

1-1-1977

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Janyce Ann Gray

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METHODS AND TECHNIQUES FOR TEACHING SPELLING

by

Janyce Ann Gray

A RESEARCH PAPER
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION
(EDUCATION OF LEARNING DISABLED CHILDREN)
AT CARDINAL STRITCH COLLEGE
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
1977

This research paper has been
approved for the Graduate Committee
of Cardinal Stritch College by

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Date Oct. 1, 1977

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this paper was to research current literature on the methods, approaches, and techniques used to teach the poor speller.

Spelling is often given a subordinate position in our schools. It tends to be a "nuisance" subject in which words are taught in isolation. Some teachers consider it to be an unpleasant necessity. Many students and teachers fail to realize the importance of mastering this "tool" skill. After all, children will not grow up to be spellers or gain employment using this specific skill alone.

The lack of spelling skills can negatively affect a person's life. Failure to spell correctly is a definite handicap. Poor spelling hinders communication and brings ridicule. Our society has a tendency, either subtly or openly, to frown upon those who cannot spell. Some people, especially employers, may feel the poor speller as being non-intelligent, uneducated, careless, or negligent in his job.

The need to spell grows with the need to write.

Children are required to do progressively more written work each year they are in school. Depending on the type of employment as adults, a great amount of written work may be required. If the person's employment does not require writing it may still be needed as a communication skill such as writing out checks, letters, and job applications.

When a child or adult is a poor speller he or she may shy away from writing. When he does choose to write, his spelling disability may keep him from expressing his ideas. He may cut his writing to only words he can spell. He could also be so concerned with his spelling that his thoughts are lost.

Knowing how to spell enables one to write something today that can be understood tomorrow. Spelling also gives consistency so persons with other dialects or accents can still understand what was written even though it is not pronounced the same.

Spelling is a highly complex task--more complex than people realize. In the reading task for example a person gets clues to help him figure out an unknown word. Pictures (especially in children's books), context clues, phonics, structural analysis, and configuration clues help readers pronounce an unknown word. In spelling, the opportunity to draw upon peripheral clues is greatly reduced. If the person has poor auditory or hearing skills, there are even fewer clues.

If the need for written communication is real, then correct spelling is important. Basic words, positive attitudes toward correct spelling, and skills to determine the spelling of unknown words must be developed if the communication is to be effective.

Limitations

The major emphasis of this paper was on teaching spelling to the child who is failing to learn to spell, especially since the child who has learned to spell obviously does not need to learn other approaches of studying words. His techniques obviously work. The area of concern is with remedial help with individual or small groups.

Authorities in spelling generally agree that the teacher of spelling must know the subject matter and be enthusiastic toward spelling; this being more important than any particular approach or technique.

The teacher must know that spelling is more than just writing words correctly. According to Hanna and Hanna¹ the teacher has to know the nature of language in general and of American English in particular. He must also know the relationships that exist between spoken and written forms of the language. He must know why spelling is

¹Paul R. Hanna and Jean S. Hanna, The Teaching of Spelling (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company), pp. 8-9.

important. And he must know the needs, potentials, and the experiences the child may have had that have helped him prepare for or inhibited him from learning to spell. The skills and abilities needed by a teacher are important but were not discussed in this paper.

When a teacher discovers a student who is not succeeding in spelling, what should she do?

Hammill and Bartel² list six questions that they feel a teacher must ask immediately when a child fails to learn to spell. They are:

1. Does the child have sufficient mental ability to learn to spell?
2. Are his hearing, speech, and vision adequate?
3. What is his general level of spelling ability?
4. Has he areas of specific weakness in spelling?
5. Has the child a modality preference?
6. What systems, techniques, or activities might be used to remediate his difficulty?³

Questions one to five are crucial and are prerequisites to question six. They are relevant to question six and to teaching spelling. For example, diagnosing weaknesses must be done in order to remediate. Without it, how does the teacher know what is to be remediated? However, the intent of this paper was to find approaches and techniques to help teach the poor speller. Therefore, even though important, the first five questions are not discussed unless they are brought into an approach or technique. However, in order to

²Donald D. Hammill and Nettie R. Bartel, Teaching Children With Learning and Behavior Problems (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1975), pp. 92-93.

³Ibid.

teach remedial spelling, it would be advised to be knowledgeable in the other areas.

The teacher of spelling has to know more than just specific techniques of word study to teach spelling. Therefore, a basic knowledge of the English language and basic techniques of teaching are necessary. However, these were not discussed in this paper. The basis of English is only discussed as it relates to linguistics.

The subject of linguistics covers many areas including syntax, word origins, generalizations and structural analysis. These areas were not covered in depth. The area was discussed only in general terms.

Generalizations were discussed but specific generalizations were not given. These can be found in most reading and spelling books.

Techniques for a whole class or the average or above average spellers were not discussed. The focus of this paper was on methods of teaching remedial small group and individualized spelling. Activities for enrichment were not given since they are usually for average or higher level students.

This paper does not discuss or refer to grades. If the teacher knows the scope of a good spelling program she should be able to teach any child from the point where he is functioning. Also many of the techniques can be used with any grade level. Adaptations can be made to any

of the suggestions to enable them to be used with a lower or higher grade level.

Many skills are required to be able to spell, such as auditory perception and discrimination, visual perception and discrimination, reading sequentialization, and writing, to mention a few. These subjects are discussed only as they affect spelling. Specific activities or methods to increase writing legibility, reading, auditory perception, etc. were not investigated.

Spelling can be related to other subjects such as writing compositions, reading, and vocabulary. These relationships are not relevant to the topic of methods and techniques of teaching spelling. For example, it has been established that excellent readers are seldom poor spellers but poor readers are, with few exceptions if any, poor spellers.⁴ However, this fact has no bearing on choosing approaches or techniques to teach spelling.

The research for this paper covered the current literature from 1966 to 1977. Sources of information came from books and magazines in the Cardinal Stritch College library, the Kenosha Public Schools, fellow teachers, and this author's own books, magazines and experiences.

⁴Ernest Horn, "Teaching Spelling: What Research Says to the Teacher," cited by Patricia S. Geedy "What Research tells us about Spelling," Elementary English 52 (February 1975):233-236.

While researching this topic, particular ideas were often expressed by a number of authors. These ideas were expressed at different times during the eleven-year span covered by this paper. The choice to quote the more recent or later articles was made on the basis of the clarity of the ideas expressed. Most of the quotes given were expressed in similar ways by at least two authors. Only the specific teaching activities were given by only one author.

The following questions were attempted to be answered in the content of this paper:

(1) What approach or technique is the most successful in teaching poor spellers to spell?

(2) What words should a student learn?

(3) What sensory channel, if any, is the best to use when teaching spelling to the poor speller?

(4) Are there any techniques or procedures presently in use that should not be?

Definitions

As with any subject matter, there are terms that are peculiar to the subject of spelling. Hammill and Bartel define spelling as "the forming of words from letters in both written and oral forms according to accepted usage." ⁵

⁵Hammill and Bartel, Teaching Children with Learning and Behavior Problems (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1975), p. 89.

There are a number of terms to express parts of our speech and written language as they refer to spelling. Phonemes refer to the spoken sound while graphemes refer to the written symbols (letters of the alphabet).

Phonology, "the study of speech sounds, begins with the phoneme as its smallest unit and progresses upward through the syllable, the word, the phrase, the clause, and the sentence--treating all these as units of sounds."⁶

Phonograms then refer to "combinations of letters that commonly represent English sounds."⁷ Examples are act-fact; ad-bad, dad, glad, had, and age-cage, page.

The term grapheme refers to printed letters, the alphabet. Grapheme-phoneme correspondencies then refer to a one-to-one letter-sound relationship.⁸

Many authors and teachers refer to spelling generalizations or rules. In this paper, the author has chosen to agree with the following idea that the term "rule" connotes a law that applies without exceptions, whereas a

⁶The Encyclopedia of Education, 1971 ed., s.v. "Teaching of Spelling," Ralph M. Williams, p. 389.

⁷John M. Kean and Carl Personke, The Language Arts Teaching and Learning in the Elementary School (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), p. 252.

⁸Ibid.

generalization connotes an accuracy that applies in many but not all instances."⁹ Generalizations are inferences applied to the act of spelling. Generally, the term generalization was used throughout the paper instead of rule.

Phonetics is defined as the science of speech sounds. Phonics is the application of phonetics to spelling and reading. Linguistics is the study of human speech. It includes the study of phonetics as well as the study of meanings of words and grammar. Structural analysis is the use of meaning units (or morphemes) in the spelling or recognition of words. Phoneme is a bundle of phonetically similar sounds in language which are distinguishable in that the substitution of one for another changes the meaning of a word. For example: sounds represented by b, m, or the e in bet. Morpheme is the smallest meaningful unit in the structure of words. Examples: root word, prefix, suffix, inflectional ending. Silent letters are any letters which are not a part of a blend or digraph that is not heard when the word is pronounced. Synonyms are words having the same, or nearly the same, meaning.¹⁰

Sensory channels refers to the way a person receives information. Such as by hearing (auditory), vision (visual), and touch or feel (kinesthetic).

Summary

Educators no longer consider spelling to be a simple skill acquired through rote memorization. It is considered

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Howard E. Blake and Robert Emans, "Some Spelling Facts," Elementary English 47 (1970):241-249.

a highly complex cross-sensory integration task. The best teaching results are obtained when a teacher adjusts instruction to meet the individual capacities and abilities of the students.

Some authorities feel that when a child is asked to study his spelling lessons, he is frequently at a loss as to what to do. In some cases, the teacher is making the assumption that the child knows what to do. In other cases, perhaps the teacher does not know how to teach the child to study. Yet another reason may be that the teacher does not feel the subject is important enough to deserve the extra attention.

While spelling, according to many authorities, may receive less attention in modern schools, most children who are poor spellers are placed at a considerable disadvantage in our society.

Spelling, for some pupils, is a frustrating, complicated undertaking. Oftentimes, it becomes a dreaded task to be avoided whenever possible. The lack of this skill can cause difficulty in all other school subjects. The intent of this paper was to learn how to help the poor speller out of his dilemma.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This paper sought to answer the question of how to teach the poor speller to spell. One suggestion, often heard, to increase spelling ability is to read a lot.

However, Smith

. . . has shown reading at a certain point is the worst of all possible things for spelling. The whole art of reading requires more and more minimal scrutiny of words in order that one may move with greater and greater efficiency to meaning. The better you read the less you will learn about spelling.¹

Henderson² suggests that there is a general agreement that all words cannot just be memorized letter by letter. Since memorization is not the answer, people try to learn rules or generalizations. However, he says good spellers do not know them and bad spellers remember them incorrectly. Therefore, generalizations do not work.

According to Henderson³ good spellers are supposed to have excellent "auditory senses." However, he says poor

¹Psycholinguists and Reading, Rinehart and Winston, 1973, cited by Edmund H. Henderson, "Correct Spelling--An Inquiry," Reading Teacher 28 (November 1974):177.

²Edmund H. Henderson, "Correct Spelling--An Inquiry," Reading Teacher 28 (November 1974):177.

³Ibid., p. 178.

spellers do also since they usually spell things as they sound. Consequently how do poor spellers learn?

Henderson⁴ suggests that children are equipped to learn to spell. He feels all they need is our confidence, encouragement and time. They need activities and things of importance to do and feel and write about. They need the right to be wrong and the chance to try and test what will work for them at their own pace. They need interesting schools and teachers of sense and sensitivity.

Current research does not show any particular approach, method, or technique as being the "one" best approach. The deciding factor seems to be the teacher's knowledge of the subject, attitude toward spelling, and her awareness of her student's feelings, abilities and needs.

The only area that this paper could influence is the subject knowledge. The following approaches, techniques, and suggestions were the most prominent and current approaches in the current literature.

There are very few authors who do not at least give reference to the Linguistic Approach being used in many spelling and reading series. There is some controversy as to the usefulness of this approach, but it appears to be the current trend.

⁴Ibid., p. 179.

Linguistics "is the science of language, including phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics." It is the study of the structure and development of a particular language.⁵

Many people believed that the American English Language is extremely irregular. Irregular means that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between phonemes and graphemes. That is, each sound spoken does not have its own letter symbol. This makes spelling, in the opinion of some, pure memorization since there are no rules to follow.

However, the research of linguists says otherwise. Studies have shown that each sound is represented by a particular letter, or a group of two or more letters, more frequently than any other letter.⁶ Some authorities stress the regularity while others stress the exceptions. This sound and symbol relationship is generally termed phoneme-grapheme correspondence.⁷

The linguists are not limited to the phoneme-grapheme associations. They also study the origin and history of

⁵David B. Guralnik and Joseph H. Friend, ed., Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1968), p. 853.

⁶Walter T. Petty and Marjorie F. Becking, Experiences in Language Tools & Techniques for Language Arts Methods (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1976), p. 249.

⁷Ibid., p. 249.

words and principles to be observed in forming compound words, in affixing, and in dividing words into syllables.⁸

Using this system means that instead of learning each word separately by memorization, which is the most difficult kind of learning, the child can use these rules or generalizations to help him make choices in spelling.⁹

There are five broad generalizations that cover the whole expanse of English spelling. The first is that the number of syllables in a word may affect its spelling. Second, the position of a sound in a word or syllable may affect its spelling. Third, the sound immediately preceding or following a phoneme may affect the spelling of the phoneme. Fourth, the etymological origin of a word will determine some of the characteristics of its spelling. Finally, the fifth generalization concerns the position of the accent in a word.¹⁰

There are many generalizations to learn. The best known one is the "i before e" generalization. This however is one of the poorest to start with. There are many other rules that are more regular, such as the fact that at and all words that rhyme with it end in at. This would

⁸Ibid., p. 251.

⁹Sara W. Lundsteen, Children Learn to Communicate (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976), p. 327.

¹⁰The Encyclopedia of Education, 1971 ed. S. U. "Teaching of Spelling," by Ralph M. Williams, p. 390-391.

be the better generalization to start beginners with so they will not grow up believing that all English spelling is arbitrary and inconsistent.¹¹

Kean and Personke express the concern that the generalizations apply to reading rather than spelling.¹² However, between morphological and phonological generalizations they suggest that the morphological generalizations be taught first since they are easier to learn. Therefore, when attacking multisyllabic words, children should look for morphological elements first and for phonological elements second.¹³

The morphological generalizations refer to meanings of words and are more consistent so are of greater value in spelling. Since they involve meaning units they are of double value in that they provide an opportunity for the spelling to serve as a vocabulary program as well.¹⁴

All the authorities in spelling suggest that only the most regular generalizations should be taught to children.

¹¹Ibid., p. 391.

¹²John M. Kean and Carl Personke, The Language Arts Teaching and Learning in the Elementary School (New York: St. Martins Press, 1976), p. 249.

¹³Ibid., p. 266.

¹⁴Ibid.

Today's spelling programs are organized around the phonetic and structural elements and generalizations.

A study done by Davis¹⁵ on applicability of the phonic generalizations was interesting. He took a list of forty-five phonic generalizations and analyzed each as to the number of words used, number of words conforming to the generalization, number of exceptions, and the percent of applicability. He does this with six spelling programs. Two programs employed a phonic/linguistic approach with phonic generalizations taught by the deductive method, two were linguistic-based with phonic generalizations taught by the inductive method, and two showed versatility in their organization and employed a variety of approaches. Table 1 shows the results of the study.

Exceptions to the generalizations were high among subject-related or technical words. Twelve of the twenty-six vowel generalizations were in every series (grade 2) but the majority of them did not meet the seventy-five percent applicability. Consonant generalizations met the criterion better than vowel generalizations.

This study was informative. The phonic generalizations are linguistically oriented and, therefore, apply better to spelling lists that are organized on the basis of sound-letter relationships than to more traditional organizations.

¹⁵Lillie Amith Davis, "The Applicability of Phonic Generalizations to Selected Spelling Programs," Elementary English 49 (May 1972):706-713.

TABLE 1
 APPLICABILITY OF FORTY-FIVE PHONIC GENERALIZATIONS
 TO SELECTED SPELLING PROGRAMS

Generalization	Total Number of Words	Number of Words Conforming	Number of Exceptions	Percent of Applicability
1. When there are two vowels side by side, the long sound of the first one is heard and the second is usually silent.	1893	612 (yeast) ^a	1281 (infield) ^a	22
2. When a vowel is in the middle of a one-syllable word, the vowel is short:	942	626	316	66
middle letter	(325)	(240) (chest)	(85) (wrong)	(74) ^b
one of the middle two letters in a word of four letters	(379)	(242) (silk)	(137) (dart)	(64)
in a word of more than four letters.	(238)	(144) (latch)	(94) (burst)	(61)
3. If the only vowel letter is at the end of a word, the letter usually stands for a long sound.	26	20 (spy)	6 (who)	77
4. When there are two vowels, one of which is final <u>e</u> , the first vowel is long and the <u>e</u> is silent.	418	263 (zone)	155 (one)	63

5. The <u>r</u> gives the preceding vowel a sound that is neither long nor short.	1507	1301 (orbit)	206 (ferry)	86
6. The first vowel is usually long and the second silent in the digraphs <u>ai</u> , <u>ea</u> , <u>oa</u> , and <u>ui</u> :	536	309	227	58
ai	(140)	(104) (bait)	(36) (curtain)	(74)
ea	(282)	(150) (steam)	(132) (great)	(53)
oa	(55)	(52) (toast)	(3) (abroad)	(95)
ui	(56)	(3) (nuisance)	(53) (quit)	(5)
7. In the phonogram <u>ie</u> , the <u>i</u> is silent and the <u>e</u> has a long sound.	169	24 (hygiene)	145 (tries)	14
8. Words having double <u>e</u> usually have the long <u>e</u> sound.	140	120 (teeth)	20 (queer)	86
9. When words end with silent <u>e</u> , the preceding <u>a</u> or <u>i</u> is long.	564	329 (admire)	235 (welfare)	58

^a Words in parentheses are examples of words that conform or of exceptions;

^b Figures in parentheses indicate specific applications of the generalization.

TABLE 1--Continued

Generalization	Total Number of Words	Number of Words Conforming	Number of Exceptions	Percent of Applicability
10. In <u>ay</u> the <u>y</u> is silent and gives <u>a</u> its long sound.	60	50 (display)	10 (kayak)	83
11. When the letter <u>i</u> is followed by the letters <u>gh</u> , the <u>i</u> usually stands for its long sound and the <u>gh</u> is silent.	59	40 (sigh)	19 (eight)	68
12. When <u>a</u> follows <u>w</u> in a word, it usually has the sound <u>a</u> as in <u>was</u> .	67	15 (want)	52 (reward)	22
13. When <u>e</u> is followed by <u>w</u> , the vowel sound is the same as represented by <u>oo</u> .	26	11 (flew)	15 (dew)	42
14. The two letters <u>ow</u> make the long <u>o</u> sound.	107	58 (arrow)	49 (plow)	54
15. <u>W</u> is sometimes a vowel and follows the vowel digraph rule.	159	59 (marrow)	100 (lawn)	37
16. When <u>y</u> is the final letter in a word, it usually has a vowel sound.	529	435 (cozy)	76 (decay)	86

17. When <u>y</u> is used as a vowel in words, it sometimes has the sound of long <u>i</u> .	570	55 (cycle)	515 (gym)	10
18. The letter <u>a</u> has the same sound (ô) when followed by <u>l</u> , <u>w</u> , and <u>u</u> .	335	116 (bald)	219 (final)	35
19. When <u>a</u> is followed by <u>r</u> and final <u>e</u> , we expect to hear the sound heard in <u>care</u> .	28	27 (share)	1 (are)	96
20. When <u>c</u> and <u>h</u> are next to each other, they make only one sound.	169	169 (torch)	-	100
21. <u>Ch</u> is usually pronounced as it is in <u>kitchen</u> , <u>catch</u> , and <u>chair</u> , not like <u>sh</u> .	169	144 (merchant)	25 (chef)	85
22. When <u>c</u> is followed by <u>e</u> or <u>i</u> , the sound of <u>s</u> is likely to be heard.	271	232 (cease)	39 (social)	86
23. When the letter <u>c</u> is followed by <u>o</u> or <u>a</u> , the sound of <u>k</u> is likely to be heard.	401	401 (vacant)	-	100
24. The letter <u>g</u> often has a sound similar to that of <u>j</u> in <u>jump</u> when it precedes the letter <u>i</u> or <u>e</u> .	188	150 (age)	33 (gift)	80
25. When <u>ght</u> is seen in a word, <u>gh</u> is silent.	64	64 (light)	-	100

TABLE 1--Continued

Generalization	Total Number of Words	Number of Words Conforming	Number of Exceptions	Percent of Applicability
26. When a word begins <u>kn</u> , the <u>k</u> is silent.	20	20 (knee)	-	100
27. When a word begins with <u>wr</u> , the <u>w</u> is silent.	20	20 (wreck)	-	100
28. When two of the same consonants are side by side only one is heard.	699	629 (blizzard)	70 (nodded)	90
29. When a word ends in <u>ck</u> , it has the same last sound as in look.	49	49 (truck)	-	100
30. In most two-syllable words, the first syllable is accented.	2244	1846 (quarter)	398 (hello)	82
31. If <u>a</u> , <u>in</u> , <u>re</u> , <u>ex</u> , <u>de</u> , or <u>be</u> is the first syllable in a word, it is usually unaccented.	347	281 (decide)	66 (area)	81
32. In most two-syllable words that end in a consonant followed by <u>y</u> , the first syllable is accented and the last is unaccented.	199	195 (candy)	4 (deny)	98
33. One vowel letter in an accented syllable has its short sound.	2943	1693 (zoology)	1250 (volcano)	68

34. When <u>y</u> or <u>ey</u> is seen in the last syllable that is not accented, the long sound of <u>e</u> is heard.	431	-	431 (merry)	00
35. When <u>ture</u> is the final syllable in a word, it is unaccented.	23	23 (venture)	-	100
36. When <u>tion</u> is the final syllable in a word, it is unaccented.	116	116 (election)	-	100
37. In many two- and three-syllable words, the final <u>e</u> lengthens the vowel in the last syllable.	437	212 (unite)	225 (medicine)	49
38. If the first vowel sound in a word is followed by two consonants, the first syllable usually ends with the first of the two consonants.	1591	1273 (fattest)	318 (ledger)	80
39. If the first vowel sound in a word is followed by a single consonant, that consonant usually begins the second syllable.	1301	641 (bacon)	660 (olive)	49
40. If the first vowel sound in a word is followed by a single consonant, that consonant usually begins the second syllable.	132	127 (eagle)	5 (tackle)	96

TABLE 1--Continued

Generalization	Total Number of Words	Number of Words Conforming	Number of Exceptions	Percent of Applicability
41. When the first vowel element in a word is followed by <u>th</u> , <u>ch</u> , or <u>sh</u> , these symbols are not broken when the word is divided into syllables and may go with either the first or second syllable.	74	74 (feathers)	-	100
42. In a word of more than one syllable, the letter <u>y</u> usually goes with the preceding vowel to form a syllable.	193	132 (movies)	61 (favor)	68
43. When a word has only one vowel letter, the vowel sound is likely to be short.	840	560 (blank)	280 (child)	67
44. When there is one <u>e</u> in a word that ends in a consonant, the <u>e</u> usually has a short sound.	120	109 (zest)	11 (germ)	91
45. When the last syllable is the sound <u>r</u> , it is unaccented.	828	676 (under)	152 (repair)	82

The study showed a loss of efficiency in correct spelling by using phonic generalizations on multisyllabic words. There was also a loss of spelling when generalizations were applied to short and long vowels, vowel diagraphs, and vowel sounds affected by l, w, u, and r.

The use of phonetic generalizations were only moderately useful to spelling. The probability of correct spelling resulting from the use of any of the generalizations with less than seventy-five percent applicability is questionable and should be thoughtfully considered by spelling teachers.

Kean and Personke¹⁶ caution teachers about having the teacher tell the child to look for a little word in the big word. This is only correct if the little word actually exists in the larger word--as in broadwalk, containing board and walk. It is not suitable, however, to look for oar in board, because the meaning of oar is not a part of the meaning of board. Oar is a phonogram. Teachers need to remember that phonograms are sound-spelling units, not meaning units. Do not confuse morphemes and phonemes.

When working with generalizations, children will learn better if they make up words to test the generalization.

¹⁶John M. Kean and Carl Personke, The Language Arts Teaching and Learning in the Elementary School (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), p. 259.

This is more valuable than filling in blanks in exercise books. The spelling books should be used as a source of words with which to check a spelling generalization.¹⁷

In later grades, children should be led to discover which letters or combination of letters will produce a particular sound. For example, the sound of k. If children are asked to give words beginning with the k sound, they will usually give words beginning with c and k. The teacher should rewrite the words given by the children into two separate columns. She then leads the children to discover that k is used when i or e is the next letter. This is done because if c were used, it would have the s sound. Generalizations can be discovered in this manner.¹⁸

This can also be done with vowels. The children can note the various ways to spell a sound. An example is the phoneme a in clay, state, wait, gauge, neighbor, and they. Making a chart of these going from the most common to the least common options is very helpful. Using such charts will also help children to find dictionary entries.¹⁹

¹⁷Ibid., p. 275.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 274-275.

¹⁹Sara W. Lundsteen, Children Learn to Communicate (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1976), p. 332.

There are exceptions to every generalization. Kean and Personke²⁰ recommend not avoiding these exceptions when teaching the generalization. Their presence does add an element of difficulty but this presence causes the generalization to be learned separately. The teacher should be prepared to offer one or two exceptions if children do not volunteer them.

Studies have shown that instruction in generalizations have not been effective. Kean and Personke²¹ feel that this is a result of the instructional materials, especially in the selection of generalizations to be taught, the teaching methods suggested by the materials, and the type of evaluation employed. They feel the generalizations being used apply to reading, whereas in spelling they need to be designed with the encoding process in mind. The books purport to teach the generalizations. However, the child learns quickly that the weekly spelling test is what counts for the report card. Therefore, the exercises in the book become just that, exercises routinely carried out because they have to be done. The students fail to perceive that generalizations are even a part of the spelling program.

²⁰John M. Kean and Carl Personke, The Language Arts Teaching and Learning in the Elementary School (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), p. 275.

²¹Ibid., p. 270.

As far as disabled spellers are concerned, the teaching of spelling rules is likely to have limited value. However, in some cases the teacher may feel a few rules will help a particular child. If so, the only rules that should be taught are those that the child discovers for himself or those that are useful in a reasonable number of cases.²² The following five generalizations were recommended:

1. Most nouns form their plurals by adding s to the singular; es is used when it makes the word easier to pronounce (e.g., dress, dresses).
2. Drop the final e before adding a suffix beginning with a vowel.
3. When the final y is preceded by a consonant, change the y to i before adding any suffix that does not begin with i.
4. Q is always followed by u.
5. I before e except after c, or when sounded as ā, as in neighbor and weight.²³

Otto and McMenemy²⁴ point out the fact that disabled spellers cannot quickly recall rules when they are needed. Therefore, not much time should be spent on them.

However, Kean and Personke²⁵ believe that given the opportunity to observe, hypothesize, to test the hypothesis

²²Wayne Otto and Richard A. McMenemy, Corrective and Remedial Teaching (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966), p. 223.

²³Ibid., p. 223.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵John M. Kean and Carl Personke, The Language Arts Teaching and Learning in the Elementary School (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), p. 274.

with new words, and to discover the generalizations themselves, children even in the primary grades should be able to accomplish the task of learning and applying generalizations.

Petty, Petty, and Becking express five conclusions regarding the phoneme-grapheme correspondence issue that can be useful in teaching children to spell.

1. Instruction in both the consistencies and inconsistencies of phoneme-grapheme relationships should be a part of every spelling program.
2. Instruction in generalizations or "rules" concerning spelling patterns or sound-to-letter association should focus upon those that occur in a considerable number of words and have few exceptions.
3. Instruction in sound and symbol correspondence must recognize that there are dialect differences in many classrooms and that the pronunciation of many words even by the same individual, varies with the context in which they are used.
4. Linguistic principles should be regarded as aids to spelling rather than as substitutes for teaching pupils to study the lesson words directly.
5. Most persons have learned to make application of many phoneme-grapheme correspondences from their reading and spelling instruction. Thus, it appears that generalizations which are useful are learned quite easily. Programs that rely heavily upon learning many generalizations may result in the formal teaching of rules, which may be misapplied as well as correctly applied.²⁶

The area of linguistics is the number one area of discussion in spelling. However it is not the only approach

²⁶Walter T. Petty, Dorothy C. Petty, and Marjorie F. Becking, Experiences in Language Tools and Techniques for Language Arts Methods (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1976), p. 249.

and cannot replace learning to study spelling words. Knowledge in linguistics does help the student, but even more, it helps the teacher understand our system and what she is teaching. Once the teacher knows the system, the information gained can greatly improve her teaching whether she teaches generalization per se or not.

The type of presentation of a spelling program appears to affect the child's achievement. There are four methods of presentation. Two in particular seem more applicable to the poor speller. However, all of them have value depending on the students in question.

Multiple Day Plan

The plan most used today is the multiple-day plan. In this approach, words are studied for five consecutive school days. The lists for lower grade children contain seven or eight words while lists for upper grades usually contain twenty words, depending on the grade level and the spelling series.²⁷

Daily Plan

In contrast to the five-day plan is the daily plan. It presents a smaller number of words but new words are

²⁷Martha Dallmann, Teaching the Language Arts in the Elementary School (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1966), p. 9.

presented each day. Reviews are provided or can be provided on later days at spaced intervals.²⁸

Not all teachers use a one-day or five-day plan, some use three- or four-day plans. The most common multi-day plan is the five-day.

Dallman lists the values of the two plans as follows:

1. When systematic spelling instruction is first begun in primary grades, it is probably advisable to present a few words several times a week with continued study on succeeding days.
2. Pupils with low intelligence seem to profit more from having only a few words presented daily, with provisions for adequate review, rather than more words presented to them once a week.
3. Pupils with many difficulties in spelling, regardless of their grade placement or their intelligence, would probably profit more from a one-day plan of procedure with adequate review than from a multiple-day plan.
4. After pupils of near-average, average, or above-average intelligence who are near-average, average, or above-average spellers are beyond the stage of beginning work in systematic instruction in spelling, the multiple-day plan is probably superior to the one-day plan for them.²⁹

Rieth and others³⁰ conducted some studies on the influence of distributed practice and daily testing on weekly spelling tests. Many teachers introduce the words in the

²⁸Ibid., p. 156.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 156-157.

³⁰Herbert Rieth et al., "Influence of Distributed Practice and Daily Testing on Weekly Spelling Tests," Journal of Educational Research 68 (October 1974):73-77.

beginning of the week, as stated above (the five-day plan) and test at the end of the week. It was felt that this practice might be inferior to one in which the presentation of words and testing was distributed throughout the week (the daily plan only with definite testing added in).

The study indicated that the students did better on the weekly spelling tests when a few words were given each day and were tested daily, as compared to receiving all the words in the beginning of the week, without daily quizzes. When the students received a few words each day but without daily quizzes their scores decreased but even then they were still better than those who received all their words at the beginning of the week.

These results would indicate that giving all the words in the beginning of the week is not the best approach. Daily testing may also be indicated.

Once the teacher has decided on a multi-day or daily plan, there are two more decisions to be made as to presentation. Now she must decide if she will test the children on the words to be presented first and then study the words missed; or if she wants the children to study all the words and then test.

The above approaches are referred to as the Study-Test and Test-Study methods. The question is really whether it is better to test children on a list of words before they

study them or is it more advantageous to have the first testing follow some study of the words.

Test-Study Procedures³¹

There are variations but basically the procedure is as follows: (1) Either before the students see the words or after only a brief glance they are given a pre-test on the list; (2) Then each student studies the words he missed on the test; (3) He is retested; (4) He again studies any words missed; (5) A so-called final test is given.

Study-Test³²

The typical procedure here consists of four steps: (1) The student studies the new words carefully; (2) He is tested on the words; (3) The student then studies the words he missed; (4) He is retested. If a five-day plan is used the student studies on the first and second days, has a trial test on the third day, studies the fourth day and has a final test on the fifth day. Basically any combination can be used as long as study precedes testing each time.

Research has not established which of the two methods is superior. However, there is some reason for believing

³¹Martha Dallmann, Teaching The Language Arts in the Elementary School (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1966), p. 157.

³²Ibid.

that considerations such as the following should help determine which of the two should be used.³³

1. An argument against the test-study procedure is that pupils might be discouraged in studying a list of words if they found out in a pretest that they have missed a large percent of the words.
2. Another argument against the test-study procedure is that a pupil might spell a word correctly on a pretest and then miss it in a test given later. For example, when he writes the word receive in a pretest, he may be in doubt whether the vowel sound in the second syllable is spelled ei or ie, but, without any surety, he may happen to spell it ei. If he gives no further attention to the word before the time of the next test, he may again wonder whether the long e sound should be spelled ei or ie and then by chance happen to write it ie. The child studying the word before his first testing will at least have the benefit before the final test of some study of a word that he really does not know.
3. An argument for the test-study procedure is that a pupil who has spelled almost all words correctly is encouraged by knowing he has only a few words to learn.
4. Another argument for the test-study procedure is that a pupil does not waste time studying the spelling of words he already knows. For pupils who do not know how to spell a large proportion of the words on a list, the study-test procedure is probably superior to the test-study plan. For others, the test-study procedure probably is better. To obtain an estimate of whether a given pupil is likely to miss many words on pretests, his achievement on tests given on earlier lists may be considered or he can be given a semester pretest on a sampling of the words for the term.³⁴

Lundsteen³⁵ expresses the opinion that the test-study procedure is superior to a study-test procedure. Her

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Sara A. Lundsteen, Children Learn to Communicate (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1976), pp. 334-335.

reasons are as follows: (1) the pretest avoids the empty ritual of studying words already known; (2) some children will learn a word and make it theirs from just this one activity; (3) immediate results are reinforcing the children's need to know what they have spelled correctly, what they need to change, and how well they have coped with spelling patterns and options. The immediately self-corrected test can give precise, specific feedback; but a grade of A or B is ambiguous feedback.

Taking the pretest involves the child in attentive behavior. Yet this is not excessively threatening or unpleasant because the child is not expected to be perfect. Usually in two days he takes the test again, if he still gets the words correct, the assumption is made that it was not an accident and the child does know the word.

In the study-test method one asset in favor of its use was that the child received immediate feedback as to his work. This idea of immediate feedback is the basis for another technique used in spelling, the corrected test technique.

Corrected Test Technique

According to Horn,³⁶ the test-study technique is the theory behind the "corrected test technique" which

³⁶Thomas D. Horn, "Test, Then Study in Spelling," Instructor 86 (December 1976):81.

utilizes testing, studying and retesting. He feels this technique "is the most efficient single method known for learning to spell, often resulting in an error reduction of fifty percent."³⁷

According to Horn,³⁸ the child takes the test with no previous exposure to the words, correcting his own test as the teacher or another child orally spells each word, then retesting and correction. This process emphasizes recall and utilizes visual, auditory, and kinesthetic imagery.

When first using this procedure, it is effective to retest and correct immediately following the initial test and correction in order to show the pupils how much they have learned from the first correction. Some teachers have excellent results when they introduce the technique by telling the students that it is a way to learn to spell without studying.

This technique is good for individualizing spelling since the students can pair off and practice together.

Some better students elect to learn three to five times the usual number of words in a week. For the less able speller, the teacher may reduce the number of words, select high frequency words according to individual needs, and provide for individual assistance in developing other skills through personal practice sessions.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

The focus in this technique is an error reduction so even the poorer student can succeed rather than rarely or never attaining the hallowed condition of "getting one hundred." The results of the final test should be compared with the initial test errors. Periodic review tests are also recommended.

Using the children to check their own test is objectional to some teachers. These teachers usually fear that the child will cheat if he is correcting his own paper. Kean and Personke³⁹ feel children will not cheat, especially if the teacher's interest is not in how many were correct. Some children, however, could make an error in perception with no intention to deceive. They also feel that some children cannot accept their own mistakes. This type of child can be helped if the teacher helps him see that everyone errs and that this is simply another way by which we learn.

Having children check their own papers appears to be a valid method of learning to spell. The teacher must remember to stress improvement rather than the number of correct words. If this is done, the child will generally not need to cheat. The corrected test, test-study, and study-test procedures all have one element in common. They all express the idea that the student must study his words. However, what does it mean to study? Many of the authorities

³⁹Jean M. Kean and Carl Personke, The Language Arts Teaching and Learning in the Elementary School (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), p. 272.

in spelling feel that teachers assume that the students know how to study. The child is told to study his words but he is never told how to go about this.

Otto and McMenemy⁴⁰ state that teachers should not assume the child knows how to study. Children think looking at the word is studying. Particularly with the poor speller they suggest the teacher show him and take him step by step through the steps in studying a word. The teacher's job is to prove to the child that the method does work.

These authors also state that general agreement of spelling teachers and educational psychologists is that a multisensory approach is the best for the poor student. The approach works for all spellers but the good speller does not really need it.

Multisensory Approach

The multisensory approach consists essentially of the following steps:

HEAR the word--the word is pronounced correctly for the child;
SEE the word--the pupil looks at the word;
SAY the word--the pupil repeats the word correctly;
WRITE the word--the pupil writes the word (some methods have the pupil lightly trace the word on paper or in the air with his fingers before he writes it);
CHECK the word--the pupil checks for accuracy.⁴¹

⁴⁰Wayne Otto and Richard A. McMenemy, Corrective and Remedial Teaching (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966), pp. 215-216.

⁴¹Ibid.

According to Otto and McMenemy⁴² this method used thoroughly and conscientiously will produce gratifying results that even the most severely disabled speller can achieve. Since in remedial cases each case is different, they feel a "remedial method" for use with all pupils is not possible. The teacher must decide, on the basis of diagnosis and pupil needs, what adaptations need to be made in this approach.

Petty, Petty, and Becking⁴³ also suggest a multisensory approach that is basically the same as above. However, it has more emphasis on "thinking" or seeing the word in the child's mind. They too suggest that the steps actually be taught to the poor student. The steps in their method are as follows:

1. Look at the word carefully and pronounce it correctly. Say it slowly, naturally, and clearly, looking at it as you say it.
2. Cover the word with your hand or close your eyes. Say the word and think how it looks. Try to visualize exactly the way the word is written as you say each letter in sequence to yourself.
3. Look at the word again to be sure that you said it and spelled it correctly. If you did not, start again at step one.
4. Cover the word and then write it, thinking carefully about how it looks.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Walter T. Petty, Dorothy C. Petty, and Marjorie F. Becking, Experiences in Language Tools and Techniques for Language Arts Methods (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1976), p. 248.

5. Check your spelling. If you misspelled the word, begin again at step one. If you spelled the word correctly, go on to the next word.⁴⁴

The two methods mentioned are very similar. Hill and Martinis⁴⁵ describe an individualized approach using the multisensory spelling technique. Each student receives sequenced study packets consisting of four words per packet. The contents and the sequence of words in the packets depends on the performance of the child on the pretest.

Packet worksheets were designed to utilize eight specific activities denoted for each spelling word. The eight steps devised by Mullen were:

1. A simple sentence containing a selected word within a strong context is provided. The child is required to select from two given words the one which makes the better sense. One of the choices is a target word, which is not necessarily the better word to insert in the blank.
2. The target word is presented. The child looks at the word, then closes his eyes trying to visualize it. He checks his mental image with the printed form. He repeats the process, if necessary.
3. The child locates and circles five repetitions of the target word appearing in a group of twelve words arranged in three columns. The foils include words having beginnings, endings, or other features similar to the target word. This exercise requires children to exercise gross word discrimination.
4. The target word is reproduced a number of times in one row across the page. In each reproduction, one letter is omitted, a single space indicates the position of the omission. The letters are omitted in sequence. The pupil writes the appropriate letter in each blank.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Charles H. Hill and Anne S. Martinis, "Individualizing A Multisensory Spelling Program?" Academic Therapy 9 (Fall 1973):77-83.

5. Within a row of scrambled letters are embedded, from left to right, the letters of the target word (in sequence). The pupil begins with the first letter on the left and moves toward the right, circling only those letters comprising the spelling word.
6. The pupil is required to locate five repetitions of the target word among foils which closely resemble the target word. In many instances nonsense words are included to require children to exercise fine discrimination.
7. A blank space is provided for each letter in the word. The child writes the word.
8. The child writes the word from memory, without any cues.⁴⁶

The students are instructed in how to complete the worksheets. Wall charts of example worksheets were left up in the room so the children had an immediate reference. The students completed the activities for each word in the packet. They were then tested on their mastery of the words by using the Language Master. The Language Master cards were in numbered pockets to go with each packet. On each card the word was pronounced singly and in context. If all four words were mastered, the child went on to the next packet. If not, the student was to study the word by any method he chose. The test was then retaken.

After completion of five packets, a review test was given using the Language Master. One hundred percent accuracy was required to continue to the next packet. If mistakes were made the student had to study the words until one hundred percent was reached.

⁴⁶"Action Research on Spelling Methods in Grade Two," 1971 cited by Hill and Martinis, "Individualizing a Multisensory Spelling Program?" Academic Therapy 9 (Fall 1973):79.

The time spent on this approach was approximately twenty minutes per day, four days per week.

The authors felt their program was successful. Three weeks after the program was finished, the students displayed an eighty-four percent retention of the words studied.

This program attempted to individualize the spelling program. Each child worked at his own pace on his own packets.

A type of multisensory approach is thought to be the best approach to learning a new word, whether this is done individually or not does not appear to be of any concern. The current trend in spelling programs appears to be in individualizing.⁴⁷

Individualizing Spelling

This idea has some merit. In any subject, the children will not all be functioning at the same level. Just as reading and math are divided into smaller groups, so should spelling. However, according to Kean and Personke,⁴⁸ some of these attempts have been too crude to be effective

⁴⁷John M. Kean and Carl Personke, The Language Arts Teaching and Learning in the Elementary School (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), pp. 276-277.

⁴⁸Ibid.

and some may have proved to be detrimental. Such practices as having a lower-level spelling book or having the child learn only the first five words of a word list only serve to draw attention to the student's shortcomings. This is not the goal of individualized spelling.

These authors suggest having the teacher construct spelling lists from the words the child misses in his own writing. However, they do admit that this is too narrow an approach since it teaches no generalization but treats each word as an individual entity. This could not serve as a complete spelling program.

The authors also feel that just letting each child progress at his own pace in a spelling series has problems. Spelling series teach most generalizations poorly and provide little extrinsic motivation. The child completes the unit but gains little knowledge of spelling.

Kean and Personke⁴⁹ go back to the discovery or inductive method of learning. They suggest working with children to help them discover spelling generalizations and their exceptions. This approach is usually done with large groups but is conducive to small groups also.

Petty, Petty, and Becking list five ways of individualizing:

⁴⁹Ibid.

1. having each pupil keep a list of words he has difficulty spelling;
2. recording such words yourself for each child;
3. permitting children to do the spelling lessons at their own speed;
4. placing lesson tests on tapes so that a pupil can take them at times of his own choice;
5. providing activities and exercises which develop vocabulary.⁵⁰

Both of the above approaches suggest teaching words that the child uses in his own writing. This is called functional spelling and is referred to frequently in spelling literature.

An article by Jackson⁵¹ suggests ways to individualize spelling lists using words from the children's writing. Each child makes his own spelling dictionary.

The dictionary is a loose-leaf notebook with alphabetical dividers. The student records all the words he needs to know for his writing experiences. Using the loose-leaf enables the student to change and update as necessary. This also allows the same notebook to be used year after year. When a child needs a word spelled for him, he does one of two things. Either he will ask the teacher or look it up in a regular dictionary. Once he has the correct spelling he writes it in his dictionary. In the future if

⁵⁰Walter T. Petty, Dorothy C. Petty, and Majorie F. Becking, Experiences in Language Tools and Techniques for Language Arts Methods (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1976), p. 247.

⁵¹Mae L. Jackson, "Individualized Spelling Lists," Teacher 91 (January 1974):86.

he needs that word again, he uses his own dictionary to look it up.

Jackson⁵² also presents some ideas and activities that the teachers in her system have used with the spelling dictionary as a major ingredient.

One suggestion is to have story folders.⁵³ Daily or weekly creative writing periods are scheduled in which the presentation of a problem situation--picture, posters, or films--that are open-ended as starting points for writing. The children write stories, poems, plays, interviews, articles, or any type of writing they wish.

The students then put their stories in their folders. The teacher underlines misspelled words and the child looks them up the next day and puts them in his dictionary. Later the children share their stories with the class and each other.

Another suggestion is to Describe a Rip-n-Snort.⁵⁴ For this activity the teacher dreams up strange creatures or "things" for the children to describe and draw. The example given was as follows:

Did you know that a "Rip-n-Snort" lives in a land called Quezeltine, eats quamanults and pink quizels and snorts

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 87.

all the time? How do you think he got his name? How do you suspect he travels? What size and shape is he?⁵⁵

The kids take the story from there.

Another suggestion was to have the child work out an incongruous situation such as describing a particular animal or place for someone who has never seen it.⁵⁶

The authors also suggest using films with few words to inspire discussion and writing. A number of films were listed as excellent sources. They also suggest providing story titles such as "A Day in the Life of My Shoes," or "If My Pencil Could Talk" to serve as starting points for stories.⁵⁷

The Authors Club is a group of students who write their own books for younger students.⁵⁸ Any student who writes a book can join the authors club.

The authors suggest using typewriters as motivation, also a cozy corner of the room with an old sofa, rug, or big pillows to sit on.

Some children also enjoy working under Language Contracts. The student agrees to learn a specific number

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 88.

of new words per week. The child actually set up or helps set up the terms of the contract.⁵⁹

The ideas suggested above are all examples of an individualized, functional spelling program.

By using functional spelling words and individualizing, the child is learning what is important to him. He does not have to waste time learning words that are not in his vocabulary. The topics the child writes about are, at least in part, his choice and, therefore, of interest to him. When the child is interested in what he is doing, he should learn easier.

There are other techniques to learn spelling words besides the multisensory approach and using the words functionally in the student's writing experience. One such method is called Imitation Training.

Imitation Training

This approach was developed by researchers at Peabody College.⁶⁰ These researchers felt that spelling in the past has primarily found the teacher in the role of dispensing drill activities and spelling words, which the student memorized.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Carole E. Stowitschek and Nancy K. Jobes, "Getting the Bugs Out of Spelling--or an Alternative to the Spelling Bee," Teaching Exceptional Children 9 (Spring 1977):74; quoting "The Acquisition and Retention of Spelling Through Imitation Training and Observational Learning With and Without Feedback," Unpublished doctoral dissertation, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1975.

Many innovative teachers made attempts to enhance the memorizing by the use of gamelike activities. However, in the game situations the teacher's function is primarily that of a referee with little opportunity for active involvement. While many children do learn to spell with these traditional techniques, when they fail, teachers find that available alternatives are extremely limited.

As a possible alternative, these researchers suggest the Imitation Training method.

The Imitation Training method does require direct teacher involvement during the spelling period. This process "involves three basic steps: (a) selection of students and spelling words; (b) the imitation training procedure; and, (c) evaluation and record keeping."⁶¹

Since the program was designed to aid children who had failed repeatedly with traditional spelling methods, the only prerequisite required was to recognize and write all letters of the alphabet. The words selected for the lessons could come from many sources--the students' own vocabularies, academic materials, vocabulary lists and other spelling textbooks. Once the words have been chosen, spelling probes (or tests) are given to find the words that are misspelled consistently. The words are then taught in groups of five, through the Imitation Training method.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 74.

The training procedure is completed on a one-to-one basis, during daily periods which should not exceed fifteen minutes. During these periods, the teachers provide oral and written models of each word. The child has to imitate these models and the teacher confirms the correctness or incorrectness of each response. Stowitschek and Jobes⁶² feel the oral and written models, student imitation of the responses, and immediate feedback are critical to the success of Imitation Training.

The teachers are encouraged to use the following training sequence and scripted teaching format, which involves a three-step sequence.

1. The teacher begins by saying, "We're going to learn some new words today. The first one is cloud. A sentence using cloud would be, 'I see a big rain cloud.' Cloud is spelled c-l-o-u-d. This is the way to write cloud." The card with the word written on it is shown. Pointing to each letter, the teacher again spells the word, c-l-o-u-d.
2. Removing the card, the teacher says, "Spell cloud." The child is expected to spell the word aloud.
 - a. If the child spells the word correctly, the teacher praises the child by saying, "Good spelling. That's the way to spell cloud," or "Good job," or some other statement of praise. The teacher then goes to step 3.
 - b. If the child spells the word incorrectly, the teacher corrects the response by saying, "No, let's look again." The card is presented again and the teacher says, "The word is cloud, c-l-o-u-d. You spell it after me, c-l-o-u-d." The teacher continues to use the word card until success is achieved.
 - c. After a correct response is achieved, the teacher says, "Good spelling," removes the card, and says, "Now spell cloud." If the child gives a correct response, the teacher praises him and goes to step 3. If the response is incorrect, the teacher returns to step 2.b.

⁶²Carole E. Stowitschek and Nancy K. Jobes, "Getting the Bugs Out of Spelling--An Alternative to the Spelling Bee," Teaching Exceptional Children 9 (Spring 1977):74-76.

3. With the word card out of view, the teacher says, "Write cloud." The student must write the word correctly on the chalkboard.
 - a. If the child responds correctly, the teacher says, "Good spelling. You can write cloud," and goes on to the next word using the same procedure.
 - b. Following an incorrect response, the teacher corrects the response by saying, "No, let's look again." The card is presented again and the teacher spells the word, c-l-o-u-d, pointing to each letter as it is called. With the card visible, the teacher says again, "Write cloud." The teacher continues until success is achieved.
 - c. Following a correct response, the teacher says "Good spelling," removes the card, and says, "Write cloud." If the child gives a correct response, the teacher praises the child and goes to the next word, following the same procedure. If the response is incorrect, the teacher returns to step 3.b.

This procedure continues until all the words can be spelled without models or prompts when the teacher requests the child to write or spell the words.⁶³

To evaluate the students' progress, spelling probes or tests are given daily. If a word is spelled correctly for three consecutive days, the word is considered mastered. It is then taken out of the set and a new word is put in. These daily probes also provide a retention check on previously mastered words. If the student fails a previously mastered word, the word is returned to the set. To conduct a probe the teacher presents the word orally, uses it in a sentence and repeats the word. The child responds by writing the word.

Jobes⁶⁴ conducted a study with eight children who attended a school for learning disabled children. These

⁶³Ibid., pp. 75-76.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 75.

children were functioning at least one and a half years below grade level in spelling achievement. The Imitation Training was conducted. After the training all the children demonstrated increases in spelling accuracy. As for retention, the children retained upwards of eighty percent of the spelling words acquired and one child retained one hundred percent.

It is important to remember that this method does require frequent checks with probes to ensure that the students maintain correct spelling. This method also was not intended to replace the basic spelling curriculum. It was intended to help make spelling programs work.

The above approach found the teacher in a prominent role. This next approach does not involve the teacher at all. Blau describes a method of study that utilizes the tape recorder.

In this method, the student gets ready to record his voice. He pronounces his first word into the microphone. With the tape recorder still running, he writes or copies the word twice, marks off the syllables, if any, says the word again, and spells it aloud. He does the same with the next word and the next for a total of five or ten words. Only at the very end does he shut off the tape recorder.

He now studies the words--hard parts, syllable parts, word-within-a-word parts, and so forth. Having done this he dons his earphone and plays the whole thing back writing the words from his own dictation.⁶⁵

⁶⁵Harold Blau, "Unusual Measures for the Spelling Invalid," in Building Spelling Skills, ed, John I. Arena (San Rafael, California: Academic Therapy Publications, 1968), pp. 1-2.

The author feels the earphones are extremely important. It prevents intruding on others with amplified sound, and it ensures privacy. With privacy the student is not embarrassed. Being alone also reduces the temptation to clown or otherwise subvert the learning situation.

This approach has a number of advantages. The student is his own teacher. His voice is the dominant one, rather than that of a teacher. The teacher's voice may be associated with failure. Copying the word twice gives him ample time to think when it comes to taking it by dictation, and the correct spelling coming at the end lets him correct any mistakes--again, in complete privacy.

The student goes over the tape at least once in full and then as often as may be deemed necessary to correct stubborn errors. The tape may be retained and, as material is added, a kind of spiral review is also begun to ensure mastery.

Of course, if an aide or teacher's help is needed to pronounce words and to identify syllable parts that help should be provided.

A second technique offered by Blau⁶⁶ is a nonvisual technique. He has the student close his eyes or blindfolds

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 2.

him. The student says a word and calls off the letters as they are printed on his back by an aide. The student should have the word put together with three-dimensional letters in front of him. The student may touch or trace the letters if he is uncertain. After two or more practice runs, he must be able to say the letters only as he feels them. The three-dimensional letters are then scrambled and the student puts them together in proper sequence. If successful, he is permitted to take off the blindfold and to write the word two or three times on his paper or chalkboard.

This is a slower method and it may have to be used on the same word more than once, but there seems to be no transition problem.

In the method under discussion, the author explained the reason for some of the steps. The blindfold is to make sure the eyes remain closed, and the tracing is to provide letter and syllable recognition. The printing on the back has a number of purposes. It fills in the gap caused by the missing visual input and it ensures realization of letter sequence and directionality.

Both of these techniques are completely individual and consequently not compatible with a typical class. Individual tutors are needed but the tutors may be interns, student aides, or other students as well as the teacher.

For the student with whom no approach has worked, these may offer some hope.

There are a number of approaches suggested for use in a one-to-one remedial situation. There are two approaches that suggest the use of color, and a third that suggests color as being motivational.

The first approach was suggested by Madison.⁶⁷

After the words to study have been decided on, the teacher writes them on study cards (3" x 7"). These can be stored in a shoe box or any type container wished. The shoe box should have two sections, a learned and a study section. Color is used in each word and each color has its own meaning. The following code was suggested:

Black is used for consonants with a regular sound association. For example, in the word dad, d would be written in black.

Green is used for the special sound made by two consonants or two vowels in combination. For example, in the word ship, sh would be written in green; in the word boy, oy would be written in green. (Green signifies, "Hold these letters together for a special sound.")

Red is used for vowels which follow regular rules for long and short vowels. For example, in the word sleep, ee would be written in red; in the word pen, e would be written in red; in the word go, o would be written in red.

Blue is used for words, or at times parts of words, which do not have regular sound-letter association. For example,

⁶⁷Betty D. Madison, "A Sensory Approach to Spelling," in Building Spelling Skills, ed, John I. Arena (San Rafael, California: Academic Therapy Publications, 1968), pp. 45-47.

the word once would be written in blue. (Blue means, "Remember this--don't try to sound it." A word written entirely in blue is termed a "sight" word and is learned by revisualization and rote memory.)⁶⁸

Once the words have been color-cued they are traced over with clear glue. The students can do this on their own. The students can then use their fingers to trace over their words. The raised strokes of the word enhance their memory for those who learn kinesthetically.

Next each student writes a short sentence using the word he is trying to learn on the back of the appropriate card. He also underlines the word and illustrates the sentence to increase recognition.

Now each student studies the word using the approach that is best for him. The kinesthetic learner will trace the word until he feels secure enough to write it without aid. The visual learner will look at the word, note its parts, close his eyes and think of the word, and then try to reproduce it. The auditory learner attaches sound to the letter of a regular sound-letter association word, says it and translates the sounds back into letters for writing the word independently. A person who learns best by a multi-sensory approach will use all three methods.

After the student feels he has mastered three words, he is tested by the teacher, another student, or by using the Language Master. If he has mastered all three words, he chooses

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 46.

three more from his study box to learn and files the mastered words in the learned section of his box.

At first the student should be tested on all learned words once a week. Later every two weeks is sufficient. Any misspelled words go back into the "study" section of his box.

The author suggests the use of the Language Master to learn the sound and meanings of the word. He also suggests the child keep his own progress graph so he can see his progress.

The second approach that uses color was suggested by Kimmell.⁶⁹ She suggests putting spelling words on cards that have a colorful background, such items as wallpaper strips, gift-wrapping paper and advertisements or scenic photographs from magazines. However, high-gloss paper should not be used since it impairs vision by reflecting the light.

Any words that the teacher feels should be learned are put on the cards. Be careful not to write the words with a color that is present in the background.

The cards are exposed to the group, (not more than four to six children) so they will be familiar with the context before the exercise starts.

⁶⁹Geraldine M. Kimmell, "Teaching Spelling in a Splash of Color," in Building Spelling Skills, ed, John I. Arena (San Rafael, California: Academic Therapy Publications, 1968), p. 53.

The children are asked to focus their attention on the center, or nearest center, letter of the word. They are also told to look at the shape of the word. Following is the method of presentation:

Expose for thirty seconds a word printed in primary letters on the spelling file card, then flip it from view.

Ask for a show of hands for an oral response.

Ask the student to say the word before he attempts to spell it orally.

Each student should make an attempt to pronounce the word even if he cannot (or thinks he cannot) spell it correctly.

If all the children cannot then spell the word correctly, expose it for another thirty seconds. This also serves as a reinforcement for the others in the group.

The students who are still unsuccessful in spelling the word will have another chance in the next session.

The final step is to have the student write out the word. Do not present another spelling flip card until the foregoing steps have been completed.⁷⁰

When the first set of cards written in primary letters has been mastered, the next set of ten cards is presented. This set contains the same words, but the letter size and spacing will be reduced.

The design and color of the background should be altered with each presentation. This will retain the child's interest and will challenge his visual system. This reduction in letter size will continue until it is the size of the child's own grade-level reading material.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 53.

As the students become better at using this technique some of the letter size stages could be cut out.

The third suggestion for color is not really an approach as much as a technique to increase motivation. Winkler⁷¹ believes using color is fun, different, and motivating.

She suggests that each child purchase or have the use of a set of colored pencils and colored paper. The results of exercise are attractive and can be displayed. Some children like to draw a design or cut scallops around the edge of the paper before it is put on a bulletin board.

Winkler⁷² believes that most children like to write on chalkboards but they do not get the chance very often. She suggests letting the child use colored chalk on the board to practice his words. If the child has a spot in a word that is hard for him, have him use red chalk for that part. Red means he should be cautious. Changing color at the point of the problem is an aid to the child's memory, as is the color emphasis in the visual representation of the completed word.

Rainbow writing is suggested. The child uses two or three different colored pencils or crayons held by a rubber band. He can even change colors with each practice of the word.

⁷¹Sandra Winkler, "Make It Attractive," in Building Spelling Skills, ed, John I. Arena (San Rafael, California: Academic Therapy Publications, 1968), pp.93-94.

⁷²Ibid., p. 93.

Another aide is to use the broad side of a crayon to make the word. Then wash over the entire page with water-color. The waxed area will not take the color, thus allowing the word to stand out as a strong visual effect.

The last suggestion given is to write the word lightly on tagboard. Then go over the word with glue and cover that with glitter. When dry, remove the extra glitter. This work can also be displayed.

There is one more approach that deserves consideration when teaching spelling. Often in any approach the teacher will suggest looking a word up in a dictionary to check on its spelling. This is especially true when a child is completing some written work and asks for the correct spelling of an unknown or unsure word.

Poteet⁷³ says after elementary school, a child gets little instruction in spelling. He may get tests, but not instruction. If the child asks how a word is spelled, he is usually told to look it up.

Poteet⁷⁴ believes the dictionary is only of use if the person is trying to check a word of which he is unsure. He may only need to know one or two unsure letters so he looks up the word to see which letter to use.

⁷³G. Howard Poteet, "A Brief Note on Spelling," English Journal 62 (October 1973):1029.

⁷⁴Ibid.

The suggestion made by Poteet⁷⁵ is to use the Thesaurus. Then the student only needs to turn to a synonym of the word and he will find a list of words that will usually contain the word he wants.

He suggests getting the paper-back entitled Roget's New Pocket Thesaurus in Dictionary Form. Other editions are more difficult so it is important to get the dictionary edition.

Poteet⁷⁶ has found that the student seldom has to look further than the first level and in fact often finds a better word to use than what he had intended. Whether children use a dictionary or not they must have some way to spell a word if their memory fails them. Poteet feels the Thesaurus may be a faster way to look up a needed spelling.

According to Kean and Personke⁷⁷ any technique used with poor spellers can become dull and meaningless. No matter how successful a particular method appears to be, if it fosters negative attitudes toward spelling, it must be discarded. Any method that is a success for the poor speller will be strongly motivating but continued use will eventually lead to boredom and negative attitudes. Therefore,

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 1030.

⁷⁷John M. Kean and Carl Personke, The Language Arts Teaching and Learning in the Elementary School (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), p. 281.

the wise teacher will not rely on one approach for a long period of time.

As with the teaching of any subject, there are some procedures that should be avoided as well as those that should be used. These "don'ts" deserve to be mentioned.

The Don'ts in Teaching Spelling

A practice that is often used in spelling is pointing out or emphasizing difficult parts of words. When presenting spelling words, this practice is frowned upon.⁷⁸

Petty, Petty, and Becking⁷⁹ also disagree with pointing out hard spots. They feel such pointing out may implant a spelling difficulty that may have been avoided.

Another practice that is often done which Petty, Petty, and Becking⁸⁰ disagree with is "writing words in the air." This is done as a kinesthetic-tactile approach but is not valid since to have a true kinesthetic-tactile impression the shape of the letters should be felt and the muscle movement should be approximately that used when actually writing.

⁷⁸Wayne Otto and Karl Koenke, ed., Remedial Teaching (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), p. 351.

⁷⁹Walter T. Petty, Dorothy C. Petty, and Marjorie F. Becking, Experiences in Language Tools and Techniques for Language Arts Methods (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1976), p. 248.

⁸⁰Ibid.

Another activity that Petty, Petty, and Becking⁸¹ disapprove of is that of having a child write a word ten times or more without attempts at recall between words. This practice is related to the use of assigning the writing of spelling words as punishment. Neither practice promotes positive attitudes toward spelling, nor does reprimanding children for asking how to spell a word.

Lundsteen⁸² mentions air writing, writing words a specific number of times without intervening attempts at recall, or as a form of punishment as practices to avoid.

These authors, among others, also dislike having words spelled orally for the child, since it ignores the importance of a visual impression to learning. If a student asks for the spelling of a word, the teacher should always write the word on the board or paper for the child, not spell it orally.

Johnson and Myklebust⁸³ also disapprove of oral spelling. They say there is no demand for oral spelling in our culture. They feel parents who spend hours drilling orally on spelling words at night often find their children fail the written tests at school. The reason, they believe,

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Sara W. Lundsteen, Children Learn to Communicate (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1976), pp. 348-349.

⁸³Doris J. Johnson and Helmer R. Myklebust, Learning Disabilities Educational Principles and Practices (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1967), p. 240.

is that the child has not integrated the letter name with the visual equivalent or because he cannot revisualize letters.

Lundsteen⁸⁴ also disagrees with oral spelling.

She specifically mentions the old "spelling bee." She feels it is competitive and not natural. She also disagrees with spelling a word orally for a child, and pointing out "hard spots."

Lundsteen⁸⁵ suggests another item to avoid. This is the practice of having children mark out "silent" letters. She feels it distorts the spelling pattern. Instead, have the patterns that form the sounds underlined.

The topic of homework is often brought up by parents and teachers. Dallmann⁸⁶ feels if the child makes good use of the seventy-five minutes or so a week in spelling, that there should be no reason for homework. Unless, however, someone has been absent a great deal. Then occasional homework may prove profitable.

Mnemonic devices (memory aids) are recommended by many authors. One suggestion was that they were of value only if the child thought up his own. These memory aids

⁸⁴Sara W. Lundsteen, Children Learn to Communicate (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1976), pp. 348-349.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Martha Dallmann, Teaching the Language Arts in the Elementary School (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1966), p. 166.

are referred to as "crutches." Some authors feel it is more efficient to teach the word directly than to learn a device to help remember it. However, not everyone agrees with this. Otto and McMenemy⁸⁷ feel they are interest builders that enliven the lesson as well as help the child remember. They also give a list of ten of the mnemonic devices. For example: Stationery is papere; Is old age a tragedy?; and A professor is a prof.⁸⁸ None of the methods and techniques mentioned are cure-alls. The student and teacher must care about learning to spell. Without the motivation from both parties, little can be accomplished.

The teacher is also reminded that any of the mentioned methods can become dull and boring. Care should be taken to make the activity as pleasant and attractive as possible without losing sight of the main goal of learning to spell.

When teaching spelling the teacher needs a firm understanding of the American English language. She also must know her students' strengths and weaknesses.

Summary

Unfortunately there is not an abundance of remedial techniques for use with the poor speller. Research shows that no particular approach or technique is the best approach.

⁸⁷Wayne Otto and Richard A. McMenemy, Corrective and Remedial Teaching (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966), pp. 223-224.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 224.

There are no cure-alls in remedial work in spelling.

Teachers of spelling will be better equipped if they have a firm knowledge of the American English language. This would include the whole area of linguistics, the study of generalizations, word origins, structural analysis, and syntax.

Whenever a spelling program is initiated the teacher must decide if she will use a multi-day or a daily plan of teaching. She also must decide if she will use the study-test method or test-study method or presentation. Her choices will depend on her students.

General consensus among authorities in spelling is that a multisensory method of studying is best for most poor spellers.

A number of techniques were discussed. These techniques were generally used in a one-to-one situation. Suggestions were made to use tape recorders, Language Masters, color, and functional writing to teach spelling.

Functional writing was considered the best method of teaching spelling. However, this does need to be supplemented with the teacher's knowledge of generalization and linguistics rules. Together this should give the child a well rounded spelling program.

When teaching spelling, there are a number of practices to avoid such as air writing, orally spelling words, and pointing out hard spots.

One last and important caution is to be careful about over-using any specific technique. Any technique will become boring, dull, and can foster negative attitudes toward spelling. Care should be taken to keep techniques interesting.

CHAPTER III

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Much of the research read by this author was geared to the whole class. The literature generally expressed concern for the type of programs and books being used. Research on specific techniques for remediating spelling was limited.

The teaching of generalizations was one of the most frequent topics read by this author. The linguists say our language is very regular. With the use of the phonological and morphological generalizations, the child can spell most words. However, as far as this author is concerned, there are too many generalizations and rules. To learn all of them would require a great feat of memory. If the child's memory is that superb, he would not have a problem in spelling to begin with.

Some of the research expresses the idea that the poor spellers have either learned the generalization incorrectly or cannot apply the ones they can recite. The good speller on the other hand, does not know the generalizations either, simply because he does not need them. This author's own experiences concur with this opinion. Once the child has found a reason to learn to spell, a few rules may become of value.

However, there are still too many to ever make it a practical approach.

The ways to present a program were interesting. For remedial purposes, this author feels the study-test technique used with a daily plan appears to be the best method. There are a few occasions when the test-study method is better. If the teacher feels the student knows a few of the words, pre-testing is a valid procedure. Also grouping words by phonetic similarities can be helpful.

The Imitation Training technique discussed in this paper was one of the best suggestions given. This author has been using the technique, sometimes with adaptations, and has found it be extremely valuable.

The suggestions for the use of color were also appealing. This should provide motivation which is badly needed since spelling requires so much drill to memorize a word.

This author found the "don'ts" of spelling very important. Some of the items mentioned, such as sky writing, and oral spelling, have been done by this author and appear to be used by other teachers, too. Knowing they are not of value is important. The poor speller does not need to learn bad practices, he has enough problems.

This author has come to the conclusion that the poor speller will never become a good speller. He may become

adequate enough to write what he needs to but he will never find spelling easy. Even if the poor speller becomes adequate with words he uses frequently he will probably never enjoy writing and still may shy away from it.

Saying the child will never become a good speller does not mean the subject should not be taught. The above statements were made on the basis of this author's own experiences, research, and working with poor spellers.

This author would approach spelling from a different view. Instead of trying to teach the child to spell all the words he needs for his adult life, he should be taught how to find the correct spelling of the words he needs.

Adults do not all use or need the same vocabulary. Each profession has its own unique vocabulary and some people seldom find a need for writing. Therefore, it is hard to know what words a child will need as an adult. Since this is not known, we cannot teach it. There are, of course, certain words that everyone uses. These should be taught. These words could be taken from a number of word lists that are available. Most teachers have easy access to these lists and can pick the one they feel is most valuable (example, Dolch word list).

This author feels the teacher has primarily two jobs. The first is to teach the child how to study his spelling words. Once the child knows how to study words, he can use this knowledge anytime in the future. The teacher and/or child works to find the strongest channel or channels of learning for him. Any aids such as tracing or subvocalizing that help the child remember are incorporated into his personal method of study.

The second job, and the most important as far as this author is concerned, is to teach the child how to find the words he wishes to spell. This is the area where phonics and linguistics become valuable.

The teacher must teach the child the choices he has when he hears a sound in a word. For example, if the child wanted to look up the word "phone", he needs to know that the ph and f make the same sound. For vowel sounds, the child has to know that the long a sound, for example, can be spelled a, ai, eigh, ay and ey. Having the knowledge to make these choices will allow a child or adult to look up any word he wishes to use. The person uses the most common spelling of a sound first and then proceeds until he finds the word he is looking up. This may take time but it results in the correct spelling. If left to memory, and that memory fails the child, he has no way to find the spelling unless he has a friend who will spell it for him.

Some people may feel this approach will not work because of the auditory or hearing abilities required. However, research and experience shows that poor spellers generally spell phonetically. A reader often knows what the child has written even though it is not spelled correctly. Therefore, if the child knows the letter choices for each sound, he can always look a word up in the dictionary to get the correct spelling.

With the method presented, the child should be able to write as he wishes. He does not concentrate on spelling. Therefore, spelling does not interfere with the person's flow of thoughts. After his ideas are written down, he goes back and looks up the words he is unsure of. If the person writes often, chances are his spelling will improve at least for the words he uses frequently. The strongest motivation is not having to look up the words each time they are used. This author has found the approach using the Thesaurus to be valuable and effective especially for older children. This approach also complements this author's views on spelling. The use of the Thesaurus is often faster than using a dictionary.

Using the views toward spelling expressed by this author may not teach the child to spell new words but it does allow the writer the confidence to be able to write what he wants. This approach may also allow the poor speller to use bigger words, since he knows he can find the correct spelling when needed.

No matter what approach is used, the spelling task takes drill, practice, and the child's concentration or attention. Until the child decides spelling is important to him, it will not be learned.

A functional writing program along with some word lists and spelling books used as sources of words and information, appears to be the best way to teach spelling. The spelling techniques and study procedures should be used to learn the words the teacher decides are important enough to warrant memorizing.

Spelling and writing will probably never be pleasant or easy tasks for the poor speller. With proper teaching, however, the child should be able to learn what has to be learned.

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