

Emergent Literacy: A Look at How Preschoolers Begin to Develop Spelling Skills

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Reading and spelling success in school relies on early phonological development. Much is known about emergent reading during preschool years, but less is known about spelling, the “hard copy” of phonological processing. The first purpose of this study was (1) to determine if there is a difference in sensitivity between two spelling score systems, invented spelling and bi-gram analysis, as they relate to phonological awareness. The second purpose was to examine the relationship between spelling and phonological awareness scores, letter name and letter sound knowledge. Scores from forty children who have participated with a caregiver in an emergent literacy play group were examined. Participants ranged in age from 3:7 to 5:10, with a mean age of 4:6. Data were gathered from both pre- and post-tests of the *Assessment of Primary Literacy Skills* (APLS). Analysis of the data suggests that there is no difference in sensitivity between invented spelling and bi-gram analysis. An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) indicated a significant positive relationship between phonological awareness and spelling scores. A moderate relationship was found between post-test spelling scores and letter name/letter sound knowledge. Previous research found a relationship between spelling and phonological awareness in third graders (Clarke-Klein & Hodson, 1995), but this study demonstrates that relationship as early as preschool. Implications of this study are that phonological awareness activities, even in low intensity programs, may be beneficial to the development of emergent reading and spelling skills. Other implications for educators are that teaching letter names and sounds may improve spelling abilities, especially since several letter names include the letter sound within the name (i.e., S, M, L) which aids in encoding. Spelling provides a window into a child’s phonological processes and children should be given opportunities to use invented spelling.