
Dear Parents:

Some parents have asked whether or not they should be concerned about their child's misspellings in stories and compositions they write. In class, we call this "invented spelling." Let me answer some questions about invented spelling and how we use it in class.

What is invented spelling? Invented spelling (some teachers call it "approximate spelling" or "temporary spelling") is the name we use to describe children's misspellings before they know the rules, and exceptions to the rules, that adults use for spelling. Learning to write takes a long time, and using invented, or temporary, spelling is one of the natural stages that all writers must go through.

Is invented spelling normal? Yes. It is a normal and predictable stage of emerging writers. In many ways, it parallels the way your child learned to talk. Your child's earliest words were probably only approximations of the words they were trying to communicate ("Da" for "Dad," for example). With practice and encouragement, the words became more distinct, more "correct." Like early efforts at talking, we want to encourage students, not correct them constantly. Correct spelling will come with more experience and practice.

Is invented spelling something that you encourage at school? Yes, I encourage invented spelling for several reasons. One is that it helps writing fluency because children don't have to stop and ask or look up every word they are not sure how to spell. Constant interruptions to check or ask about spelling make it hard to concentrate on the ideas of writing. Invented spelling makes your child more independent and less reliant on adults for writing. It also encourages richer language in writing. I would much rather your child describe a dog as *froshus* (ferocious) than as bad. When children are encouraged to use their speaking vocabulary in their writing, rather than being limited to the words they are sure to spell correctly, their writing will be much richer.

How do you tell if children are getting better with spelling? First of all, using invented spelling does not hinder your child's progress toward becoming a good speller. It helps! The stages young children go through are predictable:

- first a string of letters to represent words
- beginning sounds only
- beginning and ending sounds only
- beginning, middle, and ending sounds

Your child's misspellings are not random. They are actually quite systematic. As children read and write more, they internalize more spelling rules and generalizations and use them in their writing. They formulate rules based on their understanding of how the language works. Their system gets more elaborate with more reading and writing experience. In turn, their misspellings become more sophisticated. The kinds of spelling inventions your child makes help me decide what rules or words to teach in spelling.

Don't children have to be accountable for spelling? Yes, and they are. I expect your child to "know" (that is, spell correctly each time the word is used) the spellings of some important, frequently used words. The conventional spelling of these words is expected. The number of words I expect your child to "know" will grow as the year goes on. Spelling will be a focus correction area for some pieces of writing. On those, your child will be expected to check for correct spelling on all, or at least selected, words.

I understand that spelling is very important to good writing. What I am doing with our writing program is balancing spelling skills development with other important aspects of writing such as idea organization, content, and style. If you have further questions about our writing program, please contact me.

Sincerely,