

ACQUISTION OF ENGLISH ORTHOGRAPHY BY ESL STUDENTS  
AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THEIR READING PERFORMANCE

A Dissertation

by

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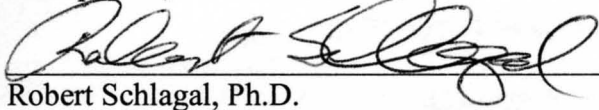
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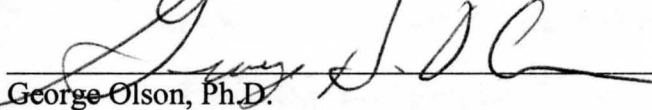
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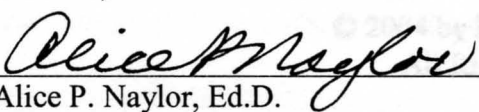
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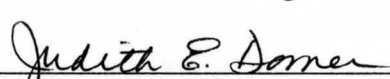
  
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## ABSTRACT

### ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH ORTHOGRAPHY BY ESL STUDENTS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THEIR READING PERFORMANCE (May, 2004)

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Public school systems in the United States have seen a dramatic growth in the number of English-as-a-second language (ESL) students. The U.S. Department of Education reports a 46 % increase nationwide. Some school systems have experienced as much as a 1000 % increase in ESL population in the past decade, and educating these students is putting additional demands on special education service providers, classroom teachers, administrators, and support personnel. For these students learning to read and write English is imperative to success in U.S. schools. For the school systems attempting to educate them, little empirical data exist to help guide the literacy and orthographic development of this growing population.

In Study One qualitative spelling inventories were used to assess the English orthographic knowledge of second, third, fourth, and fifth grade native

speaking ( $n = 642$ ) and ESL students ( $n = 187$ ). The acquisition of orthographic knowledge proved to be hierarchical and developmental for all students regardless of the first language. The patterns of development suggest that the cognitive processes that native English speakers use when learning English are the same processes used by ESL students when learning English orthography regardless of their first language.

In Study Two the qualitative spelling inventories were used to determine students' instructional spelling levels; it was hypothesized that instructional spelling levels would correspond to instructional reading levels for ESL and native English speaking students. To test this hypothesis, prototypical spellers (native English speaking and ESL) for instructional levels one through four were selected and given informal reading measures to determine instruction reading levels. Analyses of the data showed that spelling level was an accurate predictor of reading level regardless of language group. Regression analysis revealed that students' spelling levels accounted for 28% of the variance in the reading scores above and beyond students' grade levels and regardless of language group.

The data from this study indicate that ESL students appear to acquire and process knowledge about English words in the same manner as their native English speaking peers.