

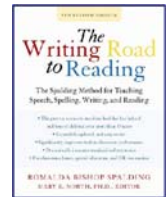
Florida Center for Reading Research

Spalding Writing Road to Reading

What is Spalding Writing Road to Reading?

The Spalding Writing Road to Reading is a total language arts program designed for K-8 grade students: those who are typically learning, who have special learning needs, or who may be learning English as a second language. Its backbone is its manual, entitled *The Writing Road to Reading*, which leads the teacher through the daily Spelling Lesson, the Writing Lesson, and the Reading Lesson. Included in the manual as well are chapters on the theoretical foundations of the *Spalding Writing Road to Reading Method*, guidance on planning integrated language arts lessons, children's literature recommendations, and all instructional material needed to implement the program. The instructional materials include phonograms, rules for pronunciation, spelling and language, syllable division, the Extended Ayres Word List (presented in a variety of formats for maximal teacher ease and utility) and a K-8 recommended scope and sequence. The Extended Ayres Word List is a compilation of the most frequently used words as compiled by Dr. Leonard Ayres and recently corroborated through its comparison with other high frequency word lists. In addition to the manual, teachers are provided with phonogram cards, word building cards, and readers written at progressively more difficult levels. The readers consist of half-page stories followed by ten to twelve multiple choice comprehension questions. There are also accompanying decodable books from Flyleaf Publishers, Scholastic Books, Random House, and children's literature books by grade level. Student materials include notebooks with very specific paper and spacing guidelines that are used to write high frequency words following various spelling and pronunciation patterns. These notebooks are also used by students to mark words that illustrate rules. All students' notebooks have a precise format, and thus are identical to one another. They are intended to be a reference for the student as his reading and writing skills grow and develop.

The Spalding Writing Road to Reading Method is a teacher-directed program. It includes a very specific scope and sequence for K-8 spelling, writing, and reading. The progression of instruction and learning for students using the *Spalding* method is: (1) first grade students learn the first 45 phonograms, the correct handwriting for each, and read words that contain these phonograms, (2) formal spelling lessons begin, with rules and patterns, etc. (3) students read the spelling words to develop automatic word recognition (a sight vocabulary), (4) students begin to write sentences using the spelling words, (5) students read sentences, and (6) students begin reading from books in all content areas.



Initially, lessons are given in whole class format, but are followed up with small group work for children who need additional practice to master the skills. The program's philosophical pillars are that it is child-centered, multisensory, built on high expectations for student success, and is purpose and meaning driven. It was designed to draw on and to develop children's reasoning and higher level thinking skills. Teachers model their thinking aloud for students so that students' metacognitive skills are developed throughout the instructional lessons.

Instructional sessions last two hours each day, though they may be broken into smaller units. Each day spelling, writing, and reading are addressed. The Spelling Lesson teaches phonemic awareness; letter-sound associations; decoding, fluent word

recognition, rules of spelling, and pronunciation. In the first grade spelling lesson, the children are introduced to phonograms (approximately 4 per day). A card with the phonogram is shown to the child, and all of the possible sounds for the letters are given (with the children repeating them). The phonogram's usage is discussed, with teacher guidance and supervision. Subsequently, the phonograms are dictated and the child writes the letters for the sounds that he hears after repeating them softly to himself. Once 45 such phonograms are learned, which usually occurs after three weeks, the phonograms are blended into words and written by the children. Phonemic awareness is taught through blending and segmenting words during the spelling lesson dialogue. Words for dictation are drawn systematically from the Extended Ayres Word List. *Spalding* has a unique feature in that the words are written and marked with a marking system designed to help children remember and apply rules of pronunciation and spelling to the words they are writing and reading. Parts of words may be underlined, syllables separated, and numbers written indicating which of several alternate phonogram sounds apply to the word. Lessons increase in difficulty to ensure children's progress and to give them the tools that they need to accommodate their increasing skills and interests.

As students' skills increase, they write textual material beyond words alone, including informative, narrative, and informative-narrative paragraphs. The Writing Lesson provides instruction in vocabulary development, language concepts and grammar, sentence construction, and composition. During writing lessons, word definitions and usage are explicitly taught as the teacher models her thinking for the children. Each lesson contains the elements of teacher modeling, checking for student comprehension, practice for the students, and checking for correct application in students' independent work. In addition, the five stages of writing (prewriting, composing, revising, editing, and publishing) are taught explicitly. Although the *Spalding* method is not a scripted method, the manual includes exemplary sample dialogues that are helpful to teachers getting to know the curriculum.

Reading lessons in the early days of *Spalding* instruction are devoted to fostering the students' love and appreciation for literature. A list of recommended books, many considered classics, accompanies the program. The Reading Lesson focuses on literary appreciation, text structure, and listening and reading comprehension, including fluent and expressive reading. A key to the *Spalding* approach is that the initial reading that students do includes the words that they are writing and learning in the spelling lessons. Additionally, students listen to teachers read from McCall-Harby and McCall-Crabbs readers, each story of which is approximately a half page long and is followed by a series of 10-12 questions. Students are taught a broad range of comprehension and metacognitive skills, such as making predictions, making connections to prior knowledge, summarizing, and noting characteristics of narrative, informative, and informative-narrative writing samples. Children begin reading daily in the McCall-Harby and/or McCall-Crabbs readers after they have completed Sections A through G from the Ayres list in their spelling notebooks, roughly a period of four to five weeks.

How is Spalding aligned with Reading First?

Reading First has identified five critical components to effective reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Phonemic awareness is addressed in the *Spalding* method by having students separate and then blend (with teacher guidance) the sounds of the words from the Extended Ayres Word List as the words are presented each day. Students segment phonemes in

the word as the teacher writes the letters (phonograms) on the board. The blended word is then read. Other phonemic awareness activities are not included in instruction.

Phonics instruction is a strength in *Spalding's Writing Road to Reading*. From the very beginning, children are shown letters and taught their associated sounds. (It bears repeating that *all* of the sounds represented by that phonogram are presented at once). Children repeat the sounds individually and write the letters that correspond with the sounds. There are no additional phonics-based activities that are typically found in many other curricula, but application and understanding of phonics is emphasized in *Spalding*. The first words that the students read are those words that they have learned to write, concomitantly learning the sound/symbol representations. Students are thus equipped with the knowledge to blend the sounds they have learned as they write and read.

Vocabulary instruction is focused on the Extended Ayres Word List. As new words are encountered in the presentation of the word list, teachers give specific definitions and enriching associations of the words, and children use the new words in sentences. Children are exposed to vocabulary through the literature with which teachers are encouraged to supplement the program. Fluency is practiced by reading the word lists and by reading from the McCall-Harby and McCall-Crabbs readers and literature books. Although students are encouraged to read daily from their basal readers, library books, and/or a collection of classroom books, specific fluency building strategies using connected text are not a prominent component of the program. *Spalding* explicitly teaches a wide variety of comprehension skills to students, as well as text elements such as character, plot, and setting. The McCall-Harby and McCall-Crabbs readers are used initially for listening comprehension exercises and then used primarily to practice reading comprehension. Dialogues are helpful in serving as examples for teachers to explain in detail and to model various metacognitive, comprehension, and text structure awareness skills.

Spalding's Professional Development Program (PDP) provides two 45-hour courses of integrated language arts training and school inservices. Teachers completing the courses are able to apply research-based spelling and language rules and concepts, model strategies for teaching plans, and adjust instruction to meet students' changing needs. Courses are taught by Masters-level *Spalding* Certified Teacher Instructors (SCTIs), who have completed a rigorous training program. After each course, SCTIs provide any or all of the following: follow-up modeling in the classrooms; grade-level and/or school inservices; after-school question and answer sessions; and parent sessions. A school has the option of having one of its own staff members train as a SCTI.

Research Support for Spalding



Although the *Spalding* method was first developed in the late 1930's, its initial publication was in the 1950's. It was originally designed for use with children who were developing typically in their academic skills, but was found to be helpful for students with special learning and reading needs as well. The *Spalding Writing Road to Reading* manual presents the findings of the recent National Reading Panel report and discusses the dimensions of reading that are being strengthened through research. The program's alignment with those findings in phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension are strong, while the alignment with phonemic awareness and fluency, although not absent, is less direct.

An evaluation of the *Spalding* method of teaching reading was conducted in 1990 by the El Paso Independent School District's Office for Research and Evaluation. Students in grades 1-8 participated in the study; information about the students' backgrounds in the study is not provided. It is noted that 539 students participated. Assessment instruments used in the evaluation were the Brigance Diagnostic Comprehensive Inventory of Basic Skills (Brigance, 1999), the Morrison-McCall Spelling Scale, and a written composition. The Wilcoxon Matched Pair Sign Test was used to analyze the results from the pre- and post-testing with the three assessment instruments. On the Brigance, the Wilcoxon test showed a statistically significant difference between pre- and post-test scores at the .0001 level for five of the eight grade levels and for the group as a whole. It is notable that two of the grades that did not reach statistical significance were grades 1 and 2, which are very formative years in the reading and writing process. For the Morrison-McCall Spelling Scale, there was again a statistically significant difference between pre and post test for five of the eight grades, with the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades *not* reaching significance. On the written composition evaluation, pre- and post-test scores indicated significant improvement for all grades except grades 1 and 7. Because no control groups were used in gathering these data, it is impossible to draw conclusions regarding the efficacy of the *Spalding* method because the improvements seen conceivably could have been attributable to factors other than the *Spalding Writing Road to Reading* instruction.

A study of 1st and 2nd grade students was conducted in 1999 at Young Town School in Tasmania. Instruction using the *Spalding* method was given to classes averaging 9 students per class, for one-and-a-half hours per day. Additional time was given to students with special needs. Six assessment measures were used to pre- and post-test the students: The Morrison McCall Spelling Test, The Waddington Diagnostic Spelling Test, The South Australian Spelling Test, The Waddington Diagnostic Reading Test, The Woodcock Passage Comprehension Test, and The Woodcock Word Identification Test. *Spalding* was taught for a period of eight months. Pre- and post-test scores were reported in terms of the number of months gained between the two tests. The children showed the greatest improvements on the spelling measures. For example, on the Morrison McCall Spelling Test, scores reflected an increase of 12 months in Grade 1 and 14 months in Grade 2. No statistical procedures were employed, therefore it is not possible to determine the relative significance of the progress made from these data. There were similar gains on the other spelling measures, with varying amounts of growth seen.

Results of the reading pre- and post-tests are not as impressive as those of the spelling tests; and, in some cases, the amount of growth seen (again, reported in months) was less than the 8 months that had been spent in instruction. Furthermore, special needs children were removed from the administration of the Woodcock Word Identification Test due to time constraints. Even without these children included in the sample, the growth over the 8-month teaching period was small: 9 months.

Because the Tasmania study had no control group, it is impossible to determine if the growth seen (either equivalent growth or more growth) is the specific result of the *Spalding* reading program. In the study, children with grade equivalent scores lower than their chronological ages are considered to be at risk. On all six of the assessments, the number of children at risk decreased, ranging from a decrease of 3 students on each of the Woodcock tests to a decrease of 18 children on the South Australian Spelling Test.

Farnham-Diggory (1992) conducted a study of the *Spalding* method with children in grades 1-3 that used a quasi-experimental design. Although little information is given regarding the specifics of the study, the study did involve control classes, and Farnham-Diggory was able to draw percentile rank comparisons on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills Total Reading Scale between the control and *Spalding* classes. She reports (though no details are given about the statistical procedures or results) that results in favor of *Spalding* were found in all three grades.

In sum, although several studies have been conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the *Spalding* method, these studies are seriously flawed because they either do not use control or comparison groups, or the data are reported in an incomplete fashion. Although the results suggest that the *Spalding* materials can have a positive effect on the growth of spelling skills, evidence for consistent effects of the curriculum in producing reading growth beyond that obtained by other methods is less convincing.

Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Spalding*:

- The *Spalding* program is well organized and highly systematic.
- All facets of a written language program are included: reading, writing, spelling, handwriting, and sound-symbol correspondence, and are integrated.
- *Spalding* offers many opportunities for review and practice to achieve mastery, and teachers are encouraged to spend extra time with students who need help beyond the two-hour language arts block.
- There is a strong professional development component that provides teachers with two 45-hour courses and follow-up instructional support.
- Materials are compact, thorough, and easy to use.
- The use of enriching literature for the children is encouraged from the very first day.

Weaknesses of *Spalding*:

- Understanding how the different aspects of the curriculum are integrated can be challenging. For instance, it is not clear when one shifts from working only with phonograms to beginning handwriting and spelling lessons, or when one changes from reading spelling words to writing and reading those words in sentences.
- The phonograms are taught to the children in an order that is based on the actual formation of the letters ("clock" letters begin their formation at 2 o'clock on an imaginary clock face on the child's paper). Because they are not taught in order of utility or frequency of use, children's reading of basic words may be delayed until later in the school year. Also, the concept of an imaginary clock face on a writing paper may be too abstract for some children to easily grasp.
- The presentation of all of the sounds associated with a phonogram at one time could be confusing for some children, especially those with memory or auditory processing weaknesses.

Which Florida districts have schools that implement Spalding?

Hillsborough	813-272-4050
Lee	239-337-8301
Santa Rosa	850-983-5000

For More Information

www.spalding.org

References

Brigance (1999). Brigance Diagnostic Comprehensive Inventory of Basic Skills. North Billerica, MA: Curriculum Associates.

Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills Total Reading Scale (discontinued, no publishing date). Monterey, CA: CTB McGraw-Hill.

Farnham-Diggory (1992). Cognitive Processes in Education. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishing.

Morrison-McCall Spelling Scale.

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Important Note: FCRR Reports are prepared in response to requests from Florida school districts for review of specific reading programs. The reports are intended to be a source of information about programs that will help teachers, principals, and district personnel in their choice of materials that can be used by skilled teachers to provide effective instruction. Whether or not a program has been reviewed does **not** constitute endorsement or lack of endorsement by the FCRR.

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