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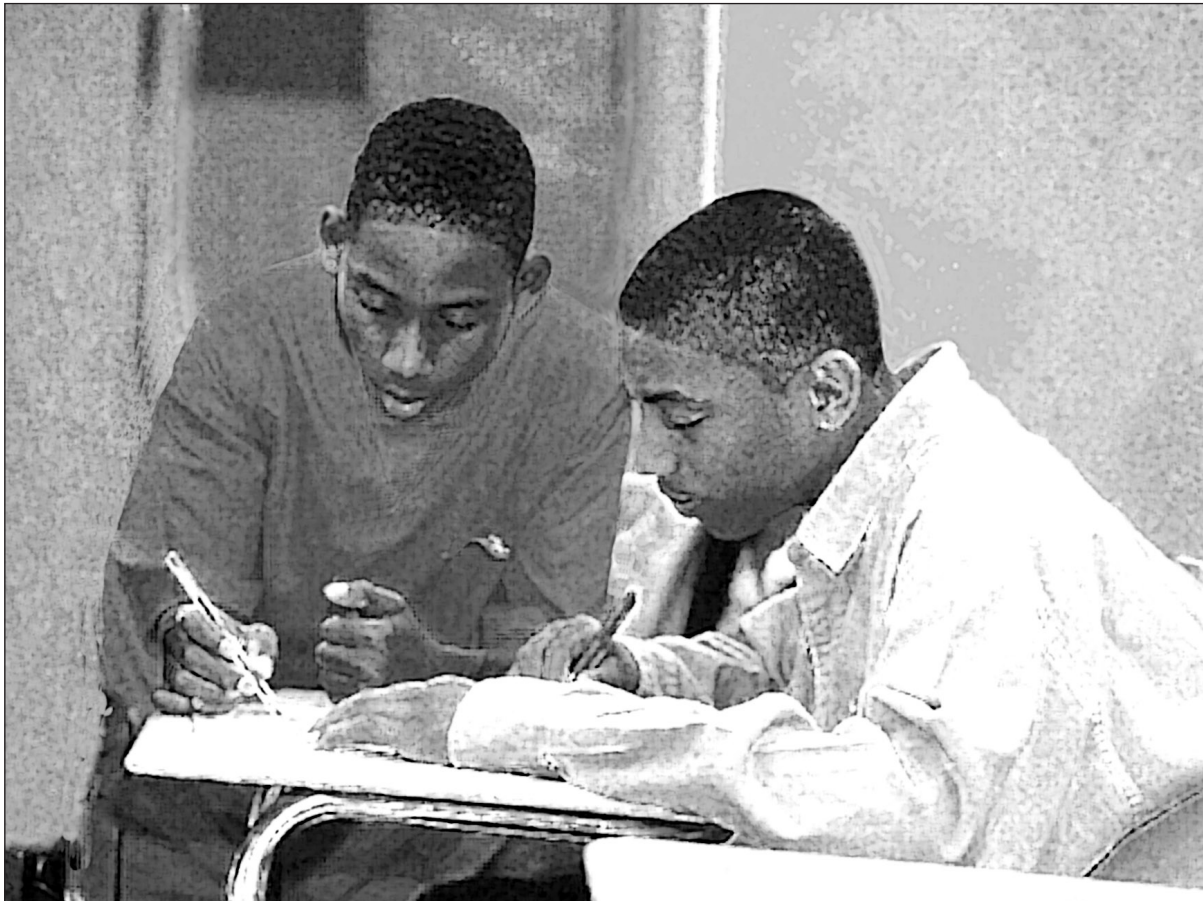
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A New Twist on Spelling Instruction for Elementary School Teachers

CASSANDRA L. KELLER



General and special educators are frequently confronted with the problem of how to provide spelling instruction that meets the needs of all their students, especially their students with mild disabilities. The purpose of this article is to combine two effective instructional methods (Classwide Peer Tutoring and a spelling strategy) to help students acquire and maintain spelling competence both inside and outside of the classroom.

As students with mild disabilities step out of resource and self-contained classrooms and relocate into more inclusive general education classrooms, expanding numbers of general and special education teachers are presented with the enormous challenge of how to teach these students. This is especially so in academic subjects such as spelling. Teachers have many different methods of providing instruction in spelling. Some of these methods include writing the words a number of times, rainbow writing (tracing words with different color crayons), using the words in a sentence, and putting the words in alphabetical order. This article poses a new way to teach spelling in the classroom with the use of a spelling strategy incorporated into a Classwide Peer Tutoring (CWPT; Delquadri, Greenwood, Whorton, Carta, & Hall, 1986) procedure. CWPT, enacted by researchers at the Juniper Gardens Children's Project, is an effective delivery technique in which all students in the classroom participate simultaneously. Research has shown that using CWPT procedures increases academic results such as mastery, accuracy, and fluency in almost all academic areas, including spelling (Arreaga-Mayer, 1998). For example, in a study conducted by Mortweet et al. (1999), spelling accuracy increased for students with mild mental retardation and their nondisabled peers using CWPT procedures compared to traditional teacher-led spelling instruction. Teachers can help students with and without mild disabilities acquire and maintain spelling competence by using a spelling strategy along with CWPT. The spelling strategy introduced in this article is called SPELLER and was adapted from a spelling method created in 1951 by Fitzgerald (as cited in Pressley, 1995).

CWPT Meets the SPELLER Strategy

Preparing Students for Tutorials

The CWPT procedure described for spelling instruction involves the entire class in tutoring 20 minutes per day, at least 3 days per week. This tutoring occurs simultaneously for all tutor-tutee pairs, which gives the teacher the freedom to roam the classroom to monitor students' performance and provide feedback.

On the first day, give students their spelling words for the week, either individually or as a class assignment, depending on your usual classroom procedures for assigning spelling words to students. Some teachers assign the entire class the same list of spelling words, while other teachers pretest and assign words on an individual basis. Students then write the spelling words on flashcards so that they have their own sets of cards. During the second, third, and fourth days, you will facilitate the

CWPT procedure. Test students on the last day. You can either follow the usual classroom procedure for administering spelling tests, with the tutoring pairs checking each other's papers for immediate feedback, or use your standard grading procedure. Assign new spelling words each week at your discretion.

Before starting the CWPT, you will want to pair the students into dyads using one of three methods: random, personality, or ability. Pairing the students *randomly* ensures that all students eventually get a chance to work together. However, random pairing can create problems for students who don't work well together; interaction difficulties may interfere with tutor session effectiveness. Assigning students to pairs by *personality* (students who work well together) ensures smooth tutoring sessions but may limit the choice of partners available each week. If students are assigned by *ability*, students who do not have learning disabilities may be able to help each other on more difficult words, but students who experience learning difficulties may have trouble completing the spelling task without constant teacher assistance. The method of assigning tutor pairs should be decided by posing a simple but fundamental question: "What would work best for each classroom to ensure the highest level of tutoring session effectiveness?" New dyads can be reassigned weekly or as needed throughout the program. During CWPT, one student is the tutor and one the tutee for 10 minutes; the students then switch roles for another 10 minutes. During each 20-minute tutoring session, each student has the opportunity to play the role of teacher and student.

Implementing SPELLER

The strategy used with the CWPT procedure takes the form of a mnemonic called SPELLER, designed to help elementary students acquire and maintain spelling competence. It is a seven-step strategy that uses visual imagery, systematic testing, and auditory reinforcement.

In the first step, *Spot the word and say it*, students look at the spelling word and pronounce it aloud. Then they *Picture it*, taking a visual picture of the word with their eyes open. Third, students close their *Eyes* and see that picture. Next, students open their eyes and *Look to see if it's right*. During this step they check to see if the visual picture "in their heads" was correct by looking at the word again. Fifth, the students *Look away and write it*. In this step, students recall the word from memory and write it on the SPELLER practice sheet. The sixth step is to *Examine it*, where the students check the spelling of the words with their flashcards. The final step, *Repeat or Reward*, tells the students to repeat Steps 1 through 6 with the same word if they spelled the word incorrectly or to reward themselves if they spelled it right. The reward is a verbal praise statement given by the tutor such

as, "Great spelling," "Excellent remembering," or "Superior performance." Figure 1 shows a cue card of the SPELLER strategy and rules for students to follow during CWPT.

To teach the SPELLER strategy with the CWPT procedure, use the following steps:

STEP 1: *Prepare the materials.* The materials needed for SPELLER and CWPT are poster board, pencils, colored pens, SPELLER practice sheets (see Figure 2), cue cards (see Figure 1), and a timer. Write the SPELLER strategy and rules on the poster board. Also, print a copy of the strategy on a cue card for each student to use during the tutoring sessions. The SPELLER practice sheets are for tutees to write their words as tutors dictate. The tutees' spelling words can be checked using the colored pens.

STEP 2: *Teach the students how to use the SPELLER strategy* by explaining and modeling the steps. A role-play example follows:

- TUTOR: Holds up the flashcard so the tutee can see it and says, "Spot the word and say it."
TUTEE: Looks at the word and says the word aloud.
TUTOR: (Still holding up the card) says, "Picture the word, Eyes closed."
TUTEE: Takes a mental picture of the word and closes eyes.
TUTOR: (Still holding up the card) says, "Look to see if you pictured the word right."
TUTEE: Replies, "yes" or "no."
TUTOR: Turns flashcard away from the tutee and says, "Write the word."
TUTEE: Writes the word on the SPELLER practice sheet.
TUTOR: Checks the tutee's spelling of the word with the flashcard using a colored pen. If the word is spelled correctly, the tutor rewards the student with verbal praise. If incorrect, the tutor and tutee go back to Step 1 and repeat the steps again with the same spelling word.

STEP 3: *Ask the students to role-play* a tutoring session using the SPELLER strategy and rules. Training should take place each day until the students are comfortable with the spelling strategy and rules. Tutor training typically takes two or three 30-minute sessions.

STEP 4: *Check for mastery of rules* and SPELLER strategy by asking the students to recite the steps. Assign students into dyads.

STEP 5: *Start teaching using SPELLER and CWPT.* Students should sit in their dyads with materials. Set the timer for 10 minutes and begin. Circulate and assist stu-

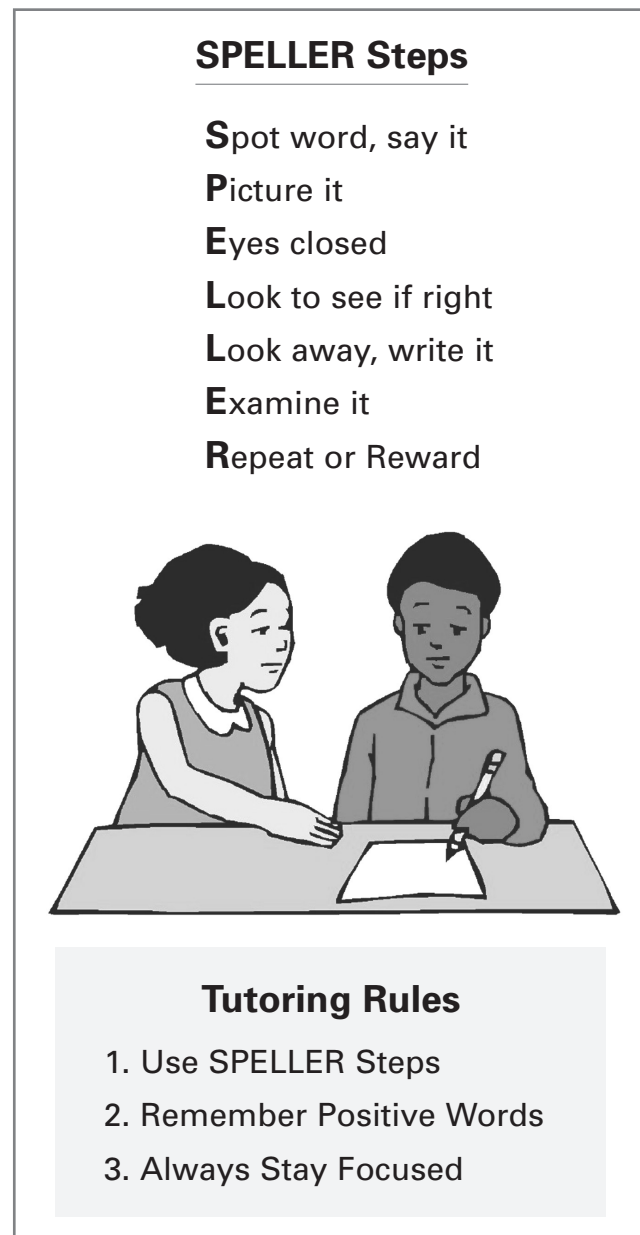


Figure 1. Cue card for SPELLER steps and tutoring rules.

dents during tutoring, and provide praise to the students following the tutoring rules. At the end of 10 minutes, ask students to switch roles. Reset the timer for 10 minutes, and ask the students to begin again. At the end of the tutoring session, ask students to take home the practice SPELLER sheets each night and use the SPELLER strategy on the words they spelled incorrectly that day. The students can use the strategy for homework by themselves or with a parent.

STEP 6: *Evaluate the CWPT program* by monitoring students' test scores and asking students about the program effectiveness by using the questionnaire in Figure 3.

SPELLER

Practice Sheet

Tutor's name _____

Tutee's name _____

Date: _____

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Figure 2. SPELLER practice sheet used during tutoring sessions.

Student Questionnaire

- | | | |
|---|------------|-----------|
| 1. The tutoring program helps me learn my spelling words. | Yes | No |
| 2. I would like to continue to use tutoring to help me learn my spelling words. | Yes | No |
| 3. I would like to switch partners each week. | Yes | No |

Figure 3. Student questionnaire for evaluating the CWPT program.

Summary

For teachers to accomplish the feat of meeting all of the individual academic needs of students with and without mild disabilities, it is essential that we constantly try fresh, innovative, research-based instructional methods with our students. By using the CWPT and strategy instruction outlined here, teachers will provide all students increased opportunities to respond, time-on-task, and practice with their spelling words. Students will also receive immediate feedback and continual error correction. It offers teachers an effective, adaptive, and motivating, instructional program that they can implement and maintain with little time and effort.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ests include the development of effective instructional strategies, techniques, and programs for teachers of students with and without disabilities and teacher education. Address: Cassandra L. Keller, Florida Atlantic University, Department of Exceptional Students Education, 777 Glades Road, Boca Raton, FL 33431.

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