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AUTHOR Ediger, Marlow  
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ABSTRACT

Traditional methods of teaching spelling emphasized that pupils might write each new spelling word correctly and repeatedly from a weekly list in the spelling textbook. Some weaknesses in this approach are that rote learning is being stressed without emphasizing application of what has been learned, and that there is nothing which relates the spelling of words correctly to situations in daily life. A review of traditional methods of teaching subject matter shows that sometimes these approaches were successful. The issue of phonics versus the whole word method of instruction in spelling has been around for some time. Leonard Bloomfield's linguistic approach, whereby pupils learned through a patterns approach in reading and in spelling, does not stress phonics, but phonics is inherent in the method. Many approaches should be used in helping pupils learn to spell well, based on the pupil's style of learning and based upon what works. The following approaches should be stressed in teaching spelling: (1) all pupils should experience phonics instruction as an approach to unlock words, but it should not be overdone; (2) the key to how much phonics to teach should be based upon what a specific child needs; (3) the teacher should focus upon the individual pupil rather than debate phonics versus holistic approaches; (4) diverse procedures should be used in teaching spelling to provide for the pupil's learning style; and (5) a patterns approach may assist some pupils in spelling development. (Contains 11 references.) (NKA)

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*M. Ediger*

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# SPELLING WORDS CORRECTLY

**Marlow Ediger**

**THERE CERTAINLY ARE A PLETHORA OF BELIEFS AS TO HOW THE SPELLING CURRICULUM SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. DIFFERENT SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT WILL BE DISCUSSED IN THIS MANUSCRIPT.**

Traditional methods of teaching spelling emphasized that pupils might write each new spelling word correctly from a weekly list in the spelling textbook, five to ten times. There are definite weaknesses in using this approach in teaching spelling:

1. rote learning and memorization are being stressed without emphasizing application of what has been learned.
2. monotonous learning may well be an end result.
3. there is nothing here that relates the spelling of words correctly to situations in everyday life.
4. boredom may set in with the same approach being used again and again in learning to spell words correctly.
5. the style of learning may not be appropriate for a given pupil (Ediger, 1998, 3-5).

Should the approach of writing each new word several times correctly in spelling then be omitted? There are many pupils who learned to spell words well by using "the write each new word correctly in spelling a certain number of times." When being an elementary school pupil during the 1934-1942 school years, I learned to spell words correctly using the above named approach. My spelling vocabulary is very excellent and functional. Thus, writing each new word correctly a certain number of times correctly must have some merit. Might it be a learning styles for selected pupils? I would recommend selected learnings to be involved prior to having pupils write each new word a certain number of times. These learnings include:

1. make certain pupils pronounce each new word correctly
2. have pupils use each new word correctly within a sentence.
3. assist pupils to make application of the new word to be memorized in spelling (Ediger, 1998, 164).

Too frequently, educators want to throw out the old entirely and bring in the new only, in teaching and learning situations. I think we need to review how subject matter was taught previously and how successful these traditional approaches might have been.

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## **Learning to Spell Words Correctly through the Sight Method**

**The issue of phonics versus the whole word method of instruction in spelling has been with us for some time. I know individuals where phonics was not emphasized/learned in teaching and learning situations. And yet, these individuals can spell many words correctly through use of the sight method largely or only. For example, one of my cousins admits to not hearing sounds when spelling words correctly, but he can spell most words correctly by using sight methods. By looking at misspelled word on paper, the person notices a word that does not look correct in spelling. The misspelled word is then erased, in part, and rewritten until it "looks correct." I know others who use the same procedure in erasing parts of a word written and changing it until the word is spelled correctly through the sight method.**

**One of my room mates at Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas almost dropped out of teacher education during his student teaching experiences during the 1950-1951 school years. Why? The cooperating teacher reprimanded him, in front of the class, for not teaching a vowel sound correctly. Upon talking together that same evening, my room mate, who felt very badly indeed over the embarrassing incident, stated that he was weak in phonics and believed this was due to being taught the whole word method in spelling and in reading during the elementary school years. And yet, this former room mate had a very distinguished forty-two year teaching career, teaching on the intermediate grade levels and also becoming superintendent of schools. When he spelled words on paper, by erasing and changing the unknown word in correct spelling in whole or part, he came up with the correct spelling. We need to remember, there are a small number of words only that these individuals need to correct in spelling. Presently with the word processor, there might be little or nothing made of not being the best speller in the world (See Ediger, 1997-1998, 1-6).**

**When teaching a graduate class for many years in the language arts, I emphasized strongly, in part, a linguistic approach developed by Leonard Bloomfield (1961) whereby pupils learned through a patterns approach in reading and in spelling. To be sure, phonics was inherent, but Bloomfield did not stress this facet of spelling and reading. His patterns approach emphasized pupils studying words individually and in phrases whereby patterns were noticed, such as the man, can, fan, ban, ban, pan, tan, ran family of words. There are several families here which are very consistent between symbol and sound correspondence showing a pattern. Even where words have an irrational spelling such as bough, cough, rough, though, and dough, there is an "ough" pattern of spelling words. Presently, there are several spelling**

series of basals that emphasize tenets of Leonard Bloomfield's approach to spell words correctly, such as pupils learning to spell words using a patterns approach. In my own thinking, this does bring into the learning activities, grapheme/phoneme relationships, which Bloomfield tended to deemphasize.

One day while supervising a student teacher in the Moulton/Udall School district in Iowa, in March of 1986, the cooperating teacher had printed on the chalkboard for second grade pupils, the following sentence "The cat sat at a vat with a rat on the mat. I asked the cooperating teacher as well as the student teacher where this patterned sentence idea came from. Neither one knew about linguistic patterns approach nor was this philosophy stressed in the basal text being used. Both teachers believed where possible, pupils should see patterned words in sentences, since this made it possible for pupils to generalize on relationships among words in correct spelling and reading. Thus by changing an initial consonant, a word may be changed from "van" to "tan." Very frequently, the student teacher and the cooperating teacher had pupils give words which patterned with a particular word, such as "pine." This activity became a fascinating game for pupils as well as learners being able to relate words to ascertain more clues in correct spelling and reading of words.

Now, going back to those who cannot hear sounds vividly and need to erase and change until they perceive the correct spelling of a word, the individuals I knew as mentioned above, did say something about the likenesses of the word being spelled to the one known and the relationships involved--perhaps a patterns approach. I would not minimize Leonard Bloomfield's patterns approach in learning to read and spell on the pupil's part. Thus, many approaches need to be used in helping pupils learn to spell well, based on their style of learning and based upon what works.

### **Phonics Approaches**

To some writers in teaching the language arts, phonics is a key ingredient in spelling and reading of words. I would differ in this line of thinking. Phonics may hold the key for some in learning to spell and read words correctly. It might be that a strong phonics approach needs to be used in teaching and learning for selected primary age pupils. In my elementary school years, 1934-1942, I received much phonics instruction. Did it hurt me? Definitely not. I spell very well when writing longhand and poorly when using the word processor, but spell check saves me from quitting writing altogether, since I no longer have access to a work study person who types well. I never took a typing class and learned to use a word processor at age sixty due to perceiving much purpose in writing for publication. Would other approaches than a strong

phonics method of instruction been more beneficial? That is hard to say. But the methods that were used when I was taught in the elementary school years were very beneficial. The following, however, are danger points in teaching phonics:

1. it becomes routine in dealing with abstract symbols in spelling/reading rather than studying fascinating narrative and expository accounts.
2. it lacks the luster and interest that holistic approaches have in teaching and learning.

Which approaches then should be stressed in teaching spelling?

1. all pupils should experience phonics instruction as an approach to unlock unknown words, but it should not be overdone due to nonphonetically spelled words.
2. the key to how much phonics to teach should be based upon what a specific child needs. Some may need very little phonics. Others need more so that they can benefit from spelling/reading instruction.
3. the teacher needs to focus upon the individual pupil rather than have a long debate over phonics versus holistic approaches in teaching and learning.
4. diverse procedures need to be used in teaching spelling so that the learning style of the pupil is provided for (See Ediger, 1997, 339-344).
5. a patterns approach may assist selected pupils to do well in spelling.

Inventive spelling is used not only by many primary grade pupils but also by adults who attempt to spell words phonetically. Perhaps, these are the adults who erase and change words until they "look" correct. The goal should be to have pupils spell words correctly, but it is not known why selected adults never did learn to spell well. With these individuals, perhaps, inventive spelling using phonics and the sight method may need to suffice.

### Contextual Spelling

In looking at pupils reading subject matter, few educators would extol the virtues of using context clues. Use of context clues emphasizes meaning theory in that the word selected, by the reader, for the unknown must make sense in relationship to the other words in the sentence. Meaning theory is also salient to stress in the spelling curriculum. Certainly, pupils should understand the meaning of a word as it is used in a context before learning to spell that word. Rote learning to spell words correctly has limited value unless meaning is there to guide achievement. The following are ways for pupils to use in

**learning to spell words meaningfully:**

**1. write the new words, from a list of words to be mastered, in a story, poem, paragraph, letter, and/or play.**

**2. fill in a crossword puzzle using the new words. Within crossword puzzles, synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, and heteronyms are asked for in which meaning needs to be established.**

**3. use software packages designed for learning to spell words. Many of these packages fascinate pupils. The spelling words therein may be used as tutorial as well as in gaming approaches. Learners do become fascinated with both approaches. I have observed student teachers and cooperating teachers use games whereby healthy completion is involved. Quality competition may spur pupils on to greater achievement in spelling if respect, caring, and sharing become important objectives to stress in using computerized programs as well as other means of instruction in spelling involving competition. Rules do need to be established when competitive endeavors are involved (Ediger, 1998, 137-144).**

**4. help pupils to pronounce words correctly, respecting dialects used of pupils. Correct pronunciation of words assist pupils to attach meaning to new spelling words.**

**5. read stories to pupils in which learners raise their hands when a new spelling word from an ongoing lesson is being encountered in oral reading.**

**If pupils do not do well in spelling words correctly, a specific methodology may need to be taught. the methodology may add to the meaning repertoire of the learner. The following methodology in studying the correct spelling of a word may be emphasized:**

**1. make certain that pupils look at the new word carefully that is to be mastered before learning to spell that word through practice. Too frequently, pupils have not looked at a word carefully in learning to spell that particular word correctly.**

**2. have pupils practice writing the new word once without looking at the word.**

**3. let pupils check the written word with the correct spelling before engaging in more practice with using that word in a written product.**

**4. engage pupils in writing the correctly spelled word in diverse kinds of writing experiences.**

**5. remedy situations where pupils misspell a new word by having them look carefully at the new word and point out phonetic elements that assist in remembering the correct spelling (Ediger, 1996, 91-101).**

### **Application of Words Mastered in Spelling**

**The language arts teacher needs to provide a variety of learning**

opportunities in order that pupils may use what has been learned in spelling (Ediger, 1995, 19-36). There certainly are a plethora of activities to guide pupil learning in applying what was acquired in spelling. These learning opportunities include the following:

1. writing poetry such as couplets, triplets, quatrains, limericks, haiku, and tankas (See Ediger, 1997, 273-277) .
2. writing short stories, formal dramas, summaries, outlines, an autobiographical sketch, a biography, opinions, and journal entries.
3. writing letters of appreciation, announcements, invitations, thank you notices, as well as writing friendly and business letters.
4. writing to inform, to present a point of view, to persuade, and to analyze argumentative content.
5. writing diary entries, logs, journals, conclusions, and points of view.

A variety of kinds of written work need to be in the offing so that pupils may practice the correct spelling of words in context. At the same time incorrect spelling of words need to be diagnosed to notice the kinds of errors made. Thus, if a word is spelled phonetically consistent between grapheme and phoneme and the involved pupil is not using phonic leanings, the type(s) of errors made in spelling will determine the kind of remedial work to emphasize (Ediger, 1997, 57-71).

### **What the Pupil Can Do to Improve in Spelling**

In addition to appropriate methods in learning to spell words correctly as well as applying what has been learned to increase depth learning in correct spelling of words, pupils may do the following to increase abilities to spell words correctly:

1. engage in reading of library books on the pupil's reading level of achievement.
2. write down words, from the reading activity, that might cause problems in spelling and study these words for mastery in learning to spell.
3. keep an accurate record of words misspelled from the weekly list of words as well as from daily writing experiences. Practice the correct spelling of these words.
4. study spelling words together with a peer. Studying with others may be a learning style which fosters increased learning (See Gardner, 1993).
5. develop a bar or line graph to show improved performance in spelling.

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