

How Children Learn to Spell in First Grade

by

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## Abstract

This study investigated how first grade children learn to spell. It targeted first grade students in an urban elementary school in Western New York who are learning to spell. The researcher examined the influences that affect a student's ability to learn, the characteristics of spellers, and the strategies that teachers and students use to help them with spelling, whether teaching or learning. Data was collected through the analysis of writing samples, observation checklists, and early literacy assessments, interviews with students, questionnaires for to parents, and surveys given to first grade teachers.

Children learn to spell in stages and use common strategies to spell. Writing samples of each child were analyzed to determine the stage each child was at. At the end of the study there were only three stages visible in this classroom; those included the phonetic stage, the transitional stage and the conventional stage. The most common stage was phonetic and these children were either where they were supposed to be or they were supposed to be at the transitional stage. Many of the students at the phonetic stage used sounding out to help them with spelling during writer's workshop. The children at the transitional stage used many strategies to help them spell. However, all children used invented spelling to help them with spelling unknown words. Most teachers (75%) said that invented spelling is helpful because it enables children to write ideas without worrying about the correct spelling of words.

Overall, children learn to spell in stages and a strong knowledge of phonics contributes to being able to spell well. Also, invented spelling enables children to express their ideas.

## Chapter 1 Statement of the Problem

### Background

During a typical school day most first graders write as much as possible. Some schools, including the urban school where the researcher conducted the study, use writer's workshop as the time for students to write. Writer's workshop requires 10 minutes of a mini lesson, 40 minutes of writing time and a 10-minute closing. It is during this time where most of the writing in one day is completed. It is important to see if the students are using varied strategies to spell and receiving teacher feedback during writing time. Learning the factors that influence students' ability to spell and applying them will help students improve and become stronger writers. Students may also feel better about their writing and want to write and share more often. This is what teachers should strive for. This research is designed to explore the different ways children learn to spell. This study will investigate the factors that: 1) influence a child's ability to spell (including invented spelling), 2) the characteristics that make a good or poor speller, 3) whether or not invented spelling is helpful and.

### The Research Question

How do first grade children learn to spell? What are the factors that influence students' ability to spell? What characteristics make a good/poor speller? Is invented spelling a good way for students to learn how to spell? The researcher will explore strategies, including invented spelling that students and teachers use, to find out the characteristics of spellers and the different stages of writing. The researcher will also use this information to investigate how children learn to spell in first grade.

## Methods

The researcher will conduct this study in an urban elementary school in Western New York. The focus is on 18 first grade students. Five first grade teachers will be involved as well. Interviews with a randomly selected group of students will be done to see what they think about themselves as spellers. These interviews will be conducted two times, at the beginning and the end of the study.

Each week, a random sample from the writer's workshop pieces will be collected for all 18 students to analyze what type of writer each student is (Emergent, Novice and Independent) and what stage they are at in invented spelling. This will also help the researcher know who is a good speller and who is a poor speller.

Along with the sample writing pieces and the interviews of randomly selected students, observations of students will be recorded on a checklist to capture frequency of specific literacy behaviors. Analyzing the writing pieces, interviews, and checklists will help in deciding what contributes to learning how to spell.

Letter/Sound identification score sheets and phonemic awareness tests are administered regularly and are part of the students' records. These will be collected throughout the year. This data will be compared to the writing and spelling stages and it will help to determine if students' knowledge of phonics contributes to being able to spell well.

A parent questionnaire will be sent home to each of the 18 students at the beginning of the study to find out if any child does some form of writing at home. Knowing this information will help to assess who is a good/poor speller. Good spellers are spellers who are exposed to print and who write frequently. Poor spellers

are usually not exposed to the same amount of print and do not write frequently. The researcher would like to find out if this is true.

Lastly, data will be collected through surveys given to five first grade teachers to find out what their opinions are about the factors that influence spelling ability. These surveys will also ask the teachers what types of spelling strategies they use in their classroom and if it works for helping students to learn to spell.

### Limitations

This study is limited to one first grade inclusion classroom in an urban school. What is true for one school may not be true for another and what is true for one classroom may not be true for another. This one urban school does not necessarily represent all urban schools or all first grade classrooms. The findings would vary from school to school and classroom to classroom. A second limitation is that only eight students will be interviewed and not all students think the same way. A third limitation is that the researcher will only give surveys to five first grade teachers. Most of these teachers should teach spelling the same way considering they have to teach the same curriculum, but their views will be different. The findings from the surveys would vary from teacher to teacher.



## Definitions

Invented Spelling: Invented spelling is the use of temporary spellings for an unknown word. For example, if a child did not know how to spell her, he/she might just write hr for that word.

Memory Channel: The memory channel, according to Personke and Yee (1971) “is the process of extracting learned words or generalizations from the memory drum and using these to produce a written response” (p. 26).

Kinesthetic Bypass: “The kinesthetic bypass of this channel occurs when the spelling of a word is so well known that it can be written without an overt response” (Personke & Yee, 1971, p. 26).

Memory Drum: “The memory drum may be viewed as a storehouse for past information and a receptacle for new information” (Personke & Yee, 1971, p. 18).

Strategy: A strategy is a way children use to help them spell. For example, visualizing a word is a strategy or sounding out a word is a strategy.

Retrieval: “The rapid, automatic or close to automatic, activation of a spelling” (Rittle-Johnson & Siegler, 1999, p. 334).

Backup Spelling Strategy: Explicit, controlled, step-by-step methods for constructing the sequence of letters” (Rittle-Johnson & Siegler, 1999, p. 334).

Legal Errors: Plausible spellings of words that are actually spelled incorrectly. Each phoneme needs to be represented. For example, *kare* is a plausible spelling for *care* because “*k* is a reasonable rendering of the phoneme /k/. Since teachers should not say that a students spelling is incorrect when using invented spelling, they say it is a legal error.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

### Introduction

There are many times during a school day when first graders write. There is one particular aspect of writing that some children dread, and that is spelling. A number of students are afraid to try to spell unknown words because they think that being wrong is unacceptable, or they think that they cannot spell. Other children just do not see a purpose in writing or spelling at all. They have misinterpretations about spelling such as spelling is only learned so that they can get a good grade on a test/report card, or to pass and go on to second grade. First graders (as well as other students) need to be taught that spelling is learned in order for others to read their writing (Snowball & Bolton, 1999) and so that they can learn to write well (Gentry, 1993).

The long-term goal of teachers should be to help students avoid such misinterpretations about spelling and to help students become improved and confident writers. In order to do this, teachers need to become aware of certain aspects of spelling. These aspects include how children learn to spell, the strategies that influence students' ability to spell, and teacher feedback during writing. Becoming aware of these aspects will help teachers figure out ways for all children to develop an ability to spell. Understanding invented spelling and its five stages, ways writing and reading help assist in spelling, and the characteristics of spellers will also make a teacher's job to teach spelling a lot easier. If teachers were not made aware of these aspects of spelling then they would not have any idea on how to teach spelling. As a

result, students would struggle greatly with spelling as well as writing. Teachers need to ensure student success in their classrooms.

### How Children Learn to Spell

Many teachers, researchers, teacher educators, etc. have opposing beliefs on how children learn to spell. For instance, some people who believe in a whole-language approach, argue that direct instruction could be hurtful and that “children will figure out the relations between spellings and sounds on their own...” (Treiman, 1993, p. 4). However, many people argue that direct spelling instruction is absolutely necessary to guarantee children’s success in spelling, known as formal instruction. Neither of these two methods of instruction demonstrate “ways to teach spelling” or “ways to help children learn *how* to spell” or “ways to structure activities to help children create their own understanding of our language” (Rosencrans, 1998, p. 6). Instead these methods of instruction teach memorization and *what* children should learn to spell, and they do not apply to all ways of learning. According to Rosencrans (1998), “to ensure that children receive the support they need, our job as teachers is to identify key ingredients of successful instruction and incorporate these into a classroom spelling program that enables all children to develop their ability to spell” (p. 5).

Many researchers have found that children learn to spell in a number of ways, and by including many of these in a spelling program, teachers will have success in teaching spelling and children will have success in learning spelling. One way is to let children use invented spelling. When a child uses invented spelling, he/she makes errors and learns from them. When a child makes errors one should know that he/she

is taking risks and learns from those risks. Invented spelling occurs in stages just like learning to talk. Learning to spell takes time and it is a complex process (Gentry, 1987). Another way to teach spelling is to let children read and write as much as possible for a purpose, however reading and writing alone will not guarantee students become expert spellers. Reading and writing are tied to spelling (Gentry, 1997). One other idea is for teachers to be able to recognize the stages each child is at and also what makes a poor speller a poor speller and what makes a good speller a good speller.

### *Invented Spelling and Its Stages*

Invented spelling is when children who are learning to spell use temporary spellings of their own when they do not know how to spell a word. They spell an unknown word as they *think* it should be spelled. Some people, like Kelly and Sheridan-Regan (1993), have opposing viewpoints. Unlike Kelly, Sheridan-Regan says that invented spelling is not good to use because it can “do a disservice to the students with specific learning disabilities...” (p. 42). She also believes that there are many children out there who are ready to use the rules of spelling but are “‘put on hold’ when they are encouraged to use invented spelling” (p. 5). She believes that it is not necessary to teach invented spelling, especially with all the curriculum that has to be covered for the year, and then have to re-teach students to spell correctly.

On the other hand, some say that invented spelling gives children confidence in their writing and by using invented spelling they do not have to think that they need to be correct all the time. If children think that their spelling has to be correct all the time, it will turn them away from writing (Gentry, 1987) and won’t let them

express their own ideas; they will be afraid that they are going to be wrong. Gentry also says that children who use invented spelling, find it more easy to spell words than children who do not use invented spelling and that invented spelling gets children to “think about words and generate new knowledge” (Gentry, 1987, p. 17). Invented spelling is natural- “we all do it” (Gentry, 2001, p. 31).

Learning to spell is a developmental process, which consists of five stages of invented spelling. According to Gentry (1993), children “learn the foundations of spelling in the same way as learning to talk” (p. 7). Spelling is learned by imitation, invention, interaction, and risk-taking just like language. Learning spelling also involves using invented words, phrases and sentences just as learning language. For example, children hear others use plurals and endings as “s”, “ed,” or “ing” and the children would over-generalize the rules and say something like hurted, eaten, or gooses. In order for children to write and spell they must interact with written language (reading or pretend reading, looking at print on grocery lists or cards or books or notes, and writing as frequently as possible), just as they interact with others when learning to speak. Otherwise writing and spelling will not take place. Spelling takes place when children take risks. Making mistakes is okay and natural; people learn from their mistakes. Children need to risk failure and experiment in order to succeed (Gentry, 1993). Imitation, invention, interaction and risk taking are all part of the developmental stages that children go through when learning to spell. The stages are described below and taken from Gentry (1993).

\* Stage one- The Pre-communicative Stage (3 years, 3 months): Before Stage one there are two earlier forms of writing, which are scribbling in horizontal rows, not necessarily from left to right, and character writing, which is when children realize that the marks have features. During the pre-communicative stage children write random letters stringed together to form a word that only they can read at the moment they write it. At this stage children do not know that letters make sounds and they might include numbers for letters as well. They might not know that in the English language people write from left to right or they might mix lowercase and uppercase letters together. Stage one is an exciting occurrence in a child's life and is considered the "onset of spelling development" (p. 24).

\* Stage two- The Semi-phonetic Stage (5 years, 11 months): At this stage children discover that letters have sounds and in their spelling only some of the sounds of the word being spelled are represented. For example, ALD for allowed can be written. Children at this stage also can break apart segments in words and they write two letters or just initial consonants to represent a larger word. Using the letter-name strategy is common as well. For example, the letter R might be written to represent "are," or U might be written to represent "you," or ATE might be written for "eighty." Children at the semi-phonetic stage understand the idea that people write from left to right in the English language and they also master the alphabet. Children are engaged in writing and thinking at this stage.

\* Stage three- The Phonetic Stage (6 years, 3 months): During this stage children write down all the sounds they hear in the word being spelled. They are also creative

writers and write in forms of stories, signs, notes, letters, cards, etc. Even though some of the sounds that children write down may not be the right way to spell the word, it is “systematic and perceptually correct” (p. 29). Phonetic spellers develop certain spellings for sound features. For example, for –Ed endings a child might use a T instead (stopt for stopped). Children at this stage also show recognition of word segments and spacing.

\* Stage four- The Transitional Stage (7 years): The transitional spellers realize that they have to not only write what English sounds like, but also how English looks. Vowels appear in every syllable that transitional spellers write, including vowels before syllabic r (as in ar, or, er, ur, ir), two vowels together to form a vowel digraph (ai, ea, ay, ee, ow), long vowels with a silent e (as in sale, cane, late), and endings are spelled more often than not (such as s, ed, ing, and 's). Children at this stage move to using visual strategies (visualizing what the word looks like in their head), though they may still reverse some letters, for example, taod for toad. Transitional spellers also use learned words (words they can spell) more often than others when they are writing. This stage is very important because it indicates that the child is ready for formal spelling instruction.

\* Stage five- The Conventional Stage (7 years, 9 months): The first four stages are viewed from the developmental scheme; however, the conventional stage is sometimes viewed from the instructional scheme because it requires more formal instruction. “Conventional spellers develop over years of word study, reading, and writing” (p. 34). Their knowledge of the English writing system is mastered, their

phonetic knowledge is extended to position in word and stress, and they demonstrate a broad knowledge of semantic (meaning of a word) demands and word structure as well as recognizing homonyms. Conventional spellers accurately use double consonants and silent letters correctly and spell demon (irregular) words correctly. Spellers at this stage also have a wide variety of learned words in their memory.

This summary of Gentry's (1993) five stages of invented spellings indicates that learning to spell is continuous and complex. It starts off easy and concrete, but moves to being complicated and abstract. Some form of instruction is needed to create an expert speller.

### *Reading and Purposeful Writing*

Reading and writing are definitely tied to spelling; unfortunately they cannot stand alone to teach spelling. They are factors that influence a child's ability to spell. As previously mentioned, children learn to spell in the same way they learn to talk. One of these methods is by interaction. According to Gentry (1993), "Just as children interact with oral language in order to speak, they also must interact with written language in order to learn to write and spell" (p. 16). Children need to live in a print rich environment to motivate learning. Reading helps children focus on words and pictures (Lin, 2001). Children must be read to and have books so they can try to read and they also must see adults write things such as grocery lists, cards, letters, etc. When children write, their efforts must be appreciated (Gentry, 1993). Since some families do not provide these opportunities, classrooms must provide them as much as possible as well as providing purposeful writing.



“Purposeful writing [writing to an audience] is an important key to learning to spell. It unlocks children’s thinking about spelling by engaging them in the process” (Gentry, 1987, p. 17). Giving a child a reason to write and not making a huge deal out of misspelled words, makes them eager to write more. According to Snowball and Bolton (1999), purposeful writing gives children a chance to try to spell words they do not know, a chance to figure out different strategies, and a chance to use resources to help them spell. If the type of writing and purposefulness is limited than the scope of learning is limited as well. Teachers should give students the opportunity to read each other’s writing or read to the class. This gives them an audience and a purpose to write (Gentry, 1987). Writing in general is important because spelling is a writing skill. Because of that there is little value in being able to spell orally, according to Personke and Yee (1971): “All practice in spelling should be conducted in writing” (p. 86).

There is a belief, according to Treiman (1993), that some children have difficulty with spelling because of the irregularity of the English writing system. She reports that because of the irregular system a child’s “only hope of success is to memorize the spelling of each word” (p. 21). Treiman (1993) also says that words are so complex that children cannot figure out how to spell them. This results in memorization. It would be easier if the letters’ names always matched the sounds that they make in words. Most children have more trouble spelling vowels than consonants because vowel sounds sound similar to each other and they have many different spellings, which results in misspelling (Treiman, 1993).

When a child has the opportunity to see and read print, they are able to recall words and have a broader range of vocabulary making it easier to spell (Snowball and Bolton, 1999). Purposeful writing makes a child eager to write as much as possible, thus learning how to spell.

### *The Characteristics of Good and Poor Spellers*

Teachers need to determine whether or not students are having trouble with spelling in order to help them become better spellers. There are many characteristics that make spellers the kind of spellers they are, whether good or poor.

“Only the speller who can efficiently control a large corpus of words through the Kinesthetic Bypass, or secondarily the Memory Channel, can write and spell efficiently and fluently” (Personke & Yee, 1971, p. 83). The expert speller has a visual memory of words and is able to store words and retrieve them when they are needed (Gentry, 1993). Good spellers use backup spelling strategies less often than retrieval, however when they do use backup spelling strategies, the strategies are performed to the best of their ability (Rittle-Johnson & Siegler, 1999). A good speller is also able to break words into parts and think about the smaller known parts of the words. Combining the word segments with a visual image is a strong characteristic of an expert speller as well as being able to inspect words and noticing if a word looks wrong. A good speller first uses phonics and then visual and semantic (meaning) information along with pronouncing the words in order to activate auditory memory (Rosencrans, 1998).

Poor spellers use fewer strategies than that of a good speller (Rosencrans, 1998), putting them on a lower level. Poor spellers cannot visualize words, which

gives them a difficult time in recalling spellings of commonly used words and words that have been studied and learned. Instead of visualizing the words they use a lower level strategy, such as spelling words as they sound, which can be considered the semi-phonetic or phonetic stage. Having an inability to see misspellings, also characterizes a poor speller. A poor speller may also always ask for help from the teacher.

According to Kamhi and Hinton (2000), “In general, good readers are typically good spellers and poor readers are poor spellers” (p. 37). However, some good readers are poor spellers and this is evidence that nonlinguistic factors, such as visual memory, are important to spelling ability. In contrast to Rosencrans (1998), Kamhi and Hinton suggest that poor spellers have “limited knowledge of sound-letter association rules” (p. 47), therefore, relying more on visual matching. Good readers who are poor spellers are only good at either decoding or comprehension in reading. Furthermore, poor spellers follow a different developmental path.

Recognizing a child’s ability to spell will aid a teacher in helping that child to become a better speller. The teacher will teach the child strategies that apply to the level that he/she is on, therefore helping him/her to become an improved speller.

#### The Factors/Strategies that Influence Children’s Ability to Spell

There are many factors that affect a child’s ability to spell unknown words. There are also many strategies that students use and that teachers teach in order to spell an unknown word.

A factor that teachers need to keep in mind when teaching spelling is not to destroy a child’s motivation to learn to spell or to make a child develop a bad attitude

about spelling (Personke & Yee, 1971). Rosencrans (1998) believes that a positive attitude is necessary in order for children to be able to successfully succeed in spelling. She also mentions that children need to have the confidence to take risks and make mistakes. Teachers need to model a positive attitude for the students. They need to see that the teacher likes spelling and is enthusiastic because then they will be too! Another factor for children that Rosencrans (1998) discusses is that they need to have the opportunity to think about what strategy they want to use while spelling an unknown word. If they do not have the chance to think about a strategy then no learning will take place. Yet another factor is that teachers need to have resources available for their students to use such as dictionaries, word walls, posters, books, etc. If a child has an idea about what the word should look like and starts with he/she can look it up using an outside source.

A further factor to consider, according to Treiman (1993), is dialect. She says that if spelling were based on memory then people's dialect would not affect their spelling ability and that everyone would make the same types of errors when spelling (if they had the same exposure). However, everyone has different dialects, which results in different spellings because they construct words from sounds and pronunciation. For example, most people from the south pronounce *pen* and *pin* the same with the short *i* sound. Sometimes children get confused and write *pin* for *pen*. Another example is that African Americans pronounce words differently than Caucasians, saying *south* as *sowf*. So, they misspell the word south. There are still many more factors that affect spelling and these include, experience with reading,

word-length, inflected words (endings), commonness of a word, and proper names (Treiman, 1993).

Many different strategies work for both teachers and students. Teachers teach different kinds of strategies for students to use when spelling and they also need their own strategies to teach spelling (and other subjects). According to Powell and Hornsby (1993), having a timetable of the school day might be handy for teachers. Teachers need this in order to keep themselves organized, that way they will know what time spelling is supposed to be and how long it should be. They also could set daily routines for their students. This way the students have structure, which is needed for management, and they also learn to work independently. Having routines, teachers can expect their students to know what to do during a certain time, for example during spelling or writing time. Teachers should also be learners in their own classroom. Then teachers will learn new and exciting ways to teach.

Another strategy teachers can use, according to Powell and Hornsby (1993), is that they should use cloze procedures. During a cloze procedure, students usually “focus on certain letters, letter clusters or blends, and/or letter patterns” (p. 56). Covering or deleting the letters in the text and creating meaning by reading and predicting is a useful way to use the cloze procedure. Using word sorts is useful in teaching spelling as well. In doing this, students group the words according to certain features. For example, by initial sound, long vowels, short vowels, ending sounds, vowel digraphs, etc. There is also a strategy teachers can use to teach clusters: Cluster Analysis. This process helps students to understand the different clusters and helps them learn to decode words they have never seen before. Cluster analysis also

assists students in remembering spelling patterns and making connections with words. There are also many activities teachers can use for their students to obtain a better understanding of words. These include: chants and rhymes, tongue twisters and alliterations, I spy, sound charts, homophone pairs, silent letter search, word webs, etc (Powell & Hornsby, 1993).

Along with teachers there are many strategies that students can use. There are many different strategies that children use when they get stuck on an unknown word they are trying to spell. If a student lacks these strategies it will interrupt their thoughts. One strategy a student can use is to write the first letter or letter cluster, follow that with a dash and go on with writing. Another strategy can be to leave out any letters the student is not sure of and replace them with a dash. Then he/she can go on with writing. Still another strategy can be to circle or underline a word to remember that it needs checking. Recalling what a word looks like is an additional strategy that students can use while spelling a tough word. The word being spelled might have been read in a book or seen somewhere else. Trying to recall it might help with spelling. If a student cannot remember what the word looks like then he/she can use his/her knowledge of sounds and letters to spell it. One more strategy involves pictures. If the word being spelled is just too hard for a student then he/she can draw a picture of the word if necessary. All these strategies are called have-a-go. These are the strategies that help students attempt temporary spellings for words. "If your students use these strategies as they are drafting, their thoughts and ideas will not get bogged down by having to stop and check the spelling of various words" (Powell & Hornsby, 1993, p. 78).

Many more strategies are available for children to use. Rosencrans (1998) suggests six of them and she says that these six strategies could be used for any unknown word and that they should be taught through direct instruction. These six strategies are listed below:

1. "That Reminds Me:" In using this strategy students should relate unknown words to words they know with similar spelling patterns, helping them to apply the rules.
2. "Looking Good:" In this strategy children use their visual ability, checking to see if the word looks right. This strategy takes practice to improve. Students use self-questioning to find and fix the misspelling.
3. "Sound in Parts (SIP):" This strategy encourages students to break apart words into syllables and sound each part out. This strategy should be taught through direct instruction.
4. "Rap:" auditory spelling strategy that uses rap music to verbalize the letter sequence of words that are strange or hard to spell (Mississippi was taught for most adults using the Rap strategy), increases memory
5. "Imagine, Copy, Examine (ICE):" imagine the word as a picture, describe it in detail, imagine the last time seeing the word for that item
6. "Building Blocks:" uses letter clusters (prefixes, suffixes, Greek and Latin roots), build new words by adding structural knowledge to known words, helps students to expand their knowledge of words, more for children older than first grade (Rosencrans, 1998).

As suggested by Rittle-Johnson and Siegler (1999), retrieval and backup spelling strategies are used as well. A child uses backup strategies when faced with a

hard word. “Beginning spellers retrieve spellings of their names and other very high frequency words” (p. 334). However, it is uncertain if backup spelling strategies are more accurate than retrieval in correct words. In their study, 70 percent of first graders used more than one strategy to spell a word. Retrieving part of the spelling and sounding out the rest was the most common combination of strategies. When using retrieval, children were faster and correct on a higher percentage of words than when using backup strategies (86% vs. 22%). More children used sounding out even though it is less accurate and least effective (Rittle-Johnson & Siegler, 1999). Teachers need to find a way to help children learn to use retrieval more than backup strategies.

Some students, especially in first grade, do not know about these strategies. “Children need to be aware of strategies to become competent spellers. It is the teacher’s job to structure experiences that will ensure strategic development” (Rosencrans, 1998, p. 46). These strategies influence a child’s ability to spell, and in order to have a successful speller, a teacher must teach and encourage students to use many of these strategies mentioned. And for a teacher to be successful in teaching strategies he/she must use the strategies meant for teachers.

#### Teacher Feedback on Spelling

Many students make mistakes when they are writing and trying to spell words. Making mistakes are a natural characteristic of all people and it is the result of taking risks and trying something new (Gentry, 1993). When students make mistakes they are learning. Some teachers think that they are required to correct these mistakes so



the students know the correct way of spelling a word. However, some teachers just let the mistakes go and let the children learn on their own.

According to Personke and Yee (1971), it cannot be determined how much reinforcement is necessary to fix a mistake or how much positive feedback is necessary. However it can be determined that feedback is necessary. Feedback should be varied with individuals. "It is important...that the teacher of spelling understands that feedback is necessary if [they] are to attain the goal of mature spelling... In addition the teacher of spelling must understand that effective feedback is positive and immediate..." (p. 83).

According to Gentry (1993), if a teacher corrects every misspelled word a child makes the teacher is teaching the child to avoid risks and delays the learning process. Self-esteem and confidence must be nurtured and protected by the teacher. If a teacher is to correct mistakes, he/she should choose only a few to show to the student, as well as praise them for their attempts. Teachers should not only point out a student's problems, but also point out a student's strengths. Recognizing hard words spelled correct and parts of misspelled words that are correct boosts a child's confidence and self-esteem as well. Responding to effort *and* achievement is the key to protecting and nurturing confidence and self-esteem (Gentry, 1993). Gentry also writes, in his 1997 book, that not every piece of writing needs to be corrected. Some of it is for practice, however teacher's still need to pay attention to a child's spelling.

Helping individual children proofread is a good way for them to find their mistakes. It is okay for them to have misspellings when they are reading their piece to the class. However, it is necessary for the teacher to work with an individual child

on proofreading when he/she has improved in spelling development. This also helps teachers recognize who has the proofreading skills and who does not (Powell & Hornsby, 1993).

It is important for teachers to recognize children's misspellings, however, it is not important for teachers to correct every piece of writing a child produces. Correcting every piece of writing will just discourage a child from taking risks and it reduces a child's confidence. It is a teacher's job to help make students become stronger writers. By telling children that they are wrong reduces the chance of a child to become a strong, independent writer. Teachers should strive for improving student writing and spelling!

In this study, the researcher will investigate the factors that influence a child's ability to spell (including inventive spelling), whether or not corrective feedback is helpful, and the characteristics that make a good or poor speller. In learning these aspects, teachers will help children become confident and improved students.

## Chapter 3 Methodology

### Introduction

This study was conducted in an urban school in Western, NY. It was designed to answer the question, how do first grade children learn to spell? There were also other questions that the study sought to answer. These included, what are the factors that influence students' ability to spell? What characteristics make a good/poor speller? Is invented spelling a good way for students to learn how to spell? Making teachers aware of how children learn to spell can help teachers alter their way of teaching spelling and the strategies they teach to children. Teachers will also become better teachers when understanding their students. Students will become better learners as well.

### Research Design

The researcher took many steps in the beginning of the study to prepare for data collection. The first step was seeking approval by the school's administration to conduct the study in the elementary school. The administrator signed a consent form for proof of approval. Next, after the administrator approved the topic of the research, a proposal that included the consent form was written to the Department of Education and Human Development that asked for approval. Finally, a second proposal was written and submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) regarding the human subjects that were to be involved in the study. The data collection and research began when the researcher received approval from the Department of Education and Human Development and the Institutional Review Board.

### *Unobtrusive Data: Early Literacy Assessments*

The researcher collected phonemic awareness tests and letter/sound identification score sheets that had been previously administered to students by the classroom teacher and the special education teacher. The phonemic awareness tests were divided up into seven whole parts, which included rhyming, segmentation of syllables, identification of sounds, segmentation of sounds, deletion of syllables, deletion of sounds, and substitution of sounds. These were collected at the beginning of the year as unobtrusive data and were part of the regular classroom program. The students' names were not identified. Instead, each student was assigned a number from one through 18. The tests and data sheets were collected to see which students knew what letters and sounds and to see if students' knowledge of phonemic awareness contributed to good spelling during writing. Ninety-four percent of the students did not complete the phonemic awareness test, which is a limitation in this study. However, 71% of students did fairly well with phonemic awareness. See appendix A and B.

### *Unobtrusive Data: Writing Samples*

After collecting the phonemic awareness tests and letter/sound identification score sheets, the researcher collected writing samples from each of the 18 students. Collecting these was also part of the regular classroom program and considered unobtrusive data. The writing samples were collected twice a month from the beginning of the year to the end of the study. Mistakes in the samples were clearly identified and they were used to specify the writing stage of each child. The phonemic awareness tests and the letter/sound identification score sheets were then

compared to the writing samples. Only the researcher viewed this data and all data was confidential.

### Parental Questionnaires

The researcher then generated parental questionnaires. The researcher's mentor teacher approved the questionnaires before they were sent home with the students. The questionnaires were used to determine how many children write or draw at home and how frequently, and what types of writing they do at home. Information about writing at home was then compared to other data sources to determine if students who wrote frequently at home had better spelling skills. The questionnaires were sent home with the students at the beginning of the study, and returned within one week. The return rate was 90%. See appendix C for the questionnaire.

### Teacher Surveys

A survey was designed for all first grade teachers to identify the different strategies that the teachers used to teach spelling in their own classrooms. The surveys were also used to obtain the first grade teachers' perceptions of factors that contribute to the development of good and poor spellers. These were given to the teachers by the researcher in the middle of the school year after their spelling programs had been in place for three months. The teachers were asked to fill out the survey and were given about two weeks to complete it. They were asked to return it to the researcher in her classroom. Most teachers returned it within one week. The return rate of the teacher surveys was 80%. The teacher surveys were anonymous. See appendix D for the teacher survey.

### *Student Interviews*

The researcher then created questions to ask a randomly selected group of first grade students during conferencing for writer's workshop. Questions were asked regarding students' feelings toward spelling as well as strategies that students use. Most students only said that they used sounding out if they were not asked about any other strategy. These conferences were meant to see if teachers need to do anything more in the teaching of spelling, whether teaching new strategies, reinforcing old strategies, or teaching about the misconceptions of spelling. See appendix E for the interview questions.

### *Observations of Writer's Workshop*

The researcher designed observation checklists that were generated to capture frequency of specific literacy behaviors of each student. Each checklist was compared to the writing samples, the phonemic awareness tests and the letter/sound identification sheets of each student to see if they were connected in any way possible. The researcher observed 18 students two times each to refine the checklist. The eight students selected at random who were interviewed were observed two more times to triangulate the data from literacy assessments, writing samples, parent questionnaires, teacher surveys and interviews. The observations were also compared to the conference questions that the eight students were asked. See appendix F for the checklist.

## Subjects

The teacher survey was given to all first grade teachers in the building. There are five teachers, all of whom are female. Four of the teachers are White/Caucasian and one is of African Descent. Teacher A has been in the teaching profession for 22 years. Fourteen of those years were in school 39 while 19 were in first grade. Teacher B has taught for 18 years, all of which were in the city and in first grade. Teacher C has taught for seven years, three of which were in first grade and all were in the city. Teacher D has taught for five years, all of which were in the city and one of those years was in first grade. Teacher E has taught for eight years, all of which were also in first grade. All of these teachers have had training in the Reading Excellence Act (REA). For REA all first grade teachers are required to attend monthly meetings, where they discuss leveled reading materials, running reading records, phonemic awareness and assessments. Spelling is discussed at the meetings as well.

The conferences were administered to eight of the 18 students. The eight students were chosen at random. The researcher chose four females and four males. Six of the eight students were of African Descent, one was of Hispanic Descent and one was Caucasian. The writing samples, the phonemic awareness tests, the letter/sound identification score sheets, and the observation checklists were collected from the entire first grade class of 18 students. Out of the class of 18 students there were seven males and 11 females. Two of these students are White/Caucasian, 11 are of African descent, and 5 are of Hispanic descent.

## Analysis of Data

All of the information that was needed to complete the study was kept in a folder that was specifically used for this study. The writing samples, parent questionnaires, phonemic awareness tests and letter/sound identification score sheets, interviews, and observation checklists were all kept together for each student. Number codes were written on each data source to keep the study confidential. A spreadsheet was made that organized the scores of the phonemic awareness tests onto one sheet. Another spreadsheet was made to organize the letter/sound identification score sheets onto one sheet for easier viewing. A third spreadsheet was made to organize the responses that the teachers had on the surveys and to find a correlation between answers to specific questions. The researcher recorded the findings on charts and graphs to see which strategies were most effective in teaching spelling.

Validity of the study was high. Research was conducted during one school year during a regularly implemented writer's program in a natural setting in the classroom. A matrix was made at the beginning of the study to triangulate data sources. Each research question had three different sources (see data matrix on page 28). Data cannot be generalized to other classes or groups because the participant pool was one class size of 18 students.



## Data Matrix

<u>Research question</u>	<u>Data source #1</u>	<u>Data source #2</u>	<u>Data source #3</u>
What are some of the factors that influence a student's ability to spell?	<b>Interview Students</b> (ask them what strategies they use)	<b>Parent Questionnaire</b> (Do students write or spell at home frequently?)	<b>Early Literacy Assessments</b> (How well do spellers do on literacy assessments?)
What characteristics make a good/poor speller?	<b>Interview students</b> (ask 8 students if they are a good/poor speller)	<b>Observation Records</b> (Do all good/poor spellers have the same literacy behaviors?)	<b>Collect writing samples</b> (Find common characteristics of both good and poor spellers)
Is inventive spelling a good way for students to learn how to spell? (Inventive spelling is properly used when words are spelled phonetically correct.)	<b>Teacher Survey</b> (What are their opinions about inventive spelling?)	<b>Collect writing samples</b> (Who uses inventive spelling & is the spelling phonetically correct?)	<b>Observation records</b> (What are their literacy behaviors and are they related to invented spelling?)

## Summary

The researcher gathered information from first grade teachers, first grade students and their parents in an urban school setting to answer the question: What are the strategies that influence a child's ability to spell? There was an 87% return rate for all questionnaires and surveys to the researcher. The information gathered was analyzed to answer the research question and to find generalizations about learning to spell in first grade.

## Chapter 4 Findings

### Introduction

Throughout the study, the researcher was able to find data about how first graders learn to spell. Generalizations and conclusions were drawn that answer the three questions that stem from the essential question. The research in Chapter Two supports the generalizations and conclusions as well.

#### *What are the factors that influence a student's ability to spell?*

- Generalization one: A child's knowledge of phonics is important for him/her to learn to spell.
  - Findings:
    - ✓ According to teacher surveys 100% of first grade teachers said that knowledge of phonics is a factor that influences a child's ability to spell. See appendix G.
    - ✓ According to student interviews 88% of students said that they use sounds to spell an unknown word. See appendix H.
    - ✓ According to phonemic awareness tests 86% of transitional spellers got more than 50% right out of all the parts each student completed on the test. See appendix I.
    - ✓ According to letter/sound identification score sheets 100% of transitional spellers received a score of 98/108 or better.

- Generalization two: Home writing does contribute to being able to spell well.
  - Findings:
    - ✓ According to parent questionnaires 83% of transitional spellers write stories at home and 66% of phonetic spellers do the same. See appendix J.
    - ✓ According to parent questionnaires 50% of transitional spellers write in journals at home, while 44% of phonetic spellers write in journals. See appendix J.
- Generalization three: Good readers tend to be good spellers.
  - Findings:
    - ✓ According to Running Reading Record scores 71% of transitional spellers increased reading levels by six levels or more.
    - ✓ According to student interviews 50% of transitional spellers said that it is important to learn to spell so you can learn how to read. See appendix H.
    - ✓ According to student interviews 50% of transitional spellers said that for them to become a better speller they would like to read a lot of books. See appendix H.
    - ✓ According to student interviews 50% of phonetic spellers said that the hardest part of spelling is reading the word. See appendix H.

### What Characteristics make a good/poor speller?

- Generalization one: Poor spellers cannot visualize words.
  - Findings:
    - ✓ According to writing samples, 50% the poor spellers mix up the order of letters and the direction of letters as well; a result of not being able to visualize how words look.
    - ✓ According to writing samples, the high frequency words are not always spelled correctly in poor spellers' writings.
- Generalization two: Poor spellers cannot memorize how to spell a word and good spellers can memorize how to spell words.
  - Findings:
    - ✓ According to teacher surveys 50% of teachers said that poor memory is a characteristic of poor spellers. See appendix G.
    - ✓ According to spelling tests 85% of transitional spellers received a 100% on three spelling tests. See appendix K.
- Generalization three: Good spellers have good attitudes about spelling.
  - Findings:
    - ✓ According to student interviews 100% of transitional spellers said that they were good spellers. See appendix H.
    - ✓ According to the observations records 86% of transitional spellers show a positive attitude during writing time. They smile, they say, "I like spelling/writing." These students are also not afraid to ask for help if they need it. See appendix L.

- Generalization four: Girls are better spellers than boys.
  - Findings:
    - ✓ According to comparisons of stages, gender, age, etc. 75% of transitional spellers and 100% of conventional spellers are girls. See appendix M.
    - ✓ According to comparisons 73% of girls are at the stage they should be at according to Gentry (1993) and 43% of boys are at the stage they should be at. See appendix M.

*Is Invented Spelling a Good Way for Students to Learn to Spell?*

- Generalization one: Those students who use invented spelling tend to use phonics correctly (“legal errors”, Treiman, 39), which helps them to learn to spell.
  - Findings:
    - ✓ According to writing samples 72% of students have a legal spelling for unknown words. For example, nice was spelled *niss*, and want was spelled *wot*. See page four for definition of legal errors. Out of these 72% of students, at least 50% are transitional spellers (good spellers).
    - ✓ According to teacher surveys 75% of teachers believe that invented spelling is helpful for students to learn to spell and 100% of teachers use it in their classroom. See appendix G.
    - ✓ According to observations records and writing samples, 100% of students use invented spelling when trying to spell an unknown word.
- Generalization two: Invented Spelling helps children to express their ideas without having to worry about spelling.

- Findings:
  - ✓ According to writing samples 78% of students did not let spelling stop them from writing or being imaginative. These students always wrote more than one page long.
  - ✓ According to observation records 86% of transitional spellers and 70% of phonetic spellers usually attempt new words independently, still being creative with their writing. See appendix L.
  - ✓ According to teacher surveys 75% of teachers believe invented spelling is helpful because it gets students to write down their ideas without being hung-up on spelling. See appendix G.

### Summary

Spelling/writing occurs in stages, as seen in student writing samples. Eight students went from stage one (pre-communicative) to stage 3 (phonetic). One student went from stage 2 (semi-phonetic) to stage three (phonetic). One student stayed at stage 3 (phonetic). Two students went from stage two (semi-phonetic) to stage four (transitional). Four students went from stage three (phonetic) to stage four (transitional). One student went from stage one (pre-communicative) to stage four transitional). One student went from stage four (transitional) to stage five (conventional). The writing samples support this overall generalization. The higher the stage of spelling a student achieved, the more the student demonstrated a specific literacy behavior, as indicated on the observation checklist (see appendix L). Teachers need to do away with the misconceptions students have about spelling, such as spelling is important to pass a grade level. If students see that spelling is important

so that other people can read their writing and so that they can learn to read, it might motivate more students to be better spellers. They need a good attitude to go along with it as well.

## Chapter 5 Implications

Spelling is an aspect of writing (a skill) that some children dread. They dread it because of several reasons and teachers need to help students learn to enjoy it.

Teachers also need to help students avoid the misinterpretations that they have about spelling. The researcher designed a spelling program for teachers to use in order to help their students become better spellers.

### The Spelling Program:

Teachers should:

- Let children use temporary spellings (invented spelling) in order for them to spell unknown words and to express their ideas without having to worry about spelling
- Give children confidence and appreciate their writing. Point out students' strengths and recognize parts of words spelled correctly. It makes them feel good about themselves. Have a positive attitude!
- Let children imitate writing, invent spellings, and interact with writing since it is learned just like learning to talk
- Let children know that writing and spelling is difficult because the English language is very challenging
- Know who their weak/poor spellers are and why they are poor spellers. Poor spellers use few strategies, mostly just sounding out. They cannot visualize words or cannot see misspellings. Encourage different strategies, and use visuals with students.



Teachers should avoid:

- Correcting every misspelling. Only correct a few. Correcting all will delay learning in a child and he/she will learn to avoid taking risks.
- Telling students that they are wrong. This hinders self-esteem and confidence.
- Pointing out weaknesses. This also hinders a child's self-esteem.
- Correcting mistakes in front of classmates. This will make a child feel embarrassed or incompetent. Therefore, teachers should help students to proofread individually.
- Telling students mistakes are wrong and they need to be correct all the time. Making mistakes is a natural part of learning and happens to everyone.

Strategies teachers can use:

- A timetable for the school day to get organized and daily routines, that way teachers aren't rushing through subjects.
- Have resources available for students to use such as dictionaries, thesaurus, word wall, etc.
- Be learners as well as teachers. Learn about student's needs and wants.
- Use the different strategies to teach phonics such as cloze procedures, word sorts, cluster analysis, etc.

Strategies students can use:

- Have-a-go- Leaving out letters, replacing letters with a dash, etc.
- That reminds me- Relate unknown words to known words.
- Looking good- See if the word looks correct.

- Sound in parts- Break the word into parts and say the sounds out loud.
- Rap- Make up a song/rap to go with the spelling of a word
- Imagine, copy, examine- Imagine the word as a picture, describe it, and remember the last time it was seen
- Building blocks- Using letter clusters to form words

### Questions for Future Research

- Are good spellers in first grade always good spellers all the way through elementary school?
- Would research change if it were conducted in a second grade classroom?
- How much longer does it take a child to go from the transitional stage to the conventional stage? Do they ever go back a stage?
- Should teachers use the strategies mentioned in this research for all students?  
How well does each strategy work?
- Do children stop inventing spellings for unknown words?
- How do older children learn to read if they haven't already learned at an early age?

### Summary

The researcher studied one first grade classroom, surveyed first grade teachers and parents, and interviewed a group of first graders whom were selected at random to discover how first graders learn to spell. This study was important for teachers and staff because learning the factors that influence students' ability to spell and applying them will help students to improve and become stronger writers. This is important for children to be successful students and citizens.

# Appendix A

## PHONEMIC AWARENESS CLASS ROSTER

Teachers Name <i>Kebec / Phillips</i>		Rhyming		Segmentation of Syllables	Identification of Sounds			Segmentation of Sounds (in a word)	Deletion of Syllables		Deletion of Sounds			Substitution of Sounds			
Student Name		Disc.	Prod.		B	F	M		Comp	3 Syll.	L	F	BL	I	F	BL	V
<i>G 1</i>		<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>						
<i>B 2</i>		<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>					
<i>G 3</i>		<i>-</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>
<i>G 4</i>		<i>-</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>		
<i>G 5</i>		<i>-</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>				
<i>B 6</i>		<i>-</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>					
<i>B 7</i>		<i>-</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>		
<i>G 8</i>		<i>-</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>					
<i>G 9</i>		<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>						
<i>G 10</i>		<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>								
<i>B 11</i>		<i>-</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>				
<i>G 12</i>		<i>-</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>				
<i>G 13</i>		<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>						
<i>G 14</i>		<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>									
<i>G 15</i>		<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>									
<i>B 16</i>		<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>						
<i>B 17</i>		<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>						
<i>B 18</i>		<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>						
<i>B</i>		<i>-</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>+</i>	<i>-</i>						

38

+ = 3 out 4 Answers Correct  
- = Less than 3 Answers Correct

# Appendix B

## LETTER/SOUND IDENTIFICATION SCORE SHEET

✓ Check each box if the student knows letter and sound of letter,

Name: Student 19

Date: 11/19/03

Recorder: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE	*L/S	L/S	L/S	DATE	L/S	L/S	L/S
	Beg Year	Mid Year	End Year		Beg Year	Mid Year	End Year
A	✓			a	✓		
F	✓			f	✓		
K	✓			k	✓		
P	✓			p	✓		
W	✓			w	✓		
Z	✓			z	✓		
B	✓			b	✓		
H	✓			h	✓		
O	0			o	0		
J	✓			j	✓		
U	0			u	0		
				a	✓		
C	✓			c	✓		
Y	✓			y	✓		
L	✓			l	✓		
Q	0			q	0		
M	✓			m	✓		
D	✓			d	✓		
N	✓			n	✓		
S	✓			s	✓		
X	0			x	0		
I	0			i	0		
E				e	0		
G	✓			g	✓		
R	✓			r	✓		
V	✓			v	✓		
T	✓			t	✓		
				g	✓		
Total	/26 + /26	/26 + /26	/26 + /26	Total	/28 + /28	/28 + /28	/28 + /28
	/52	/52	/52		/56	/56	/56

Letters Unknown:

Consonants

Long Vowels

Short Vowels

Comments:

TOTAL/ Beg. Of Year  
SCORE 52 + 56 =

/108

TOTAL/ Mid Year  
SCORE 52 + 56 =

/108

TOTAL/ End of Year  
SCORE 52 + 56 =

/108

Record Totals on  
Master 10  
Summary Form

Criterion Score: 86 out of 108 correct.

\*Letter/Sound

Recording Form 2

## Appendix C

To the parent(s)/Guardian(s) of \_\_\_\_\_:

We just wanted to take the time to tell you about a part of school that is very new to us. Our school is part of the America's Choice School Reform where writer's workshop is implemented. Every day for about 40 minutes your child participates in writer's workshop. This lesson provides models of effective writing. During this time children discuss and apply the strategies of writing. Writer's workshop is a way to help your child become a stronger writer and for your child to feel more comfortable as a writer. Because your child is writing more often in our classroom, we would like to know about writing at home. We would appreciate it if you could take the time to answer the questions below. Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,

Miss Tudisco

Mrs. Kehoe

Please circle those that apply:

My child:			
draws at home.	Not at all	Sometimes	A lot
writes stories at home.	Not at all	Sometimes	A lot
writes on the grocery list.	Not at all	Sometimes	A lot
pretends to write in cursive.	Not at all	Sometimes	A lot
writes in a journal at home.	Not at all	Sometimes	A lot

# Appendix D

## Teacher Survey

(Name is not necessary. Use back if more room is needed.)

- 1) How many students are in your classroom?
  
- 2) What kinds of factors do you think influence students' ability to spell?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3) What characteristics do you think make a student a good speller? Do you think that teachers should correct student spelling during writing time? Does it help a student to become a better writer? Why or why not?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4) What characteristics do you think make a poor speller? If a teacher does not correct spelling during writing, do you think that hinders a student to become a good speller? Why or why not?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 5) What strategies do you teach for spelling? Do you advise your students to use invented spelling when they are writing? Do you think invented spelling is helpful for students or hurtful? Why or why not?

# Appendix E

## Spelling Interview \*

---

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. Is it important to learn to spell? Why?

2. When you are writing, how do you spell a word you don't know how to spell? Do you do anything else to help you?

3. What is the most important thing about spelling to you?

4. Who helped you the most to learn to spell? How did they help?

5. What is the hardest part of spelling?

6. What would you like to do to become a better speller?

7. Are you a good speller? Why or why not

8. Is it easy for you to find mistakes in your spelling? Why or why not?

Rate the following strategies. How often do you use them to spell words when you are writing a story, on a worksheet or in your journal?

Sound out the word	Yes, a lot	Sometimes	Not at all
Think about how it looks	Yes, a lot	Sometimes	Not at all
Find the word on your sheet	Yes, a lot	Sometimes	Not at all
Look around the room for the word	Yes, a lot	Sometimes	Not at all
Ask a friend or teacher	Yes, a lot	Sometimes	Not at all

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\* Black Line Master 5 and 5A Spelling Interview Adapted from *The Spelling Book: Teaching Children How to Spell* by Gladys Rosencrans, ©1998. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.



## Appendix F

### CHECKLIST OF SPELLING BEHAVIORS During a 40 minute writing lesson

Behavior: Does the student:	usually	at times	seldom
Show a positive, thoughtful attitude about spelling?			
Show willingness to attempt new words independently?			
Use a variety of spelling strategies?			
Verbalize his/her spelling strategies? (eg. Sound out words)			
Use a varied and extensive speaking vocabulary during lesson?			
Consistently spell age-appropriate high frequency words correctly?			
Use grammatical structures correctly?			
Use a word bank if provided or looks for words around the classroom?			
Demonstrate knowledge of common letter clusters? (eg. br, tr, dr, etc.)			
Demonstrate knowledge of base words and endings? (eg. ed, ings, s)			

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\* Black Line Master 8 Spelling Analysis Adapted from *The Spelling Book: Teaching Children How to Spell* by Gladys Rosencrans, ©1998. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

## Appendix G

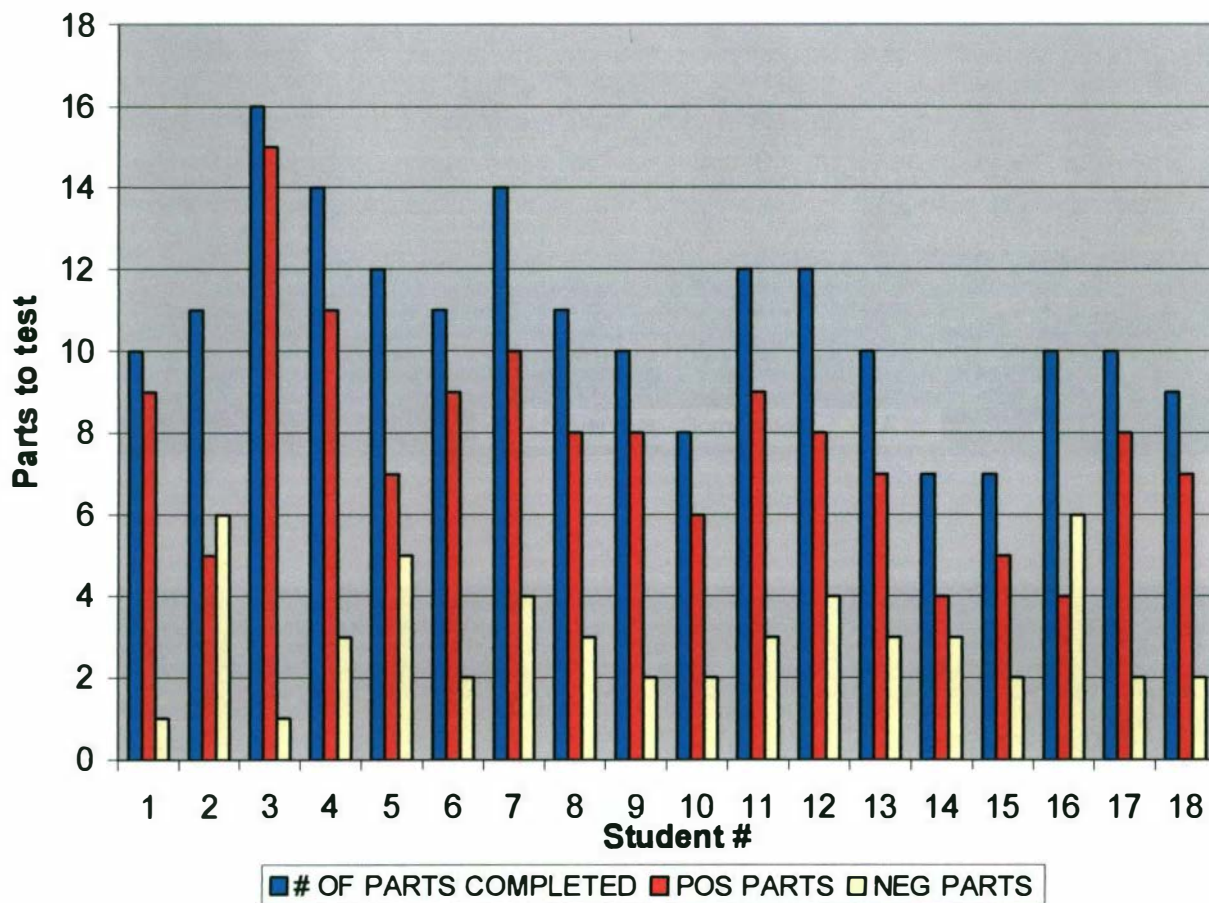
<b>TABLE OF TEACHER SURVEY</b>				
<i>Factors that influence Children's spelling ability</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>		<i>Should teachers correct spelling?</i>	<i>Does not correcting spelling hinder a child to become a good speller?</i>
	<i>Poor spellers</i>	<i>Good spellers</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Knowledge of phonics <b>100%</b></li> <li>-Practice <b>25%</b></li> <li>-Parental guidance <b>25%</b></li> <li>-Print rich environment <b>25%</b></li> <li>-Being read to <b>25%</b></li> <li>-Self-motivation <b>25%</b></li> <li>-Good listening skills <b>25%</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Phonemically unaware <b>50%</b></li> <li>-Poor attention <b>50%</b></li> <li>-Poor memory <b>50%</b></li> <li>-Lack of practice <b>25%</b></li> <li>-No selfmotivation <b>25%</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Phonemically aware <b>75%</b></li> <li>-Intelligent <b>25%</b></li> <li>-practice <b>25%</b></li> <li>-Good memory <b>25%</b></li> <li>-Good study habits <b>25%</b></li> <li>-Self-motivation <b>25%</b></li> <li>-Good listening skills <b>25%</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Not during writing time <b>50%</b></li> <li>-During conferences <b>75%</b></li> <li>-For final copies <b>50%</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-No <b>50%</b></li> <li>-It doesn't make them good or poor spellers <b>25%</b></li> <li>-Yes, there are many poor spellers because of not correcting spelling <b>25%</b></li> </ul>
<i>Does correcting spelling help to make a child a better writer?</i>	<i>Strategies that are used?</i>	<i>Do you use invented spelling?</i>	<i>Is invented spelling helpful?</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-No, a better speller <i>not</i> writer and makes them dependent on you <b>50%</b></li> <li>-Yes, they start to know how words look <b>25%</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Spelling games <b>25%</b></li> <li>-Practicing <b>50%</b></li> <li>-Phonics <b>50%</b></li> <li>-Writing sounds <b>25%</b></li> <li>-Stretching words <b>25%</b></li> <li>-Using the environment <b>50%</b></li> <li>-Word families <b>25%</b></li> <li>-Memorization <b>25%</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Yes <b>100%</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Yes <b>75%</b></li> <li>It gets students to write down ideas (they wouldn't write if they had to have correct spelling all the time), they don't get hung-up on spelling.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>/ = tally mark (one mark is equal to one teacher)</b></p>				

## Appendix H

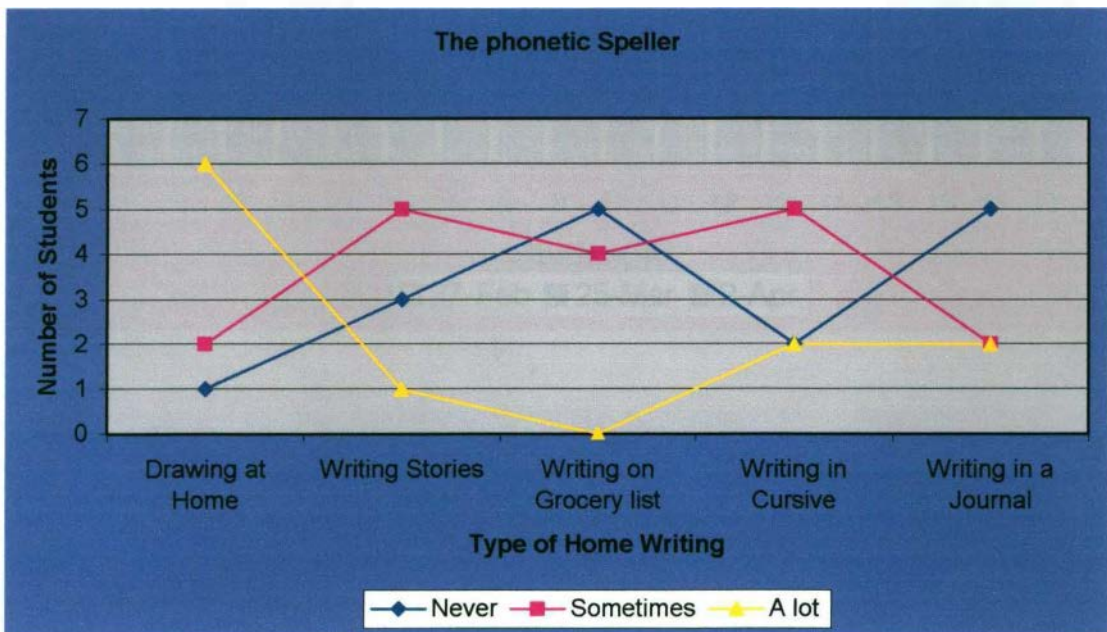
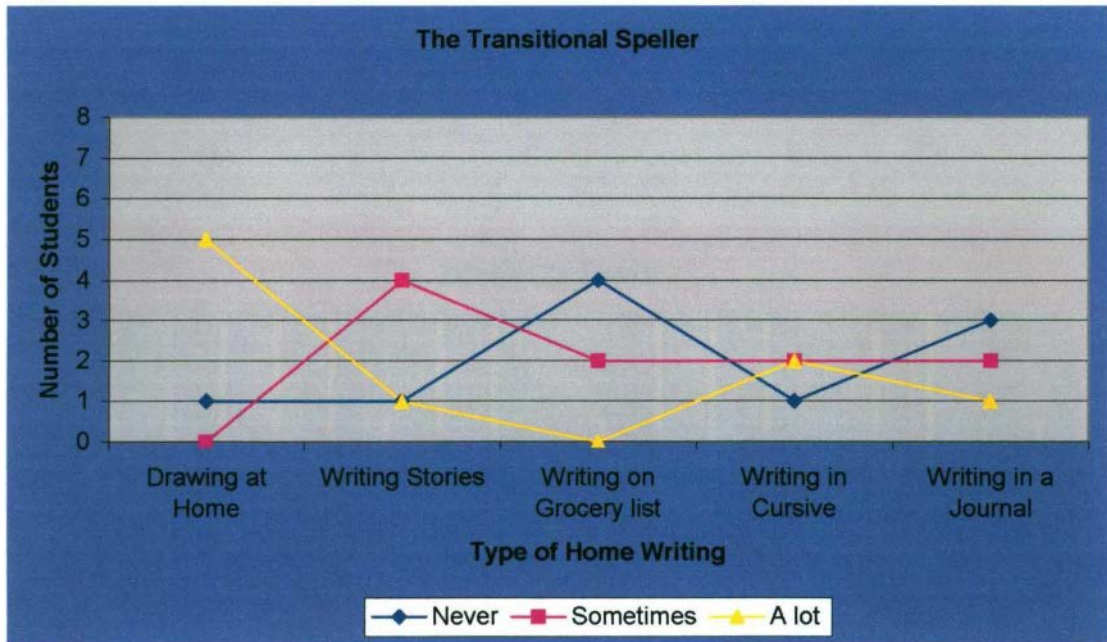
Question	Most popular answer	Students Interviewed				
		% (trans)	% (phonetic)	2nd most popular answer	% (trans) (Phonetic)	
1	to know how to read	50%	25%	to go to next grade	25%	0%
2	Sound it out	100%	75%	look at the word wall	50%	25%
3	to learn how to read	25%	25%	work hard and try your best	25%	25%
4	Teacher	50%	50%	Mother	25%	25%
5	Long words	50%	50%	when you can't read the word	25%	50%
6	Practice reading and writing	100%	25%	To sound out better	0%	25%
7	yes	100%	50%	no	0%	50%
8	no	75%	50%	yes	25%	50%
8a	I don't know	25%	25%	I can't tell when it is different	25%	25%
Strategy	<i>I do this strategy a lot</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>not at all</i>			
sound out	38%	63%	0%			
how it looks	63%	25%	13%			
find on paper	38%	50%	13%			
around room	63%	38%	0%			
ask	25%	50%	25%			

# Appendix I

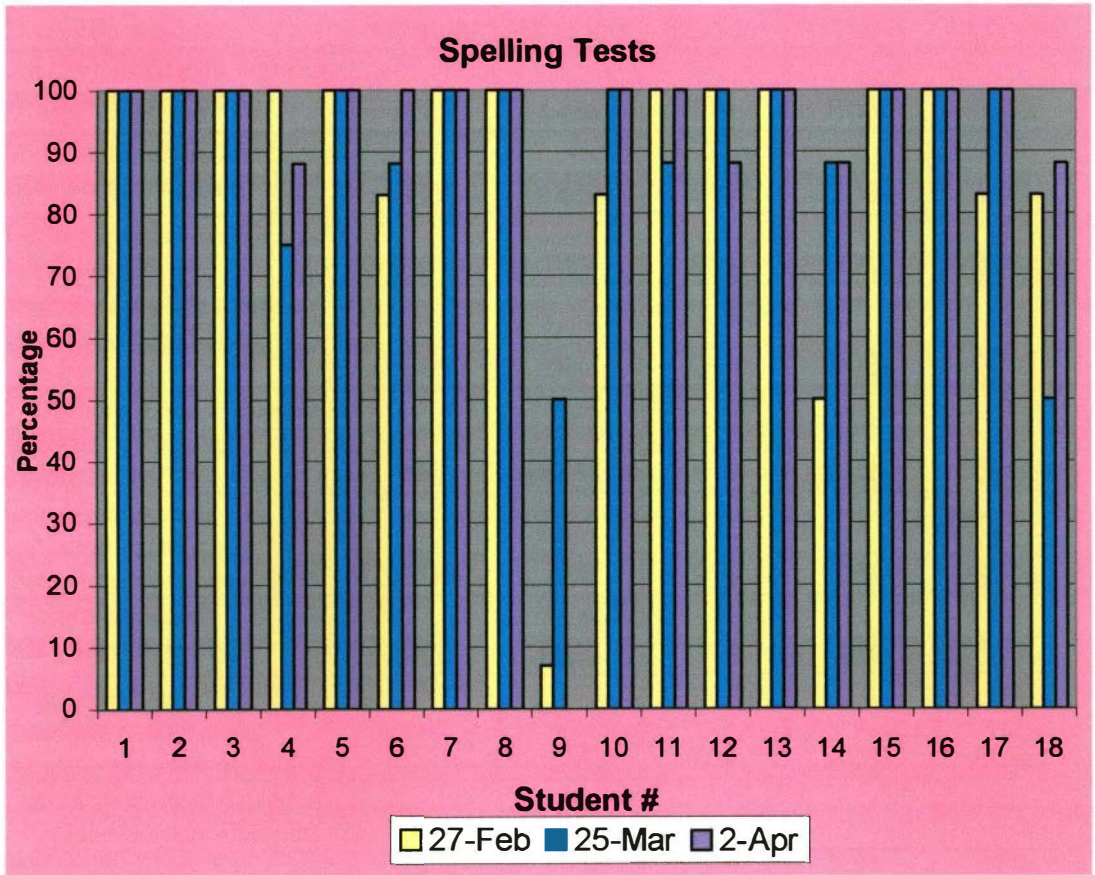
## Phonemic Awareness Test



# Appendix J



# Appendix K



## Appendix L

<b>Literacy Behavior Checklist- All Students</b>						
	<i>The Transitional Speller</i>			<i>The Phonetic Speller</i>		
<b>Behavior:</b> <b>Does the student:</b>	Usually	At times	Seldom	Usually	At times	Seldom
Show a positive, thoughtful attitude about spelling?	86%	14%	0%	60%	40%	0%
Show willingness to attempt new words independently?	86%	14%	0%	70%	30%	0%
Use a variety of spelling strategies?	100%	0%	0%	30%	60%	10%
Verbalize his/her spelling strategies? (eg. Sound out words)	100%	0%	0%	80%	20%	0%
Use a varied and extensive speaking vocabulary during lesson?	14%	86%	0%	10%	50%	40%
Consistently spell age-appropriate high frequency words correctly?	100%	0%	0%	0%	90%	10%
Use grammatical structures correctly?	14%	86%	0%	0%	50%	50%
Use a word bank if provided or looks for words around the classroom?	100%	0%	0%	40%	50%	10%
Demonstrate knowledge of common letter clusters? (eg. br, tr, dr, etc.)	86%	14%	0%	0%	20%	80%
Demonstrate knowledge of base words and endings? (eg. ed, ings, s)	14%	86%	0%	0%	30%	70%



## Appendix M

Student	Gender	L/S score	Comparisons		
			RRR level (9/04)	RRR level (3/04)	PA score
1	G	104	3	8	90
2	B	103	1	6	45
3	G	108	4	12	94
4	G	106	3	8	19
5	G	108	4	12	58
6	B	97	1	4	82
7	B	106	2	8	71
8	G	102	2	12	73
9	G	70	1	4	80
10	G	100	3	4	75
11	B	106	4	8	75
12	G	33	0	6	67
13	G	98	1	4	70
14	G	87	2	5	57
15	G	104	4	12	71
16	B	101	2	5	40
17	B	104	2	10	80
18	B	96	0	4	78

Student	Stage	Age	Is student where he/she should be?
1	Transitional	6 yrs. 8 months	beyond
2	Phonetic	7 yrs. 6 months	no- transitional
3	Conventional	6 yrs. 11 months	beyond
4	Phonetic	7 yrs. 7 months	no- transitional
5	Transitional	7 yrs. 8 months	yes
6	Phonetic	6 yrs. 11 months	yes
7	Transitional	7 yrs. 2 months	yes
8	Transitional	7 yrs. 3 months	yes
9	Phonetic	7 yrs.	no- transitional
10	Transitional	7 yrs. 8 months	Yes
11	Phonetic	8 yrs.	no- conventional
12	Phonetic	6 yrs. 9 months	yes
13	Transitional	7 yrs. 6 months	yes
14	Phonetic	7 yrs. 3 months	no- transitional
15	Transitional	6 yrs. 7 months	beyond
16	Phonetic	7 yrs.	no- transitional
17	Transitional	7 yrs. 4 months	yes
18	Phonetic	7 yrs.	no- transitional



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