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## Spelling Instruction Reform Topic of UMaine Conference

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# COLLEGE OF EDUCATION & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

## *Selected News Releases*

### **Spelling Instruction Reform Topic of UMaine Conference**

ORONO, Maine -- While many education trends come and go, one issue remains a constant concern for teachers, administrators and parents—teaching spelling well in elementary schools.

Gail Gibson, fifth grade teacher and principal at Mapleton (Maine) Elementary School will explain how teachers at her school worked with parents and each other to reform spelling instruction when she presents, “Spelling Inquiry: How One Elementary School Caught the Mnemonic Plague.” Her talk will serve as the keynote address at the University of Maine College of Education and Human Development Conference, Learning By Inquiry, to be held Tuesday, May 4, from 4-8 p.m. at Wells Conference Center.

The spelling project began as a “stone in the shoe” for the Mapleton teachers—a tension among many teachers about the different ways they approached spelling instruction. It bothered the staff that Mapleton students performed exceptionally well on the reading and writing components of the Maine Education Assessment of student achievement. At the same time, students performed poorly on other standardized tests of spelling proficiency.

Rather than implement a new spelling curriculum, Gibson brought the teachers together in a year-long study group. They surveyed parents and students about spelling, documented their own beliefs and practice in teaching spelling, read many research reports about spelling instruction, and pored over student work samples in regular group meetings.

The prestigious Spencer Foundation based in Chicago, gave the group a \$30,000 grant to sponsor some elements of the program, including hiring a facilitator from the University of Maine and paying for a week-long writing retreat that 11 of the teachers participated in during July, 1998. That retreat led the group to write "Spelling Inquiry: How One Elementary School Caught the Mnemonic Plague." Published last month by Stenhouse Publishers of York, Maine, the book is available to teachers across the country.

Gibson's appearance at the Learning By Inquiry Conference is designed to increase participation in the University of Maine's research network in local schools. As part of its new Professional Development Network, the University is committed to help teachers learn techniques for developing research projects in their own classrooms, based on their interests and needs.

“We think Gibson's work is a model for any school. This is a reform effort that combines the needs of teachers with the needs of students, and enlists parents as vital partners in the reform process,” says James Artesani, a leader of the Action Research Task Force at UMaine's College of Education and Human Development.

The conference will also include roundtable presentations by teachers in training in the College who have just completed their first research projects, as well as workshops by veteran teachers who are well-versed in research strategies.

For conference registration information, contact Phyllis Thibodeau at 581-2433.

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