BEGINNING WRITING:
AN EXPLANATION OF INVENTED SPELLING

What Is Invented Spelling?

Early spelling and phonics behavior proceeds in stages along a continuum, from random scribbling through to conventional spellings.

When your child begins to write, you may notice the following:

- First efforts may take the form of a simple drawing or imitation writing:

- Later, the drawing may be accompanied by the first letter of the subject of the drawing:

- Or, your child may print a whole word that s/he knows, which may or may not be related to the drawing:

- Or, your child may print “symbols” s/he can “read” back to you:
• Odd groups of letters may then appear, as your child begins to realize that words are sounds joined together:

• These groups of letters may become longer as your child draws more heavily on knowledge of letter sounds and memorized words:

• After any one of these steps (and they may not occur in the order shown here), your child should be encouraged to “read” back what has been written. The teacher (or you) can print, word for word, the message your child has said, and voila! Your child is an author!

• Gradually, as your child gets older and moves to a higher grade, s/he will be shown how to rewrite the work, using the correct spelling and punctuation, WITHOUT LOSING CONFIDENCE!

This process can take a long time because children enjoy practicing the same thing over and over. Have patience, trust, and regularly praise your child’s attempts. If you have concerns about your child’s writing development, PLEASE see me. I’ll try hard to fill you in on the particulars of your child and put your mind to rest.

“Invented Spelling” is well researched – and its benefits to children are many and varied. If you would like further information about this process, please see me. I can talk to you and/or give you some further information to read, if you would like. There is MUCH information available! (Note: A more detailed copy of spelling stages is attached…)
Why Do Teachers Encourage Children To Invent Their Own Spelling (Or as I call it, “Write their own words”)?

Most children love to write, even before they come to school. To ensure that their initial enthusiasm is not squashed, we must try to make the process of learning to write as happy and as rewarding as possible.

So, in the same way that parents reinforce their child’s first sounds as approximations of their first words (i.e. When a child first says “Ma Ma” parents jump up and down, scream “hooray” and phone everyone they know to say “Johnny said his first words today!”), teachers reinforce their students’ first scribbles as approximations of their first writing attempts.

Giving children the freedom to write in this way allows them to experience success in writing at the early stages. And, success builds confidence. Children with confidence in their own abilities are willing to try hard and keep trying because they believe themselves to be capable.

Writing requires taking risks. Children must feel safe and that they won’t be criticized for their attempts in order to take the chance to put pencil to paper without inhibition. An expectation that all words be spelled correctly can shut children’s creativity and risk taking down. If they feel they are “wrong”, they stop trying.

Invented spelling allows children to put their ideas onto paper, using the language skills they already have, and in the process (we hope) they come to view themselves as writers and want to write often. This can be an extremely happy and exciting experience for child, teacher and parent.
What Are The Advantages Of Using Invented Spelling?

1. Invented spelling requires that children **listen carefully to the sounds of spoken words and make attempts to translate these sounds to print**. This process is not easy! It takes great skill and research tells us that by practicing invented spelling on a regular basis, they can become better readers and writers.

2. Invented spelling allows children an opportunity to **practice phonics in context**. In order to translate sounds of spoken language to print accurately, they must have knowledge of phonics principals such as letter sounds, blends, punctuation, etc.

3. Invented spelling serves a **diagnostic purpose** – it allows teachers to better assess a child’s understanding of phonics rules and principals. This knowledge will help guide teaching. If, for example, a child can already spell words such as “cat, sat and mat”, no further teaching time needs to be spent on this concept. Time will be better spent learning about concepts a child has not yet mastered.

4. Invented spelling allows children to **focus on the meaning** of their writing rather than the mechanics. When writing, ideas begin to roll off of the tongue and if interrupted to think about spelling, the flow is lost along with the ideas. When this happens, frustration sets in and the tendency is to put the pencil away and stop writing. Or, the writer will stop attempting to write interesting stories and limit their writing to only those words they know how to spell. Spelling DOES need to be correct in a final draft – and as children move to higher grades, they will learn how to edit their writing to be sure that spelling is correct. The first step, though, is to let children “have a go” at writing, secure in the knowledge that it will be accepted and that their ideas are valued.
Books About Invented Spelling


4. Turbill, Jan (Ed.), *No Better Way to Teach Writing!*, Primary English Teacher’s Association, 1982.

5. Turnbull, Jan, *Now. We Want To Write!*, Primary English Teachers Association, 1983.