

“Y WRD STDE?”

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“I love word sorts, Grandma”, my six-year-old granddaughter Lyla, a grade one student, tells me as she busily cuts apart words and tries to discover the patterns with her work buddy, Jacob. I tell them how many groups they should end up with and they rush to solve the mystery of the word patterns.

Several years ago, looking for courses to satisfy my professional development requirements, pursue my own interests and gain some practical learning at my own “leisure”, I was introduced to long-distance courses from Canter University through Andrews University.

The course “Strategies in Literacy” uses a text that I recommend every reading teacher should have. It is a wealth of information on the sequence of the reading process, with many strategies, activities and immediately available materials. The text is *WORDS THEIR WAY: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction*, Third Edition, by D.R.Bear, M. Invernizzi, S.R Templeton and F. Johnston.”

Here is a segment taken from their introduction that explains what the course is all about:

“Why Word Study? Students’ growing knowledge of spelling or orthography--the correct sequences of letters in the writing system--strengthens the bond of literacy. Word study, as described in this textbook, occurs in hands-on activities that mimic basic cognitive learning processes: comparing and contrasting categories of word features and discovering similarities and differences within and between categories.

For example, students often misspell words that end with the /k/ sound, spelling the word snake as SNACK or even SNACKE. By sorting words that end in ck and k into two groups by sound, students discover the invariant pattern that goes with each (ck only follows a short vowel). The system is laid bare when words are sorted into categories.

During word study, words and pictures are sorted in routines that require children to examine, discriminate, and make critical judgements about speech sounds, word structures, spelling patterns and meanings. The activities presented build on what students do on their own.”

This particular course covers the sequential development of literacy from the youngest emerging reader to the most advanced readers through five stages (K-12): Emergent, Letter Name-Alphabetic, Within-Word Pattern, Syllables and Affixes, and Derivational Relations. The names are self-explanatory.

There are many strategies, suggested activities and games for each stage and an abundance of materials at the back of the text to print for immediate use. The CD included with the book holds a binder full of additional materials on each level. Of course, if that isn’t enough, there is a website from which to purchase a wealth of reproducible materials for

each stage. I just googled in the name of the text and found a comprehensive list of products. Also included in this text are levelled spelling tests for easy placement of readers into an appropriate stage.

Each reading level group is given a word sorts activity and told how many groups they can make out of it or left to discover the groups on their own. Sometimes the kids sort in a different way and their explanations for the sort are perfectly acceptable. There is also an “oddball” category, for words that seem to be “loners,” so the whole activity is like solving a mystery. Finding the groups quickly turns into a competition against the clock. These words can be further used for transfer activities in spelling or vocabulary.

Read it!! Imagine being able to solve the mystery of “absorbed prefixes”, use etymology to get your students started on a life-long fascination for word meaning, and perhaps eventually help out a Theology student with his Greek studies!