

Invented Spelling

What is it?

Invented spelling is a developmental approach to spelling in which students are encouraged to take risks in spelling unknown or unfamiliar words by “having a go” at an approximate spelling. The approach is designed to encourage students to become active spellers, who try to solve words using their understandings about sound letter knowledge, patterns of words that are similar or parts of the words retained in visual memory. The goal is to have children become independent spellers rather than have them sit and wait passively for a teacher or helper to simply provide the “correct” spelling for them to copy without discussion. Invented spelling is sometimes called “temporary” spelling. This is because spelling attempts that students make are only temporary (in the moment) spellings that will become “correct” later as they learn more about how words work and as they become more skilled in either recalling the correct spellings or representing them more completely.

Why is it important?

The invented spelling approach is designed to build on what emergent literacy researchers (e.g. Clay, 1976, Read, 1986, Dyson, 1986) have understood for years; that beginning writers and spellers are incredibly creative in their attempts to communicate and that they will “invent” words that they do not know! Many researchers advocate active encouragement of this inventiveness coupled with a systematic program of knowledge and skill building in letter sound awareness and thoughtful guidance by teachers during the writing process (Sipe, 2001). Sipe (2001) encourages teachers to engage in systematic scaffolding of spellers’ inventiveness through an experimentation chart called the “Have a Go” chart. During any writing activity, students can use a Have a Go chart to attempt spelling new words. As they do this they will be exploring their knowledge of phonics and word structures and using spelling strategies that they are familiar with. The rest of this guide is focused on how you can use this resource to enhance the teaching of spelling in your classroom.

Benefits of using an Invented Spelling approach:

Using an invented spelling approach has a number of advantages that have long lasting effect on the competence of spellers.

- It improves and enhances phonemic awareness as students listen to words that they are attempting to spell and map the phonemes (sounds) to graphemes (letters).

- It also helps students explore words and word parts and how they are put together as units of meaning.
- It allows students to express themselves by getting their thoughts and ideas onto paper without obsessing about correct spelling.
- It engages students in a problem-solving process where they use their knowledge of sounds and word-structure to attempt “best guesses”. This experimentation is an integral part of spelling development. It is part of the process by which students move through the stages of spelling development.
- It provides many rich opportunities for teachers to explicitly instruct students at their point of need.

Things to consider before starting

- Know where your students are as spellers. The Words Their Way and South Australian Spelling resources sets provide teachers with inventories that they can use to determine each student’s developmental phase as a speller. Note that these phases may overlap, but broadly, knowing what they can do and what they are learning to do gives you critical information in knowing which words to focus on and what skills the developing speller is working to extend.
- Consider how you will record any assessment information that you learn during a Have a Go chart coaching session. Coaching invented spelling provides wonderful opportunities for formative assessment. Students’ invented spelling attempts can give you insights into where students sit on a continuum of spelling development e.g. Do they still need assistance with phonics? Can they hear medial vowels in single syllable words? Are they mapping long vowels correctly?
- Remember: Invented Spelling is not an instruction free approach. Students need to be TAUGHT how to “Have a Go” and to reflect thoughtfully when they read the words back to themselves. You can support this thoughtful use of spelling strategies by coaching students as they invent ways to represent unknown words.

Getting Invented Spelling going in your classroom

Before you begin, it is important to gather resources and MODEL how to use the “Have a Go” chart for your students. You can do this as a whole class or small group session.

Teachers often tell us they find it useful to give each student a laminated chart so that they can be reused. You will need to supply some inexpensive whiteboard markers so that students can record easily and erase attempts when the chart becomes full. When students are doing any writing, they should be used to having a chart beside them and to making thoughtful spelling attempts.

Teach your students how to “puzzle” over unknown words without panic. You can model this “wondering” when you write on the whiteboard or during shared writing. This will get your students ready to do the same puzzling and problem solving when they are writing independently.

Steps in using the “Have a Go” chart

1. The student identifies a word that she is puzzling over and then makes an attempt to write the word in the first (My Word) column of the Have a Go chart (eg. egul).
2. At this stage, the teacher coaches the student in spelling strategy and helps her access knowledge that might help her. The teacher scaffolds the student’s understanding through guiding her to listen to, think about and record parts of the word she is puzzling over.
3. The student then has another go at the word, rewriting the word into the second (HAVE A GO) column (eg. eegul).
4. If this attempt is incorrect, the teacher either writes the word for the student or directs the student to a dictionary. After studying the parts of the word that were tricky and looking at the whole word, the student then writes the word using the correct spelling into the last column. As she does this, she attempts to recall the correct spelling. This last step is useful in helping the student commit the spelling of the new word to memory.
5. The new word can be entered into the child’s personal dictionary for future reference or for learning.

References

- Clay, M. (1975). *What did I write?* Heineman. Exeter, NH.
- Dyson, A. H. (1986). Children's early interpretations of writing: Expanding research perspectives. In D. B. Yaden, Jr. & S. Templeton (Eds.), *Metalinguistic awareness and beginning reading* (pp. 201-218). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Read, C. (1986). *Children's creative spellings*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Sipe, L.R. (2001). Invention, convention, and intervention: invented spelling and the teacher's role. *The Reading Teacher*, 55 (3), 264-272.



Have a Go Chart

My Word	Have a Go	Correct Spelling	Copied Spelling

Name

Class

