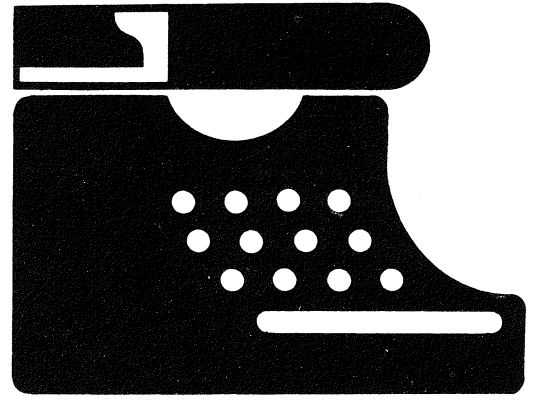


Teachers & Writers



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Special Issue!

THE CREATIVE USE OF MISTAKES

Invented Spelling

by David Armington

FROM HER EARLIEST DAYS AS A TEACHER OF young children Jeanette Amidon has run an informal primary classroom based on well-established principles of child growth and development. At the core of these principles is the idea that the human animal learns because it's built for learning: that the urge to learn and the capacity to learn are inherent in children, and that they function best in a stimulating environment. Jeanette believes, as do many early childhood educators, that the powers children bring with them to school are already well developed, as evidenced by the learning that normally occurs during the first five years of life. (Consider the intellectual feat of learning one's native language. Chinese infants even learn to speak Chinese—incredible!) Therefore,

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the challenge to teachers, primary school teachers in particular, is not to impart intellectual powers to children, but to sustain and nourish the powers that children already have. In her teaching, Jeanette has always taken seriously the idea that children's developing powers, so evident in pre-school years, can and should be brought to bear on all kinds of learning, including the learning of basic literacy skills. So for many years she has used children's writing as a way of helping them into reading, because it's a natural way for them to learn.

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Until seven years ago Jeanette had encouraged her children to draw and write from their own experience, using whatever words the experience called for. There was no “controlled vocabulary” to restrict expression. If children wanted to write a word they didn’t know how to spell (which was often), they would try to find the correct spelling—by consulting one of the many word charts available in the room, or by looking in their personal “dictionaries,” or by asking Jeanette or any available adult. Gradually many children built up a vocabulary of words they knew how to spell, thus becoming less dependent on these outside resources. Still, Jeanette thought that the children’s insistence on correct spelling had restricting effects: their drawing tended to be restricted by what they knew they could write, and their writing to be restricted by what they knew they could spell.

Seven years ago Jeanette discovered a different way of thinking about the spelling “problem,” a way that has effectively removed these restrictions and, in the process, has widened her children’s opportunities for using their natural powers in acquiring the skills of literacy. The result is that her children have been doing more drawing and writing than ever before, doing it more imaginatively, independently, and enjoyably. Now, more than ever, her children’s writing has become their natural way into reading. Perhaps a brief historical detour would be in order here, to explain this discovery and how it came about.

In the autumn of 1976 my wife Rosemary invited Jeanette and me to her graduate seminar in the Early Childhood Program at the University of New Hampshire. At this seminar one of the students, Debra Cheney, presented some of the writing that her kindergarten children were doing, writing that showed the children’s “invented spelling.” Debra had heard Carol Chomsky, the linguist, speak about “invented spelling” at a conference and had read several of Carol’s articles on this subject (such as “Write First, Read Later” in *Childhood Education*, March 1971 issue). After the meeting Debra showed me these articles, and several days later I visited her class.

On that day Debra’s five-year-olds spent most of their morning working informally, a great many different activities going on, Debra fitting in here and there whenever she was needed. I became particularly interested in three little girls who were sitting around a table cutting pictures from a catalog, pictures they then pasted onto blank sheets of paper. After each pasting the student would pick up a pencil and make as if to scribble a label next to the picture. Although the child knew the word she wanted to write, she did not know how to spell it. So these children were trying to figure out spellings; they were *inventing* them. As I watched from across the room, I could see that this was a very engrossing, introspective, and, at the same time, a very social process. It went on for at least forty-five minutes, during which time Debra and I intentionally stayed away. Later in the morning the children showed us the pictures and read the labels. Here are four of the labels, together with the children’s “translations.”

JLE—Jewelry FSPL—Fishing Pole
BK—Bike BT—Boat

In many classrooms over the years I had watched children struggling to *remember* how to spell certain words, a struggle that would generally lead to asking the teacher, or making wild guesses, or giving up. But Debra’s children were not struggling to remember correct spellings. They were struggling to figure out ways to write certain words by putting ex-

isting information to use. They were using their inner resources to solve present problems. So there was a thinking process going on, a process far more complex than an effort simply to remember correct spellings.

A week later Jeanette, who had also been intrigued by Debra’s presentation, decided to encourage invented spelling in her classroom, as a stimulus to her children’s writing. “It is,” she said, “a little experiment.” Later in the year she attended the Early Childhood Conference in Durham, New Hampshire, at which Debra made another presentation of invented spelling, a talk that included a videotape of the children writing in her classroom. Afterwards Jeanette invited Debra to repeat this presentation at her school. Carol Chomsky also agreed to participate. By this time Jeanette had had enough experience to be convinced that the approach was worth sharing with her children’s parents, the school faculty, and other professional colleagues. It was the naturalness of the approach that appealed to her—giving children a chance to develop the basic coordinations of writing and reading before being burdened by the complexities of English spelling.

Since that important decision, writing has bloomed as never before in Jeanette’s classroom. It’s as though the children have discovered yet another medium through which to release and express their creative energies. Here is an example, a story written by John, which originally appeared in book form—one sentence on each page, and a drawing to go with each sentence. (The reader will no doubt be grateful for the translation.)

The Year Without a Santa Claus by John

I the ks yt md if	I think the kids won’t mind if
I ks krisms	I cancel Christmas.
No toes	No toys!
Sad ksd krisms	Santa cancelled Christmas.
The kes w sid	The kids were sad.
It ys nst krs	It is next Christmas.
Mi stokn	My stocking!
kok Dsn NKN NGB	Calling Dasher and Comet and Cupid.
M ksms	Merry Christmas.
I love ksms	I love Christmas.
Y ds it h to snow it Kms	Why does it have to snow at Christmas?
Y is gen n rid the kol	Why is green and red
kms	the color of Christmas?
is the s the	Is there such a thing
is fin rds	as flying reindeer?

To those of us who learned to read and spell years ago, such invented spelling can seem not only confusing but irksome. It can be hard for us to understand what the child is doing, and whether it’s really worth doing. We need to try to get inside the young child’s head. One way to do this is to recognize that once we know how to spell a word, “Christmas” for example, it’s hard for us to think about the sound of that word without also thinking about the look of it. But the children don’t know the look of it; they know only the sound. I find that if I close my eyes and say the word “Christmas,” trying hard not to see it, I can more easily imagine what the children are struggling with, more easily understand their spellings, and begin to understand the importance of what they are doing with invented spelling.

An example may be useful. In John's story, *The Year Without a Santa Claus*, John opened by having Santa say:

I thk the ks yt md if I lks Krismas
I think the kids won't mind if I cancel Christmas.

When John wrote this line, he seemed to know:

- that his spoken words can be written down
- that words can be broken down into separate sounds that come in a particular order
- that the written “squiggles” (letters) do not represent whole words but the component sounds of words
- that the letters are written horizontally from left to right, in an order corresponding to the order in which he hears himself saying the sounds
- that spaces between clusters of letters show where words end and begin.

John was using his knowledge of these general truths about the nature of written English, and in particular he was revealing his developing ability to separate words into their component sounds. He seemed far more aware of consonant sounds than of vowel sounds, especially initial and final consonants. He seemed to be hearing the order of the consonants correctly, even though he left some of them out (the D in KIDS, for example). Interestingly, he omitted the N in several words: THINK, WON'T, and MIND. Omission is frequent among invented spellers. In speech children hear the difference between BED and BEND, BET and BENT, THICK and THINK, but they write down only what they consider worthy of representation as separate sounds. With respect to his spelling of WON'T (YT) we can guess that John was hearing the initial W sound but hooked it up with the letter Y—probably because he heard the W sound when he said the *name* of the letter Y. (Discovering the difference between letter *names* and letter *sounds* is something that occurs gradually.) It seems pretty clear that visual memory must have given John the correct spelling of one word—THE—which he couldn't possibly have spelled correctly by sounding it out. He may have known the correct spelling of I, which happens to coincide with the name of the letter. He probably sounded out the IF and luckily got it correct—we do spell it IF, not IPH or IFF!

Not surprisingly John's Santa Claus story appeared in December. In April the 101 Press (the classroom newspaper) published another of his stories, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. The opening pages of the original text reveal John's expanding awareness of sounds and his progress in word-building skills.

One dae wrkt and wrkt a littl grl.
One day worked and worked a little girl.
One day the gene sad mor mor on the wol.
One day the queen said mirror mirror on the wall.
One day the littl gerl wint out side.
One day the little girl went outside.
She ran thro the woz.
She ran through the woods.

It is a big jump from YT (WON'T) written in December to WRKT (WORKED) written in April. John heard all of the consonant sounds in WORKED, and he had begun using W (for its sound) instead of Y (for its name), an insight that he also applied to WOL, WINT, and WOZ. We can see how he

was sneaking up on correct spelling by developing his auditory sense. But that's not all. He was also sneaking up on correct spelling by using his visual memory—as in ONE, DAY (which replaced DAE), OUT, SIDE, QENE, and LITTL.

How did this progress occur? Impossible to say, exactly. What we can say is that it did *not* occur as a result of workbook exercises and drills, or of lessons and assignments in writing. We can also say that between December and April John was beginning to read, mostly his own stories and his classmates' stories, edited to correct spelling by the teacher, and published in booklet form by the classroom “press.” During these months he was enjoying extensive exposure to written language, within the context of an informal classroom that afforded all children the time, incentive, and pressure-free opportunity to engage in a variety of expressive activities, including, of course, talking, drawing, and writing. Invented spelling made a significant contribution to this environment, an environment of learning through experience, not through exercises. This process involves mental “inventions,” the visible part being what appears on paper.

“Invented spelling” is the technical term used to describe young children's efforts to write words from their own speech before they have learned the correct spellings of the words. It's the process that goes on in the children's heads when they listen to the sounds in the words and then write whatever graphic symbols they know, or can contrive, to represent those sounds.

I must admit that this “definition” is a bit too pure to account for the range of curiosities that occur when children cut loose with stories in invented spelling. To solve their spelling problems children seem to draw clues from many sources, some traceable, some not. Still, there are general patterns of linguistic development in children's inventions, patterns that suggest persistent inquiry, experimentation, and growth. The following samples of writing illustrate some of these patterns, as well as features more personal and idiosyncratic. The reader should bear in mind that these stories were originally written in book form, generally with one sentence to a page, usually an illustration on each page. You might enjoy the challenge of trying to decipher a child's invented spellings, *before* looking at the translation, but I hope you will not become so engrossed in code-cracking that you fail to notice what the children are writing about.

There is a general pattern of development that can be seen in children's early writing when they are encouraged to spell words the way they sound. At first, many children hear just consonant sounds, maybe only the first consonant of the word or syllable. Even at this early stage some children pick up the correct spelling of common words such as “the.”

S N THE F HS — Snoopy in the firehouse
Gradually they become aware of more consonant sounds, at the ends of words and in the middle.
1 OF THE HIKE One of the hockey
PLR GT HRT players got hurt.

For many children awareness of vowel sounds comes still later, and the long vowels seem easier to hear than the short ones.

HAY R SAL THE BOT—They are sailing the boat.
HAY R AT THE BECH—They are at the beach.
Gradually children's ears become sensitive to the flow of

sounds, and their spelling moves closer to standard forms.

If you life in Japn you slep on the flor and you eat on the flor too.

In their early writing children often seem to be using information from several sources:

- Auditory (the sounds they hear in the words, combined with the graphics they know for representing those sounds);
- Visual (their memory—often garbled or inexact—of spellings they may have seen);
- Copying (the immediately available correct spelling of a word).

Often it's impossible to be sure which of these sources a child used in arriving at a particular spelling. Douglas' story below seems to me an interesting mix of these three sources.

Krismis is soonu
Krimis is 3 weiks away
It is Christmas
Christmas is over
We are playing
We haftr to go in
We haftr to go to skool
On aer way we sor roodoof
He was sad
We made roodoof happy
Roodoof went with us
Merrey Krimis
The End

In the earlier stages the teacher will often need the children to translate their own messages—right away, as the children may forget what they wrote. Even Jeanette with all her experience cannot understand everything children write! In an informal classroom not all children are writing at the same time, so Jeanette can reach the children as they work. Imagine formalizing this activity and having thirty stories written all at the same time and handed in for translation. Impossible!

Police by Marty

Pg. 1 ETHEI R WZ RBR I GD The RW	There was a robbery. I got the robber.
Pg. 2 WE T The RB BK TO PE S	We took the robber back to the police station.
Pg. 3 DN SR N The PE	Down in the cellar in the police station.
Pg. 4 The GR of the PL SN AZ HS ADT CS	The garage of the police station has horses and cars.
Pg. 5 E THEIR WZ ANR HRB I c the RB the ND	There was another robbery. I caught the robber. The end.

Simon was just beginning to hear sounds in sequence. On page 4 he gave up the effort of completing his sentence, but when reading it later, he remembered what he had intended to say. On page 6 he could not remember his fourth word and said, "I think it's *presents*," but Jeanette thinks he probably had a different word in mind when he was writing.

The Hanukkah Book by Simon

Pg. 1 Thes is the Hineion Bioo	This is the Hanukkah Book.
Pg. 2 Tom to gat the tose	Time to get the toys.
Pg. 3 I men oping the pszts	I am opening the presents.
Pg. 4 Mi bis r maet kis. . . .	My brothers are mad because they didn't get toys.
Pg. 5 Ase got birk	They got bikes.
Pg. 6 I got to sas	I got two presents.

Here's invented spelling combined with correct. Luke was using words he recognized in his classroom. He found "morning" on a songsheet entitled "Morning Has Broken." "Making" was on a sign in the block area.

Christmas by Luke

Stmtas Morning	Christmas morning.
It is Stmtas Morning	It is Christmas morning.
We are paeoling weri ri tioes	We are playing with our toys.
The ls r making bug cende kanz	The elves are making big candy canes.

Children in the process of composing have many things to think about, and so they often do not spell inventively as well as they could if constrained to give spelling their full attention. Sometimes children become so absorbed in what they want to write that their spellings "trip out" almost like shorthand. To illustrate this point for me Jeanette one day asked Jerry to rewrite the text of his *Animal Wish Book*, making any improvements in the spelling he could. Here is a portion of Jerry's original text, then his improvements, then the translation.

THE ANAR WH BOOK

1. WT WD LALAFT WH FOR i NO MR GS
2. WT WD A FTH W FOR THE HL WID TO BE OHN
3. HM TING!!! CA YOU WH FRO

THE ANDIMLE WISH BOOK

1. WAT WAD A LAFNT WISH FOR I ON MR GRAS
2. WAT WAD A FISH WISH FOR THE HL WORLD TO BE OTH
3. HAOO MNE TING CAN YOU WISH FOR

The Animal Wish Book

1. What would an elephant wish for? I know, more grass.
2. What would a fish wish for? The whole world to be ocean.
3. How many things can you wish for?

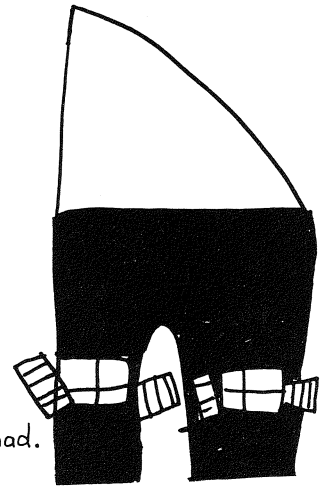
In order to begin to write by spelling inventively children must be able to recognize on a conscious level that a word consists of separate sounds that can be graphically represented, and must have some ability to segment the word into its component sounds. This analytic ability involves making judgments about words and sounds, not just "knowing" them as isolated units acquired by rote. Jeanette emphasizes the informal ways that young children acquire these abilities: through the enjoyment of talking, playing with words and sounds, listening to stories, playing alphabet games, responding to rhymes, and, of course, telling and writing stories. En-

The Pumpkin Book

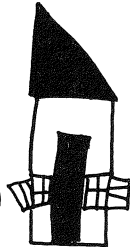
Written and Illustrated
by Chris

Edited by Jeanette
Amidon

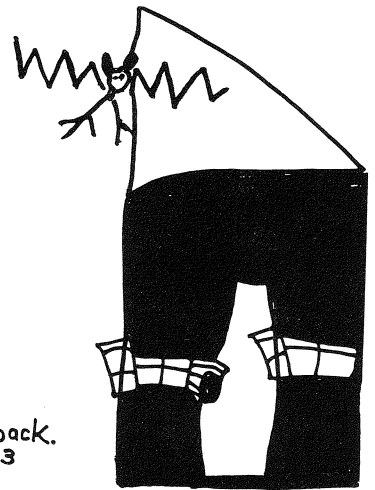
Published by the 101 Press
October, 1978



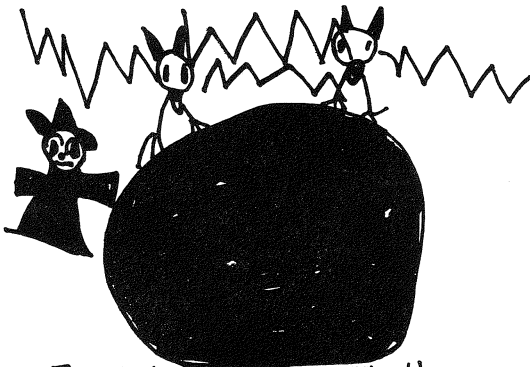
The witch is mad.
1



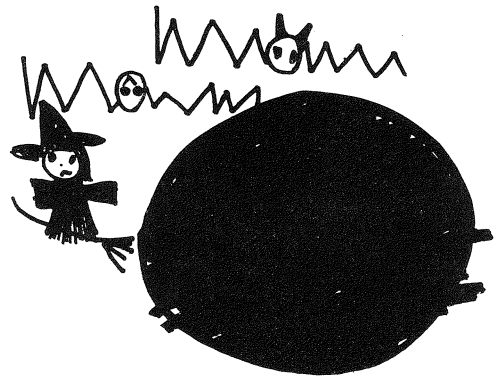
The witch is mad because Halloween
is over.
2



Halloween is back.
3



In nineteen seventy-eight the scary
things took over the world.
4



The scary things turned the world
inside out.
5

About the Author

"I like games," says Chris.
"I like playing soccer. I like
school. I like my teacher."

Chris is 6 years old. He
has two sisters.

This is his first book to be
published by the 101 Press.

Original Text

TH PTCN BRC

- 1 THE WCH AS MD
- 2 TH W MD BCS HOWN AS OOFR
- 3 HOAN AS BAC
- 4 AN NT SDE AT TH SCRE VINGS TC
(19 78)
OVR TH WRD
- 5 TH S FING T F WRD ANSDIT

joyment seems to be the key. If children enjoy language, they're likely to go on learning more about it and how to use it.

The Book a Bot Rooddof The Red Noas Radr
by Joanie

Mommy I dont wont this noas	"Mommy, I don't want this nose!"
Fathr Rooddof dusit like his noas	"Father, Rudolph doesn't like his nose."
I doo no wut too doo	"I don't know what to do!"
Fathr poot on a blak noas	Father put on a black nose.
I don't want this noas	"I don't want this nose!"
Thay wit to a radr game	They went to a reindeer game.
His noas fall off and thay did not lat him play	His nose fell off and they did not let him play.
He ran away	He ran away.
He cam bak. Tay all wr hppee	He came back. They all were happy!
The end	The end

A Book About Cats by Sally

Cats dringk all the time. Thea bont stop.	Cats drink all the time. They don't stop.
Thea allso plye with sring-loots.	They also play with string—lots!
Thea allso sleep on the rateeatr mor thne thea shood too.	They also sleep on the radiator more than they should too.
Well thea bont boothr you for a sekint bot afr thea tak ovre the holl hous.	Well, they don't bother you for a second, but after, they take over the whole house!
I allmost forgot its my brthday. I hope I get a cat. I bib! I bib!	I almost forgot! It's my birthday! I hope I get a cat. I did! I did!
I have to feeb my new cat. Here is yore lunch	I have to feed my new cat. Here is your lunch.
Theats wots a matr with thom. Thea have babys	That's what's the matter with them. They have babies.
I ket ondrsed it. Cats have babys all the time. I ges all have to keep them	I can't understand it. Cats have babies all the time. I guess I'll have to keep them.
Lets go for a wok cats. The end.	Let's go for a walk, cats. The end.

The first part of *When I Was Little* by Pamela

I had a Wonnerful House. I Loved it. Me—my sister Hoos Name was Ellen Had our own Bedrooms. It was so Buettful. One night my momy and Dady Desided they were going to get a Divorse. A divorse is what you get wen your momy-Dady get mod. One of them stays in the old House the other Mooves. When I got my Divorse Me and Ellen swich Houses. On school days we are at Moms On weekends we are AT Dads. Both houses were Buetiful. But Both Me and Ellen like the House ware Both our parints Lived at the same time together. That Hous was in the woods. Me and Ellen would. . . .

When the spelling hurdle is removed, writing can become an important medium for children's expression of some of their deepest thoughts and feelings.

A note to a friend:

To Sally
Do you like Pupcin* Sally Wall last night at 8:30
Pupkin got hit By my bad and mom hee got hit by
a car We are sad
and it is true

form Jennifer

*Pumpkin, Jennifer's cat

From *The Pain Book!!!* by Billy

Yasterdae I wet to the datisst. It wus prite mush pane	Yesterday I went to the dentist. It was pretty much pain!
The dae bfor I wit to the datisst I wat to the doters.	The day before I went to the dentist I went to the doctors.
He gave me a shot It wus pane	He gave me a shot. It was pain!
The dae bfore I wet to the doter I sprade my akl on on the stip It is pane	The day before I went to the doctor I sprained my ankle on the step. It is pain!
Sumtimse Miss Amidon gets pane in hier eas—gets pane ril pane. The chigrin do it	Sometimes Mrs. Amidon gets pain in her ears—gets pain, real pain. The children do it!

When Billy wrote this book, his father, dying of cancer, was in great pain. For the "author page" of his book Billy dictated what he wanted said: "I wrote this book because I think a lot of people have a lot of pain—and that's the truth." Billy's acceptance of his father's death was partly his seeing it as a release from pain.

There are three things in general that excite me about the children's work. The first is its naturalness and authenticity, qualities of good writing by writers of any age. Jeanette's children write (and draw) about things that matter to them, and they are doing this honestly and without pretence. It's as though the children are saying, "Here I am, this is what's on my mind." They must feel this way in her classroom because they know that she respects what's on their minds and is prepared to take their concerns seriously. Her interest in them as individuals takes priority over her interest in them as readers, spellers, handwriters, or mathematicians. She manages to keep her human agenda in the front of her mind and her teacher agenda in the back, an admirable accomplishment in today's world of pressures to get children to produce measurable performance in "the basics."

The second thing that excites me about the children's work is its intellectual quality. Here is a list of things that seemed to be going on in the children's heads as evidenced by their books.

1. Exploring personal feelings—joy, worry, anger, loneliness, jealousy, fear, love, grief
2. Exploring nature
3. Exploring adult roles
4. Exploring how things work
5. Telling how to do something or how to make something

(Continued on p. 8)

Questions Teachers and Parents Ask

MANY TEACHERS AND PARENTS ARE UNCOMFORTABLE with the idea of encouraging children to spell inventively. Here are answers to their questions about this approach that is so different from traditional classroom practice.

Won't children get the wrong idea about spelling if we encourage them to be inventive with it? After all, a word is either correctly spelled, or it's not.

Invented spelling is not creative spelling. It doesn't specifically encourage creativity, as in art or movement or music. It encourages the child to listen to the sounds he hears when he says a word, and to write symbols representing those sounds. He is working on his own awareness. An important feature of a child's writing "inventions" is the way they evolve toward correctness as he becomes more aware of sounds and spellings and the formation of letters. But the evolution rarely proceeds in a straight line. In a child's early writing we can observe a good deal of to-ing and fro-ing, fading in and fading out, as the child uses information and skills not yet firmly under control. It is not unusual for him to misspell the same word two or three different ways in the same story, for example, or to form the same letter two or three different ways. We need to bear in mind that when everything is new, and when nothing has become automatic, there is a lot for a child to think about all at once. Some adults worry about a child's inconsistencies and "reversals," but these are perfectly normal and will gradually fade—if the child is given full opportunity to work on his own awareness and sort out what he needs to know. The danger is in pushing a child, or making him feel a failure, or, worse yet, classifying him as a misfit or "problem." Such treatment makes him anxious, and anxiety, more than anything else, walls him off from that vital contact with his own awareness.

Aren't children learning incorrect spellings that will have to be unlearned later?

The children are under no illusions about correctness. They know they're not spelling the way adults do. They see correct spellings all around the room, and their own books are edited (by adults) into correct spelling before they are published—but with the original spellings included at the back of each book. As children master the basic coordinations and become more confident in their word-building skill, they become more interested in correct spellings. Then is the time to introduce various games and activities that help develop the visual memory that is so important in correct spelling. Such activities are available in this classroom, and many children begin to find them interesting, particularly toward the end of the first grade year, when their reading skills are more fully developed. A child's invented spelling gives us a window on his awareness; he is giving us some visible signals of what is going on in his head. In the early stages it is not correctness that is important to the teacher but a child's progress towards

correctness. A child who writes SANA IS SIK (Santa is sick) is further along than a child who writes ST Z SK, and that child is further along than one who writes S K. What a child knows and can do is just as important, indeed more important, to the teacher than what he doesn't know and can't do. When we encourage a child to spell words the way they sound to him, we encourage him to open that window. The alternative is to keep the window shut, by not encouraging children to write and by insisting on correctness—which is what happens in many classrooms.

But for years children have been learning without benefit of invented spelling, haven't they?

Most children pick up these vital coordinations (the ability to read and write unfamiliar words by sounding them out) from traditional methods of instruction where correctness is emphasized from the beginning. But many children do not, and they become casualties—our remedial readers, "language disability" cases, and functional illiterates. We have other casualties too—the children who are turned off school because their schooling has been little more than a succession of skill exercises divorced from life and experience. Skills are seldom well learned apart from situations that require their use. Most of us learn best by doing, and in the process our minds are exercised and expanded. And what's more, like Jeanette's children, we find joy in the doing.

Aren't there more direct ways of helping children learn these word-building skills?

Yes, of course, but these put the teacher in the driver's seat, and children have little choice but to go where she wants to take them. It's a trip that tends to make the children feel passive and dependent, whereas they could be feeling active and responsible. It's an inherently stressful trip too, with some children doing well and some doing poorly and competition being almost unavoidable. In the grip of anxiety, frustration, and failure many children lose touch with their own awareness and recklessly search for ways to give the teacher the answers they think she wants. These children become sure-fire candidates for remedial reading. In situations where young children are in control of their own expressive activities, indeed where they have a significant part in shaping what happens during the school day, they are constantly revealing what they can do without the teacher's help, and also the kind of help they need her for. The sensitive and experienced teacher knows how to read these signals. There need be no failure, no frustration, and, I predict, no remedial reading. I am not implying that all children will be fully functioning readers by the end of first grade. Some will not. I am implying that in this kind of supportive environment all children will move forward in their learning and will have a keen sense of their own travel. Our job is to sustain that kind of environment. ●

6. Rehearsing things known and understood
7. Wondering about things unknown and mysterious
8. Expressing humor
9. Investigating connections and relationships
10. Exploring ways to express and communicate ideas
11. Exploring the skills of reading, writing, and spelling
12. Exploring alternatives to language (e.g. art)
13. Solving problems (of many different kinds)
14. Coping with personal problems

The children's work is a constant reminder that their heads are humming with serious concerns, concerns that compel their attention and spur them to expressive action.

The third thing that excites me is the organic way in which skills develop, in situations where they are constantly being put to use. In this mix of expressive activities most children draw and write before they know how to read. Indeed, for many children drawing and writing become their road to reading, a process facilitated by classroom publishing. Many of the children's writings, completed and ready for the others to see, are run off on a ditto machine.

In fact, these pieces are generally written in the form of "books," many of which get published—by the Room 101 classroom press. Book publishing has become a cottage industry in this room. Not all books that get written get published, of course. Jeanette takes a number of things into account in deciding whether or not to publish a book. Sometimes she feels a child really needs to publish for some special reason—the timing may be just right. Sometimes she decides against publishing because a child may have had enough attention for a while. Sometimes she has to take account of parent pride. The reasons involve more than the quality of the work or the effort of the writer. Celeste, for example, was a prolific and very imaginative writer, and the other children loved her books. They knew that Jeanette wouldn't publish too many by one child. Sometimes they tried to persuade her that Celeste had written one that simply had to be published.

The books are run off on a ditto machine located in the hallway outside the classroom. Each child gets a copy of each book, so that personal libraries grow quickly. The published version contains the author's illustrations (which he or she redraws onto ditto masters), plus the author's text, which an adult editor writes *in correct spelling* on each page—so that the book can be easily read by anyone who is interested. At the end of the book is the author's original text (showing original spellings) condensed onto a single page by the editor. There is also a title page and a page called "About the Author," which contains pertinent remarks, usually supplied by the author.

The entire publishing process requires a great deal of adult time. One year the school system provided an aide for Jeanette's classroom because she had twenty-nine children. The following year she had twenty-four children and didn't qualify for an aide, so parents helped with the publishing, and are continuing to do so.

The children's published books, plus a selection of high-quality children's literature, have become the principal reading fare of the classroom. As a consequence, basal readers and workbooks have virtually disappeared, and "reading groups" have proved unnecessary. Yet the children do learn to read, as well or better than with Jeanette's earlier approach.

To get a sense of the children's books in their published form, there is no substitute for looking at the real thing. Take a look at *The Pumpkin Book* by Chris elsewhere in this article.

Regardless of what one thinks about the technical qualities of the writing these children are doing, one thing is clear: their efforts come from deep inside. It's as though the powers that these children used in learning to walk and talk are now being applied to learning to write and spell. Whereas at an earlier stage the children were trying to figure out how the spoken language operates, at this stage they are trying to figure out how the written language operates. At both stages the process reveals the active mind at work.

Using invented spelling, Jeanette's children are doing more drawing and writing, doing it more imaginatively, independently, and enjoyably. A distinctive feature of this change is the way drawing and writing seem to blend, each stimulating and enriching the other. Freed from that nagging concern—"I don't know how to spell it"—the children now seem more adventurous in their ideas and use of words. Freed from spelling-related interruptions, the children draw and write more easily, with smoother flow of thought and language.

No matter how organic the urge to write is, children won't write, as these children write, without a teacher who puts her priorities in that direction. Jeanette is passionately interested in children's development, particularly their language development, and she encourages this in many ways. But it is also true that Jeanette's children write because they feel so free *not* to write. Writing is valued, but many other things are valued also. In her classroom there are many ways, equally legitimate, for children to express and develop their powers. Invented spelling ultimately affects these other ways as well.

“. . . Curious endityng and hard sentence is full heavy at onys for . . . a child to lerne.”

—Geoffrey Chaucer

(*Curious* = skillful; *endityng* = writing; *sentence* = subject matter)

Misprints

by Blaise Cendrars

Spelling errors and misprints make me happy
 Some days I feel like making them on purpose
 That's cheating
 I really love mispronunciations hesitations of the tongue and
 the accents of all local dialects

—Translated from the French by Ron Padgett

BLAISE CENDRARS (1887-1961) was a poet, novelist, journalist and adventurer. "Misprints" is from his *Feuilles de routes* (1927).

The Frontiers of Language

by Ed Friedman & Kim MacConnel

JAU TU IUZ ZDIS

(How To Use This)

1. Covur zdi grameticeal-reten inglesh sentenz uiz e card. (Cover the grammatically written English sentence with a card)



2. Sei zdi saunds ov zdi foneticeal-rendurd inglesh sentenz *aut laud*. (Say the sounds of the phonetically rendered English sentence *out loud*)

3. Luk et zdi picchur tu jelp huiz sentenz mineng. (Look at the picture to help with sentence meaning)

4. Oncovur zdi grameticeal-reten inglesh sentenz end covur foneticeal-rendurd huan. (Uncover the grammatically-written English sentence and cover phonetically-rendered one)

5. Nau rid grameticeal-inglesh sentenz *aut laud*. (Now read the grammatically-English sentence *out loud*)

<p>shi s uipz lik no bodis beiznez</p> <p>She sweeps lik nobody's business.</p>	
<p>ji is aur big djis en zdi cumponi</p> <p>He is our big cheese in the company.</p>	

<p>ai em flotin on clauds</p> <p>I am floating on clouds.</p>	
<p>ai em en e fok</p> <p>I am in a fog.</p>	

ED FRIEDMAN and KIM MACCONNEL are the authors of *La Frontera: Modurn Mezod ov Iunivarsol Ingles*, a parody of quickie language-learning books. Like the children in David Armington's article on p. 1, Friedman uses inventive spelling, but unlike the children he does it for purely artistic purposes. Specializing in performance poetry, he is the author of *The Telephone Book*, published by Telephone Books. Kim MacConnel is an artist who lives in New York and shows at the Holly Solomon Gallery. "The Frontiers of Language" is a selection from *La Frontera*, which is available from Helpful Book, 520 East 14th St., Apt. 36, New York, N.Y. 10009 for \$6 (plus \$1 shipping).

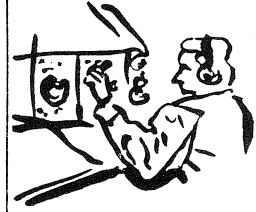
zDi man jas aibols

The man has eye-
balls.



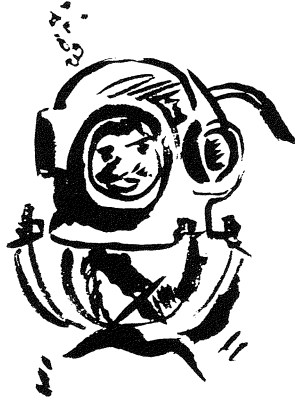
iu enturfir pipols
praivetz

You interfere
peoples' private.



ai jav salaiva in
mai mauz

I have saliva in my
mouth.



iu cip zdet ies pi
iuars elf

You keep that ESP
yours elf.



ca mpiuter sez jis
klin

Computer says he's
clean.



jelo skai zeitur ken
iu reiseru tu
beks talsitz for
banzozotucaledj

Hello, Sky Theater?
Can you reserv two
back stall seats for
*Bonzo Goes to Col-
lege?*



ceir tu sain iuar yon
jencac tuet

Care to sign your
John Hancock to
that?



luk hua t e biutefol
gerl zdi illant
vevianliuaz

Look what a beauti-
ful girl the young
Vivian Leigh was.



Hats Off

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A Special Note

The mailing format of this issue is experimental. For the first time, we're sending out the magazine as a self-mailer, that is, not enclosed in an envelope. We're doing this to help make our organization as cost-effective as possible. If the new mailing format works, great. On the other hand, if your copy arrives in shreds, not so great. (We'll gladly send you another copy.) It would be very helpful if you could drop us a note

to tell us whether or not the self-mailer format works. We have no other way of knowing. If a lot of you say, "Boo, take it away!" we'll go back to mailing the magazine in manila envelopes. In the meantime, we hope you have the kind of summer you've been dreaming about.

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