

# The FLORIDA Reading JOURNAL

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Common Core through predicting

Discovering the transformation  
of Picture Books

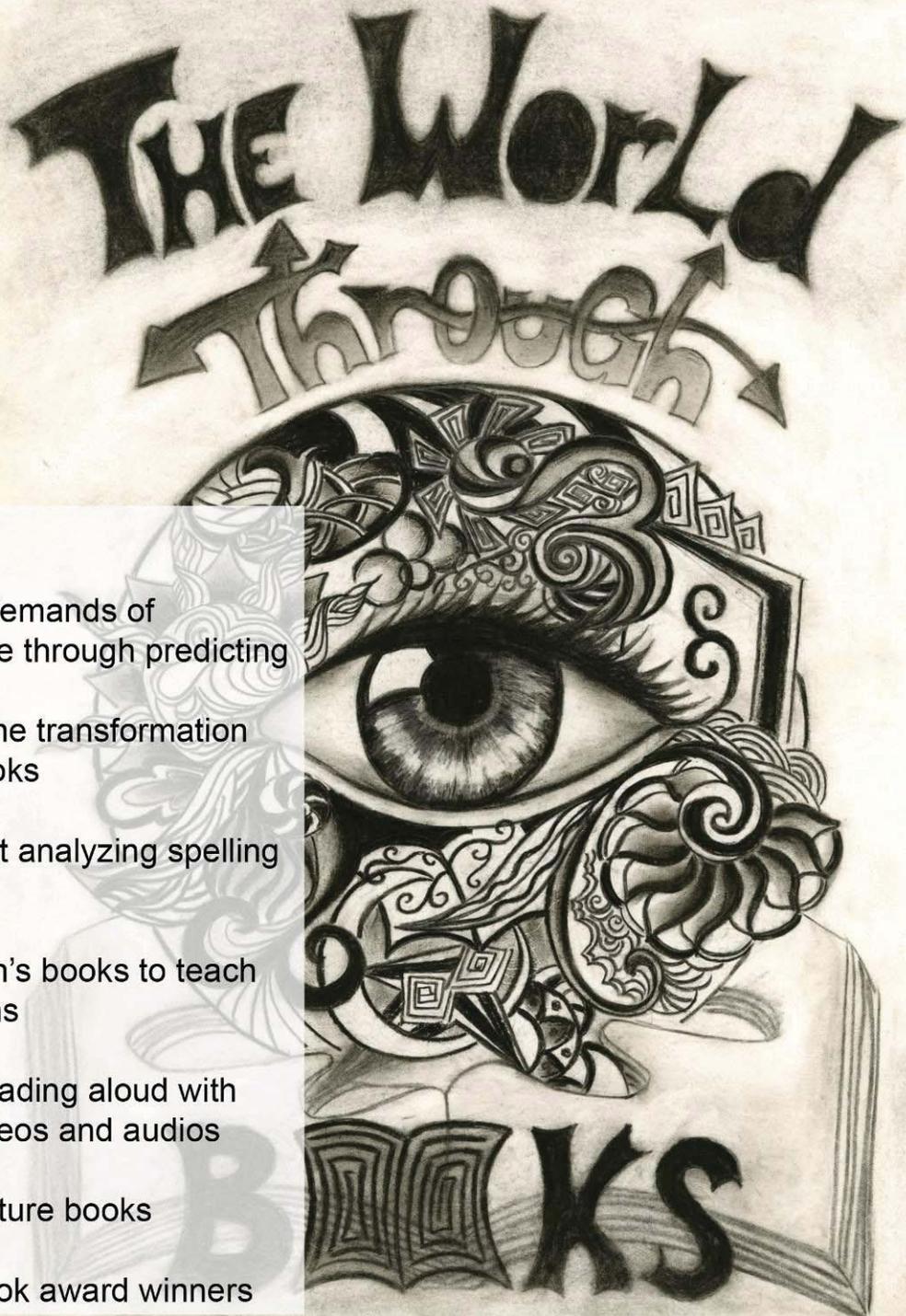
A fresh look at analyzing spelling  
tasks

Using children's books to teach  
world religions

Supporting reading aloud with  
streaming videos and audios

Nonfiction picture books

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## EFFECTIVE SPELLING INSTRUCTION: MOVING BEYOND “IS IT RIGHT OR IS IT WRONG?”

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**Abstract:** This article suggests applying information about the stages of spelling development to facilitate spelling instruction and help them to achieve spelling success.

### Introduction

What do we know about the teaching of spelling? We know that spelling supports reading and writing (Moats 2006) and strengthens these components of literacy. We also know that even though it relates to reading and writing, spelling is often taught as an isolated skill. Although we know that repeated practice is important to acquire accurate spelling, often that practice consists of rote drill where children have little opportunity to manipulate word concepts (Bear et al. 2012). We also know that spelling is a linguistic task that involves knowledge of sounds and letter patterns, yet some teachers primarily use flash cards, rote memorization, and writing words 5 to 10 times, the effectiveness of which is not well established. Another fact about spelling is that spelling assessment in the past and present commonly comes down to whether a word is right or wrong. Teachers often do not examine students' spelling errors to determine what they know about spelling patterns. It is possible that these ideas and practices will shortchange the spelling development of many students. When teachers have a strong understanding of spelling stages and other concepts, they can plan effective word study that will match the students' actual spelling stages to instruction.

### Teachers' Understanding of Spelling Concepts

To effectively plan spelling instruction and interpret its assessment, it is important to consider teachers' understanding of spelling

concepts. Teachers need a foundational understanding of the basic principles of spelling: alphabet, patterns, and meaning to teach these concepts to students (Moats, 2009). According to a national survey of typical teachers by Graham et al. (2008), most teachers do teach spelling, but a large number (42%) of the respondents to their survey indicated that they make few or no adaptations for weaker spellers. This statistic implies that the spelling needs of a large percentage of students are not being met. These students who struggle with spelling also often avoid writing, which can result in arrested writing development. One concept about spelling that would facilitate teachers' understanding of how to teach spelling is applying the different stages of spelling development during instruction.

### Stages of Spelling Development

As with all components of the literacy process, spelling is complex and multifaceted.

In order for children to correct their spelling errors, they must understand them. An important factor for teachers to understand is that there are stages to the spelling process. Researchers differ on the number of and names of these phases, but they all have similar foundational information (Bear et al. 2012; Gentry, 2010; Young, 2007). Spelling development occurs along a continuum or series of stages. These stages often overlap as students make progress with their spelling. Bear et al. (2012) describe these stages as emergent, letter name-alphabetic, within word

pattern, syllables and affixes, and derivational relations. Students' orthographic knowledge is defined by what they do correctly, what they 'use but confuse', and what is absent (Invernizzi, Abouzeid, & Gill, 1994). For example, students may know short vowels and beginning and final consonants, but confuse common long vowels (oa in float; igh in sight). Knowledge of the doubling rule when joining syllables (shop to shopping) may be absent. It is important for teachers to know these stages in order to plan appropriate instruction within a student's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1962). What a student uses but is not clear about in spelling is where instruction will be most beneficial. Word sorts and activities that address the concepts of a student's current spelling stage will help the student learn those spelling patterns and progress to the next stage (Bear et al. 2012). Knowledge and use of these spelling stages can assist teachers as they plan differentiated instruction for their students.

### Position of Phonemes and Graphemes

The position of a phoneme or grapheme in a word is another significant spelling tool. The position refers to the placement of a letter and its sound at the beginning, middle, or end of a syllable and what sounds or letters come before or after it. The position of sounds and letters often determines which letters are used for spelling. Many vowel spellings are determined by the place of the vowel sound in a word. For example, /oi/ is spelled two ways: oy is used at the end of syllables and oi is used when the sound is at the beginning or middle of a syllable. There are some exceptions to this pattern that come from the French language are oyster, royal, and loyal. These exceptions can be their own category in an oi and oy spelling word sort. Table 1 displays an example of the position of the /oi/ sound in words.

**Table 1: Positions of the /oi/sound**

Initial	Medial	Final
oil	soil	toy
oink	boil	joy
ointment	spoil	boy
	join	soy
	coin	employ
	point	enjoy
Exceptions (from French)	Exceptions (From French)	
oysters	royal	
	loyal	

## Knowledge of Spelling Vocabulary

If young students understand the alphabetic principle, they understand that letters and letter groups represent separate speech sounds or phonemes. Phonemic awareness is a prerequisite skill for matching speech to print. Teachers need an understanding of what phonemic awareness and other spelling vocabulary mean in order to plan spelling instruction effectively. In a recent study (Washburn & Joshi 2010), pre-service teachers demonstrated minimal knowledge of the meaning of language terms like phoneme, grapheme, phonemic awareness, and syllable. Before the position of phonemes and graphemes can be used as an instructional tool, teachers must have a working knowledge of their meaning. Table 2 shows some of the important spelling vocabulary that teachers

need to understand so that they can effectively teach spelling concepts and patterns.

## Syllable Types

Knowledge of syllable types is important for helping spellers and readers who are challenged by longer words (Bhattachary, 2006). When encountering multisyllabic words, struggling students often lack the confidence and skill to break these words apart for spelling and reading. There are six types of syllables that teachers need to understand, in order to assist these students. Table 3 describes these six syllable types.

**Table 2: Spelling Vocabulary**

Vowels	Vowels are sounds that open the mouth and are voiced; the vowels are a,e,i,o,u
Consonants	Consonants are sounds that close the mouth; the sounds are blocked by the tongue, teeth or lips.
Syllable	A syllable is a word or part of a word made with one opening of the mouth. A syllable has one vowel sound. There are 6 syllable types.
Closed Syllable	In a closed syllable the vowel is closed by a consonant; the vowel is short and is coded with a breve (ă).
Open Syllable	In an open syllable the syllable ends with a vowel; the vowel in an open accented syllable is long; code it with a macron.
phoneme	Smallest segmental unit of sound; /b/ in bat
grapheme	The fundamental unit in a written language; written letters A and G are graphemes.
morpheme	The smallest component of word that has semantic meaning; <i>cars</i> has two morphemes: <i>car</i> and <i>s</i>

**Table 3:** Syllable Types

Syllable Type	Description	Examples
1. Closed	A closed syllable has one vowel and it ends in a consonant. The vowel is usually short.	rock, sketch, task, dog, pen·cil bas·ket  Exceptions: find, cold
2. Open	An open syllable ends in a single vowel. The vowel sound is usually long.	no, she, my, go, be, so ba·con, ta·ble  Exceptions: do, to
3. Vowel-Consonant-Silent e (VC-e)	A VC-e syllable contains a long vowel spelled with a single letter followed by a single consonant followed by a silent e. The first vowel is usually long and the final -e is silent.	make, pile, note, snake, while  Exceptions: give, have
4. R-controlled	A syllable with one or two vowels and is followed by an r. The vowel(s) are neither long or short, but the sound is controlled by the r.	Car, air, bird, corn, germ  Exceptions: fire, tire
5. Vowel Combination Syllables:	A vowel combination syllable has a cluster of two or three vowels with a long sound or variant sound	Long vowel combinations: rain, day, see, veil, pie, piece  Variant vowel combinations toy, noise, brew, sound, boil  Exceptions: said, bread
6. Final Stable -le (-al, -el) Syllables:	A syllable usually at the end of a word with a consonant followed by -le, -al, or -el	loyal, trouble, table, funnel, final
Other Final Stable Syllables	A syllable usually at the end of a word that has a recognizable word part, such as: -sion, -tion, -ture, -sure, -cious, -tious	mention, tension, insure, nature, precious, cautious

Knight-McKenna (2008) offers systematic instructions for helping students become proficient at breaking down multisyllabic words. She recommends introducing each syllable type separately. One example she suggests is to use letter chips instead of actual letters to model the difference between closed and open syllables. Taking a chip away changes hit into hi and the vowel also changes from short to long.

### Types of Spelling Errors

Three decades of word study research reveal several categories of spelling errors: (1) those dealing with the alphabetic match of letter and sound (i.e. bad for bed), (2) those

dealing with letter patterns (i.e. snaik for snake), and (3) those dealing with words related in meaning (i.e. compusition for composition) (Bear, et al. 2012). Spelling errors, therefore, are not made randomly, but converge at developmental spelling levels. It is important for teachers to understand these kinds of errors and stages because the same types of errors have been observed among students with learning disabilities and dyslexia (Sawyer, Lipa, Wade & Kim, 1999), students who speak in nonstandard dialects (Cantrell, 2001), and students who are learning to read in different alphabetic languages (Bear, et al. 2003). Today's diverse classrooms are comprised of such students and if teachers understand these spelling errors, they will be able to implement

response to intervention - tier one spelling interventions to match students' errors.

### Word Origins

Spelling often refers only to the conventional reproduction of a word in print. However, "word study" encompasses the notion of exploring word origins, histories, and the relationships between words. Spelling is made easier by an understanding of a word's roots and origins. Word meaning is communicated through word parts, such as prefixes, suffixes, Greek roots, and Latin stems. Often the spelling of a word may seem unusual, but an understanding of its origin can provide a powerful key to remembering the spelling. Learning that the word sign is related to signature and signal, for example, can further a child's spelling of the two different sounds of the letter "g" within the same word family. In a similar vein, understanding that the prefix "re" is spelled the same but pronounced differently in react and remark can help students with conventional spelling.

Word study can provide powerful spelling tools for all students, but especially for English learners as they negotiate the nature of spelling across languages. A significant part of transitioning from one language to another is spelling and vocabulary development. A strategy that can be especially effective for instruction in this area is teaching the meaning of cognates, words that look similar and have the same meaning in both languages. For example, Spanish/English cognates include Spanish *enfermo* (sick) and English *infirm* and Spanish *proceso* and English *process*. Cognate study has proven beneficial for both English learners and native English speakers alike (Lubliner & Hiebert, 2011).

It is important to realize that most students will not make the connections about these cognates automatically. It is explicit instruction that will encourage them to understand cognates and eventually recognize and use them as linguistic tools. Once students understand what cognates are, they can become

word detectives looking for cognate connections between English and other languages. Cognates found during their searches can then be sorted and placed on charts for further discussion and visual reinforcement. Attention to cognates helps English learners see morphological similarities between English and their home language (Bear et. al, 2012).

### Conclusion

Today there is a high demand for students to communicate using literacy skills. Spelling ability is a key part of this literacy profile. All sorts of negative assumptions are made about people who cannot spell well. In order for teachers to be able to help all students make progress with the integrated components of literacy, they need to have a thorough understanding of spelling concepts and vocabulary. School districts and teacher preparation programs should examine in-service and course curricula to determine if content knowledge about spelling is adequately and correctly covered. Instead of focusing on whether a word is or is not spelled correctly, informed teachers can plan and adjust spelling instruction and assessment based on what a student knows about spelling patterns and what is still confusing. Such actions can prevent students from experiencing continued failure and help them to achieve spelling success.

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