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Development of an Effective Spelling Curriculum to be Implemented in a First-Third Grade Classroom

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DEVELOPMENT OF AN EFFECTIVE SPELLING CURRICULUM
TO BE IMPLEMENTED IN A FIRST-THIRD GRADE CLASSROOM

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by
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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPMENT OF AN EFFECTIVE SPELLING CURRICULUM TO BE IMPLEMENTED IN A FIRST-THIRD GRADE CLASSROOM

by

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May, 1997

Spelling is a frequently investigated curriculum area. There has been extensive research in the last century concerning various instructional procedures for the acquisition of spelling skills. Many research-based principles of effective spelling instruction have emerged from one of two contrasting models for the development of spelling competence. Traditionally, spelling has been taught with textbooks from spelling series. Students followed a structured program with the goal of learning to spell the list words. Advocates for spelling reform suggest spelling instruction should be based on the understanding of the developmental nature of the child. This project report provides guidelines for implementing a developmentally-based spelling program in which writing is emphasized.

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Chapter 1

Background of the Study

Introduction

Children must learn to spell if they are to write competently. Consequently, the teaching of spelling has naturally been a part of the work of schools. Hillerich (1982) responded to a 1973 literature search done by Hodges that found few if any studies had been conducted to discover what teachers are doing in the classroom to teach spelling. Consequently, Hillerich conducted a small study in which he found that spelling textbooks are often used as the main source of spelling instruction. The results of his study indicated teachers need to be made aware of recent knowledge surrounding spelling instructional methods.

Gentry (1987) concurs with Hillerich. He submits, Ditto sheets, workbooks, and exercises don't create expert spellers. In fact, too much of what spelling workbooks require kids to do is not at all useful for learning to spell. Time spent on workbook exercises would generally be more valuable if the kids were allowed to do free writing and word study instead (p. 10).

Statement of the Problem

Contrary to time-honored tradition, spelling can be taught in the classroom without the aid of current, popular spelling workbooks. Spelling workbooks become, for too many teachers, the whole of spelling instruction. Conscientious educators often feel an obligation to teach and test each and every lesson in the workbook. Spelling is often treated as an isolated subject, apart from purposeful writing and void of relevancy and usefulness.

A preliminary review of the literature indicates that a considerable amount of research addresses developmental spelling and its role in spelling instruction. Experts (Barone, 1992; DiStefano & Hagerty, 1985; Gentry, 1982; Henderson, 1978; Read, 1971; Templeton, 1986; Wilde, 1990) advise that educators familiarize themselves with the natural, predictable steps through which children progress as they acquire spelling skills. They then apply this knowledge to implement instructional strategies to enhance student learning.

The problem is twofold: first, teachers are aware that completing spelling workbooks may not create good spellers (Gentry, 1987; Hillerich, 1982). Student writing often serves as a glaring example of the ineffectiveness of the current spelling curriculum as it is most often carried out within the classroom. Second, the implementation of a new, more practical and effective spelling curriculum requires specific guidelines that

educators can follow to achieve desired student learning. A first step toward an improved curriculum is to replace the traditional workbook approach of spelling instruction to one that embodies the developmental nature of spelling growth.

Statement of the Purpose

In order to operationalize a developmentally-based spelling curriculum, this project includes a handbook to be used as a guide for primary grade teachers in classrooms where writing is emphasized. It will include suggestions for word selection, a sample lesson plan, teaching strategies and student learning opportunities and techniques to encourage home involvement, as well as suggestions for effective recording and evaluation methods.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this project are:

1. The review of literature is not exhaustive.
2. The handbook is aimed at teachers of the primary age student interested in implementing a nontraditional spelling program.
3. The handbook provides suggestions for a new spelling curriculum, but does not represent a complete primary level spelling program.

Definition of Terms

Alphabetic: English spelling is alphabetic in that letters correspond to sounds in a more or less left to right sequence. There is not a consistent one-letter one-sound correspondence (Templeton, 1986).

Corrected Test: Students self-correct their own spelling pretest as a means to improve spelling scores (Horn, 1947).

Developmental Spelling Model: Reaching spelling competency is viewed as a strategic task that children progress through in multiple developmental stages (Gentry, 1982).

Direct Instruction Model: Spelling is viewed as a procedural task that children are required to follow to learn to become good spellers. Spelling success is primarily attributed to highly-structured, controlled spelling strategies (Gettinger, 1993).

High Frequency Words: Words that have been discovered, through multiple studies, to be the basic core words that students most often use in their writing (Templeton, 1986).

Invented Spelling: Spelling that differs from standard spelling but is an attempt, by the emerging writer/reader, to approximate the spelling of a word. The words are most likely to be pre-phonetic or phonetic and are a necessary step toward standard spelling (Gentry, 1978).

Mini-lessons: Brief episodes of instruction targeted to a single piece of knowledge or strategy (Wilde, 1992).

Orthography: A set of rules, principles, standards, and conventions by which spoken forms of language are transcribed into written forms; spelling. In English the orthography is largely a set of rules for transcribing phonemes into graphemes (Hanna, 1971).

Traditional spelling curriculum: A traditional spelling curriculum is the one most adults grew up with: textbooks with lists of words to be learned each week, and related exercises to fill about 15 minutes a day (Wilde, 1992).

Organization of the Project

Chapter 1 includes the need and rationale for the project. Chapter 2 is a review of the related literature. Chapter 3 outlines the procedure for designing the spelling handbook. Chapter 4 describes the spelling handbook designed to assist primary grade teachers interested in developing a nontraditional spelling program. Chapter 5 summarizes the project, presents conclusions and makes recommendations.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Topping (1995) stated, "Spelling is a curriculum area that is both neglected and controversial. Few teachers enjoy teaching spelling, and fewer children enjoy learning it" (p. 374). According to Jongsma (1990), many educators share concern about their own spelling strategies. They are concerned that they are not finding the time or have the knowledge to implement a quality spelling program. They worry that their students will become poor spellers.

While there are differences among experts on spelling instruction, Jongsma (1990) continues, they all agree that some degree of formal word study is necessary. Various instructional procedures for and theoretical accounts of the acquisition of spelling skills have appeared in the literature in recent years (Brown, 1990). According to Templeton (1986), "spelling is enjoying a renaissance" (p. 73). New knowledge about how children master spelling, combined with research on language development provide the foundation for an informed spelling program.

In the following review of literature, the history of English spelling is surveyed. Further, two different models of spelling instruction, the Direct Instruction Model and the Developmental Spelling Model are examined.

Chapter 2 also presents research-based instructional strategies upon which a spelling program can be based.

An Historical Overview of Spelling

Attitudes in the United States about correct spelling and its importance have been debated since people left their homelands and pioneered the new world. Hanna, Hodges and Hanna (1971) cite the following as an historical spelling time-line for the United States of America:

Pre-1600s: Language evolved as settlers mingled with other people from various parts of the world. The first English-speaking settlers had very few rules about spelling.

1638: The first printing press was set up and helped to initiate a movement toward uniformity in spelling.

1755: Dr. Samuel Johnson published A Dictionary of the English Language, which helped to stabilize English spelling.

1782-1785: More and more people were receiving at least some formal education. Noah Webster's book entitled, A Grammatical Institute of English became the popular instruction book for spelling and reading practice.

1798: Samuel Johnson, Jr., published A School Dictionary--a first of its kind.

1806: Noah Webster published a small school dictionary that omitted many British-English words that he considered useless and inappropriate for

American life. Webster's new dictionary was considered superior to early dictionaries.

1900-1930: Spelling lost the position of respect it had gained during the 19th century. The subject of spelling turned into simply memorizing lists of words to be tested each Friday.

1930s: Evidence began to accumulate that students who could read couldn't necessarily spell well. A new spelling curriculum was created that provided attractive student books and was based on words that were most frequently used in student writing.

1940s: Spelling books continued to change. The lessons now had a place for a mid-week test and a six-step study plan.

1950s-1960s: Spelling workbooks began to introduce spelling words through the use of introductory stories. Concern about this method of spelling instruction prompted educators to enlist the help of linguists. With the help of the U.S. government, funds were made available to establish a study to clarify the alphabetic nature of the English language. The result of the research project (known as "Project 1991") demonstrated that, contrary to traditional viewpoints, English spelling is not erratic; instead it is largely systematic.

1960s: Spelling programs began to reflect the knowledge gained from research. Phoneme-grapheme correspondence became significant to spelling instruction.

1970s: Research demonstrated (Read, 1971) that children make abstract inferences about their sound system and language before they learn to read or write.

1980s-1990s: Spelling research began to focus on natural spelling development through observing children's writing. Research indicated that learning to spell is much more than a low-order memory task.

Barone (1992) suggested that spelling instruction has basically been taught in three different ways. The first method to teach spelling was through rote memorization of spelling lists. Instruction was based on the belief that English spelling was chaotic and must be learned in a letter-by-letter manner. Spelling words were directly connected to reading instruction.

Eventually, according to Barone (1992), spelling instruction evolved from rote memorization of letters in words to instruction focusing on pattern generalization within and between words. The connection between reading was not as close as in the memorization method. Children studied words from spelling books and lists not necessarily related to their reading program.

The latest change in spelling instruction focused on viewing spelling as a developmental process. Beer and Barone (1990), Henderson and Templeton (1986) and Hodges (1981) recommend that teachers use the

information received from student writing to guide them in developing an appropriate word study program.

In summary, many efforts have been made to reform the English spelling system through the past several centuries. Wilde (1990) suggests that the struggle to find the best way to teach spelling has been going on since at least, the early part of the twentieth century.

Models for the Development of Spelling Competence

Direct Instruction Model

Various instructional procedures for the acquisition of spelling skills have appeared in literature over the years. They are based on two contrasting models for the development of spelling instruction. The first, Direct Instruction, is a two-stage view of spelling instruction. It proposes children progress from a stage of not being able to spell correctly to a stage of being able to spell correctly. Spelling is viewed as a procedural task that children are required to follow to learn to become good spellers. Spelling success is primarily attributed to highly-structured, teacher-controlled spelling strategies. Gettinger (1993), an advocate of direct instruction strategies, outlines its basic components. She wrote:

Direct instruction involves systematic presentation of instructional materials and differential responses to students' academic performance. For spelling instruction, features of direct instruction include (a) a test-study-test format that incorporates immediate

corrective feedback, (b) error-correction procedures, (c) positive reinforcement for correct spelling, (d) modeling and imitation of correct spelling, and (e) systematic repeated practice to learn a set of words (p. 281).

Gettinger (1985) directed a study to examine the effectiveness of student-directed versus teacher-directed spelling instruction on children's spelling accuracy and retention. Nine poor spellers were referred by teachers. They ranged in age from 8-13 years old. All were of average intelligence, but approximately one year below grade level in spelling.

Prior to the study, students were trained in a fairly structured teacher-determined direct instruction procedure. The results demonstrated that student-directed instructional procedures using visual and verbal cues produced the higher scores. Teachers reported (Gettinger, 1985) that "students were clearly more 'active,' 'involved,' and 'on task' during student-directed conditions" (p. 170).

Another study directed by Gettinger (1983) compared the effects of invented spelling to direct instruction on children's spelling and writing. The effectiveness of each approach was judged, in part, by students' accuracy in each week's spelling test. Children spelled more of the words correctly when they received direct instruction and practice with words in isolation than during the invented spelling condition.

While students were involved in the invented spelling phase they were encouraged (but not specifically instructed) to incorporate the targeted words into their weekly writing. Although spelling test scores reflected less accuracy during the invented spelling approach, writing samples demonstrated a higher percent of accurate spelling, leading the researchers to surmise that frequent writing opportunities to apply orthographic knowledge by using invented spelling has a positive effect on overall spelling accuracy.

Gettinger, Bryant and Fayne (1982) conducted a study that examined an intervention designed to enhance spelling achievement for learning disabled elementary students. Results of the study document the effectiveness of incorporating direct instructional techniques, along with reduced unit size and distributed practice and review. It was concluded that low-achieving students benefit from additional reinforcement of specific spelling skills.

Developmental Spelling Model

A second model of spelling instruction proposes that spelling competency progresses through multiple developmental stages (Barone, 1992; DiStefano & Hagerty, 1985; Gentry, 1982; Henderson, 1978; Read, 1971; Templeton, 1986; Wilde, 1990). In this model errors reflect the level of a child's emerging or developing spelling ability. Learning to spell is a

matter of acquiring knowledge rather than habits. Children manipulate and discover words as they are encouraged to write independently.

In the early 1970s, Charles Read first discovered the phonetic logic behind the young child's invented spellings. Read (1971) noted that children approached reading and writing with abstract inferences about the sound system of their language. Read's research provided educators with valuable new insight in which to examine the developing nature of learning to read and spell. He suggested that spelling mistakes should be seen as natural and logical attempts, by the developing child, to apply phonetic knowledge to the spellings of the English language. Read further suggested that many children come to school already able to recognize phonological relationships. He proposed it is the educator's task to help guide the child "to master new principles that extend and deepen the already abstract conception of the sound system of English that he brings to school" (p. 13).

Gentry (1978) built on Read's early discoveries of the developmental nature of children's spelling. He suggested spelling development may have the same pattern as language development. According to Gentry, children develop spelling skills by moving through clearly-defined stages which parallel the early stages of oral development. Gentry proposed children learn the foundations for spelling much the same ways as they learn to talk and use language. Like oral language, spelling proceeds from simple to more

complex activities. Each level marks a new understanding of the language system. Gentry states, "Early experience with writing is essential to the child's written-language development" (p. 89).

Gentry (1978) goes on to identify five levels of spelling, each representing a different conceptualization of English orthography: pre-communicative spelling, semi-phonetic spelling, phonetic spelling, transitional spelling and correct spelling. Learning to spell, according to Gentry, must be treated as a complex developmental process that begins at the preschool and primary school levels. Change from one spelling stage to another is more or less gradual. Examples of more than one stage may exist in student writing. However, Gentry explains that development is continuous. Development proceeds from simple to more complex, as children draw more and more from their increasing knowledge base. Gentry proposes knowing the stages of spelling development can help teachers guide children to spelling improvement, consciousness and competency. He does not connect specific age ranges to children's spelling development.

Developmental spelling levels

Gentry (1978) describes the first stage as the pre-communicative level. It is at this level the child first uses symbols from the alphabet to represent words. At this stage the child does not have knowledge of letter-sound correspondence. Consequently, these first attempts at spelling do not communicate language by connecting letters to sound. Pre-

communicative spelling is the child's first endeavor to understand the alphabetic nature of the English language.

The next level to explore is described by Gentry (1978) as the semi-phonetic stage. Unlike the previous stage, semi-phonetic spellings represent a letter-sound correspondence. At this stage, the speller demonstrates the first approximations to alphabetic orthography. At this point in the student's development, not all sounds the child hears are represented by letters. The speller takes risks and invents his own spelling of the word based on his developing knowledge of written language.

The third level, according to Gentry (1978), is the phonetic stage. It shows evidence of even greater understanding of the link between letter and sound. Children's phonetic spellings, although not conforming to conventional spelling, completely represent the entire sound structure of the word being spelled. As a result, the child's writing is now readable to the writer and, in most cases, to the experienced reader.

Opportunities to write enable the speller to progress to the fourth level, which is described by Gentry (1978) as the transitional stage. Spelling discoveries made in the previous stages help spellers who are more knowledgeable about standard spelling. Their experience with language has helped them develop a greater awareness of spelling patterns and that they must further disassociate written language with spoken language. The

transitional speller, for the first time, begins to understand that words are spelled not only by how they sound, but by how they look.

Gentry (1978) explains the last level, correct stage of spelling, to be more instructional than developmental. Children are ready for direct spelling instruction. They have a much clearer understanding of the spelling system and how it works. More experience with words and continued instruction, according to Gentry, will extend their knowledge of written language. Becoming a correct speller, the final stage, is a lifelong process.

Other researchers (Beers, Beers & Grant, 1977; DiStefano and Hagerty, 1985; Templeton, 1986; Wilde, 1990) have joined Read and Gentry in their conclusion that learning to spell involves a developmental process. Through careful observation of children's writing, they noted patterns of spelling development. Beers and Henderson (1977) conducted a study to explore and identify spelling error types as they occurred in the creative writing of first graders. The students were followed over a six-month period in order to determine whether or not stage-like patterns would occur. The data indicated that children proceeded through many of the spelling pattern sequences at different rates. However, it was discovered that although the rate of learning varied, the sequence of steps for the spelling patterns examined appeared constant for most of the children. They concluded that the pattern sequences are generally the same regardless of the time the child begins to write. Beers and Henderson

stated, "progression through a sequence may be based upon developmental as well as instructional factors" (p. 146).

Invernizzi, Abouzeid and Gill (1994) outlined a theory of developmental spelling that evolved from qualitative research on children's invented spelling. They demonstrated how an analysis of students' invented spelling can inform teachers when and what to teach. Examples of three students' (ages 6, 8 and 14) invented spellings were examined. An alternate approach to spelling instruction, called word study, was considered within the context of several mini-lessons about examining words by sound, within word patterns, and meaning.

Mini-lessons in word study (according to Invernizzi, Abouseid, & Gill, 1994) offered the students opportunities for directed instructions within a process-oriented reading-writing classroom. The lessons were rotated around three activities: picture sorting, word sorting and word hunting. Student instruction was guided by the student's developing knowledge of the three tiers of English orthography: sound, pattern and meaning.

Invernizzi, Abouseid and Gill (1994) concluded that although a few students find learning to spell easy, most do not. They stated,

Students must have the opportunity to examine, manipulate, and make decisions about words according to categories of similarities and differences. It is up to teachers to direct students' attention to a

particular contrast and to create tasks that requires students to do so (p. 166).

Invernizzi, Abouseid and Gill (1994) suggest that examining words is a discovery approach, directed by the teacher, to learning the principles of English spelling.

Learning to Spell

Traditional approach to learning to spell

The textbook approach to teaching spelling is familiar to most educators. Traditional spelling curriculum (Wilde, 1990) is still widely used in most elementary schools. Wilde's description of the textbook model is based on an examination of three spelling series, all from major publishers and with well-known researchers among their authors. Wilde states,

although spelling programs differ in small ways and vary in quality, they are essentially alike in philosophy and format. Their primary goal is that students learn to spell a collection of words, typically 10-20 a week or 400-800 a year (p. 276).

Wilde cites Stetson and Boutin's (1980) study that suggests that students may already be capable of spelling around 68% of all words in their speller for their grade level before the start of the year.

Furthermore, continued Wilde (1990), the lessons are arranged so that the words to be learned are basically the same for all children. Students are most often grouped into one learning level. Lessons are

usually arranged according to spelling pattern and rules are frequently given as an aid to remembering words. The exercises vary little from lesson to lesson. The main focus, according to Wilde, is to practice the rule or provide opportunities to write the list words so that the students will memorize them. The programs take from 15 to 30 minutes a day, with extra exercises that are sometimes used as homework. Wilde states, "the underlying (and often explicit) goal of these programs is that students will memorize the spellings of individual words" (p. 277).

A new approach to learning to spell

According to Callaway, McDaniel and Mason (1972), traditional spelling programs may be overrated. They found that of five language art programs examined, the best spelling came from students in a program that had an abundance of reading and writing opportunities but no formal spelling curriculum. The worst spelling scores came from students who received formal spelling instruction unrelated to reading and writing. Hammill, Larsen and McNutt (1977) found that by the end of fourth grade, students who had received no instruction in spelling could spell as well as or better than those who had spelling instruction.

According to Wilde (1990), a new view of learning to spell, based on research and practices related to invented spelling, is now emerging. She states,

This view rests on a double foundation: (a) research about how children spell when left to their own devices and (b) the work of teachers and others who have thought about spelling as it occurs in the classroom but outside the confines of a formal curriculum (p. 278).

Wilde (1990) continues to say that a philosophy of spelling curriculum that is based on current research differs from traditional spelling programs. Its goals, its conception of the knowledge base that a good speller must have, and its view of learning and of differences between learners differentiates the two spelling programs. Encouragement and many varied opportunities for children to write are critical to this new way of thinking about spelling. Instruction of spelling focuses on adapting curriculum to meet the individual students' needs. Teachers monitor progress and provide opportunities for continuous growth. Learning to spell, according to Wilde, progresses through a series of predictable steps that, when supported, lead to increased spelling accuracy.

Effective classroom practices

Gentry (1982), an early advocate for spelling reform, contended that learning to spell should be viewed as a complex developmental process that begins at the preschool and primary levels. According to Gentry, teachers must be ready to engage children in meaningful cognitive activities that will

lead to spelling competency. Gentry offers the following classroom practices:

1. Provide purposeful writing experiences that engage students in cognitive activity that is needed for developmental spelling growth.
2. Frequent writing that is integrated with all aspects of the curriculum should be a natural part of the daily routine.
3. Set the foundations for spelling growth by encouraging writing without overemphasis on correctness, writing mechanics and memorization. Teacher expectations for correctness should be adjusted to each child's level of development.
4. Continuously observe and assess student progress. Awareness of developmental process provides the teacher with the knowledge necessary to intervene with appropriate instructional strategies.
5. Help students develop spelling consciousness. Respond to student work in a manner that builds interest in words and makes word study fun.

Invented spelling

DiStefano and Hagerty (1985), advocates for developmental spelling, argue that "the first step to teaching spelling is to let the students experiment with language while writing and not worry about spelling" (p.

373). They say that children are natural risk-takers and if given the opportunity to write frequently will invent spellings, coming closer and closer to conventional spelling as they progress naturally from one stage to another. Gentry (1982) suggests that students be encouraged to write stories, songs, lists, poems, plans, signs, messages and letters. Read's (1971) early research demonstrated that young children can predict spelling of words auditorially in sophisticated ways. Read suggests that there is a valid rationale for children's invented spellings based on phonetic generalizations.

High frequency words

According to Templeton (1986), "Educators agree that a solid program of formal spelling instruction should teach those words most likely to be used by students in their writing" (p. 77). The results of extensive high-frequency word analysis showed that students use basic core words in their writing. Significant data was collected from research conducted by Gates (1937), Horn (1926), Rinsland (1945), Green (1954) and Harris and Jacobson (1972). Their finding demonstrates that children develop in their ability to manipulate words just as they develop in other areas. A study done by Beers et al (1977) showed that low-frequency words had consistently more misspellings than their corresponding high-frequency words. Especially interesting was that students did not apply what they knew about spelling from high-frequency words to low-frequency words,

indicating that even though the children have used more advanced strategies with words they know, they are not usually capable of applying the same strategies to words they do not know.

The results of these studies provided valuable information into how students learn to spell. Templeton (1986) states,

Learning to spell involves an interaction with reading, with writing and with vocabulary development. Learning to spell means coming to understand the structure of words at progressively more abstract levels (p. 77).

Test-study method

Advocates for the test-study method, Kingsley (1923) and DiStefano and Hagerty (1985) suggest that students should not be expected to study and be tested on words they already know. The test-study method is a plan by which the students study only those words which they cannot spell. They suggest that the plan can be implemented in a number of different ways. Usually at the beginning of a week a pretest is given. Students correct their tests and record their scores. Some teachers may elect to allow students who have superior scores to be excused from the spelling lesson for the week. Other teachers might instruct students to do activities directed only for the missed words. Kingsley's study concluded that the test-study method shows much better gains in class average, and the

average grade using the test-study method was higher than the study-test method.

The corrected test

Horn (1947) conducted a study designed to determine the effect of a student-corrected test under the direction of the teacher. The study was concerned with viewing the test as a learning device in addition to its role as a measuring tool. The results of the study clearly demonstrated that test scores improved significantly when students corrected their own tests.

Techniques used to make learning interesting

Zahorik (1996) conducted a study to discover what teachers do to create interest in learning. He found that teachers overwhelmingly preferred learning activities that engage the learner as an active participant rather than a passive listener. Hands-on activities were viewed as an effective learning method. Teachers reported that personalizing the content area increased student interest in learning. Creating an atmosphere of trust was seen as a significant factor. This was accomplished by allowing students to share their ideas and experiences through a variety of different methods. They were involved in the decision making and class planning. Teachers also reported that having a variety of activities kept students interested and excited about learning. Many teachers used student groupings to encourage student cooperation and interest. Using practical tasks, such as creating a menu, was another method teachers reported using to stimulate interest.

Teacher enthusiasm (including being humorous), sharing personal experiences, participating in groups as an equal group member and communicating a sense of purpose all play a large role in generating student interest in learning.

Chapter Summary

It is evident that developmental readiness plays a crucial role in children's spelling growth. All children move through predictable steps when learning to spell. Educators have a responsibility to provide a program that embraces the developmental nature of children's spelling and provides effective instructional strategies. A spelling handbook is a useful vehicle for transmitting this information to educators considering making a change in their spelling program.

Chapter 3

Procedures

Introduction

Researchers (Barone, 1992; DiStefano & Hagerty, 1985; Gentry, 1982; Henderson, 1978; Read, 1971; Templeton, 1986; Wilde, 1990) agree that learning to spell is a developmental process dependent on maturation, experience and effective teaching activities. Children come to school ready to learn at different levels. Within one classroom, student experiences and prior knowledge can vary tremendously. Conscientious teachers recognize the limitations of the traditional workbook approach to spelling instruction.

Traditionally, workbooks have filled the time frame assigned each week for spelling. They have conveniently provided the seat work practice within a subject area that teachers are expected to teach. Hillerich (1982) researched what really went on in classrooms when teachers reportedly were teaching spelling. He discovered that many teachers' lesson plans allowed for an extensive amount of time each day for spelling instruction. However, he discovered that the stated time in the plan book did not actually reflect spelling instruction. Instead, most of the time was devoted to administrative and irrelevant activities such as giving directions, monitoring behavior, testing and grading student work. Another large

portion of time was connected to students working in their workbooks. There was very little, if any, spelling instruction from the teacher. Only a few teachers engaged in oral spelling activities. He concluded that "overall, only about 50 percent of teachers' time was devoted to anything related to spelling, and most of this time was devoted to unprofitable activities" (p. 616).

Traditional spelling instruction fails to keep in mind that learning to spell is a developmental process. Students will not all be at the same developmental stage at the same time. Furthermore, the focus of the spelling workbook is the mastery of words for a weekly test, not for mastery during writing.

Practical, more effective ways of teaching spelling that produce visible spelling proficiencies in writing are needed. Therefore, the spelling handbook presents key components of a spelling program to be implemented in primary grade classrooms in which writing is emphasized.

Handbook Design

The spelling handbook offers guidance to teachers in spelling word selection, demonstrates a possible lesson plan, describes teaching strategies and student learning opportunities, offers ideas that encourage home involvements and suggests recording and evaluating methods.

The handbook will serve as a guide to teachers interested in a non-traditional approach to spelling instruction. Numerous suggestions and

strategies for learning are presented, but not intended to be the total program--just one source for a teacher-customized spelling program.

Chapter Summary

In conclusion, the spelling handbook will provide the framework to guide educators in a positive direction toward effective spelling instruction. Chapter 4 will demonstrate specific strategies and techniques that include game-like activities to customize a program tailored to meet the instructional needs of teachers in primary grades. The curriculum design is sensitive to the developmental aspects of spelling acquisition. Numerous instructional methods are suggested that contribute to spelling growth as students evolve into writers.

Spelling Handbook to Facilitate a Non-Traditional Spelling Program

by

Katherine Marie Richardson

Chapter 4

Spelling Handbook

Introduction

The first obligation that you have as a conscientious educator is to be knowledgeable of how students develop and learn. Then, however, you must apply this knowledge to implement instructional strategies to enhance student learning. A stated curriculum provides the foundation for this instruction and suggests strategies for achieving, or developing, the learning goal.

This spelling handbook is designed to assist the teacher who is interested in developing a spelling program that complements a classroom where writing is emphasized and meets the variety of needs of the students. The spelling handbook presents a program that departs from the traditional approach to spelling instruction. You will find this program is considerably less structured than the usual basal spelling series. However, spelling instruction follows a clear and logical plan.

This spelling handbook is based on the expert opinions of Sandra Wilde from her book, You Kan Red This!; J. Richard Gentry, Spel...IS A FOUR-LETTER WORD; J. Richard Gentry and Jean Wallace Gillet, Teaching Kids to Spell; Cheryl Lacey, Moving On in Spelling; Jo Phenix and Doreen Scott-Dunne's book, Spelling Instruction That Makes Sense; and Rebecca

Sitton's Spelling Sourcebook 2. This handbook demonstrates a teacher-customized spelling program. Many of the strategies and activities have been adapted from various expert sources. If you are interested in further information, I would encourage you to read the above-mentioned books, as well as any others on the subject.

Selection of Spelling Words

Basic to any spelling curriculum is the choice of spelling words. Over the years researchers have carefully tabulated those words most often used in students' reading and writing vocabulary. There are numerous lists you can choose from: Gates (1937), Spelling Difficulties in 3,876 Words; Horn (1926), A Basic Writing Vocabulary; Rinsland (1945), A Basic Vocabulary for Elementary Children; Green (1954), The New Iowa Spelling Scale; and Harris and Jacobson (1972), Basic Elementary Reading Vocabularies.

Research (Beer & Henderson, 1977; Beers & Grant, 1987; Chomsky, 1971; Clark, 1988; Read, 1971; Templeton, 1986) has been done that strongly suggests that learning to spell is a developmental process, not unlike learning to talk. This spelling handbook presents suggestions for selecting a spelling list that keeps in mind the importance of choosing words for study that will most often be used in student writing and still be developmentally appropriate for individual students within the classroom.

You will notice that the words are divided consecutively by grade level to guarantee orderly instructional progress. Formal spelling instruction,

using the word list to be studied, most often begins the second half of first grade or the beginning of second grade. For best results, you will need to be able to recognize readiness for formal spelling instruction. A decision must be made as to how many words each grade will assume responsibility for introducing. Following are two examples of the many different ways you could divide the words among grades one through three.

Example 1:

Grade 1	word frequency	1-30
Grade 2	word frequency	31-130
Grade 3	word frequency	131-228

Example 2:

Grade 1	word frequency	1-50
Grade 2	word frequency	51-150
Grade 3	word frequency	151-325

The use of long lists does not necessarily make better spellers. Your focus should be that the children master the spelling words, not just on the Friday test, but in everyday writing across the curriculum.

Golden Words

"Golden words" is a term coined by the author. These are words for which the students are accountable for spelling correctly in all of their daily writing. You select the words after looking at many student writing samples. Golden words should be high-frequency words. The number of golden words varies according to grade level and student need.

Post the golden words in alphabetical order on the Golden Word Chart. Send the list home so parents can help check work for correct

spelling. Copy an alphabetical list of the words and paste them on the inside cover of the "Words to Know Notebook." As the year progresses, and more words are added, you will need to paste a new alphabetized list over the previous list. Instruct students to check all their writing against this list before they bring it to the writer's workshop or turn it in for your evaluation.

Tell students you will be looking for correct spelling of Golden Words. A method to check regularly for these words is necessary. For example, you may wish to check one everyday writing assignment for golden words once a week. Students should not be told when or what papers will be checked. Your routine selection of brief writing samples clearly conveys the message that the teacher cares, and is looking. After checking the paper, you return it to the student for correction.

Weekly Spelling Test

Monday pretest

Pass a spelling pretest paper to students. Divide it vertically, providing a place for your students to write the pretest words. Directly across from each word, tell the student to write the corrected spelling of the word, if needed. Students who spell the word correctly use this place to write their individual spelling word. Remind your students that their words may be selected from a number of sources, such as student writing

portfolios, class charts, students' "Words to Know Notebook," dictionaries and class books.

Remind the children that honesty is important when correcting their own papers. Students need to understand that learning to spell the words is what is important, not how many they get correct on the pretest. Have fun; you or a student can pretend to sprinkle "Honesty Dust" by waving a magical, teacher-created wand. It will relax children with test anxiety and encourage truthfulness.

Self-correct procedure

After every student has finished the pretest, have them check their spellings, using the following self-correct procedure.

Teacher	Students
Spells the word.	Proofread the word by touching each letter with point of their pencil as the letter name is said. Circle problem area.
Prints the word on the chalkboard, saying each letter as it is printed.	Look at chalkboard and listen to the teacher.
Observes students.	If misspelled, rewrite the word in the right column of their papers. If correct, leave the space blank to be filled in later with a teacher- or student-selected word.

Accommodating varying spelling levels

You may choose to provide three different spelling levels to accommodate varying developmental readiness. Determine appropriate

levels by closely analyzing student writing samples. Give the Monday pretest at the same time, by saying group one's words first, group two's words next and, finally, group three's words last. Your students will learn which group of words to listen to and write only those words.

Mid-week test

Have students test each other using individual class blackboards or regular writing paper. They test each other and check their own work by looking at the spelling words they wrote in their "Words to Know Notebook." Providing this opportunity gives your students extra word practice and helps to set the way for a successful Friday test.

Friday test

To ensure an accurate record of spelling word test results, it is best that you correct the final test. However, you may prefer to allow students to self-correct, as done in the pretest. You, not the spelling program, makes this decision.

"Words to Know Notebook"

The "Words to Know Notebook" is a spiral notebook, kept by your students, that is divided into three sections. The Golden Words are pasted onto the inside cover. As the year progresses, have your students paste new alphabetized Golden Words over the previous list. Paste a spelling test chart to the inside back cover. Have students record their weekly test scores each Friday. Reserve the first section of the notebook

for the weekly spelling words. Divide the other two sections between high-interest words and the students' own spelling dictionary. High-interest words may come from classroom studies, or just words your student wants to learn how to spell. Spelling dictionary words are words that were misspelled in your student's everyday writing or from previous Friday spelling tests. The notebook personalizes learning to spell for your students, one of the key elements Zahorik (1996) discovered through his research in creating student interest in learning.

Lesson Plan

Provide opportunities for word study in each week's lesson plan. Approximately 15 minutes a day should focus on studying list words. Incorporate spelling activities into classroom learning centers. Have learning center time available to all students at least 20 minutes a day. The time will vary depending on your week's schedule. Frequent writing opportunities provide your students the chance to practice transferring their word knowledge to where it really counts--in daily writing.

Day 1. Give the pretest. Have your students immediately correct their own pretest. Next, instruct your students to correct missed words or replace with new words and then write them in their "Word to Know Book." Finally, have them prepare another list to take home for study.

Day 2. Have your students practice their words using a study technique first introduced by Horn (1947). DiStefano and Hagerty (1985)

outline the procedure that is still widely accepted today. In it, have the student

- (1) pronounce the word while looking at it,
- (2) close his/her eyes and try to visualize the word and spell it correctly,
- (3) check to see if his/her oral spelling for the word is correct,
- (4) cover the word and write it,
- (5) check his/her spelling against the model. If s/he misspells the word, s/he goes back to step 1 (p. 376).

Day 3. Have your students give each other a midweek test. They self-correct their tests.

Day 4. During this period, have a whole-class spelling activity or spelling center time.

Day 5. Give your students the post-test. After you have checked their test, have your students record their scores on the spelling test chart, located inside their "Words to Know Notebook." Instruct the students to write any misspelled words inside the spelling dictionary portion of their notebook.

Writer's Workshop

Time needs to be set aside each day to provide the students you are working with the guidance they need to develop as spellers and fluent writers. The workshop can be scheduled into the day in a number of

different ways. You may elect to meet with students during a sustained silent reading time, as a center activity, or while the rest of the class is involved in seat work. Allowing 20 minutes a day for this individual or small group time with your students is important for instruction and assessment.

Teacher's Response to Spelling at Each Developmental Stage During
Writer's Workshop

Children need your gentle encouragement to guide them in their natural spelling development. Spelling attempts should never be devalued in any way. Remember, the instructional needs of students depend on their own developmental readiness. The following suggestions have been adapted from Moving On In Spelling (Lacey, 1994):

Pre-communicative and semi-phonetic spellers

- Have your student begin the conference by reading his/her writing to you.
- Do not make any marks that deface or destroy the student's invented spelling.
- Write the correct spelling below or above your student's work exactly as s/he said them. As you write, read the words out loud and discuss capital letters, word spacing, etc., with him/her.
- Run your fingers under the words and encourage the student to read along.

Pre-phonetic and phonetic spellers

- Have your student begin the conference by reading his or her writing to you.
- Praise the words spelled correctly.
- Have the student read the text through with you, only this time stop to underline words that need fixing.
- Words are corrected with your help and written on the side of the paper in column form.
- After the entire draft has been corrected, instruct the student read the corrected spelling words on the side of the page.
- If the paper is to be published, have the final draft put into correct form. Otherwise, it could be placed directly into the student's writing folder.

Transitional and conventional spellers

- Before the student brings his or her paper to the writing conference, any words in question should be underlined.
- At the conference encourage your student to come up with possible spelling for the word(s) in question.
- Discuss words still not spelled correctly and write them on a sticky-note and attach it to the student's work.
- Finally, instruct your student to write the words correctly on the first draft.

It is important that you remember that children should not be expected to spell every word correctly. Too much emphasis on correct spelling can cause students to become discouraged about writing. The number of final drafts should be limited. Take into consideration the developmental spelling level of the student and the purpose of the writing assignment when deciding if perfect spelling is an appropriate objective.

Record Keeping, Evaluation and Grading

What you collect, how you collect it, and how you record it depends on the students' stages of development and your own personal management style. However it is accomplished, keep in mind that a well-planned and effective evaluation system should not detract from valuable planning and teaching time.

Students' work samples provide important information in documenting spelling progress. Dating student work and ensuring that it is stored appropriately will assist in the evaluation process. The "Words to Know Notebook" also offers valuable insight into spelling development. A progress chart that records Friday test scores is another place to look for confirmation of your students' spelling growth. Student files could include notes from anecdotal observations, reports from previous years, work samples, conference notes, checklists and test scores.

Parent Information and Involvement

Support develops as a result of understanding the spelling program. Helping parents to see the benefits of the nontraditional spelling curriculum is a large step toward gaining their support. Information letters, a parent workshop, encouraging parent classroom help, offering suggestions for home help, maintaining an open door policy, inviting parents to sit in on spelling/writing conferences, setting up a parent check-out corner of professional reading materials, and inviting parents to "writing celebration parties" are all methods that keep your students' parents informed and involved. Communication is the key.

Activities that Foster Spelling Growth

Children need to have many opportunities to make the connection between words they hear, the printed words and their spelling. Students benefit from a classroom environment that includes stimulating activities that increase their knowledge about language. Learning activities that involve games, hands-on activities, projects and problem solving are very effective in producing student interest and involvement in learning (Zahorik, 1996).

Use students' writing

Observe students' writing to decide the spelling instructional needs of individuals, small groups or the whole class. Share your observations

with the students and present lessons or provide other significant learning opportunities.

Find words together

As a class, read a big book, a song or a poem and ask students to watch out for specific spelling patterns and list them on a chart. If you are looking for words with "ed" or "ing" endings, write the base words right next to them (Lacey, 1994).

Assign a pattern search

Have students look through books or other writing examples and write down words that follow specific patterns. For example, ask students to search for words beginning with the letter "t" (Lacey, 1994).

Make rule books

Provide numerous opportunities to observe and search for specific word patterns, encourage students to explain the rules they have discovered. Help revise the rules, if necessary (Wilde, 1992).

Make class lists

Display a class word list that students can add to throughout the year. Tell students to check the list when wanting to find a particular spelling for a word (Lacey, 1994).

Student-created word books

Have children create their own homophones, homographs, similes or opposites books. Instruct students to keep them in their writing portfolio for reference (Sitton, 1995).

Mini-lessons

Teach a brief lesson on a specific topic. For example, at the beginning of the school year, you might want to teach a lesson on how to try to figure out the spelling of an unknown word, without teacher help (Wilde, 1992).

Spelling bulletin board

Create an exciting spelling bulletin board display where children can add each week's high-frequency and individual student words. For instance, if your class is studying volcanoes, high-frequency words could be on yellow index cards and individual student words on red index cards, which explode out of the erupting mountain (Lacey, 1994).

Displays

Sometimes it's fun to combine spelling activities with another kind of activity. For example, in the spring have students write their spelling words on the dots of ladybugs made out of construction paper (Lacey, 1994).

Word train

Instruct your students to write high-frequency words on construction paper train cars. Have them read and spell the words as the year

progresses. Various colors of construction paper could be used to signify word categories, for instance: yellow for high-frequency words, and blue for individual student words (Sitton, 1995).

Class rhyming games

Using class words, have children think of words that fit certain clues. For example, "This word starts like 'goat' and rhymes with 'curl' (girl)." Depending on student readiness, you may want to take this opportunity to point out the pattern differences in the words "curl" and "girl" (Gentry & Gillet, 1993).

Wall charts

Have students sit on the floor in front of a wall chart that has had a plastic cover flipped over the top. Ask the students to read the story, poem or sentences on the chart. Next have them look for specific words. For instance, words that end in "ing." After everyone has had a chance to think about the activity, call on a student to come up and circle the appropriate words. At the close of the activity, the chart is removed and the plastic cover wiped clean to be used for another word search activity (Powell & Hornsby, 1993).

High-frequency spelling word extensions

High-frequency spelling words that are integrated into language experiences through activities engage the learner in meaningful word study.

- Have student cut high-frequency words out of newspapers and magazines. Then paste them to construction paper or a class chart.
- Repeatedly hide a word among a whole string of nonsense letters on the chalkboard. Ask a child to come up and circle the designated word. Have him count the number of times he found it and write the number after the letter sequence.
- Write color similes with students: "As green as grass," "As white as snow," "As orange as a pumpkin," "As red as an apple." Have students create a class simile book.
- Use books to connect spelling words to literature. For example, read Pickles Have Pimples (Judi Barrett, Atheneum, 1986) to get extra practice with the word "have." Have students create a class book along the same format.
- Discuss the different meanings of the word "like." Practice finding the word "like" in the dictionary. Have the students write sentences about things they like on strips of paper and paste them to a wall chart. They might also circle or color the high-frequency word to make it stand out (Sitten, 1995).

Summary

The spelling program outlined requires you to expand your understanding of what it means to teach spelling. Workbooks are not a

source for word selection or practice. Words selected from a high-frequency word bank make up the class spelling list. Spelling instruction is directly connected to the writing experience. Extension activities designed to develop spelling skills provide another vehicle toward spelling growth. It is your responsibility, as the classroom teacher, to provide opportunities for learning for the student who has difficulty learning and the average learner, as well as the student who needs an extra challenge.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary

Educators play a critical role in children's spelling development. Providing a spelling program that is based on a sound theory of language development and that is linked to writing requires the classroom teacher to put aside the traditional spelling workbook. The old spelling programs are replaced with practical, more effective ways of teaching spelling within an integrated curriculum.

The purpose of this project was to offer guidelines to educators interested in providing developmental spelling instruction in a classroom in which writing was emphasized. The handbook includes numerous suggestions and strategies to be considered in developing a teacher-customized spelling program.

Conclusions

Based on research, several conclusions may be drawn as to what is necessary for an effective spelling program.

1. Children need developmentally appropriate word study.
2. Classrooms should offer multilevel spelling instruction and resources.

3. Spelling words are best comprised from high-frequency word list.
4. Students are engaged in many writing activities throughout the day.
5. Invented spelling is viewed as a logical and natural step toward conventional spelling.
6. Spelling programs have an observable plan for moving children from one level to the next.
7. A management system is in place for instructional activities and assessment.
8. An effective spelling program has a parent education component.
9. A plan for teacher education is in place.

Recommendations

For the spelling program to be successful, it is critical for all teachers to fully understand and support its rationale. Prior to implementing a new spelling program the following is recommended:

1. Educators should take classes, read books and articles on spelling development and how it relates to spelling instruction.
2. Teachers must analyze high-frequency word list and decide how to divide the words among the grade levels.

3. Opportunities to discuss and plan for the development of a new spelling program must be in place prior to and throughout the school year.
4. Parents must be educated and informed about their vital role in the spelling program.

Developing a new nontraditional spelling program requires leadership. Educators, as well as others, must be committed to reshaping their thinking surrounding spelling instruction. Further experimental research needs to be done to test the effectiveness of the activities suggested in the handbook.

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