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Parental Reactions to Authentic Performance Assessment of Spelling

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PARENTAL REACTIONS
TO
AUTHENTIC PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT
OF SPELLING

THESIS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine parental reactions to authentic performance assessment of spelling.

The subjects for this study were seventy heterogeneously grouped third-grade students and their parents from a small, rural, public elementary school in western New York. Three standardized written retellings of stories were collected from the seventy students over a period of three semesters and were analyzed for misspellings. The results were recorded on a developmental spelling progress chart (see Appendix A). Parents were asked to respond to a confidential and anonymous questionnaire regarding their reactions to the Stages of Spelling Development progress chart. Since many parents did not choose to make comments, a more in-depth interview was conducted with three parents of high, middle, and lower achieving children to further understand their reactions. Parental responses were then subjected to a qualitative analysis.

The majority of parents in this study had positive reactions to the developmental spelling chart as a means of communicating authentic performance of spelling. The majority (97%) reported that they could see their child's spelling growth over the last three semesters. The majority (91%) also reported that the developmental spelling chart

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Chapter 1

Statement of the Problem

In the classroom, spelling has often been taught and evaluated as a separate subject with memorization being the key to its mastery. Recent research has indicated that spelling is a conceptual and developmental process, and that spelling should be interwoven through all subject areas. With changes in the methods of teaching spelling comes changes in the manner in which spelling is evaluated. Weekly spelling tests are no longer adequate for assessing a child's growth in spelling. What is needed are authentic performance assessments. However, what will parental reactions be to authentic performance assessments of spelling?

Definition of Terms

In this study, the following terms will be defined:

Alternative assessment- This is assessment other than standardized or teacher-made tests.

Performance assessment- The student completes or demonstrates the same behavior that the assessor wishes to measure. (Meyer in Diez & Moon, 1992)

Authentic assessment- The student not only completes or demonstrates the desired behavior, but does it in a real-life context. For students this may include classroom activities. (Meyer in Diez & Moon, 1992)

Stages of spelling development- These are stages all children progress through before they use standard spellings. In terms of this study the stages will be labeled:

1. Pre-phonetic stage- The child uses pictures, marks, or alphabet symbols to represent words without regard to letter-sound correspondence.

2. Early phonetic stage- There is a connection between the physical aspects of producing a word and the spelling of the word. The number of letters used often corresponds to the number of syllables but vowels do not usually appear.

3. Advanced phonetic stage- Each element of sound-production of a word is represented in the spelling. Words are spelled as they sound but are unconventional.

4. Transitional- The child over-generalizes rules and uses what he knows best.

5. Synactic-Semantic- Errors occur with homophones, contractions, roots and affixes, and inflections.

6. Standard spelling- The spelling recognized in the dictionary as the correct spelling.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine parental reactions to authentic performance assessment of spelling.

Question to Be Answered

Given a questionnaire, how do parents respond to the use of a developmental spelling progress chart as a means of reporting their child's spelling progress?

Need for the Study

Conventional spelling is something that our society expects in a literate person's writing. At the elementary school level, parents are interested in the progress their children make in this area because they believe that spelling is important. The progress report card reflects a student's ability to spell words on the "Friday Final Test," regardless of how he spells words in his daily writing. Parents are not getting a true picture of their child's spelling performance.

If school districts begin implementing changes in report cards, however, without educating parents concerning different types of assessment, their reaction may be negative. Parents cannot be expected to value something with which they are unfamiliar. Gentry (1987, p.34) asserts that "Good parent education is an important component of a

quality spelling program." It is important, therefore, to investigate parents' reactions to alternative spelling assessment once they are educated concerning spelling development and authentic performance tasks in spelling.

Limitations of the Study

By sharing the Stages of Spelling Development progress chart with parents during regularly scheduled parent/teacher conferences, there is limited time to explain everything about spelling development in full detail. There are also many other academic and social topics to be covered during this parent conference time.

In addition, the voluntary nature of the parent questionnaire limits the study to those parents who chose to respond. While making the questionnaire confidential and anonymous helps ensure honesty, it prevents the researcher from asking parents why they responded in a particular manner.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine parental reactions to authentic performance assessment of spelling.

The literature reviewed in this chapter is organized as follows:

Invented Spelling

Spelling as a Developmental Process

Properties of Spelling Words

Spelling Growth Through Writing

Alternative Assessment

Invented Spelling

With invented spelling being defined as a young child's attempts to use his best judgment when spelling words, several researchers have examined invented spelling in preschoolers, kindergarten and first graders.

In 1971 Charles Read, a linguist, reported on twenty selected preschoolers' spellings. Through their invented spelling he found that different children chose the same phonetic spellings to a degree that could not be explained by random choice. Therefore, he suggested that some

preschool children have an unconscious knowledge of aspects of the English sound system.

At first young children's spellings are strung together without spaces between the words. Morris conducted studies (1983) in which he found a direct and highly significant correlation ($r=.72$, $p<.01$) between first graders' concept of word in text and their ability to represent phoneme segments in their spellings. He found three sub-groups of children at the beginning of first grade. One group could not finger-point to words as they read. They seldom could represent more than the beginning consonant letter in their invented spellings. Those in the second sub-group were able to finger-point to some degree but were unable to consistently self-correct their errors. This group evidenced some phoneme awareness when they put beginning and ending consonants in their invented spellings. The third group pointed to words easily and accurately, and self-corrected errors. They were able to spell words at the phonetic stage or better, representing consonants and vowels. He hypothesizes that once a beginning reader has established a stable concept of word, then attention can be paid to the analysis of letters within the word.

At the kindergarten level many educators believe that because children cannot spell and have limited handwriting abilities, they will be frustrated with attempts at writing.

Often children are not given the opportunity to write for their own purposes until spelling and handwriting abilities are evidenced. A study by Partridge (1991) compared kindergarten students in four whole-language classrooms. Two classes were given daily opportunities to draw and write, while two were given weekly opportunities. An Invented Spelling Assessment Test was modeled after an informal test suggested by Temple, Nathean, and Burris (1982). A ten word test was given. The rating criteria were as follows:

Prephonemic: blank space, random or favorite letters-1 point

Early Phonemic, stage 1: one phoneme represented-- 2 points

Early Phonemic, stage 2: two phonemes or three consonants-- 3 points

Letter name: initial, middle vowel, ending sound-- 4 points

Transitional: a spelling that contains features of correct spelling; silent e, two vowels, blends-- 5 points

Correct: word is correctly spelled-- 6 points

Those students who wrote daily scored significantly higher ($p < .05$) in their ability to spell phonemes in their spelling inventions.

In studies of young children's invented spelling, researchers have found that all children progress through the same stages. Several researchers began building on Read's (1971) research to analyze and describe and label these stages.

Developmental Stages of Spelling

Through research, considerable insights have been gained into the ways in which students master spelling. In 1977 Beers and Henderson decided to further extend the work done by Read (1971) where he found that children do not progress as spellers in a random manner. They conducted a longitudinal study of twenty-five first graders over a six month period. Their objective was to identify error types as they occurred in creative writing samples to determine whether there were stage-like patterns. A weekly writing sample was analyzed for each child over the six month period. They selected words that fit into the specific error categories of: long and short vowels, vocalic r spellings, and morphological marker spellings. After analyzing the results the researchers found that at the first level of spelling, the child uses the letter-name strategy. He uses the letter name that is closest to the sound he hears. Next, a beginning writer starts adding orthographic knowledge when he observes that letters are generally symbols for sounds. He refines his vowel spellings as he seeks the letters which represent the sounds he hears. The children's spellings were taken from the context of written stories so as they began using the final e marker and ing ending they demonstrated an increased understanding of the relationship between

syntactic (in context of their writing), phonemic, and morphophonemic constraints. Beers and Henderson concluded that while students progressed through the spelling levels at different rates, they all went through the same sequence. They hypothesized that the rate of progression may be based upon developmental as well as instructional factors.

In 1979 Zutell extended the investigations of children's spelling patterns by examining the responses of third and fourth graders as well as first and second graders. He used a rating scale of 1 - 5 which was an extension and adaptation of one constructed by Beers (1974). Spelling lists, rather than writing samples, were used with fifteen children from one each of a first, second, third, and fourth grade class. The same levels of spelling were found as in previous studies (Beers, 1974; Beers & Henderson, 1977; Read, 1971) with first and second graders. Zutell found that with tense vowel spellings (e.g.creep, slime) over 90% of the fourth graders used possible vowel marking patterns. He also found that correct use of the marking system for the Tense Marker category (e.g.raked, cheated) emerged in third grade. Zutwell found that there was a significantly positive relationship ($r=.56$, $p<.01$) between cognitive development, as measured with Piagetian developmental tasks, and spelling development. He concluded that the development of spelling proficiency seems to

involve both cognitive and linguistic processes and so requires active, exploring participation of the learner.

Using a case study conducted by Bissex (1980), Gentry (1982) described five stages of spelling development. Bissex traced her son Paul's written language development from his first writings as a four-year old through the ages of nine or ten.

In the precommunicative stage the child uses symbols but shows no knowledge of letter-sound correspondence. In the semiphonetic stage the child begins to understand letter-sound correspondence but often uses the name of the letter for the sound. In the phonetic stage the child uses a letter or group of letters to represent every speech sound that is heard. In the transitional stage the child moves from dependence on phonology to reliance on visual representation. At the correct stage the speller knows the English orthographic system (the representation of the sounds of the language with written symbols) and its basic rules.

In the phonetic stage the cognitive awareness of English orthography is more developed in children who are allowed to invent their own spelling. They discover that there is more than one possibility for the way a word could be spelled phonetically. Then they pay more attention to the conventions of English spelling and begin to move into the

transitional stage. At the correct stage of development, the speller is able to think of alternative spellings and recognizes visually when words "don't look right." Gentry notes that change from one spelling stage to the next is gradual but continuous.

Developmental spelling levels may be determined only by observing spelling miscues, so research into developmental stages of spelling has often used a developmental spelling test (DST). Words in a DST are chosen to include spelling features which have been shown to be sensitive to developmental changes. Ferroli and Shanahan (1987) found that a DST could be given to kindergarten children. One purpose for doing so was to investigate what knowledge is necessary to move from one spelling stage to another.

Twelve words were scored from 0 to 5 points each, depending on what stage of spelling development was evidenced. The average score was equivalent to a Semiphonetic 1 stage in kindergarten. The regression analyses of DST scores indicated that Preliterate and Semiphonetic stages of spelling are most dependent on letter recognition and concept of word. This corresponds to Morris's findings (1983) discussed earlier. At the Semiphonetic and Phonetic stages the previous knowledge is still important but phonemic segmentation appears to be the most important ability. By the Phonetic and Transitional

stages reading and spelling abilities become highly interrelated.

Properties of Spelling Words

Until recently when children made spelling errors in their invented spellings, the only thing observed was poor sound discrimination and inadequate visual and sequential memory. Now researchers (Gentry, 1982) have pointed out that observing spelling miscues leads to the determination of developmental spelling levels. As Goodman (1979, p.3) points out, miscues are "the windows into the mind."

We no longer consider spelling miscues to show lack of visual and sequential memory because we now know that English is not as irregular as was once thought. As cited in Templeton (1979, 1986), Chomsky and Halle (1968) and Venezky (1970) were pioneers in spelling research in that they found that there is a logical system in English spelling if one looks beyond one-to-one phoneme-grapheme correspondences. Linguistic analyses have found that there are three principles according to which English is spelled (Henderson & Templeton, 1986; Templeton, 1986). English spelling is alphabetic in that letters match sounds in a left to right progression. The within-word pattern principle means that the sound a letter or letters make within a syllable depends on the position within the syllable. An example would be the

sound of "gh" at the end of "rough" compared to the sound at the beginning of "ghost." The third principle is meaning. The same spelling is preserved in words in order to maintain the meaning. An example would be "sailboat, sailor, mainsail" rather than "saleboat, salor, mainsale."

Mangieri and Baldwin (1979) used the principle of meaning to predict the spelling difficulty of one hundred words for fourth, sixth, and eighth graders. The meaning principle functions such that visual relationships between words with similar meanings are kept. They found a significant relationship between the subject's ability to spell words and the subject's ability to identify the meanings of the words. They hypothesized that knowing what a word means facilitates recall of its visual shape. Templeton's research (1979) with good spellers in sixth, eighth, and tenth grade supports this conclusion. He found that seeing a base word, as opposed to hearing it, helped with the spelling of derivatives of the base word.

Spelling Growth Through Writing

In the developmental stages of spelling studies it was noted that the rate of progression through the stages is based on developmental as well as instructional factors. The instruction may be implicit at times. Gentry (1982), for instance, holds that the key to cognitive growth in spelling

is frequent and purposeful writing. Read (1971) found that preschoolers who began to spell had one thing in common. They had parents who were willing to accept the child's own spelling efforts, who supplied materials for forming words, and who answered their child's questions. The children who created their own spellings arrived at a deeper understanding of English phonology. Zutell (1979) concluded that spelling involves cognitive and linguistic processes and therefore requires active, exploring participation of the learner. This happens when there is frequent and purposeful writing as evidenced in Partridge's study (1991) where regardless of the kindergarten child's developmental level, daily writing helped improve invented spelling.

As early as 1929 Ernest Horn examined spellings by first and second graders of three words (circus, tease, and miscellaneous). He found that, "The way for any student to discover the part of any word that is hard for him is to attempt to spell it" (p. 288). Gentry (1982) also found that at the "correct" stage of spelling the child can use visual identification of mis-spelled words as a correction strategy.

One study (Klesius, Griffith, & Zielonka; 1991) compared three classes of first graders in a phonics based reading program with three classes in a whole language program. There was found to be no difference in

understanding about phoneme-grapheme relationships for students who learned indirectly through reading and writing experiences and those who were explicitly taught phonics.

In 1977 Donald Graves reviewed Cohen's doctoral dissertation (1969) in which he studied the value of word study exercises in spelling textbooks. He found that the spelling books had become largely language arts skills texts, and did not contribute to spelling power. The Cohen data showed that when words are applied in writing, they are more likely to be spelled correctly. Graves notes:

> *The medium of spelling exercises and the spelling of words in isolation on a Friday test may carry the clear message, "spelling is for exercises, not for writing." They exist as so many pushups for the real game that is never played. (p. 90)*

Cohen used a corrected test method. In 1947 Thomas Horn compared a corrected test method with the test-study procedure outlined in the spelling books using sixth-grade students. He found that 90 to 95 percent of the achievement on the final test could be attributed to correcting three practice tests with no word study at all. Through this approach the students merely studied the words they did not know. Therefore, he concluded that a large amount of time spent in spelling books might be spent more advantageously.

From the research that has been conducted over the last 20 years, some conclusions can be made that have ramifications in the classroom. Educators need to accept

that learning to spell follows a developmental progression and that attaining mastery takes years. Students' misspellings should be celebrated as attempts to "learn the system." Learning how to spell is primarily a conceptual process, rather than a memorization process. Therefore daily writing becomes crucial for the manipulation of the language. When children "invent" spellings, they are engaged in thinking about how words are spelled. Lastly, introducing parents to the developmental nature of spelling, the importance of writing, and encouraging them to have fun with spelling is crucial given that they play an active role in shaping their children's attitudes toward spelling (Gentry, 1987). Parents can begin to appreciate and celebrate the growth their child makes in spelling when informed educators have a means to show them.

Alternative Assessment

One means of showing parents their child's growth is through alternative assessments, where children actually perform the task in a real-life situation. An example would be when spelling is assessed within the context of purposeful writing.

In two articles in a recent Education Week newspaper (1994) Usdan, president of the Institute for Educational Leadership, and Schwarz, a member of the Coalition of

Essential schools' National Faculty, both call for "Local School Folk (or L.S.F., since, from all we can tell, we need plenty of acronyms)" (p.34) to have a strong influence in deciding standards and in looking at students' work to decide "whether they are learning, and how well and how much." (p. 34) When discussing the passage of Goals 2000: Educate America Act, Usdan says that the federal government will have substantial influence not only on what is taught and how it is taught, but also on how it is evaluated. He maintains that one of the potential pitfalls to this legislation is the possible lack of local support. He thinks that the worst tactic is to ignore or insufficiently involve major stake-holders such as teachers, administrators, board members, community members and parents.

Many educational specialists have called for alternative assessment, such as portfolios of student writing samples, without collecting information about reactions of educators, parents, and the community at large to these alternative means of assessing. One study (Flood, Lapp, & Monken, 1992) examined what teachers believed about portfolios and what their actual practices were. The study was an examination of current practices after two years of district implementation in a suburban elementary school district in southern California. Two hundred and fifty-nine teachers participated. Their training in portfolio

assessment included: definition of portfolio assessment; and the purpose, audience, structure, and content of portfolios. The 259 teachers were given a Likert-scale survey (strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, disagree) with questions about four key topics within portfolio assessment: purpose, contents, structure, and management. The data were then regrouped into three categories: agree, disagree or not sure. In addition, twenty-four teachers with four at each grade level, K through 5, were randomly selected to be interviewed using an open-ended interview format concerning the four key topics identified in the survey.

The teachers believed that the primary purpose of portfolio assessment was evaluative rather than instructional. The majority believed that portfolios should not be used in place of either norm-referenced or teacher-made tests. They did believe that the data should be used for report cards and for sharing information with parents but not for planning lessons or conferencing with students. Partly because of their inservice training, the teachers often viewed portfolios as places for completed work rather than work-in-progress. Since the work was completed, it was difficult to use the portfolios as instructional tools. In this study of the use of portfolios after two years, portfolios were viewed very narrowly, almost as "writing folders."

Other researchers (Dewitz, Carr, Palm, & Spencer, 1992) wanted to determine if teachers would find the portfolio process valuable and if the portfolio material and summary checklist of reading behaviors and attitudes would be useful in making instructional decisions. Twenty-five second grade teachers in five rural and three suburban elementary schools near Toledo, Ohio, were involved. The teachers participated in a year-long project to improve reading and writing instruction using a literature based approach and portfolio assessment. The teachers decided what to include in the portfolios and how to record on-going impressions of students' reading and writing behavior. To evaluate teachers' attitudes and beliefs about portfolio assessment, they used a variety of surveys and interviews throughout the year.

At the beginning of the year the teachers relied on basal reader skills and book tests, and standardized achievement tests for most of their instructional decisions. Although they felt that the most useful information came from daily observations, very few teachers used information from daily observations to make instructional decisions. Few teachers were interested in assessing children's interests and attitudes towards reading.

By January, 18 of the 25 teachers made the portfolio a regular aspect of their reading/language arts program. They

used them to note students' progress in reading, interests in reading, and growth in writing ability, especially progress in invented spelling.

Findings from observations and interviews showed that ownership of the portfolios varied from being largely owned and controlled by students to being a joint effort to having the teacher be solely in charge of what went into the portfolio. Teachers found that the portfolios were significantly more valuable for the assessment of writing than reading. They found individual conferences and observations to be more valuable for assessing students' growth in reading. The teachers in the rural schools were allowed to integrate the checklist and the portfolio into their grading system. In the suburban district, the grading procedures were more rigid and teachers were troubled by what amounted to a double system of assessment, with standard assessment being done along with portfolios.

Parents have been interviewed (Hiebert, Hutchinson, & Raines, 1991) to consider their view of standardized and alternative assessment. A case study involving a second and fourth grade teacher was done, in which their classroom assessment practices were studied. The researchers also interviewed six sets of parents, three at second grade and three at fourth grade, to consider their view of standardized and alternative assessment. Parents of high,

middle, and lower ability children were interviewed. In addition to interviews, observations of classroom activities took place and samples related to assessment were collected. The researchers analyzed the data to find answers to the following questions:

What were the uses of the assessment information?

How was assessment data collected?

How was data interpreted to make instructional and assessment decisions?

Was the assessment intrusive? i.e. part of the regular classroom procedure or a special assessment event?

Was the student or teacher in control of the assessment?

Similar data-gathering formats of writing folders; student literature logs, and miscue analyses were used in both classrooms. The fourth grade teacher collected less anecdotal records about students than did the second grade teacher. In both classrooms the students participated by maintaining writing portfolios with rough and final drafts. In both, the assessment system was somewhat structured but not intrusive, occurring as part of the classroom learning routine. The biggest difference was that the second grade teacher made close connections between assessment and instruction while the fourth grade teacher failed to do so.

Students in the second grade had not yet taken the

standardized tests and parents thought that they gave very little useful information about their child, but might be useful in comparing school districts. Parents of fourth graders felt the same. They were, however, reluctant to do away with standardized tests because their child would be required later to take them for college entrance exams and needed to learn how to do so.

Parent-teacher conferences at second grade centered around the samples of student work and literacy processes as evidenced in checklists. The teacher showed specific ways that the student had shown growth. At the fourth grade the teacher also used student writing to show growth but was not specific as to what areas of writing showed improvement. The researchers concluded that the fourth grade teacher was able to rely on standardized tests for assessing students. On the other hand, the second grade teacher felt compelled to take responsibility for establishing goals and assessing progress toward them by using the alternative assessments because she had nothing else to rely upon.

Summary

Parents are usually heard after school practices change, not as a part of the change. Alternative assessments represent a drastic change in the way information about student progress is shared with parents. They may expect

familiar forms of reporting, such as standardized tests, but may not realize that these tests do not necessarily provide information on authentic reading and writing use (Hiebert, Hutchison, and Raines, 1991). What most adults know about school is what they experienced when they were in school. Often they feel that since they learned well with the methods that were used, there is no need to change the way things are done. Recent research reviewed in this chapter points out, however, that much has been learned about how children learn to spell. The research examined invented spelling in the context of the developmental nature of spelling as well as properties of spelling words and the growth of spelling through writing.

The research reviewed in this chapter seems to indicate a need for more study of parental reactions to alternative performance assessments of spelling.

Chapter III

Design of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine parental reactions to authentic performance assessment of spelling. Three standardized written retellings of stories were collected over a period of three semesters, and were analyzed for misspellings. The results were recorded on a developmental spelling progress chart. (See Appendix A) Parents were asked to respond to a confidential and anonymous questionnaire regarding their reactions to the Stages of Spelling Development progress chart.

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects for this study were seventy third grade students and their parents from a small, rural, public elementary school in western New York. The students for this study were from three heterogeneously grouped classrooms.

Materials

Standardized written retellings of stories were collected from the students in October of second grade, May of second grade, and October of third grade. According to

Buchanan (1989), the writing samples were standardized in several ways:

1. All students retold the same story each time after much discussion and practice at oral retelling of the story.

2. The stories were developmentally appropriate to the listening comprehension of the students.

3. Only the title of the story was printed on the board and no other spelling helps were given, which exclude word banks, use of dictionaries or any student/teacher help with spelling.

4. This type of assessment was non-intrusive because uninterrupted, sustained, silent writing has been a regular part of the school day.

A misspelling analysis was done on the first 100 words (sometimes there were less than 100 words) of each sample. Misspellings were analyzed to determine the stage of spelling development the students were at when each retelling was written. A percentage of spelling errors and of standard spelling was also calculated for each student's writing sample.

A chart of Stages of Spelling Development was developed using some of Buchanan's (1989) descriptors. The chart gives information concerning the stage of spelling development exhibited by each writing sample, the percentage of standard spelling used each time, and the percentage of students at

each spelling stage in the fall of third grade. (see Appendix A)

Procedures

In the fall of third grade, after 10 weeks of school, the procedure for the misspelling analysis was shared with parents at a reguarly scheduled parent/teacher conference. The information on the Stages of Spelling Development progress chart was also shared, making sure that any parental questions were answered by the teacher. Finally a confidential and anonymous parent questionnaire was given to each parent to examine parental reactions to this form of progress reporting. (See Appendix B)

Since many parents did not choose to make comments, a more in-depth interview was conducted with three parents to further understand their reactions to authentic performance assessment of spelling. Parents of high, middle, and lower achieving children were chosen according to convenience and willingness to come to school during the day for the interview. The questions involved how they responded to the questionnaire and why they responded in that manner.

A qualitative analysis of the parent responses to the questionnaire and the interview was completed.

Summary

Three standardized written retellings of stories were

collected and were analyzed for misspellings. The results were recorded on a developmental spelling progress chart.

Parents were asked to respond to a confidential and anonymous questionnaire regarding their reactions to the Stages of Spelling Development progress chart. In addition, three parent interviews were conducted to further understand parent reactions to authentic performance assessment of spelling.

Parent responses were then subjected to a qualitative analysis.

Chapter IV

Analysis of the Data

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine parental reactions to authentic performance assessment of spelling. Three standardized written retellings of stories were collected over a period of three semesters and were analyzed for misspellings. The results were recorded on a developmental spelling progress chart. (See Appendix A) Parents were asked to respond to a confidential and anonymous questionnaire regarding their reactions to the Stages of Spelling Development progress chart.

Analysis of the Data

The spelling progress charts were shared with 69 parents during normally scheduled parent/teacher conferences after the first 10 weeks of third grade. Of these 69 parents, 34 (49%) responded to the questionnaire. As presented in Table 1, the majority of parents (33 out of 34 or 97%) responded that they could see their child's spelling growth over the last three semesters. The majority (31 out of 34 or 91%) also responded that the progress chart helped them to understand their child's spelling progress compared

to other children at the same grade level and in the same school district.

The majority of parents (24 out of 34 or 70%) preferred to have their child's spelling progress reported either on a developmental spelling chart alone (13 out of 34 or 38%) or have a combination of a developmental spelling chart and a numerical grade (11 out of 34 or 32%).

Of the five responses where parents either gave no response, wanted a letter grade, or a combination developmental spelling chart and a letter grade, no comments or suggestions were given.

Of the five responses where parents wanted only a numerical grade, there were two comments. One parent wanted more information about the spelling program. This was the same parent who was "not sure" if the developmental spelling chart helped to show spelling growth over the last three semesters. Another parent expressed frustration that the grading system on the report card was not standardized. This parent pointed out that report card grades are influenced by what curriculum is being taught so that one student may receive higher grades than "a child in an advanced or more challenging curriculum [who] may score lower but actually be achieving more."

Two comments were made by parents who preferred having only the developmental spelling chart. One parent stated,

"This system really seems to put a lot of what the child does in perspective. The differences between the stages and where the child is at is really well explained." Another stated, "The "stages" help you know that your child is moving along with the "majority" of the class of students tested. If there's a problem of falling behind you'll probably pick that up with the comparisons to other students."

Of the two parents who were unsure whether the developmental spelling chart helped them understand their child's progress compared to the other students at the grade level and in the same district, one preferred having only the developmental spelling chart and the other preferred both the developmental spelling chart and a numerical grade.

There were positive comments from three parents who preferred both a numerical grade and the developmental spelling chart. One parent thought that the chart helped to see what "at grade level" meant on the report card. Another thought that the chart was very informative and that the parent could see what was involved at the next stage so that they could work together toward that stage with the child. One parent even gave encouragement by writing, "Keep up the good work!"

Table 1

Parent Questionnaire Results

1. Did the Stages of Spelling Development progress chart help you to see your child's spelling growth over the last three semesters?

yes	no	not sure	no response
33/34 (97%)	0	1/34 (3%)	0

2. Did the Stages of Spelling Development progress chart help you to understand your child's spelling progress compared to other children at this grade level in this district?

yes	no	not sure	no response
31/34 (91%)	0	2/34 (6%)	1/34 (3%)

3. How would you prefer to see your child's spelling progress reported?

*numerical grade.....5/34 (15%)
*letter grade.....1/34 (3%)
*developmental progress chart 13/34 (38%)
*combination of numerical grade and developmental progress chart 11/34 (32%)
*combination of letter grade and developmental progress chart 1/34 (3%)
*no response.....3/34 (9%)

Interviews

While every student in this study progressed from one stage of spelling to the next with no regressions to previous stages, there were some who did not always progress in "percent of words spelled using standard spelling." When this was the case, teachers explained to parents that it might be a function of more advanced vocabulary or a longer written and more complex piece of writing. One parent was unsure that the developmental spelling chart did show her child's progress over the last three semesters. At the advanced phonetic stage, her child had 74% and 83% of words spelled with standard spellings in second grade but only 73% spelled with standard spelling at the beginning of third grade. This parent asked for an additional conference with the teacher and language arts coordinator for further explanation concerning her child's progress. Another spelling analysis was done, along with further explanation of her daughter's progress in relation to the spelling process, and she was satisfied. No other parents raised concerns about their child's progress.

Interviews were conducted with three other parents to further understand their reactions to authentic performance assessment of spelling. Parents of high, middle, and lower achieving children were chosen for the interviews. While the parents did not express the same preferences for report

cards, they did all express a need to know how their child was progressing in terms of his own growth or compared to others.

The parent of the higher achieving student thought the developmental spelling chart helped her especially to see her child's progress because even though her child is bright and usually gets high grades, she could still see that she was making growth. She preferred the developmental spelling chart as a means of reporting progress because "spelling tests only show weekly knowledge and some carry-over needs to be made to writing." She also stated that numerical marks are not important until students get to high school when you need to find out the child's standing in the class for purposes of getting into college. At the elementary level, she believed that the attitude and behavior grades (Satisfactory, Not satisfactory, Very good) are more important.

The parent of the average achieving child also preferred the developmental spelling chart because it told her where he stood compared to others and it gave more information than spelling tests. She also could compare where he was on the developmental spelling chart to the work he brings home. However, she could understand how some parents might like numerical grades because that is what they are used to. Since the report card says that 90-100 is

exceptional, 85-90 is above average, 80-85 is average, and 75-80 is below average, she thought that most parents feel comfortable that they know what their child's grades mean. She noted that letter or numerical marks do not explain how the child is doing in all aspects and that more information is better.

The parent of the lower achieving child said that with the developmental spelling chart she could see her child's growth over the last three semesters and how her progress compared to others, but she preferred numerical grades. She referred to the part of the report card that explains what the range means and said, "When I was in school everything was based on a certain average. I had numerical grades when I was in school." She thought that numerical grades on the report card show where her daughter is having difficulty. She mentioned that the first 10 weeks of school her daughter usually has higher grades, and then they progressively go down. That showed her that her daughter is having difficulty processing new information. She does not think that the standardized tests, such as the California Achievement Test, tell a child's ability because, "some kids panic and may not understand directions and the teacher can't explain" so the test results may be lower than the child's true ability.

Summary

The majority of parents in this study had positive reactions to the developmental spelling chart as a means of communicating authentic performance of spelling. The majority (97%) reported that they could see their child's spelling growth over the last three semesters. The majority (91%) also reported that the developmental spelling chart helped them to understand their child's spelling progress compared to other children at that grade level and in this school district. Some parents thought that the developmental spelling chart gave them more information regarding spelling achievement, while others preferred numerical marks or a combination of the two.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Implications

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine parental reactions to authentic performance assessment of spelling. Three standardized written retellings of stories were collected over a period of three semesters and were analyzed for misspellings. The results were recorded on a developmental spelling progress chart. (see Appendix A) Parents were asked to respond to a confidential and anonymous questionnaire regarding their reactions to the Stages of Spelling Development progress chart.

Conclusions

It was hoped that the Stages of Spelling Development spelling chart would be an alternative means (other than report card grades) of reporting spelling progress that would:

1. show growth over a period of time;
2. show progress compared to other children at the same grade level and in the same district.

The majority of parents indicated that this was so. A majority also indicated that they appreciated the added

information provided by the developmental spelling chart. It became apparent through parent interviews that parents were, however, most comfortable with school reporting systems that they had experienced in the past. This was most likely the reason for 15% and 32% of the parents wanting a numerical grade to be a part of the reporting, since this was the means of reporting always used by this district.

Implications for Education

It becomes apparent, therefore, that the only way for educators to effect a change and have positive parental reactions, is to educate the parents as to the benefits of the change. During the regularly scheduled 10-week parent/teacher conferences, three third grade teachers spent some time explaining to parents how a misspelling analysis of their child's writing was done. This was done in order to evaluate their child's stage of spelling development in the authentic context of writing. The Stages of Spelling Development chart was shared in an effort to educate parents regarding the development of spelling ability in children. To some extent this education occurred, as evidenced by several comments concerning how informative the chart was and how it put into perspective what the child was doing concerning spelling and writing. However, the language arts committee of this school decided to heed Gentry's admonition

(1987, p.34) that "Parents are important spelling teachers who play an active role in shaping their children's attitudes about spelling." A spelling informational meeting was planned to better educate parents concerning the educational research that has taken place since they were in school. It is obvious from some parents' comments that they are more comfortable with what they experienced when they were in school. It is important to let parents know that methods used to teach them were not always based on sound educational research. In the last two decades much educational research has been done to support better methods for instructing children in writing and spelling. It is important to share these ideas with parents so that they can become informed and supportive partners with teachers in educating their children.

A further implication of this study would be that parents need to become more comfortable with alternative means of assessing spelling through frequent exposure. If writing samples and misspelling analyses were shared at every parent/teacher conference throughout the elementary school grades, spelling (and writing) growth would be well documented. This growth might help to alleviate any fears that the use of "invented" spelling leads to poor spellers.

Implications for Research

Further investigations into parental reactions are suggested. Once misspelling analyses are shared with parents over a period of time, the same questionnaire could be given across grade levels. This would provide a much larger sample, over a broader range of grade levels, from which to base conclusions. It may be found that a longitudinal study, using the same set of parents, might provide insight into changes in attitudes over time.

Another possibility for research is to involve students. By sharing their spelling growth with them, as well as their parents, they may become more accountable for their learning. A study could be conducted concerning their reactions and the possible effects on their further spelling growth.

Summary

After educating parents as to the developmental nature of spelling and the importance of evaluating spelling in an authentic context, parents may begin to appreciate and celebrate the growth their child makes in spelling. When informed educators have a means to show parents this growth, the results of a parental questionnaire may indicate even more willingness to embrace authentic assessment.

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% of students at each stage Fall 3rd grade	STUDENT NAME: Sample student A.B.C. 2F = 2nd grade fall 3F = 3rd grade fall 2S = 2nd grade spring 3S = 3rd grade spring APPENDIX A Stages of Spelling Devopment						
	Stages	**Charateristics** *	**Examples** *	**Descriptors** *	**Grade Placement**	**Date**	**%Standard Spelling:**
	Pre-Phonetic Stage	Uses pictures, marks, alphabet , or symbols to represent words without regard to letter - sound correspondence.	picture F (father) marks m (mother) T a man went to the store	1. Correspondence between object and symbol to represent it. 2. Use of characters, lines, numbers and shapes; 3-5 characters for a word - big thing - long word			
1/70= 1%	Early Phonetic Stage	There is a connection between the physical aspects of producing a word and the spelling of a word. The number of letters you need to spell a word is equal to the number of syllables in a word	F R Father S dress mthr mother	1. Spellers use mostly uppercase letters. 2. Vowels do not usually appear. 3. Numbers of letters used very often corresponds to the number of syllables in the word.			
45/70= 64%	Advanced Phonetic Stage	Each element of sound - production of a word chould be represented in the spelling of a word.	NBR - Number KaK - Cake Clod - Cloud Rop - Rope Wis - Was hem - him aftr - after sets - city	1. Words are spelled as they sound. (speak) 2.All sounds are represented however,the spelling may be unconventional. 3.Teacher can figure out words	2F 2S	10/93 5/94	68% 76%
21/70= 30%	Transitional	Child over generalize rules.	crido - cried lite - light chanse - charge are - our bact to- back to	1. They use what they know works 2. The same sound may be represented by more than 1 letter 3. Different sounds may be represented by the same letter" 4. They realize that the sound/symbol relationship is not simple or consistent	3F	10/94	87%
3/70= 4%	Syntactic-Semantic	Students are trying to use all three cueing systems: sound symbol semantic syntax these take precedence over sound symbol cues.	guest - guessed to - two - too there - they're - their	Homophones (syntactic) Contractions (Semantic) Compounds(Semantic) Roots & Affixes(Semantic) Inflections- plural poecssion change in tense comparisons Bleads (Semantic) Acronym (Semantic) 1. Focus on word meaning 2.Meaning units within words 3.Meaning units shared by words			
	Standard Spelling	The spelling recognized in the dictionary as correct		* taken from Buchanan (1989)			

Appendix B

Parent Questionnaire About Stages of Spelling Development Progress Report

This questionnaire is very important for gaining feedback to share with teachers and administrators. In order to keep it confidential and anonymous, please place it face down in the box provided in the hall. You may also return it via your child if you wish.

1. Did the Stages of Spelling Development progress chart help you to see your child's spelling growth over the last three semesters?

yes no not sure

2. Did the Stages of Spelling Development progress chart help you to understand your child's spelling progress compared to other children at this grade level in this district?

yes no not sure

3. How would you prefer to see your child's spelling progress reported? numerical grade_____
letter grade_____
developmental progress chart_____
other_____ Please explain:

Comments:

Suggestions for change: