Stages of Spelling Development

Handout Booklet

- Letter Name
- Within Word
- Syllable Juncture
- Derivational Constancy

Emergent
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The first stage of spelling development is emergent. It includes the writing attempts of children who are not yet reading. Some children pretend-write with scribbles or random marks, or reveal greater understanding through their more linear and wave-like writing. Students begin to write with strings of letters and letter-like symbols as they observe print around them. However, there is no sound-symbol relationship. This type of writing is sometimes called pre-phonetic. Children must be phonemically aware and have some knowledge of the alphabet in order to understand the alphabet principle. Children begin to match spoken words with words in print and develop the concept of a word as they acquire the alphabetic principle. Teachers use big books, dictated experience stories, and nursery rhymes to foster this learning. Children who have not acquired the alphabetic principle may show directionality with a sweep of their finger as they recite but will not be able to accurately point to individual words. Children who associate letters with sounds will use their knowledge to point to words. For example, students know that if they’re saying “be,” their finger needs to point to a group of letters that starts with a b, not with another letter. As children become more conscious of word boundaries in their tracking of text, their spelling reflects this. Initial and final consonants are recorded. Writing at this time often lacks spacing between words. Writing may appear to be a random string of letters. However, because these spellers do include part of the words’ sounds, a closer look will usually disclose an interpretable message.

-Kathy Ganske, Word Journeys, 2000
Letter Name Stage

Children in the letter name stage have just learned the concept of a word. Reading and writing are slow processes with many pauses. Predictable text and picture clues support these students. The predictable text enables readers to anticipate words. Choral reading and echo reading also give support to these beginning readers. Writing is laborious at this stage and words are written sound by sound. Sentence structures from pattern books and read alouds offer support as they allow students to write the sentence pattern along with their own version of the text. During this stage, letter name spellers rely on the names of letters to spell words. They seek out the letter name that most closely matches the sound they are trying to reproduce. For example, in the word bake, the “buh” -b, “aye” -a, and “kuh” -k are much more straightforward for these spellers than the sounds in drip. There is no letter match for the dr sound or for the short i vowel sound. When this happens, children choose the letter name with the closest “feel” (place of articulation) to the sound they are trying to represent. The j or g may be used as the beginning element since both letter names result in a “juh” sound, “jay” and “gee”. Letter name spellers display most of the sounds in their words.

-Kathy Ganske, Word Journeys, 2000
Letter Name Features

• Initial and Final Consonants (KAT = cat, CAD = sad, and YAT = wet)

• Initial Consonant Blends and Digraphs are made up of two consonants (GAB = grab and TAT = that)

• Short Vowels are written with many substitutions (BAK = back, PAT = pet, FET = fit, GIT = got and MOD = mud)

• Affricate refers to the speech sound heard (JROM = drum, GOB = job, HRE = tree, and CHRAP = trap)

-Kathy Ganske, Word Journeys, 2000
Within Word

Within Word is the third spelling stage. Within Word spellers have developed sight word vocabulary that enables them to read without the support of patterned or familiar text. Students rely less on letter-by-letter and sound-by-sound processing and more on chunks and word parts; thus, processing words more quickly. Students are able to read in phrases which aids in expression. This increases fluency which directly affects comprehension. Students are now able to read chapter books with more complex plots. Word knowledge affects student’s writing also, making it easier and more fluent. Students are now writing longer pieces. Short vowel substitutions gradually disappear at this stage and long vowel markers appear. The many ways of spelling long vowel sounds is confusing and students aren’t sure which pattern to use or when to use it. Students will overuse and misapply these patterns in words. Within Word pattern spellers need opportunities to explore meaning connections. A study of homophones (words that sound alike but are spelled differently) can help clear up many writing confusions. Understanding actions that happen in the past are usually recorded with -ed regardless of how the ending is pronounced. Within Word spellers will gradually sort out the correct use of patterns in single-syllable words. Their developing knowledge of pattern, sound, and meaning relationships, along with their accumulation of sight vocabulary will strengthen their fluency in reading and writing.

-Kathy Ganske, Word Journeys, 2000
Within Word Features

• Vowel-consonant-e patterns are frequent. (BAIK = bake)

• R-controlled vowel patterns, those in which r follows a vowel or a team of vowels, are often substituted for each other (HERT = hurt, FEER = fear). Reversed letter order is also common (GRIL = girl and BRID = bird)

• Other common long vowels include vowel teams like ai, ay, ee, ea, oa, and ui, as well as igh, i-consonant-consonant (find and wild), and o-consonant-consonant (cold and post). Using but confusing is apparent in spellings like BOET for boat and POAK for poke, or TITE for tight.

• Complex consonant patterns (Venezky, 1970) include the following types: three-consonant clusters (scr, tch), two-consonant units that result in the sound of a single letter (ck, kn), and consonant and vowel units (dge, qui).

• Abstract vowels are vowel patterns that are neither long nor short. Most of the patterns consist of two vowels that form a diphthong, a speech sound that begins with one vowel and glides into the next as in the following words: pout, cow, few, boil, toy. Other patterns include the vowel teams of oo (foot and boot) and au and aw (caught and paw). Spelling difficulties often result from confusion of the patterns, like COWCH for couch and POYNT for point.

-Kathy Ganske, Word Journeys, 2000
Syllable Juncture

Most students have become proficient readers and process print efficiently by the Syllable Juncture stage. Students often reach this stage in the intermediate grades. They are exploring new genres and expanding their purposes to read and write. Informational texts are more difficult and expose them to more vocabulary and complex spelling patterns. Writing at this stage is usually done in response to what students are learning. Students write to persuade, explain, describe, summarize, and question, using forms as letters, essays, and various types of response logs to convey their ideas. Their writing voice becomes more distinctive and more personal. Spellers at this stage use most vowel patterns in single-syllable words correctly. Polysyllabic words become the instructional focus. Students must learn how to apply patterns within and across syllable boundaries. Syllable stress needs to be taken into account at this stage. Syllables in polysyllabic words differ in the amount of stress or accent placed on them when they are pronounced. When syllables are stressed, the vowel sound is obvious. This simplifies the process of selecting the right pattern. Unstressed syllables tend to not clearly identify the vowel and cause numerous spelling errors. The schwa sound causes many difficulties because of the number of possible vowel spelling patterns. Common prefixes and suffixes, also known as affixes, are other issues faced by the syllable juncture speller. Students need to remember that their spelling remains unchanged when added to a base word. Knowledge of prefixes and suffixes also helps in decoding and understanding unfamiliar words.

-Kathy Ganske, Word Journeys, 2000
Syllable Juncture Features

- Doubling and e-drop with ed and ing ending requires a firm understanding of how patterns work. For example, in order to correctly spell baking, a learner must first know that bake is spelled BAKE and not BACK or BAIK. Then attention must be given to preserving the vowel’s sound by dropping the final e, by doubling the final consonant, or by simply adding the ending (taping, tapping, tacking).

- Other doubling at the syllable juncture also depends on pattern knowledge. In syllables that end with a long vowel sound, the quality of the vowel is maintained by not doubling the consonant (silent, not SILENT). In contrast, a syllable that ends in a consonant and contains a short vowel retains its vowel sound through consonant doubling (matter, not MATER, and cabbage, not CABAGE). Exceptions exist such as rabbit and habit.

- Long vowel patterns in the stressed syllable present opportunities for the syllable juncture speller to apply pattern knowledge learned at the within word stage to words of more than one syllable - complaint, not COMPLANTE.

- R-controlled vowels in the stressed syllable provide further opportunities for students to apply and extend their within word pattern knowledge (DISTEBR =disturb).

- Vowel patterns in the unstressed syllable have a schwa sound (trample and solar) that lead to spelling confusions (TRAMPUL and SOLER).

-Kathy Ganske, Word Journeys, 2000
Derivational Constancy

The last stage of spelling development is Derivational Constancy. It continues through adulthood. Most of the words students encounter in their reading and many they use in their writing are of relatively low frequency and primarily of Greek and Latin origin. Although some students reach this stage by fourth grade, the majority are likely to be in seventh or eighth grade before they attain it. Sometimes students exhibit word knowledge characteristic of this period early in their school years. However, this does not mean that these young learners are ready for word study with derivational constancy features. They typically lack the necessary reading and writing connections. The text they choose to read reflects age-related interests and vocabulary rather than word power. These students may be able to spell some of these words when called upon. However, they are rarely used in their writing. Many of the words at this stage are related and derived from the same root. Roots, like prefixes and suffixes, carry meaning. Learning to preserve the meaning units of derivationally related words is the key issue confronting spellers at this stage. For example, in each of the following pairs of words, notice the consistency of the spelling-meaning connection, despite the pronunciation changes that are evident in the underlined letters: condemn/condemnation, discuss/discussion, music/musician, compose/composition. An awareness of this relationship can greatly facilitate spelling knowledge and enhance vocabulary acquisition. Realizing that spelling can signal a common root, students are able to make meaning connections among related words and expand their vocabularies.

-Kathy Ganske, Word Journeys, 2000
Derivational Constancy Features

- Silent and sounded consonants occur in word pairs such as hasten and haste.

- Consonant changes involve a predictable change in a consonant’s sound or its sound and spelling. In the following examples, notice the changes that occur in the underlined portions of the words. Then note the types of misspellings that may result when students are not aware that words related in meaning are often related in spelling as well. (consume/consumption, resume/resumption, conclude/conclusion, include/inclusion, allude/allusion).

- Vowel changes most often involve a change in the vowel’s sounds. Vowel sounds may shift from long to short, long to schwa, short to schwa, and schwa to short in the related form.
  - compose/composition; long to schwa
  - democracy/democratic; short to schwa
  - explain/explanation; spelling change

- Latin-derived suffixes often have sound-alike counterparts, and this leads to confusion. (invisible-not INVASABLE, respectable-not RESPECTIBLE, and abundant-not ABUNDENT)

- Assimilated prefixes are characterized by double consonants. However, unlike syllable juncture doubling, this doubling results from the fact that over time the final consonants of some prefixes have been assimilated into the accompanying base word or root (in + literate = illiterate, sub + press = suppress, and in + merse = immerse). Most spelling errors related to this feature are due to a lack of doubling (ILITERATE, SUPRESS, and IMERSE).

-Kathy Ganske, Word Journeys, 2000
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