

Supporting Struggling Readers and Writers

Strategies for Classroom Intervention 3-6

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Chapter 6 Exploring Words

In this chapter we address the word-learning needs of struggling readers and writers in the middle grades. Although these students have likely experienced several years of phonics and spelling instruction, many have acquired only a rudimentary understanding of how our alphabetic writing system works and lack strategic knowledge for reading, writing, and understanding unfamiliar words. Unlike novice readers and writers in the primary grades, who typically approach literacy tasks with enthusiasm and determination, older students who have met with frustration and failure in their reading and writing commonly regard such tasks with apathy or dread.

Background and Issues

Although the ultimate goal of reading and writing is to construct meaning, what children know about words affects their ability to make meaning. When word knowledge is limited, as is often the case with struggling readers and writers, so much attention must be given to figuring out individual words that little energy is left for comprehending text and expressing ideas. We see how truly labor-intensive this process can be when we observe the many pauses that punctuate students' reading and writing as they struggle with words.

Skilled readers process print quickly and efficiently, so they can devote their full attention to meaning. Because they have well-developed sight vocabularies, they are able to rapidly and automatically identify many words. When skilled readers encounter an unknown word, they have little difficulty determining what it is. They are able to apply

their knowledge of word analysis strategies and spelling patterns to read the word and follow up by cross-checking the results with the surrounding context.

The approach struggling readers take tends to be more one-sided. Some depend solely on a sounding-out strategy and would forge ahead without pause after “reading” a sentence such as *Let’s go watch the game* as though the word *watch* rhymes with *patch*. Others rely on context and may misread *The car whizzed down the road* as “The car went down the road.” Although students who rely on context may maintain the overall meaning of a sentence, as in the example above, overuse of this strategy suggests an underlying problem: limited *orthographic knowledge*, or knowledge of spelling patterns (Snow, Burns, and Griffin 1998).

In the primary grades, where text tends to be narrative and most words are within children’s speaking or listening vocabularies, struggling readers sometimes compensate for their deficiencies in word knowledge by relying heavily on context and picture clues and using only minimal, if any, letter-sound clues. However, with advances in grade, students read informational text that is rich in content-specific vocabulary with increasing frequency. Because many of the words and concepts are new to students, readers who depend on context discover that it is no longer a sufficient aid to understanding and their reading difficulties become more apparent. All readers need to be able to balance the use of context with a well-developed knowledge of letters, sounds, and spelling patterns.

What Intermediate-Level Teachers Should Know About the Role of Orthographic Knowledge

Orthographic knowledge has been called the engine that drives both reading and writing (Templeton and Morris 1999, p. 103). Children typically come to school knowing many words through spoken language but must learn their printed forms. As they learn to read and write, they begin to associate particular letters and letter sequences with certain sounds. Images that identify an individual word’s letters and sounds, as well as its meaning and function (noun, verb, and so on), are stored in memory in a kind of mental

dictionary. Reading and writing depend in large part on the strength or quality of how words are represented in memory (Ehri 1998). The more children know about letter-sound relationships, the more complete the stored mental images are and the easier it is for them to read and write words. Because beginning readers and writers lack a full understanding of the spelling system, especially vowel patterns, reading and writing are initially slow processes and often inconsistent. The word *bike*, for instance, may be correctly identified on the basis of remembered associations for just the initial and final consonant sounds of the word (/b/ and/k/). However, because only some of the letter-sound clues are being used, the word may also be misread as *book*, *beak*, *bark*, or *bank*. Children's spellings provide a window that can reveal how complete their stored representations for words are in memory. For example, a child with word knowledge such as the novice reader just described might write the words *bike*, *book*, *beak*, *bark*, and *bank* in an identical manner—BK, demonstrating her attention to the initial and final consonant sounds, but not the vowel.

As children's experiences with print increase and they learn how our English spelling system works, they are better able to recognize and produce words. Letters that recur in various words are perceived as common spelling patterns (*bl*, *sh*, *ai*, and *ake*) and meaning units (*eg*, *ing*, *pre*, and *un*) rather than as individual letter sequences. This "chunking" makes it easier for children to decode and spell words and eventually to recognize and produce them automatically and thereby give greater attention to meaning.

If orthographic knowledge underlies both reading and writing, one may wonder why some students are good readers but poor spellers. Although reading and writing are closely related processes, there are differences between the two that contribute to the seeming contradiction of good reader, poor speller. (1) Familiar words can often be identified on the basis of just some of the letters. By contrast, accurate spelling hinges upon the recall of every letter and its correct order. For example, few of us would have trouble identifying the following word, even though two letters have been omitted: *a comodate*. However, if asked to spell *accommodate* many of us would have to think twice before deciding whether it is spelled with two *c*'s and one *m*, one *c* and one *m*, one *c* and

two *m*'s, or two *c*'s and two *m*'s. (2) A particular spelling pattern presented in text has fewer ways of being pronounced than a sound has patterns for representing it. Consider the *ea* pattern in *bead*. As a pattern, *ea* can be pronounced with either a long *e* or a short *e* sound (*deaf*), or in a few instances as long *a* (*great*). By contrast, the long *e* sound can be represented in many different ways, including *he*, *beat*, *deed*, *these*, *thief*, *seize*, *key*, *baby*, and even *ski*. It is little surprise that most people are better readers than they are spellers!

The Importance of Timely Instruction

Activities that foster the development of orthographic knowledge help students read and write more fluently and therefore warrant instructional attention. Although children who experience difficulties may require more direct instruction or may take more time to become confident in their use of new understandings, instruction for them does not need to be radically different than that for normally achieving children (Spear-Swerling and Sternberg 1996). However, it does need to be developmentally appropriate. Like normally achieving students, struggling readers and writers vary in what they know about words and in how this knowledge changes over time. An understanding of how spelling or orthographic knowledge develops is essential to providing students with instruction that is appropriate, namely within their *zone of proximal development* (Vygotsky 1978). When instruction is child-centered and not driven by grade level, students can gain maximum benefit from learning situations; they can experience success while still being challenged. Developmentally appropriate instruction is beneficial for all students but may be a necessity for some if they are to become literate.

What Intermediate-Level Teachers Should Know About How Spelling Knowledge Develops

For more than two decades, researchers have examined children's spellings in an effort to discover how learners acquire a knowledge of the English spelling system (e.g., Gentry 1980; Read 1971; Schlagal 1989; Templeton and Bear 1992). Henderson (1990)

synthesized findings from this research and outlined a developmental progression that reflects students' changing understandings of how words work. The progression encompasses five stages and extends from the preschool years through adulthood. Although labels for the stages sometimes differ, the characteristics are similar. A brief summary follows.

Emergent spellers initially write with scribbles and random letter strings, sometimes relying on the letters in their name. They have not yet made the match between speech and print, so there is no connection between the words they try to write and the marks or letters they record. For example, when asked to “read” back the picture caption BN1EF3, the child may reply, “I see my dog!” Toward the end of this stage, as children become aware of the sounds in spoken language, and learn letters of the alphabet, they start to associate letters and sounds. We can see this increased understanding in their writing in the form of attention to initial or initial and final consonant sounds. The caption “I see my dog” may now be written as ICMIDK.

Letter name spellers are beginning to read. Their sight vocabularies are limited as is their understanding of letter-sound correspondences. They use a sound-based strategy to spell words but rely on the names of alphabetic letters rather than their associated sounds. Although this strategy produces recognizable words, it leads to the misuse of many letters. For example, *cap* may be spelled KAP because the letter name *k* makes a /k/ sound. Whereas the letter name *c* (/s/) does not. Substitutions are often made for short vowels and for certain consonant patterns that have no direct letter-name match. Spellings such as JRAS for *dress* and SIP for *shop* result. Silent letters and those with difficult-to-discern sounds tend to be omitted (BOT for *boat*, WAT or WET for *went*, and MADR or MATR for *matter*). Struggling readers and writers in grades 3 through 6 often exhibit word knowledge characteristic of this stage and the next.

Within word pattern spellers' growing sight vocabularies and greater experiences with print make them aware that there is more to spelling words than just attending to sound. Although students realize that they must deal with patterns, especially the marking of

long vowels, they do so inconsistently (BOET for *boat*, WAIK for *wake*, and SALE for *sail*), and sometimes they even overgeneralize their understandings (TAPE for *tap*). Other vowel patterns in single-syllable words as well as more complex consonant patterns present further challenges (BRN for *burn*, POWCH for *pouch*, RIGE for *ridge*, and BICKE for *bike*).

Syllable juncture spellers use spelling patterns in single-syllable words with confidence but face new challenges with multisyllabic words. Students must learn when and when not to double consonants (*trapped* and *cotton*, but *roped* and *motor*) and how to represent the schwa vowel sound in unstressed syllables. The schwa is a difficult sound to spell because it can be represented by any of the five vowels (*a, e, i, o, u*) as well as vowel combinations; for example *severe*, *bacon* and *mountain*.

Derivational constancy spellers are proficient readers with large vocabularies and well-developed knowledge of spelling patterns. Meaning takes on a significant role at this stage as students learn to make connections between the spellings of words and their meanings. They explore families of words in which the sounds of consonants and vowels change but not the spellings, as in *muscle/muscular*, *express/expression*, *define/definition*. Later, they expand their vocabulary knowledge by examining Greek and Latin roots, such as *phon* (sound), *spec* (to look or behold), and *spire* (to breathe), and words that derive from the roots (*spectator*, *specter*, and *retrospect*).

Because struggling readers and writers in the intermediate grades have often experienced grade-level rather than developmentally appropriate instruction, and an emphasis on rote memorization rather than conceptualization for word learning, they frequently demonstrate inconsistencies in their knowledge of how words work. They may recall the spellings of certain more advanced words but have difficulty correctly representing basic vowel patterns, blends, or digraphs. These “holes” are significant and suggest an instructional situation in which the students did not have adequate time to build a solid foundation before instruction moved on to more abstract issues. Without a firm

understanding of underlying concepts, the more complex aspects of spelling become difficult, if not impossible, for them to grasp.

Instructional Strategies: Learning to Recognize and Spell Words

Anyone who has worn a pair of shoes that weren't the right size, slipped into the driver's seat of a car belonging to a much taller or shorter person, or tried on someone else's glasses knows how true the expression "one size does not fit all" is. Because of the developmental nature of learning to spell, the needs of students within a given classroom are also likely to vary considerably, and this must be taken into account when instruction is planned. Although various formats, including whole-class, small-group, partner, and individual, can be used for exploring words, many of the activities we describe in this section are designed for small-group or partner work.

Small-group instruction in word study ensures that students at different stages of spelling development are given timely instruction. This type of focused attention is beneficial for all students because most do not discover how words work on their own; they need guidance to understand where and what to look for. This is especially true of children who are struggling with literacy and for whom focused intervention is critical. Teachers can assist these students by scaffolding their learning through modeling and practice that builds on what they already know, and by planning activities that encourage them to think about words and to form generalizations, rather than merely relying on rote memorization.

During word study, students explore words in and out of context and learn strategies to help them with the words they are reading and writing. Word study activities, such as those described below, should make up only about 15 to 20 percent of the time spent on language arts. Using the instructional framework that was presented in Table 4.1 as a guide, teachers can determine where word study will best fit into their schedules. Word work can be incorporated into the guided reading lessons or literature circles discussed in Chapter 5, into special small-group sessions that target specific needs, or into the writing

workshop format discussed in Chapter 9. Follow-up activities might be carried out during the independent reading/writing activities time. To get started, teachers examine student's spellings from informal assessments, such as those described at the end of this chapter, and identify what children already know and what they are ready to learn. The time and effort put into determining appropriate instruction pays off—all students can experience success, gain confidence in their word learning, and enjoy exploring words.

Using Analogy

Understanding that sequences of letters often sound the same in different words is a strategy that can make struggling readers' word reading easier and more efficient. *Onsets* are series of letters found at the beginning of a syllable, and *rimes* are the vowel and all the letters that follow it (*b/at*, *sh/ark*, *br/ake*). Because every syllable has at least one vowel, all syllables have a rime but may not have an onset, as *at* and *ox*. Most often it is the rime that aids the reading of words. For example, students who can read the word *sing* can probably also read *swing*, *bring*, and *sting*. Sometimes both the onset and rime are used to decode unfamiliar words, as when a student draws on her knowledge of *drip* and *take* to figure out *drake* in *The male duck is called a drake*.

Although analogy also supports writing, it is less reliable here because of the different ways some sounds can be represented. For instance, knowing how to spell *cake* helps with writing *make*, *shake*, and *take*, but knowing how to spell *nail* does not guarantee a correct spelling for *pail* (*pale*), *sail* (*sale*), or *tail* (*tale*). Learning to accurately spell words like these homophones requires an understanding of pattern and meaning.

Rimes that are common to many single-syllable words form families of words, like the *ing* family. Because such rimes (see Figure 6.1) are also found in the syllables of longer words, familiarity with them can often help students read and write multisyllabic words. For instance, the word *evaporate* can be broken down into the four rimes: *e*, *ap*, *or*, and *ate* (as in *me*, *cap*, *for*, and *gate*).

-ab	-an	-eat	-ill	-oke
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-ace	-ank	-ell	-im	-old
-ack	-ap	-ent	-in	-op
-ade	-ash	-est	-ine	-ore
-ail	-ave	-et	-ing	-ot
-ain	-at	-ew	-ink	-ub
-ake	-ate	-ice	-ip	-uck
-ale	-aw	-ick	-it	-ug
-all	-ay	-ide	-ob	-ump
-ame	-eam	-ight	-ock	-unk

Karin Jarvis, a fourth-grade teacher, introduces her struggling readers to a common rime each week as part of their word study. First, she writes the rime, *ine* for instance, on the chalkboard and pronounces it several times, inviting the students to join in after one or two readings. Then she asks them to brainstorm other words with the rime and records their responses on the board or chart paper. Although the focus is on single-syllable words, the occasional multisyllabic word contribution, as *combine* or *define*, is included as well. Next, word meanings are clarified and the complete list is read aloud in unison. Because the students have heard more words than they have seen in print and because speech may blur the spelling, children sometimes suggest words with similar sounds but a different rime, as when Timmy volunteered *remind* for their *ine* list. When asked what he meant, Timmy replied, “You know, people say I remind them of my dad.” Karin responded by writing *remind* on the board and saying, “The word you’re thinking of is spelled R-E-M-I-N-D. The second syllable of the word has a rhyming part, but it’s I—N—D, as in *kind* and *find*. Perhaps another day we can talk about other words with I—N—D.

Karin culminates the lesson by adding a card labeled *ine* under the “I” heading on their word wall of known rimes. She places the word *mine* directly underneath to serve as an example. Five columns are on the wall, each headed by one of the vowels. Several rimes and word examples are already posted. During the coming days Karin will look for opportunities to encourage the students to use the rime to assist their reading and writing.

She may do this by calling attention to an *ine* word encountered in their reading or by asking them to spell a particular word with the rime. Karin realizes that this type of guided practice increases the likelihood of her students using the strategy when they are working independently. To help them internalize their knowledge of this and other rimes they have studied, Karin periodically engages the students in a game of Concentration or Go Fish, using families of words such as *shake/snake* or *slick/trick/pick/kick*.

Comparing and Contrasting Word Features

Although knowledge of rimes can assist students with many words, an understanding of specific spelling patterns is also important, for there are many words, especially those with multiple syllables, with which rimes do not work as well. To help students increase their understanding of spelling patterns many teachers use the strategy of *word sorting*. In this activity students categorize known words according to similarities and differences in their sounds and patterns, and sometimes their meanings or structure. This is unlike traditional approaches which typically focus on one spelling feature at a time and do not involve comparing or contrasting. For example, one week students might work with long *a* patterns and be presented with words such as *same, eight, great, mail, they, and play*, and the next week they might move on to a comparable assortment of long *e* patterns, or perhaps to something totally different, such as contractions. For the child who is struggling with literacy, several problems are inherent in this approach. The multitude of different patterns and the lack of a contrasting sound make it virtually impossible for students to conceptualize what long *a* is and to form generalizations about which patterns to use, and when. The task becomes one of sheer rote memorization. To know “long *a*,” students must also know what is not “long *a*”; in other words, how does long *a* differ from other patterns that might be confused with it, such as “short *a*”? Further compounding the difficulties is the notion that the focus the following week will likely be completely different, and the long *a* pattern might not be revisited until the following year. Most important of all is the fact that the student may not be ready to negotiate long vowel patterns at all, but instead may require work with short vowels, blends, or digraphs.

Struggling readers and writers need time to explore features that are developmentally appropriate, and they need to do so in meaningful ways. They also need frequent opportunities to revisit features, so they can deepen and solidify their understandings. Below are some ways to help struggling readers and writers maximize their word learning through word sorts.

Seven Ways to Help Struggling Readers and Writers Make the Most of Word Sorting

1. *Build on what they know.* Use words they can read (about half of which they can also spell), and categories that include known as well as new features.
2. *Keep the sorts simple in the beginning.* Start with two, fairly obvious categories; work up to more, and less distinctive, categories over time. Focus on just sound or pattern; gradually work up to sorting by sound and pattern.
3. *Walk them through the sort.* Model how to attend to particular details within the words.
4. *Maintain their attention on important aspects of the words.* Include an occasional exception or two.
5. *Encourage thinking by asking them how the columns are alike and different and by prompting them to make generalizations.*
6. *Provide time for frequent and varied sorting practice.* This will help them internalize the patterns.
7. *Create opportunities that will require them to apply and extend their understandings through their reading and writing.*

Word sorting has the advantage of actively engaging students, both physically through manipulation of word cards, and mentally by encouraging them to generate and share ideas about the placement of their words. In addition, because word cards can easily be rearranged, students can readily change and fine-tune their ideas as they work through a sort. This is especially advantageous for learners who have experienced frequent failures

and who are often fearful of revealing their uncertainty and lack of understanding through a trail of erasures and sometimes torn papers.

When putting together a word sort, it is important to keep several points in mind. For one, use words the students can already identify. This enables them to concentrate on how the words work rather than on figuring out what the words are. It is common practice to include about as many words in the sort that students can already spell as words they cannot. This helps to ensure a “Goldilocks” level of challenge: not too easy, not too hard, but just right. For struggling readers and writers it is especially important to keep things simple in the beginning and plan sorts that involve only two categories. The categories should be fairly obvious and should enable students to build new understandings on the foundation of what they already know. This is easily accomplished by including some known features to contrast with what is new. Once students are comfortable with the new pattern, another can be added so that gradually, over time, the sorting hurdle is raised. The number of categories is built up to perhaps four or even five, and the distinctions among the categories are made less apparent. This form of support or scaffolding for word learning increases student confidence and encourages active participation.

The sorts should address spelling features at the students’ stage of spelling development, those that the students are using and misusing, such as OUCH, OWL, and POWCH (*pouch*). Results of an informal spelling inventory, such as the one discussed later in the chapter, and a look at students’ reading and writing can reveal which features should be targeted. *Word Journeys* (Ganske 2000) presents effective sorting contrasts for spelling features across the stages and includes supplemental words for use in word study activities.

Guiding Students Through a Sort

Words chosen for the compare and contrast activities are written on small cards and then sorted into categories headed by key words. Because the categories are predetermined, usually by the teacher, this type of sort is known as a *closed sort* and is the cornerstone of

word sorting. The key words contain a targeted letter-sound, spelling pattern, syllable pattern, and/or meaning unit (such prefixes or suffixes) and set the stage for how all the words in a particular column will be alike. For example, if the short vowels *a*, *i*, and *u* are targeted, the key words might be *bat*, *sit*, and *cup*. All the words with a short *a* sound are sorted under *bat*, those with short *i* under *sit*, and so on. Words such as *stop* and *was*, which don't match any of the key words, are placed under a special category for exceptions, usually identified with a question mark.

Exceptions, when included, are used sparingly, usually just one or two. They serve useful purposes. Once, they help students maintain a focus on the important aspects of the word. This is valuable for all students, but particularly for struggling readers and writers who sometimes key in on just a single detail to make their sorting decisions and overlook essential bits of information. For example, in a sort with long *a* and short *a* words, where the long *a* pattern used is *vowel-consonant-e* (VCe) as in *tape*, many students will simply separate the words into two piles, those with a final *e* and those without. Including an exception such as *have* or *was* in the card pile ensures that careful thought is given to how the words sound as well as to how they look. Another advantage of including exceptions is that these words are often high-frequency words. The special attention they receive in a word sort helps students remember them, thereby reducing the amount of outside reinforcement needed. Because exceptions represent an additional element of challenge, they may overwhelm some students if used when a feature is first introduced.

Sometimes a closed sort focuses on sound or just on pattern, but it can focus on sound and pattern simultaneously. At times, students may be asked to do multiple sorts in a lesson, where they sort the same set of words several times, each with a different aim; for example, they may sort by sound one time and by pattern the next. Sorting by sound and pattern is the most difficult type of sort because students must consider two different aspects of each word before deciding on its placement. However, the emphasis on aural and visual cues makes it a worthwhile goal and one that can be attained, even by students who experience difficulty with literacy-related activities. It should be worked up to gradually when students are showing signs of confidence and success, and it should be

preceded by sound and/or pattern sorting with the same set of words, whether that day or earlier.

Figure 6.2 shows multiple sorts that Gail Morris developed for a group of struggling readers in her fourth-grade class. After hearing Gail read aloud *Frindle*, the students begged to read a book by Andrew Clements themselves during guided silent reading. Gail found an easier book that was at their instructional level, *Jake Drake: Bully Buster*. Despite the students' fairly secure understandings of the VCe and short vowel patterns, they repeatedly confused the main character's name, *Jake*, with *Jack* during their reading of the first chapter. This confusion and their need to better understand *r*-controlled vowels, as revealed by Gail's informal assessments, prompted Gail to create a set of words for sorting that included short *a*, *aCe*, and *ar*. Although Gail typically draws words for study from multiple sources, including the children's reading, writing, and various word lists, she was able to get all the words for the sorts in Figure 6.2 from the children's novel.

Figure 6.2 Multiple Sorting, with Words from *Jake Drake: Bully Buster*, a Fourth-Grade Guided Silent Reading Novel

Sorting by Sound				Sorting by Pattern			Sorting by Sound and Pattern			
sack	bake	hard	?	sack	bake	?	sack	hard	bake	?
back	grade	smart	want	back	same		class	smart	Jake	are
class	Jake	card		smart	are		back	card	grade	want
fast	same	art		fast	grade		fast	art	same	
	face	are		card	Jake			part	face	
	made	part		art	face				made	
				class	made					
				part						
				want						

Whether students sort by sound, pattern, or both, teacher modeling is used to call their attention to the particular details within the words that need to be considered. A “guided word walk” (Ganske 2000, p. 86), works well for this. At the end of the next day’s guided reading, Gail “walks” her students through a sound sort by placing cards with the words, *sack*, *bake* and *hard* in front of them on the floor where they are gathered. Next to the final word, she lays a card bearing a question mark. Because the words are all from the chapter they read and discussed the day before, Gail does not make sure the children can identify the words, nor does she inquire about any of their meanings, as she otherwise would. Instead, she points to the three key words and names them. Before she can explain further, Brandy asks, “Are we sorting by sound or pattern or what?” Gail says they will be sorting by sound.

Craig immediately announces, “This is gonna be a cinch!” Even though the students have previously done several sound sorts, Gail begins by modeling the process: She takes the first card, *grade*, identifies the word, and checks to see which key word it matches—“*Grade/sack*, *grade/bake*, *grade/hard*; *grade* goes with *bake*.” She places the card below *bake* to start a column of words. Then she continues in like manner with the next card from the pile, *smart*. Seeing the students’ eager faces, Gail holds up the next card, *back*, and says, “Okay, who’d like to try this one? And be on your toes—there could be some tricky words in the stack today. Jeff, here you go.” Jeff takes the card and after identifying the appropriate match places it in its column. Gail continues through the cards, allowing the students to determine the appropriate columns. When the *Jake* card is held up, James volunteers to place it. He starts to name the word *Jack*, but quickly changes his mind as he holds the word under the *sack* column and says, “Oh, that’s right; this word is *Jake*, because it’s got an *e* at the end, just like *bake*.”

“How would *Jack* be spelled?” Gail asks.

“J-A- . . . C-K,” James declares.

“Good thinking, James! You’re on your toes. Now how about this word,” and Gail holds up *want*. Several hands shoot up.

Gail hands the card to one of the volunteers, saying, “Randy, you haven’t had a turn; show us where you think it goes.”

Randy takes the card and thinks aloud. “Well, this one’s tricky; some people might think it should go under *sack*, but that would make it sound like somebody crying . . . ‘waant.’ I don’t think it fits any of the columns. I think it belongs here,” and he places the card below the question mark card.

“You’re right, Randy. You paid close attention to sound; good job.”

After all the words are sorted, Gail asks the students to read through each list and to generate ideas to explain why certain words are grouped together (such as, “The words under *bake* all have the long *a* sound, and it’s spelled with *a-consonant-e*”). Through discussion, Gail and the students clarify and confirm or reject the hypotheses.

Because the sound sort was completed with ease, Gail decides to go ahead and have the children sort the same words again, this time by sound and pattern. She gathers up the cards, leaving just the key words and question mark, and tells the group what she has in mind. Because this will be the students’ first attempt at sorting by sound and patterns, Gail plans to model with several words before she invites the children to join in. She will correct any mistakes they make, in her usual way, by immediately moving the word to its appropriate column and saying something such as, “No, *are* goes in the oddball column. Even though it sounds like *hard*, it has a different pattern, and this time we’re sorting by sound and pattern.” When all of the words have been sorted, she will again ask the students to form ideas about the characteristics of each column of words.

Opportunities to Internalize the Features

Struggling readers and writers need frequent sorting practice to internalize the patterns under study. It is this deep understanding of how words work that facilitates students' reading and writing of words with similar patterns. Although practice may simply mean sorting the words under key words, a number of variations serve to add interest and maintain students' enthusiasm. Once students have a clear understanding of how to categorize a particular set of words, they may engage in *speed sorts*, in which they attempt to sort their fastest but with accuracy. Often individual goals are set and several trials completed with a stopwatch to reach the goal or to break a previous personal record. Care should be taken to help struggling readers and writers set attainable goals and to provide them with ample practice time. *Picture sorts* and *blind sorts* are other variations. They encourage students to focus on sound, which is especially important since phonological awareness plays such an important role in learning to read and write. In a picture sort, pictures are substituted for all or some of the words. Besides making it so learners must consider similarities and differences in sound, pictures enable novice older readers to learn about beginning consonant sounds, short vowel sounds, and rimes without being hindered by their limited sight vocabularies. Blind sorts encourage a balance between visual clues and auditory clues, because students must determine the correct placement of a word after hearing it read but before it is shown. Usually partners at the same stage of spelling development work together and take turns reading and pointing to the appropriate key word. If desired, instead of pointing to the correct column, students can write the words under column headers on a piece of paper as their partner reads them aloud. A final sorting activity, the *open sort*, adds variety and an element of mystery to the task. In this activity students determine their own categories. When everyone is finished, students and teacher try to figure out the categories that each person used. This activity is not only motivating but can also provide the teacher with useful insights about the students' approach to words. For example, do they design categories based on what has been studied, or do they focus on less pertinent details, such as word length, placement of the vowel, or how the word begins?

Applying What Has Been Learned

Word hunts return students to text they have been reading or writing and encourage them to apply their understanding about words. Using a story, poem, content-area material, or other text, students search for examples of words with the particular patterns they have been studying. These, as well as any exceptions, are recorded, sorted, and discussed. The recording may be done on word cards, in notebooks, or on chart paper. Initially, it may be helpful to limit the number of features that struggling readers and writers search for at one time. If three or four categories have been used in the sorting, the group may first hunt for one pattern, then another, until all have been explored; or individual students or pairs of students may hunt for different patterns and pool their results at the end. Once struggling readers and writers understand the process and have had guidance in searching for all of the categories at once, they can complete word hunts collaboratively, with a partner or in small groups. Several groups can hunt for words simultaneously while the teacher circulates, prompting and encouraging appropriate categorizations. Because word hunts involve application of learning, students should have a clear understanding of the spelling features that are targeted.

Reading Big Words

Struggling readers and writers enjoy the opportunity to apply their knowledge of letters and sounds, spelling patterns, and meaning units to tackle multisyllabic words.

Collaborative efforts enable them to combine their understandings and learn from each other. Even students with very limited word knowledge can make contributions. One student may draw attention to a single consonant or blend, another to a rime, vowel pattern, or meaning unit. Prepare for the activity by selecting a word from math, social studies, science, or the current read-aloud that is in the students' listening or speaking vocabularies. Write it on the chalkboard or overhead transparency, and invite students to point out recognizable parts of the word. Here are connections one group of students made with the word *interested*:

- David: The *ed* at the end shows something happened in the past. We could cover up that part for now and just look at the rest. [*Teacher puts her hand over this part of the word.*]
- Jen: The *in* at the beginning is the same pattern that's in *win* and *in*.
- Josh: I know you can divide a long word between consonants, like the *n* and *t*, to break it into smaller parts, so *t-e-r* is probably another chunk.
- Evan: *E-r* is in a lot of words like *her*.
- Marcy: And *t* sounds like /t/, so that chunk is /ter/.
- Kamika: The last part has the same spelling as the end of *best*, *e-s-t*.
- Teacher: Can you put all the parts together now? [*Uncovers the ed.*]
- Students: In-ter-est-ed . . . inter-ested . . . *interested!*.
- Teacher: Good job! These same types of strategies can help you read many other big words.

Even when students' contributions don't quite match the actual pronunciation, getting close can often help them figure out the word. For example, thinking that the second syllable of *captain* has a long *a* sound because of the *ai* pattern may still trigger the correct word in students' memories, especially when they can use the context of the sentence to double-check.

Because students will encounter big words in their reading, teachers should consider how and when to intervene with assistance. Jumping in immediately and providing the word or, if in a small-group setting, encouraging other members of the group to do so, is probably not the best approach. This neither builds the reader's confidence nor allows the reader to exercise what he knows to try to read the word. Instead, teachers should be prepared to wait a few moments (three to five seconds) while the student attempts to decode the word; then, if necessary, the reader can be prompted to use a helpful strategy. For example,

Teacher: Remember, Josh, if you need to break a longer word into chunks and you see three consonants in the middle like this word has [*athlete*], be sure you keep the two together that make a team when you divide the word.

Josh: Oh, like the *th*. So I should split the word between the *h* and the *l* [*covers up* *lete*]. The first part is . . . *ath* and [*uncovers* *lete*] the second part is *lete* . . ., so the word must be *athlete*.

Teacher: That's right!

Although it may be tempting, intervention during students' reading should not digress into a ten-minute mini-lesson; this would be too distracting. During students' reading or rereading, interventions should be brief, just long enough to get the student back on track. Later, after the passage is completed, or the following day, a mini-lesson might be planned to reinforce the strategy that required cueing. Errors that don't alter meaning may be allowed to pass without correction, unless they are a frequent problem.

The Slate Game

This activity is used to reinforce students' understanding of spelling features at the letter name stage: blends, digraphs, and short vowels. The use of slates to write words makes this activity particularly motivating, even for sixth graders. Students and teacher sit in a circle. The teacher dictates a single-syllable word and everyone, including the teacher, writes it down. Then the teacher says, "Show me," and all turn their slates around. Students check their accuracy against the teacher's, while the teacher notes which students had difficulty. Misspelled words, such as FAP or FALP for *flap* are decoded and discussed. If desired, students can use the following point system to keep score on their slates: one point for a correct beginning element (single consonant, blend, or digraph), one point for a correct short vowel, and one point for a correct final element (single consonant, blend, or digraph). For additional challenge, teachers may include a few "alien" words. These are syllables taken from multisyllabic words, such as *seg* from *segment*, or real words that the children may not yet be familiar with, such as *shod*.

Teachers can teach students a number of strategies to help them spell the words.

1. Before writing the word, say the word carefully by stretching it out like a rubber band. Draw a line on the slate for each sound you hear. Be sure your word has at least that many letters. For example, “f-l-a-p” needs four lines and “sh-i-p” three.
2. Think of a word that rhymes with the one you are trying to spell. If you can spell that word, the new one may have the same spelling pattern.
3. Identify an easy-to-spell word for each short vowel (for example, *cat*, *bed*, *lip*, *hot*, and *cup*). Be sure you can name the vowel sound in each. Use these key words to help you choose the right vowel. Compare the vowel sound in the word you are trying to write with that in each key word until you find the closest match. If necessary, peel away other parts of the word and isolate the vowel sound:
grip→*ip*→*i*.

Using Context

Sometimes struggling readers have difficulty with both letter-sound knowledge and the use of context clues, as the child who reads *Pete hit the big red ball* as “Pet hit the big red bal.” *Cloze* passages encourage students to use context to figure out unknown words. The procedure is easy to carry out. A short passage of text is selected and copied or summarized on the chalkboard or a transparency. Several words are deleted, and students are guided to figure out the missing words by using the sense of the surrounding sentences. Students who have difficulty with this may be given banks of words from which to choose their answers; including three words in each bank usually works well. When an aim of the cloze activity is to help students learn to cross-check their use of context with letter-sound clues, the beginning part of each omitted word can be provided. This limits students’ answer possibilities to words that fit the meaning of the sentence and begin with the appropriate letter-sound. Carol O’Meara, a sixth-grade teacher, has been regularly using the cloze technique to help one of her struggling readers, Scott, learn to balance context and letter-sound clues. In the following example, Carol and Scott work

with an upcoming passage from Phyllis Reynolds Naylor's *Shiloh*, a book Scott is reading for guided silent reading.

Before Scott arrived, Sharon summarized on the chalkboard a portion of the story he was about to read. Then she deleted several key words, leaving only their onsets. Next, she placed a sticky note over the top of each blank, covering up even the onset.

Marty's mom walked over to the of the pine tree. She undid the wire that keeps the fence , so she could get in. She crouched in the pine , and Shiloh started to up on her with his front paws. He licked at her .

Later, when she met with Scott, she asked him to carefully read the paragraph and try to figure out the hidden words. Initially, Scott thought the missing words might be *back*, *shut*, *down*, *needles*, *jump*, and *face*. The first blank gave him considerable trouble; after vacillating between *back* and *side*, he finally shrugged his shoulders and said, "It could be either; you can't tell," and he opted for the former word. Sharon asked Scott to reread the paragraph aloud. She knew that some of his selections were incorrect, but overall, the words he had chosen made good sense in the paragraph. She praised his efforts at using context clues and then peeled away the sticky notes so Scott could see the beginning of each word.

Marty's mom walked over to the tr_____ of the pine tree. She undid the wire that keeps the fence cl_____, so she could get in. She crouched d_____ in the pine n_____, and Shiloh started to l_____ up on her with his front paws. He licked at her _____.

She encouraged Scott to reconsider his choices in light of the additional information, saying, "It looks like you may have many of them right. See if the letter-sound clues can help you with the ones that obviously don't fit."

Immediately upon looking at the first blank, Scott said, “Oh, it must be *trunk*.” After careful consideration of the next blank, he changed his response to *closed* and then quickly added, “but *shut* means the same thing.” He stuck with his original choices of *down*, *needles*, and *face*, but couldn’t think of a different response for the next-to-last blank. As a further help, Sharon added the word’s final letter, *p*, to the end of the blank. “Oh, it must be *leap*!” Scott said.

“You did a good job of putting the clues together, Scott!” Sharon noted and ended the session by reminding him of how valuable it is to use both context *and* letter-sound clues when reading and by telling him they would try another passage the next day.

Instructional Strategies: Learning to Understand Words

As we noted earlier in this chapter, struggling readers in the intermediate grades are likely to need instruction that helps them to better understand spelling patterns and enables them to build a repertoire of decoding strategies. They also need help learning new concepts and the words that represent them; this is especially important considering that the conceptual load in content-area studies increases in the intermediate grades. Students must be able to read and understand many words they do not use in their speech to comprehend the informational text. According to the National Reading Panel (2000), “reading vocabulary is crucial to the comprehension processes of a skilled reader” (p. 4-3). Good readers, who tend to read a lot, already know many words and understand many concepts. As they read and encounter new ideas, words, and expressions, they are able to relate this new information to existing understandings, and their vocabulary grows, making it easier for them to comprehend even more difficult text. The cycle is different for children who experience difficulty in reading. Their reading is often slow, laborious, and even frustrating, and their vocabulary knowledge may be limited. Because reading likely provides little enjoyment, they are apt to read less and be exposed to fewer new ideas and concepts. Rather than increasing, their reading ability may be further impeded, leading to a downward spiral of reading failure.

To realize the detrimental effect that encountering numerous unfamiliar words can have on students' comprehension, read the following paragraph and try to identify this well-known piece of literature in this "meatier" form:

A female of the Homo Sapiens species was the possessor of a small, immature ruminant of the genus Ovis, the outermost covering of which reflected all wavelengths of visible light with a luminosity equal to that of a mass of naturally occurring, microscopically crystalline water. Regardless of a the translational pathway chosen by Homo Sapiens female, there was a 100 percent probability that the aforementioned ruminant would select the same pathway.

Although readers may have previously heard all, or nearly all, of the words in the paragraph, most are probably unclear about some of the concepts associated with them. Furthermore, few readers probably make a regular practice of using words such as *Homo Sapiens*, *ruminant*, *Ovis*, *wavelengths*, *luminosity*, *microscopically crystalline* and *translational* in their reading, writing, or speaking. The paragraph's concentration of unfamiliar words makes it difficult, if not impossible, to connect ideas and understand the whole. The task is even more daunting for anyone who has never experienced Mother Goose rhymes, for those who are familiar with the rhymes might be able to recognize the text as "Mary Had a Little Lamb" by figuring out just a few key phrases. Without such background knowledge, a topic discussed in Chapter 8, the paragraph may never make sense.

Thus, it is essential that teachers engage struggling readers in activities that foster vocabulary development. Wide reading is one such activity. As previously discussed, struggling readers need encouragement and opportunities to read, read, read, both in school and out of school. They learn words through this reading, as well as through their everyday speaking, listening, and writing experiences. Although wide reading should be encouraged and facilitated, struggling readers need more than just time to read. They seem to have difficulty gleaning the meanings of words from context (McKeown 1985) and benefit from having new words and concepts that are critical to their learning taught

directly to them. They also need instruction and practice in the use of specific strategies, such as those described in the previous sections of this chapter, so that they can continue to learn new vocabulary on their own.

Which Words Should be Taught?

Many social studies, science, and math texts highlight new vocabulary in the teachers' and students' texts. The number of new words and concepts can be staggering—as many as twenty to twenty-five in a single chapter! Teachers need to be selective when deciding which words students should “know.” Words should be taught because they are crucial to understanding the content, not just because they are identified as new.

Support for the meanings of new words that aren't taught may be provided in the form of a handout that lists the new word or concept and its page number, followed by an easily understood synonym or explanatory phrase to which students can refer as they read. Also, teachers can use On-the-Spot Elaboration to extend students' understanding of some of the words. This simple technique, which is especially beneficial to English Language Learners, can easily be incorporated into read-alouds and discussions. When a concept or word is encountered that is likely new to at least some of the students, the teacher merely provides an immediate, short explanation. For example, “Today you will be reading about the earth's *crust*, its outermost layer,” or “I want you to *paraphrase* what the king said about the colonists' actions; in other words, tell me in your own words what he said.”

How Should Words Be Taught?

Traditionally, vocabulary instruction consisted of a weekly list of words distributed to students with the expectation that they look up the meanings, use each word in a sentence, and prepare for a quiz at week's end. More often than not the words had no relation to each other and generally were not even connected to what was being learned in the classroom. Although the length of the list might vary depending on the teacher,

student response to the practice tended to be similar. Some were overwhelmed by the task, and others were annoyed at having to put so much effort into learning words they figured they would probably soon forget, even if they passed the test. Instead of this type of passive learning, students need to be actively involved when learning new vocabulary (Allen 1999; Stahl 1986). There are many ways to accomplish this, including discussion, real-life experiences and simulations, mapping activities, drawings, and games.

1. *Active involvement through discussion.* Teacher read-alouds afford wonderful opportunities for struggling readers to immerse themselves in the rich vocabulary and interesting language of children's literature. Relieved of the obstacles presented by limited word recognition ability, poor readers can think about and enjoy reading material that is more advanced than they are able to read on their own. During the read-aloud, new concepts and interesting words can be puzzled over, savored, discussed, or investigated in the dictionary. For example, Terry Behr has been reading *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (Rowling 1997) to her fourth-grade class. In the story Harry has just put on the sorting hat to find out which dormitory he will be assigned to, when he hears a voice in the hat thinking aloud as it makes a decision. It muses that the decision is a difficult one and then recalls several of Harry's attributes, including courage, a good mind, and talent. The hat further observes that Harry seems to have a "nice thirst" to prove himself. At this point in her reading, Terry pauses and thinks aloud, ". . . and a nice thirst to prove yourself.' *Thirst* is a word we usually use when we want a drink of water. A 'thirst to prove yourself' doesn't sound like water. I wonder what the sorting hat means here. Can anyone help?" Terry looks around, noticing a few puzzled looks and several hands poised to volunteer an answer. "Jay, what is your idea?"

Jay briefly explains, "The hat probably means that Harry *really* wants to prove himself, just like when you're thirsty for water, you feel like you just have to have it."

"That makes good sense, Jay, and what an interesting way for the author to say that Harry seems to have a desire to prove himself."

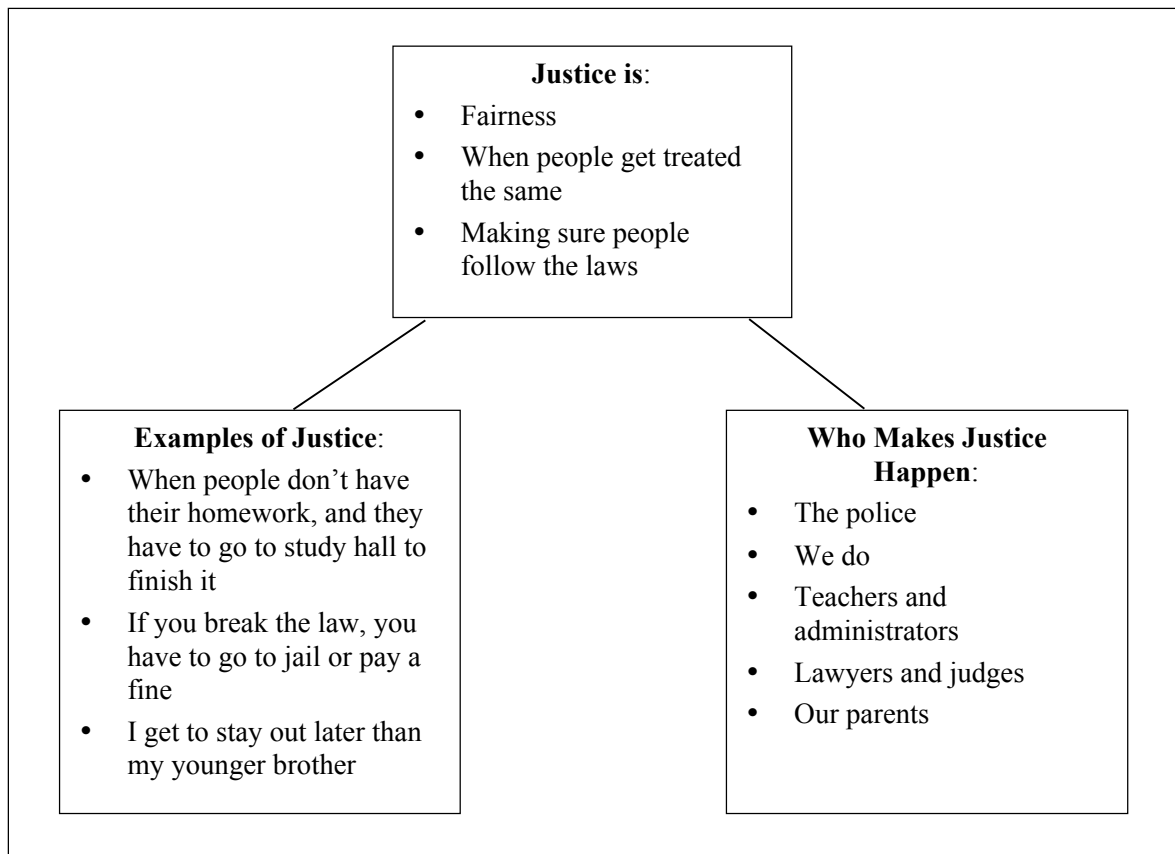
This type of vocabulary discussion often occurs during Terry's read-aloud. Not only does it ensure that everyone understands the meanings of difficult words and phrases, but it also enables Terry to model how good readers monitor their understanding as they read. Struggling readers' participation in the discussion as either listeners or speakers helps them acquire new understandings and extend and deepen their existing knowledge of words.

2. *Active involvement through real-life experiences and simulations.* Some topics of study lend themselves to field trips, classroom visits by a local expert, or in-class simulations. These types of experiences can make the abstract concepts that are presented in reading material much more concrete for struggling readers. For example, a trip to a nearby water treatment plant may help students to realize what *filtration*, *sedimentation*, and *purify* mean. A supporting hand on the back of a standing fellow student can serve to demonstrate the real meaning of *flying buttress*. Such real-life experiences and simulations, or skits, create memorable moments for students and make it easier for them to recall and use the words later.

3. *Active involvement through mapping activities.* It is best to engage struggling readers in semantic maps using a whole class or small-group format and teacher guidance. This collaborative effort enables struggling readers to increase their own understanding of a concept by drawing upon the knowledge of their peers, and helps them connect ideas to what they already know. To begin the activity, the teacher chooses a concept important to material that is about to be read. As the group shares their ideas about the concept, the teacher makes a visual representation of the discussion on the board or chart paper. Robin Davies, a sixth-grade teacher, has decided to do a web for *justice*, a concept she considers important for the students' reading of their next social studies chapter (see Figure 6.3).

1. First, Robin writes the word on the board and draws an oversized box around it. She informs the students that they will be reading about the justice system in the United States.

Figure 6.3 Concept Map for Justice



2. Then she invites students to tell what they think *justice* means and records their responses under the word, inside the box.
3. Because some of the responses are examples of justice, Robin makes a new box for this information and then asks the students to share other examples of when they've seen or experienced justice and adds these to the recorded information.
4. Finally, Robin asks the students to consider who they think is responsible for bringing about justice, and she completes the map on the board by creating one more box for this new information.

Sometimes teachers reuse the same categories when mapping different words or concepts. These might include relations such as synonyms, characteristics,onyms or opposites, examples, the word's meaning, or students' personal connections.

4. *Active involvement through drawing.* Phrases that form idioms also need to be taught. Because the individual words in an idiom do not literally represent the meaning of the phrase, idioms such as those in the sentences that follow can be difficult for students to grasp, especially English Language Learners (see Chapter 3).

My brother gets in my hair.

The teacher called him on the carpet.

I'm in the doghouse.

Don't make a mountain out of a molehill.

Maybe we should play a game at the party to break the ice.

Money always burns a hole in my sister's pocket.

You've lost your marbles!

Despite their trickiness, idioms provide fun learning opportunities. As an aid to remember their meanings, students in the intermediate grades seem to particularly enjoy drawing comparison pictures labeled at the bottom with the idiom. One illustration shows the literal interpretation of the phrase and the other the actual meaning. For example, one picture for *my brother gets in my hair* might depict a youngster with a brother entangled in his or her hair. The other would represent the brother as a pest. Collections of such comparison drawings often are bound into class books or displayed in hallways. Because idioms are such fun and so common in everyday speech and the language of books, it usually takes little encouragement to get struggling readers and writers to try spicing up their writing with such phrases.

Students can also draw comparison pictures for homophones, words that sound the same but have different spellings and meanings (such as *cellar* and *seller*); for homographs, words that are spelled the same but have different pronunciations and meanings (such as *desert the army* and *cross the desert*); and for the different meanings of a particular word (such as *an index in a book*, and *your index finger*). Such activities not only serve to reinforce word meanings in a way that most students enjoy, but also provide an

opportunity for some struggling readers who may be very capable drawers to demonstrate expertise.

5. *Active involvement through games.* Students need many exposures to words and their meanings before the words become part of their vocabulary. Games such as Concentration are well suited for reinforcing vocabulary. Vocabulary words are written on one card and a synonym, definition, or sentence example (with a blank drawn where the word belongs) is recorded on another card. Students randomly place eight or ten card pairs facedown in front of them and take turns drawing cards and trying to make matches. Most card games and many television game shows can be adapted to reinforce vocabulary learning. Because students find the games engaging, they are eager to play again and again, and each time their understanding of the words is strengthened.

Celebrate Words

Teachers can encourage all students to learn and use new vocabulary by calling their attention to unusual and interesting words during read-alouds and by applauding particular words that students include on their bookmarks during guided reading or in their role as word wizard during literature circles (see Chapter 5). A chart or bulletin board area might be devoted to “exotic words,” out-of-the-ordinary words that have captured students’ interest. Students can be asked to tell where they found the word (story, conversation, billboard, and so forth), what it means, and why it’s special to them. Among the many finds on a fifth-grade exotic word board, and the student’s reason for posting it, are:

humdrum (“way it sounds”)
quay (“way it’s pronounced”)
audiophile (“I am one”)
regurgitate (“it’s meaning”)
rojo (“because it’s Spanish”)
cosmopolitan (“it’s a really fancy word”)

filet mignon (“it looks really weird”)

tittered (“I’m going to use this one in my story”)

Teachers can also engage students in I’ve Got a Word; What’s Your Word. In this activity the teacher writes a sentence on the chalkboard or an overhead transparency, underlines one of the words, and invites students to come up with a synonym for it. The teacher’s word may be an overworked word, such as *said*, or an unusual word, such as *ponder*. In the former instance, students generate words that are less familiar, such as *commented*, *uttered*, *proclaimed*, *announced*, *shouted*. By contrast, when a word such as *ponder* is used, students are more likely to suggest more common words, such as *think* or *consider*, but may offer *contemplate*.

Assessment Strategies

Appropriate instruction hinges upon informed teachers. Observation is one means for teachers to learn about their students’ word learning. As children engage in reading, writing, and word study activities, teachers capture insights about the student’s discoveries and use of strategies by taking anecdotal notes. To make their instructional decisions, they then consider this information in conjunction with information gained from more structured forms of assessment, such as spelling analyses, the Names Test described in the Strategy Bank, and running records (see Chapter 7).

Spelling Analyses

To plan effective word study experiences, teachers need to know which spelling features students are ready to explore. Invernizzi, Abouzeid, and Gill (1994, p. 160) suggest that appropriate features are those the student is “using but confusing.” For example, consider the words *rain*, *float*, and *fright*. Syllable juncture spellers write words like these correctly. They already know how to use long vowel patterns in single-syllable words. Since there is no confusion, instruction focused on this feature would not benefit them. By contrast, letter name spellers show only confusion; they tend to omit long vowel

markers entirely (MAK for *make* and AT for *ate* or *eight*). Their lack of experimentation is a strong indication that they are not ready to study this feature. Students at the within word pattern stage are. As spellings such as TAKE, SAME, TRANE for *train*, and WAYT for *wait* reveal, they have some knowledge of how the feature works but not a complete understanding.

Once teachers become familiar with how spelling knowledge develops, they can examine children's spelling to see what is being used but confused and plan instruction accordingly. A wealth of information about students' spelling competence can be gained by comparing invented spellings from their daily writings with those from a dictated word inventory. Children's writings afford valuable insights about their ability to apply their knowledge of words in live writing situations, where spelling is just one of many concerns. However, the number of inventions in spontaneous writing is sometimes limited, and interpreting the errors for meaningful instruction can be difficult and time consuming. Dictated word inventories (Bear et al. 2000; Ganske 2000; Schlagal 1992) are quick and easy to administer and yield information that can guide teacher's instructional planning.

Spelling Inventories

Figure 6.4 shows a student's performance on the letter name list of the *Developmental Spelling Analysis*—DSA (Ganske 2000). The DSA includes a separate list of twenty-five words for each of the stages; letter name, within word pattern, syllable juncture, and derivational constancy. Each list focuses on different spelling features and different words. The scoring system enables teachers to examine a student's ability to spell individual features as well as entire words, thus making it possible to recognize understandings that are just developing. As Figure 6.4 illustrates, correctly spelled words receive a score of two, words that are not correct but that have a correctly spelled target feature are awarded a one, and those with an incorrect feature are given a zero. Answer cards make it easy to score the items and analyze performance.

Figure 6.4 Jessi's DSA Performance at the Letter Name Stage

Answer Sheet: FORM A

Name Jessi

Stage LN +12 Date Mar 31

1	1. <u>jat</u> jet	0	16. <u>gab</u> grab
1	2. <u>shap</u> ship	2	17. <u>chap</u>
2	3. <u>bet</u>	2	18. <u>fast</u>
2	4. <u>got</u>	2	19. <u>dish</u>
2	5. <u>cop</u>	0	20. <u>wat</u> went
2	6. <u>drum</u>	2	21. <u>win</u>
0	7. <u>bap</u> bump	1	22. <u>fad</u> fed
1	8. <u>mash</u> much	0	23. <u>drip</u> trip
2	9. <u>with</u>	1	24. <u>rob</u> rub
2	10. <u>map</u>	0	25. <u>fet</u> fit
2	11. <u>hop</u>		
0	12. <u>pan</u> plan		
2	13. <u>that</u>		
1	14. <u>sled</u> slid		
0	15. <u>mad</u> mud		

From *Word Journeys* by Kathy Ganske. Copyright © 2000 by The Guilford Press.

Jessi is a third-grader who reads with support at a late first- to early second-grade level. She spelled twelve of the twenty-five words correctly on the letter name stage list. Her responses reveal a growing but incomplete knowledge of the letter name features. Jessi demonstrated a strength in her use of beginning and ending consonants. She correctly represented the feature in each target word: *got*, *map*, *win*, *fed*, and *rub* (as well as in other list words). However, when the initial or final element was a blend, Jessi had difficulty. Incomplete blends are evident in her spelling of *plan*, *grab*, *bump*, and *went* as PAN, GAB, BOP and WAT. Jessie also had trouble with *tr*. When *t* or *d* is followed by *r* it makes the sound you hear at the beginning of *jet* and *chop*. Because several different letters and letter combinations can produce this sound, sound-conscious spellers at this stage often confuse them, as Jessi has in her spelling of DRIP for *trip*. Short vowels proved challenging as well. Jessi's uncertainty over which vowel to use is apparent not only in her spelling of the targeted short-vowel words (*bet*, *cap*, *hop*, *mud*, and *fit*) but throughout the list.

What implications do these assessment results have for instruction? Given Jessi's solid grasp of initial consonants, her teacher Ms. Graves decides to build on this strength and begin by having Jessi compare words and pictures with single consonants to those with blends (for example, *p* and *pl* or *g* and *gr*). Then she plans to have Jessi contrast several different blends, such as *pl*, *sl*, *gl* and *cl*. Next, to help Jessi sort out the use of short vowels, Ms. Graves intends to introduce families of words that have the same vowel, such as *ip* and *it*. She has chosen word families as a starting point because vowel sounds are more stable in rimes than they are alone (compare the sound of short *a* in *cat*, *that*, *hat*, and *bat* with *clap*, *ran*, *dad*, and *pat*). After families of different vowels have been explored, the focus can shift to the short vowels themselves. For example, words with short *a* and short *i* might be contrasted. This type of systematic approach will help Jessi discover the regularities of English spelling and strengthen her reading and writing.

Darrell, a fifth-grader who reads with support at the third-grade level, responded to words from the DSA at the within word pattern stage and correctly spelled eighteen of the twenty-five words. An analysis of his performance on the five targeted features reveals a

firm understanding of the vowel-consonant-e pattern (as in *grape* and *smoke*) but some confusion with other patterns.

VCe	R-Controlled Vowels	Other Long Vowels	Complex Consonants	Abstract Vowels
5/5	3/5	4/5	3/5	3/5

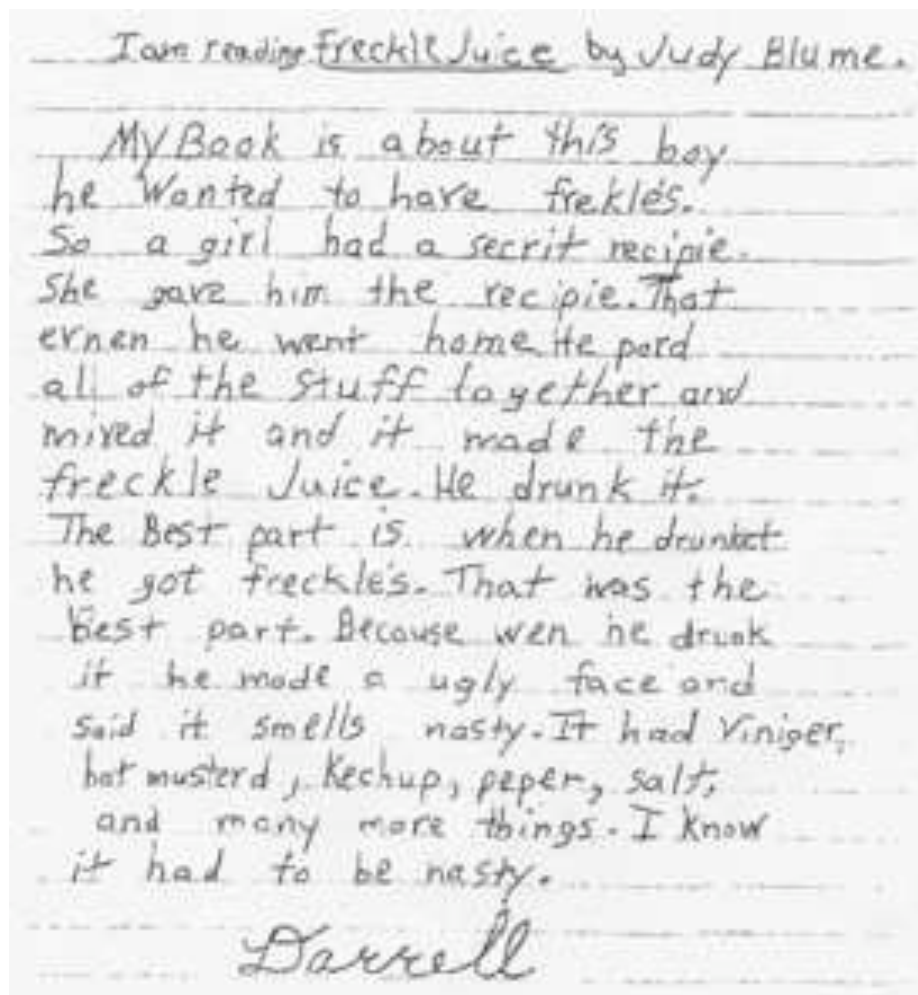
Although Darrell correctly spelled other long vowel patterns in four out of five words (for example, *might* and *steep*), he had difficulty with the feature in *least* (LEEST). Long vowel patterns were also a problem for him in words with *r*-controlled vowels. He accurately spelled *girl*, *short*, and *hurt*, but misspelled *glare*/GLAIR and *fear*/FEER. Complex consonants and abstract vowels presented further difficulties for Darrell as shown by his spelling of BRIG for *bridge* and SKRAP for *scrap*, and by his correct spelling of *couch*, *yawn*, and *point* but his inaccurate rendering of *frown*/FRAWN and *stood*/STOUD.

Based on these results, where should word study instruction begin? Other long vowel patterns are a good first choice. Darrell has already learned much about this feature but will benefit from opportunities to solidify his understandings. His teacher plans compare and contrast activities that focus on long *e*. She gives Darrell a stack of cards to sort that includes words with short *e*, a feature Darrell already knows, as well as words such as *sheet*, *feet*, *keep* and *heat*, *leap*, *feast*. First, Darrell categorizes the words by sound (short *e* and long *e*), then by sound and pattern (short *e*, long *ee*, and long *ea*). Inclusion of the word *bread* in the sort as an exception encourages Darrell to think carefully about the words as he sorts them. The following week his teacher may include more words like *bread* in the sort to help Darrell realize that numerous short *e* words are spelled with this pattern.

Daily Writing

Darrell's writing can also be analyzed to reveal information about his spelling strengths and weaknesses. As Figure 6.5 shows, he spelled numerous high-frequency words correctly, such as *said*, *was*, *many*, and *have*. His use of short vowels is a strength, as is his spelling of words with VCe. Some of the using but confusing of patterns that characterizes Darrell's inventory results is not evident here, because words with those patterns were not used. For example, *ow* in *know* is the only long vowel pattern he used besides VCe. Darrell has errors in several multisyllabic words, but the issues in these are more complex and would not be addressed at this time. The influence of dialect can be seen in his spellings of EVNEN for *evening* and WEN for *when*.

Figure 6.5 Darrell's Log Entry for *Freckle Juice* by Judy Blume



Darrell's spelling ability in his *Freckle Juice* response can also be analyzed by applying the *index of control* formula devised by Laminack and Wood (1996). Although described by the authors as "time-consuming" (p. 48), the formula enables teachers to estimate how well students correctly spell words in their writing. The index is determined by dividing the number of different words that a writer spelled correctly by the number of different words he used. Of Darrell's 104 words, 65 are different, and 52 of these are spelled correctly. His index of control is $52 \div 65 = .80 \times 100 = 80$ percent. Darrell used a variety of words and demonstrated control over 80 percent of them. A word of caution in interpreting the percentage scores: High percentages sometimes result when students play it safe and limit their choice of words to those they know. By contrast, students who freely express themselves and construct spellings for words they don't know may exhibit a low index of control.

It is important that teachers be sensitive to where struggling writers are in their spelling development so they can set realistic expectations for accuracy in daily writing. If correctness is stressed above all else, the students are likely to avoid risks and write little. Follow-up editing with a partner or a spell-checker (available through most school supply stores) can aid struggling writers when accuracy is deemed necessary, as it is in published pieces of writing. Difficult-to-spell words that will be used frequently during a unit of study should be recorded in a notebook or on a wall chart for easy reference (see Chapter 9). Also, when reviewing the spellings in writing of students like Darrell, teachers should be careful to notice and point out to students what they are using correctly. For example, although a spelling of REVALUSHUN for *revolution* is far from correct, it does show attention to beginning, middle, and ending sounds and reveals an understanding, though perhaps tacit, that every syllable needs a vowel.

Learning how words work is a challenge for some students. Too often we have responded to their limited understandings by providing them with grade-level instructional fare and pushing them onward. Without a solid foundation, struggling readers and writers end up with a mishmash of understandings that don't allow them to make sense out of our English spelling system and expand their knowledge of words. It is time to provide more

student-centered instruction, instruction that takes into consideration what students know and what they are ready to learn, instruction that encourages students to think about words and motivates them to read and write.