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## Integrating Spelling Instruction in a First-Grade Balanced Literacy Classroom

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## Integrating Spelling Instruction in a First-Grade Balanced Literacy Classroom

### Abstract

This article describes how one teacher integrated some explicit spelling instruction in her first-grade balanced literacy classroom. The purpose for this article is to give an overview of the latest research concerning issues that affect spelling instruction and describe activities that can be used to teach children strategies for effective word study. The spelling program described in this article provided students with a purposeful way to study words and provided them with authentic writing experiences. The conclusion states a need for a balance between authentic reading and writing and purposeful word study.

Integrating Spelling Instruction in a First-Grade  
Balanced Literacy Classroom

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 Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

Michele Smith

October, 1999

This Research Paper by: Michele Smith

Titled: Integrating Spelling Instruction in a  
First-Grade Balanced Literacy Classroom

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

Oct. 20, 1999  
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Penny L. Beed  

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Graduate Faculty Reader

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Rick C. Traw  

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Head, Department of Curriculum  
And Instruction

October 16, 1999

Editors  
The Reading Teacher  
International Reading Association  
PO Box 8139  
Newark, DE 19714-8139, USA

Dear Editors,

Enclosed please find five copies of the manuscript "Integrating Spelling Instruction in a First-Grade Balanced Literacy Classroom", which I am requesting you consider for publication in The Reading Teacher. This manuscript is an original work and has not been simultaneously submitted to any other publication outlet.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

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Running Head: Integrating Spelling Instruction

Integrating Spelling Instruction in a First-Grade Balanced  
Literacy Classroom

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This article describes how one teacher integrated some explicit spelling instruction in her first-grade balanced literacy classroom. The purpose for this article is to give an overview of the latest research concerning issues that affect spelling instruction and describe activities that can be used to teach children strategies for effective word study. The spelling program described in this article provided students with a purposeful way to study words and provided them with authentic writing experiences. The conclusion states a need for a balance between authentic reading and writing and purposeful word study.

Word Count: 5,638

Submitted for consideration for The Reading Teacher

October 16, 1999

Integrating Spelling Instruction in a First-Grade Balanced  
Literacy Classroom

Dear Mrs. Smith,

How aer (are) you? Did you hav (have) fan (fun) at  
the skaeting (skating) parte (party)? My litl (little)  
bruthr (brother) fell dowyn (down) tow (two) tims (times).  
Wy (we) mit (might) git (get) to go ovre (over) to my  
gramas (grandma's) hos (house). It will tak (take) us two  
owres (hours) to deriv (drive) thar (there). My bruthr  
(brother) wil (will) kom (come) wiht (with) us to (too).

Love,

Kaela

In this letter, the child has done a good job representing most or all of the sounds in her words with her spelling. However, it is apparent that she has not learned conventional spellings for many of the words basic to the writing vocabulary of first-grade students (e.g., have, will, and get). Her spelling raises an interesting question: Is explicit spelling instruction needed and when should it begin? In this article, I will describe the spelling program that I implemented in my first-grade classroom this past year and discuss the effects this program had on my students' writing. I will conclude with

my thoughts about the need for explicit spelling instruction in first-grade classrooms. I begin by explaining why the need for spelling instruction became an issue in my classroom.

#### Why A Need For Spelling Instruction

For many years, I have struggled with the issue of whether or not formalized spelling instruction belongs in the first-grade classroom. In recent years, I have become a believer in the value of children's use of developmental spelling, which I call "first-grade" spelling. By this I mean that children write the sounds they hear when trying to spell a word on their own. One of the most difficult challenges when teaching beginning writers to write is to help them see themselves as people who communicate through writing. When asked to write, students often respond by saying, "But I don't know how to spell." I tell them that it is okay for first-graders to just write the sounds they hear and to do the best they can. As we learn more about the English language, we will be able to spell words like adults. But for now, we will use our first-grade spelling.

In the past, students were involved in daily writing experiences in my classroom. My goal was to create an environment that was "rich with print" so I could immerse my students in the language processes (Fountas & Pinnell,



1996; Morrow, Tracey, Woo, & Pressley, 1999; Wilde, 1992). Learning centers, most of which were devoted to literacy, were set up around the room. The walls were covered with numerous charts, including calendars, weather charts, helper charts, letter charts, and many other charts with functional information. Charts and webs were created through shared writing for many topics in science and social studies. These charts were used daily by the students during their independent writing time. The charts provided a model for writing from which the children could refer to when writing on their own.

My classroom appeared to have all the components of a balanced literacy program: Reading aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, shared writing, independent writing, and interactive writing (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Mooney, 1990; Routman, 1994). Children wrote daily and in many different forms. Writing experiences included personal journal entries, letters to friends and family, writing about topics in science and social studies, and responding to literature. These authentic writing experiences provided the students with a real reason to write: to communicate with others.

Shared writing and interactive writing provided students with a model for writing. Shared writing is

writing that the teacher and student work on together. It may involve the student dictating what he/she would like to write to the teacher. Interactive writing is much the same as shared writing, except in interactive writing the student actually steps in and does part of the writing when he or she is able to (Button, Johnson, & Furgerson, 1996). Students participated in interactive writing daily when we shared news about the day and wrote the sentences together on chart paper (e.g., "Today is sunny and warm. We will go on our picnic today.").

However, even though my students were involved in many writing experiences, I noticed many of my students were often misspelling commonly used words in their writing (e.g., like, from, here). I began to think that they should learn to use conventional spellings for these commonly used words in order for them to take writing seriously. Routman (1993) states that "invented spelling was never meant to be 'anything goes'." (p.37) Students need to be held accountable for basic standards so they can take pride in their work. When teachers accept invented spellings even for high-frequency words, students usually do not take writing seriously (Routman, 1993). Lisa Delpit (1991) advocates that educators need to teach children rather than to teach a curriculum. Delpit states, "Some

children will need to learn explicitly certain strategies or conventions; some children will not need that because they've gotten it through the discourse that they learned in their homes" (Teale, 1991, p.544). This statement is noticeably apparent at the school in which I teach, as many of the students have their first experiences with text when they enter school. I began to reflect about my literacy instruction. I wondered what kind of changes in instruction would improve my students spelling in their daily writing.

#### My Goals For A Spelling Program

I wanted a spelling program that would meet the following goals for my spelling instruction: 1) to provide students with spelling instruction that presents words in context, 2) to make spelling meaningful to the students, 3) to help the students begin to use some conventional spellings as well as first-grade spelling, and finally, 4) to improve the self-esteem of students through a developing awareness of themselves as writers.

Sandra Wilde's (1992) writing on integrating spelling instruction in a whole-language classroom provided some insight into the connection between my existing classroom reading/writing instruction and my students' spelling needs. Wilde states that the goal of a spelling curriculum

should be to create independent, competent writers, with an emphasis on independent. "Allowing children the freedom to write independently is the basic principle underlying the use of invented spelling in the classroom." (Wilde, 1992, p.57) Learning to spell is a process that is learned little by little and needs to be individualized. Wilde describes how to create a classroom climate that supports spelling. One important component of a good spelling curriculum is daily reading and writing. This was a component that was already in place in my classroom.

In her writing, Wilde addresses three concerns that I had about spelling: 1) the unwillingness of some children to use first-grade spelling, 2) how to help children begin to use conventional spelling, and 3) how to communicate to parents about spelling.

#### Encouraging First-Grade Spelling

Wilde suggests that the best way to help children begin to use first-grade spelling is to help them see the purpose for it. She recommends that teachers do not tell children how to spell words or whether words are spelled correctly. She suggests that it is more important to help them develop their own resources in this area. Wilde (1992) states, "Most children are fairly quick to accept the value of inventive spelling when they see how it

increases their independence." (p. 63) Several researchers have discussed the importance of encouraging inventive spelling in the classroom (Gentry & Gillet, 1993; Graves, 1994; Johnston, 1997; Routman, 1994; Wilde, 1992). "When children invent the spelling of a word, they practice the representation process, analyze the words, and become more expert and flexible in thinking about the relationships between sound and print, and print and sound. When they use only a sight-word representation method, their development is slower and it may be more difficult to read the writing later because it is written unconventionally and has little relationship between print and sound."

(Johnston, 1997, p.117) Inventive spelling allows children to use what they know to make meaning before they actually know how to spell a word (Graves, 1994; Johnston, 1997).

#### Transition to Conventional Spelling

Helping children learn how to begin to use conventional spellings is most easily accomplished by providing them with authentic writing experiences. Wilde (1992) states "As writers develop their sense of audience they can learn to see the real importance of conventional spelling and punctuation, not to please the teacher or some standard, but to make their writing more readable." (p.64) According to Carol Avery (1993), conventional spelling

develops when children are allowed time every day to write in a classroom that is filled with language. "Spelling in the classroom, then, assumes the same function it has in real life: to communicate clearly." (Gentry & Gillet, 1993, p.60)

### Communicating With Parents

Wilde suggests using the analogy of how children learned to talk when communicating with parents. We accept mistakes in oral language development because we realize that children learn to talk through trial and error. "If we can help parents see that written language works the same way, they can take part in celebrating that growth as well." (Wilde, 1992, p.66) Richard Gentry (1987), another expert on children's spelling development, also compares learning to spell with learning to talk. "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." (P.27) Wilde sums up the importance of learning to spell: "Writing and spelling develop together; learning to spell is a lifetime process." (1999, p.173) With a better understanding of these three concerns, I began to search for an effective approach for teaching spelling.

### Approaches to Teaching Spelling

Wilde discusses two approaches to teaching spelling that most teachers use: 1) a traditional spelling curriculum or some adaptation of it or 2) no formal spelling instruction.

#### Traditional Instruction

In a traditional spelling curriculum, teachers often use textbooks with lists of words to be learned each week. Some teachers, who have eliminated spelling books, create alternate word lists based on words drawn from thematic units or from words students use in their own writing. Wilde suggests that this is a step in the right direction, although a problem with using word lists is they are usually isolated from reading and writing. Some children may have difficulties learning how to spell using a traditional approach to spelling because this approach is not centered within the context of reading and writing. Children will experience difficulties seeing spelling as a purposeful activity. Research has indicated that in order for weekly spelling lists to be effective, the words on the spelling lists need to have meaning for the students and be useful to them in their writing (Graves, 1994; Routman, 1994). Gentry sums it up when he says students with good visual memories may find spelling lists helpful. However,

he states, "When spelling is not taught socially in interaction with reading, writing, and other language arts, most kids will see no purpose or use for it... For these kids, a ready-made spelling curriculum not related to their personal experience is boring. In this context, many will not learn to spell." (1987, p.46)

### No Formal Spelling Instruction

Many teachers have eliminated spelling as a formal subject altogether. These teachers most likely are dissatisfied with the traditional approach and believe that children will pick up spelling on their own through reading and writing. Routman (1994) states four principles of the whole language view of spelling: Spelling should facilitate communication of written language, not limit it; spelling is developmental; the need for standard spelling should be kept in proper perspective; there should be no special spelling curriculum or regular lesson sequences (p.238). Wilde suggests that we need to think about what children need to know about spelling and how are they likely to learn it in the context of writing. Bear and Templeton (1998) sum up the characteristics necessary for quality spelling instruction: "To read and write words appropriately and fluently and to appreciate fully how words work in context, instruction must balance authentic



reading and writing with purposeful word study." (p.223)  
Spelling instruction needs to provide opportunities to learn and support for learning with appropriate evaluation.

My decision to implement some explicit instruction in spelling was based on the advice from these spelling experts (Avery, 1993; Bear & Templeton, 1998; Gentry, 1987; Gentry & Gillet, 1993; Johnston, 1997; Routman, 1994; Wilde, 1992, 1999). In the following section, I will describe the spelling program that I implemented in my classroom and the effects it had on the students' writing. As a part of ongoing assessment, I paid particular attention to the growth of one student about whom I was most "worried" (Allen, Michalove, & Shockley, 1993). Following my description of the spelling program, I will describe how this focus student responded. It is my hope that this article will show how the use of some explicit spelling instruction can work effectively when contextualized in an environment in which children read and write for authentic purposes.

#### What I Did

This study took place in a Midwest urban school with an enrollment of approximately 244 students in grades K-5. Eighty-five percent of the students are classified as minority. My first-grade classroom consisted of 25

students who were diverse in their learning abilities and needs.

### Instructional Techniques

I based my instructional decisions about spelling on my observations about what my students could do and on the needs they demonstrated in their writing. My students were very excited about writing for authentic purposes and about content area topics discussed through thematic units. I wanted to create a growing awareness of conventional spelling without discouraging first-grade spelling. I decided to reinforce conventional spellings of words that were commonly used in the students' writing and to connect the spelling instruction with our themes being studied in order to provide meaning for the students. I planned to put emphasis on conventional spellings of these high-frequency words (e.g., the, like, and have) and teach strategies for learning to spell the harder, content area words (e.g., animals, spring, and baseball).

I decided to introduce target spelling words through an interesting "spelling sentence" rather than through traditional word lists. My decision to use a sentence instead of a list was based on the research about making spelling meaningful to the students and connecting spelling to their everyday experiences, e.g., providing

opportunities for word learning in the context of purposeful reading and writing (Bear & Templeton, 1998; Gentry, 1987; Wilde, 1992,1999).

The spelling program in my classroom began in November with the class composing a sentence about turkeys, the main topic of our current unit. After reading the story A Turkey for Thanksgiving (Bunting, 1991), in which the turkey thought he was going to get cooked for dinner, I asked the students to think of a sentence about a turkey. The sentence they came up with was: "The turkey will run away so he will not get cooked for dinner." We used interactive writing to write the sentence together. Interactive writing provided many opportunities to teach directly about language conventions and concepts about print and provided students with opportunities to hear sounds in words and connect those sounds with letters (Button, Johnson, & Furgerson, 1996). During interactive writing, students helped me write by actually taking turns using the marker and writing the words on chart paper. After writing the sentence on the chart paper, I announced that we would practice writing this sentence and learn to spell the words throughout the week. We discussed ways to study our sentence at school and at home. We decided to have spelling "tests" on Fridays. The students went back

to their seats and eagerly copied the sentence on paper to take home. They seemed very excited. Our spelling program was on its way to a great start.

The next day, we continued to practice spelling the words in this spelling sentence. We wrote the sentence together as a group on chart paper, carefully reviewing each word as it was written. We reviewed the known words in the sentence: the, will, so, he, not, get. We practiced spelling other words with the same ending sounds (e.g., not, got, hot). We practiced spelling the word turkey by first clapping the two parts (e.g., tur, key) and then orally spelling the word (e.g., t-u-r, k-e-y) as we clapped the parts again.

On Wednesday, students used dry erase boards to write the spelling sentence on their own. I asked the students if they had some strategies that could help us remember how to spell dinner. One student responded by saying that the word dinner had the word in in it and since we knew how to spell in, this would help us to spell dinner.

The next day, we focused on the word cooked. Look was a known word for most of the students, so we used this as a way to remember cook. Then we discussed adding "ed" to words to make them past tense. All students then wrote the complete sentence on writing paper for added practice.

On Friday, I dictated the sentence to the students and they wrote it on a piece of writing paper. I collected the papers and recorded anecdotal information about each student's spelling progress (e.g., Is this student spelling some high-frequency words correctly? Is he/she beginning to use some consonant blends?).

These weekly spelling sentences provided a number of possible teaching activities and a valuable opportunity to study words. Since the sentences were related to our theme for the week, we were constantly using the words in our daily reading and writing. Our spelling time varied throughout the week, but we generally spent about fifteen minutes a day working on learning to spell the words in the sentence. An example of another week's spelling lessons will demonstrate more of the possible teaching possibilities.

Monday: We had been studying about African animals and had just begun learning about zebras. I asked the students to tell me something about zebras. One student said that zebras have black and white stripes. Another student said that zebras eat trees and another student said that zebras eat plants. So we decided to combine all these ideas together to make one sentence. The sentence we created for the week was: "A zebra has black and white stripes and

they eat trees and plants." We wrote the sentence interactively on chart paper and then the students copied the sentence on writing paper to take home to study. We also practiced the sentence on the computers during our computer lab time.

Tuesday: We reviewed the sentence together as a group. We talked about words we knew like and and a. We discussed the "str" and "tr" blends in stripes and trees. We listed other words beginning with these blends such as street, strap, straw, truck, trip, try. We ended our lesson by writing our sentence again on the chart paper, but this time we used a different colored marker to write the blends we practiced.

Wednesday: Each child used a dry erase board to practice our sentence. I wrote the sentence on the chalkboard and students wrote it on their dry erase boards. We worked on the word they and talked about how we could remember how to spell it. Many students noticed the word the and then we add a "y". We also talked about adding "s" to words that mean more than one (e.g., stripes, trees, and plants).

Thursday: All students wrote the sentence on a sentence strip. Then they cut the words apart and practiced putting it back together. Each student then put

the cut-up sentence in an envelope and took it home to practice. (This activity is much like the cut-up story in a Reading Recovery lesson [Clay, 1993b].)

Friday: This was test day. I dictated the sentence to the students and they wrote it the best they could. I collected the papers and recorded any new information about the student's spelling progress. Corrected papers were then returned to the students to provide them with feedback.

This is just a sample of the many activities that we used throughout the year to progress toward the use of conventional spellings of the words. We also did many activities with word families during our spelling time. Word families are rhyming words that have the same vowel and ending letters, but different beginnings (e.g., fat, sat, cat). Children can quickly increase the number of words they know by learning how word families work (Cunningham, 1995). Our spelling sentences also provided us an opportunity to learn about consonant digraphs (e.g., sh, ch, th, and wh) and clusters (e.g., tr, dr, and bl). I incorporated the use of a Word Wall to which high-frequency words were added throughout the year to aid the reading and writing of the students (Cunningham, 1995; Wagstaff, 1997-1998). Once we included a word in our spelling sentence, I placed the word on the word wall so it would be visible for

student reference when needed. We discussed capital letters, punctuation, and spacing between words daily during our interactive writing. We also reinforced these skills during spelling time.

I sent home monthly newsletters with ideas for spelling practice for parents to work on at home with their child (e.g., say the word slowly and write the sounds you hear, and look for small chunks of the word that you know). I also sent home a list of the high-frequency words we were learning so parents could reinforce conventional spellings at home. This open communication with parents appeared to help them better understand spelling development and also reinforced what was being learned at school.

#### Assessment Methods

In order to document the impact these weekly spelling activities had on the students' writing, I monitored the children's use of conventional spellings of their spelling words. I kept a journal of all daily reading and writing activities with specific information about each individual spelling lesson. In my journal, I included information about the spelling strategies discussed and specific activities used for spelling lessons. I also recorded all the high-frequency words that were included in the sentences.



I then studied the students' daily journal writings to assess their spellings and their use of spelling strategies. I looked for correct spellings of some high-frequency words, progress in the use of first-grade spelling, and use of words from the spelling sentences. I kept a record of all the high-frequency words that had been in our spelling sentences that the students were using in their journals. I also recorded whether or not these high-frequency words were spelled correctly.

#### What I Found

The spelling program that I implemented in my classroom provided students with a purposeful way to study words and provided them many opportunities to use these spelling words in their daily writing. As a result, most of the students showed that they saw a connection between spelling and other areas of the curriculum. Once, while working on a writing assignment for social studies, a student exclaimed, "Hey, that's one of our spelling words!" Another student made a connection between spelling and writing during independent writing time. She responded, "I know how to write that word. We had it in our spelling sentence." Responses like these were heard quite frequently as students completed their writing throughout the day.

As the students' daily writing improved, parents' attitudes about their children's spelling instruction improved as well. One parent commented that her child was constantly writing at home and she was impressed at how many words her child could write. It appeared that the use of this type of spelling program had a positive effect on the students' self-esteem as well. I asked several students how they felt about spelling. One response was, "I like to spell hard words. It makes me feel good when I write a "big" word all by myself." Another response was, "I used to ask the teacher how to spell. But now I can figure it out myself." Students, who rarely shared their writing at the beginning of the year, began to ask to share their writing with the class. One student, in particular, made tremendous improvements in his writing. This student, whom I will call Denzel, struggled a great deal more than the other students with writing and spelling at the beginning of the year. In the next section, I will highlight the growth that Denzel made in his writing and spelling.

#### Denzel's Story

Denzel was representative of some students who enter first-grade as nonreaders and nonwriters. On Clay's Observation Survey (1993a.), given in August, Denzel

correctly identified 33 out of 54 letters. He was able to read one word (the) out of twenty on the word test. Denzel wrote three words on the writing vocabulary section of the test: his first name, his last name, and the word the. He recorded 9 sounds out of 37 on the task in which the teacher dictates a sentence. Denzel wrote: "thezktcptLNm" for the dictated sentence, "The bus is coming. It will stop here to let me get on." Denzel was very hesitant about attempting to write in the classroom. He lacked self-confidence and appeared to be afraid of making a mistake when writing.

During the first few months of the school year, Denzel's journal entries consisted of pictures. Sometimes he wrote lists of names or words that he copied from the charts posted in the room (see Figure 1). Denzel didn't seem to be very motivated to write in his journal. When I would ask him about what he was going to write, he would often say, "I don't know what to write." I tried to encourage him to write by talking to him and asking him questions in hopes of sparking an interesting topic for him to write about. This didn't seem to be effective.

After the implementation of the new spelling program, I observed Denzel using the words from the spelling sentences in his daily journal writings. Samples from his

journal provided some evidence that he was connecting what he was learning during our spelling sessions to his daily writing (see Figure 2). His journal entry from late November, seen in Figure 2, says "I like soccer. I will have a turkey. The turkey is going to get cooked." The spelling sentence prior to this journal entry was, "The turkey will run away so he will not get cooked for dinner." Denzel used conventional spellings for many of the high-frequency words (e.g., like, the, will). The word soccer was copied from one of the charts posted in the room. Denzel spelled the word turkey two different ways: turky and turkey. This suggests that Denzel was thinking about how words look and may have realized that the first spelling of turky didn't quite look right. His close approximations of got for get and cook for cooked showed his awareness that words consist of both consonants and vowels. His writing also showed his knowledge of sentence structure. He knew that spaces were needed between words and that sentences begin with a capital letter and end with a period. His writing at this point, however, did not include much first-grade spelling.

Denzel continued to use words from the spelling sentences in his writing as can be seen from his March 29 journal entry (see Figure 2). This entry read, "Today is

sunny. Our UNI buddies come today. My bike is blue. I like to ride my bike." The spelling sentence from the week before was, "It is spring and we can ride our bikes and play outside." Denzel used and correctly spelled four words from this sentence in his writing: our, bike, ride, and is. He used these words to tell about his own experiences, which showed that he was connecting spelling to his own life. These spelling words were meaningful to him. He also correctly spelled the following high-frequency words: come, my, like, and to. A few words were copied from charts visible in the room (e.g., today, sunny, buddies, and blue). He did not use any first-grade spelling in this example of writing.

As the school year progressed, Denzel began to use first-grade spelling more often in his daily writing. His willingness to use first-grade spelling made his writing more interesting. Samples of his writing from the end of the school year show the remarkable improvements he made in his writing throughout the year (see Figure 3). The first writing sample seen in Figure 3 says, "The flowers grow. I like my teacher. She is nice. Me and Lee play basketball. We like the bulls." Examples of first-grade spelling in this piece of writing were: flywors for flowers, tehter for teacher, and bascitdall for basketball. He correctly

represented the "fl" blend in flowers and the "er" ending in teacher. He represented the "k" sound in basketball with a "c". When saying the word basketball slowly, he heard the word it and the word all.

The second writing sample shown in Figure 3 says, "Today is Monday. My Aunt Velma is going home today. I have mosquito bites. I get to eat at McDonalds. We are going walking on Friday." This piece of writing really summed up the growth Denzel made in his writing. He correctly spelled many high-frequency words and used first-grade spelling to write unknown words (e.g., ant for aunt, masctobis for mosquito bites, McDons for McDonalds). His freedom from concern for conventional spellings of all words allowed him to write about his personal experiences.

In summary, over the course of the year, Denzel developed into a confident writer. He was able to spell many high-frequency words correctly and learned many strategies for spelling harder, more difficult words. He knew the importance of correct spelling, yet also knew that it's okay to use first-grade spelling when learning how to write "hard" words. Denzel was able to become a successful writer because he was encouraged to write about topics of his choice. Spelling and writing became meaningful to

Denzel. He had a purpose for learning how to spell words. Over time, Denzel's progress in writing and spelling demonstrated how young students can meet the challenge of learning to spell when put in an environment that encourages, accepts, and celebrates students' attempts at writing.

#### Conclusions and Implications for Teachers

In conclusion, I felt that the spelling program that I implemented in my classroom was successful. As the students grew more comfortable with making links and using spelling strategies, their classroom writing improved dramatically. Because the students were immersed in a classroom environment that encouraged and supported spelling development (Wilde, 1992), their willingness to use first-grade spelling increased as did their transition to conventional spelling. The use of some explicit instruction helped students become aware of the importance of using conventional spellings for frequently used words.

Next year, I will continue to allow my students many opportunities to read and write daily and experiment with spelling. I will teach spelling in a meaningful way and connect spelling with all other areas of the curriculum. I will continue to encourage first-grade spelling and continue to use explicit instruction for teaching

conventional spellings of high-frequency words. I will continue to observe my students' daily writing to see the areas that need extra demonstration and guidance from me. I will continue to provide a learning environment that encourages students to write and celebrate their accomplishments in writing. Most of all, I will continue to be an enthusiastic and positive role model for my students and share in their excitement about learning to spell through authentic writing experiences.



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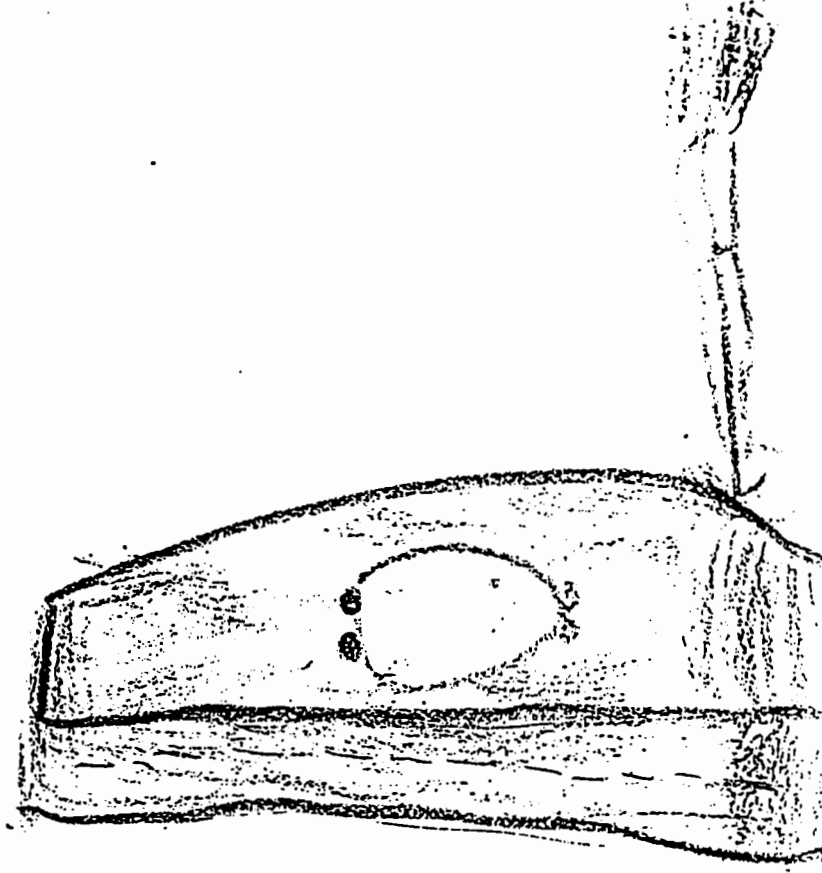
Figure Captions

Figure 1. Two early samples from Denzel's journal writing.

Figure 2. Two mid-year samples from Denzel's journal.

Figure 3. Two later samples from Denzel's journal.

9-11-98



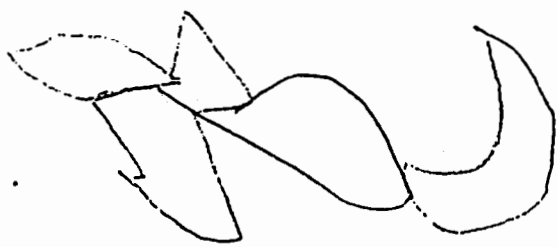
10-14-93

Halloween  
OCTOBER

bat.

200

200



11-25-98

I like soccer.

I will have a

turkey.

The turkey is

going to get  
cook.

FORM

3-29-99

today is sunny.

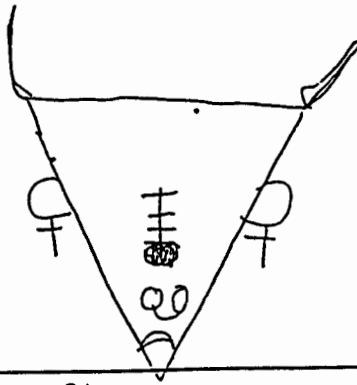
our friends

come today.

my bike is blue.

I like to ride my

bike.



The flyovers are

I like my tent

She is nice.

me and the play

has a tent.

we like the tent.

FORM 798 A 9/88

5-24-44

today is

Monday. I

am going

home

today. I have

no school.

I get to eat

at school.

we are going

walking at school.

FORM 798 9/88