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## Moving students forward in spelling

Catherine Miller  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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## Moving students forward in spelling

### Abstract

This article describes how one teacher integrated additional spelling instructional strategies into her current basal program. The purpose of this article is to give an overview of research about methods of spelling instruction and describe strategies that can be incorporated into an existing program to motivate students toward becoming conventional spellers. The article emphasizes the importance of purposeful writing experiences to give students ample opportunities to practice their growing knowledge of spelling.

Moving Students Forward in Spelling

A Graduate Research Paper

Submitted to the

Division of Reading and Language Arts

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts Reading and Language Arts Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

Catherine Miller

September, 2001

This research Paper by: Catherine Miller

Titled: Moving Students Forward in Spelling

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the  
Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

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**Penny L. Beed**  

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Graduate Faculty Reader

Nov. 11, 2001  
Date Approved

**Rick C. Traw**  

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Graduate Faculty Reader

Nov. 11, 2001  
Date Approved

**Rick C. Traw**  

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Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

The Reading Teacher  
International Reading Association  
P.O. Box 8139  
Newark, DE  
19714-8139

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am submitting 5 copies of my manuscript entitled "Moving Students Forward in Spelling" to be reviewed. All of the participants in the study were second grade students whose parents agreed to the conditions of the study. The treatment of the participants was in accordance with the ethical standards of APA. This article was written over the course of two years in which I researched and incorporated various teaching strategies for a spelling program. I give an overview of research about methods of spelling instruction and describe strategies that can be incorporated into an existing program. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Catherine Miller

(319) 373-5541  
212 Crandall Dr. N.E.  
Cedar Rapids, IA 52402  
[bigkmiller@home.com](mailto:bigkmiller@home.com)

Running Head: Moving Students Forward in Spelling

Moving Students Forward in Spelling

Catherine J. Miller

University of Northern Iowa

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September, 2001

### Abstract

This article describes how one teacher integrated additional spelling instructional strategies into her current basal program. The purpose of this article is to give an overview of research about methods of spelling instruction and describe strategies that can be incorporated into an existing program to motivate students toward becoming conventional spellers. The article emphasizes the importance of purposeful writing experiences to give students ample opportunities to practice their growing knowledge of spelling.

## Moving Students Forward in Spelling

*I like brgr kang (Burger King) bkos (because) it tats (tastes) godd (good) and i like makdlsd (McDonalds) to (too) and i like pezza (pizza)*

*I like to ply (play) manaple (monopoly) and i like to ply (play) it wesh (with) my mom and my dod (dad) and i like it beks (because) it is fnoan (fun)*

As I circulated around the classroom during writer's workshop I stopped at Troy's (all names are pseudonyms) desk and read the beginning of a story he was writing. It was the first week of second grade and I was discovering that, like Troy, many students use invented spelling, along with some conventional spelling of high frequency words, in their daily writing. As a former first grade teacher, I was a little surprised that second grade students still used invented spelling so frequently and hadn't accumulated a larger number of conventionally-spelled words. I wondered what strategies I needed to use to move students forward from phonetic spelling to conventional spelling.

The school district in which I teach had recently adopted a new reading series, which contained a spelling component. Each weekly list included a few words from the current literature selection and contained 10 or more words with patterns related to the story words. It seemed to make sense to have the literature and the spelling words coincide to provide a meaningful way for children to learn to identify and spell new words.

The reading series included a 5-day spelling plan for each story. The first day begins with a pretest which the students self-correct upon receiving their new list for the week. Day two of the plan invites the children to identify the vowel



sound in each word and sort the words according to their spelling pattern. A worksheet option was also available to reinforce the spelling pattern. Day three of the spelling plan continues the lesson on the spelling pattern with word building and includes a fill-in-the blank worksheet to work on the meaning of the words. The fourth day of the lesson connects spelling and writing. The lesson might have the students draw a picture of and label the spelling words, write sentences, or write a paragraph including the spelling words. It also provides a worksheet option, which works on proofreading a paragraph with the spelling words. The last day of the spelling plan ends with a posttest and another worksheet on which the students are to circle the correctly spelled word and find the words in a word find. I started the school year with the new reading series by following the spelling lessons closely and using many of the teaching options provided. I was hopeful that this spelling program would move my students closer to conventional-speller status.

In addition to the spelling program, my students were involved in writing experiences in the classroom. These experiences included creative writing opportunities of the students' own chosen topic, journal writing, letters to family and friends, and written responses to literature. At first, I believed that the spelling program, along with the writing opportunities would help my students become conventional spellers.

Despite the spelling program and the immersion in writing in the curriculum, I noticed many of my students continued to misspell words in their writing that they had previously "learned" on spelling lists. They simply didn't

recall spellings they had correctly represented on spelling tests. I decided that the spelling instruction in my classroom needed to be more meaningful for the students. I reevaluated exactly how I was teaching spelling through writing in my classroom. What I discovered was that my students weren't connecting spelling to writing at all. They considered spelling to be connected to the textbook lessons and writing to be completely separate. Children shouldn't think of conventional spelling as belonging only to lists and tests isolated in a week's time. I wanted my spelling instruction to enable students to become competent and independent spellers who could effectively express themselves in writing (Scott, 1994). I came to the conclusion that my current methods of teaching spelling and writing were not enabling my students to become competent and independent spellers. I was focusing less on the process of writing and more on the completion and correctness of a piece of writing. In this article I will describe how my spelling instruction evolved to help students connect spelling and their own writing to move toward conventional spellers.

### My Goals for a Second-grade Spelling Program

Because my district expects the teachers to use the new reading series' spelling program, I decided that I needed to find ways to contextualize the students' spelling activities to make them more authentic and meaningful. I wanted to incorporate strategies, activities, and lessons to compliment the existing program. I would have to continue to use the lists provided; however I could change my approach for the way the students viewed and studied spelling at school and home. I wanted to make changes to meet the following goals for

spelling instruction: 1) to transfer the spelling words to their daily writing experiences, 2) to connect the spelling words in context with the literature selections from the series, 3) to provide worthwhile activities to supplement or replace the lessons in the current spelling program and, finally, 4) to make spelling meaningful to the students. I felt it was important for students to view the spelling lists as a way to enhance their writing.

My first step in accomplishing my goals was to evaluate my current method of teaching spelling. The first component of my curriculum I chose to evaluate was the way I utilized the creative writing time. The students spent this time writing stories on a given topic or a topic of their choice. The students composed a first draft and then handed it in for me to correct and hand back for rewriting. If time allowed I met with the students and together we proofread for spelling, capitalization, and punctuation errors. The students took the story and copied it over correcting their mistakes. They handed the final copy in for a grade. I spent very little time teaching spelling patterns or introducing resources to help the students; rather the time was spent pointing out errors. This was the first area of teaching I felt needed changing.

Another writing activity was journal writing. I used journal time as a filler or extra writing time. The students could write in their journals when they completed other work or when we had an extra minute to spare. It was not used daily and I didn't have high expectations for this type of writing. In fact I discovered that many of my students drew pictures, wrote family and friends' names, or scribbled in their journals. They didn't use the journals for expressing ideas and learning

about writing. Unfortunately, my students were fulfilling my low expectations of journal writing. In addition to making changes in my creative writing time, I also chose to focus my efforts on creating a higher quality journal writing time. I felt that by changing these two areas of my writing curriculum along with using more direct instruction of spelling strategies, I could assist my students in becoming more conventional spellers.

I decided to focus on implementing teaching strategies and methods into specific areas of my spelling and writing curriculum as well as making changes in the classroom environment to create a successful program. My next step in accomplishing my goals was to review current articles and research effective methods for teaching spelling within writing experiences.

### What the Literature Has to Say about Spelling Instruction

There are several different views about spelling instruction. I decided to narrow my focus on just a few in order to find specific methods to compliment my existing program. The traditional approach proved to be quite similar to the textbook program I was currently using and focused on lists with patterns. I chose to research the developmental stages of spelling and discovered that children's language development and learning to spell are similar processes. Also because writing is an essential part of spelling I discovered methods on integrating spelling and writing through writer's workshop.

#### Traditional Approach to Spelling

The primary goal of a traditional, textbook spelling program, similar to the one I was expected to use, is that students learn to spell a collection of words,

typically 10-20 a week (Wilde, 1990). In many traditional spelling programs the words are grouped according to spelling patterns, so that a single lesson may focus on ways to spell the vowel sound found in “day” or “rain”. “An approach to spelling that helps children see that most words fit categories – some large, some small – will encourage them to make sense of the system” (Johnston, 2001, p. 377). Rules that provide generalizations about these spellings are presented as an aid to remembering the words and as a strategy to apply to unknown words. The belief behind these procedures is that familiarity with a pattern enables children to be able to spell other words with the same pattern (Gillet & Gentry, 1993). Although the traditional program acknowledges the importance of using patterns in spelling lists, usually only written practice exercises aimed at rote memorization are included. These low-level exercises often involve a great deal of tedious practice requiring very little thinking (Heald-Taylor, 1998) and the focus is often on handwriting, proofreading skills, copying, and dictionary skills. Exercises such as these are not used in context with other writing or reading activities; thus they seem to be meaningless to the children. Rote-practice workbooks do not involve self-discovery and the proofreading exercises are often dull and not related to children’s own writing (Bartch, 1992). Engaging in meaningless activities such as copying spelling words does not allow children to think and learn about words through segmenting sounds and taking risks (Gentry, 1987). In traditional spelling programs teachers are simply givers of information and the students are passively learning through memorization, imitation, and rote learning (Heald-Taylor, 1998). Emphasis is

placed on the product of correct spelling not on the process of learning to spell. Teachers circle spelling errors and expect all errors to be corrected. This model of spelling, which relies heavily on rote memorization, does not fit with all children's knowledge about how words are built and fails in the long term. Words that students memorize for the test on Friday may already be forgotten on Monday. Additionally, when children are expected to deal with words that are at a level that is too advanced, the children may become confused about spelling strategies which may result in bad habits (Schlagal & Schlagal, 1992).

### Alternative Approaches to Spelling

In order to meet my goals for teaching spelling I researched alternative views about how spelling is learned. Learning to spell is similar to learning to speak (Gentry & Gillet, 1993). Both are developmental processes that involve immersion in a particular environment. When learning to talk, children must hear language and interact with others through imitating and inventing (Lindfors, 1991). A child will not learn language unless he or she is in a language environment (Lindfors, 1991). "Children learn to speak by speaking, making mistakes and refining their language as they communicate. So they learn how to spell by writing, inventing spellings, and refining their understanding of print" (Gentry, 1987, p. 27). Spelling is a tool for writing; therefore learning to spell conventionally might not occur as effectively if it is not in an environment filled with writing and reading experiences. The purpose of learning to spell is so that writing may become easier for the writer and more easily read by the reader (Gentry & Gillet, 1993). Therefore, the logical place for spelling instruction is

within the writing program. Wilde explains: "Writing and spelling develop together; learning to spell is a lifetime process" (1999, p. 173). Students can test their knowledge of how words are spelled when they are actually spelling them (Wilde, 1990). This occurs when children are writing. Frequent, regular writing for authentic purposes is crucial to learning to spell.

### Spelling and writer's workshop.

Donald Graves (1994) offers several guidelines for successful implementation of writing in a workshop approach. He states that children should have "ownership" of their writing by allowing them to select their own topics. Children should be taught how to use the writing cycle which includes prepare, write, revise, edit, and publish. Teachers need to respond to the content of the writing before emphasizing errors for form, including spelling. "We must never lose our focus on what writing is for – communication" (Graves, p. 256). Invented spelling plays a large part of the writing process and should be encouraged. It is the spellings children create before they know the full conventional spelling of a word. Inventive spelling allows children to begin to make meaning before they know how to actually spell a word (Graves, 1994). They are also beginning to edit at their own developmental level. Another component of writer's workshop includes encouraging collaboration among peers. Children can learn a great deal from each other by talking to one another about their writing and spelling. They help one another with topic ideas, spelling, punctuation and sentence structure. Teachers need to emphasize the importance of children's writing by providing real outcomes for it. Some examples include displaying the work, publishing it,

and allowing for sharing time. By participating in writer's workshop where writing is viewed as an exciting, purposeful activity, children can try out their knowledge of words through invented spelling and take risks in a supportive environment.

### Spelling development.

Through engaging writing activities students develop through the stages of spelling at their own pace while feeling supported by the teacher and their peers. According to Wilde (1990), the usual view of spelling is based on the product: is the spelling right or wrong? This notion of spelling is gradually being replaced by an emphasis on the process of spelling. A close look at children's spelling processes helps us understand why children produce particular spellings (Wilde, 1990). "Learning to spell should ultimately be as natural, unconscious, effortless, and pleasant as learning to speak" (Wilde, 1990, p. 287-288). Children begin to acquire information about spelling and writing long before they enter school. They learn this through the experiences with print they encounter or see adults use, such as with books, letter writing, grocery lists, magazines, computer, telephone messages and other day-to-day kinds of writing (Gentry & Gillet, 1993). Children begin their discovery process through experimentation which involves imitation and invention. The earliest writing attempts consist of scribbles, but as children continue to be read to and shown writing they discover other conventions of print. Eventually they learn that instead of scribbles, the marks on paper are actually letters. Familiarity with the developmental process involved in spelling and understanding invented spelling can assist teachers in planning activities to implement into their spelling curriculum. By observing children's



attempts, teachers can assess what knowledge a child is securely using and make decisions to guide instruction (Fresch, 2001). If teachers are familiar with the stages of writing and spelling development they can recognize the small steps of progress that children make and identify what is needed to nudge them forward and scaffold their progress.

### Five stages of invented spelling.

The earliest level of invented spelling development is called the precommunicative stage. In this stage, the inventive speller constructs a written message that only he/she can “read” directly after it is written. This message might mean something completely different when the child reads it at another time. The message consists of a string of letters that have no letter-sound correspondence. For example a student might write the word monster as ewsp. In the next stage of spelling development, semiphonetic, the writer begins to recognize and represent sounds of words with the letters they write. Often they use only consonants and represent beginning and/or ending sounds of words, ds for the word dress. Phonetic spelling is the next stage of development. Phonetic spellers spell what they hear, for example egl for eagle. They assign letters to their writing on the basis of sound only, unaware of letter sequence or other conventions of traditional spelling. In the transitional stage, the speller begins to spell words with increasingly greater accuracy. They are beginning to recognize and use uncommon spelling patterns and apply them to unknown words. They begin to use the visual features of words instead of depending solely on the way they sound, for example bottum for bottom. Conventional spellers continue to

master alternative spelling patterns and words with irregular spellings. They have accumulated a large number of learned words and can regularly use them when writing (Gentry, 1987 & Gentry & Gillet, 1993).

### My Changes Toward a Successful Spelling Program

I chose to implement components from various approaches to fit into the current program I was using, as well as meet the expectations of my school district. I was especially interested in the writer's workshop approach and how it fit in with spelling.

#### Writer's Workshop

Upon researching the benefits of writer's workshop I transformed my creative writing time into a writer's workshop. I implemented several of the guidelines suggested by Donald Graves in his popular book A Fresh Look at Writing, 1994. I scheduled a 45-minute writer's workshop component three times a week. I taught the students how to prepare, write, revise, edit, and publish their writing. The students selected their own topics, and collaborated with their peers throughout the writing process. I taught mini lessons targeting the strategies for students to implement when they are writing on their own. I often used the students' writing (with their permission) as examples when conducting mini lessons. When students needed help with spelling in their drafts they would use a post-it note to mark the spot or circle the word with which they needed help. Then they brought their writing to the large group the next day for a mini lesson. The class would help spell the necessary word using strategies that had been reinforced throughout the year, such as looking at what was written to decide if it

looked right and identifying letter sounds that were missing or added. Other strategies included saying the word slowly to break it into syllables, identifying word parts, suffixes, and prefixes, and consulting other words with similar patterns. The students also utilized the resources in the room such as word walls, word charts, and dictionaries, as well as posters in the hallway, trade books, and stories from the reading series. Through mini-lessons I used the students' writing to highlight the word solving strategies, previously mentioned, as well as particular spelling patterns (e.g., -ite, -ight), vowel phonograms (e.g., -ea, -ai), digraphs (e.g., th, wh), and consonant blends (e.g., bl-, tr-). I felt it was meaningful to use the students' writing to teach phonetic skills and spelling strategies.

### Journal Writing

In an effort to make journal writing more meaningful to the students I scheduled daily journal writing activities. As the students arrived in the morning they wrote in their journals about the topic that I provided on the board and as the year went on the students could either choose the provided topic or write on an appropriate topic of their choice. At first I let students volunteer to share what they wrote. I did not emphasize correct spelling or mechanics, but rather focused solely on content. As the year went on, when I noticed that many of the students were not spelling previous spelling words or words listed on the class word wall with conventional spellings, I became concerned that they might be learning inaccurate spelling of words and developing poor habits. For example, a common misspelling was writing the word they as thay. Journals were not used for grading

purposes, but I decided that it was important for the students to develop good habits when they write, no matter what the purpose of the writing. When teachers accept invented spellings even for high-frequency words, students may not take writing seriously (Routman, 1993). As a result, I chose to have a short editing time at the end of journal writing in which the students were expected to reread their own journal entry to find incorrect spellings. They were encouraged to try to use the word wall or their personal word dictionary to correct the mistakes. Gradually the students used the word wall and word dictionaries while they wrote, instead of waiting until after the piece was completed. I saw improvement in the quality of the spelling in the students' journals.

### Word Study

I felt that by changing two areas of my writing curriculum, writer's workshop and journal writing, I was well on the way to helping my students see a purpose for correct spelling. However, for many students active participation in writer's workshop, other writing activities, and a traditional spelling program is not enough and they need further explicit spelling instruction. Teachers need to take a more active role in promoting spelling growth (Wilde, 1990). Explicit spelling instruction can take place in "word study" activities where students sort and classify words according to phonetic, visual, and meaning principles (Heald-Taylor, 1998). Word study involves instructional activities that the teacher designs to support students' spelling development (Pinnell & Fountas, 1998). In word study spelling, phonics, and vocabulary instruction are integrated.

Processes and strategies for examining and thinking about words are taught, and

students apply this knowledge to new words they encounter in reading (Bear & Templeton, 1998). Word study becomes useful and instructive when it is based on students' levels of development and when appropriate words and patterns are explored through interesting and engaging activities (Bear & Templeton, 1998). Word study focuses attention to words and word elements to help students become successful readers and writers (Pinnell & Fountas, 1998). Studying words with visual structures, such as consonant blends, digraphs, and long and short vowel patterns helps students make phonetic and visual connections. Understanding how prefixes, suffixes, homophones, and affixes effect the meanings of words can also help students make phonetic, visual, and semantic connections. There are many different instructional contexts in which word study experiences can take place. In addition to the spelling activities suggested in my reading manual, I also utilized other methods in my classroom to provide ample opportunities for my students learn spelling strategies and work with words.

I utilized and adapted several activities and lessons from Word Matters by Pinnell and Fountas (1998) and Patricia Cunningham's book Making Words (1992). One activity is making words out of a given set of letters. In this activity the students were able to manipulate their own set of letters to make as many 2-letter, 3-letter, 4-letter and 5-letter words as they could. Once the students created their lists, the words were put on index cards and sorted in a variety of ways, such as by spelling pattern (-at) and beginning blends (flat, floor). The students were able to see relationships and patterns with the words as they were making them with their letters. The index cards were placed in centers for further

sorting activities. Sorting words is a mind-stretching activity and helps children to attend to sound and letter patterns and move beyond simple letter-sound correspondence (Pinnell and Fountas, 1998). It also provides a hands-on way to study words (Fresch & Wheaton, 1997). Word sorting can be conducted in large groups and small groups. I taught word sorting lessons with the whole class using reading and science vocabulary words, spelling words, and word wall words. I also used this activity with small guided reading groups. Giving students all of the letters of the alphabet can vary the word making activity. The students build words in a variety of categories. My students built words that begin or end with a particular sound, words with certain phonograms, blends, or digraphs, homophones, compound words, rhyming words, color words, animal names, words with silent letters, and words related to the science theme. Through word sorting “students are actively engaged in problem solving, constructing knowledge as they discover complex relationships within and between words, and taking greater responsibility for their own learning” (Zutell, 1996, p. 107).

Another way to extend word study is through lessons and practice of strategies and techniques to help solve unknown words (Pinnell and Fountas, 1998). Students were encouraged and prompted to use effective strategies when spelling words. In addition to just recognizing patterns in word making and sorting activities, I wanted my students apply this knowledge to spelling an unknown word. For example, most of the second graders were familiar with how to spell the word day. When they were trying to spell staying I had them think of the phonogram -ay and apply it to the word staying. Pinnell and Fountas include a

list of effective strategies for solving words. I adapted this into my classroom by having the students brainstorm a list of things they could do when trying to spell a word. We posted the list in the classroom and referred to it often. Some of the strategies included sound the word out, think about how the word looks, try several ways on scratch paper, use rhyming words, break the word into parts, use the classroom walls and charts, and use dictionaries or other books.

### Changes in the Classroom Environment

The type of environment that is provided for students is crucial to the development of spelling and writing abilities. Just as learning to speak requires an environment filled with oral language opportunities (Lindfors, 1991), learning to spell requires an environment filled with print and writing opportunities. One key element of a literacy environment is that students read often and are exposed to a variety of literature. Teachers need to read to students to model good reading practices (Routman, 1994). Opportunities for students to participate in reading and writing should occur throughout the school day. Materials for writing experiences need to be easy to access in order to encourage writing (O'Flahavan & Blassberg, 1992). The classroom should have a variety of resources available for students to find spellings of words that they may want to use in their writing, such as on labels, word charts, word walls, dictionaries, glossaries, books, and student-created dictionaries.

#### Labels.

Fountas and Pinnell (1998) suggest labeling various things in the classroom for children to use as resources in their own writing. In my classroom I

labeled the centers, furniture, windows, door, sink, overhead projector, computer, clock, and various supplies such as the stapler, tape, scissors, and markers. I labeled the shelves and baskets where certain books, manipulatives, folders, journals, and other supplies were located. This not only assisted students in spelling and recognizing the words, but also in returning materials to their proper locations.

### Word Charts.

In my classroom I posted numerous word charts for a variety of purposes. As a class we created word lists and word webs from our spelling lists that had a common pattern. We also created and posted lists of homophones, words from our science units, word families, adjectives, nouns, verbs and so on. Even after a lesson was complete, the children knew that the list was not. They were encouraged to try and locate additional words in books and other resources to add to our lists.

### Word Wall.

My classroom has always had a word wall featuring high frequency words. Every morning I introduced the word of the day, which would become a word wall word. We identified the word and noticed its characteristics, such as if it was a noun, verb, or adjective, whether it had a suffix or prefix, or whether it had a familiar phonogram. Students would volunteer to use the word in a sentence. At the end of the week I added the five words from the week to the word wall. The students then added the words to their personal word books. During the week we played games to help the students to remember the words and use the word



wall. Some of the activities included having them guess a word based on clues, write sentences with the word-wall words, and play wordo (similar to Bingo).

Cunningham (1995) provides further information about word walls including several useful classroom activities.

### Other Resources.

In addition to providing instruction and immersion in classroom print, I provided a variety of book resources. In the classroom the students had easy access to picture dictionaries and word dictionaries for developing readers. In their desks they had personal word books with alphabetized pages to which the students added words. Also they kept a spelling journal which featured the spelling pattern that they had for the weekly list and added additional words they came across containing the same pattern. I encouraged the students to use the glossaries in their reading and math textbooks. Alphabet books, poetry books, and tongue twister books lined the shelves in the library corner for the students to use to help them with their writing.

### Spelling Center.

During center time the students could choose from a variety of literacy centers. At the spelling center there were materials for the children to practice their spelling words. The center contained magnetic letters, letter stamps, word cards for sorting, individual dry erase boards to play Hang-man with spelling words, and spelling words from previous and current lists. Four students were allowed at the center and could participate in the activities without guidance from the teacher.

## Assessment and Results

In order to document the impact the additional spelling and word study activities, writer's workshop and journal writing had on their written work, I monitored the students' use of spelling words and familiar spelling patterns in their daily writing. I studied the students' rough drafts and edited versions of stories that they wrote for writer's workshop, as well as the journal entries the students created. I listed the words that students had difficulty with throughout the year and noticed a decline in the number of misspelled sight words and spelling words. I kept track of the spelling patterns that were introduced in the reading series and planned review lessons when the students had difficulties. Certain phonograms such as -ight, -aught, and -ought were particularly difficult for the children to remember. We reviewed these often and referred to posters and charts in the classroom when necessary.

The additional word study activities, spelling strategies, and basal lessons provided my students with a practical way to study and learn the weekly spelling words. The activities enabled the students to use conventional spelling more effectively and efficiently in their daily work; for example by teaching the patterns and providing wall charts for resources, they could quickly refer to the chart on the wall to assist when spelling a word. Most of the students recognized connections between familiar spelling words and patterns and unfamiliar words. They had numerous resources to aid them when writing and students became more confident about helping one another with spelling. Students often helped others by reminding them that a word was a spelling word and to look in their

spelling journal. Sometimes they directed their peers to look on the word charts or word wall. As students began to utilize the spelling resources throughout the room, their attitudes about writing seemed to improve. They often requested to have writer's workshop on days that it was not scheduled. During center time the students were allowed to choose between eight different centers. Many of the students were so enthusiastic about the writer's workshop stories they were working on, that they chose to write instead of go to a center.

The writer's workshop conferences with students provided tell-tale signs that they were improving their spelling within their writing. There were far fewer spelling errors in the students' rough drafts, proving to me that the children were making an effort to proof and edit while drafting a story, rather than waiting for a conference with me at the end. Their journals provided indication of improvements as well. They went from pictures and lists to interesting stories, descriptions, and perceptions. The earlier dated entries contained many errors of common sight words, former spelling words, and simple word family patterns, but the entries toward the end of the year showed dramatic improvement in all of these areas.

### Two Students' Successes

There were several spelling success stories in my classroom. Many of my students went from using invented spelling for most words to using it for only difficult words. Their confidence improved by recognizing and utilizing resources. There were numerous opportunities to practice spelling and improve

the quality of writing. Upon completion of second grade most were well on their way to becoming conventional spellers.

The students in my second grade enjoyed writing and gained confidence about their abilities as conventional spellers. Two students, in particular, both at various stages in their spelling development, were motivated about writing and excited to share with others. They both made huge strides throughout the school year.

### John's Progress

*I like playing with my frends (friends) at reeses (recess). My frst (first) day of Shcool (school) was fun. My favret (favorite) subjet (subject) in shcool (school) is math.*

The example is taken at the beginning of second grade from John's story about starting school. John came into second grade confident in his abilities as a reader, writer, and speller. He showed great interest in writing creative stories. He wasn't afraid to make mistakes on rough drafts. When asked if he noticed any spelling errors on his drafts at the beginning of the year, John usually said "No" and was surprised to discover that there were some. He was always very confident that the stories would be interesting and well received by the class. He studied each night at home for Friday's spelling test and usually did quite well. On his daily work and on writer's workshop stories that he completed, however he didn't transfer his knowledge of the weekly spelling words. He was able to spell many basic sight words accurately, added the inflectional ending -ing fairly consistently, and represented most consonant sounds in a word when using

invented spelling. He used some correct blends, like fr- in his word friends. He also used some digraphs correctly, -th in the word math, and he was beginning to use an e at the end of a word to make the middle vowel sound long. He recognized that there are “silent” letters in words and attempted to place them correctly, such as putting an h in his spelling of shcool. According to the developmental stages described by Gentry and Gillett (1993), John was in the early transitional stage of spelling. He was not only writing the sounds that he heard in words but also beginning to use his knowledge of how the word looks to help him spell. Transitional spellers such as John show evidence of using a visual strategy, as they move from phonological to visual spelling (Gentry and Gillett, 1993).

At mid-year, John continued to show similar spelling habits. He continued to use invented spelling even for words we had previously had on a spelling list. For example, he spelled cream as creme. He was beginning to take notice of some of the rules for conventional spelling. He was making progress in reading basic sight words, but not in spelling them. He didn't refer to the word wall when writing at all, such as writing friend for friend, cum for come, and becus for because. He was beginning to recognize that there are homophones, but continued to be unaware of which form to use; wood for would. His creative stories were beginning to be shorter in length and he was losing interest in writing. He wrote very short stories and it seemed that his goal was to get his work done quickly. I began to feel frustrated, because John's enthusiasm for writing was diminishing. I knew that he was also frustrated with writing. When he

was in the editing stage of writing, he didn't want to share his story, because he was afraid he would have too many mistakes. John was still in the early phases of the transitional stage of spelling and not progressing as rapidly as I had hoped he would.

By the middle of the second semester, I had begun using the word study activities and lessons and my classroom was beginning to be full of word charts and lists. I had used numerous lessons and activities to teach students to recognize patterns in words, use the word wall, and to connect spelling with writing and reading more effectively. John was beginning to show signs that the lessons were effective. Eventually, he used the word wall without reminders and corrected his own mistakes in writing sight words. For example, after we had the ending -ould in a spelling list and the students participated in activities and lessons to practice the ending, John was using the word charts and word wall to correctly spell the words could, should, and would in his daily writing. In writer's workshop his editing was improving. I would ask him to find the words he thought were spelled wrong and try to change them. This encouraged him to be more responsible and to use the resources around the room. With time, he did this step in his editing without being reminded. His stories became longer in length and his enthusiasm for creative writing slowly returned.

### Shelly's Progress

*tis (This) spmrg (spring) i (I) wat (went) to fvezit (visit) my grdpus (grandpa's)  
houns (house) i (I) wt (went) to the ymca (YMCA) and swd (swam) and i (I) weat*

*(went) to speep (sleep) i (I) wock (woke) up and i (I) stadt (stayed) antald (all night)*

As in any class of diverse learners, I had students who began the year as below average readers. Shelly was able to recognize some sight words and spell them correctly. Her spelling was below the average of my second grade students at the beginning of the year. Her test scores on the weekly spelling tests were very low, even though her parents assured me that she studied at home. Shelly was very enthusiastic about learning and was always willing to try her best. She enjoyed writing in her journal each day and often chose to do this activity during center time. She wrote very slowly and I thought she was trying to listen for sounds and write them; however often her words included some random letters that weren't representative of sounds. In one story she wrote bsrshba for birthday. She used invented spelling to write most words. Many consonant sounds were not represented in her spelling attempts and she didn't always include a vowel in each word, such as in smng for snowman. She often included extra letters in her spelling that didn't have a sound represented in the word, indicating that she knew there should be more letters in the word. I found Shelly's developmental spelling stage to be at the early phonetic stage.

By the middle of the year Shelly's spelling of sight words was improving, but continued to be very inconsistent. She was beginning to use blends and digraphs but didn't use any spelling patterns that were presented in the weekly spelling lists. She spelled cus for comes, sisr for sister and tax for takes. Her vowel usage improved slightly as she was starting to represent short and long

vowel sounds as in sid for side. She didn't use the word wall at all to help with spelling. She didn't use correct vowel combinations or rules for long vowels such as putting an e at the end of the word to make the vowel long. She had difficulty identifying which vowel to use to represent a sound; slid for sled and thin for then. Shelly was still in the early phonetic stage, and her spelling was representative of the letter-name stage of phonetic spelling (Temple, Nathan, Temple, & Burris, 1982).

By the end of the year, Shelly had a higher sight word vocabulary, both in reading and in spelling. She continued to write slowly, but she was using the resources in the classroom. Shelly's learning style was very visual and therefore she relied heavily on her personal dictionary, the classroom charts, and the word wall to aid her writing. A strategy that Shelly applied when writing was visualizing a word before spelling it. Instead of simply copying the needed word from the word wall or dictionary, I encouraged the students to look at the word, close their eyes and visualize it in their mind before writing it down. According to Gentry & Gillett (1993), good spellers visualize words. This requires the ability to store and retrieve the visual form of a word in the brain. I was hopeful that by using this strategy, Shelly's visual memory capacity could be strengthened to assist her with spelling. During writer's workshop Shelly was beginning to proofread for errors before requesting an editing conference. She was also starting to recognize and use spelling patterns from the weekly spelling activities in her daily writing. In the following example Shelly has remembered to use the chart in the



room with the ay spelling phonogram and the word wall for the words friends, have and fun.

*Sometimes (Sometimes) wen (when) it colde (cold) I stay inside I play mople (Monopoly) with my friends and I have fun.*

### Conclusion

At the beginning of the school year when my second grade students were not progressing to conventional spelling at the rate I had expected. I realized there was something lacking in my current spelling instruction program. I saw a need for more than spelling lists and activities not related to actual writing. I thought the spelling activities from the reading series would address that need since the lists were connected to the words in the basal stories. But the students were not making connections between the lists and their own writing. After researching writing and writer's workshop, spelling strategies, activities for teaching and practicing spelling, and spelling development I implemented several components into my existing second grade curriculum. I created a more successful writer's workshop by connecting the students' writing to the lessons on phonics and spelling strategies. I placed more emphasis on daily journal writing in my classroom and encouraged students to proofread and edit while writing. I taught word building lessons and created centers and practice opportunities for the students to work with words. The students learned to use the classroom resources independently to become more successful spellers. Through the use of mini-lessons and explicit teaching of spelling strategies the students made definite steps toward becoming conventional spellers.

Next year, I plan to continue providing my students with many opportunities to read and write daily to practice their knowledge and experiment with spelling. By connecting spelling with other areas of the curriculum my students will find it meaningful as well as enjoyable. I will continue the use of my school district's chosen basal spelling program, but I will implement a variety of worthwhile activities to nudge my students forward in their spelling development.

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