What’s in your word study suitcase?
Tips for building better phonics and vocabulary instruction
by learning about your students’ language backgrounds

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University of Minnesota
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Orthography Special Interest Group

Goals for the presentation
• To review how word knowledge develops for English learners.
• To examine the role of students’ home languages on their learning of the English orthography
• To share instructional methods that build on students’ language and literacy experiences and support their growth of English phonics, vocabulary, and spelling

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Word study is an instructional focus on the spelling, sounds and meanings of words

Topical Agenda
• How word knowledge develops
• What assessments tell us about English learners’ word knowledge
• Instructional applications: Strategies for your word study suitcase

Word study with English learners is more complex because we cannot assume students know the meanings of many English words, and their background languages may influence how well they differentiate and pronounce specific sounds in English or understand the English writing system.
Emergent Spellers

**Age/grade**
- Ages: 1-7 or older students without formal schooling
- Grades: pre-K to mid-1 or newcomers without formal schooling at all grades

**Corresponding stage of reading and writing:** Emergent

**Assessment**
- Do your students spell this way?
  - Random marks, representational drawing, mock linear or letter-like writing, random letters and numbers

**Instruction**
- Talk with and read to students to share the sounds and meaning of language; build vocabulary with concept sorts and explicit instruction; develop phonological awareness with picture sorts, songs and games; enhance alphabet knowledge with games, matching activities and sorts.

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**Sample spellings**

**Emergent learners at the upper grades and secondary...**

- Usually are immigrant students with limited formal schooling in their home language.
- Tend to copy words or use a limited set of memorized words or word-approximations.

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**Aged 16, recent arrival from Guinea, copied from a map.**

- In addition to learning the letters and sounds of English, older emergent learners will profit from:
  - Survival skills such as learning to read maps and street signs
  - Learning essential vocabulary and attaching the written words
  - Having their stories and words written down, such as in the language experience approach
  - Concept sorts that allow them to learn sorting while learning content vocabulary words
Letter Name-Alphabetic Spellers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age/grade</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Instruction</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ages: 4-9 or older students with limited formal schooling. Grades: K to early 3 and newcomers at later grades. Corresponding stage of reading and writing: Beginning</td>
<td>Do your students spell this way?</td>
<td>Engage students in rich interactions to share the sounds and meaning of language; build vocabulary as a part of each literacy lesson; compare and contrast initial and final consonant sounds first through pictures; provide explicit instruction for sounds that are difficult in English. When vowels appear regularly in students’ spelling, compare and contrast short vowel word families; focus on the sound and spelling of one short vowel; examine consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) patterns.</td>
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Within Word Pattern Spellers

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<tr>
<th>Age/grade</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Instruction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ages: 6-12 or older students who began literacy instruction in English at a later age. Grades: 1 to mid-4 or students at later grades who came more recently to English reading instruction. Corresponding stage of reading and writing: Transitional</td>
<td>Do your students spell this way?</td>
<td>Build content-area vocabulary throughout concept sorts, picture dictionaries and language-rich activities; sort pictures and words to contrast long and short vowels; sort words to examine long vowel patterns; collect words in word study notebooks; look for cognates in students’ home languages; conduct word hunts for specific long and complex vowel patterns; teach the meanings of homophones as you play games with them; contrast r-influenced vowel sounds.</td>
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Syllables and Affixes Spellers

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<tr>
<th>Age/grade</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Instruction</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ages: 8-18 Grades: 3 to 8 or students at later grades who came more recently to English reading. Corresponding stage of reading and writing: Intermediate</td>
<td>Do your students spell this way?</td>
<td>Investigate academic vocabulary in English throughout literacy activities; study consonant doubling and common affixes in sorts, hunts and games; examine past tense and plural endings in writing and speech; compare stress in words; interrelate spelling and meaning in word study groups; study words from readings by patterns in spelling and meaning; continue word study notebooks.</td>
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Derivational Relations Spellers

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<tr>
<th>Age/grade</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ages: 10+ Grades: 5 to 12 Corresponding stage of reading and writing: Advanced</td>
<td>Do your students spell this way?</td>
<td>Examine the spelling-meaning connection, including cognates with words in students’ home languages; analyze words by bases, roots, and affixes; examine etymologies in the content areas; use root books and dictionaries to look up Greek and Latin forms and foreign borrowings.</td>
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The research base in word study

What are some key findings?
Research highlights

• The developmental spelling of preschool children reflected their growing knowledge of the English writing system (Charles Read, 1971).
• Spelling errors reveal students’ understanding of the English orthography (Ed Henderson, 1972).

Research highlights

• Students’ development in spelling reflects a growth in sophistication about the letters and sounds, letter patterns, and meaning units of English (Ehri, 1993; Henderson & Templeton, 1986; Bear & Templeton, 1998; Invernizzi & Hayes, 2004).
• Active lessons that include sorting and games help students make generalizations about words (Barnes, 1989; Perez, 1981).

Research highlights

• Word knowledge can be assessed through developmental spelling inventories (Schlagal, 1992; Ganske, 1999).
• The scores on these inventories have been related to other measures of spelling as well as reading measures such as word recognition, reading rate, writing and standardized assessment scores (Invernizzi & Hayes: Bear; Templeton & Morris).

Research highlights

• Working at students’ developmental spelling level has been shown to produce more powerful learning than instruction beyond students’ conceptual understanding (Morris & Bloodgood, 2005).
• English learners proceed through the same developmental stages but at a slower pace and with influences from their home languages (Helman & Bear, 2007).

You can use observation and informal assessments such as:

• Informal reading inventories
• Examining unedited writing
• Assess phonics knowledge

-OR-

• Give a qualitative spelling inventory

We have learned a lot about English learners’ word knowledge through the use of developmental spelling inventories
Six Notes on Spelling
Development by English Learners

1. Misspellings reflect minimal contrasts between the primary language and English.

2. Look for whole word substitutions and the similarities and differences in the features of the target words and the misspellings.

   For example, PINK for pick

3. English learners often do more sounding out.

   Difficulty sounds:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sounds</th>
<th>Pronounced Like</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fish</td>
<td>shish</td>
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<tr>
<td>sound</td>
<td>sound</td>
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<td>mouse</td>
<td>mouse</td>
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<td>house</td>
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</table>

   Sound and letter confusions in Spanish

   - Beginning s blends st, sp, sc, st, sp, st, sp, str, str, spl, spl
   - Ending blends with r: -ed, -rt, -rl, -sp, -ng in sing
   - Ending blends with c: -sp, -at, -sl, -en

   Examples:

   - Send (sind)
   - Hard (hard)
   - Car (kair)
   - There (there)
   - Was (wasp)
   - Ask (ask)
4. There is greater variability in the spelling of English learners.

5. Students may omit ending and middle syllables.

For example, CAMP for camped

6. Students follow the same developmental progression, but may take longer to progress.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 1 students’ literacy levels (Nevada REA, 2003)</th>
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<tr>
<td>English-only (-Sp Ed)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spanish-speaking (-Sp Ed)</td>
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Instructional support for English learners in phonics, spelling, and vocabulary

Learn about students’ home languages to improve instruction

Begin with commonalities

- What is the same about reading and writing in the student’s home language and English?

For example, these English consonant sounds also exist in Spanish

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<tr>
<th>P</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>L</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K/C</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Y CH</td>
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What does the student know about the concept or skill you are teaching?

Can you check in the home language?

Ways to assess language strengths:

- Have students tell a story and then write it.
- Ask students to read or write with you in their home language.
- Use one of the “other language” spelling inventories with your students.
- Locate a native speaker who can help you analyze students’ background knowledge in their home language.
Use knowledge of home languages to understand students’ developmental reading and writing

Learn more about Spanish (or another home language of your students)

Why would the student in the sample above spell
• “ship” CHEP
• “spoil” EXPOLLO
• “shopping” CHOPPIN

Try sounding out students’ developmental writing in Spanish

For example,

DA

Identify areas of distinction and provide explicit support

Build on important cognates in Spanish and other languages

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>estudio</th>
<th>materiales</th>
<th>análisis</th>
<th>literatura</th>
<th>físico</th>
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Use frequent informal assessments.
Ensure students understand foundational concepts

Include students in think-aloud processes comparing English and Spanish (or other home language).

Incorporate multilingual materials, alphabets in other languages, and bilingual books.

Teacher observation and the developmental spelling inventory may also shed light on how students’ languages are influencing their spelling and word knowledge.

Four considerations...

Ways to approach your adaptations:
1. Compare oral languages: What languages do you hear among your students?
2. Compare writing systems: How do primary languages influence students’ word knowledge and spelling?

Four Considerations
3. Know what language and literacy experiences students have had:
   - Observe students’ vocabulary and syntax
   - What can they do in their home language?
   - Look at developmental spellings
   - What commonalities do you notice?
1. EXPLICIT AND SYSTEMATIC INSTRUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Word Study Applications</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modified Language</td>
<td>Vocabulary development is explicitly integrated into word study activities for English language learners. Students are encouraged to select out known from unknown words in the sorts they are doing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple to Complex</td>
<td>Students build on their growing orthographic knowledge through the developmental levels, from the simplest level of sound, through pattern, and then the complex meaning layer.</td>
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2. ENGAGING IN A LEARNING COMMUNITY

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<tr>
<td>Low Anxiety Environment</td>
<td>Games, songs and chants are integrated into word study activities. Sharing of thinking is encouraged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-to-Student Interactions</td>
<td>Word study provides numerous opportunities for student interactions such as sorting with a partner, playing games in a small group, going on a word hunt together, and brainstorming word derivations with others.</td>
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3. HIGHLIGHTING CONNECTIONS

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<tr>
<td>Personal Experiences</td>
<td>Investigating words of personal interest and meaning, using the names of children in class for letter and sound learning, and personal readers of favorite stories all help students build on their personal experience in word study activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background Knowledge</td>
<td>Word study builds on background knowledge when words and pictures for sorts are familiar to students, and are connected to vocabulary in their home language. Look for cognates between students’ first language and English, and compare word roots and affixes to those in students’ home languages.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Highlighting connections

Help students see relationships, and build on what they know.

Active construction of knowledge

Involves students with hands-on activities, purposeful tasks, and using their bodies and voices.

4. ACTIVE CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purposeful Activities</td>
<td>Write letters, cards and lists for families, friends and the community. Connect word study to lots of reading and writing of meaningful texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Physical Response</td>
<td>Word study may be expanded to involve physical actions such as people sorting, acting out spelling patterns with movements, or demonstrating word relationships through physical lineups.</td>
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The first principle of good teaching is... teach them to tell you where they are.
Lillian Katz

Best wishes in packing your suitcase to provide students with tailored, meaningful word learning!

Words
set us on journeys of ...
knowledge

exploration
career
enjoyment
understanding!