Abstract

This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach within a constructivist paradigm to examine spelling and spelling motivation of four suburban Illinois high school students: two male seniors with LD, one male freshman with ADHD, and one female freshman with LD. The purposes of the study were to determine why students with writing goals and spelling objectives/benchmarks on their Individualized Education Programs continue to misspell words, identify their metacognitive thoughts while writing and spelling, and discover their thoughts on what would motivate them to spell correctly. Teacher and curriculum profiles documented relevant background information. Student profiles included age, grade, gender, the Words Their Way Upper-Level Spelling Inventory which determined each student's current spelling stage, and results of Motivation to Write and Motivation to Spell Profiles to measure students' perceptions of their motivational levels. The researcher collected an initial writing sample for each student from the special education Writing II classroom teacher in order to gather additional information about students' spelling. Three rounds of observations, writing sample reviews, and individual student interviews completed the data gathering. The findings of this study reflect students' perceptions. They believe spelling is important, but high school teachers do not provide instruction nor do they include accurate spelling in grading rubrics. Study participants do not know or remember learning spelling rules and have no framework to guide their spelling. Their primary spelling metacognition while writing is to limit word choice to those words they know how to spell correctly or to use words they know they cannot spell correctly if they believe doing so makes their writing more descriptive or richer. Students suggested they would be better motivated to spell correctly if spelling counted toward their grade, if teachers viewed it as important, or if they were competing with their peer students.