

## INTRODUCTION

As a 6th grade teacher using the writing process with my students, I struggled with the problem of spelling. I was struck by the fact that many students who earned good grades on weekly tests did a poor job of spelling in their own writing. Not only did they misspell words from the previous week's list, they consistently misspelled basic and common words.

It was impossible for me to ignore spelling and mechanical deficiencies in student writing. I did not want to mark papers with a red pen, yet I felt uncomfortable allowing students to continue to practice errors without comment.

I took the problem as a challenge. It was my conviction that a truly effective spelling program would lead to improved spelling in first-draft writing, and that such a program need not require a disproportionate amount of teacher time and energy. I set out to find something which would *work* and be practical.

*Spelling Plus* is the result, and includes everything I found *most* valuable in improving student spelling while conserving my own time and energy. It is based on the following ideas:

- It is important for children to become successful spellers for these reasons:
  1. Judgments about a person's intelligence, literacy and the quality of his/her education are often based on competence in spelling.
  2. Good spelling is an important courtesy to the reader.
  3. Spelling is an indication of a person's attention to detail and quality.
- Formal spelling instruction should take as little time as needed to accomplish the goal of competency. Individualized spelling may be ideal, but it is impractical in most classrooms. *Spelling Plus* allows for efficient, effective use of time and energy.
- Spelling ability is largely a talent. Spelling is much easier for some people to learn than others. But nearly everyone, regardless of talent, can become a competent speller. Instruction should be to all learning modes and should be flexible enough to challenge gifted students while providing extensive review for children having difficulty.
- About 90% of text in English consists of just 1000 words. The most basic and frequently-used words should be memorized and overlearned, so that they can be spelled as easily and correctly as a child's own name. Once words have been *mastered*, they will be spelled correctly at all times, even in first-draft writing.
- Writing is the *purpose* for spelling, but spelling is best taught separately from creative writing using methods of direct instruction. Teachers then help students "bridge the gap" between spelling and writing. As students gradually master spelling, they will no longer need to devote much conscious thought to it. They will be able to write creatively *and* correctly.
- Spelling a word correctly on a weekly test is just the *first* step toward mastery. Most students will need extensive mixed review, dictation, and practice with editing before they will consistently spell well in their writing. Time must be provided for this.
- Teachers will be most successful when using methods that support their philosophies and preferences. Although effective methods are recommended in *Spelling Plus*, a schoolwide program will succeed if teachers at each level ensure that all of their students master 165 of the 1000 words using *any* methods. This is a *minimum* requirement. Teachers are free to supplement and expand the core program as suggested or as they choose.