

**Developmental Word Study, K-3:  
Meaningful and Motivating Phonics, Spelling, and Vocabulary Instruction**  
NESA Spring Educators Conference  
Bangkok, Thailand  
March, 2010

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**Exploding a Myth: English Spelling Makes More Sense Than We Think**



- At the level of sound and the level of meaning, the spelling system of English makes much more sense than we have traditionally believed. (Ehri, 1997; Venezky, 1999; Templeton, 2003)
- While spelling knowledge is a critical skill for writing, it is also a critical skill for *reading*. Importantly, practice at spelling helps reading more than practice at reading helps spelling. (Perfetti, 1997; Templeton & Morris, 2000)

**Logic at the Level of Sound: Patterns**

How sounds are spelled very often depends on where they occur within words:

*Example:* Words such as *say* and *rain* reveal that, in single-syllable words, “long a” is usually spelled *ay* at the end of a word (but rarely in the middle) and often *ai* in the middle (but never at the end).

How sounds are spelled very often depends on other sounds they are adjacent to:

*Example:* Words such as *ridge* and *cage* reveal that the /j/ sound is usually spelled *dge* when it follows a short vowel, and usually spelled *ge* when it follows a long vowel.

**Logic at the Level of Sound: Between-Syllable Patterns**

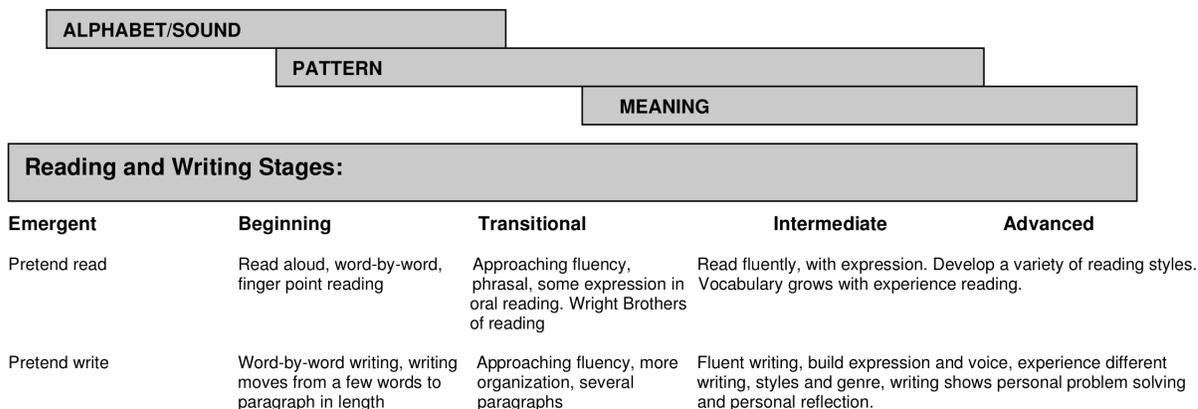
**Logic at the Level of Meaning: The Spelling/Meaning Connection** – “Words that are related in meaning are often related in spelling as well, despite changes in sound” (Templeton, 1979, 1983, 2004)

*define*  
*definition*  
*definite*  
*definitive*

“Many teachers themselves see spelling as more arbitrary than systematic; at least, they give that impression to their students. Even when that is not the case, it is likely that their own knowledge of the spelling system is largely implicit or relatively poorly understood. For example, they may teach spelling as a solely sound-based system long after that is useful....If we teachers do not believe that spelling has logical, negotiable patterns, how can we hope to help children develop that insight?”

M. Hughes & D. Searle (1997)

## Layers of the Orthography



## Spelling Stages:

Emergent →	Letter Name- Alphabetic →			Within-Word Pattern →			Syllables and Affixes →			Derivational Relations →						
	Early	Middle	Late	Early	Middle	Late	Early	Middle	Late	Early	Middle	Late				
Examples of spellings:																
bed		MST	E	bd	bad		bed									
ship		TFP	S	sp	sep	shep	ship									
float		SMT	F	ft	fot	flot	flott	flowt	floaut	flote	float					
train		FSMP	G	jn	jan	tan	chran	tran	teran	traen	trane	train				
bottle		B		bt	botl	bodol		botel	botal	bottle	bottle					
cellar		S		slr	salr	celr	seler	celer	seler	celler	seller	cellar				
pleasure		P		pjr	plsr	plager	plejer	pleser	plesher	pleser	plesher	plesour	plesure	pleasure		
confident												confadent	confiednet	confedent	confendent	confident
opposition												opasishan	oppasishion	opositian	oposition	opposition

## *The Relationship between Spelling and Phonics – Encoding and Decoding – at each Developmental Phase of Literacy*

### **EMERGENT LITERACY**

- Phonemic awareness instruction is more effective when children are taught to use letters to represent phonemes and to apply their knowledge of phonemic awareness when reading and writing (*National Reading Panel, 2000*)
- Spelling words as they sound enhances phonemic awareness and letter knowledge and accelerates the acquisition of conventional spelling (*National Research Council, 1998*)

### ***The critical importance of developing a “concept of word in print” (Morris et al., 2003)***

Facilitates *full phonemic awareness* – the explicit awareness of all consonant and vowel sounds within a syllable. The concept of word in print is a benchmark in the development of the child’s *sight vocabulary* – words that she or he can identify immediately *and* out of context – increases dramatically.

***The Relationship between Spelling and Phonics – Encoding and Decoding – at each Developmental Phase of Literacy***

<b>BEGINNING LITERACY</b> <i>Alphabetic/Letter Name</i>	<b>TRANSITIONAL LITERACY</b> <i>Within Word Pattern</i>	<b>INTERMEDIATE LITERACY</b> <i>Syllables and Affixes</i>	<b>ADVANCED LITERACY</b> <i>Derivational Relations</i>
[Grades K-1]	[Grades 2-3]	[Grades 3-5]	[Grades 6 and Above]
<p><i>BAD - bed</i> <i>SEP - ship</i> <i>LAP - lump</i> <i>JRIV - drive</i></p>	<p><i>TRANE - train</i> <i>FLOWT - float</i> <i>CATOL - cattle</i> <i>SMOKE - smoke</i></p>	<p><i>SHOPING - shopping</i> <i>ALOW - allow</i> <i>CAPCHURE - capture</i> <i>MIDDEL - middle</i></p>	<p><i>APPEARANCE - appearance</i> <i>OPPOSITION - opposition</i> <i>CONFERENCE - conference</i> <i>IRRELEVANT - irrelevant</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Beginning single consonants</li> <li>- Consonant digraphs</li> <li>- Consonant blends</li> <li>- Short vowel patterns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Common long vowel patterns</li> <li>- <i>r-</i> and <i>l-</i>influenced vowels</li> <li>- Three-letter consonant blends</li> <li>- Complex consonants: Final sound of /k/ Final /ch/: <i>ch tch</i> <i>/j/</i>: <i>dge Vge</i></li> <li>- Common spelling for diphthongs /ow/, /oi/</li> <li>- Compound words</li> <li>- Homophones: <i>sail/sale beat/beet</i></li> </ul> <p><b><i>IMPORTANT: Students learn to apply their understanding of spelling patterns in single-syllable words to decoding polysyllabic words in their reading; for spelling purposes, these polysyllabic words will be studied more systematically at the Syllables and Affixes developmental phase</i></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inflectional suffixes <i>-ed, -ing</i></li> <li>- Plural endings</li> <li>- Changing final <i>y</i> to <i>i</i></li> <li>- Base words + common prefixes and suffixes</li> <li>- Syllable patterns: VCCV <i>bas/ket rab/bit</i> VCV open: <i>hu/man</i> VCV closed: <i>cab/in</i></li> <li>- Less-frequent vowel patterns</li> <li>- 2-syllable homophones: <i>peddle/pedal dual/duel</i></li> <li>- 2-syllable homographs: <i>PREsent/preSENT</i> <i>REcord/reCORD</i></li> <li>- Vowel patterns in accented and unaccented syllables</li> </ul> <p><b><i>IMPORTANT: For vocabulary development, students learn about simple spelling-meaning patterns and high-frequency Greek and Latin elements; for spelling purposes, these will be studied more systematically at the Derivational Relations developmental phase</i></b></p>	<p>Spelling/Meaning Connection: <i>sign music</i> <i>signal musician</i></p> <p><i>ignite reside mental</i> <i>ignition resident mentality</i></p> <p>Greek and Latin elements <i>-therm- -spect-</i> <i>-photo- -dic-</i></p> <p>Assimilated/Absorbed Prefixes: <i>in- + mobile = immobile</i> <i>ad- + tract = attract</i></p>

***The Nature of Instruction: Spelling***

1) What about encouraging young children to spell words the best they can, even though the spelling may be incorrect from a conventional perspective? Spelling words as they sound enhances phonemic awareness and letter knowledge and accelerates the acquisition of conventional spelling (*National Research Council, 1998*)

2) What types of instructional activities work best?

Rather than simply writing words several times, students should be involved in examining the words from a *variety* of perspectives. Activities should engage students in *comparing*, *contrasting*, and *discussing* the words; this will ensure that memory for words and spelling patterns are reinforced:

### ***Closed and Open Sorts***

Word sorts are a categorization activity in which students compare and contrast words according to spelling and/or meaning. Students first read the words and set unknown words aside. In closed sorts, students arrange the words underneath the columns designated by the teacher. In open sorts, the students organize the words into categories that they develop. After sorting, students read the words in each column to check their work. These sorts can be recorded in word study notebooks.

*Handy tips as you model and encourage your students' word sorting:*

Start with two-column sorts

Make sure word cards stay in *students'* hands!

Accept all sorts that students can 'justify' or explain

Use *open-ended teacher talk* such as:

- What did you notice?
- Tell me about your sort.
- Tell me your thinking here.
- What are some words here you can organize by the way they sound? By spelling pattern? By meaning?
- What's in your odd, crazy, miscellaneous, still-thinking pile? Tell me what you were thinking about those words...

### ***Word Hunts***

After studying a pattern or patterns, students return to texts they are reading to find words that go with a specific pattern; for example, students may be asked to hunt for words that sound like "beat" (*long e*) in the middle. The words they find can be recorded in word study notebooks.

### ***Word Study Notebooks***

These are notebooks, or a section of larger notebooks, in which students collect words and occasionally record word sorts that they've completed. We can begin word study notebooks with students in the middle of the Letter Name phase of spelling. The word study notebooks expand when students are in the Within Word Pattern phase of spelling. When students study long vowels, several pages can be set aside for each vowel. Students add words to sorts in their word study notebooks. Sorts in the word study notebook include sound, pattern, and meaning sorts.

### ***Writing Sorts***

Students often do a *writing sort* after they've completed a closed sort. Categories are set up, and as words are called out, students listen and decide in which category each word belongs. They then write the word under that category label. For independent assignments, students can be asked to add more words to each column.

### ***Word Study Games***

Almost any card game or board game can be adapted for word study. Path games are particularly successful, as are word study versions of "Go Fish," "Concentration," and "Bingo." Many commercial electronic games are fine as long as students can read the words with ease. Ask the student to read through the words in the games and expect very high accuracy.

### **3) How are "most frequently misspelled" words handled?**

Many of the words that students most frequently misspell remain constant throughout the grades. Most of these words are high-utility words in writing and eventually need to be learned to the point where they are automatic. These words should be addressed throughout the year, but should not be the *sole* focus of spelling instruction.

### **4) Should students select words they wish to learn to spell?**

This can be highly motivating -- but these words should not be the *only* spelling words the students study. A few self-selected words can be added to the "core group" of words students will study each week. These self-selected words can be words of particular interest to the students (dinosaur names, for example, are popular during a unit focusing on the earth's history) as well as words that continually are troublesome for the students.

### **5) What about pretests and posttests ("pre-assessments" and "post-assessments")?**

A mainstay of much spelling instruction over the years has been the "test/study/test" approach. *If students are placed at their appropriate developmental level* for their spelling and word study, this approach is very effective. On

Monday, students take a pretest *and correct their own papers*. Over the next few days students should engage in activities with *all* of the words, not just those misspelled on the pretest. This will ensure that the students will be successful on the posttest -- and they are much more likely to *transfer* this performance to their writing.

6) **How many words?** Research has shown that *the number of words* is not as important a factor in learning to spell as the spelling *patterns* that are addressed (see Johnston, 2001; Templeton & Morris, 1999, 2000).

7) **Aren't these words too easy?** Students should be able to *read* the spelling words and already know how to spell some of the words on the list correctly (this may be determined by a pretest). This ensures that they are working at their *spelling instructional level*.

8) **What about students for whom the transition of spelling skills to writing is NOT happening?**

If students are placed at their appropriate developmental level for spelling/word study, then their transition from spelling study to writing will be much more likely to occur. If they are working at their frustration level in spelling, then that transition is not nearly as likely to occur. If students are at their appropriate level and we still are not seeing transfer, then we work to help them develop a "spelling conscience." Even after a first draft, students may skim over their writing for common errors – if they know how to spell a word, in other words, they should expect themselves always to spell it correctly in their writing. For those persistent errors such as THAY, we may simply have them read back through their composition, looking only for this type of error. For many first graders, however, we should not overly emphasize their mastery of a number of challenging words. We simply want to get them into writing and enjoying it; once they are developmentally moving into a transitional phase of literacy development we may then expect more of their spelling consciences and their editorial skills!

9) Students should *not* "write words 10 times each."

10) "How can we find the time to 'fit it all in'?" There are some excellent suggestions in Chapter 3 of *Words Their Way*. Of course, it is not possible to do a wide variety of activities every day, but when you look across your week you will find more opportunities opening up. There is nothing that says these activities should only occur in the morning Reading/Language Arts block, either – opportunities for making connections with other areas of the curriculum exist at other times during the day.

### ***The Nature of Instruction: Vocabulary***

#### ***Three "Layers" of Vocabulary Learning/Instruction:***

##### ***1. Immerse children in rich oral language, readalouds, and purposeful writing:***

- Includes *your* commenting on and making observations about words throughout the day and in the context of *instructional readalouds* – both narrative and informational (Chard, 2006)
- When children write about topics they know and care about, they exercise the special vocabulary knowledge that they own and are then able to share with others.
- When children are writing about a topic that relates to a theme you are exploring as a class, support their use of new vocabulary in first drafts and journal writing by not insisting on correct spelling.
- Target several words, define them using words children know, discuss, and *use them* throughout the week

**Compare and Contrast Concepts through *Concept Sorts*:** Concrete objects and pictures – Teachers should model and use the language of comparison/contrast: bigger than, smaller than, not as large as, and so forth.

##### ***2. Explicitly teaching and talking about word structure: Morphological Analysis***

Morphological analysis builds upon students' knowledge of word-formation processes: How meaningful word parts combine – *prefixes, suffixes, bases, and roots*. Literally tens of thousands of words are created by combining these meaningful parts of words.

"Knowledge of word-formation processes opens up vast amounts of vocabulary to the reader"

(Nagy & Anderson, 1984, p. 314)

##### ***Morphological Analysis: Compound Words***

- *fireplace* is a specific *place* for a *fire*
- *firewood* is *wood* for a *fire*
- a *snowstorm* is a *storm* made up of *snow*

These relationships seem so obvious that one might wonder, "Why bother discussing them?"

Such discussion engages the language of relationships, so thinking about the relationships among concepts is more precise – and vocabulary grows.

Later on, relationships among more abstract concepts represented in compound words will be more complex to sort out and discuss – *deadbeat, pigeonhole, roughneck* – but students will have the foundation already in place for taking about these relationships.

### ***Morphological Analysis: Affixes and Bases***

<i>Build-a-Word:</i>	<i>Take-Apart:</i>
help	unbreakable
helpful	breakable
unhelpful	break

“When you learn one word, you learn ten!”

courage  
 courageous  
 courageously  
 encourage  
 discourage  
 discouraging  
 discouragingly

***By teaching students how to look for and understand morphological relationships among words, we can significantly increase the number of words they can learn independently in reading.***

### ***3. “Deep,” intense study of specific words***

#### ***Guidelines for Teaching Core Academic and Content-Specific Academic Vocabulary***

(Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002, 2008; Diamond & Gutlohn, 2007; Marzano, 2004; Nilsen & Nilsen, 2004; Stahl & Nagy, 2006; Templeton, 2004; Templeton, Bear, Invernizzi, & Johnston, 2010)

***Core Academic*** (High-utility general vocabulary; “Tier 2): These are words students that students may encounter frequently in their reading and should be able to use in their writing. They probably already have an underlying concept for the word.

***Content-Specific Academic Vocabulary*** (Specialized Academic, “Tier 3”): These are words that refer to a new and difficult concept that is important for students to learn

#### ***For both Core and Content-Specific Academic Vocabulary:***

##### ***- Activate background knowledge:***

Through discussion, determine what your students already know about the terms/concepts, and relate this to familiar concepts and newer concepts they have recently learned. Usually there is a range of understandings among your students, so getting them involved in discussion is very important.

##### ***- Use a variety of activities*** that involve students in using words and thinking about its meaning:

- sorting the words
- thinking of related words
- discussion and explanation of the words that include examples and non-examples – graphic organizers and charts or diagrams support these explanations and discussions: for example, *word* or *concept maps*; 4-Square diagrams; *semantic maps*; *semantic feature analyses*
- Teaching synonyms, antonyms, having students rewrite definitions, provide nonexamples, “silly questions”
- Students use word, collect examples of its use (seeing, hearing, or using) outside of class

- When necessary, ***you may explain the meaning and give examples*** of how the words are used. Importantly, you make a point of using the words often yourself.

##### ***- Teach generatively!***

Reinforce how the structure of the words – affixes and – provides clues to their meaning

- Periodically ***review*** the words

## Assessment and Organization

### Words Their Way Primary Spelling Inventory Feature Guide

Student \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Words Spelled Correctly: \_\_\_ / 26 Feature Points: \_\_\_ / 56 Total \_\_\_ / 82 Spelling Stage \_\_\_\_\_

Stages and gradations →	Emergent		Letter Name - Alphabetic				Within Word Pattern			Syllables & Affixes	Feature Points	Words Spelled Correctly
	Late	Early	Middle	Late	Early	Middle	Late	Other Vowels	Inflected Endings			
Features →	Beginning Consonants	Final Consonants	Short Vowels	Digraphs	Blends	Long Vowel Patterns						
1. fan	f	n	a									
2. pet	p	t	e									
3. dig	d	g	i									
4. rob	r	b	o									
5. hope	h	p						o-e				
6. wait	w	t						ai				
7. gum	g	m	u									
8. sled			e		sl							
9. stick			i		st							
10. shine				sh				i-e				
11. dream					dr			ea				
12. blade					bl			a-e				
13. coach				-ch				oa				
14. fright					fr			igh				
15. chewed				ch				ew	-ed			
16. crawl					cr			aw				
17. wishes				-sh					-es			
18. thorn				th				or				
19. shouted				sh				ou	-ed			
20. spoil								oi				
21. growl								ow				
22. third				th				ir				
23. camped									-ed			
24. tries					tr				-ies			
25. clapping									-pping			
26. riding									-ding			
Totals	/7	/7	/7	/7	/7	/7	/7	/7	/7	/56	/26	

#### Example of a Weekly Plan:

**Monday:** Introduce Sort – New Words  
**Tuesday:** Word Hunt w/Partner  
**Wednesday:** Writing Sort  
**Thursday:** Games / Speed Sorts  
**Friday:** Assess (if you wish!)

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