
MEETING THE NEEDS OF LOW SPELLERS IN A SECOND-GRADE CLASSROOM

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This article describes a second-grade teacher's attempt to differentiate spelling instruction according to student achievement levels. The article begins by reviewing developmental spelling theory, particularly the stages that relate to first- and second-grade reader/writers. Following is a detailed description of the classroom spelling program, including beginning-of-year assessment, assignment of children to instructional groups, weekly lesson plans, and end-of-year assessment. Results showed that low-achieving spellers in September nearly "caught up" with their average-achieving classmates by the end of the school year. The article concludes with a discussion of why the spelling program was successful.

This article describes a second-grade spelling program I (first author) have developed and refined over the course of several years. I teach in a small town in western North Carolina, my school serving a mix of working-class and middle-class families. After twelve years of teaching, two influences led me to institute a new spelling approach in my classroom. First, through graduate coursework, I came to understand that learning to spell is a developmental process that underlies success in reading and writing. Second, I recognized that approximately one-third of my entering second graders were deficient in word

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recognition/spelling ability, a factor that limited their chances for success in a second-grade literacy curriculum.

In this article, I begin by reviewing developmental spelling theory, particularly the stages that relate to first- and second-grade reader/writers. Next, I describe my classroom spelling program, including beginning-of-year assessment, assignment of children to instructional groups, weekly lesson plans, and end-of-year assessment. I conclude by offering some thoughts about why the program worked for my low spellers.

DEVELOPMENTAL SPELLING THEORY AND EXPECTATIONS FOR FIRST- AND SECOND-GRADE SPELLERS

How does spelling ability develop, and what exactly are schoolchildren supposed to learn about the spelling system in first and second grade? Research supports the idea that spelling, far from being a simple visual memory activity, is a complex, knowledge-based process that evolves slowly over time (Henderson, 1990; Templeton & Morris, 1999). In first and second grade, average-achieving children progress through at least three stages in learning to spell (see Table 1).

In the *semi-phonetic stage*, children's early attempts at spelling often include only the consonant sounds in one-syllable words (e.g., B or BK for *back*; S or ST for *seat*). In the next stage, *letter-name* (or *phonetic*), they begin to represent vowels in their spellings. They "sound their way" through the word to be spelled, making one-to-one sound-letter matches as they write. Long vowels are represented with the corresponding letter name (PLAT for *plate*; JRIV for *drive*). Short vowels are also represented with letter names, but, curiously, with those letter names that bear a phonetic similarity to the specific

Table 1. Developmental spelling stages

Word	Semi-phonetic		Letter-name	Within-word pattern
	(1)	(2)		
back	B	BK	BAK	BAKC
seat	S	ST	SET	SETE
plate	P	PT	PLAT	PLAET
drive	J	JRV	DRIV	DRIAV
fill	F	FL	FEL	FIL
dress	J	JS	DRAS	DRES
float	F	FT	FLOT	FLOTE

short-vowel sound. For example, the short *i* and long *e* sounds are articulated in a similar manner (the tongue is in a similar position in the vocal tract). When the child attempts to represent the short *i* in *fill*, he/she lacks a letter–name referent (there is no alphabet letter “ih”). Thus, he/she tacitly chooses the nearest long-vowel letter name, *E*, and spells *fill*, FEL. (Other phonetically appropriate short vowel-letter name pairings are: *A* for short *e*; *I* for short *o*; and *O* for short *u*.)

With extended opportunities to read and write, many first graders and most second graders move into the *within-word pattern* spelling stage. At this stage, the children begin to represent short vowels correctly (FIL for *fill*; DRES for *dress*) and mark long vowels (PLAET for *plate*; FLOTE for *float*), even though the vowel markers are often misplaced. Within-word pattern spellings, though still incorrect in the conventional sense, are a clear step forward developmentally. They indicate that the children are beginning to abandon their earlier conception of spelling as a one-to-one code (one sound = one letter). Instead, these young spellers are searching actively for the legitimate patterns of letters (CVC [*mat*]; CVCe [*lake*]; CVVC [*tail*]) that actually map the sounds of the spoken language to the spelling system.

Not surprisingly, published spelling programs (e.g., Houghton-Mifflin, Scott-Foresman, Zaner-Bloser) follow this developmental progression. In first-grade spelling books, children study short-vowel patterns (e.g., *had*, *big*, *top*, *fun*, *let*), frequently occurring long-vowel patterns (e.g., *make*, *day*, *ride*, *keep*), and consonant digraphs and blends (e.g., *chin*, *shop*, *play*, *green*). The idea is for first graders to learn specific words and patterns that will challenge their intuitive Letter–Name stage hypotheses about vowel representation. For example, from October to February of first grade, a child’s spelling might change in the following manner:

Word	October	February
hid	HED	HID
dress	DRAS	DRES
but	BOT	BUT
made	MAD	MAYD
sleep	SEP	SLEPE

Given spelling instruction and abundant opportunities to read and write, the first grader, over a few months, learns to represent short vowels conventionally (HID vs. HED) and to mark long vowels with

an extra letter (SLEPE vs. SEP). These are important goals of first-grade spelling instruction.

Second-grade spelling book instruction builds on what was introduced in first grade. The first ten to twelve units in a second-grade spelling book often review and elaborate on the basic short- and long-vowel patterns (e.g., CVC, CVCe) that were covered in first grade. By Week 13 (of 36), however, the second-grade book begins to introduce new material—a myriad of one-syllable vowel patterns that are found in the English language (e.g., *train, clean, sheet, call, draw, boat, slow, food, took, light, find, found, brown, start, and short*). The task of learning these patterns challenges average second-grade spellers, as it should. Unfortunately, the task can overwhelm weak spellers who did not master the first-grade curriculum and, therefore, enter second grade still unsure of how to spell short-vowel words.

The problem of underprepared or slow-developing spellers led me to revamp my approach to second-grade spelling instruction. I realized that using the same grade-level list of spelling words each week for all of my students was short-changing my low spellers. Some of these children were able to hold a dozen words in immediate memory for the Friday spelling test but they were unable to spell these same patterns even a week later. Moreover, as the year advanced, the low spellers tended to fall further and further behind. I was already grouping for reading instruction; I decided it was time to group for spelling.

AN INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN FOR DIFFERENTIATED SPELLING INSTRUCTION

Initial Spelling Assessment

During the first week of school, I administered the first- and second-grade lists of a widely-used informal spelling inventory (Schlagal, 1992) to my whole class (see Appendix 1). There were twenty words on each list. I was not just looking to see how many words each student spelled correctly, although that was important. I was also interested in which letter/sounds they were writing correctly, which they were omitting, and which they were “using but confusing,” such as A for short *e*, a predictable short-vowel substitution, or JR for *dr*, a predictable consonant blend substitution (see Invernizzi, Abouzeid, & Gill, 1994). Table 2 shows the percentage of words the children spelled correctly on each list. Table 3 shows how four children, with different percentage correct scores on the first-grade list, spelled a sample of eight first-grade words and eight second-grade words.

Table 2. Children's performance on the initial spelling assessment

Child	First-grade list (% correct)	Second-grade list (% correct)
Anna	95	70
Tim	90	35
Danielle	80	50
Armin	80	40
Katie	60	30
Sydney	60	30
Bradley	60	25
Zachary	50	10
LaBreia	50	10
Ashley	45	20
Cindy	45	0
Cory	40	15
Logan	30	10
Cole	30	10
Shaniece	25	10
Randall	20	15
Duncan	15	5
Jordan	15	0
Zach	10	10

Note: Two children who moved into the classroom later in the school year are not included.

To determine which students would begin work in the second-grade spelling program and which would need to go back and review first-grade spelling patterns, I looked at percentage correct scores on the first-grade spelling list and also at the quality of the children's misspellings. I started off with the assumption that any child who could spell 50% of the first-grade list correctly probably had an adequate grasp of first-grade spelling principles (i.e., short vowels, consonant blends and digraphs, and e-marker long vowel patterns). This proved to be the case (see *Katie's* spellings in Table 3). Proceeding on, I found that children who scored 40–45% correct on the first-grade list also showed good knowledge of first-grade spelling patterns (see *Ashley's* spellings).

The next step was to determine a cutoff point, a first-grade percentage correct level where the quality of the children's spellings began to deteriorate. For my students, the cutoff point seemed to be around 30% correct on the first grade list. Table 3 shows that Ashley (45% correct) produced more sophisticated spellings than Logan (30% correct) (e.g., PLANE vs. PLAN; BOMP vs. BUP; THIK vs. THCK; CHAIS vs. CHAS). The picture is even clearer

Table 3. Sample spellings of four children achieving different percentage correct scores on the first-grade list

	Katie (60%)*	Ashley (45%)	Logan (30%)	Jordan (15%)
<i>First-grade words</i>				
plane	PLAIN	plane (c)	PLAN	PELN
drop	drop (c)	drop (c)	DOP	GRD
wish	wish (c)	WITH	wish (c)	WIASH
ship	ship (c)	ship (c)	SIP	SHEP
bump	BOP	BOMP	BUP	BUP
sister	sister (c)	sister (c)	SITR	SESRT
bike	bike (c)	bike (c)	BICK	BIK
drive	drive (c)	drive (c)	DIV	GIV
<i>Second-grade words</i>				
thick	THIK	THIK	THCK	FET
dress	dress (c)	DRES	DRES	DSE
stuff	STUF	STOF	SUF	SEF
year	year (c)	year (c)	YIRE	YRU
chase	CHACS	CHAIS	CHAS	CHAK
queen	QUEIN	QIN	QEN	KRUN
trapped	TRAPED	TRAPT	TRAPT	CHAP
shopping	SHOPING	SHOPING	SOPING	CHOB

*The percentage correct score refers to performance on the first-grade list.

when one compares Ashley's spellings with those of Jordan (15% correct), a child who lacks even first-grade spelling knowledge.

After applying the 30% correct cutoff, I came up with a grade-level spelling group of twelve students (Table 2: Anna – Cory) and a below-grade-level spelling group of seven students (Logan – Zach). Although I was a bit unsure about the borderline children, such as Logan and Cole, an analysis of their errors suggested that they could benefit from a review of first-grade spelling patterns.

Organizing for Spelling Instruction

Guided reading and process writing were the main activities in my two-hour morning language arts block. Spelling was allotted only 15–20 min. per day, this time doubling as the children's phonics instruction (for me, learning to decode words and spell words are two sides of the same coin). I ran three reading groups in my second-grade classroom. The top two groups, who read at a second-grade level, worked in a literature-based basal reader (Scott Foresman Reading Program, 2000) and leveled tradebooks. The low group, who started out reading at a first-grade level, worked in

an older basal reader (Laidlaw Reading Program, 1980) that provided needed word repetition within and across reading selections. Five of my lowest seven spellers (see Table 2) were members of the low reading group; the other two were members of the middle reading group.

To launch my spelling or word study program, I needed to:

1. place children in appropriate instructional groups.
2. obtain lists of first- and second-grade spelling words that were graded in difficulty, and
3. develop instructional activities that would engage the children in learning the words.

Based on results from the initial spelling assessment, I formed two spelling groups: a second-grade group containing twelve students and a first-grade group containing seven students. Regarding curricular materials, the second-grade spelling book (Houghton Mifflin Spelling and Vocabulary, 1990) adopted by the district provided lists of second-grade words. First-grade words were taken from lists that were part of Early Steps (Morris, Tyner, & Perney, 2000), a first-grade reading intervention program that was being used in our county (see Appendix 2 for fifteen units of first-grade words).

Regarding instructional activities, I decided to use the *word sort* approach developed at the University of Virginia in the 1980s (see Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2000; Morris, 1999). Word sort is an inductive, child-centered activity in which students group and regroup words according to common spelling features. For example:

mat	take	car	?
ran	name	park	rain
glad	race	start	say
bag	plate	farm	

Through column sorting, games, word searches, and a bit of old-fashioned memorization, children, over time, begin to internalize the basic one-syllable patterns of our spelling system. Given appropriate word lists to study, the only materials needed for word sorting are a pocket chart that can hold large word cards, paper and pencils, spiral notebooks in which the students can write their word sorts, and game boards.

Weekly Schedule

Monday: Pretest and self-correction of misspelled words

I administered a ten-word pretest to each group in the following manner: “Group 1, your first word is *bed*. Group 2, your first word is *clean*. Group 1, your second word is *pig*. Group 2, your second word is *keep*,” and so on.

Group 1	Group 2
bed	clean
pig	keep
bus	please
sit	green
rug	we
jet	be
cut	eat
wet	free
fin	mean
let	read

With the pretests completed, I posted the two spelling lists in the room, and the children self-corrected their errors, writing the correct spelling beside each mistake. Next, they practiced only the words they had misspelled, writing the word correctly three times. I collected the pretests, and the spelling lists (List 1 or 2) were sent home with the children to study.

Tuesday: Sort, make, and write words in notebook

I met with each group for five minutes, leading them in sorting their respective spelling words into patterns. Using a pocket chart and a set of enlarged word cards, I placed exemplars across the top row of the pocket chart:

let	pig	bus
bed		

Working with Group 1, I sorted *bed* under *let* and pronounced both words. Then the children took turns sorting the remaining six spelling words (*sit*, *rug*, *jet*, *cut*, *wet*, and *fin*) into columns, each time reading down the list after they sorted. We discussed why words went into given columns, focusing on the vowel sound. I even had the children “tap out” (with their fingers) each sound in a few words to heighten their attention to the medial vowel.

With the teacher-led sorting completed, the students returned to their seats to make their individual word cards. Each student copied his/her spelling words on a gridded 8" × 11" sheet of paper, printing one word in each space (see below Fig. 1).

After I had checked the correctness of their copying, the children cut the words apart, and each child sorted the resulting word cards by pattern on his/her desk. I checked the correctness of their sorting, often having a child read down a column of words to make sure the words shared the same vowel sound. Finally, the children wrote the spelling words in their word study notebooks—in columns, just as they had sorted them on their desktops (see Fig. 2).

Wednesday: Partner game day

I met briefly with the two spelling groups to review their respective patterns. (At the beginning of the year, this group time was used to model the playing of word games.) Next, children within the same spelling group partnered up to play a word game. Having initialed the backs of their cut-out word cards (see Tuesday), two children combined their cards to play one of several games: “Memory”, “Racetrack”, “Bingo”, or “Speed Sort”.

Memory (see Fig. 3) involves matching pairs of words that share the same spelling pattern and sound (e.g., *bed* and *wet* or *keep* and *green*). Ten to fourteen word cards are placed face down on the table. The first player turns over two word cards. If the cards are a pattern match (e.g., *bed*, *let*), and the child can read the words, he or she can pick them up, place them in his/her pile, and take another turn. If the two words turned over are not a pattern match (e.g., *bed*, *rug*), the

bed	pig	bus
sit	rug	jet
cut	wet	fin
let		

Figure 1. Word sort grid to be cut up into individual words.

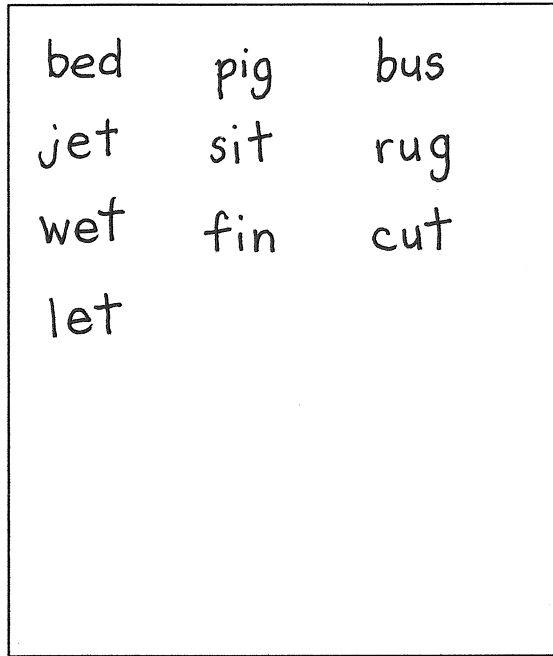


Figure 2. A word sort copied into student's word study notebook.

child must replace them face down in their original position on the table, and allow the other player to take a turn. The game is over when all the words have been removed from the table.

Racetrack (see Fig. 4) is a spelling game played with a racetrack board, one die with each side marked 1 or 2, and two colored chips. The first player rolls the die. If she rolls a 1, she must spell one word

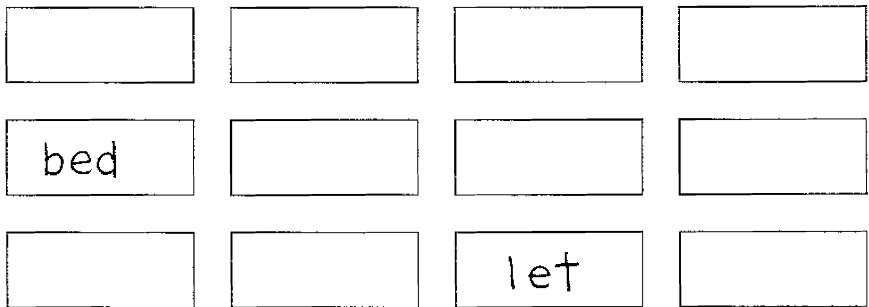


Figure 3. A short-vowel pattern match in the Memory game.

dictated by her partner; if she rolls a 2, she must spell two words. By spelling the words correctly, the child not only gets to move her chip forward but also gets to take one more turn. If she misspells a word, she loses her turn. The game is over when one player reaches the finish line.

Bingo (see Fig. 5) is a variation of column sorting (see Tuesday). It is played with two bingo boards (8"×11"), two sets of word cards, and four additional "wild cards." Pattern exemplars are placed in the top row of both Bingo boards. To begin the game, one player draws a word from the deck. If he/she can place it in the appropriate column (e.g., *name* under *make*) and then read each word in the column, the word is left on the board. If the player places the word in an incorrect column or misreads the word (and the other player challenges), then the word is removed from the board. The players alternate turns. If a player draws a "wild card," he/she can place it anywhere on the board and then take another turn. The game is over when one player fills all the squares on his/her Bingo board.

Speed Sort helps to build fast, accurate recognition of the weekly spelling words. Using a stopwatch, one child times his/her partner in sorting and reading the word cards. Then the children switch roles, the timer becoming the sorter/reader and vice versa. A second Speed Sort trial follows, allowing each child a chance to beat his/her first time.

Thursday: Oral spell check and word hunts

For the *oral spell check*, students partnered up within their spelling group to give each other a practice test. This was essentially an oral word sort where the words were heard but not seen. That is, as one student called out the spelling words one by one, his/her partner

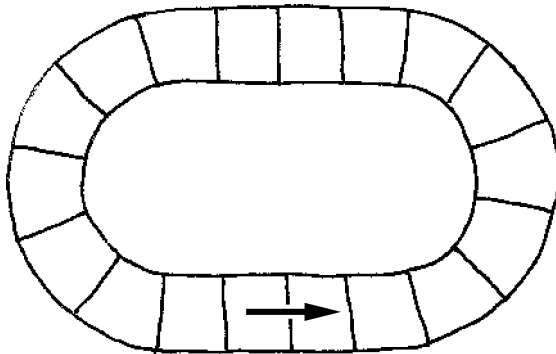


Figure 4. Racetrack game board.

bat	make	car	Player 1
man	name	park	
☺	tape	hard	
flat	page	barn	
clap	gave	☺	

DECK

bat	make	car	Player 2
map	race	part	
jam	trade	card	
☺	same	far	
make	☺		

Figure 5. Bingo game (with *a* vowel patterns) won by Player 1.

keep	mean	we
green free	read eat	be

Figure 6. Oral spell check with *e*-patterns.

wrote the word in the correct “pattern” column (see Figure 6). Spellings were checked for correctness before the children switched roles.

Word hunts served to broaden students’ attention to pattern and helped them make connections between spelling and reading. At various times, word hunts were conducted in small spelling groups or in twosomes. In either case, children skimmed a story they had previously read to find new words that fit the weekly spelling patterns. The new words were then added to their word study notebooks. Questionable pattern matches were written down in a “mystery column”; for example, *head* and *bread* share the same pattern but not the same vowel sound as the weekly spelling words, (*clean*, *please*, and *mean*). When word hunt groups met with me to share their new words, there was often a lively discussion regarding whether given words did or did not fit the target patterns.

Friday: Weekly spelling test

Spelling tests were administered every Friday, again alternating the dictation of words for Groups 1 and 2. Very seldom did a child score below 90% on the Friday test. Every sixth week, on Monday morning, *review* tests were administered. These review tests, taken cold without study, contained spelling patterns that had been introduced to the children during the previous five weeks. Students in both spelling groups consistently scored 80% or better on these review tests,

bolstering my confidence that the spelling program was working for all children in my classroom.

End-of-Year Evaluation

The low spelling group (Group 1) spent fifteen weeks in the alternative spelling lists, where they reviewed short-vowel patterns along with consonant blends and digraphs. In mid-November, the low group began in Unit 7 of the second-grade speller, which placed them about nine units (or weeks) behind my grade-level spelling group (Group 2), who were starting Unit 16 in the speller. For the last 21 weeks of the school year, both groups progressed through the second-grade spelling book, Group 1 eventually reaching unit 28 and Group 2 completing all 36 units in the book.

In the third week of May, a spelling posttest was administered that contained the first-, second-, and third-grade lists from Schlagal's (1992) informal spelling inventory (see Appendix 1). Table 4 shows the progress made by my students from the September pretest to the May posttest.

The class as a whole did very well on the posttest assessment (94%, 72%, and 60% correct on the first-, second-, and third-grade lists, respectively); however, I was most pleased by the performance of my low spelling group. These seven students showed huge pretest-to-posttest gains on the first- and second-grade spelling lists and performed surprisingly well on the third-grade list.

Table 5 compares the low spelling group's posttest performance to that of seven students (Sydney – Cory) who performed just above the low group on the September pretest. Note that by the end of the school year, the low group had caught up with their average-achieving peers on the first-grade posttest (93% to 94%) and compared favorably with their peers on the second-grade posttest (62% to 73%) and the third-grade posttest (47% to 56%). The low-group's mean percentage of 47% correct on the third-grade list is particularly encouraging. Morris et al. (1995) found that third-grade spellers who score at least 40% correct on a beginning-of-year pretest tend to achieve well in a third-grade spelling curriculum.

DISCUSSION

As a second-grade teacher, I began to group for spelling instruction because I was concerned about the word knowledge gap existing between my low and average reader/spellers. My intervention for my seven lowest spellers essentially consisted of fifteen weeks of short-vowel

Table 4. Children's pretest-posttest performance on an informal spelling inventory (Schlagal, 1992)

Child	First-grade list (% correct)		Second-grade list (% correct)		Third-grade list (% correct)	
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
Anna	95	100	70	90	—	95
Tim	90	100	35	75	—	80
Danielle	80	90	50	90	—	70
Armin	80	100	40	80	—	80
Katie	60	100	30	95	—	95
Sydney	60	90	30	95	—	70
Bradley	60	90	25	80	—	60
Zachary	50	95	10	60	—	35
LaBreia	50	95	10	65	—	35
Ashley	45	100	20	80	—	75
Cindy	45	95	0	70	—	50
Cory	40	90	15	60	—	70
Logan	30	90	10	80	—	60
Cole	30	95	10	50	—	40
Shaniece	25	85	10	70	—	40
Randall	20	100	15	95	—	95
Duncan	15	95	5	50	—	40
Jordan	15	100	0	60	—	30
Zach	10	85	10	30	—	25
<i>Mean</i>		<i>94</i>		<i>72</i>		<i>60</i>

word study before placing the children in the second-grade spelling book. Henderson (1990, pp.122–123) discussed the importance of short-vowel word knowledge in the early stages of literacy:

The most consistent and frequently occurring pattern is that for the short vowel, and that pattern requires particular attention because the vowel phoneme is represented differently than children expect.

Table 5. A comparison of the spelling performance of the low group ($N = 7$) with that of a group of average-achieving peers ($N = 7$)

	First-grade list (% correct)		Second-grade list (% correct)		Third-grade list (% correct)	
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
Average group	50	94	16	73	—	56
Low group	21	93	10	62	—	47

It is for this reason that the short vowels need to be studied first and very carefully.

The pattern concept emerges gradually and in a very general form What is occurring is something like this: remembered words are spelled correctly, short vowels are spelled correctly, and long vowel markers may or may not be spelled correctly but are usually put in long vowel words Data of this kind let us know that the pattern idea is forming. Only then can we expect children to examine pattern exemplars and by degrees learn the characteristics of each long English vowel Success in this learning will depend very much on the foundation that is built during the letter-name [short vowel] stage of word knowledge.

Henderson's words describe what happened to my seven low spellers. These children entered second grade lacking a firm grasp of short-vowel words (CVC, CCVC). During the first fifteen weeks of school, they internalized the short-vowel patterns along with consonant blends and digraphs. This solid foundation not only allowed them to learn the various long-vowel patterns in the second-grade spelling book but also to learn words from their contextual reading.

The growth made by the low spellers was striking, keeping in mind that they almost caught up with their average-achieving peers by the end of the school year. Although the differentiated spelling instruction undoubtedly contributed to the low spellers' achievement, these children were also reading stories written at the correct instructional level and doing a great deal of writing in my classroom. In truth, I believe that there is a synergy among spelling, reading, and writing. That is, studying spelling words at the appropriate level allows children to attend to critical features or patterns in the words (e.g., the *o* in *top*, *shot*, and *job*; the *a-e* in *made*, *name*, and *rake*; the *ea* in *clean*, *real*, and *speak*). Contextual reading and writing then become "practice fields" that serve to automatize these spelling patterns and drive them deep into orthographic memory. Spelling, reading, and writing are thus interrelated, with growth in one area leading to growth in the other areas, particularly when children are given opportunities to study words and read text at the appropriate difficulty level.

There are three potential obstacles to grouping for spelling instruction. First is the teacher's fear that low spellers will fall even further behind if they do not work in the grade-level spelling book. The positive results in this study, as well as those reported in Morris et al.'s (1995) study of third-grade spelling groups, would seem to address this concern. Second, some parents might object to their children being placed in a below-grade-level spelling group. In such

cases, the teacher must explain clearly and confidently to the parents that their child will benefit most by working at his/her instructional level in spelling; furthermore, that as the child's spelling improves, there may be concomitant improvement in his/her reading and writing. A third obstacle is that grouping for spelling requires additional planning by the classroom teacher. There is no way around this problem. However, once alternative spelling lists are obtained (see Appendix 2) and daily instructional routines established, grouping for spelling becomes more manageable in the elementary classroom.

This study described spelling-group instruction in a second-grade classroom. Differentiated spelling instruction is also needed in third, fourth, and fifth grade, where the range of student spelling performance within a given classroom is even greater—where some students may be functioning two or more years below grade level. Teachers in these upper-elementary grades can follow the general plan described in this article: assess students' spelling ability during the first week of school, assign them to "instructional level" groups, obtain multi-level spelling lists, establish daily study routines (word lists and activities found in commercial spelling programs can be used), and evaluate students' spelling progress at regular intervals—weekly, every six weeks, and at the end of the school year. At the upper grades, the justification for careful spelling instruction is that it strengthens and elaborates the word knowledge that underlies students' reading and writing ability.

Conclusion

Although multi-level spelling instruction is called for throughout the elementary grades, from a prevention standpoint it is particularly advantageous in grades one and two. As Morris et al. (1995, p. 176) stated:

The idea of intervening early and intensively has been tried successfully with low-reading first graders. It is probably time that teachers adopt a similar approach with low spellers. The longer the teacher waits, the further these students will fall behind, and it should be obvious that the spelling achievement "gap" will be easiest to close before it starts to widen.

In this classroom-based study, I have shown that low-spelling second graders can close the achievement gap if they are provided

appropriately-leveled instruction paced to their learning rate. Spelling is, of course, only one part of a balanced language arts curriculum; however, it is a part whose importance is often overlooked (see Templeton & Morris, 1999). We must remember that children who learn to spell with accuracy and confidence in the primary grades master the orthographic patterns that underpin future success in writing and reading the English language.

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Appendix 1. First-, second-, and third-grade spelling lists from the Qualitative Inventory of Word Knowledge (Schlagal, 1992)

First grade	Second grade	Third grade
girl	traded	send
want	cool	gift
plane	beaches	rule
drop	short	trust
when	trapped	soap
trap	thick	batter
wish	plant	scream
cut	dress	sight
bike	carry	count
trip	stuff	knock
flat	try	caught
ship	crop	noise
drive	chore	careful
fill	angry	stepping
sister	chase	chasing
bump	queen	straw
plate	drove	nerve
mud	cloud	thirsty
chop	shopping	handle
bed	float	sudden

Appendix 2. Fifteen units of first-grade spelling words

<i>Unit 1</i>	<i>Unit 2</i>	<i>Unit 3</i>	<i>Unit 4</i>	<i>Unit 5</i>
cat	pack	lip	man	pot
nap	had	did	nap	hop
hit	sick	mop	win	net
big	lip	hot	mop	bed
that	tack	shop	hop	sock
map	mad	sip	ran	top
fit	rack	kid	tap	lock
dig	kick	dot	chin	get
lap	dip	chop	van	shop
fig	dad	hid	chop	neck
sat	lick	ship	kin	check
lit	tip	not	cap	red
<i>Unit 6</i>	<i>Unit 7</i>	<i>Unit 8</i>	<i>Unit 9</i>	<i>Unit 10</i>
cut	mad	bad	wet	had
when	big	lip	fit	fed
luck	hot	dot	rub	lot
pet	ham	fan	bell	bath
hen	rib	did	plug	chop
up	mop	cob	slip	pet
get	bag	trap	fell	path
shut	will	drag	flip	well
ten	rob	drip	slug	shop
but	with	trot	sled	job
wet	that			
pup	rock			
<i>Unit 11</i>	<i>Unit 12</i>	<i>Unit 13</i>	<i>Unit 14</i>	<i>Unit 15</i>
sat	map	flag	black	fast
pet	bed	dress	chin	desk
pop	pick	drip	drop	milk
slam	pass	ball	block	just
sled	leg	glad	grass	ask
spot	mess	fall	thin	best
step	bag	smell	whip	last
snap	miss	call	clock	lift
sock	red	drag	glass	nest
pen	fin	fell	which	help

Note: These lists were compiled by Stamey Carter of Watauga County Schools, NC.

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