AN INDIVIDUALIZED SPELLING PROGRAM
FOR FIRST GRADERS

MASTER'S PROJECT

Submitted to the Department of Teacher Education
University of Dayton, in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science in Education

by

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

Purpose of the Study

Spelling instruction has changed little since its introduction in 1783 with the publication of Noah Webster's first Blue-Backed Speller (1783/1968). Since that time teachers have presented lists of selected words and students were tested for accuracy at the end of each week. Students who had a knack for spelling (the words "looked right") did well on the weekly tests. But others struggled to memorize the words for Friday's test and often found the effort fruitless because many times they would misspell those same words in a writing exercise a week or two later. Bloodgood, (1991).

The interest of an Individualized Spelling Program has been a desire of the writer. The writer wanted to help her students become more strategic spellers. The writer originally became interested in this idea when after twelve years of teaching and three years of teaching from an adopted spelling series by the public school system, the writer still found that the present series was not meeting the needs of all of her students in teaching them to spell easily and accurately. Somehow the writer, along with other educators of spelling, was not getting the job done when it came to spelling competency. Hillerich (1977) speaks of a spelling
conscience—a desire and concern to spell correctly. He says that teachers must teach children that spelling is a courtesy to the reader of writing. Therefore, the writer feels that an individualized spelling program, a program that would ensure that each student would be working on words at his/her ability level with words found frequently in their reading books, journals and other classroom writing, would be much more beneficial.

The writer also feels that students should see the close relationship between the three areas of spelling, reading, and writing. The writer found that most of her students who are good spellers are good readers and good writers. Shaughnessy (1977) says "...without constant experience with written words, it is impossible to absorb the letter-sound correspondences that govern English". Asking students to choose words from their journals, story writings, and other reading and writing activities would help illustrate how closely the three areas are related and compliment each other. The writer through a program of this sort feels that her students would be better able to transfer their spelling into their writings and also make the transition of inventive to conventional spelling easier.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to devise an individualized spelling program for first graders.
Definition of Terms

ISP—Individualized Spelling Program. This is a plan devised for the individual student intended to encourage the student to become a better strategic speller.

Invented Spelling. This is the spelling stage where the student spells words according to the letters and sounds of the word.

Transitional Spelling. This is the spelling stage where the student spells the words closer to the real spelling.

Conventional Spelling. This is the spelling stage where the student spells the words correctly.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

A review of the literature reveals that there has been very little change in the way spelling is viewed or taught. (Bloodgood, 1991; Wilde, 1990). Prior to the 1950's learning to spell was driven by rote memorization. It was felt that learning to spell was word-specific; words were learned one-at-a-time (Hillerich, 1977). Consequently, there was no guarantee that children would still spell the same words correctly if presented with them at a different time. It simply meant that if a child had a good memory, he/she would be a "good speller" and if a child did not have a good memory, he/she were a "poor speller".

In the late 1950's and on through the early 1970's, a review of the literature notes that more researchers of spelling began to believe that instead of teaching spelling letter-to-letter, words should be examined for patterns which would help a child learn other words with the same patterns. This approach gave the poor speller a little more hope, provided they could remember the patterns.

In the late 1970's through the present time, a new position about the way children learn to spell has unfolded. Henderson and Beers (1980) suggest that children go through conceptual stages when learning to spell. Other researchers such as Henderson and Templeton (1986) and Gentry and
Gillet (1992) also support this idea. The literature also reveals that learning to spell is a matter of acquiring knowledge of how the alphabet reflects meaningful language and spelling competency comes at different levels for each individual child.

Before the writer discusses the elements necessary for a well-balanced spelling program, she presents a brief overview of two philosophies of how spelling is taught.

At present, there are two main philosophies of how to teach spelling. There is the whole language view where the belief is that the role of the teacher is to guide and facilitate a developmental change in the strategies that a child uses to spell words rather than to direct the child to correctly spell specific words, and the traditional view where words are studied in isolation, memorized, and then given on a weekly test. Each of these philosophies has supporters that believe their method of teaching spelling is the right way. What modern educators need to be knowledgeable of is not their beliefs in a philosophy, but rather the understanding of the very complex process of spelling and how it works. To hold on to one model and toss the other aside is not the issue.

Research notes many advantages for having a spelling program that fosters the individual ability levels of spelling for children. Hillerich (1977) notes that individual or group-level work rather than class-level work might be better suited for some children for spelling instruction. This
chapter discusses the individualized spelling program. It will be divided into two parts. The first part discusses three reasons why the writer feels the use of an individualized spelling program would be beneficial to first grade students. The second part deals with research-based theory that support twelve elements for promoting a well-balanced individualized spelling program.

Reasons for an Individualized Spelling Program

One reason for establishing an individualized spelling program is to help students learn spelling strategies and be better able to transfer their correct spellings into their writing, thus seeing the connection between spelling, reading, and writing. According to Templeton (1991) in order for students to become good, accurate spellers they must first become good strategic spellers. Routman (1991) suggest that understanding spelling strategies and discovering rules about spelling and examining words through different activities are all presented to encourage students to become better independent spellers. This approach to spelling focuses on students taking risks by learning and applying spelling strategies. Constant exposure and experience with written words in the context of reading and writing activities will also help the natural developmental process of spelling.

Another reason for establishing an individualized spelling program is that it helps the student make the
transition from inventive spelling to conventional spelling. Researchers Henderson and Templeton (1986) and Gentry and Gillet (1992) all share the idea that children's learning of spelling is done in developmental stages, similar to the process children go through when learning language. They say that a child progresses from very simple spellings of words to more advance spellings of words as they go through these developmental stages. They go on to say that foundations of spelling competence are set by imitating, inventing, interacting, and taking risks in a print-rich environment, and as children engage in these activities, they construct or invent a system of spelling. In this system, each stage is qualitatively different from the others and each indicative of a different mind set or cognitive awareness of how spelling works. Each stage represents a critical insight followed by an extension and refinement of understanding about English spelling. Though inventive spellers tend to move in the direction of conventional spelling, the end of this progression is not so much the acquisition of expert spelling ability as a setting of the foundation from which expert spelling might be constructed.

The five stages identified by Henderson and Templeton (1986) are:

1. Preliterate Period: This stage is identified as the child's earliest attempts at writing. The child begins to understand the form and functions of print.
2. **Alphabetic Principle**: This stage is when the child begins to understand that letters and sounds are related. The child attends to the phonetic aspects of print.

3. **Within-Word Pattern**: In this stage children are beginning to attend to both sound and pattern in words. They are also beginning to deal with meaning as it relates to spelling.

4. **Syllable Juncture**: At this stage, children begin to understand the rationale for joining common inflections to single-syllable words. Children are attending to the differences between multisyllabic words.

5. **Derivational**: This is the stage when children really begin to understand that words that are related in meaning are also related in spelling. The children are attending to the base and root words. Children also begin to study the impact of Greek and Latin on English spelling patterns. Similar stages of spelling development are suggested and used by Gentry and Gillet (1992). They are:

1. **Precommunicative Stage**: In this stage, the child spells random letter strings and is aware that letters are symbols, but he shows no knowledge of letter-sound relationship.

2. **Semiphonetic Stage**: During this stage, the child becomes aware that letters represent sounds of words but depends on the dominant consonants in the word.
3. **Phonetic Stage**: In this stage, the child begins to break up words into phonemes and then attempts to match the phonemes with the right letters.

4. **Transitional Stage**: In the transitional stage, the speller has enough knowledge of sounds of letters that he begins to rely less on phonology and more on visual and morphological strategies.

5. **Conventional (correct) Stage**: In this stage, the speller now knows the English orthographic system and begins to produce correct spellings of words.

As children move through these developmental stages, they most likely will produce spelling characteristics of more than one stage at the same time, but according to the above researchers, the stage that describes most of their invented spellings represents their developmental level.

One other reason cited by Graves (1991) for implementing an individualized spelling program is that it encourages students to make "good" informed guesses of how to spell unfamiliar words. Graves (1991) suggests that children can normally look at a word and decide if it is spelled correctly, even if they do not know the word. Teaching children to make attempts or guesses at unknown words is the same process used by adults when they cannot figure out a word. Routman (1991) in her use of (Have-a-go) sheets (adopted from Australia) encourages children to attempt several different ways to spell words. Authors Graves (1991) and Routman (1991) suggest that
the more attempts made at spelling the unfamiliar word correctly brings students closer to the correct spelling of the word. They also suggest that after these attempts, the teacher should have routine conferences with each student to further guide them into the correct spelling of the word.

The teaching and learning of spelling is a very complex process. Learning to spell entails both unconscious and effortless learning as well as learning that may need to be more directed and specific. Learning to spell is an individual process. We have drawn from the best of information available from whole language and research-based traditional views about how to teach spelling. But, it is suggested that the key to a successful program is a good balance between the different philosophies. Gentry and Gillet, (1992) have identified twelve elements that promote a well-balanced individualized spelling program. They are discussed below.

Elements for Promoting a Well-Balanced Individualized Spelling Program

The first element for promoting a well-balanced individualized spelling program is to treat spelling as a complex process. Gentry and Gillet (1992) state that the problem with the teaching of spelling has been that educators have treated it too simplistically. Educators have treated it as a mere memorization task and not as an aspect of language and a process that is very complex. Gentry and Gillet (1992)
along with other noted researchers Barone (1992) and Henderson and Beers (1980) express the view that because children's knowledge of spelling develops similar to oral language and is highly complex in nature, it should be viewed as such. With that in mind, the above researchers suggest that the teaching approaches of spelling should reflect this natural developmental process of children in order to guide them to spelling competency.

The second element suggested to promote a well-balanced individualized spelling program is that it should help children meet all four demands of spelling. They are: the phonetic (the one-to-one correspondences between letter and sound), semantic (the study of meanings of words or parts of words), historical (learning how a word's spelling reflect its etymology or history), and visual (the utilization of morphological factors (compounding, affixation, and word families). Gentry and Gillet (1992) note that the five predictable stages contribute in developing the phonetic, semantic, historical, and visual demands expected of expert spellers. The stages of precommunicative spelling and semiphonetic spelling cover the discovery of the English letter system and the English letter sounds. The speller is beginning to show an awareness of phonemes, the speech sounds that correspond to individual letters. As children move into the phonetic, transitional, and conventional stages, they further develop and start to acquire a systematic invention of
the English orthographic with a very complex variety of basic conventions of English that the expert speller is required to have.

The third element needed to promote a well-balanced individualized spelling program is to treat spelling as a developmental process. According to Gentry and Gillet (1992) and Henderson and Beers (1980) children move through five major stages of developing spelling strategies before they reach the final and correct stage of spelling. The child proceeds from acquiring simple skills in the precommunicative stage to acquiring very specific skills in the conventional stage. Although there are five stages in this process, the above researchers agree that the semiphonetic stage (the inventive spelling stage) sets the level of development.

The fourth element necessary to promote a well-balanced individualized spelling program is to make sure the spelling program is child-centered. According to Gentry and Gillet (1992) and Barone (1992) providing a program where the child is able to express and learn to use spelling strategies on his own is best. The child should be allowed many meaningful reading and writing encounters each day that involve spelling to enhance spelling competency. Teachers should provide many opportunities where children are allowed to examine and experiment with words. This will help the competent spellers realize their greatest potential growth and also encourage independent learning of spelling.
The fifth element needed to promote an individualized spelling program is to integrate spelling in all subject areas. According to Gentry (1987) spelling should be integrated in all subject areas especially the areas of reading and writing. He believes that these two areas should be taught in a literature-rich environment. There should be a number of opportunities for children to read and write during the course of each school day. As noted by Wilde (1990) students progress better as spellers when the teacher supports them as readers and writers. Exposure to many types of literature develops interest in books which in turn gives children ideas for writing topics. Gentry (1987) does say, however, that spelling although integrated in other subject areas does not and should not keep the teacher from the possibility of having children spend time specifically on spelling.

The sixth element necessary to promote an individualized spelling program is to take advantage of invented spelling as an opportunity to learn. Gentry and Gillet (1992) say inventive spellings are included and play a major part in a child's developmental level of spelling. Since spelling is learned by stages just like human language, the act of a child inventing spellings by hypothesising and testing ideas about spelling will eventually lead to spelling competency for most. Inventive spelling is the foundation of learning to spell. As a child's spelling progress develops, it will eventually lead
the expert speller to be able to use information from visual memory, as well as knowledge of phonetic, contextual, and meaning relationships to determine the correct spelling of a word. Gentry and Gillet (1992) state that parents should not view invented spelling as a roadmap that leads to the formation of bad spelling habits but as an opportunity to learn about the developmental process of learning to spell.

The seventh element needed to promote a well-balanced individualized spelling program is to think of whole language and spelling instruction as being compatible. Routman (1991) views the aspect of whole language and spelling as focusing on taking risks; teaching and applying spelling strategies, and recognizing and correcting misspellings when students edit or proofread their written work. She recognizes first and foremost that spelling is learned and taught in the context of writing and that spelling competence develops over a gradual period of time and differently by each child. Graves (1991) affirms the view that children will learn to spell solely through immersion in contextual reading, expressive writing, and activities involving real communication situations. Routman (1991) believes it is hard to think of spelling without thinking of reading and writing, as the three are interrelated.

The eighth element needed to promote a well-balanced individualized spelling program is to use instructional resources for teaching spelling. There are many instructional
resources cited by Routman (1991) such as mini-lessons (direct instruction) on spelling strategies which provide opportunities for the student to practice and participate. Other resources mentioned by Routman (1991) to use are (Have-a-go) sheets, wall charts, and pattern charts that display spelling or phonic patterns. Word sorts by Schlagal and Schlagal (1992) and word hunt used by Bloodgood (1991) are also good resources to use when teaching spelling. Research notes that children learn spelling when they are motivated with fun, risk-taking and challenging opportunities. Treating spelling of words in an interesting and enjoyable way can only be an advantage to any student and enhance their knowledge of words.

The ninth element necessary to promote a well-balanced individualized spelling program is to educate parents and solicit their help. According to Gentry (1987) parents play a major and active part of a child's learning of spelling. The parents, he says, really are the major factor in shaping a child's attitude toward spelling. Parents should not only be included, but they should also be encouraged and educated on elements that give their child a chance to become a successful speller. Gentry (1987) suggest that providing information to parents about topics such as: understanding spelling as a developmental process, idealizing the importance of writing on a regular basis daily, advising a parent not to be critical of children when they misspell words, and
introducing parents to the concept of invented spelling are just a few ways that will help educate parents to help and enhance their child's developmental process and attitude towards spelling and words in general. Also, it will give the child's parents a better and clear understanding of the whole spelling process.

The tenth element needed to promote a well-balanced individualized spelling program is to have children pay attention to commonly used words. Gentry and Gillet (1992) state that students spell words they are familiar with and see on a constant basis easier. Studying these words in fun, challenging ways such as word study groups, (Barone, 1992) and word sorts (Schlagal & Schlagal, 1992; Barnes, 1989) can eventually help the child begin to use these words in stories, sentences, and other independent writings. All of the above researchers believe that the more exposure to known words using many resources through reading and writing activities daily can promote a better spelling success rate in children.

The eleventh element necessary to promote a well-balanced individualized spelling program is to remember that spellers must also be readers and writers. As noted by Gentry (1987) and Routman (1991) good spellers are normally good readers and writers. Research supports the idea that spelling is a tool for writing. The purpose of learning to spell is so that writing becomes easier, more expressive and more easily read and understood by others. (Gentry and Gillet, 1992).
Research also supports the idea that children should be exposed daily to a literature-rich environment in order to develop as readers, writers, and spellers.

The twelfth element necessary to promote a well-balanced individualized spelling program is to teach proofreading and spelling consciousness. Proofreading and spelling consciousness according to noted spelling authorities Routman (1991) and Gentry and Gillet (1992) is very important when children are editing written materials. They conclude that children should have a desire and concern for spelling accuracy. Proofreading consist of two separate activities. The first activity is examination (identifying as many misspelled words as possible) and the second activity is production (correctly spelling as many of the misspelled words as possible from their writing piece). Researchers suggest that this proofreading activity should be the main responsibility of the child. As stated before by Hillerich (1977) children should develop a spelling conscious and should be taught that spelling is a courtesy to the reader of their writing. Routman (1991) goes on to suggest that using the (Have-a-go) sheets will assist in correcting misspelled words. This proofreading skill is a very important skill of spelling and is one that a child will use lifelong.
Summary

Research supports the idea that children learn spelling strategies through five developmental stages and that these stages are different for each individual child. As quoted by (Shaughnessy, 1977) "the ability to spell grows slowly out of a number of different kinds of encounters with words."

This spelling program was designed to provide students with alternative tools to help them become competent spellers. The writer hopes to help those spellers who are having difficulties learn strategies they can use in order to improve on their spelling abilities.
CHAPTER III
PROCEDURE

The writer consulted a variety of sources when she searched for ideas for her individualized spelling program. These included obtaining ideas from the sources listed below.

Journals


Books


Manuals

The writer examined several spelling manuals but drew most of her ideas from the manual in the spelling series just recently developed by four authors: Karen R. Harris, Steve Graham, Jerry Zutell, and J. Richard Gentry. This series was published by Zaner Bloser, Inc. (1995) and provides a number of activities that could be included and used with the idea of an individualized spelling program. The name of the spelling series is Spell It-Write.

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Workshops

The writer was involved in two workshops at her school that provided insight into the teaching of spelling and activities with which a well-balanced individualized spelling program could be developed. Zutell, of The Ohio State University and one of the authors of the spelling series, Spell It--Write was the head speaker at these workshops.

Critiquers

The writer's project was critiqued by two people. The first person is an early literacy teacher who is involved in the Columbus Interactive Literacy Project. Her main interaction with students is either in small groups or whole class activities. The other person that critiqued this project was a reading recovery teacher from The Ohio State University. Her interaction with students is on a one-to-one basis. Both of these teachers deal with reading, writing, and spelling in their teaching of students.

Overall, the critiquers felt the project was a good one. They liked the idea of looking at each student's personal developmental skills in spelling. They felt that the activities used were good and that perhaps more could be added at another time after use of the program. They liked the use of Schlagal's (1982) qualitative inventory for obtaining the child's knowledge of written words. They commented that the use of Gentry and Gillet's (1992) stages were good for the
younger students, which was good for the study, but research had shown that Gentry and Gillet's stages were not complete enough at the upper level. The jump from transitional to correct spelling is too broad and does not take into account things like the use of root words and endings. They felt the use of Henderson and Templeton's (1986) stages were much better for choosing the stage in which each student would be placed for spelling development.

Basically, both critiquers felt that the ideas used and the research done on this project point toward the direction in which the study of spelling is moving.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

AN INDIVIDUALIZED SPELLING PROGRAM
FOR FIRST GRADERS
## INDIVIDUALIZED SPELLING PROGRAM
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INTRODUCTION

This program is designed to establish an individualized spelling program for first grade students to assist them in spelling competency.

The program and activities used are based on the research of Schlagal's qualitative spelling inventory (1982) and Henderson and Templeton's (1986) five developmental stages of spelling.

The individualized spelling program consists of and is divided into four sections of activities. The four sections of activities are: (1) The qualitative inventory of spelling, (2) you-try-it (have-a-go) sheets, (3) word study groups, and (4) word sorts.

The teaching of spelling competency is an important and complex part of the first grade curriculum. Due to the variation in a child's developmental spelling levels, activities included in this program reflect this and follow research findings that support the importance of having an integrated program which includes the areas of reading, writing, as well as spelling.

It is the writer's desire that through a program of this type the teacher may have a guide that is more suited to meeting the individual student needs.
Schlagal's Qualitative Spelling Inventory

The first section of the individualized spelling program calls for the use of Schlagal's (1982) qualitative spelling inventory to help the teacher have a better understanding of the spelling abilities of their students in their classroom. The qualitative inventory of spelling consists of six spelling lists, Levels I through VI.

At Level I, words are chosen to include such features as pre-consonantal nasals (bump), consonantal blends involving incidental affrication (trip, drive), e-markers for simple long vowels, "r-colored" vowels (girl), and the like. At Level II, words are included with inflected endings, doubled consonants, and varied long vowel patterns. At Level III further examples of consonant doublets, as well as various silent letters (knee), further vowel patterns (count), r-colored vowels, and ambiguous consonants (circus) are added. At Level IV included are words with agentive endings (-er, -or), final /l/ sounds (camel, cable), final /d3/ sounds (badge, cabbage), and further consonant doublings. At Level V of the qualitative spelling inventory words with common affixes (re-, de-, dis-, co-, ex-, and -ive, -tion, -sion, -ment, etc), and common classically based words (television) are added. At Level VI words with assimilated prefixes (illustrate), further /d3/ sounded endings, and vowel reductions in derived words forms (combination from combine) are added to the inventory. It is important to remember that
the results of this testing will not inform the teacher as to the specific orthographic patterns the student has or has not mastered but will help the teacher estimate the stage of development for each child by observing patterns in the child's correct and incorrect spellings.

The writer suggests administering the first test of the qualitative spelling inventory to the entire class. (See APPENDIX A) After the first test has been given, the writer suggests that the teacher analyze the errors based on Henderson and Templeton's (1986) five stages of spelling competence. (See APPENDIX B)

Bear and Barone (1989) describe a year-long study in which Schlagal's qualitative spelling inventory (1982) was used and the students were placed in one of Henderson and Templeton's (1986) five stages of spelling competence from the analysis of the errors made by the students on the inventory. The students were then grouped according to where they fit on a scale of the five stages.

The inventory was given again in May to determine the progress students made during the school year. It was found that the students who were in the earlier stages tended to show growth over the year.

The writer suggest that a teacher use this inventory in his/her classroom at the beginning of the school year to analyze student's spelling in order to form word study groups. Instinctively, the writer does not like the idea of "fitting"
students into stages because not all students can be fit into a stage, but an inventory such as this will show you what your students know about written words and what they are capable of doing or not doing. It will at least give the teacher a place to start with his/her students.

This type of inventory can ensure that the students are working at their own level of ability and it enables the competent spellers to move ahead and explore complexities involved in spelling, reading, and writing.

You-try-it (Have-a-go) Sheets

The second section of the individualized spelling program is the use of Routman's (1991) (Have-a-go) sheets. The writer wanted to make the word trial sheets more personal for the students, so she refers to them for the duration of this section of the paper as You-try-it sheets. (See APPENDIX C)

Initially, it is suggested by the writer that the teacher ask students to underline all the words they think are misspelled in their writing, but because you do not want to interrupt the child's thoughts during the initial writing of a piece, the writer suggest the teacher ask the children to underline misspelled words during the editing stage.

It is further suggested that the teacher ask the children to underline misspelled words as soon as their journals have been completed. The idea is to have them be aware of the misspelled words but not to have them be so aware that they
forget what they are writing about. As quoted by (Wilde, 1990) "Helping students deal with spelling strategies is much more helpful than teaching them spelling "rules" and their "exceptions." We must teach our students spelling strategies and one important strategy is to "write more than one possible spelling of a word and then see which one looks right."

Henderson and Templeton, (1986) believe that it is important for students to examine words. Asking students to examine words forces them to use a spelling strategy many adults use. Graves, (1991) agrees with the idea of encouraging students to make an "informed guess" of the spelling of an unfamiliar word. You-try-it (Have-a-go) sheets and looking for misspelled words helps the students become better able to make "good" informed guesses.

As adults, when we try to write an unfamiliar word, we often write the word as many ways as we can and decide which one looks right. That is what the writer wants students to be able to do and the idea is to provide them with enough knowledge about words to know when a word "looks right." Examination during word study groups will begin to provide students with this knowledge.

Using the You-try-it (Have-a-go) sheets is one way to help students deal with unfamiliar words. Students are very good at knowing when they have misspelled a word, so on a You-try-it (Have-a-go) sheet the students will choose three words they know they have misspelled and try to spell each one two
different ways before they come to the word study group. However, before students use the You-try-it (Have-a-go) sheets, a great deal of modeling should be done. By using an overhead projector, the writer suggests the teacher model for the whole class how a You-try-it (Have-a-go) sheet should be completed. (See APPENDIX C) The writer suggests the teacher should allow the students to supply the misspelled words and then as a group work through the procedure together to find the correct spelling of the word. This procedure should take place several times, both as a whole class and in small groups, until all the students understand the steps involved. Routman, (1991) suggests several questions which will help guide the students through the process such as:

- Does it look right?
- What else could you try?
- What other letters could you try that make the same sound?
- You're missing a letter here. What do you think it could be?
- What can you do to help yourself?

The goal of this activity is to help the students become independent and know how to help themselves when trying to spell a new word, so it is expected that the students be able to use the You-try-it (Have-a-go) sheets on their own.

Word Study Groups

The third section of the individualized spelling program involves the grouping of students by their level of orthographic knowledge for word study groups. In this
program, the word study groups are based upon the inventory results from the qualitative inventory of spelling lists given at the beginning of the year and the teacher's analysis of each student's placement in the stages. Bear and Barone, (1989) also suggest that placement in word study groups be based upon the student's observed reading performance. These researchers believe that overall literacy performance should be assessed before placement in a word study group has taken place. Discrepancies may be found between the students overall literacy proficiency and the spelling inventory which would affect placement in a group.

Journal entries, other writings, partner reading, silent reading, and other literacy activities should be examined when determining placement in a word study group. You-try-it (Have-a-go) sheets will be a good place in which to begin a word study group. The group, along with the teacher, looks at several examples from the You-try-it (Have-a-go) sheets and work toward the correct spelling together. From there they will use one example and discuss a pattern located in the word and generate other words that will fit within that pattern. Together, the teacher and students make a wall chart that includes all the words that they have made in which that pattern could be found. As a group, you should generate a possible rule to fit the pattern that you just examined and write it on your spelling rules chart. Further word study may prove the rule to be useless, but the students will need to
figure that out on their own. That will be the major challenge for them.

Another activity during word study groups would be discussion of other places to get help in spelling a word. Students need to identify as many sources as possible in which to find the correct spelling of an unfamiliar word. Wall charts, peers, dictionaries, books, or journals are just a few sources that would be available to the student.

Templeton (1991) wrote that the purpose of studying a group of words is to examine the structural and/or the semantic features of words. He says students must study the patterns that underlie the orthographic knowledge that they construct in order to be able to read and construct a text-appropriate meaning by which they as students write efficiently. Spelling is so closely related to reading and writing, and each can be used to enhance the others. In the word study groups, teacher helps the students to understand this relationship and to use it to their advantage.

Word Sorts

The fourth section of the individualized spelling program deals with the activity of word sorts. A word sort is an activity used by students to systematically categorize words based on an analysis of their features. Some features the students might examine are the phonetic, syntactic, or semantic features of the word.
The two basic types of sorts are closed (the criterion which the words share is stated in advance of sorting), and open (the criterion is not stated before the sorting, but groups are formed as the words are examined and relationships suggest themselves naturally).

The word sorts are related to the developmental stages and therefore should start out forming categories using picture cards only. As students advance through the spelling stages and become more familiar and comfortable with the mechanics of sorting, then they can start to become more independent with the sorting process themselves.

It is suggested that the activity should be conducted in small groups of eight to ten children (seated on the floor) with the teacher leading the group in a step by step manner so as to avoid confusion.

When the students are first introduced to word sorts, have them sort pictures into categories based on their judgments of how things go together. After the students master this beginning level of sorting, then introduce the idea of sorting the picture cards in relation to key picture cards. As stated before, initially, the teacher selects the sorting patterns and the students do the sorts, but eventually, the students can choose the patterns themselves and sort the words or ask a friend to do the sort with them.

Beginning with two categories is the best way to start, but after a while, the students should be able to sort into
more than two major categories. One other (miscellaneous) category that should eventually be included is the category in which the students place any card of which they are uncertain. Students should also sort the same group of words more than once. When a student has mastered one sort, he/she can move on to another one. Word sorts force students to look closely at the different features of words. It is important also that the students be able to read all the words used in the sort. The purpose is not to force students to "sound out" words, but to look at different features in the words. Barnes (1989) has summarized that word sorting should help children "...use their sight word knowledge to deepen and improve their ability to spell word patterns." Barnes goes on to say that "these activities allow students to generate personal rules about how the spelling system of English works."
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to devise an individualized spelling program for first graders to help improve their spelling competency.

The writer consulted a variety of sources when searching for ideas for her individualized spelling program. They included review of journals, books, spelling manuals, attending workshops pertaining to the development of spelling, and consultations with two literacy teachers who had expertise in the areas of reading, writing, and spelling.

Research concludes that the development of spelling competency among first grade students is very important. Learning to spell is a very complex process much like that of learning oral language and is affected by human cognition, linguistics, child development and behavioral sciences.

The individualized spelling program provides the teacher with activities and strategies that deal with the student's developmental level of spelling.

Conclusions

This individualized spelling program was designed to provide the first grade student with spelling strategies to help him/her become more of a competent speller.

The program was also designed to assist teachers in their
commitment to the development of spelling competency among first graders. Research concludes that it should be the mission of the teacher to examine the many processes of teaching spelling and incorporate them into activities and strategies appropriate to each student's level of spelling development. The writer feels that the activities included in this program are research based and are suited for individual levels of spelling development.

Recommendations

It is recommended by the writer that the aforementioned activities and strategies in the individualized spelling program be examined and used in selecting an individualized spelling program for the first grade student.
APPENDIX A

Table A1. The Qualitative Inventory of Spelling

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<th>Level IV</th>
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(For a complete copy of The Qualitative Inventory of Spelling, see Schlagal, R. C. (1989). "Constancy and Change in spelling development." Reading Psychology: An International Quarterly, 10, 207-232.)
APPENDIX B

Henderson and Templeton's (1986)

Five Stages of Spelling Competence

1. **Preliterate Period**: This stage is identified as the child's earliest attempts at writing. The child begins to understand the form and functions of print.

2. **Alphabetic Principle**: This stage is when the child begins to understand that letters and sounds are related. The child attends to the phonetic aspects of print.

3. **Within-Word Pattern**: In this stage children are beginning to attend to both sound and pattern in words. They are also beginning to deal with meaning as it relates to spelling.

4. **Syllable Juncture**: At this stage, children begin to understand the rationale for joining common inflections to single-syllable words. Children are attending to the differences between multisyllabic words.

5. **Derivational**: This is the stage when children really begin to understand that words that are related in meaning are also related in spelling. The children are attending to the base and root words. Children also begin to study the impact of Greek and Latin on English spelling patterns.
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