DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 364 870   CS 011 513

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TITLE   Beyond Memorization, Lists, and Trial Tests:
                Exploring the Influence of Teacher Knowledge of
                Developmental Spelling on Pedagogical Decisions.
PUB DATE   Dec 93
NOTE   16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
                National Reading Conference (43rd, Charleston, SC,
                December 1-4, 1993).
PUB TYPE   Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports -
                Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE   MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS   Elementary Education; *Instructional Development;
                *Instructional Effectiveness; *Instructional
                Improvement; *Spelling; *Spelling Instruction;
                Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Effectiveness
IDENTIFIERS   Qualitative Inventory of Word Knowledge

ABSTRACT
                A study examined the experiences of elementary
teachers as they learned about the developmental nature of spelling,
how to analyze student spellings, and ways to restructure their
spelling program based on the needs of individual students. Nine
teachers at two elementary schools volunteered to participate and
expressed discomfort about current practices for spelling
instruction. Surveys were completed and interviews were conducted.
Inservice teacher education sessions over a 6-month period showed
teachers how to administer and analyze the Qualitative Inventory of
Word Knowledge (QWIK). Results indicated that: (1) at the beginning
of the intervention period, most of the teachers' questions centered
on issues of time, instructional organization, classroom management,
and grading; (2) at the end of the period, teachers' questions
shifted to a concern for how to refine newly adopted teaching
strategies; (3) use of the QWIK enabled teachers to expand their
understanding of their students as spellers by encouraging them to
reconsider instructional grouping decisions and documenting patterns
of errors in a systematic way; (4) teachers expressed frustration
about the amount of time it took to conduct the QWIK analysis and
about difficulties they experienced in doing the analysis; (5)
teachers varied in the amount of change they instituted; and (6) the
teachers expressed a strong desire for continued support to explore
innovations in their spelling program. (Contains 16 references and 1
data table.) (RS)

ED 364 870

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Running Head: Spelling

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Since the early 1970's, a growing body of research has

revealed a process of development of orthographic knowledge in

children as reflected in their errors or invented spelling

(Chomsky, 1970; Read, 1971, 1975). This process has been

described as a continuum of increasingly complex inferences made

by children of sound-symbol relationships and has been compared

to the development of oral language. Henderson and his

colleagues have described this development across five stages:

preliterate, letter name, within word pattern, syllable juncture,

and derivational constancies (see Henderson, 1990). That this

process might be considered a linguistic universal is suggested

by parallel research in spelling in other languages (Gill, 1980).

Researchers soon began to question existing approaches to

spelling instruction in favor of practices supporting the child's

naturally developing awareness of orthography (Henderson, 1981,

1990; Schlagal & Schlagal, 1992). Typical standard basal

spelling lessons are characterized by weekly lists of words to be

learned, written exercises requiring student memorization, and

two weekly tests (trial and final). In contrast, spelling

instruction informed by recent research involves wide reading and

writing and is based on the developmental level of individual

students as opposed to unitary placement in the grade level basal

spelling book (Scharer, 1992a; Wilde, 1990). According to

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Spelling

Schlagal & Schlagal (1992), "The instructional implications of
this research on developmental word knowledge are interesting and
varied, but they remain largely untapped" (p. 419).

There has been some documentation of the change process
during implementation of literature-based reading programs
(Scharer, 1992b) and extensive reporting of transitions from
traditional writing instruction to a process writing approach
(Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983). None, however, have reported on
the pedagogical shift to teaching spelling as a developmental
process. This study examined the experiences of elementary
teachers as they learned about the developmental nature of
spelling, how to analyze student spellings, and ways to
restructure their spelling program based upon the needs of
individual students.

The following research questions guided data collection and
analysis: What questions do teachers have about their current
teaching practices in spelling? How do teachers respond as they
learn to analyze spelling errors using a developmental
perspective? What difficulties are identified as they examine
student errors? Are there instructional changes from a
traditional program of spelling instruction to one informed by
the research on developmental spelling as teachers learn more
about analyzing students' spellings?

<center>Methodology</center>

This study began with an invitation by an elementary school

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principal for us to organize a series of inservice sessions

focusing on language arts instruction and assessment techniques

that could inform teachers' instructional decision-making. The

inservice sessions were presented monthly to the 15 teachers in

the two elementary schools served by this principal. Topics

requested by the teachers (grades 1-5) at the initial meeting

included spelling, literature-based reading, and the writing

process. Spelling was an area of concern for all the teachers.

Participants

Nine of the 15 teachers volunteered to participate in this

study. (See Table 1) All expressed discomfort about their

current practices for spelling instruction and were anxious to

discuss issues related to spelling instruction in their

classrooms. A first-grade teacher (D), for example, explained

that

> ...they [students] are still missing those
>
> words in their writing that they may get
>
> right on a spelling test. That is when you
>
> think, "All that time that you are spending
>
> on it and all the time the parents are
>
> spending at home just isn't really worth it.

A second-grade teacher (E) had experimented with her weekly

schedule of spelling assignments by requiring her students to use

the spelling words in sentences with correct punctuation. She

soon abandoned the practice as she observed that "It was too much

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torture." She was anxious to change her spelling program
explaining that, "I have a lot of questions. I think it goes
back to not knowing any better, so you just do it that way."

Data Collection and Analysis

During the first meeting, all teachers completed a survey
instrument with questions about knowledge of current spelling
research; descriptions of their present instructional approach
including materials, activities, and schedule; students' current
achievement levels; and methods of determining student
achievement. Survey data is displayed in Table 1 for the nine
participants in this study. Teachers were then interviewed to
clarify and extend the survey data before the second inservice
session.

Inservice sessions over the next six months began with
learning to administer and analyze the Qualitative Inventory of
Word Knowledge (Schlagal, 1982) in ways that would inform
spelling instruction. The QIWK consists of word lists containing
increasingly complex spelling patterns related to developmental
stages. Student's accuracy scores and error patterns may be used
to determine an appropriate instructional level.

Classroom demonstrations of alternative instructional
techniques were also provided for individual teachers upon
request. Additionally, three informal forums were held in which
teachers shared both struggles and successes experienced as they
implemented new spelling strategies. A second round of

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interviews followed the last inservice session. All interviews

and forums were audiotaped, transcribed, and entered into a

computer program, Ethnograph, (Seidel, Kjolseth, & Seymour, 1988)

to facilitate coding, analysis, and retrieval.

Data were analyzed inductively through multiple readings

resulting in 24 coding categories (Boçdan & Biklen, 1982).

These categories were then clustered in ways to inform each

research question. For example categories QINK, TESTING (general

assessment), TESTWK (weekly tests), and ERRORS (student errors in

writing) were clustered to discern patterns of responses

informing the second research question: How do teachers respond

as they learn to analyze spelling errors using a developmental

perspective?

<div align="center">Results</div>

Teachers' Questions

At the beginning of the study, most of the teachers'

questions centered on issues of time, instructional organization,

classroom management, and grading. A fourth grade teacher (G)

asked, "How do I organize this so that I don't feel like I am

losing control of what they are learning as far as spelling is

concerned?" The teachers also questioned how to assign grades on

the report card and how to communicate students' development to

their parents. Regarding grades, for example, a second grade

teacher (E) said, "My only way of doing this [giving grades] was

to give a test." Due to a strong tradition of spelling grades

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based on weekly tests over a single word list, teachers were concerned about parents' responses to changes in spelling assessment which did not rely exclusively on a weekly test score.

At the end of the study, teachers's questions shifted to a concern for how to refine newly adopted teaching strategies. For example, they wanted to know specifically how to get words for the word sorts, what to do with word cards after instructional activities, whether students should keep individual sets of word cards from their word sorts, and how word study notebooks should be utilized. Teachers still had questions about management issues, but these questions were also more specific such as how to manage individual and small group spelling instruction.

Impact of the QIWK

The use of the QIWK enabled teachers to expand their understanding of their students as spellers in three ways. First, as they scored the tests teachers were surprised by their students' instructional levels as well as the range of student's scores in their class. Th... teacher of learning disabled students (I), for example, had previously tested her students using the Brigance Diagnostic Inventory of Basic Skills and reported, "My kids were pretty close to the same [scores]...at a third and fourth-grade level." Consequently, she established two instructional groups using third- and fourth-grade materials, but reported, "I saw in the first several weeks that it wasn't going to work. There were some kids who weren't getting the spelling

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test." By using the QIWK, she learned that these students were functioning at a much lower level which encouraged her to reconsider the level of difficulty for instruction. After using the QIWK, a fifth-grade (H) teacher expressed her surprise that the ability range in her class spanned from level 2 to level 8. Similarly, a second grade teacher (E) concluded

> I need to get better at recognizing what
>
> levels they are at. It only makes sense that
>
> if kids are at different reading levels, they
>
> will also be at different levels in their
>
> spelling. I don't know why I didn't
>
> recognize this before.

Thus, using the QIWK encouraged teachers to reexamine how grouping decisions were made and to reconsider their practice of posing a single word list for their class.

A second way the QIWK increased teachers' knowledge about spelling resulted from analyzing the QIWK in two ways. First, the accuracy percentage of individual students for each list of the QIWK was generally used to identify students' instructional level. Next, teachers closely examined student errors within each list for insight into qualitative changes in student's errors which demonstrated achievement over time. A first-grade teacher expressed concern that the accuracy percentage scores for her students in May did not reflect an upward movement in levels when compared to January scores. However, when she compared

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characteristics of the errors students made on the two tests, she
concluded that over half of her students were, indeed, moving
from letter name stage to within word stage.

Thirdly, as teachers learned to administer and interpret the
QIWK, they noticed changes in the ways they examined students'
spelling errors in written assignments and stories. Rather than
circling spelling mistakes, teachers began to document patterns
of errors in students' writing assignments in a systematic way
that was informed by their work in analyzing errors from the
QIWK.

Difficulties

Although the close analysis of student errors both in the
QIWK and in their writing enabled teachers to raise their level
of knowledge about students' spelling achievement in significant
ways, teachers expressed frustration about the amount of time it
took to conduct the analysis and about difficulties they
experienced in doing the analysis. They identified the need for
more practice analyzing errors, additional inservice
opportunities, more time to talk with their colleagues about
their observations of student errors, and more time to plan
instruction based on those observations. Teacher (E), for
example, shared the following: "What scares me is the diagnostic
part of this. Making sure that I know enough so I do a good job
at this." In addition, as teachers increased their recognition
of individual differences, this awareness heightened feelings

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about inadequacy for providing appropriate instruction to support the multiple needs of their classes.

Instructional Changes

Teachers varied in the amount of change they instituted during the course of this study. One first grade teacher (C) reported that she had made few changes during the six month inservice period explaining that "I am going to do it differently next year, but I didn't want to change in the middle." Other teachers began to make a variety of changes in their approach to spelling. One change involved rethinking the criteria for choosing words for weekly lists. Teachers who were using teacher-selected lists at the beginning of the study began selecting words misspelled in their students' writing which were appropriate developmentally rather than using vocabulary from books the students were reading. Spelling instruction also began to be linked to writing through mini-lessons based on observed errors in students' writing and coaching in self-editing and peer editing strategies. Teachers began moving away from activities which supported memorization to activities which involved the children in comparing and contrasting word features (word sorts) in both large and small group settings. Word hunts and word study notebooks were also being used to extend and record students' developing word knowledge.

Concerns about grading and reporting to parents led to the development of a rubric to inform grading decisions. The rubric

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included: participating in instructional activities, recognizing
relationships among words, increasing grapho-phonetic knowledge,
applying skills in purposeful writing, engaging in self and peer
editing, and using available resources to spell conventionally in
final drafts. Using the rubric reduced teachers' concerns about
how to assign grades in spelling beyond weekly test scores.
Parents responded favorably to the rubric and agreed that it was
more informative than a single letter grade on a report card.

Discussion

As we worked with these teachers and talked with them about
their progress, questions, and concerns, it was clear that the
instructional shifts they were attempting were being facilitated
by their personal discomfort with past practices, their
participation in the inservice sessions, their interact.ons with
each other, and the support provided by their principal.
However, we were also struck by the pressures they identified
working against their attempts to change which included lingering
concerns about parents' reactions, perceptions of colleagues who
were not implementing changes, and personal feelings of
inadequate expertise. In a sense, these teachers traded one set
of frustrations for another. Was it worth it? First grade
teacher (A) stated:

> I am glad that I had the opportunity to
> change because I would have done it like it
> had always been done. I would have felt in

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my heart that it wasn't right. This is so

much more pleasant. You can see growth, what

more could you ask for?

At the end of the study, all of the participants indicated

an intention to continue to explore innovations in their spelling

programs. They expressed a strong desire for continued support

including inservice opportunities, provision of professional

reading materials, and opportunities to observe and meet with

other teachers. Fourth grade teacher (G) said,

I am not sure exactly where I am going to go

yet...It is going to take a lot more reading

and development on my part. I am just headed

in that direction somewhere. I don't want to

let it drop by the wayside.

The results of this study raised additional research

questions. What are the long range implications of changes in

teachers' pedagogical decisions which have been informed by

knowledge of developmental spelling? What are the effects on

students' attitudes and achievement during the change process?

Is there any evidence of a ripple effect or impact on other areas

of instruction such as reading and writing when teachers move

away from a traditional spelling program?

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Table 1

Spelling Program at the Beginning of the Study

Teacher	Grade	Minutes each Week (Teacher-Directed)	Source of Weekly List	Use of Weekly List	Materials	Activities
A	Transitional First	100	Teacher-selected	Single list for whole class	magic slates, letters & chart, overhead projector	Sing letters in order, write using magic slates or shaving cream
B	First	50	Teacher-selected high frequency words	Multiple lists for small groups	paper & pencils, magnetic letters, magic slates	Write words, 4x each, scrambled word list, put words in sentences
C	First	150	Teacher-selected CVC patterns	Single list for whole class	paper & pencil	Write words and illustrate
D	First	30	Teacher-selected words misspelled in student writing, high frequency words, student-selected challenge words	Individual lists	individual spelling notebooks, paper & pencil	Write words 4x each, practice with a partner, add to individual dictionaries
E	Second	105	Basal speller	Single list for whole class	paper & pencil, flashcards	Discuss patterns, write words for handwriting grade, spelling games
F	Second	95	Basal speller and Teacher-selected words	Single list for whole class	paper & pencil	Write 4x each, use words in sentences, alphabetize in small groups
G	Fourth	115	Basal speller	Single list for whole class	textbook, paper & pencil	Write words in sentences, practice in teams, work with dictionary, games, board drill, alphabetize, unscramble
H	Fifth	15	Teacher-selected from reading books or themes	Single pretest. Students select 10 words to learn from errors	paper & pencil, spelling dictionaries	Students choose 10 words missed on pretest to practice with spelling monitors (students with perfect pretest papers), final tests given by monitors
I	LD	30	Student-selected from reading book	Individual lists	paper & pencil, spelling dictionaries	Write in dictionary, write 4x each, alphabetize, write in sentences, practice with partners

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