Enunciation

Enunciation is the habit of correct pronunciation of English sounds and words. Training in enunciation begins when a child is born, as he will mimic the pronunciation he hears in his home. Parents concerned with including Oratory in the grammar stage of their children’s education should themselves practice and develop the habit of correct pronunciation. The habit of enunciation in children is further developed in the school years during phonic instruction. Children should be encouraged to pronounce the letters, diphthongs and digraphs they are learning clearly and with accuracy during phonic drill. Insisting on proper enunciation consistently from ourselves and our children is the best way to teach it.

Proper enunciation does more than just portray the appearance of education in our children. It is important to the success of spelling, as well. In modern English, many vowel sounds in certain syllables in our words are slurred. Vowels in unaccented syllables are routinely pronounced with the “schwa” sound, instead of the vowel sound the syllable indicates. The schwa sound is denoted in the dictionary as an upside down e, and is pronounced like a short u: “uh.” An example is the word “movement.” The word is broken into the syllables “move” and “ment,” with the accent, or the stress, placed on the first syllable when spoken. The first syllable, because it is accented, is pronounced the way we expect it to be. The second syllable, “ment,” is unstressed. The syllable reveals that we should pronounce the vowel as a short e: “eh.” Most of the time, however, we pronounce the syllable with the schwa sound: “munt,” or “movemunt.” Enunciation seeks to make a child aware of how he is saying what he is saying, and to encourage him to enunciate properly when he speaks. Correct enunciation is vital if a child is to learn how to spell by syllables. (See The Subject of Grammar for more on spelling by syllables.) Many children spell the “-ment” suffix as “-munt” unless taught differently, as they hear “munt” when they say the word. Correct enunciation alleviates this difficulty.

Another problem sound is the “wh” consonant team, which when properly enunciated says “hw.” In modern English many times we pronounce this team the same as a single “w.” It is hard for a child to hear the difference between “which” and “witch” when they are both pronounced as “w-short i-ch.” When pronounced properly, the difference is clear, and the children’s spelling will reflect that difference.

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