



DISCUSS SPELLING AND RECOMMEND THE BEST STRATEGIES FOR SPELLING INSTRUCTION

by Melinda Matthews

2013 Teachers' Certificate Course student

The English language is derived from many different sources resulting in a spelling system that appears random. However, it is estimated that 96 percent of English words are regular with half of all English words having sound to letter predictability while 34 percent of English words are predictable except for one sound (Malatesha et al., 2008). Spelling is predictable if three intrinsic layers of a word are learned: alphabetic, syllable-letter patterns and meaning (Bear & Templeton, 1998; Malatesha et al., 2008; O'Sullivan, 2000). Learning to spell is a developmental process with students acquiring knowledge about the layers progressively (Bear & Templeton, 1998; O'Sullivan, 2000).

To become competent spellers, students must pass through several stages:

- Pre-phonemic Spelling - No connection is made between letters and sounds. Writing consists of pictures and scribbles.
- Semi-phonemic spelling - An alphabetic awareness develops with a connection between letters and sounds and left to right reading. Spelling is usually represented by consonants without vowels.
- Letter name spelling - Alphabetic awareness continues at this stage with each sound representing one letter and the recognition of short vowel sounds. Simple consonant-vowel-consonant patterns indicate the emergence of the syllable-letter pattern layer.
- Within-word pattern spelling - Children explore more of the syllable-letter pattern layer with complex sounds including long vowels, consonant blends and digraphs.
- Syllable juncture spelling - Continuing with the syllable-letter pattern layer an understanding of the type and number of syllables in polysyllabic words and the rules affecting base words when joined by prefixes and suffixes are learnt.
- Derivational constancy spelling - Reflects a transition into the meaning layer where an understanding of a connection between base and root words and their spelling and word origins are developed. Students gain an insight that sound is not a good representative of spelling.



The ability to spell relies to varying degrees on a number of cognitive sub skills and processes including visual perception and visual sequential memory, phonological awareness, orthographic awareness, morphological awareness, word origins and kinaesthetic memory (Bissaker & Westwood, 2006; Westwood, 2008).

Visual memory plays an important part in mastering the spelling of new words as well as checking and proofreading to confirm correct spelling. It aids in recall from our long-term memory of correct sequences of letters and patterns and learning to spell irregular words (Malatesha et al., 2008; Bissaker & Westwood, 2006).

Auditory discrimination and auditory analysis play significant parts in phonological awareness which is the knowledge of and sensitivity to the sound structure of language. Appropriately modelled pronunciation allows students to auditorily analyse words correctly (Bissaker & Westwood, 2006). There are several important skill requirements for phonological awareness (Westwood, 2008). These include:

- Auditory discrimination - The detection of similarities and differences in speech sounds and the ability to pronounce words correctly.
- Segmentation - The ability to segment spoken sentences into words, words into syllables and syllables into individual sounds. Rime and onset are important in helping to identify phonemes and letter patterns within words.
- Phoneme blending - The ability to isolate small units of sounds and combine these speech sounds into syllables and syllables into words in a mental or verbal capacity. It allows encoding with spelling and decoding with reading.
- Rhyming - The ability to detect rhyme by identifying words that share common sounding patterns and sometimes common pattern letters. It is the emergence of orthographic awareness.
- Alliteration - Are words starting with the same initial sound.
- Isolation - To identify the initial, medial and final sounds within a word.
- Exchanging - The ability to mentally move sounds within a words; e.g. *tab* and *bat* or change a sound in the same position; e.g. *cat* and *tap*.

Orthographic awareness is recognising letters and patterns within words and knowing the rules that govern the grouping and placement of letters (Birsh J. 2011). With explicit spelling instructions of spelling rules, exposure to a wide range of writing activities and reading, students will progress beyond phonetic or alphabetic spelling.



Students begin to recognise features and patterns within words and are better able to generalise predicting the spelling of unknown word (Malatesha et al., 2008: Kohnen et al., 2010).

Developing a morphological awareness in conjunction with orthographic awareness is helpful for spelling words that are complex. A morpheme is of the smallest unit of speech sound that has meaning (Birsh, 2011). When the unit has meaning, it is known as a free morpheme (e.g. cat). However, when the unit by itself has no meaning, it is known as a bound morpheme (e.g.) (Malatesha et al., 2008). Students move beyond one-syllable words with an awareness that by joining a prefix or suffix to a base word, words become multisyllabic. Understanding morphemes allows students to manipulate the structure of the English language, increase their word knowledge; e.g. creating verbs from nouns and spelling more sophisticated words (Hurry et al., 2005: Ouellette & Senechal, 2008).

In conjunction with an awareness of orthography and morphemes, the knowledge of word origins will help students make accurate choices when spelling unknown words by knowing why words are spelt the way they are (Birsh, 2011: Malatesha et al., 2008). The origin of a word will give insight into the possible letter patterns and combinations a sound might make. For instance, there are 14 different spellings in English for /sh/ (Birsh, 2011). Knowing from which language a word originated will indicate a grapheme for that sound; e.g. Anglo-Saxon for ship, French for chef and Latin for nation, discussion and special to name a few.

The way spelling is taught and what is taught are of equal importance. Teachers showing enthusiasm and excitement about words and language play a critical role in stimulating children (O’Sullivan, 2000). Spelling instruction should consist of conspicuous instructions that are direct and explicit, provide instructional scaffolding and have numerous opportunities for practice with high quality feedback (Santoro et al., 2006). The teaching of spelling concepts, skills and strategies should be consistent, clear and concise and presented in a careful sequence of steps. Considerable support and modelling by the teacher is required with repeated explanations and demonstrations of the skill required before asking students to perform the tasks. As a child improves in their spelling ability, demonstrated by using the skills and strategies they have learnt, the support can be progressively withdrawn allowing them to work more independently.

Spelling is a complex and layered skill that requires explicit and consistent tuition from Kindergarten to the end of Year 6 and beyond (Hammond, 2004: Kemper et al. 2012: Moats, 2000). The level and content of spelling instruction should reflect the student’s developmental level (Bear & Templeton, 1998: O’Sullivan, 2000). Invented spelling should be encouraged with kindergarten children. Studies have shown it to reinforce phonemic awareness, sound-letter knowledge, oral language and orthographic knowledge (Ouellette & Senechal, 2008).



Activities at this level should concentrate on developing phonemic awareness (Moats, 2005). Sound – letter correspondence can be further reinforced securing the sound-letters in memory if the position of the mouth and tongue and quality of the breath being voiced or unvoiced are taught for each sound and associated letter (Castiglioni-Spalten & Ehri, 2003).

Explicit instructions continue through the primary years in phonemic awareness with sounds to letter correspondence, letter patterns, syllables, morphemes and orthographic rules. It is important when teaching spelling rules, teachers also highlight exceptions as this reinforces understanding of the rules (Malatesha et al., 2008). Teaching of homophones is important to convey meaning as these words have the same sounds but different spellings. Knowing the meaning of homophones allows students to choose the correct word based on its spelling (Malatesha et al., 2008). Students should be taught etymology or word origins in the later primary years building on previous spelling knowledge (Moats, 2005).

Word study is an integral part of spelling instruction. They are planned activities given through direct instruction providing an opportunity to practice speech sounds, words and syllable patterns combined with vocabulary development (Westwood, 2008). Activities allow students to make a connection between spelling a word, its meaning in text and its structural relationship to other words (Bear & Templeton, 1998). Peer group activities and individual activities effective in word study include identifying and exploring word families, sorting words and dictation (Westwood, 2008).

Word families are groups of words sharing the same visual, phonological or morphemic features (Westwood, 2008). Word sorting allows students to identify similarities and differences between words. This may be similar vowels, number of letters, letter patterns, consonant blends and so on. These activities require students to analyse words gaining insight into speech sounds, letter patterns and rules. Dictation gives students an opportunity to concentrate on speech sounds giving full attention to spelling, with chances for proofreading and error correction further reinforcing the correct spelling (Birsh, 2011: Westwood, 2008)

Writing in a wide variety of experiences plays an important role in developing spelling. Handwriting and typing involves kinaesthetic memory reinforcing correct sequence of letters and letter patterns of words to long-term memory (Bissaker & Westwood, 2006). A poor speller will use their cognitive resources trying to spell words instead of focusing on composition resulting in limited word choices and possible loss of ideas due to thoughts focusing on spelling words (Moats, 2005). Opportunities for students to practice spelling and explore different types of writing styles will facilitate speed and fluency in automatic letter writing (Medwell & Wray, 2007: Westwood, 2008).



The Whole Language approach to learning to read and write observes that in learning to speak children do not require explicit systematic skilled instructions which children find difficult to master (Groff, 1997). Children learn to speak in a natural fashion so by exposing children to literature they will automatically learn to read and spell thus acquiring knowledge implicitly and simultaneously. In learning to read students are encouraged to guess the word by using context and then to check this prediction by looking at the letter. Research has shown however that the reverse process is more successful with students encouraged to look for known spelling patterns within a word and then to confirm by looking at the context (Kelly, 2003). Teaching phonics and spelling explicitly is far more effective than implicit instructions (Kemper et al., 2012). Explicit instruction in phonics and spelling are important precursors to learning to spell and read and subsequently facilitate generalisation between reading and spelling (Bear & Templeton, 1998; Kohnen et al., 2010).

Regular assessments to gauge the student's understanding of orthography, patterns and phonemic awareness are part of explicit spelling instructions. The errors a student makes may indicate areas that require attention, especially if there is a consistent pattern. Errors highlight shortfalls in the student's knowledge and give an opportunity for teachers to adjust their lesson planning and instructions or put an intervention plan in place (Bissaker & Westwood, 2006; Kohnen et al., 2009).

There are numerous teaching strategies used for helping to predict and teach spelling. These techniques do not replace explicit instructions though some may be of use once a student has developed knowledge in orthography, morphology and word origins. Strategies that use predominately visual and visual/motor memories include rote memorisation including flashcards and writing a word numerous times, Look, Cover, Write, Check, (Kelly, 2006) and CHIMP (Roberts, 2003). Rote memorisation and Look, Cover, Write, Check involve a two-step process: observing a word and then writing or verbally spelling it (Kelly 2006). There is no word analysis opportunity to apply spelling knowledge allowing students to and make generalisations to spell unknown words. These techniques are not teaching students effective skills and strategies to develop spelling knowledge. Students who have difficulties with phonemic awareness have limited spelling orthographic awareness and/or are using one-off forgettable strategies are limited in their spelling development (Kelly, 2006).

The CHIMP technique is an acronym for CH - chunk, I - Investigate, M - create a screen memory and P - practice. It could provide an effective strategy for students with morphemic and orthographic awareness as they are able to apply their knowledge to the second phase of investigating the detail and structure of words, however visual memory is required primarily for the subsequent phases. It may also benefit in spelling irregular words.



Strategies that are predominantly auditory include 'spell it as it sounds', over-enunciation and recitation or letter repetition (Westwood, 2008). These strategies are effective if the student already possesses spelling knowledge but limits the learning potential as there is no word analysis.

More sophisticated spelling strategies include spelling by analogy, using knowledge of morphemes and mnemonics (Westwood, 2008). These strategies use visual and auditory memories and generalisations of words to help children spell unknown words. However, by their nature the techniques only draw on specific areas of spelling knowledge.

Learning to spell is a developmental process that requires many years to master. It is essential students be taught explicitly the origins of words, the rules, structure, patterns and sounds that make up English words. Well-structured activities and generous opportunities to practice allow students to become competent spellers.

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