

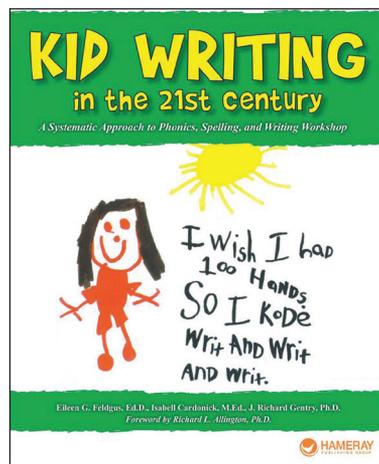
Write to Read

WHAT

In 1982, Marie Clay, the world-renowned expert in developmental and clinical child psychology who founded Reading Recovery, issued a call for educators to find the writing connection in learning to read (Clay, 1982). Ouellette and Sénéchal have mapped out the way. It turns out that allowing and encouraging children’s early “invented spelling” is the key.

WHY

Before children become conventional readers and spellers at the very beginning of learning to read—often in preschool, kindergarten, or the beginning of first grade—they use self-directed and spontaneous attempts to represent words in print. If teachers and parents engage beginners in pencil and paper activity by having them draw their picture and write their story or information, beginners will naturally over time “invent” spellings. The emerging spellings demonstrate what the child knows about the sounds in words, along with how he or she thinks letters represent these sounds. As Richard Gentry has written before, one can literally “see” the child’s development—that is, monitor the child’s progress in the process of breaking the complex English code—by looking at his or her spelling (Gentry, 2006, 2000). What researchers, including Gentry, and exemplary teachers have found over the last 30+ years of research and practice is that the act of inventing a spelling greatly increases the child’s understanding of sound/letter relationships and the role they play in written language and reading. (To learn more, see Feldgus, E., Cardonick, I. & Gentry, R. (2017). *Kid Writing in the 21st Century: A Systematic Approach to Phonics, Spelling, and Writing Workshop*. San Diego, CA: Hameray.)



* HOW

When inventing a spelling, the child is engaged in mental reflection and practice with words, not just memorizing. This strategy strengthens neuronal pathways, so as the reader/writer becomes more sophisticated with invented spelling, he or she develops a repertoire of more and more correctly spelled words at the same time. These words are stored in the word form area of the brain where the child can retrieve them automatically as sight words for reading and eventually as correctly spelled words for writing.

By J. Richard Gentry, Ph.D., author, researcher, and educational consultant known for his groundbreaking work on topics such as early literacy; best practices for reading, writing, and spelling; and dyslexia.



To learn more:

- Gentry, J. R. (2008). *Step-by-Step Assessment Guide to Code Breaking*. New York: Scholastic.
- Feldgus, E., Cardonick, I. and Gentry, R. (2017). *Kid Writing in the 21st Century*. Los Angeles: Hameray.