



Rifka Schonfeld **STRATEGIES**

THE NEWSLETTER FOR OPTIMUM SUCCESS

TIPS ON SOCIAL SKILLS FOR ADULTS & CHILDREN

In the Age of Computers, Who Needs Spelling?

Dear Readers,

This week's newsletter addresses a question on the topic of learning how to spell when we are in an age of computers and spell-check...

Rifka Schonfeld
STRATEGIES

QUESTION:

I do not understand anything that my child writes. Is that okay?
When should I correct his spelling?



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- (1) No grils a loud ixebt my mom.
- (2) Ther ouns wer two flawrs. Oun was pink and the othr was prpul. Thae did not like ech athr becuse thae whr difrint culrs. Oun day thae had a fite.
- (3) Wuns u pon a tim a prinzes met u frog.
- (4) Dogs ar the bst becs thei burc.

Can you read the sentences above? They are examples of invented spelling (sometimes called “inventive spelling”) in which students use what they know about letters, sounds, and spellings in order to spell the words as best as they can.

The sentences above when spelled correctly are below:

- (1) No girls allowed except my mom.
- (2) There once were two flowers. One was pink and the other was purple. They did not like each other because they were different colors. One day they had a fight.
- (3) Once upon a time, a princess met a frog.
- (4) Dogs are the best because they bark.

Some people object to the practice of invented spelling, arguing that it produces bad habits in children that can carry over into adulthood. While there might be some merit to this claim, there are others (particularly from the Natural Child Project) whose claims are equally valid who argue that no one would ever forbid their child to speak until they had mastered the pronunciation of each word. Rather, parents encourage students to speak, engage in conversation, and then correct mispronunciations as they arise. The practice that children get speaking more than makes up for the mispronunciations that occur.

The same argument holds true for invented spelling. If we only allow our children to write when they perfectly know how to spell, they will not be able to experiment and make mistakes. Those experiments and mistakes, when addressed, are an integral part of the learning process.

There are several stages that children go through when learning to spell:

- **Pre-Communicative.** This stage seen in preschool and early in kindergarten is when children understand that letters make sounds but do not match specific letters to specific sounds and do not necessarily write from left to right. Children who are in the pre-communicative stage will draw random letters in a formation that represents “I love my mother.”
- **Semi-phonetic.** Children who are semi-phonetic are beginning to understand that specific letters correspond to specific sounds. Children in this stage might represent whole words with one or two letters (HP for “happy” or R for “are”).
- **Phonetic.** When children are in the phonetic stage they are most likely to use invented spelling. They will chunk together certain letters and understand that “sh” makes a different sound than “s” and “h” by themselves. They will also be able to recognize sight words and correctly spell common words such as “the” and “and” even if they aren’t easily spelled inventively.
- **Transitional.** Children are often in the transitional stage at the end of first grade through third grade. They are learning common and uncommon patterns in spelling and attempting to use those patterns at the appropriate times. They will begin to memorize the spelling of words that are exceptions such as “brought” and “again.” Children will still use invented spelling in this stage, but will also attempt to

apply the rules they are learning to their spelling.

- **Correct.** Beginning at the end of third grade or at the beginning of fourth grade, students in this stage will spell correctly using common patterns and will often recognize when they have misspelled a word. Students will strengthen their spelling by understanding the roots of words in order to generalize from word to word.

In the Era of Computers, Who Needs to Spell?

J. Richard Gentry, an expert on spelling education, explains why spelling is so important even in the age of computers and software that automatically checks our spelling. If you ask a reading specialist what children need in order to read successfully, their answer would be knowledge of the alphabet and phonemic awareness (the ability to identify that certain letters correspond to certain sounds). In other words, kindergarten and first grade spelling! Obviously, teaching spelling is only a small part of literacy instruction. However, in past years, spelling instruction has fallen out of favor.

Perfecting Spelling

Many schools have adopted curricula that incorporate spelling through reading, but do not include specific spelling instruction. For some children, this is a problem because for many children, spelling must be taught (even if student use invented spelling). Of course, spelling should be connected to reading and writing, but in a straightforward manner. It's easy to judge if a good spelling program is part of an elementary classroom. Simply ask, "Are children in this classroom engaged in the spelling process: finding words, inspecting words, mastering words, and developing good spelling habits?"

Each week children should be:

- finding unknown spelling words and using those words when they write.
- actively engaged in mastering the spellings of those words.
- provided with opportunities for word study that will help them learn the patterns of English spelling.
- paying attention to spelling in their writing and developing better spelling habits.

Through these techniques, children can develop spelling skills that will aid them for future reading and writing. So, should you be worried if your first grader writes you a note that says, "I luv u, mummie"? Absolutely not, chalk it up to invented spelling and understand that she's on the road to spelling success.

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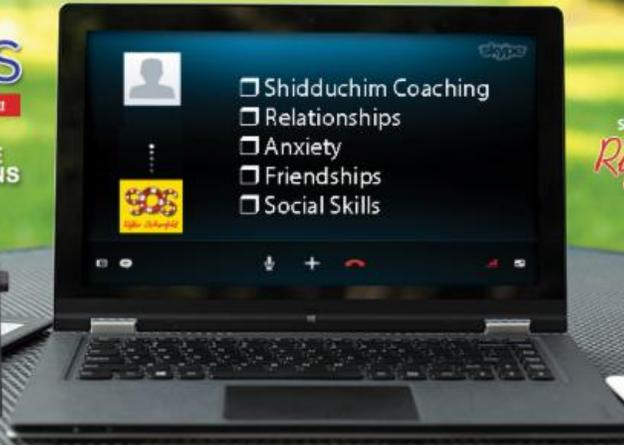


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