

Spelling K–8

Planning and Teaching

Diane Snowball and Faye Bolton

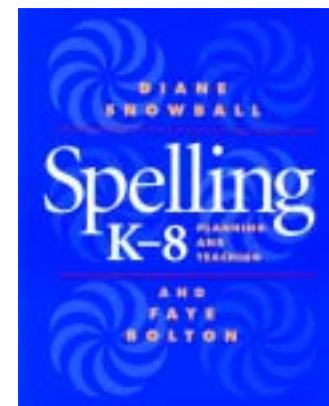
Teachers and school administrators are searching for ways to improve spelling instruction. Even schools where many successful practices are in place may not have a consistent approach for teaching spelling across grade levels or throughout a school. Competent spellers use many strategies in tackling unfamiliar words, and growth in these strategies should be a goal when analyzing children's writing strengths and needs. Even when such strategies are taught in school, a consistent approach is not always applied by school faculty.

Diane Snowball and Faye Bolton provide a possible school plan for teaching spelling and suggest a constructivist approach. Their suggestions are based on what is understood about children's development in spelling, principles of English orthography, the way people acquire understanding, and the ability to apply what they learn.

Contents

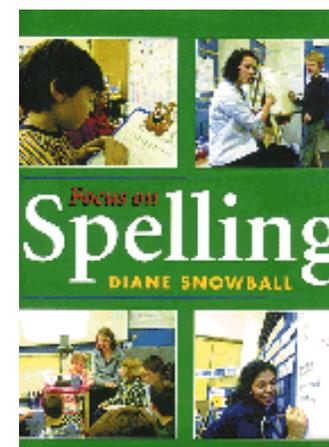
1. Introduction
 2. Principles and Practices
 3. Planning a School Spelling Program
 4. Letters
 5. Phonological Awareness
 6. Onset and Rimes
 7. Sounds
 8. Spelling Patterns
 9. Contractions
 10. Compound Words
 11. Homophones
 12. Plurals
 13. Prefixes and Suffixes
 14. Derivatives and Origins of English Words
 15. Apostrophes for Possessives and Plurals
 16. Proofreading
 17. High-Frequency Words
 18. Personal Words to Learn
 19. Sample Schedules for a School Spelling Program
- Appendix A: Student Checklists
Appendix B: Questions Parents Ask
Appendix C: Class Words
Appendix D: Personal Words
Index

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WORKSHOP 1



Goal

In this workshop participants explore how a consistent school spelling plan can impact student spelling achievement. Participants will have the opportunity to try a spelling strategy that emphasizes the benefits of a school-wide spelling plan.

Three Column Notes		
What I See	What It Makes Me Think	What I Can Try

Figure 1

Improvements and Obstacles	
How do you want to improve in spelling instruction?	
What obstacles might get in the way of making changes?	

Figure 2

Planning a School Spelling Program

Materials Needed

You will need:

- ✓ Copy of *Spelling K–8: Planning and Teaching* by Diane Snowball and Faye Bolton
- ✓ Set of *Focus on Spelling* videotapes by Diane Snowball
- ✓ Copy of Three-Column Notes (Figure 1) for each participant
- ✓ Copy of Improvements and Obstacles (Figure 2) for each participant
- ✓ Copy of Small-Group Discussion Questions (Figure 3) for each participant

Participants will need:

- ✓ Copy of *Spelling K–8: Planning and Teaching*

Small-Group Discussion

15 Minutes

Distribute Small-Group Discussion Questions (Figure 3) and have everyone write their answers to the questions silently (5 minutes). Break into groups of three or four to discuss the various ways that participants teach spelling and how it fits within their literacy program. Discuss the answers participants have to the Small-Group Discussion Questions.

Reading the Excerpt

15 Minutes

Have participants read pages 5–20 from *Spelling K–8* silently.

Whole-Group Discussion

10 Minutes

How does this approach to spelling fit into your existing notion of spelling instruction? What changes might you make? What connections do you make to the earlier small-group discussion?

Viewing the Video

10 Minutes

Show the segment, “Learning High-Frequency Words,” from Tape 1: Learning Words (cue the tape to 01:39). It addresses the issue of consistency through a common approach to learning words using the strategy “Look, Say, Spell, Cover, Write, Check,” and by having students tell what they know about specific words. As participants watch the video clip, have them focus on the common approach used to help students learn words. Distribute copies of Three-Column Notes (Figure 1) and ask participants to take notes using this form to help them focus on what they are viewing.

Whole-Group Discussion

10 Minutes

As a group brainstorm the potential advantages and disadvantages of all students using the same strategies to learn words.

Putting the Ideas into Practice

5 Minutes

Review the strategy “Look, Say, Spell, Cover, Write, Check” (see page 214 of *Spelling K–8*). Have everyone use this strategy when their students try to spell words. Ask students, “Is there anything about the word that surprises you? Is it like any other words you know? Are there any other words that you may be able to spell now that you know this word?” Practice “Look, Say, Spell, Cover, Write, Check” until the spelling of the word becomes automatic.

Ask participants to read Chapter 3, “Planning a School Spelling Program.” Have them explore other word learning strategies. Many strategies are located on pages 210–218 of *Spelling K–8*. Make sure participants complete Improvements and Obstacles (Figure 2) before the next session.

Follow-Up Between Workshop Sessions

Two days before the next workshop, put a reminder in participants’ boxes of what they need to bring to the next workshop.

What Participants Need to Bring to the Next Workshop

Completed Improvements and Obstacles form
Spelling K–8: Planning and Teaching

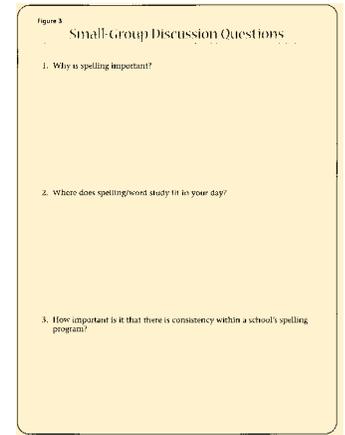


Figure 3



WORKSHOP 2

★ Goal

The goal of this session is for participants to explore the teaching of spelling to students by learning about the features of words, and rules or generalizations. In this session participants will learn how to investigate sound/symbol relationships (phonics) with the whole class. The same approach can be used to investigate common spelling patterns, rules for plurals or adding suffixes and prefixes, how and when to use apostrophes, how to use the correct homophones, or any other common features of words.

Three Column Notes		
What I See	What It Makes Me Think	What I Can Try

Figure 1

Spelling as a Process of Inquiry

Materials Needed

You will need:

- ✓ Copy of *Spelling K–8: Planning and Teaching* by Diane Snowball and Faye Bolton
- ✓ Set of *Focus on Spelling* videotapes by Diane Snowball
- ✓ Copy of Three-Column Notes (Figure 1) for each participant
- ✓ Index cards
- ✓ Copy of “An Incorrect Correction” by Cynthia McCallister (Figure 4) for each participant

Participants will need:

- ✓ Copy of *Spelling K–8: Planning and Teaching*
- ✓ Completed Improvements and Obstacles (Figure 2)

Small-Group Discussion

15 Minutes

Have participants meet in small groups of three or four to discuss the completed Improvements and Obstacles form. You might want to ask these additional questions:

- What are your thoughts on spelling in relation to a school plan?
- What obstacles are common for everyone in the group?
- How might these obstacles be overcome?
- What kind of support would individual group members need to make changes?

Ask participants to share what they have tried since the last session, and discuss the value of having a consistent approach to learning words and to other parts of their spelling program.

Refer to pages 20–23 of *Spelling K–8* to talk about how such a plan would be helpful and what they might be able to do with it. Does the plan help resolve any obstacles?

Reading the Excerpt

15 Minutes

Have participants read pages 86–94 on sound exploration. Ask everyone to highlight new ideas as they read.

Small-Group Discussion

10 Minutes

Ask participants to break into small groups of three or four. Each participant needs an index card. Using the excerpt in Figure 4, “An Incorrect

Correction,” have participants write on an index card words that contain the /ee/ sound. In small groups, organize the index cards by letter or spelling pattern. Ask participants to share what they notice about the words. Refer to page 95 if the group needs more direction or a model.

Viewing the Video

10 Minutes

Show the segment, “Exploring the /ay/ Sound” from Tape 2: Exploring Sounds, (cue the tape to 12:16). Distribute copies Three-Column Notes (Figure 1) to each participant. As participants watch the video, ask them to keep notes on this form or in whatever format they find most helpful.

Whole-Group Discussion

10 Minutes

Have participants share their thoughts about the video segment and talk about any new ideas they might try to incorporate into their spelling instruction. Encourage the group to talk about how the same approach might be used for learning spelling patterns, rules and generalizations, the use of apostrophes, and other aspects of spelling. You might also suggest that participants browse through Chapters 7–15 of *Spelling K–8* after the workshop is complete to learn how this approach is used for all aspects of spelling.

Putting the Ideas into Practice

Have participants try a sound exploration with their class before the next session. Age appropriate sounds can be found on pages 87–88 of *Spelling K–8*.

Ask participants to read Chapter 7, “Sounds.” Possible homework ideas can be found on page 99. Using these ideas as a guide, ask participants to write what they might want to try with their students.

Follow-Up Between Workshop Sessions

Two days before the next workshop, put a reminder in participants’ boxes of what they need to bring to the next workshop.

What Participants Need to Bring to the Next Workshop

Spelling K–8: Planning and Teaching

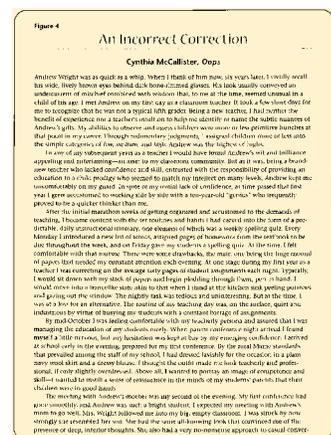


Figure 4



WORKSHOP 3



Goal

Participants will explore the personalized aspect of spelling and how students can select personal words to learn from their writing. Proofreading individual writing for strengths and needs lends itself to the process of appropriate word selection.

What I See	What It Makes Me Think	What I Can Try

Figure 1

Personal Word Selection and Proofreading

Materials Needed

You will need:

- ✓ Copy of *Spelling K–8: Planning and Teaching* by Diane Snowball and Faye Bolton
- ✓ Set of *Focus on Spelling* videotapes by Diane Snowball
- ✓ Copy of Three-Column Notes (Figure 1) for each participant
- ✓ Two highlighters (different colors) for each participant

Participants will need:

- ✓ Copy of *Spelling K–8: Planning and Teaching*

Small-Group Discussion

10 Minutes

Share ideas that have been put into practice since the last session. Reflect on the inquiry approach to spelling instruction. What place does whole-group instruction have in spelling? What types of management issues have emerged?

Viewing the Video

10 Minutes

Show the segment, “Proofreading and Choosing Personal Words,” from Tape 1: Learning Words (cue the tape to 14:33). Distribute copies of Three-Column Notes (Figure 1) to each participant. Ask them to watch the segment and take notes on this form or in whatever format they find most helpful.

Reading the Excerpt

15 Minutes

Have participants read Chapter 18, “Personal Words to Learn,” pages 226–238 in *Spelling K–8*. Ask them to use highlighters to mark new concepts (one color) and new ideas they might want to try (different color) as they read.

Whole-Group Discussion

15 Minutes

Have participants share their thoughts about what they’ve read and watched.

- Discuss how their spelling instruction may change as a result of these workshops, including possible strategies for learning words,

regular routines in all classrooms, instruction in proofreading, and establishing a mix of class words and personal words for each student.

- Talk about how children would benefit if teachers in all grade levels used the same process for teaching generalizations.
- Discuss ways to balance the components of whole-group and individualized spelling instruction. How would this also benefit teachers and parents? What may be the next step for participants? Refer participants to Chapter 19, “Sample Schedules for a School Spelling Program” for further study.

Follow-Up Sessions

If you have time for more than three sessions you could explore selections from Chapters 8–15 of *Spelling K–8* and the companion *Focus on Spelling* videotapes to help teachers try some of the other important parts of teaching spelling. Some teachers may like to read about the ideas and view the tapes individually or in small groups and then share their learning with others. This would be particularly helpful if teachers have sufficient time to try one new idea at a time. It’s a good idea for teachers to feel confident about how they are handling the learning of words before they begin other investigations.

Figure 1

Three-Column Notes

What I See	What It Makes Me Think	What I Can Try

Figure 2

Improvements and Obstacles

How do you want to improve in spelling instruction?

What obstacles might get in the way of making changes?

Figure 4

An Incorrect Correction

Cynthia McCallister, *Oops*

Andrew Wright was as quick as a whip. When I think of him now, six years later, I vividly recall his wide, lively brown eyes behind dark bone-rimmed glasses. His look usually conveyed an undercurrent of mischief combined with wisdom that, to me at the time, seemed unusual in a child of his age. I met Andrew on my first day as a classroom teacher. It took a few short days for me to recognize that he was not a typical fifth grader. Being a new teacher, I had neither the benefit of experience nor a teacher's intuition to help me identify or name the subtle nuances of Andrew's gifts. My abilities to observe and assess children were more or less primitive hunches at that point in my career. Through rudimentary judgments, I assigned children more or less into the simple categories of *low*, *medium*, and *high*. Andrew was the highest of highs.

In any of my subsequent years as a teacher I would have found Andrew's wit and brilliance appealing and entertaining—an asset to my classroom community. But as it was, being a brand-new teacher who lacked confidence and skill, entrusted with the responsibility of providing an education to a child prodigy who seemed to match my intellect on many levels, Andrew kept me uncomfortably on my guard. In spite of my initial lack of confidence, as time passed that first year I grew accustomed to working side by side with a ten-year-old “genius” who frequently proved to be a quicker thinker than me.

After the initial marathon weeks of getting organized and accustomed to the demands of teaching, I became content with the set routines and habits I had carved into the form of a predictable, daily instructional itinerary, one element of which was a weekly spelling quiz. Every Monday I introduced a new list of words, assigned pages of homework from the textbook to be due throughout the week, and on Friday gave my students a spelling quiz. At the time, I felt comfortable with that routine. There were some drawbacks, the main one being the huge mound of papers that needed my constant attention each evening. At one stage during my first year as a teacher I was correcting on the average sixty pages of student assignments each night. Typically, I would sit down with my stack of papers and begin plodding through them, pen in hand. I would move into a trancelike state akin to that when I stand at the kitchen sink peeling potatoes and gazing out the window. The nightly task was tedious and uninteresting. But at the time, I was at a loss for an alternative. The routine of my teaching day was, on the surface, quiet and industrious by virtue of busying my students with a constant barrage of assignments.

By mid-October I was feeling comfortable with my teacherly persona and assured that I was managing the education of my students nicely. When parent conference night arrived I found myself a little nervous, but any hesitation was kept at bay by my emerging confidence. I arrived at school early in the evening, prepared for my first conference. By the rural Maine standards that prevailed among the staff of my school, I had dressed lavishly for the occasion in a plain navy wool skirt and a dressy blouse. I thought the outfit made me look teacherly and professional, if only slightly overdressed. Above all, I wanted to portray an image of competence and skill—I wanted to instill a sense of reassurance in the minds of my students' parents that their children were in good hands.

The meeting with Andrew's mother was my second of the evening. My first conference had gone smoothly, and Andrew was such a bright student, I expected my meeting with Andrew's mom to go well. Mrs. Wright followed me into my big, empty classroom. I was

Figure 4 “An Incorrect Correction” (cont.)

struck by how strongly she resembled her son. She had the same all-knowing look that convinced me of the presence of deep, interior thoughts. She also had a very no-nonsense approach to casual conversation, which, within minutes, made me feel uneasy and guarded. It wasn't long before I began to feel self-conscious and insecure.

“It's a pleasure having your son in my class,” I offered. “He is a quick thinker and offers a positive contribution to class discussions.” She nodded in agreement. It soon became obvious that my insights were not original; I'm certain she'd heard similar comments each year at her son's conferences. “He has such a wonderful sense of humor,” I continued. “And he is very well liked by his classmates.” The conference limped along. I was anticipating our final good-bye when Mrs. Wright made it clear the conference was not finished.

“Oh? You have a concern?” I responded in a feigned tone of casual competence. Suddenly, Mrs. Wright reached into her purse and produced one of Andrew's recent spelling tests I had graded. I glanced at the top where I had written “100%.” But below, three out of ten words were circled in pencil. I suddenly felt confused and off guard. “I don't understand,” I muttered. In a firm and subtly accusing tone Mrs. Wright pointed out that Andrew had obviously misspelled three words on his spelling test. I had overlooked them, giving him a perfect score. Mrs. Wright went on to explain her concern: Andrew is a bright boy, but weak in some areas. Because of his brilliance he is often eased of the pressure to achieve, held to a different standard than the rest of his classmates. He needs instruction and guidance, just as any other child. She was justified in her criticism; and she waited for an explanation, pinning me down with her serious eyes.

I felt my stomach turn and my face flush. In my mind's eye I could see myself, in my tidy classroom, overdressed in a navy wool skirt and a dressy blouse, feigning confidence and competence, and suddenly having my cover blown by one of my student's parents. I felt stupid and pathetic! I wanted the ground to open up and swallow me. But I also realized I needed to be professional and at least make some attempt to save face in this unpleasant situation. How could I have overlooked three misspelled words, giving a perfect score to a child who deserved an average one? I apologized and offered my excuse...I had simply overlooked the errors. Mrs. Wright knew, and so did I, that my excuse wasn't adequate.

The incident of the incorrect correction occurred because I relied on routines that allowed me to blindly assign and reassign students into categories. It came early in my teaching career and derived from the unreasonable routine of weekly spelling tests, which I abandoned soon after. But the development of innovative practices hasn't delivered my teacher's subconscious from the dangerous ghost of Andrew and unbridled assumptions. In fact, regardless of how progressive my teaching becomes, I find myself continually exorcising him from my instructional practices. While my approaches to and philosophy of teaching have changed over the years, the newer, modified routines I currently embrace also fall victim to mindlessness, complacency, and routinization.

I'm faced with a continual challenge to structure enough routine into the classroom experience to support higher levels of thinking and learning for my students and myself. But the danger arises when I blindly or thoughtlessly embrace routines, allowing them to resemble tracks that take my students and me over the same terrain, day in and day out, steering us clear of the unexpected surprises that take learning in new and necessary directions. When my teaching routines and habits allow me too easily to slip into a potato-peeling frame of mind...that's when I know the ghost of Andrew lurks around the corner.

Time Cues for *Focus on Spelling*

Tape 1: Learning Words

00:00—01:38	Introduction (01:38)
01:39—10:36	Learning high-frequency words (09:57)
10:37—14:32	One-on-one work during writing (03:55)
14:33—18:36	Proofreading and choosing personal words, grade 2 (04:03)
18:37—24:50	Proofreading and choosing personal words, grade 5 (06:13)

Tape 2: Exploring Sounds

00:00—02:15	Introduction (02:15)
02:16—12:15	Exploring the /f/ sound (09:59)
12:16—21:35	Exploring the /ay/ sound (09:19)
21:36—28:00	Exploring the /oo/ sound (06:24)

Tape 3: Investigating Letters and Spelling Patterns

00:00—02:36	Introduction (02:36)
02:37—10:20	Investigating the “oo” spelling pattern (07:43)
10:21—19:25	Investigating a letter (09:04)
19:26—26:08	Using spelling patterns as visual strategies (06:42)

Tape 4: Discovering Generalizations

00:00—02:33	Introduction (02:33)
02:34—09:39	Discovering generalizations about suffixes (07:05)
09:40—20:51	Discovering generalizations for using “there, their, and they’re” (11:11)
20:52—27:58	Discovering generalizations about plurals (07:06)