a gust of wind came along and blew the seeds off the trees. "Oh, we can fly!" they shouted, as they went sailing happily along over the fields.

But the Sylphs saw that the wings would be too large to attach to the tiny little seeds of the Dandelion and Milkweed and Thistle. So for these they made silken parachutes and off the little seeds floated, dancing joyously about, now up, now down, as the breezes caught them and bore them far off till they found a resting place in a green meadow. Almost any day in late summer you can see their silvery parachutes floating over the green fields.

Then the lovely slender water fairies, the Undines, came swirling about. They live in the brooks and streams and are busy wherever there is mist or dew. They see that each plant gets its share of life-giving moisture.

"But we'd like to help the seed children, too," they said. "We'll make little boats or rafts to float them down the streams, and the plants that live by the water can send their seed children out into the world by boat!"

So the Undines got together and made lovely little round boats, shaped like bowls, with a compartment for each seed. They gave these to the yellow Lotus plant that grows in the ponds; and if ever you see a fairy boat, like a little bowl, gliding down the stream, look carefully in the top and you will see each seed riding safely in its tiny cabin.

Now the Orioles and Bluebirds had been watching the fairies at their work, and when they saw the Maple and Elm tree seeds flying about like birds, they were eager to do something for the other plants.

"We are not as clever as the fairies," they chirped, "but we can do something for our friends the trees just the same! We love to eat the sweet, juicy fruits of the Chokeberry and Shadbush and Dogwood, but we don't want the hard seeds hidden inside them. So we'll fly away with our berries and when we eat them we'll let the seeds fall where they've plenty of room to grow. If the trees give us their fruits to eat, why shouldn't we plant some of their seeds for them?"

And now came the flaming Fire Fairies, who bring the sun's warm rays to the growing plants, helping the blossoms to unfold and the seeds to ripen.

"We want to help, too," they cried. "We will give more of the sun's heat to some of the seed-pods, making them swell up like little balloons. Then if you touch them, pop! they'll burst open and shoot the seeds away off! Just watch the Jewelweed and Witchhazel scatter their seeds this way!

All this time the clever Gnomes had been listening attentively. You know they're the little dwarfs with long white beards, who live under the earth and help the tiny shoots to find their way to the top of the ground.

"All that you are planning to do for the seed children is very good," they said, "but what about the acorns and hickory nuts and chestnuts? Wings or silky parachutes, or even boats, would not carry them; they're too heavy. But the Squirrels store them up in hollow trees for the winter and sometimes they even bury them for safe keeping in the ground. The foolish Squirrels always have more than they need. Suppose we play a trick on them and make them forget about some of their hiding-places? Then the little nuts will begin to sprout next spring and we'll give them a shove to the top of the ground!"

The Fairies all laughed and thought this a great joke to play upon the Squirrels.

But the Gnomes spoke up again. "There are other animal friends who could be made to help, too, — Sheep and Goats and, yes, even Cows!"

"Why, how could they help?" asked the other Fairies.

"We'll take some sharp barbs or stiff hairs and fasten them to the seeds of some pasture plants—the Burdock and Tick-Trefoil, for instance. Then they will stick tight to the wool or hair of the animal as he grazes in the field, and so they'll steal a ride till they are brushed off in the next pasture!"

"Why," cried the Sylphs, "then, if they steal a ride, you could call them *tramp* seeds, couldn't you?"

The Fairies laughed merrily again and then they all set to work to make more wings and parachutes and boats and sharp barbs, so as to have plenty for the myriad little seeds that would soon be needing them.

And that is how the Fairies—together with their friends the Birds and Squirrels and other animals—help to scatter the seeds far and wide over the green earth.

Virginia Field Birdsall

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Miss Elizabeth Berlin, a former student of the Waldorf School who now lives in Mexico, sent us not long ago some Mexican ware and handwork to be sold for the benefit of the School. It was a great pleasure to receive this evidence of her interest in the Rudolf Steiner School. The sale took place at the Summer Conference and was very successful.

* * *

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Rudolf Steiner School Association wishes to announce the publication of a Fairy-Story Play:

THE BLIND BRETHREN

by

Frederick Hiebel

Orders may be sent to the
Rudolf Steiner School Association
15 East 79th Street, New York City

Price, 50c a copy,
\$5.00 per dozen.

Membership in the Rudolf Steiner School Association, including the quarterly Bulletin, is \$2.00 per year. Single copies of the Bulletin, 15c each; for more than 10 copies 10c each, postpaid.

Address Secretary Rudolf Steiner School Association, 15 East 79th Street, New York.

Editor of the Bulletin: Arvia MacKaye.
