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What every kindergarten teacher should know about spelling

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What every kindergarten teacher should know about spelling

Abstract
The purpose of this article was to determine what research stated about writing and spelling instruction at the kindergarten level. I looked specifically at research concerning spelling and writing development in kindergarten children, the role of invented spelling, and the effects of instruction on spelling outcomes. This was done for the purpose of synthesizing the research in order to help teachers implement a developmentally appropriate spelling curriculum for kindergartners.
What Every Kindergarten Teacher Should Know About Spelling

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By
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The purpose of this article was to determine what research stated about writing and spelling instruction at the kindergarten level. I looked specifically at research concerning spelling and writing development in kindergarten children, the role of invented spelling, and the effects of instruction on spelling outcomes. This was done for the purpose of synthesizing the research in order to help teachers implement a developmentally appropriate spelling curriculum for kindergartners.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Article</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of the Article</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method to Write and Submit Article</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidelines</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval from Advisor</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gathering Data and Method to Discriminate</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Process</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE MANUSCRIPT</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling Development</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling Stages</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten Spellers</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Spelling Instruction in Kindergarten</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers as Active Participants in the Classroom</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction According to the Stages of Development</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating Phonemic Awareness Instruction</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1

Introduction

Kindergarten is an extremely important year of school. It is the foundation for a child’s future learning. Research has shown initial literacy (phonological awareness, letter naming, and letter sound knowledge) to be a significant predictor of reading and spelling outcomes (Walpole, Chow, & Justice, 2004). In the past few decades, there has been an enormous amount of research in the area of reading and pre-reading behaviors. This research has shown the importance of early reading acquisition and the consequences of failing to acquire early reading skills (National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Early writing and spelling skills are just beginning to garner the same attention. Dyson (1994) argued that “...a broader and more complex vision of written language and its development is critical if educators are to build on the resources of all our children” (p. 298).

Children come to kindergarten with varying levels of knowledge about print. Building this foundation of the forms and functions of print is critical for young children. The *alphabetic principle*—the intentional and conventional connections between alphabet letters and the sounds they represent (Foorman et al., 2003) is a fundamental learning that develops in children’s early years of instruction. It is the basis for any alphabetic writing system. Most kindergartners will learn the names of the letters, and the sounds that each letter represents. At the same time, children are learning about the sounds of language through *phonemic awareness* activities in nursery rhymes, word games, and songs. Phonemic awareness refers to the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in words (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001).
As children start to hear, identify, and manipulate sounds, they begin to be phonologically aware. Research revealed that phonemic awareness, particularly phoneme segmentation, strongly relates to reading and spelling ability (Ball & Blachman, 1991; Davidson & Jenkins, 2001; Nation & Hulme, 1997). Specifically, when phonemic awareness was systematically included in the curriculum (meaning in a planned manner) and the link to the alphabetic principle was explicit through instruction in letter-sound correspondences, student performance in spelling was at its highest (Foorman et al., 2003).

As teachers engaged children in shared, guided, and independent writing experiences, they have opportunities to attend to the features of print. These activities will help children to make connections between letter forms and the sounds they make, as well as clarify the difference between letters and words. Understanding the concept of a word is a central part of kindergarten literacy because it helps children move from recognizing individual symbols to understanding that print contains a message, for that is the point of reading and writing, to receive and convey messages.

Children need to interact with a rich variety of print (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC] & International Reading Association [IRA], 1996). Every writing task should allow children to connect what they already know about writing to a new discovery about print, and therefore, expand their growing knowledge base. To say that children only need to know how to see words, sound out words, copy words, or memorize words in order to be readers and writers is a gross simplification of the learning that children do (Clay, 1998). The process is much more complex. The same is true for the stages of development through which children progress while becoming writers. One would expect a sequential progression, moving from less mature to more mature writing forms, from scribbling, to letters, to invented spelling (a beginning writer's attempt to spell a word),
to conventional orthography (Sulzby, Barnhart, & Hieshima, 1989). This is not necessarily the case, especially when considering invented spelling, its place in writing development, and its effect on alphabetic reasoning.

"Invented spelling is a term that has come to describe early attempts at word writing before children are able to read" (Pelletier & Lasenby, 2007, p. 85). In essence, it is the spellings that learners use as they come to understand the relationship between oral and written language and how the spelling system works. Invented spelling is not a single developmental stage of writing but rather a part of many of the stages that children go through while becoming writers. Invented spellings are complex and vary in skill level from random strings of letters, or letter like forms, to good letter-sound correspondences (Pelletier & Lasenby, 2007). According to McBride-Chang (1998), invented spelling is highly associated with phonological skills. It is also a reliable predictor of standardized spelling and word and non-word decoding (McBride-Chang, 1998; Richgels, 1995). Therefore assessing a child’s spelling and writing abilities to determine the developmental level of each child is especially important in kindergarten because instruction needs to be adapted for individual differences. Certainly, it allows a teacher to implement spelling and writing instruction within a child’s zone of proximal development with documented ease.

**Rationale**

Most kindergarten children enter school with some oral and written communication skills. Yet, unlike speaking, reading and writing do not happen naturally, and the role of the adult (parent, teacher, etc.) in fostering the child’s literacy development is very important (Clay, 1991; Pelletier & Lasenby, 2007). Literacy skills are learned. How do children develop early literacy skills? Do teachers know the most effective ways to help their students develop these skills to become successful writers?
My research has indicated that many major publishing companies have spelling programs starting in first grade, not kindergarten. These companies do not address spelling curricula in kindergarten except to say that children should learn the letter names, their corresponding sounds, and be able to use those sounds to write some words. In my experience, however, school district administrators often expect kindergarten children to function at a much higher level in spelling and writing than suggested by the curriculum companies. Administrators expect kindergartners to be able to compose a simple message (two or three sentences) that is legible to the reader. Some districts have implemented assessments that require kindergarten children to write twenty to thirty words spelled correctly. There appears to be a huge disconnect between what teachers and districts are expecting in spelling and writing, and the curriculum provided to guide the instruction. Many kindergarten teachers implement spelling programs because it is what the district provides or requires, or they are teaching from their own beliefs about kindergarten spelling development. I believe it is time to consider what the research has to say about kindergarten spelling and writing development.

Purpose of this Article

The purpose of this article was to determine what research stated about writing and spelling instruction at the kindergarten level and share this information with kindergarten teachers. In preparing the article, I looked specifically at research concerning spelling and writing development of young children, the role of invented spelling, and the effects of instruction on spelling outcomes with the purpose of synthesizing the research in order to help teachers implement a developmentally appropriate spelling curriculum for kindergartners.
Research Questions

While trying to determine what constitutes developmentally appropriate practices in spelling and writing in kindergarten, I asked these questions:

- What are the characteristics of kindergarten spellers?
- What are the characteristics of a developmentally appropriate spelling curriculum for kindergarten?
- How do kindergarten teachers implement a developmentally appropriate spelling program?

Importance of Article

With the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2001) kindergarten teachers began to feel pressure about practices, student outcomes, and accountability. While many districts had standards in place, it was the benchmarks or expectations that began to change. Suddenly district officials and teachers expected kindergartners to read at higher levels, write more words, and have an increased understanding of how print works. Some districts gave kindergarten teachers a spelling curriculum originally designed for first grade. Districts gave kindergarten students writing assessments that looked at neither of the developmental levels of writing or spelling, but rather at the outcome product. Teachers are starting to look toward the research in writing and spelling to understand what should be included in a developmentally appropriate kindergarten spelling curriculum.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used frequently throughout this study and it is important that their meaning be both consistent and precise.
Alphabetic principle – “The alphabetic principle can be defined as the systematic use of alphabet letters to represent speech sounds (or phonemes) in a language” (Moats, 1998, p. 4).

Grapheme – “The smallest part of written language that represents a phoneme in the spelling of a word” (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001, p. 4).

Invented Spelling – “A term that has come to describe early attempts at word writing before children are able to read. Invented spellings vary in skill level from random strings of letters or letter-like forms, to good letter-sound correspondences” (Pelletier & Lasenby, 2007, p. 85).


Phoneme –“The smallest units of information transmitted in oral language” (Clay, 1998, p. 146).

Phoneme Blending – “Children listen to a sequence of separately spoken phonemes, and then combine the phonemes to form a word” (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001, p. 5).

Phoneme Segmentation- “Children break a word into its separate sounds, saying each sound as they tap or count it” (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001, p. 5).

Phonemic Awareness - “The ability to hear, identify, and manipulate the individual sounds – phonemes – in words” (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001, p. 4).

Phonological Awareness – “…refers to the ability to hear a broad range of sound components of speech, going beyond single phonemes to clusters of sounds or clusters of sound features” (Clay, 1998, p. 146).
Chapter 2

Methodology

This chapter will outline the methodology used to write my article. I discuss how I decided on a topic, the guidelines, and methods used in gathering research, how I decided what was to be included in the article, and the writing process that I followed. It is a brief look at the thinking and the process used to write the article.

Method to Write and Submit Article

My interest in kindergarten spelling started because I thought that the program my district provides is developmentally inappropriate for kindergartners. Our students struggle with the tasks that come with the spelling series and often become easily frustrated and distracted during spelling instruction. Although I could observe that frustration, in all honesty, I didn’t know what I should expect from our kindergarten students in regard to spelling proficiency. I needed to know not only what spelling skills were developmentally appropriate for kindergartners, but also how to help the students orchestrate this knowledge into something meaningful.

As I began to look at the research on kindergarten spelling I realized how little of it had been shared with teachers. With the implementation of Iowa’s Reading First Initiative and NCLB the state of Iowa provided much research about reading and early literacy skills, but virtually nothing on spelling or writing. If I was having these problems and questions about kindergarten spelling maybe other teachers were too. I decided that there may be an audience for an article that described kindergarten spellers and what might be included in a developmentally appropriate kindergarten spelling curriculum.
Guidelines

I selected peer-reviewed, published studies that specifically dealt with kindergarten spelling. I looked at studies that fell into three categories 1) spelling and writing development, 2) invented spelling, and 3) the effects of instruction on kindergarten spelling. I deliberately excluded studies that evaluated spelling or writing in any grade other than kindergarten.

My search for information also led me to two other outside resources: (a) *Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction* (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 1996), a text that is available in my district but has not been studied or used to its potential, and (b) *Helping Children Become Readers Through Writing: A Guide to Writing Workshop in Kindergarten* (Schulze, 2006), a text that is commonly referred to in research studies. These resources were particularly helpful in looking at how to take all the available research and translate it into a developmental spelling curriculum.

Approval from Advisor

Upon completion of Chapter 1, I received approval for this topic and format for my final research requirement. After making the suggested modifications, first and second readers approved the paper.

Gathering Data and Method to Discriminate

I searched for data-based studies that focused on kindergarten spelling and writing. I then generated a list of descriptors: spelling, spelling development, stages of spelling development, writing, stages of writing development, spelling abilities, invented spelling, and spelling instruction. I entered each descriptor into an electronic search engine. I searched the education data bases ERIC, PsycArticles, Education full text, psycINFO, and Wilson. To select relevant studies, I paired each descriptor with the word *kindergarten*; I set search limits
to identify only those studies in English and published after 1988 as a peer-reviewed journal article. I purposely extended my time frame because of the lack of writing research. Finally, I conducted a detailed search within the titles identified through the electronic search for appropriate studies that met my inclusion criteria.

*Writing Process*

As I began reading research studies about kindergarten spelling and writing development, I realized how little of the research had been passed on to teachers, as most of the information was new to me. I started to wonder how I might make the research available to kindergarten teachers in my district. My information would need to be concise, thought provoking, and probably most important, helpful to them, or they wouldn’t read it. Then again, the more I thought about my delivery the more I realized that teachers in other districts could benefit from this information as well. I decided a journal article was perhaps the best way to inform teachers about the research on kindergarten spelling and writing.

I then began to read professional journals that dealt with kindergarten and literacy development. I noted writing styles, topics covered, and links to active research in each journal. I wanted to write something that was teacher friendly, yet professional. Several journals required me to do actual research with students, and since I was not prepared to do this, I eliminated them as possible choices. In the end, I believe that *The Reading Teacher* would best match my objective as one of their main goals is applying research to classroom practice. The online website for *The Reading Teacher* provided me with the writing guidelines as well as directions for submitting my article.

*The Reading Teacher* is a peer-reviewed journal that provides research-based teaching ideas to literacy teachers. Their articles cover topics such as applying research to classroom practice, developing strategies to help struggling learners succeed, and using technology to
enhance literacy development. Manuscripts should be an appropriate blend of practical classroom application and solid theoretical framework.
Chapter 3

The Manuscript

One year while studying the district’s purchased spelling program, district administrators asked the literacy coaches in my district to cross out the title of section one, First Grade, and re-label it Kindergarten. The district has a separate spelling program for kindergarten through second grades; however, the purchased program does not actually cover kindergarten. My recent research has indicated that this is not so unusual; many major textbook publishers have spelling programs that start in first grade rather than kindergarten. These companies do not address kindergarten spelling curricula except to say children should learn letter names, their corresponding sounds, and be able to use those sounds to write some words. This does not seem to support the importance, or magnitude of the teaching and learning taking place in the kindergarten year.

Kindergarten, an extremely significant year of school, provides the foundation for children’s future learning. Children engage in early literacy skills such as phonological awareness, letter naming, and letter sound knowledge, which are significant predictors of reading and spelling outcomes (Walpole, Chow, & Justice, 2004). In the past few decades, research has proven the importance of early reading acquisition and the consequences of children failing to acquire early reading skills (National Reading Panel, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Early spelling and writing skills are just beginning to garner the same attention. Dyson (1994) argued that “…a broader and more complex vision of written language and its development is critical if educators are to build on the resources of all our children” (p. 298).

With the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 (NCLB), kindergarten teachers began to feel pressure about practices, student outcomes, and accountability. While
many districts had standards in place, it was the benchmarks or expectations that began to change. Teachers and districts suddenly expected kindergartners to read at higher levels, write more words using conventional spelling, and have an increased understanding of how print works; consequently, teachers gave writing assessments not based on the developmental levels of writing or spelling, but rather on the outcome products. Graham et al. (2008) stated “Because spelling is so important to young children’s literacy development, it is critical that spelling is taught effectively during the primary grades” (p. 798). Even so, many teachers simply implement their district spelling program without much thought on spelling development. How do children develop early writing skills and which skills are developmentally appropriate for kindergarteners? Do teachers know the most effective ways to help their students develop these skills to become successful writers?

This article focuses specifically on the research surrounding the early literacy skills involving writing and spelling in kindergarten, and the application of this research to writing and spelling instruction in kindergarten classrooms. First, I reviewed the alphabetic principle and briefly discuss invented spelling and what it actually means in an emergent literacy program. From there, I move to spelling development in young children, discussing the developmental stages of spelling. I purposely took some time to focus on the skills kindergartners’ exhibit as they move through the developmental spelling stages. Next, I addressed the effects of instruction on spelling outcomes, in particular, examining the effects of phonemic awareness instruction, and a contextualized instructional approach. Then I concluded with specific recommendations for classroom practice.

Spelling Development

Children come to kindergarten with varying levels of knowledge of print. Building upon this foundation of the forms and functions of print is critical. Kindergarten children draw
pictures, write, and spell in a way that makes sense to them. Children, then move over time, from writing in their own way to a more conventional way (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 1996; Calkins, 1994; Pelletier & Lasenby, 2007). They start to understand and apply the *alphabetic principle*. The alphabetic principle – the intentional and conventional connections between alphabet letters and the sounds they represent (Foorman et al., 2003) is a fundamental learning that develops in children’s early years of instruction. It is the basis for any alphabetic writing system. Most kindergartners will learn the names of the letters and the sounds that each letter represents during their kindergarten year.

Invented spelling is a term used to describe the attempts children use to write before they learn to read (Pelletier & Lasenby, 2007). These spellings can vary in skill level from a random string of letters, to good letter-sound correspondences. They make approximated efforts at spelling, and by engaging in the process of invented spelling children discover more about the relationship between letters and sounds (Sipe, 2001). “Students’ development in spelling reflects a growth in sophistication of knowledge about letters and sounds, letter patterns and syllable patterns, and how meaning is directly represented through spelling” (Bear & Templeton, 1998, p. 222).

Researchers believed spelling stages are developmental, if not necessarily hierarchical (Bus et al., 2001; Sulzby et al., 1989). There are stages and levels of development that children progress through with the determination of which skills to practice, at what pace, and for how long, based on each individual child. Consequently, many teachers have demonstrated a hands-off approach to invented spelling, thinking that children will discover it on their own. Marie Clay, who was perhaps the most vocal opponent of this approach, said “To relax and wait for ‘maturation’ when it is experience that is lacking would appear to be deliberately depriving the child of opportunities to learn” (Clay, 1991, p. 22).
The idea of emergent literacy represents a new way of thinking about the nature and importance of children's early literacy development by recognizing the literacy-related knowledge and behaviors that precede conventional literacy (Williams & Hufnagel, 2005). Literacy acquisition begins very early in life and is a life-long journey. This differs from the readiness perspective in which children needed to have a certain set of skills before they were taught to read, and should read before being taught to write. Advocates for emergent literacy believe that children explore, experiment, and actively engage in activities that help form their working concept of what print is. This is exactly what invented spelling represents. It isn't so much that invented spelling is one stage or level of spelling development but more the process that children go through while developing a working understanding of how to spell words while exploring and engaging in writing.

**Spelling Stages**

Spelling develops in stages when a knowledgeable teacher provides the opportunity to write as well as support for the children. According to Gentry (1982, 2005) there are five stages to developmental spelling: (a) Pre-communicative, (b) Semi-phonetic, (c) Phonetic, (d) Transitional, and (e) Conventional. Bear and Templeton (1998) and Bear, Templeton, Invernizzi, and Johnston (1996) agree with these stages, although they further delineate the Transitional stage by breaking it into two separate stages. The Gentry Writing Scale (Gentry, 2005) also includes a Non-alphabetic writing stage before the Pre-communicative stage. This is a stage often seen in kindergarten, and therefore, I will include it in my discussion of the spelling stages. For the purpose of this article, I will refer to the stages as listed by Gentry.

The *Non-alphabetic writing stage* refers to the symbol representation stage. Marks, scribbles, and pictures characterize writing. There are no letters used at this stage. The child
is unaware of how the alphabetic system works. Sulzby, Barnhart, and Hieshima (1989) reported that most kindergarten children in their study used drawing and scribbling at the beginning of the year.

In the **Pre-communicative stage**, the child has gained some knowledge of letters, often writing in a random string of letters without sound/letter correspondence. Neither the writer, nor others can read the writing during this stage. The use of phonemic awareness is not evident. While the child has gained some knowledge of letters, he/she still is unaware of how the system of print works. This stage was the second most common at the beginning of the kindergarten year (Sulzby et al., 1989).

The **Semi-phonetic spelling stage** is where the writer spells dominant sounds with letter/sound correspondence. Often a child will use only two or three letters to write a word, meaning that there is not a letter to represent every sound in a word. Children may even throw in random letters occasionally. They show some phonemic awareness. This stage symbolizes the beginning knowledge of the alphabetic principle, because the writer starts to connect the sounds within words to letters. Most kindergartners should be in this stage, if not beyond, by the end of kindergarten (Gentry, 2005).

In the next stage, **Phonetic spelling**, the writer uses a letter for each sound in a new word. Children’s writing represents almost all of the sounds, including vowels (although the vowels are often still misspelled). Children in this stage display full phonemic awareness. This stage is most associated with beginning reading and writing. Children are usually functioning in this stage by the end of kindergarten through the middle of their first grade year (Gentry, 2005).

The last stage begins by the end of first grade but extends well into second and third grades (Gentry, 2005). In the **Transitional spelling stage**, children spell about two-thirds of
written words correctly. Children begin to consolidate what they know about the alphabetic system. They apply more sophisticated phonics patterns in syllables and chunks. Although not every aspect of every word is correct, children move beyond one-to-one letter/sound matches in this stage.

Children in kindergarten typically exhibit the first three stages of spelling stages in their writings. Nonetheless, some children will achieve at greater levels and move through the stages faster than indicated. One would expect a sequential progression, from *less mature* to *more mature* writing forms, from scribbling to letters to invented spelling (a beginning writer’s attempt to spell a word) to conventional orthography (Sulzby et al., 1989). Nevertheless, the research done by Sulzby et al. does not support this developmental model. They found that kindergartners moved in and out of the stages depending on the writing task. To spell a word, children must know many things: letter names, how to figure out their sounds from their letter names, how to segment the spoken word into individual sounds, how to map a sequence of sounds onto a left-to-right sequence of letters, and how to form (write) those letters (Bear, et al., 1996; Uhry, 1999). Invented spelling is a complex skill and because of this, children often experiment with one or two pieces of the necessary knowledge while trying to get a better grasp on the others. Thus, children move backward and forward between stages of development. It is important that teachers understand that the movement between stages is normal and not unexpected.

*Kindergarten Spellers*

When children enter kindergarten, a large majority of the students may be at the nonalphabetic writing stage. These children do communicate through writing, just not in a conventional way. Often their drawings and scribbles show an advanced understanding of
written communication. Sulzby et al. stated that, “Children who write using scribble, drawing, or letter strings may, nonetheless, be quite advanced in literacy development” (p. 45). One little girl in my class years ago gave me a paper that had rows of wavy scribbles across it. She told me that she was “writing like mommy” – in cursive (S. J. Ball, personal communication, 1991). It is important at this stage that all attempts at written communication receive attention.

As children start to realize that print contains meaning and is a way to communicate, they begin to experiment with letters (the Pre-communicative stage). A typical characteristic of this stage is writing with only a handful of letters (often the letters in their name) and using them over and over. Children have a basic understanding of directionality (left-to-right progression) but abandon it quickly if something interferes (i.e., the edge of the page, end of a line, etc.). Kindergartners write using both upper and lowercase letters (Ritchey, 2008), but prefer uppercase letters at this stage. Children, at this stage, do not yet understand sound/letter correspondences. They may know several memorized words like mom or zoo, but that does not indicate an understanding of the alphabetic principle or even a connection between speech and writing (Schulze, 2006). It is important that we teach the letters of the alphabet and continue phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness is “The ability to hear, identify, and manipulate the individual sounds – phonemes – in words” (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001, p. 4). Armbruster et al. (2001) stated that children who have phonemic awareness skills are likely to have an easier time learning to read and spell than children who have few or none of these skills.

Phonemic awareness and phonological awareness are not the same things. As children start to hear, identify, and manipulate sounds, they begin to be phonologically aware: they identify and manipulate larger parts of spoken language, such as words, syllables, and onsets
and rimes, as well as phonemes. Phonological awareness has a shared role in both reading and spelling (Ritchey, 2008). The relationship between phonological awareness and spelling is supported by both correlational and intervention research (Ehri & Wilce, 1987; Stage & Wagner, 1992; Tangel & Blachman, 1992). Blachman, Tangle, Ball, Black and McGraw (1999) found that children instructed in phoneme awareness in kindergarten, followed by a first grade reading program that emphasized explicit, systematic instruction in the alphabetic code, scored significantly higher on spelling performances than children who were instructed in a basal program in first grade.

Phonemic awareness and phonological awareness are not to be confused with phonics. Both phonemic and phonological awareness relate to hearing the sounds of a spoken word and working with those sounds orally. Phonics instruction focuses on the relationship between the written letters and the individual spoken sounds (phonemes) or sound-symbol correspondence (Armbruster et al., 2001). Phonics requires representing the sounds in a word with the correct symbols (letters) or looking at letters and knowing which sounds they make. Bear et al. (1996) stated, "...the most teachers need to do with phonics during the pre-literate [pre-communicative] stage is to teach children to recognize and write the letters of the alphabet and to play with the sounds" (p. 19).

The Semi-phonetic stage is where teachers begin phonics instruction. The major accomplishment of this stage is the emergence of the alphabetic principle. For kindergartners, this means that they may use the beginning sound or a couple of dominant sounds to represent the whole word; usually these sounds are consonants. Kindergartners spelling at the Semi-phonetic stage are just beginning to understand the concept of a written word; that is, there are letters within a word, there are boundaries before and after a word, and that one spoken word represents one word in print (Clay, 2005). It may be due to a limited concept of
a word that kindergarten spellers often use only one letter to represent a word or run all the
words in a message together (%Ilkts-1 like toys).

When spellers at this level move beyond using just the dominant sound, they typically
represent a word’s sounds in this order: initial, then initial and ending, and occasionally the
middle sounds (Bear et al., 1996; Uhry, 1999). Vowels, especially short vowels, are difficult
developmentally for kindergartners. They don’t start to use them until well into the
kindergarten year and then most of the time incorrectly (Bear et al., 1996). Therefore, it is
often challenging for both the child and the teacher to read what the child writes at the Semi­
phonetic stage (Sulzby et al., 1989).

As kindergartners start to learn about the alphabetic principle they search for ways to
connect this new learning with something they already know. One way they do this is to use
a single letter to represent an entire word, for example c for see or u for you (Bear et al.,
1996; Schulze, 2006). They connect letter names to the new learning of letter sounds.

Another way kindergartners make this connection (between known and new) is by trying to
match, as closely as possible, the letter names to the dominant sounds they hear. Sometimes a
sound and the letter name match at the beginning of the name such as B /Bee/ and K /Kay/.
Some letter names match their sounds at the end of their names such as L /ell/ and F /eff/.
The consonants whose sounds don’t match their names at all are often the ones that children
confuse the most such as W (pronounced /double U/) and Y (pronounced /why/), which is
why teachers often see kindergartners write what as yut. Bear et al. (1996) call this strategy
the Letter-Name Strategy. This strategy is a great way for young writers to make that link
between known and new: it is useful and should be encouraged.

McBride-Chang (1999) and Treiman, Weatherston, and Berch (1994) found that the
linguistic features of letter names affected the learning of their corresponding sounds.
Children learned the letter sounds whose corresponding letter names started with a consonant-vowel (CV) sound the quickest (i.e. T /tee/, G /jee/). Letter sounds whose corresponding letter names started with vowel-consonant (VC) sounds (i.e. L /ell/, M /em/, S /es/) took longer for children to learn. Letter sounds that had no correlation to their corresponding letter names (i.e. Q /kwa/, W /double u/, H /ach/) were the most difficult for kindergartners to learn.

Ball and Blachman (1991) stated that once children can hear individual sounds in words and know most of the letter names, they will be able to relate sounds to letters and demonstrate knowledge of the alphabetic principle. “The movement from this stage to the next hinges on learning the alphabetic principle: letters represent sound, and words can be segmented into sounds” (Bear et al., 1996, p. 19).

Most kindergartners will move into the Phonetic stage by the end of the year. In this stage, children have a stronger concept of a word, usually representing most of the sounds they hear in a word and leaving spaces when writing (Bear et al., 2000). Thus, children’s writing is much easier to read. They expand their knowledge of the alphabetic principle and make use of articulation and sounds to spell. Kindergartners at this stage are literally spelling what they hear and each letter represents one sound. They begin to gain control over consonant blends (i.e., bl, st, and cr) and experiment with consonant digraphs (i.e., th, ch, sh, and wh). These writers include vowels although many vowel confusions still exist, especially regarding short vowels. Most young children experience some difficulty with short vowels because their sound does not map directly to their letter name. Usually by the middle of first grade, children are able to isolate the short vowel sound clearly enough to correlate the sound to a learned letter form. Yet, it is also during this stage that children rapidly expand their knowledge of known sight words. Typically, these words consist of a consonant-vowel-
consonant (CVC) pattern which in turn will help solidify the basic short vowel families (Bear & Templeton, 1998).

It is during this spelling stage that children usually are beginning to read (Bear et al., 1996). While they are reading words written in standard spelling, they may be using a phonetic or semi-phonetic way to spell. Kindergartners often fluctuate between Semi-phonetic and Phonetic spelling depending on the task and the level of risk they are willing to take. Children should read as much as possible so that they will see and start to recognize words spelled conventionally in their books. It is important that the link between reading and writing becomes clear because movement from the phonetic stage to the transitional stage centers on spelling words the way they look as well as how they sound (Bear et al., 1996; Schulze, 2006).

Many kindergartners will end the year in the phonetic stage of spelling when given daily opportunities to write. Some are still borderline Semi-phonetic/Phonetic spellers, and only a few will progress to the Transitional stage of spelling in which words start to look more like conventional English spelling. Children spell approximately two-thirds of words correctly at this stage. They represent bigger parts of words during this stage, using more complex letter patterns such as long vowel patterns and inflectional endings (i.e., ing, ed, s, and ‘s) (Bear & Templeton, 1998). Transitional spellers are beginning to put everything they know about words together to help them spell. They no longer rely just on their knowledge of sounds but now also use what they know about a word’s visual features and its meaning to spell new words. The majority of children in this stage are in the first through third grade.

In summary, Kindergartners begin the year with varying levels of spelling ability. Some may be using drawing and scribbles to communicate while others are already trying to use letters to record their messages. It is important for teachers to honor each developmental
level as children who are at lower levels are often very advanced in their understanding of how print works. Teachers who are observant will gather information about what their students know, and use that knowledge to help move them to the next developmental spelling stage. The assistance provided by the teacher in order to move children from one level of performance to a higher level of performance is known as scaffolding. Researchers have noted that kindergartners will move in and out of the spelling stages depending on the task and their level of risk taking. Bus et al. (2001) and Sulzby et al. (1989) stated that while children are trying to orchestrate their varying sources of knowledge about spelling they move back and forth between early spelling behaviors and more conventional spelling. At the end of kindergarten, most children will be Phonetic spellers, using all their knowledge about letter names and letter sounds to spell words. The Rubin and Eberhardt study (1996) showed that kindergarten children on average represented all of the phonemes in written words at the end of kindergarten. The children were able to analyze words into their phonemic segments, and to use their linguistic knowledge to retrieve logical, if not necessarily conventional, letter choices (Rubin & Eberhardt). McBride-Chang (1998) found that invented spelling was highly predictive of standardized spelling. Kindergartners who were strong inventive spellers also were better word readers (Richgels, 1995). Spelling plays an important role in literacy development and by fostering the skills needed to become strong inventive spellers teachers can help to build a solid foundation for both reading and writing.

**Recommendations for Spelling Instruction in Kindergarten**

In order for children to become better writers and spellers, they must have practice at writing. Gentry (2005) stated, “Writing may be the most important part of the kindergarten curriculum” (p. 122). It improves children’s letter knowledge, phonemic awareness skills,
and leads to success with reading (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Gentry recommended that kindergarten teachers set aside a block of time for writing every day.

Based on Vygotsky's theory of children as active learners (as cited in Clay, 2005), children need to have frequent opportunities to read, write, and engage in conversations. At the same time, they need instruction in spelling and the alphabetic principle. One component of the early literacy theory is that literacy develops from real situations in which reading and writing are embedded (Stellakis & Kondyli, 2004). New learning should take place in contextualized experiences of daily reading and writing activities.

**Teachers as Active Participants in the Classroom**

Knowledge of the spelling stages as well as detailed knowledge of children's strengths and weaknesses is necessary. Gentry (2005) indicated that teachers should provide developmentally appropriate instruction by taking children at their current level of functioning and using that knowledge as a basis for instruction. Clay (2005) shared that learning opportunities must draw from the strengths children already have demonstrated and relate to the new learning taking place. Teachers must base instruction on the developmental level and progress of each child.

Research emphasizes the role of the adult (parent, teacher, etc.) in assisting the child's literacy development rather than focusing on getting the right answer (Clay, 1991). The idea that children gain control over the conventional forms of literacy through gradual and successive approximations is one of the most important concepts in the emergent literacy model (Sipe, 2001). Clay (1998) stated, "Being sensitive to the learner's thinking allows the teacher to draw the child's attention to things over looked, to new aspects of the task, or to other possible interpretations" (p. 13). Errors are not bad things but rather evidence of the active process of meaning making and provide valuable insight to children's current theories.
of how spelling works (Clay, 1991). The teacher must recognize children’s strengths and relate that to their knowledge of the spelling stages in order to provide effective instruction for all students.

*Instruction According to the Stages of Development*

For kindergartners in the Non-alphabetic stage teachers should start by teaching the letter names, letter sounds, and how to print the letters. Teachers need to remember, children at this stage are just beginning to realize that print has meaning, so read to them, dictate stories for them, and call attention to letters, words, and their meanings. As often as possible, teachers should model writing so that children can see the link between meaning and print. This modeled writing also provides a chance to teach concepts about print: where to start writing, moving left to right, and return sweep (moving down to the next line and back to the left side). It is important that teachers acknowledge all attempts at written communication to build confidence so that children see themselves as writers. Phonemic awareness activities play an active role in their development at this time. Gentry (2005) advised teachers to pay close attention to the sequence of phonemic awareness instruction, taking into account developmental levels of functioning. He suggested that teachers begin with rhyming and then move on to focusing on units of sound within a word.

For children in the Pre-communicative stage, letter names and sounds are new information. Teachers need to take time to link instruction to something children know well. This is the time to solidify what letter-names and letter-sounds children know well, while at the same time introducing new letters. At this stage, personal names are very important: make links to their names, friends’ names, and even family members’ names. Now when writing, teachers should model the link between the articulated sound and the letter form that is written (Blachman et al., 1999). Activities like shared writing and interactive writing are
good ways to involve children in the writing process while scaffolding for each writer’s level of knowledge. In shared writing, the teacher acts as a scribe while the children help to compose the story/message. In interactive writing, the teacher and the children share the pen as they work together to construct the text. Teachers can have children write or contribute when it is appropriate. It is best to start with initial sounds when modeling for children or asking them to correlate the sounds they hear to a written letter (Gentry, 2005). Phonemic awareness is moving to matching initial sounds in words and then to more difficult tasks such as isolating sounds.

The Semi-phonetic stage is where children really start to understand that letters represent sounds. Teachers should encourage children to write what they hear, teaching them to connect each sound to a letter. It is imperative that the teacher pay close attention to what children produce in writing because this is what will guide instruction. Teachers must accept all partial representations of words but use them to determine what to teach so that the writing becomes closer to full alphabetic spelling. Introduce (reading) word families when children are hearing several sounds in a word and have some known sight words. Base the selection of which word family to teach on words the children know well. Usually the short a family is first (i.e., -at or -an) and once two word families with the same vowel have been studied, individually and at length, then children can start to compare and contrast words through word sorts. Continue to model writing through interactive writing or some type of scaffolded writing, calling for children to do more and more of the writing. Interactive writing is one place to firm up the concept of word boundaries and one-to-one correspondence. Phonemic awareness activities will focus on segmentation and isolation of individual sounds (Schulze, 2006).
By the end of the year, most kindergartners will be in the Phonetic stage. Remember to accept approximated spellings and use children’s writing as a guide for needed instruction. Instruction may need to be around chunks or larger letter patterns. Keep in mind that vowels can be tricky. Encourage the use of word families and the link to known words whenever possible. Children at this stage are beginning to read (Bear et al., 1996) and should have a lot of opportunities to read and write throughout the day. While kindergartners now can write their own stories and read them back, there are still many benefits to interactive writing. For the observant teacher, interactive writing can easily be the vehicle to meet the needs of any writer. Again, it allows for the teacher to scaffold instruction on an individual basis, calling for individuals to engage with skills that still need work. Phonemic awareness has shifted to phonological awareness and phonics instruction. Now it is time to teach the CVC spelling sound pattern and continue with word families until children are able to easily sort word families and are almost always spelling short vowels correctly. Some children are also ready for an introduction to inflectional endings (i.e., s, and ing).

While some children in kindergarten may move into the Transitional stage, most will not reach this stage until first grade. For teachers it is important to know the developmental stages and their characteristics well so that they do not have unrealistic expectations. NAEYC recently updated their belief statement about developmentally appropriate practices. One key message in the statement is the belief about curriculum content. “Effective, developmentally appropriate curriculum is based on what is known about the interrelationships and sequences of ideas, so that children’s later abilities and understandings can be built on those already acquired” (NAEYC, 2009, p. 2). Since the lack of spelling curricula for kindergarten is evident, this statement is particularly important for teachers.
Integrating Phonemic Awareness Instruction

Teachers know that phonemic awareness, when taught with letter-name and letter-sound instruction, can have a significant impact on early reading and spelling skills (Ball & Blachman, 1991; Blachman et al., 1999; Ehri & Wilce, 1987). According to the National Reading Panel (NRP) (2001) findings, children who received instruction in one or two phonemic awareness skills had stronger phonemic awareness and better transfer to reading and spelling. The more important question is which skills teachers should teach to children. For appropriate instruction, each child’s level of development is considered. The findings of Schatschneider, Francis, Foorman, Fletcher, and Mehta (1999) ranked the following phonemic awareness tasks from easy (1) to difficult (6):

1. First-sound comparison – identifying the names of pictures beginning with the same sound
2. Blending onset-rime units into real words
3. Blending phonemes into real words
4. Deleting a phoneme and saying the word that remains
5. Segmenting words into phonemes
6. Blending phonemes into non-words.

In addition to task difficulty, teachers should also consider the use of the skill when making instructional decisions. For example, if teachers want kindergartners to use more sounds when spelling words then teachers might teach phoneme segmentation, or if kindergartners are learning to decode words then they might teach phoneme blending. Teachers should not just randomly teach phonemic awareness skills but rather develop needed skills in a child’s literacy acquisition. The NRP (2001) found that phonemic awareness is more effective when teachers have children use letters to manipulate phonemes.
“The most important are activities where phonemes are blended and segmented in speech, then connected explicitly and systematically to graphemes in print, through phonics instruction” (Foorman et al., 2003, p. 317). In reference to spelling, researchers have found that segmentation had a significant effect on kindergarten spelling skills (Ball & Blachman, 1991; Davidson & Jenkins, 1994; Nation & Hulme, 1997; O'Connor & Jenkins, 1995).

Teachers cannot teach spelling in isolation. The skills involved in spelling should be an integral part of all aspects of the day, not just writing activities. Anytime the class is writing or reading, the teacher can introduce, practice, or reinforce spelling skills. The reciprocity between reading and spelling is evident. Ehri (1997) went so far as to say that reading and spelling were one and the same, almost. They both rely on knowledge of the alphabetic system, the same knowledge sources in memory, and knowledge about the specific spelling of words. While instruction needs to take place in both areas, teachers need to make the relationship between reading and spelling apparent. Teachers can weave knowledge of the alphabetic system into many authentic activities throughout the day.

Conclusion

It is easy to see why kindergarten plays such an important role in literacy development. The skills, strategies, and processes that are learned intertwine. It is essential that teachers create opportunities where speaking, reading, and writing occur for authentic and meaningful purposes (Stellakis & Kondyli, 2004). In order for children to become more efficient and proficient at writing, they must have countless opportunities to do just that – write. When looking specifically at spelling, instruction in phonemic awareness, letter/sound knowledge, and how to use the two together is essential. It is imperative that teachers take time to know the developmental spelling stages and assess where children operate within those levels. It is only from this knowledge that teachers can scaffold learning: linking known information to
the new and providing the needed amount of assistance to assure growth. The orchestration of all that a kindergartner needs to know in order to write (and spell) is a complex task. Teachers will need to be very knowledgeable about how children learn and develop, and then very intentional about what they do with that knowledge. Professional development may be necessary to update teachers on the latest research, and then teachers must work to put that information into practice.
Chapter 4

Conclusions and Recommendations

The purposes of this article were to determine what research stated about writing and spelling instruction at the kindergarten level and to share this information with kindergarten teachers. I looked specifically at research concerning spelling and writing development in young children, the role of phonemic awareness instruction, and the effects of instruction on spelling outcomes with the purpose of synthesizing the research in order to help teachers implement a developmentally appropriate spelling curriculum for kindergartners.

Conclusions

Children communicate through writing in many different ways throughout their kindergarten year of school. At the beginning of the year children may draw, scribble, or use random letters to write a message. The teacher must see all of these forms of communication as an important step in a child’s writing development. By the end of the kindergarten year of school, children may have started to use the alphabetic principle to write, using all their knowledge about letter names, letter forms, and letter sounds to write. It is important to note that children will move in and out of the developmental spelling stages, depending on the writing task and their willingness to take risks (Bus et al., 2001; Sulzby et al., 1989).

Phonemic awareness plays an important role in both spelling and reading development. Researchers have reported about phonemic awareness as a necessary step in learning to read for some time now (Ball & Blachman, 1991; Davidson & Jenkins, 1994; National Reading Panel, 2000; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). However, the evidence that phonemic awareness also plays a critical role in learning to spell has just recently gained attention. Once children are able to hear, identify, and manipulate the individual sounds (phonemes) in words, then they are ready to put a symbol with each sound. The teaching of the alphabetic principle is
much easier when children have an understanding of how the sounds in spoken words work (Ball & Blachman, 1991; Blachman et al., 1999; Foorman et al., 2003).

Teachers will need to assess children in their spelling development and then use that information to plan instruction. It is always important for teachers to know the strengths and weaknesses of their students. For kindergarten teachers it is essential to note all of the ways that a child is communicating through writing and to keep in mind that children who draw or scribble may still have advanced literacy knowledge (Sulzby et al., 1989). As active learners, children will seek to connect new learning to something that they already know or about which they already have schema, so the teacher’s understanding of what a child knows is critical in order to foster the link between known and new information.

Teachers need to know and understand the developmental levels of spelling well enough to know what to expect of their students and help scaffold their learning to a higher level. The orchestration of everything a kindergartner needs to know in order to write (and spell), is a complex task. Teachers will need to be very knowledgeable about how children learn and develop, individual strengths and weaknesses, and then being intentional about what they do with that knowledge (Clay, 1991, 2001). It is only from this knowledge that teachers can scaffold learning, that is, linking known information to the new and providing the needed amount of assistance to assure growth.

Research has indicated that explicit teaching of spelling (and phonological awareness) through a contextualized approach was highly effective (Craig, 2006; Lundstrom & Williams, 2007; Williams & Hufnagel, 2005). When teachers paired systematic phonological awareness instruction with word study, interactive writing, or shared writing, then kindergarten children attained higher levels of phonological awareness and spelling achievement.
Spelling instruction cannot be isolated from other literacy instruction. It needs to be included in daily writing practice. In order for children to improve their spelling and writing they must have practice at writing (Calkins, 1992; Clay, 2001; Schulze, 2006). Kindergarten teachers should set aside a block of time for writing every day, as well as embedding instruction into the context of daily reading and writing activities. Then, children will have the chance to work with spelling and writing skills multiple times throughout the day.

Identification and Synthesis of Insights

Upon completion of this journal article, several areas have stood out as new and important learning for me. I will discuss the following insights: (a) phonemic awareness as an important role in early education, (b) teachers’ knowledge of spelling stages and their characteristics, (c) the true identity of invented spelling, (d) movement within the spelling stages, and (e) the gap between research and practice.

Phonemic awareness is much more important than teachers have been led to believe or understand. Based on my experience, the education community shared research in regards to phonemic awareness and its effect on reading outcomes, although only portions of the research made its way to teachers. Conversely, very little of the link between phonemic awareness and spelling was mentioned to teachers. The State of Iowa, through the Reading First Program, shared with teachers that for kindergartners the most influential phonemic awareness tasks were rhyming, blending, and deletion. Yet, research showed that blending and segmentation are the two areas of phonemic awareness with the most influence on reading and spelling (Nation & Hulme, 1997; NRP, 2000). The state did not share research with teachers pertaining to instruction of phonemic awareness, and it became an isolated experience with only a handful of skilled teachers knowing how to make the link between instruction and children using it in practice.
Teachers need to know the stages of spelling development and understand them well enough to use the information to differentiate instruction. Spelling stages are not new. Richard Gentry revealed his stages in the early 1980s (Gentry, 1982), and yet most teachers do not know the stages and their characteristics well enough to have them help guide instruction. The revised statement on developmentally appropriate practice by NAEYC (2009) showed an emphasis on the understanding of children’s development in all areas. The stronger teachers’ understanding and knowledge base are in the area of spelling, the easier it will be to instruct and scaffold instruction to meet the needs of all learners.

My reading on the ideas of emergent literacy really helped me synthesize my understanding of invented spelling. Children explore, experiment, and actively engage in activities that help form their working concept of what print is. Inventing spelling is a complex task, and children often experiment with one or two pieces of the task while trying to gain a better understanding of all the things necessary to write a word. It isn’t so much that invented spelling is one stage or level of spelling development, but more of the process that children go through while developing a working understanding of how to spell words while exploring and engaging in writing. In the process of developing this understanding (and using invented spelling) children learn a great deal about the alphabetic principle which is applied in both spelling and reading. Research has shown that children who were good inventive spellers were better decoders and word learners (McBride-Chang, 1998; Richgels, 1995; Ritchey, 2007). As indicated earlier, Ehri (1997) stated that reading and spelling are the same, almost. Also, Ehri said that they both depend on the same knowledge sources in memory: knowledge about the alphabetic system, and knowledge about the spellings of specific words. Needless to say, invented spelling or the process by which a child develops an understanding of how to spell words should be encouraged.
Several research studies have shown that the developmental levels of spelling are not necessarily hierarchical (Bus et al., 2001; Sulzby et al., 1989). In order to be hierarchical, once a child has completed a developmental spelling level they would move on to the next level and would not usually go back to the older levels. This is not true in spelling development. In these research studies, children moved in and out of the spelling levels, depending on the task and their willingness to take risks. When a child attempts a new learning, they often forget or temporarily push aside a fragile piece of knowledge, so that they can concentrate fully on the new learning (Clay, 1991). The new learning takes precedence over the fragile knowledge. Part of the teacher's role then becomes about helping the child learn new things without losing the old. In a way, the teacher will help the child orchestrate all of the knowledge into something useful.

The educational community has a huge gap between research and practice. While there has been a lot of research conducted, barely any of the results have been read by teachers. With NCLB and the emphasis on scientifically based research, it seems that teachers would know and understand the implications of recent research. I don't find this to be the case in my district. Teachers wait to be informed and very few look for the information themselves. We seem to have passed the burden of reading and understanding research to textbook companies and the people who create curricula. Thus, teachers may just follow the leader without knowing if the research is being correctly interpreted or not. Somehow, higher learning institutions, state boards of education, and local districts need to facilitate the link between research and practice. Otherwise, the notion that teachers can raise levels of achievement and close the gap for children will be unsuccessful.
Recommendations

There are two things that need to happen in order for teachers to provide developmentally appropriate spelling instruction to kindergartners. The first is that teachers need professional development in the areas of current spelling research, spelling stages and characteristics, and strategies to teach the necessary components. The second is a review of existing kindergarten spelling curricula in use in school districts. Once teachers know and understand the current research they need to assess whether or not the curriculum is consistent with that research.

Professional development is an essential ingredient in appropriate spelling instruction. A systematic look at the different components of spelling research is a place to start. There is a lot of research, and by tackling one component at a time the task is feasible. Knowing the levels of spelling development will be vitally important, both in knowing the research and in further exploration of level characteristics and behaviors. Once teachers have a good understanding of what spelling development looks like then research of phonemic awareness, instructional models, methods of instruction, and specific teaching strategies can be further topics of exploration. Regardless of what teachers study first, they will need to continue to learn about spelling development.

As teachers gain knowledge about kindergarten spelling development then they can begin to transfer the new learning into instruction. A review of the existing kindergarten curricula may be in order. A good kindergarten spelling curriculum should incorporate the following guidelines:

1. All forms of writing should be encouraged during development. Emergent writing in the forms of drawing, scribbles, or random letters are part of a developmental stage and not a lack of skill. Children at these levels may still have an advanced amount of literacy knowledge.
2. Teachers should teach phonemic awareness as a part of the spelling program. Specifically, blending and segmenting skills are important. Teachers should provide the link between phonemic awareness and spelling in daily writing activities.

3. Teachers should teach letters and their corresponding sounds in a planned systematic way. Teachers ought to use research to guide which letters to teach first and then make the link to the sound explicit.

4. Teachers must remember to link new learning to something that a child already knows. The retrieval of new information and the retention of that information are greater when the link between known and new is made explicit. Explicitly linking the known to the new helps the child synthesize the new learning into useable information.

5. Teachers should use letters to represent sounds and help make the link between phonemic awareness and spoken words. Research indicates that when children manipulate the sounds with letters the connection between phonemic awareness is stronger and more effective (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osbourn, 2001; Foorman et al., 2003; NRP, 2000).

6. Teachers should teach larger word parts (phonological awareness). As children progress in development, it will be helpful for them to look at larger parts of words. Word families and inflectional endings are examples of larger parts of words to study. Teaching larger word parts, especially word families, will aid in the learning of vowel sounds.

7. Teachers must make sure children have a variety of opportunities to write every day. Spelling instruction cannot stand alone. Children need the opportunity to apply the
skills they are learning. Daily writing can take place in shared, interactive, guided, and independent writing activities.

8. Teachers should explicitly teach the link between reading and writing. Reading and writing are reciprocal processes. Teachers need to intentionally show children that what they know in one area can help them to learn something new in the other area. The two go hand-in-hand and should be taught that way.

*Future Writing/Research*

The next logical step would be to research methods of instruction. This article discusses what skills to teach; now, teachers need to know how to teach those skills. What are the most efficient and most productive ways to teach the skills mentioned in this article? This could mean a comparison of contextualized approaches or more research on specific programs developed especially for kindergarten. It might also mean a more detailed look at what the research says about instructional approaches like explicit instruction, or composing think-alouds in reference to writing achievement and the delivery of writing instruction. This topic might be more highly sought after due to the fact that teachers don’t always have a say in what they teach, but are often more in total control of the instructional strategies and methods they teach.

*Educational Practices of Myself and Others*

The research and writing of this article was very beneficial to my role as a literacy strategist. I now have a deeper understanding of the spelling stages and how children move amongst the stages. I also have an awareness of the research that supports key skills and elements of spelling achievement (phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, etc.). Both of these will benefit the teachers in my school. I started this research because the kindergarten teachers in my school were unhappy with our current spelling program. I can take the
information I have gained and share it with colleagues so that they are implementing a spelling program that is developmentally appropriate for their students. I also will share the article with my building and district administration. They are looking at new spelling programs this year and this information could be very helpful to the selection committee. Whether or not *The Reading Teacher* publishes the article, the process has taught me a lot about what a good spelling curriculum should include and the way children develop as spellers, and that is information I can share on a daily basis with those around me.
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