The Effects of a Student-Centered Approach to Spelling Instruction that Incorporates the Multiple Intelligences

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THE EFFECTS OF A STUDENT-CENTERED APPROACH TO SPELLING INSTRUCTION THAT INCORPORATES THE MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

By
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Candidate for the Master of Education in Childhood Literacy Degree
State University of New York at Brockport, 2007

A thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of the State University of New York College at Brockport in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education
THE EFFECTS OF A STUDENT-CENTERED APPROACH TO SPELLING INSTRUCTION THAT INCORPORATES THE MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

by

Erin Morris

APPROVED BY:

[Signatures and dates]
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influences of a student-centered approach to spelling instruction that incorporated the multiple intelligences. A goal of this study was to identify spelling strategies that students could choose to use independently while participating in everyday writing activities.

Five third grade students who were identified as struggling writers provided usable data for this study. The students recognized their individual need to develop and increase their spelling knowledge as they made personal goals to improve their spelling skills.

Students were introduced to a number of spelling strategies that they could use independently through small group instruction. The spelling strategies used by the students were assessed by observing students during small group writing instruction. As students came to words that they did not know while they were writing they attempted to spell the word as best as they could, circled it, and kept on writing. Then, students would conference with a peer or the teacher and they would look at words that were spelled incorrectly. After identifying misspelled words, the student was provided with an opportunity to come up with a strategy to remember how to spell the word correctly. Strategies included coming up with a mnemonic device for the word, chunking the word into memorable pieces, or experiencing the word through various techniques that incorporated the multiple intelligences. Within the classroom there was also an interactive word wall where students could add words as they saw fit. Furthermore, students used and developed their own methods to study their words. The main
component of this study was that students were provided with choice, which ultimately led to their motivation and fossilization of their spelling skills.

The results of this study indicated that the students greatly benefited from experiencing words in this way. Samples of their writing were looked at sporadically throughout the study and each time their writing was evaluated the students increased the amount of words that they spelled correctly.
Chapter One: Introduction

Problem Statement

I wanted to know what happens when a small group of 3rd grade students identified as needing writing assistance participated in a student-centered approach to spelling instruction that incorporated the multiple intelligences. Using student choice to promote motivation and relating instruction to the student’s needs and interests, I wanted to facilitate a spelling program that would allow students to experience spelling strategies hands-on in order to promote individual tactics for students to use when they encounter spelling difficulties in the future.

As part of my literacy internship at Victor Primary School I have been working with five 3rd grade students on improving their writing skills. Each of these students has been identified by their classroom teachers as needing writing assistance, which is why the writing remediation program that I am working on them with was created. It is a supplemental support service program for students who need additional writing support outside of their regular classrooms. Through my interactions and observations with these students I have noticed some areas where they need improvements in order to bring their writing up to grade level. A major skill that each of them needs to improve on is spelling. My students have admitted to me and I have seen it in their writing that they have weak spelling skills. It is my hope that I can research strategies that will help them improve in this area, which will greatly affect their writing in a positive way.
I decided that I wanted to base my research on the multiple intelligences so that I could facilitate learning experiences that align with how my students learn best. I also wanted to create opportunities for them to work with spelling strategies in multiple ways. I understood that the more opportunities they had to work with words, the more spelling would become a natural process for them.

Significance of the Problem

My research is important because I know of many students who struggle with spelling and I also know of many teachers who struggle with how to teach spelling to these students. I wanted to find new and relevant strategies that would help students become better spellers, while also helping educators become better spelling instructors. I have observed current spelling instruction practices that involve students receiving a spelling list in the beginning of the week and being tested on these words at the end of the week. The spelling instruction that these students participate in allows them to write the words three times each, use the words in a sentence, unscramble the words, find the words in a word search, use the words in a crossword puzzle, and even study the words with flash cards. I do not believe that this is a practical way to learn spelling because there are no strategies that are being introduced to the students, other than simply remembering how to spell the words for that particular week.

The students that I worked with did not participate in weekly spelling assessments, however, because Victor uses the Sitton Spelling Program, which is a scope and sequence series that provides teachers with an infrastructure that allows
them to create a spelling and word study program. It was evident that even after participating in this program each of the students still struggled with spelling and needed spelling instruction that could supplement what they were receiving in the classroom because these students still often forgot how to spell the words that they were learning in their classroom. This was apparent in their writing.

I feel as though this method of teaching spelling has been in place for so many years because it is easy and teachers are afraid of change. Teachers may even feel that this practice is working because they see their students successfully completing their spelling tests, but are neglecting to realize that their students have not been able to able their knowledge of the words outside of the Friday test. Teachers may fear change if they are not shown another way, which is why I want to present various spelling instructional strategies. Once educators become familiar with more effective practices that are proven to work they will be more likely to change their instructional methods in a way that their students will benefit from.

My research will impact the students that I am working with because they will encounter a more authentic approach to spelling that involves exposing them to a number of experiences with words that will help them recall correct spellings when they encounter these words in their writing. They will walk away from this experience learning new ways to remember how to spell words and how to use independent strategies to work through their spelling difficulties. The teachers of these students will be benefactors as well because they will learn successful strategies to use with other students in their classroom. As readers of my thesis, my cohort and
my professors will also gain new insights based on my research. These educators will be presented with new and relevant methods of teaching spelling that they can apply to their own teaching. I also plan to share my findings with other teachers and administrators possibly through professional development workshops that will further enhance the use of the successful spelling practices that I find.

It is my hope that I can have a successful impact on my current students and their teachers, my colleagues, and my future students by reshaping their philosophy and knowledge of spelling instruction. If everyone observing my research walks away having learned at least one new thing about teaching spelling to struggling writers then I feel that my research has been successful. Hopefully they can apply what they already know about spelling to the new ideas that I present in a meaningful manner.

**Purpose**

Evaluations of instructional approaches to spelling, such as learning to spell through mnemonic devices and the multiple intelligences, are necessary because ineffective programs may result in limited spelling development. This, in turn, could hinder other aspects of literacy development. The acquisition of spelling knowledge, for example, enhances students’ writing development by extending and reinforcing children’s knowledge about words.

Through my research I hope to have an impact on how spelling is taught in today’s schools. It is my hope that my findings will present new teaching techniques for teachers to use in the classroom at all levels and also to promote further research
for spelling instruction so that teachers are constantly considering best practice techniques to use. I want teachers to constantly keep spelling on the forefront of their minds and to constantly evaluate and reevaluate how they are teaching in a meaningful way that meets the needs of all students. There is a high value of change for the stakeholders in my research. This value will be the result of spelling instruction that can be purposeful and tailored to the individual needs of each student. This spelling instruction will extend beyond the classroom and into immediate and practical use in one’s writing.

Rationale

In past teaching experiences I have struggled with how to effectively teach spelling and I know that my colleagues have as well. An objective of mine is to get away from teaching spelling through weekly spelling tests where students simply memorize how to spell words and then quickly forget them. I want to create experiences that help students to keep these strategies with them as they advance in school. I want these strategies to remain with my students so that they can help themselves to learn and remember how to spell difficult words.

I was drawn to this topic because the third grade students that I provide supplemental writing support to are all weak in the area of spelling. Each of them has made it a goal of theirs to become better spellers, which is why I have made it a goal of mine to find better teaching strategies for spelling. It is obvious to me that the spelling instruction that they are receiving is not helping them to achieve their goal of becoming better spellers so I am taking it into my own hands. The driving point in
my research is what my students are giving me to help me learn. This creates a reciprocal relationship between my students and me. I have a vested interest in this topic because it is meaningful to me in my present position as a literacy intern at Victor Primary School, but also because I know that I will benefit from my findings when I have a classroom of my own.

The idea to use mnemonic devices actually came to me by one of my students when she came up with her own way to remember how to spell ‘friends’ by saying the phrase, “I fry (fri) the ends with my friends.” This made me think that if she could remember how to spell friends by coming up with a little saying to trigger her to recall the letters in the word friends, then I could help my students explore other ways that they could “train their brain” to recall other spellings of difficult words.

My research will incorporate a number of different areas, however everything will be related back to the strategies that work to help students become better spellers. My research will consist of exploring books and articles about writing and spelling strategies and I will also observe how these methods work for my own students. I will compare what has been said will work to what I actually see working in my own classroom. This comparative data will bring me to my own conclusions based on my overall findings.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

For most of us growing up, spelling was a separate subject in school that focused on memorizing a list of words in order to pass a spelling test on Friday. The other days of the week consisted of looking the words up in the dictionary and defining them, writing the words in a sentence, writing the words three times each, and various other extraneous spelling activities. Current spelling instruction is steering away from this type of spelling curriculum, however, as it has not proven to be an effective method for teaching students how to spell. Through my research, I have found a number of spelling strategies that provide students with the opportunity to become immersed in the concept of spelling as they immediately apply independent spelling strategies to their writing. Most helpful to my research was exploring spelling through a student-centered approach that incorporated the Multiple Intelligences. For this reason, each of my references was ultimately related back to these two concepts.

Student-Centered Approach

The article, *Knowledge Construction in the Learner-Centered Classroom* by Kathy L. Schuh (2003) provided an overview of exactly what a student-centered, or learner-centered, classroom looks like. She indicates that “learner-centered instruction fosters opportunities for learners to draw on their own experiences and interpretations” (p. 427). In order for this to be successful it is important that teachers understand the needs of the students in the classroom. She suggests having students create goals for themselves that they wish to accomplish. In order for the students to
meet their desired learning outcomes, the teacher must tailor instruction to meet these goals. This is achieved, according to Schuh, by “active collaboration between the teacher and learners who together determine what learning means and how it can be enhanced within each individual learner by drawing on the learner’s own unique talents, capacities, and experiences” (p. 427).

Schuh’s article is relevant to my research because my students were given the opportunity to create goals that ultimately led to the instructional approach I took in spelling. Therefore, I did not just impart knowledge to the students, but I instead let the students guide us through the process that we worked on together. Collaboration was a crucial component to the student-centered approach.

**The Multiple Intelligences**

In order to tie in the Multiple Intelligences I referenced Thomas Armstrong’s *The Multiple Intelligences of Reading and Writing: Making the Words Come Alive* (2003). This book appealed to me because it combined Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences theory and recent brain research on writing. I was drawn to the research on how to engage students in the study of words through the use of imagery, logic, oral language, physical activity, emotion, music, social involvement, and nature experiences. The ideas, strategies, tips, and resources for teaching spelling that Armstrong provides introduced me to various ways that I could incorporate the Multiple Intelligences into my teaching.

Armstrong accurately identifies the challenges that hinder student’s spelling proficiency while also providing strategies that can help students to overcome these
challenges. For instance, Armstrong says, “there are more than 1,100 ways that letters in English can be used to symbolize the 44 sounds in the spoken language” (p.68) which realistically acknowledges spelling difficulties. This is why many people, young and old, struggle with spelling. When students can learn spelling through bodily-kinesthetic, musical, social, and visual experiences, however, they can begin to discover spelling strategies that appeal to their needs and interests, according to Armstrong. These strategies that he suggested in his book were implemented into my teaching and were available to my students if they appealed to them.

Also relevant to my research was an article by Marlow Ediger who wrote Assessing Student Progress in Spelling (2000). Like Armstrong, Ediger linked the Multiple Intelligences Theory to spelling instruction and suggests spelling activities “to guide optimal student achievement in spelling” (p. 5) with the opportunity to practice spelling through their individual intelligence. He states that “variety in activities used by the teacher attempts to provide for each learner in terms of intelligence(s) possessed” (p. 5). Ediger brings in the psychology of learning for students and emphasizes the need for students to attain “excellence in spelling and the writing curriculum” (p. 7). I modeled my spelling instruction from what Ediger considered a quality program that reflected the individual differences of students.

Spelling Instruction

Taking into consideration a student-centered approach to spelling and the implementation of the Multiple Intelligences, spelling instruction was carefully examined in order to successfully put both of these theories into play. The books and
articles that were used to research best practice procedures had to closely align with a student-centered approach that incorporated the Multiple Intelligences in mind.

The author of the article *A New Twist on Spelling Instruction for Elementary School Teachers*, Cassandra L. Keller (2002), shares similar feelings about ineffective spelling instruction as I do. She finds methods such as writing words a number of times, rainbow writing, using spelling words in a sentence, and putting words in alphabetical order unproductive to students who are learning how to spell. She instead poses a new way to teach spelling in the classroom. In her article, Keller suggests using Class Wide Peer Tutoring and a spelling strategy called SPELLER. The Class Wide Peer Tutoring, or CWPT, aligns with the student-centered approach to spelling because students receive spelling lists that are based on their needs and they work with their peers to study these words. Implementing SPELLER is one strategy supports the Multiple Intelligences theory because it uses the SPELLER Steps that incorporate the visual, social, and bodily-kinesthetic intelligences in spelling instruction. The SPELLER Steps are: Spot word, say it; Picture it; Eyes closed; Look to see if right; Look away, write it; Examine it; Repeat or Reward.

Keller states that “it is essential that we constantly try fresh, innovative, research-based instructional methods with our students” (p. 4) and the strategies that she suggests are just that. They offer effective, adaptive, and motivating instructional practices that were easily implemented and maintained in my spelling program with little time and effort.
The authors of *Word Matters*, Gay Su Pinnell and Irene C. Fountas (1998), also offered a number of instructional methods that were easily adapted into my spelling instruction. Pinnell and Fountas, however, refer to spelling instruction as "Word Study" which includes systematically planned and applied experiences focusing on the elements of letters and words and suggests that the goal of this instruction should be for our children, as writers, to know how to look at and use the features of print, know a large core of high-frequency words, understand simple and complex letter-sound relationships, possess the ability to notice and use patterns, and be able to use a repertoire of word-solving strategies. The instructional strategies that they present meet each of these goals. They suggest using spelling buddies, interactive word walls (see Appendix A), word ladders (see Appendix B), word stairs, word sorting, and word webs (see Appendix C) that help students to become engaged in the use of words. As students participate in these activities they also take part in a writing workshop that allows them to continue experiencing the use of words.

The information from *Word Matters* is relevant to my research because it correlates with the student-centered approach to spelling instruction. The authors recognize that students have individual needs that should be addressed through instruction that is tailored towards these needs. Therefore, the "literacy curriculum must be designed to foster interest and joy in words and their use" (p. 273).

Similar to the strategies presented in *Word Matters* were those that were presented in *Twelve Strategies to Help You Grow Better Spellers* by J. Richard Gentry, Ph. D. (1999). *Author of Spel...Is a Four-Letter Word, Teaching Kids to*
Spell, and *My Kid Can’t Spell!,* Gentry has a wealth of knowledge and experience on how spelling ability develops and how it contributes to a child’s writing and overall literacy development. He suggests using strategies that “boost spelling skills” (p. 3) such as Words-for-Free and Word Walls. He also promotes teaching students “five reliable rules that every speller can use” (p. 40) such as The QU Rule, The Silent E Rule, The Syllable Rule, and The Changing Y-to-I Rule, the IE or EI Rule (see Appendix D). Gentry also suggests assessing students progress through looking at their development in phonemic awareness and reviewing student writing samples with them during a writing conference. He includes a Spelling Growth Checklist (see Appendix E) that was also helpful to my research as it allowed me to look at students’ individual needs.

Pinnell and Fountas, as well as Gentry suggest using word walls as an effective spelling strategy, but it was *The Spelling Skills Handbook for the Word Wise* by John and Jenny Barwick (1999) that explored in greater detail how these word walls might look in the classroom. Part 6 of this book provides useful word lists that are “valuable tools to help students find out how to spell the words they need to write” (p. 67). Along with this, the authors also recommend using strategies such as Look, Say, Cover, Write, Check (see Appendix F), Chunking Words through syllabification or looking for words within words, “Concentrating on hard the part” (p. 31) by highlighting the difficult par of the word, and using “memory helpers” (p. 32) such as mnemonic devices.
Much like Thomas Armstrong, these authors also attempt to explain why students have trouble with spelling. They refer to English as the "vacuum cleaner" language because "it has picked up lots of bits and pieces (or words) from all over the world" (p.13). This makes it difficult for students to spell words because there are so many different sounds in our language. Looking at the history of words is something that these authors believe is crucial to spelling instruction because it can help explain why a word is spelled a certain way. This can help students look for patterns, which again plays into the use of word walls where various words with similar patterns can be displayed in the classroom.

**Spelling Through Writing**

Once students learn the spelling strategies, they can further develop their spelling skills when they are writing. Immersing students in the writing process further fosters spelling acquisition according to Diane Snowball and Faye Bolton (1999) who wrote the book *Spelling K-8 Planning and Teacher* along with Steve Peha (2003) who wrote *All’s Well That Spells Well*.

Snowball and Bolton link spelling to reading and writing. "If spelling strategies are developed as isolated knowledge they are not useful, so children need to realize that they can learn about spelling by studying what other authors do in published writing and to continually reflect on how the strategies they are learning can help them with their own writing" (p. 10). This promotes a student-centered approach that gives purpose to spelling while also creating opportunities for students
to respond to spelling. These authors also suggest using the process of inquiry to guide students to discover words and how they are spelled.

Similarly, Peha looks at how students can learn spelling though the process of writing. His big ideas are that spelling is for writing and that "spelling is best learned through the acquisition and use of spelling strategies rather than through rote memorization" (p. 6). He considers spelling a 'tool' for writing and stresses that the reason students must learn how to spell is so that writing becomes easier and more fluent for them. Spelling also allows students to be more expressive and more easily understood by their readers. According to Peha "active daily writing, for real purposes and real audiences, is necessary for spelling development in all grades" (p. 6).

The suggestions that Peha provides for what students should do when they are writing and cannot spell a word were implemented into my instruction. Students should use their knowledge of letter sounds to guess the word and then continue writing. Once they have finished writing, students edit for spelling. This is where they can learn and use spelling strategies. "The important thing for students to learn is that some strategies are more efficient then others" (p. 9) and this largely depends on how a student learns best.

Each of my references helped to guide my research as they presented ideas for me to implement into my instruction. It was nice to see that all of my references presented common theories and beliefs that connected to my study. The strategies
that I learned were also immediately applied to my teaching so that I could evaluate their effectiveness.

**Explanation of Terms**

- **Multiple Intelligences:** The theory of multiple intelligences was developed by Harvard Professor Howard Gardner in the early 1980s that recognizes that students can have a “plurality of capacities” instead of a single IQ. (Armstrong, 2003, p. 12-13)
  
  o **Linguistic Intelligence:** The understanding of the phonology, syntax, and semantics of language, and its pragmatic uses to convince others of a course of action, help one to remember information, explain or communicate knowledge, or reflect upon language itself.

  o **Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence:** The ability to control one’s bodily motions and the capacity to handle objects skillfully.

  o **Spatial Intelligence:** The ability to perceive the visual world accurately, to perform transformations and modifications upon one’s initial perceptions, and to be able to re-create aspects of one’s visual experience.

  o **Musical Intelligence:** The ability to understand and express components of music, including melodic and rhythmic patterns, through figural or intuitive means or through formal analytic means.

  o **Logical-Mathematical Intelligence:** The understanding and use of logical structures, including patterns and relationships, and statements
and propositions, through experimentation, quantification, conceptualization, and classification.

- **Intrapersonal Intelligence**: The ability to access one’s own emotional life through awareness of inner moods, intentions, motivations, potentials, temperaments, and desires, and the capacity to symbolize these inner experiences, and to apply these understandings to help one live one’s life.

- **Interpersonal Intelligence**: The ability to notice and make distinctions among other individuals with respect to moods, temperaments, motivations, intentions, and to use this information in pragmatic ways, such as to persuade, influence, manipulate, mediate, or counsel individuals or groups of individuals toward some purpose.

- **Naturalist Intelligence**: The capacity to recognize and classify the numerous species of flora and fauna in one’s environment and the ability to care for, tame, or interact subtly with living creatures, or with whole ecosystems.

(Armstrong, 2003, pgs. 13-14)

- **Spelling Buddies**: Students are paired with a buddy that helps him or her learn from one another by discussing words and checking on each other’s attempts. They provide immediate feedback and reinforcement during the process.
• **Interactive Word Walls:** A word wall that is a systemically organized collection of words displayed in large letters on a wall or other large display place in the classroom. This is a tool to use, not simply display.

• **Word Ladders:** Creating a word by changing one or two letters and/or removing and adding letters from specific words. The resulting ladder of words demonstrates how words are related to each other but also shows the word-building process.

  (Pinnell, G. & Fountas, I, 1998)

• **Words-for-Free:** A chart of commonly misspelled words that is posed in the classroom for students to refer to as needed.

  (Gentry, 1998, p. 3)
Chapter Three: Applications and Evaluation

Objective or Goals

Through a student-centered approach to spelling that incorporates the multiple intelligences I wanted to look at what helps students to learn how to spell words that they often misspelled during daily writing practice. It was my hope to provide my students with a variety of spelling strategies that they could use on their own and then to determine what spelling strategies led to fossilized spelling practices. A main focus of my research was to find an approach that was individually tailored to the needs of each student, which is why a student-centered approach that incorporated the multiple intelligences was incorporated into this study.

Participants

My study consisted of five third grade students; three boys and two girls. Each of these students came from a white middle-class background and had been identified as a struggling writer according to their classroom teachers. My participants provided reliable and valid data because I worked with them on a consistent basis and in a suitable manner that would have produced similar results had someone else replicated this study. If this same study were to be done with different students then of course varying results may be concluded because the strategies that were used were student selected and therefore other students may have led to varied results. These results cannot be generalized, but are specific to the students selected for participation in this study.
Measures

It was determined by teacher assessments and observations that the students I worked with were struggling writers. According to the evaluations of their classroom teachers and the Assistant Principal at Victor Primary School, each student was writing below grade level. The Writing Continuum that is used at the school further demonstrated this because it allowed me to look at specific writing targets of where the students should be at a certain grade level and where they actually were. This played a role in this study because I was able to see grade level appropriate goals for the students in writing and spelling. Student writing surveys and student writing samples also led me to conclude that each student demonstrated poor spelling skills as well. Each of the five students had also made an individual goal for themselves to improve their spelling throughout the course of the school year.

In order to measure the progress that the students were making specifically in the area of spelling, I kept a folder on each student so see how he or she was using the strategies. Each student also kept a writing journal that they wrote in on a daily basis. They also had a spelling journal where they wrote down the words that they were working on and what strategies they used for each word. Both journals were used as a guide when I had conferences with students. Every two weeks I would look at their writing samples and I would keep track of the percent of words that were spelled incorrectly. I would look at how many words that the child wrote and then see how many words were spelled wrong out of the total number of words. I began charting this information in order to evaluate the students' progress. In addition, at three
different times throughout the school year I calculated the percent of words that were
spelled correctly in the students' writing and I found average percentages at each
checkpoint to assess their progress. Checkpoints were in October 2006, December
2006, and April 2006.

Procedure

I began working with these five students in September as part of a writing
remediation program at Victor Primary School. I noticed that the students were not
making as much progress in the area of writing as I had hoped, and this partly had to
do with their spelling skills which were holding them back from expanding upon their
writing skills. After looking over the students' writing surveys and writing goals for
the year it was more evident that they also recognized the need to improve upon their
own spelling. Each student received spelling instruction in the classroom through the
Sitton Spell Program; however, it did not seem to be working for these particular
students. For this reason I wanted to find a spelling approach that could supplement
their classroom spelling instruction and that would be more authentic and innovative.
I decided to give the students choices in the spelling strategies that they used and to
make spelling more hands-on through the use of the multiple intelligences, as defined
in the literature review section. Students also had a lot of choice and often provided
me with the direction in which we would go, which put the use of the student-
centered approach into play. Students had choices in what words they wanted to
work on and what strategies they wanted to use. The student-centered approach was
a key motivator for the students to improve upon their spelling skills.
I began researching various spelling strategies and decided to use the ones that I felt were most relevant to the needs of my students based on the words they consistently spelled wrong in their writing. I taught these strategies to my students and I provided them opportunities to use the ones that they felt were most pertinent to them. They kept track of what strategies they used in their spelling journal so that they could be discussed with a spelling buddy or me. We also played a lot of spelling games during our writing time that helped to build spelling skills often without the students even realizing it.

Instructions

Because my research took place during a regular writing time I often did not have to provide my students with any special instructions. I would begin every day with a mini lesson that included teacher modeling and then I would allow for guided practice followed by independent practice. When students were writing and they came to a word that they did not know how to spell I would tell them to spell it as best as they could and then to circle it and move on without losing the flow of their thoughts about what they were writing. A circled word could be revisited later and students could use their personal word books, which are mini-dictionaries with word lists for the students where they can find the correct spelling of the word, to look words up. If the word was not in their book they could come to me to work out a strategy for that word and then the word would be added to their word book. I would also conference with each student when they completed a particular writing piece. During the conferences I would identify words that students misspelled and together
we would find the best way to remember how to spell the particular word. At the end of every lesson we would play a game that incorporated spelling. Some of the games included Hangman, Scrabble, and Around-the-World.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze data, I observed as students participated in daily writing activities and I assessed their skills by reading what they wrote and conferencing with each student. I would compare their writing from the beginning of the school year to their writing at the middle of the school year and I would look at it again at the end of the school year. I paid particular attention to how many words were spelled wrong out of the amount of words that were written. I charted this information to give me a visual of the students' progress. I also looked at what words were spelled wrong to see if they were correctly spelled after learning a particular spelling strategy for that word. I used qualitative data through observations and student conferences. I also used quantitative data when I looked at the percentage of words that were misspelled. My data was triangulated with what I found in my literature review because many of the concepts that I researched were beneficial to my study.
Chapter Four: Results

When students were given choice in how they would work through their spelling difficulties after being introduced to various spelling strategies, they had the opportunity to write creatively and independently. The students' writing from the end of the school year indicated that the average percent of words spelled correctly in their writing increased from the beginning of the school year. On average, students made gains of 6% in the amount of words they spelled correctly in their writing from October 2006 to April 2007. Students also made progress at each checkpoint throughout the school year. Checkpoints were in October 2006, December 2006, and April 2007. The evidence of change is indicated in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
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<th>October 2006</th>
<th>December 2006</th>
<th>April 2007</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student #1</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student #2</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student #3</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>94%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student #4</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>87%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student #5</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>92%</td>
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In addition to this, it is also relevant to note that each of the five students also increased the amount of words written in his or her writing. For example, in October Student #1 wrote, on average, 65 words for each writing piece but by April 2007 this student increased that average to 97 words for each writing piece. Ten writing samples were considered for each student in order to get an average, as described in
chapter three. For some students they even increased the amount of difficult words that were included in their writing. This could be an indication that they were no longer feeling the pressure to spell words incorrectly because they had a handful of strategies to help them work through new or unfamiliar words.

To support these results the spelling journals that each student kept demonstrated their ability to individually use a variety of spelling strategies as this was a place for them to reflect on what strategies worked best for them during their writing process. Not only did they use a variety of strategies, but they also used strategies that worked for them according to their individual intelligence. For instance Students #1 and #4 liked coming up with mnemonic devices, Students #2 and #5, the only two girls, liked conferencing with a peer to help visualize words, and Student #3 was accustomed to using manipulatives such as magnetic letters or a white board to work through the spellings of certain words. When asked in general conversations during class time, each student also said that they were motivated to try the strategies because they were given choice. Many of them also thought that the strategies were “fun”, “cool”, and “different”.

I have also found that students can practice their spelling skills without making it known to the students that they are actually doing it. The spelling instruction was integrated into their daily writing practice by allowing the students to try out the strategies while participating in the process of writing. Many of the students probably did not realize that spelling instruction was taking place even though they were immersed in it through valuable writing techniques. Writing
conferences also allowed individualized spelling instruction to take place. The differentiation in this kind of instruction is beneficial to all students. This will be valuable information to share with other teachers.

This data suggests that the strategies that were introduced to the students helped to improve their spelling skills that were applied to daily writing activities. It is evident that students used the strategies that were taught to them because they kept a journal of their strategies as this was a part of the spelling buddy conferences and teacher-student conferences. This was an effective method not only because the students increased the amount of words that they spelled correctly, but also because they enjoyed the process of discovering the correct spelling of words. With this positive experience, the students used in this study will most likely continue to implement these strategies and to ultimately increase their spelling skills.
Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

The effects of a student-centered approach to spelling instruction that incorporates the Multiple Intelligences are that students are able to increase the amount of words that they spell correctly. This is evident through evaluating student writing pieces and aligns with the literature on the topic of spelling instruction.

The implications of this research are extremely valuable to educators, particularly at the elementary level because it suggests strategies that are research-based and have been proven to be effective methods for students. Given this case study research, there is an indication that these types of spelling strategies might work for other spellers. Therefore, if someone wanted to complete a similar research study they might find similar results due to the fact that the students in this study increased their spelling skills over the course of nine months.

The strengths of this study are that there were weekly, explicit observations of and conversations with the students. The routine that the students took part in was also consistent as well as it taking place in a consistent location. The time and the day of the week that I met with these students remained the same. All of this added to the comfort level of the students, which further promoted their willingness to participate in this study. A major advantage to this was also that each student also made it a goal for themselves to improve their spelling skills. With a learning outcome that each student was working toward, students were motivated to learn independent spelling strategies.
Limitations to this study would include such factors as the number of students. Had there been more students in this research, there could be results that were able to be generalized. Another limitation is that students only met twice a week for 30-minutes and therefore were only exposed to and able to practice their writing under the supervision of the researcher during this time. Increasing the number of days each week and the amount of time each day that was spent with the students could have had a different effect on the results.

When considering whether or not to use this study as a basis for future research one might want to consider using a larger group of diverse students and also to meet with students on a daily basis. One might be inspired to further explore this research because of the implications it can have on both teaching and learning practices. Spelling is something that teachers struggle to teach and that students struggle to learn. When a researcher can find effective ways to immerse students in spelling through writing they are creating authentic learning experiences that prove to be beneficial to young learners. The students in this study have continued to use the spelling strategies that they learned even after the Writing Remediation program came to an end. Their classroom teachers continued to allow them to keep spelling journals and to have spelling buddies. Future spelling instruction for these students and other students in their classroom will reflect a student-centered approach that allows students to have a choice in what strategies to use after these strategies are introduced and modeled to them. With the gradual release of responsibility teachers should allow for guided practice in these strategies before students use them.
independently. It is also essential to continue to conference with students in order to assess their progress and use the assessment information to further guide the spelling instruction.

There is a need to continue to look closely at our spelling curriculum because students who are not receiving this kind of spelling instruction are missing out on what they need as individual learners. They are also missing out on key motivational factors that enable students to want to learn and to continue to use individual spelling strategies. Elementary teachers should consider, if not use, the research that was used in this study. If possible, they should also continue to be life-long learners and researchers and implement their own research on spelling into their classroom.
References


Journal of Educational Psychology. Vol. 95. No. 2.

APPENDICIES
### Interactive Word Wall

**Words with Initial Consonant Digraphs**

<table>
<thead>
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Word Ladder

Name ____________________________

Read the clues, then write the words. Start at the bottom and climb to the top.

It falls from the sky and makes you wet.
Add one letter.

Part of the wheat plant.
Change one letter.

The opposite of good.
Change one letter.

A wager or guess that something will happen.
Take away one letter.

Something that makes a ringing noise.
Change one letter.

All of us.
Take away one letter.

Walked very fast.
Take away one letter.

Short for Bradley.
Add one letter.

A stick used for hitting balls.
Change one letter.

You wear it to hold up your pants.
Change one letter.

Healthy.
Add two letters.
Spelling Rules

Rule #1: The QU Rule

Q is almost always followed by U

Rule #2: The Silent E Rule

When words end in silent e,
1. drop the e when adding endings that begin with a vowel
2. keep the e when adding endings that begin with a consonant

Rule #3: The Syllable Rule

Every syllable has a vowel or y

Rule #4: The Changing Y-to-I Rule

When the singular form ends with a vowel + y, change the y to I and add es (such as baby, babies)

Rule #5: The IE or EI Rule

Write i before e, except after c. Or when it sounds like a as in neighbor and weigh. Weird, their, and neither aren’t the same either.

Appendix E