

Invention, convention, and intervention: Invented spelling and the teacher's role

This article highlights the teacher's critical role in spelling instruction and provides examples of how to support spelling development in classrooms.

The following two vignettes of first-grade children and their writing are used to indicate subtle confusions and tensions that seem to be present in both teachers' and children's ideas about early attempts to spell. All names are pseudonyms.

Kelly is in first grade and is receiving individual help in reading. She's doing very well, and her reading teacher thinks that she is probably functioning in the average range of her fellow classmates, but Kelly's classroom teacher disagrees. She shows the reading teacher Kelly's classroom journal, and the two teachers confer. It seems Kelly is able to spell many words on her own when she writes with her reading teacher, but the same words are not spelled conventionally in her journal. The reading teacher decides to talk to Kelly about this. The next time Kelly comes to her lesson, she places her classroom journal and her writing folder side by side. "Kelly," she says, "you spelled all these words correctly when you were with me, but look at your journal—you spelled them any which way in here. Why?" Kelly shrugs her shoulders. "My teacher gives me a break—she just wants me to come close."

Fred chews thoughtfully on his pencil as he tries to encode the word *down*. For the past 30 minutes, he has been deeply engaged in writing the sentence "Bats hang upside down" following a group lesson about bats. The process has been full of signs of metacognition, as he thinks

aloud, rereads his message, evaluates it, and changes it when it doesn't match what he has in mind. He's justifiably proud of his effort, and beckons to his teacher, reading the sentence to her. She praises his efforts, and asks him if he could write one more thing about bats. He immediately thinks of writing, "Bats sleep in the daytime," while the teacher moves on to another child. He copies *bats* from his previous sentence. Then, while saying "bats sleep" to himself, he writes a *B* and a *T*, followed by a series of scribbles and letter-like shapes, ending with a backwards *N*, a lowercase *n*, and a *Y*. This is done very quickly, with no sounding out or apparent subvocalization. He calls his teacher again, and the following exchange occurs:

Fred: Mrs. Myron, I'm done. "Bats hang upside down."

Teacher: What else did you write? You have two things. What does the other thing say?

F: This one? Bats hang up—I mean Bats...sleep...in...the...day...time (pointing to the words and the scribbles in the second sentence).

T: Good. You wrote two things down.

Then something very interesting happens:

Fred: I didn't get this right, did I? (pointing to the second sentence)

Teacher: What didn't you get right?

F: Words.

T: Did you get some of it right?

F: Yeah.

T: Well, you just need to get as many right as you can. You don't need to spell all of these words yet. When you do, then you'll get 'em all right, but right now I just want you to get as many right as you can. Good for you. You did a good job.

What is happening in these two situations?

Kelly had mistakenly concluded that her classroom teacher's expectations were not the same as those of her reading teacher; "coming close" was good enough, even when she knew how to spell the word. Fred was demonstrating a form of mature metacognitive self-evaluation. He knew that what he had written was nonsense; he wasn't satisfied with it, and in his own way he let the teacher know. Fred was self-aware to the point of being able to realistically evaluate his writing, isolating the sentence in which he had merely pretended to write.

In this article, I argue that we need to look closely at children's emerging capacities as writers, focusing especially on the issue of invented (or temporary) spelling, and its use and misuse in classroom practice. In order to understand the current situation, we need to examine the history of the concept of invented spelling and its theoretical underpinnings in the general context of the paradigm of emergent literacy. We need to deal with perceived tensions between the honoring of children's approximations and our desire to assist them in making the transition to conventional literacy. In the second part of the article, I describe in detail several teacher interventions that both honor children's attempts and actively assist them in their journey to becoming more mature readers and writers.

The concept of invented spelling

The idea that children achieve mastery of the conventional forms of literacy through gradual and successive approximations is one of the most important concepts in the emergent literacy model. Invented spelling is an elegant example of this approximation (DeFord, 1980). Discussions of invented spelling often begin with the seminal work of Charles Read (1971), who examined preschool children who constructed their own spellings of words before they received formal instruction. Longitudinal case studies of children's writing (Bissex, 1980) found that spelling progressed from scribbles to letter-like shapes to sequences of letters. When the alphabetic principle was grasped, children

often encoded words by their initial consonants, followed by ending sounds. Medial sounds were the last to be heard and encoded. The whole process seemed to be like a camera lens coming very slowly into focus, as the spellings gradually came closer to conventional forms. Such research showed that, contrary to the behaviorist view that incorrect spellings contributed to confusion and the formation of bad habits, children's attempts at writing were evidence of the active process of meaning making that had sustained them when they had learned spoken language (Temple, Nathan, & Burris, 1982). Parents had responded to their meaning when they had asked for "wa-wa," ignoring the incorrect pronunciation; in a similar way, researchers argue that children's incorrect spellings should be seen in a developmental light as well. Just as children had eventually learned correct syntax and articulation of oral language, they would gradually self-construct the generative rules which would lead them into more mature and conventional uses of written language.

From this perspective, spelling errors made during the process of writing were not viewed as impediments to learning, but as opportunities for the observant teacher to notice how children were making sense of sound-letter relationships. They provided a window on the process children were engaged in, and they could be analyzed: A child's spelling of *monster* as "MSTR" tells us about the sophistication of that child's understanding of the way words work (Henderson, 1980). In a parallel way, children's miscues in reading were valued as indications of their attempts at using visual, semantic, and syntactic information and integrating this information to make meaning. The miscues could be analyzed to gain insight on children's internal theories of reading (Goodman, 1969).

Accentuating the positive qualities of children's attempts at meaning making and communication, whether in reading or writing, is another of the major legacies of the paradigm shift from a readiness model to an emergent model of literacy. Researchers and teachers let children show what they could do and what they did know rather than what they had not yet mastered. Clark's (1988) research indicated that children's writing and the ability to spell regularly are developed by invented spelling. Closely connected to this positive emphasis was the idea that

children are empowered by our acceptance of their invented spelling. They are able to write purposefully and with communicative intent from the very beginning of school, and even before. They can say, "I can do this myself. I am a writer" (Hansen, 1987).

Finally, by engaging in the process of invented spelling, children discover for themselves more about the relationships between sounds and letters. They practice applying the alphabetic principle and gain in phonemic awareness (Gentry, 1981, 1987). One first-grade teacher called the invented spelling her children did during writing her "applied phonics program." Invented spelling thus assists in the development of reading, and is one powerful component of reciprocal gains afforded by the connections between reading and writing. Writing slows down the whole process of dealing with text, so that children can see relationships between sounds and words more clearly (Clay, 1991a). It is possible that, at least for some children, writing may be an easier "way into" literacy than reading. In reading, the message is not known, but in writing the writer already knows the message. In reading, the task involves going from letters and letter sequences to sounds, whereas in writing the process is reversed: going from sounds (which are already known and automatic) to letters. In this way, writing can be viewed as an easier task than reading, because it proceeds from the known to the unknown, rather than from what is unknown to what is known (Chomsky, 1971, 1979).

Where is the teacher?

The theoretical and descriptive research, therefore, has been quite rich in describing what is happening cognitively as children learn to spell. What is still lacking is an equally rich articulation of *what adults do* that assists children's development. As Cazden (1992) wrote, "We now know much about the active child, but we still have much to learn about the active teacher" (p. 15). The stage was set for the careful *descriptive* research about children's invented spellings to be interpreted in a *prescriptive* way. The way it was falsely interpreted was "hands off." The message received (though not necessarily the message given) was this: Children will learn to spell in their own good time, and teacher interventions of any kind are suspect. Perhaps the most critical voice in questioning an "any-

thing goes" approach to invented spelling was that of Marie Clay: "[C]hildren use what they know to solve their new problems, and that, young though they are, they form hypotheses about what might work in print. I have a sense that many teachers are directing children to produce writing nonsense and children are obliging them, as they typically do" (1991b, p. 268).

In the last two decades, educators have rediscovered a theoretical voice that provides a way of conceptualizing the teacher as an active participant in the classroom without ignoring the child as the constructor of his or her own meaning. Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) theories came as a welcome antidote to the hands-off approach. Although Vygotsky felt that peers could also assist, he did not argue that interaction with peers was the *primary* way in which learning occurred. Whereas a Piagetian model places perhaps greater emphasis on social interaction of peers (Kamii & Randazzo, 1985), for Vygotsky interactions between the learner and an "expert other" are crucial, and his concept of "mediation" provides a way of conceptualizing a strong role for the teacher in assisting the child in that "zone of proximal development" between what was already grasped firmly and what was unknown. He argued that what children can do with assistance today, they can do independently tomorrow; he described learning in such a way as to emphasize its dynamic process rather than its products.

Yet, for many teachers, the hands-off message remains. We seem to have created inaccurate metaphors, which limit our understanding of the learning process. Newkirk (1991) wrote,

We are trapped by organic metaphors that suggest that the child's "unfolding" will be hindered if the teacher has objectives for that unfolding. We use misleading metaphors of property—"ownership"—that invariably imply that the teacher is an outsider in the learning process. (p. 69)

When we use organic metaphors, we are trapped into thinking that children's rate of growth is predetermined, as if any attempt to assist were an intrusion and a dangerous action, like forcibly opening the petals of a flower bud, and thereby ruining the flower. Power, empowerment, and "ownership" are falsely conceived as a zero-sum game, where if the teacher exerts more influence, the children will necessarily exert less (e.g., Garan, 1994). Even the use of the

common metaphor of “construction” implies the same thing: The teacher stands on the sidelines and observes while the real activity, the real construction of meaning, is accomplished by children alone. Perhaps we need to think more of the “co-construction” of meaning, so that the partnership among children, their peers, *and* adults is emphasized.

The dichotomies we have set up are subtly false, as well: process versus product; children’s invention versus teachers’ imposition of convention; student ownership versus teacher intervention; risk-taking versus passive reception; transaction versus transmission. The realities of the classroom are much more subtle, fluid, and dynamic than this, and should not be dichotomized in this way. The sensitive teacher will sometimes find it appropriate to emphasize products and conventions. According to Newkirk (1991),

If we stress child-centeredness and the lack of teacher direction, the almost divine right of the child to choose from a wide array of options the teacher helps place before him or her, then we may appear more permissive than we are. We are often trapped into a rhetoric of freedom that makes it difficult to acknowledge our own influence in the process classroom. By stressing process over product (as if they can be separated), we fail to demonstrate that we expect a high quality of writing from students—and usually get it. (p. 70)

An active role for the teacher is suggested by Calkins (1986), Cazden (1992), Routman (1993), Schickedanz (1990), and Weaver (1990) who feared that the constructivist theory of literacy learning has been translated into laissez-faire classrooms, and who argued for both active students and active teachers. It may be that some children (particularly children whose culture does not match the school’s “culture of power”) will fare best when teachers are explicit in their directions and in their teaching, without harming children’s independence and sense of self-worth (Delpit, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Some examples of helpful teacher intervention

It is important to recognize that teachers’ activities during the drafting stage of writing, when children are first getting down ideas, must not inhibit children’s willingness and desire to write. How can we help children make the transition to more conventional forms of spelling? This is

of particular concern for children who don’t seem to be taking on the tasks of reading and writing. If the answer is not simply more time and more immersion in purposeful and meaningful literacy activities, then how can the teacher help? What does instruction look like when both the child and the teacher are active participants? What does scaffolding look like?

Hearing sounds in words

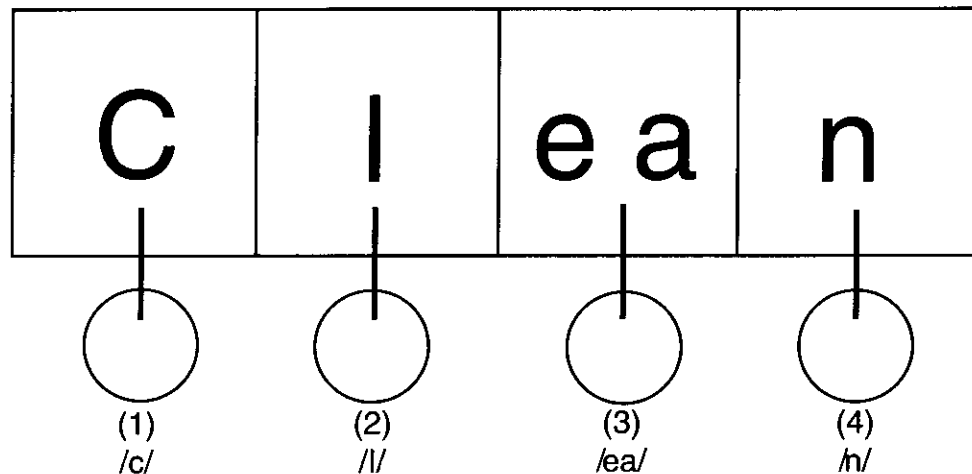
One of the techniques used in the writing portion of the Reading Recovery lesson (Clay, 1993) provides an elegant example of scaffolding in a one-to-one situation. It can also be adapted for classroom use during conferences. During the lesson, the child generates her or his own sentence or story, which is composed on the bottom portion of a double page. The top portion is the “practice page,” for trying out words of which the child is unsure. After having read the book *Mrs. Wishy-Washy* (Cowley, 1999), for example, Kenny decides to write his own story about it. He generates the sentence, “She got them all clean.” He confidently writes *She* and then rehearses the sentence again. “*Got* has a *g*,” he says, “but I know it has some more letters.” The teacher says, “Let’s make a box for it.” She quickly draws a rectangle on the practice page, and draws partitions within it so that it has three compartments, corresponding to the three sounds in *got*.

This is a technique adapted from the Russian psychologist Elkonin (Clay, 1979), who developed it in order to assist children in hearing the sounds in words. The teacher places three round markers or pennies under each of the compartments. As Kenny says *got* slowly, he pushes the markers up into the boxes.

The teacher has taught him to synchronize the pushing with his articulation of the sounds. He knows that he has to “stretch out” the word so that he is saying the last sound just as he comes to the final box. As Kenny says the */t/*, his finger pushes the third marker into the box above it. “I heard the *g* here,” he says, pointing to the first box, and he writes it there.

He then moves the markers down below the boxes, and pushes them up again, saying the word slowly. This time, he says, “I hear a *t* here,” pointing to the third box, and writes it as well. The third time, he hears the medial vowel, and writes *o* in the middle box. He’s then ready to

Figure 1
Sound box



add the word to his story. For the word *them*, he pauses, and the teacher says, "It starts like a word you know." Kenny thinks for a minute and says "*the*—it starts like *the*." He writes *th*, and the teacher says, "It has an *e* like *the*, too." After saying the word slowly, Kenny hears the final sound and writes the *m*. He's able to write *all* independently, but needs another sound box for *clean*. The same procedure is employed as for *got*: The teacher draws a rectangle with four boxes (corresponding to the four phonemes in *clean*).

Kenny pushes up the markers, saying the word slowly. He says "k" for the first sound, and the teacher praises him, saying, "Yes, it could be a *k*; is there anything else it could be?" He writes *c*, then *l*, saying, "I heard an *l*, too." Pushing up again, he hears the long *e*, and the teacher tells him that it is spelled the same way as *eat*, a word she knows he can write. He is able to hear the *n* by himself. Kenny has made some links to words he already knows, and the similarity between *k* and *c* has been made clearer to him. He has learned that the way words sound is not necessarily the way they look—it sounds like there is only an *e* in *clean*, but it turns out that there are two letters; this has been linked with another word he knows, *eat*. Kenny has contributed a great deal to the task, and the teacher has assisted him with the parts that are

difficult; she has "scaffolded" the task. At the end of the process, the words are spelled conventionally, but *that was not the purpose of the task*: The purpose was to help him hear sounds in words. In a sense, we might say that it has helped to prepare him for invented spelling.

Most children may not need this kind of help; but without it, independent writing time would be a frustrating and defeating activity for Kenny. He now has a tool that can help him to write. For the teacher to say, "Write it like it sounds, and I'll be able to read it" is not useful for Kenny, because that is precisely what he is unable to do. Children who know this procedure have been observed pushing up with their fingers as they say words slowly, and then being able to write a tricky word. When children have been introduced to the technique, the teacher can employ it quickly while circulating during independent writing time. For children who are already good at invented spelling, the technique can stretch their capacities and help them make links to what they already know. A further refinement of the technique (used with more advanced children) is to make boxes corresponding to the number of letters (rather than sounds) in the word. Children who are ready for this can consider what *looks right* as well as what *sounds right*.

Figure 2
Have-a-Go chart

Word from text	Have-a-Go	Correct spelling	Copied spelling
Brids	Birds		Birds
Luch	Lnch	Lunch	Lunch

If Kenny were writing a multisyllable word, he would be taught to clap the syllables. The purpose is not to tell how many parts the word has, but rather to assist him in segmenting the parts of the word so that it can be more easily written. If a child is trying to write the word *yesterday*, for example, it is easier to hear the sounds (and represent them in writing) in three smaller segments. Classroom teachers have found this simple technique to be greatly effective in helping children to hear sounds in words and record them.

Have-a-Go

A variety of activities can be used to support students in identifying and correcting misspelled words with guidance from the teacher or peers. An additional activity that also involves attention to syllabication, teacher scaffolding, and sounding out syllables is the use of a Have-a-Go chart (Bolton & Snowball, 1993). When the student is interested in working on words within his text, he gets the Have-a-Go chart (see Figure 2). The chart is divided into four columns. The student begins with the left column, writing the word or words that he or she has identified as incorrect and would like assistance in spelling. In the second column, "Have-a-Go," he or she attempts to spell the word correctly with assistance from the teacher or a peer. As demonstrated in the previous examples, the teacher can scaffold understanding with a variety of instructional techniques, including the use of clapping syllables or "stretching" the

word. The student then writes a revision of the word. If this is incorrect, the teacher either refers the student to a dictionary or writes the word for the student. In the final column, the student rewrites the word after finding out the correct spelling. Students should be encouraged to recall the correct spelling when writing in the last column in order to commit the spelling to memory.

Interactive writing

Interactive writing (Pinnell & McCarrier, 1993) is a technique of group composition intended for use with emergent writers. It is both similar to and different from the traditional language experience approach. Like the language experience approach, it is done with a group of children and their teacher, the children deciding as a group on the message they wish to write. Like language experience, interactive writing places a high value on using children's own words to ensure that the message relates to their own experience and use of oral language. Another similarity is that the message is written on a large piece of paper with lettering of a size that can easily be seen by the children. In interactive writing, however, the children are more involved in the actual writing of the message. The children contribute what they know about spelling and letter formation, and the teacher scaffolds their attempts by supplying spellings and other items of knowledge they lack. Thus the pen is shared between the teacher and the children, and the children do most of the recording of

the text. Interactive writing is done for a wide range of purposes. Like traditional language experience, it demonstrates that what we say can be written down and then read, making clear the vital links between reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Unlike language experience, it not only models conventional reading and writing behavior, but also scaffolds children's participation in the process. By actively involving the children, interactive writing helps them feel that they are "members of the literacy club," through structuring an environment for taking risks. Children draw upon their fund of literacy knowledge and have the experience of integrating and using that knowledge for a real and functional purpose.

Interactive writing does not occur in isolation. It is set in the context of a holistic early literacy framework (Glasbrenner, 1989), which includes several other literacy activities: reading aloud, both collaborative and independent familiar rereading, shared reading, various activities done as text extensions, and independent writing. In order to explain interactive writing more fully, I will present a summary of an interactive writing session conducted by a Kindergarten teacher.

The children have been working for several days on activities related to *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* (Galdone, 1981). They have heard the story read several times by the teacher and have also written a list of characters and words to describe the setting. These words have been written on chart paper and posted on the wall.

To begin the interactive writing lesson, the teacher reads the book aloud again. The children frequently chime in with words and phrases they remember. Then the teacher is ready to begin the interactive writing itself, which is done on a horizontally ruled piece of chart paper on an easel that is low enough for the children to use. The teacher sits on a low chair beside it. She connects what the children are going to do with what they have already done by saying that the class has written about the characters and the setting, but they now need to "tell our story." The children decide to write the sentence, "The three billy goats gruff were hungry." What follows is not a transcript, but is a fairly detailed record of the interactions.

1. The teacher asks what word should be written first. The task is writing *the*, and a child comes up to the chart to write it.

2. A child writes *the*, but the *e* is backwards. The teacher points this out, saying it's all right to make a mistake—we just fix it with correction tape. The child writes *e*.
3. The children remember the entire sentence again, in order to locate the next word that needs to be written—*three*.
4. Children call out various letters. One spells *three* correctly. The teacher acknowledges this.
5. A child [not the one who spelled *three* correctly] comes to the easel and writes the numeral 3. Another child helps to make a "three-finger space" at the teacher's request.
6. The children reread what has been written so far: *The 3*.
7. When they get to the next word, *billy*, several children call out *b*.
8. The teacher asks a child to come write "her" *b* (because this letter begins her name). Another child helps by making a space after 3.
9. The teacher encourages children to say the word *billy* slowly. Several children say *i*.
10. The teacher says there are two *i*'s "and an *i* in here that you can't hear so well." (She's already put in the *i* herself because she knows that most children in the group are not at the stage where they use medial vowels in their writing.)
11. For the long-*e* sound at the end of *billy*, the teacher asks, "Who remembers when we talked about this sound?" Some children say *e*, but the teacher reminds them that it sounds like the sound at the end of *Suzy*, one of the children's names. Children say *y*.
12. *Suzy* writes the *y*.
13. This child also rereads what is written so far: *The 3 billy*.
14. The children proceed similarly for the word *goats*. The teacher assists with a prompt for the final *s* by saying, "What do I need to make it more than one?"
15. The teacher says, "Now we want to write *gruff*." Several children call out letters.
16. A child comes to write. The teacher says, "We have a problem—there's not enough room [at the right side of the page]. So where do we go?" The child shows where to start a new line and writes the *g*.
17. Children are prompted to say the word slowly. Several call out different letters. The same child who wrote *g* also writes *r*.
18. The teacher says, "Then there's a *u* (writing it). And then finish it."
19. Children call out *f*.
20. The teacher says, "It's Frank's *f*, and mine," (the teacher's first name begins with *F*). A child writes two *f*'s, as the teacher says that there are two *f*'s.
21. The children proceed similarly for the words *were* and *hungry*.
22. The teacher prompts for a period, and a child writes it.

23. The child who wrote the period reads the whole sentence, pointing to the words.
24. The teacher calls on a few more children to come up and read the sentence. One child makes a matching mistake, realizes it, and goes back to the beginning of the sentence to reread.
25. When she is finished, the teacher says, "I like the way you went back [to make it match]. When you say *hungry*, where do you get to?" Children say, "the end," and one child points to *hungry* in the sentence.

This interactive writing lesson lasted 13 minutes and 30 seconds. All of the children were involved in writing and reading the sentence. The children had done interactive writing many times before; they frequently anticipated what question the teacher would ask next. A number of children had a clearly developed sense of the initial and final letters in words: They could hear the sounds in these positions, and represent them with letters. Medial vowels and internal nasals (*billy*; *hungry*) were much more difficult, as research suggests (Read, 1971). The teacher dealt with some variants (for example the final *y* having the long-*e* sound) as the opportunity arose. One word (*the*) was written fluently without any analysis. The teacher accepted a child's decision to write the numeral 3 instead of the word. One structural feature was dealt with (*s* to indicate plurals in *goats*). Conventions of writing (left to right; top to bottom; spacing; punctuation) were modeled by both the teacher and the children. After rehearsing the sentence, the children were able to remember the text they had decided upon, and rereading the sentence kept this fresh in their minds. Some children were clearly more able than others, but the teacher was able to find ways for everyone to be actively involved and to feel successful. The completed sentence was the first part of the retelling of a story that the children had heard and discussed several times before, and thus was heavily contextualized. The teacher later added a few more sentences to complete the short summary of the story in several more interactive writing lessons.

Linking the known to the new

A third teacher intervention for spelling is one that can be done with the whole class, small groups, or individuals. This technique draws from a variety of sources, including the word sort method (Zutell, 1996), schema theory

(Anderson, 1984), Goswami's research on onset and rime (1986), other research on phonemic awareness, and the work of Clay (1979, 1991a, 1991b). The phrase "known to new" is Clay's. The basic idea is that learning anything new is a matter of linking this new knowledge in some way with what is already known. This theoretical principle of all learning is naturally applied by many children without help from the teacher. Mike, for example, was trying to write the word *like*, and had already written an *l*. He knew how to spell his own name; and he looked up at the top of his paper at his name as he vocalized "like—Mike." Then he was able to complete the spelling of *like* because he had made a link between a known word and the new word he was working on.

It may be that many (or most) children grasp this powerful principle of linking the known to the new. Whenever children "overgeneralize" a spelling pattern, they are making use of this principle. However, some children need to be explicitly taught the ways and means of linking new spellings with words they already know how to spell. The level of teacher scaffolding varies with what the child needs. Here is one possible sequence of increasing support, based on Brad's desire to write *bright*:

1. "Do you know a word that starts like (rhymes with, is like) *bright*?" Brad may need no more than this to make a link and proceed.
2. If Brad cannot think of a word that is like the word he wants to write, the teacher may suggest a word, asking, "Do you know how to write *light*?" If this is a known word, this may be enough of a scaffold to get the child started.
3. Often, children can read a word which they cannot write conventionally. The teacher may write a word, for example, *light*, and say, "I'm writing a word you know that will help you with *bright*." If Brad can read *light*, he may be able to use that knowledge to spell *bright*.

All of these examples show joint problem-solving situations where the child becomes a co-creator of meaning along with an "expert other." The creativity and independence of children who participate in such activities is not hampered, but rather is enhanced by the teacher's active involvement and scaffolding.

Active teaching and active learning

In the last two decades, educators have made enormous strides in theory and classroom

practice related to writing. No one would want to return to the days of delaying writing until children could spell conventionally. Writing without being overly concerned with conventions that may impede the flow of thoughts is one of the most powerful literacy activities for children (Adams, 1990). It has made it possible for children to engage in writing meaningful, communicative text far earlier than we ever dreamed. It honors children as active participants in their own construction of literacy in a way that enables the development of phonemic awareness and fosters independence and control.

But an active child does not imply an inactive teacher. Teachers should be more than just close observers of children, as important as that is. Active intervention by the teacher and judicious use of direct, explicit instruction can help children along the literacy road (Spiegel, 1992). For some children, this is critical; simply waiting for them to bloom will not help (Clay, 1991a). Though our intentions were good, the dichotomies we have created—vention versus convention; process versus product; meaning versus surface features; even independence versus dependence—have probably made the transition to conventional literacy harder, not easier, for children. The metaphors we use—“ownership”; “growing”; “unfolding”—have become traps rather than heuristic guides. In an essay entitled “The Enemy Is Orthodoxy,” Graves (1984) pointed out that age and extensive use produce rigid ways of interpreting and implementing even the most robust theories. He argued that the writing process approach was being applied in inflexible ways, and that teachers needed to be aware of this natural tendency. In the same way, perhaps, we need to reexamine the orthodoxies that have grown up around the concept of invented spelling and the way it is applied in the classroom. In another book on writing, Graves (1994) stated that “when first-grade children learn to spell, they need much more teaching than I’ve demonstrated in the past” (p. xvi). We need to grapple long and hard with the concept of “development,” and consider how learning (and teaching) may enhance and encourage development. We need to recognize that active teaching and active learning go hand in hand. Kelly and Fred, the two children whose stories began this article, deserve that clearer vision.

References

- Adams, M. (1990). *Beginning to read: Thinking and learning about print*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Anderson, R. (1984). Role of the reader's schema in comprehension, learning and memory. In R. Anderson, J. Osborn, & R. Tierney (Eds.), *Learning to read in American schools: Basal readers and content texts* (pp. 243–257). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Bissex, G. (1980). *Gnys at wrk: A child learns to write and read*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bolton, F., & Snowball, D. (1993). *Ideas for spelling*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Calkins, L. (1986). *The art of teaching writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Cazden, C. (1992). *Whole language plus: Essays on literacy in the United States and New Zealand*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Chomsky, C. (1971). Write first, read later. *Childhood Education*, 47, 296–299.
- Chomsky, C. (1979). Approaching reading through invented spelling. In L. Resnick & P. Weaver (Eds.), *Theory and practice of early reading* (Vol. 2, pp. 43–65). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Clark, L.K. (1988). Invented versus traditional spelling in first graders' writings: Effects on learning to spell and read. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 22, 281–309.
- Clay, M.M. (1979). *The early detection of reading difficulties: A diagnostic survey with recovery procedures*. Auckland, New Zealand: Heinemann.
- Clay, M. (1991a). *Becoming literate: The construction of inner control*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Clay, M. (1991b). Developmental learning puzzles me. *Australian Journal of Reading*, 14, 263–275.
- Clay, M. (1993). *Reading Recovery: A guidebook for teachers in training*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- DeFord, D. (1980). Young children and their writing. *Theory Into Practice*, 19, 157–162.
- Delpit, L. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. *Harvard Educational Review*, 58, 280–298.
- Garan, E. (1994). Who's in control? Is there enough “empowerment” to go around? *Language Arts*, 73, 192–199.
- Gentry, J.R. (1981). Learning to spell developmentally. *The Reading Teacher*, 34, 378–381.
- Gentry, J.R. (1987). *Spel...is a four-letter word*. New York: Scholastic.
- Glasbrenner, C.C. (1989). Elements of a literacy lesson. In G.S. Pinnell & A. McCarrier (Eds.), *Literacy matters*, 13 (p. 306). Columbus, OH: The Martha L. King Language and Literacy Center, The Ohio State University.
- Goodman, K.S. (1969). Analysis of oral miscues: Applied psycholinguistics. In F. Smith (Ed.), *Psycholinguistics and reading* (pp. 158–176). New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Goswami, U. (1986). Children's use of analogy in learning to read: A developmental study. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 42, 413–424.

- Graves, D. (1984). The enemy is orthodoxy. In *A researcher learns to write: selected articles and monographs* (pp. 184-193). Exeter, NH: Heinemann.
- Graves, D. (1994). *A fresh look at writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Hansen, J. (1987). *When writers read*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Henderson, E. H. (1980). *Developmental and cognitive aspects of learning to spell: A reflection of word knowledge*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Kami, C., & Randazzo, M. (1985). Social interaction and invented spelling. *Language Arts*, 62, 124-133.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Newkirk, T. (1991). The middle class and the problem of pleasure. In N. Atwell (Ed.), *Workshop 3 by and for teachers: The politics of process* (pp. 63-72). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Pinne-I, G.S., & McCarrier, A. (1993). Interactive writing: A transition tool for assisting children in learning to read and write. In E. Hiebert & B. Taylor (Eds.), *Getting reading right from the start: Effective early literacy interventions* (pp. 145-170). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Read, C. (1971). Pre-school children's knowledge of English phonology. *Harvard Educational Review*, 41, 1-34.
- Routman, R. (1993). The uses and abuses of invented spelling. *Instructor*, 102, 36-39.
- Schickedanz, J.A. (1990). Developmental spelling: What's the teacher's role? *Orbit*, 21, 10-12.
- Spiegel, D.L. (1992). Blending whole language and systematic direct instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 46, 38-44.
- Temple, C., Nathan, R., & Burris, N. (1982). *The beginnings of early writing*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. (1986). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Weaver, C. (1990). *Understanding whole language: From principles to practice*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Zutell, J. (1996). The directed spelling thinking activity (DSTA): Providing an effective balance in word study instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 50, 98-109.

Children's books cited

- Galdone, Paul. (1981). *The three billy goats gruff*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Knowley, Joy. (1999). *Mrs. Wishy-Washy*. New York: Philomel.

INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION REGIONAL CONFERENCES

Your Best Professional Development Opportunity

2001/2002 Academic Year

28th Plains, Sioux Falls, SD
October 17-20, 2001

13th Great Lakes, Cincinnati, OH
October 24-27, 2001

21st Southeast, Hilton Head, SC
November 7-9, 2001

29th Southwest, Arlington, TX
February 27-March 2, 2002

2002/2003 Academic Year

29th Plains, Topeka, Kansas
October 10-12, 2002

Canadian/IRA Literacy Conference,
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
October 24-26, 2002

17th West, Portland, Oregon
March 9-11, 2003

www.reading.org