DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 249 489 CS 208 457

AUTHOR	Fehring, Heather; Thomas, Valerie
TITLE	The Teaching of Spelling.
INSTITUTION	Victoria Edu 'tion Dept. (Australia).
REPORT NO	ISBN-0-7241-)0-1
PUB DATE	84
NOTE	34p.
PUB TYPE	Books (010) -- 'uides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Dictionaries; Elementary Education; *Evaluation Methods; Language Acquisition; Learning Activities; *Letters (Alphabet); Phoneme Grapheme Correspondence; *Spelling; *Spelling Instruction; *Teaching Methods; Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

Recognizing that learning to spell is a complex, active process of discovery, this book presents some suggestions for the teaching of spelling that may be incorporated into different types of language programs and adapted to suit the needs of children with a range of spelling abilities. Following the introduction, a section on beginning spelling offers suggestions for introducing children to the purpose and structure of written language, activities for learning about the letters of the alphabet, and a description of children's spelling as they learn about the relationship between sounds and letters. Further growth in spelling is discussed in the next section, which covers topics such as teaching spelling through children's writing, helping children to discover correct spelling, and teaching children to identify and correct the words they have misspelled. Ways to extend the range of childrens' writing and to promote spelling are discussed in the next section. The last two sections offer ways for evaluating children's spelling and suggestions for helping children learn to use a dictionary. (HOD)

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THE TEACHING OF SPELLING

Heather Fehring
Valerie Thomas
Research and Development

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Published by Materials Production, Curriculum Branch, Education Department of Victoria, 1984

This document reflects the work carried out by various members of the Spelling Process Project Team in Research and Development: Curriculum Branch. In particular, thanks are due to Irene Elliott for her contribution to the work of the team.

Editor: Louis de Vries
Graphic Design: Mark Wilson.

Published by Materials Production Curriculum Branch, Education Department of Victoria. 1984

Research and Development, Curriculum Branch.

ISBN 0 7241 7400 1

CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Beginning To Spell	8
Further Growth in Spelling	15
Towards Spelling Competence	25
Evaluation	28
Learning To Use a Dictionary	31
References	33

INTRODUCTION

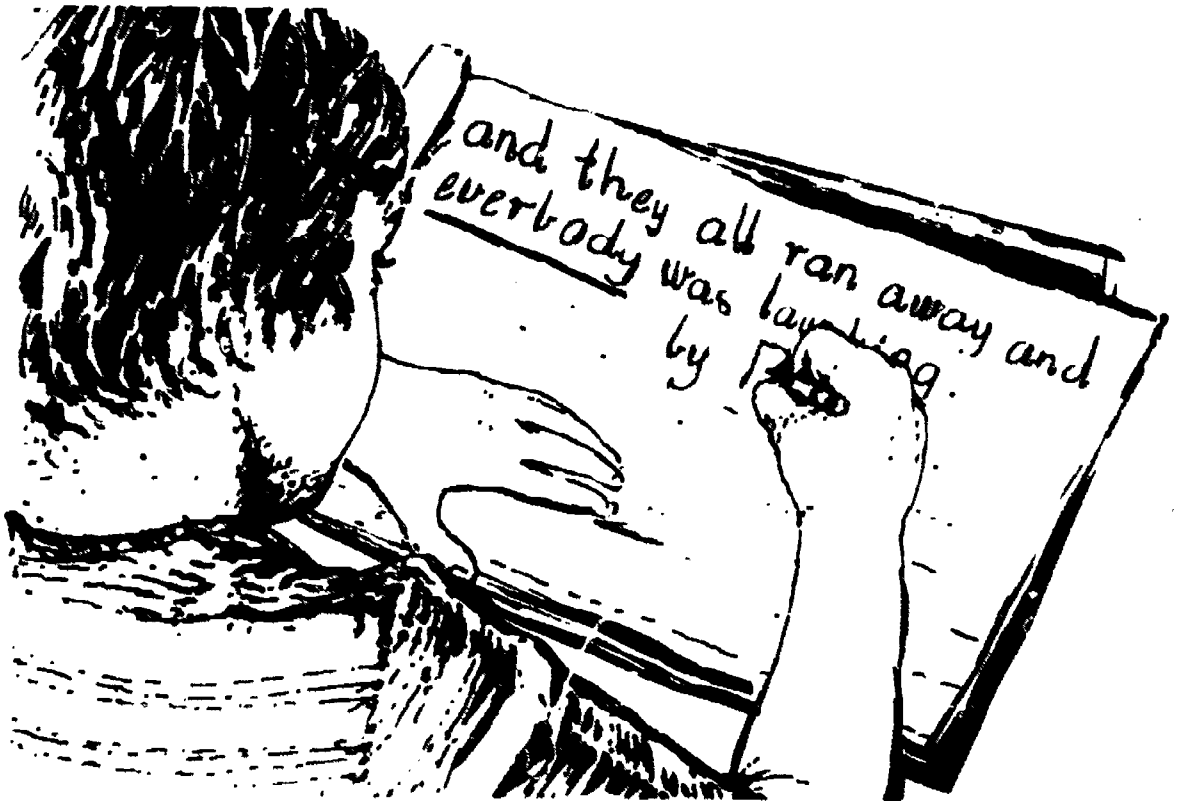
Learning to spell is one aspect of learning to write. The aim of any spelling program should be to help children become confident, competent writers.

Learning to spell is not simply a matter of learning how to spell individual words. It entails learning how our written language works. In order to learn this, children need to be exposed to many activities that involve written language: reading, word games and extensive writing.

Learning to spell is an active process, a process of discovery for the learner. Children who use words, who talk about them and play with them, will discover the regularities and patterns of written English; and using this knowledge, they will learn to spell.

The role of the teacher is vital in establishing a language program where the children have opportunities to learn about words, and where they develop a positive attitude to them. The children must discover that words are interesting, and that using them can be enjoyable and rewarding. They must have the confidence to attempt to write new words, as well as the desire to improve their spelling.

There is no single, simple method which will achieve these goals. Good teachers use a variety of methods, adapting them to suit the needs of the children. This book presents some suggestions for the teaching of spelling which may be incorporated into different types of language programs, and adapted to suit the needs of children with a range of spelling abilities.



WHAT DO CHILDREN NEED TO LEARN ABOUT WRITTEN LANGUAGE?

- **They need to learn about the different sounds represented by different letters and letter combinations.** When children want to attempt a new word, they begin by trying to represent the sounds of the word; children without this knowledge have no initial method of attack. At later stages of spelling development, "sounding out" a word can be a useful checking strategy. But children must also be aware that a strategy of matching sounds and letters will often not produce correct spelling. Many of the most frequently used words have irregular sound-letter patterns: *one*, *was*, *love*, *does*, *any*, *would*, *two*. Children who learn that *c* is for *cat* and *s* is for *snake* may be confused when they meet *cent* and *city*. *G* is for *girl* and *j* is for *jump*, but what about *giraffe* and *giant*? The vowels are even more complex. *E* may be for *egg*, but it represents the sound of *ee* in *he*, *she*, *me* and *we*. And the *ee* sound can also be represented by *ee* - *tree*, *ea* - *sea*, *ie* - *chief*, *ei* - *receive*. Children who are taught that a letter has one sound, and believe it, are likely to continue to produce spellings such as *becos*, *stopt*, *cuming* and *ennee*. "Sounding out" a word provides a clue to the spelling but it does not guarantee correct spelling; it is only one of the strategies used by a competent speller.
- **They need to learn about orthographic patterns - the letters that go together in English.** They must learn to represent sounds with letters that form common patterns in English: *tion*, *ight*, *ough*, *ould*. Children who produce such spellings as *cknum* (crumb), *thme* (thumb), *wlee* (wheel) and *holtde* (halted) have not learned that these combinations of letters do not occur in English. As they continue to learn about language, they become more aware of permissible letter patterns. They learn to rely more and more on visual information rather than on sound, and so are able to reject spellings which do not "look right". The teacher takes a great deal of the responsibility for providing models of spelling.
- **They need to learn about morphemic relationships - the ways in which meaning can be used as an aid to correct spelling.** Beginning spellers may be able to spell *birthday*, but not *birth*, or *some* and *one*, but not *someone*, because they are not aware of the significance of the parts of the compound words. Older children who write

dissappointed or *unecessary* have not understood that the words are made up of a prefix added to a root word, so that it is *dis/appointed* but *dis/satisfied*, and *un/happy* but *un/necessary*. The spelling of such words as *sign* and *muscle* appears more logical when their relationship to *signature* and *muscular* is understood. Children who understand that many words consist of meaningful units have a spelling strategy that will help them to spell a large number of words at every stage of their spelling development.

Children who are to develop into competent spellers must also:

- **Master the mechanics of handwriting.** Children who find it difficult to form the letters will not be free to concentrate on what they are writing. If they write slowly and awkwardly, they are likely to restrict the amount of writing they do, and so have less experience with using language than the fluent writers. Those children who write fluently and easily are more likely to enjoy the task, and so develop positive attitudes towards writing and spelling.

- **Learn to use resources to help them obtain the correct spelling.** For beginning spellers, these resources may initially consist of teachers and parents. Then they may progress to using class word lists, their own word books or personal dictionaries. But before children can become independent spellers, they should be able to use a dictionary, a skill which requires careful and detailed teaching.

- **Feel that they are able to succeed in learning to spell.** Young children learn to speak in order to communicate, and their first words are received with delight and approval. As they continue to talk they receive encouragement and guidance. Young writers need the same kind of encouragement. They need to learn that writing is for a purpose, and that purpose is to communicate with other people. They need to learn that writing is something that brings pleasure and a sense of achievement. They need to feel free to attempt to spell new words, without the fear of making a mistake. Children who feel that they are good at spelling will have the confidence to attempt new and unusual words as they continue to write, and, as they experiment with the language, they will learn to use it.

7

BEGINNING TO SPELL

Children beginning school will vary widely in their knowledge of the purpose and the structure of written language:

- Some will not understand that writing is for communication.
- Some will recognise many letters and be able to write their own names.
- Some will be able to write several words, and be willing to attempt to spell words they do not know.
- A few may be able to write simple sentences.

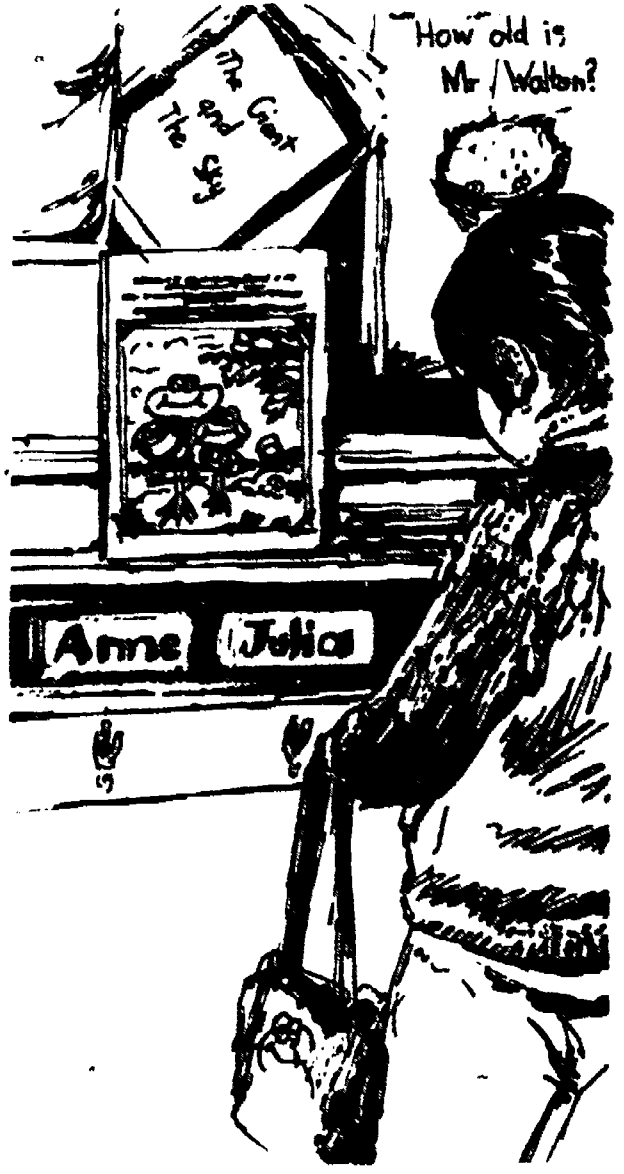
So a language program must be able to cater for children at different stages of language development. In the early stages, spelling will be just one part of the total language program: as children learn to read and write, they will learn about spelling.

Beginning spellers must learn that written language is meaningful, that its purpose is to communicate, and they must also learn about the structure of written language.

There are many good ways to introduce children to these aspects of language. The following suggestions are intended only as examples.

The concept that written language conveys meaning can be introduced to children from their first days at school.

- Label children's belongings, pictures, shelves, coat pegs, with their names. Children learn to recognise not only their own names, but those of the other children.
- Write captions under children's drawings, to their dictation. Repeat each word as it is written, so that children understand that the caption is composed of separate words.
- Write messages on the board, repeating each word as it is written.
- Write songs and poems the children are learning onto the board, or onto large pieces of paper, as the children watch.



An easel and thick felt tip pens are useful for this activity.

- Write stories dictated by groups of children onto large sheets of paper, and then pin them to the wall. During the writing, individual words may be discussed, as well as such aspects as the direction of the writing and the start of new sentences.
- Hold story books so that the children can see the text, as well as the pictures. When reading, occasionally point to a significant or repeated word, helping children to understand that it is the words that tell the story.

For further suggestions, see *Beginning Reading* (Infant Education Committee, 1981).

At the same time, children should be encouraged to write. Some children will begin by scribbling and creating shapes which resemble letters, while others will be able to write most of the letters of the alphabet. But whatever their stage of development, their own writing should be accepted. This early writing is an important part of language development, a stage at which the children learn facts about written language, and an attitude towards it.

In considering the process of learning to spell, it may be useful to think about the way children learn to speak. Their first attempts are welcomed and accepted without criticism, but a correct model is provided. The child who says "Dink" is given a drink, so the communication brings results, but the parent may reply, "Here's your drink", supplying the child with the correct form of the word.

In the classroom, the children's contact with written language will provide models for their own writing. This contact should be as varied as possible, providing children with opportunities to look, listen and experiment.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPELLING IN CHILDREN'S WRITING

Children who are encouraged to write, and whose efforts are accepted, will experiment with written language. When they begin school, their "writing" may consist of scribble patterns. But as their involvement with written language continues, their writing will more closely resemble conventional writing. Shapes which resemble letters will be introduced into the scribble, and these will later be replaced with the actual letters. Then, as the children learn about the relationship between sounds and letters, they will attempt to represent the sounds of the words they are writing.

Researchers have documented the progress of children who have "invented" their own spellings.

Typically, the children begin by using one or two letters to represent a word. Vowels are often omitted. Then, as their writing develops, it will include more of the sounds of the words, and an increasing number of words which are correctly spelled, words which have become part of the children's spelling vocabulary.

Some examples:
A four-year-old wrote:
I EM SRY TAT U R SIC.
I am sorry that you are sick.
A 5½-year-old wrote:
I AM CMIN DAOON STERS YES.
I am coming down stairs yes.

A 6½-year-old wrote:
I WOOD LIK YOU TOO GET UP BEKUS I WANT SMTHING.
I would like you to get up because I want something.

From "Invented Spelling in the Open Classroom" (Chomsky, 1975).

For more detailed descriptions of children's writing development, see the references listed on page 34.

When children are encouraged to write, and their invented spellings are accepted, it is important that parents be informed about the aims of such an approach. Parents who understand the process will be more able to accept their children's first attempts at writing.

LEARNING ABOUT THE LETTERS OF THE ALPHABET

The activities designed to help the children to understand that written language conveys meaning will also help them to learn about the structure of the language. As they watch the teacher write on the board, on large sheets of paper, and on their drawings, and as they listen to the teacher pronounce the words that are being written, they will learn:

- that written language progresses from left to right;
- that written language is composed of words;
- that words are composed of letters which represent sounds.

As the children learn more about the way in which the letters of the alphabet represent sounds, their writing will slowly progress towards correct spelling. This understanding can be developed through many different types of activities.

Young spellers need to learn:

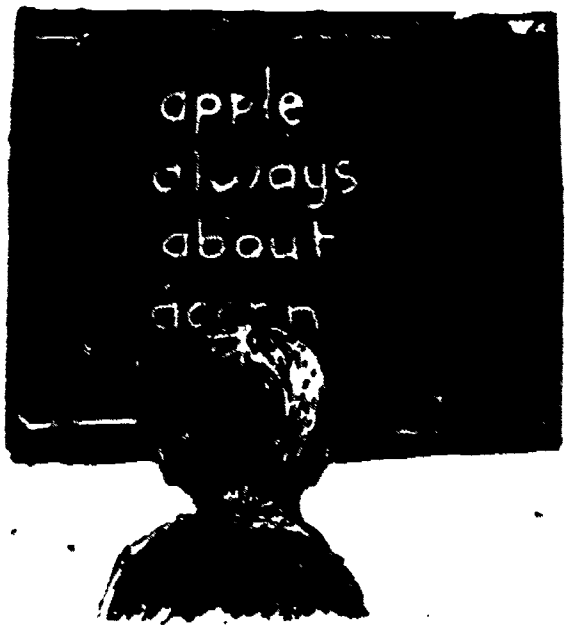
- what the letters look like;
- the names of the letters;
- how to write them;
- the sounds they represent;
- that capital and small letters are different representations of the same letter.

When children begin school, they should be able:

- to see the letters of the alphabet on charts and cards, and in alphabet books. A copy of the alphabet stuck to each table, and covered in clear plastic, makes a useful reference for the children.
- to play with alphabet blocks and tiles. Some children may use them to make words, an excellent way for them to begin to learn to use written language as they are learning to write the letters.

A good starting point for discussion of the letters of the alphabet is the initial letter of the children's names. When Mark's name is written on the board, some children will be able to *hear* that Mary and Michael have names that begin with the same sound, and when those names are written on the board, will *see* that they begin with the same letter. Brief discussions of the various names will help children to begin to understand the relationship between sounds and letters.

When the letters are discussed, it is important that children develop an understanding that many of the letters represent many different sounds. *C* may be for Catherine but it is also for Cynthia, and Kate begins with the same sound as Catherine. *Apple*, *always*, *about*, *acorn* and *after* begin with the letter *a*, but they all begin with a different sound. For this reason, it is less confusing to call the letter by its *name*, and then talk about the different *sounds* it represents.



As children build up a store of letters they are familiar with, they can join in with the daily routine of meaningful writing. For example, the teacher who is writing: "We went to the farm", may ask: "What does farm start with?" Some children may be able to hear the sound and identify the letter; those who are not yet at that stage will be listening and learning. Later, the teacher may ask for the letter representing the last sound, or the second sound, or simply for any other letter the children can suggest.

An activity such as this provides the opportunity for children to begin to learn to spell. And, most importantly, it allows for discussion of the fact that different letters may represent the same sound. If *s* is suggested as the first letter for *circus*, the teacher is able to point out that both *s* and *c* can represent the sound of *s*.

As children participate in group and class writing, and experiment in their own writing with the information they are acquiring, they will learn about the spelling system.

Activities which are designed to direct children s attention to the relationship between sounds and letters can be useful. However, it is most important, if children's attention is directed specifically to single letters, that they learn about the *different* sounds they represent.

- Collect pictures, or let children draw pictures, of objects which begin with a particular letter. Make them into a book, and label each picture with its name. *Circus* and *cat* would both be in the *c* book.
- Build up lists that begin with the same *sound*, but different letters: *photograph*, *flag*; *snake*, *circus*; *jump*, *giraffe*; *kangaroo*, *cat*; *knee*, *nine*.
- Spend a few minutes writing words which end with a particular sound, as children suggest them. Again, for some words this will require more than one letter or letter combination: *leaf*, *cough*; *farm*, *lamb*.
- Play I Spy. "I spy, with my little eye, something beginning with the same sound as *dog*."
- Choose a word the children are familiar with - *man* - and ask: "How can we change it to *mat*? *mad*? *map*? *can*? *ran*? *fan*?"
- Ask children to sort word cards into different categories: those that begin or end with the same letter or group of letters, or those that begin or end with the same sound.

Such activities as these, which occupy just a few minutes, help to provide children with the information which they need for their own attempts at spelling. And, during activities which focus on a particular letter, the children should be shown how to write it. Those children who learn how to form the letters easily and confidently will be happy to continue to write, and free to concentrate on what they are writing.

Beginning spellers develop their spelling skills in many different ways:

- As they learn more about the relationship between sounds and letters, they will more accurately represent the sounds in the words they write.

- As they learn more about the structure of the written language, they will learn about common letter patterns in English, and purely phonetic spellings will be replaced by spellings which more closely resemble written English.

- As they continue to read and write, they will learn the correct spelling for an increasing number of words. The first word children learn to spell correctly is often their name. Then they will learn to spell words that they frequently use in their writing, or which have a special interest for them.

Teachers can help children to build up individual collections of words they can spell correctly:

- Write words that the children often use in their writing on cards. Each child keeps a personal card file for easy reference. As the children learn the letters of the alphabet, and build up a store of words, the cards may be arranged in alphabetical order. This word bank can also be used for word sorts, where the children sort the cards according to categories they choose, or into groups suggested by the teacher.
- Have frequently used words displayed in the room, with an identifying picture, as close to the children's eye level as possible.
- When children write about a topic such as a class visit, make a list with the children of words they may want to use.
- Develop a class dictionary, where children may look for words they want to write.
- Each child may keep a personal dictionary.
- Children who ask the teacher how to spell a word should be asked to try to spell it first - to have a go. Each child may keep a "Have-a-go" card, which provides a record of the child's attempt. The teacher writes the correct spelling alongside the child's attempt, so that the child can compare the two spellings, and this card becomes another rescurce. This card may also be used by the teacher to note the child's development in spelling.

All of these resources provide the children with opportunities to find the correct spelling, and to begin to develop the skills necessary to use a dictionary. However, it is important that the children are not inhibited in their writing by the fear of making a spelling mistake. They should be encouraged to try out different spellings and to attempt new and unusual words.

Beginning spellers are learning not only how to spell — they are learning an attitude towards spelling. They need to learn that words are interesting, and that writing is enjoyable and useful. If their first experiences with written language are successful and they continue to write with confidence, beginning spellers have made a promising start.

FURTHER GROWTH IN SPELLING

Children are ready to make further progress in their spelling when they:

- understand that writing is for communication;
- know the names of the letters of the alphabet, and how to write them;
- have a concept of sound/letter relationships;
- have a vocabulary of some words they know how to spell.

Now, in order to progress:

1. They need to learn that sound/letter matching is often not sufficient to produce correct spelling.
2. They need to learn the common letter patterns which occur in written English: *ight*, *ough*, *tion*, *atch*.
3. They need to develop an understanding of the units of meaning — morphemes — in words. Such an understanding will help them to spell:
   - compound words — someone, birthday, anything, upon;
   - words which have affixes — *dis*appointed, *un*natural, soft*en*, *refreshing*;
   - meaning-related words — major, majority; native, nation, national; medicine, medical.
4. They need to develop the ability to consider words they know, when they are faced with writing new words. The child who wants to write *shake* may know how to spell *make* and *cake*. Presentation of words with similar letter patterns will help the children make these types of connections.
5. They need to develop a method for learning to spell difficult words, such as the Look, Say, Cover, Write, Check method, which encourages them to make use of a visual strategy.
6. They need to develop a fluent handwriting style which allows them to concentrate on *what* they are writing, rather than *how*.
7. They need to develop the ability to proofread their own work, to see which words look as if they may be wrong, and to use a dictionary to check the correct spelling.

The focus of the spelling teaching will be the children's own writing, but a good spelling program will include a variety of activities, some of which may involve groups of children, or the whole class. **The more children use words — write them, read them, play with them, talk about them — the more likely they are to develop into good spellers.**

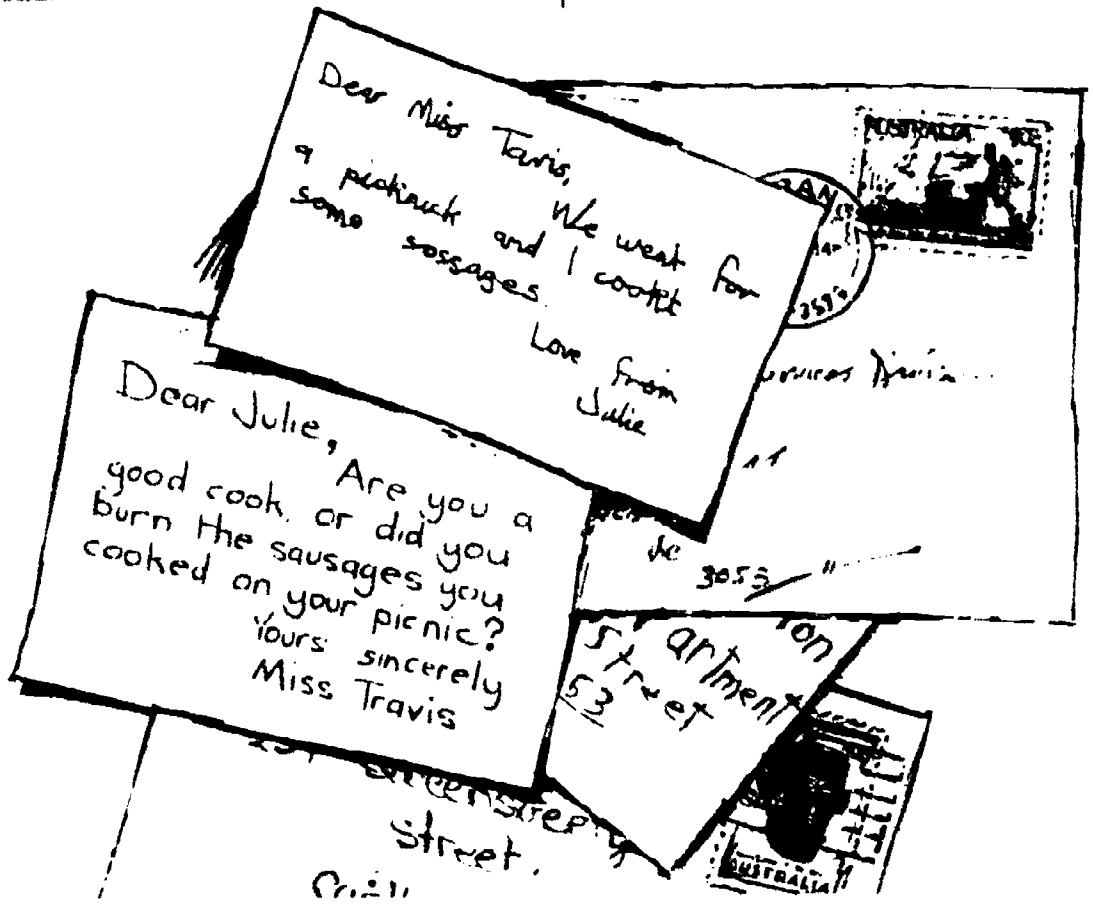
TEACHING SPELLING THROUGH THE CHILDREN'S WRITING

The aim of a spelling program should be to help the children to become competent, confident writers. Therefore, the words the children need to learn to spell are the words they want to write. Most of the teaching at this stage will involve the child and the teacher working together to improve the child's spelling.

If the children are to be encouraged to improve their spelling, they must feel that they are writing for some real purpose, and that correct spelling is required. If they are to learn that the purpose of writing is to communicate, their writing should be directed towards an audience.

Some suggestions:

- A class newspaper which is produced at regular intervals and distributed to other classes and to parents.
- Stories which are illustrated and made into books. Some of these can be presented to infant classes as reading material, and older students may help the younger ones to read them.
- Letters written to parents informing them of school matters. These can be composed as group or class activities, as well as individual projects.
- Materials written for a class project, which are displayed in the school for others to read.
- Letters written to the teacher, or other members of staff, which receive a reply. If the teacher replies, spelling correctly any words which the child misspelled, this can be an effective teaching strategy.
- Articles written for publication in local newspapers, informing the community of activities at the school.



- Letters written to invite visitors to the school, or to thank people who have worked with the class.
- Contributions to class books on various topics, with each page written by a different child. At the beginning of the year, this could be a book containing the autobiographies of each child, with a photograph or drawing.

For more ideas, see "100 Ways to Publish Children's Writing", in *Better Reading/Writing - Now!* (Walshe, 1977).

It is important to remember that spelling is only one aspect of the writing process. If writing is viewed as communication, the content of the writing and the intention of the writer must be the first considerations. An emphasis on spelling mistakes may teach the child that spelling and writing are difficult and unpleasant. Writing should be enjoyable. Children whose writing receives a positive response, and who feel a sense of achievement as they continue to write, will have the confidence to attempt new words, and will constantly extend their spelling vocabularies.

Teachers using the children's writing as the basis of their spelling teaching have two main concerns:

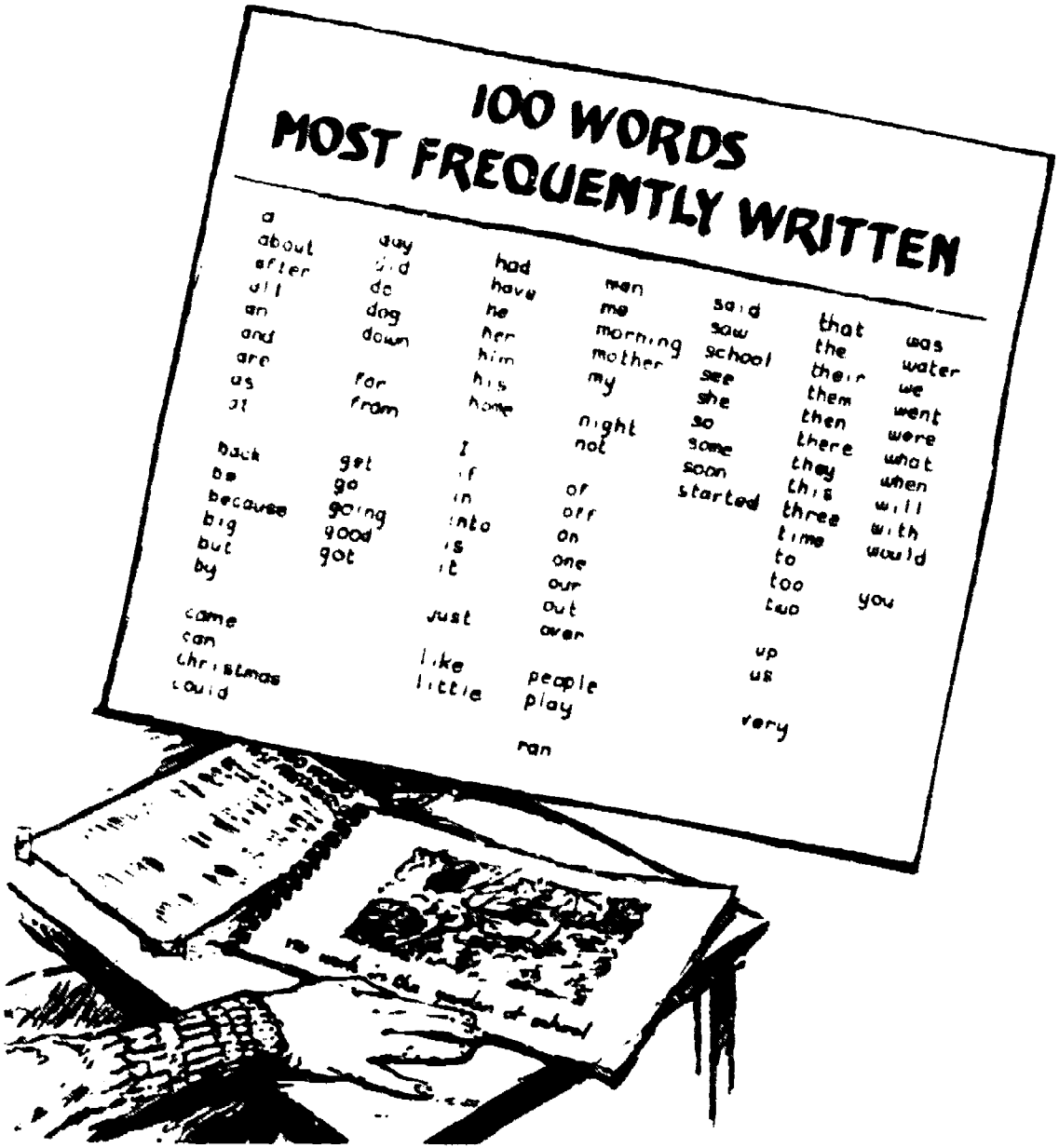
- To help children discover the correct spelling of the words they want to write.
- To help children identify and correct the words they have misspelled in their writing.

Helping Children To Discover the Correct Spelling of the Words They Want To Write

At this stage many of the strategies used will be developments of those discussed in the beginners' section.

- The children's personal dictionary will become increasingly important. This contains words that are used frequently, and can become the first reference. If the children enter the words, the dictionary should be checked regularly, to prevent constant use of misspelled words.
- Simple commercial dictionaries can be introduced, and the teaching of dictionary skills begun. Spellers at this stage will not develop into self-reliant spellers until they can use a dictionary, and this is a complex skill which requires careful teaching. (See p. 31, "Learning To Use a Dictionary.")
- The teacher may produce a class dictionary, containing words the children ask for when they are writing. This needs to be simple, with a large double page spread for each letter of the alphabet. The teacher enters the words as the children need them, so that the collection of words is steadily increased.
- Whenever a new word is introduced, in any area of the curriculum, it should be written and discussed: multiply, equals, pyramid, collage, comma, concert, energy.
- Words which are common to the children's environment, such as the names of teachers, classmates, local streets and suburbs, should be readily available:
  on a wall chart,
  in a special book,
  on a card attached to writing folders.
- Teachers who work with themes will find this a useful way to introduce new words. Many of the words which arise during a particular theme may not be those which the children would use frequently, but more common words may also be discussed. For example, if the theme is *Food*, spaghetti, hamburger and cauliflower may be used, but common words would also be presented:

eat	eaten	ate	
cook	cooks	cooking	cooked
apple	orange	banana	pear



When the children come to write on the theme, they have the class collection of words to refer to. These theme words can also be illustrated and compiled into books, for later reference.

- The teacher may collect words that are frequently misspelled in the children's writing, and use these for various types of word study exercises.
- As the 100 most frequently occurring words make up about 55 per cent of our written language, it is important that children be able to spell them. A list of these words, arranged in alphabetical order, can be attached to the inside front page of the children's dictionary, or onto the top of their tables for easy reference. However, it should be realised that many of these words must be taught in context. With words like *there*, *their* or *were*, *where*, the problem may be which word to use, not how to spell the alternatives. A few minutes spent discussing the connections between *here*, *there*, and *where* may help children to use these words correctly. (See "A Core Vocabulary of Children's Writing", by Ves Thomas in *Reading Education*, Vol.2, No.1, Autumn, 1977, p.9, for a list of most frequently written words.)
- The "Have-a-go" card should be maintained. If the children attempt the word first, they may be right. If not, their mistakes provide a useful guide for further teaching.

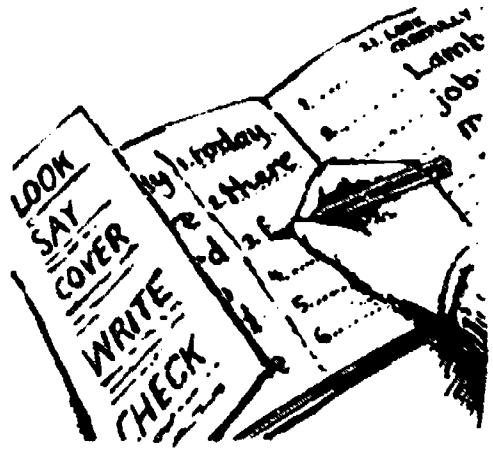
The teacher's response to the attempt should be positive:

- There's only one letter wrong.
- The first part of the word is right.
- Yes, that's just how it sounds, but it's spelled like this.
- The "Have-a-go" card may also be expanded to have three, or even four, columns. The child has several attempts at the word, decides which one looks right, and then compares the attempts with the correct form. The column containing the correct form may be cut off when the card is completed, and used as an individual spelling list.

Whenever the children are provided with a word they want to spell, they should be encouraged to write it as a whole, from memory, rather than copying it, letter by letter. The Look, Say, Cover, Write, Check method is useful, and should become a habit with the children. This method, devised by Ernest Horn (1919), and developed by Charles Cripps (1978), consists of the following steps:

- *Look* at the word carefully, trying to memorise the spelling.
- *Say* it.
- *Cover* it.
- Try to *write* it from memory.
- Uncover it, and *check* to see if it is written correctly.

A booklet with a covering flap may help children with this procedure.



Helping Children To Identify and Correct the Words They Have Misspelled in Their Writing

Children who are to develop into competent spellers need to be efficient proofreaders. They must be able to identify words which *are* misspelled, and those which *may be* misspelled, check the spelling, and correct any mistakes. Many children need considerable help in developing these skills.

- If the writing is to be published in some way, and the children write a first draft which they then revise, they can be encouraged to mark the words they are uncertain about, as they write. If they circle these words, or write them in pencil, they can check the spelling later, as part of the revision process. Such a method allows the children to concentrate on the content of the writing as they are composing, and they are also developing the skills necessary for good proofreading.
- When the teacher is able to discuss the writing with individual children, their attention can be directed to spelling mistakes, and alternative spellings discussed:
  How else could you spell that word?
  Which way do you think looks right?
  They can be given clues to help them find the mistakes themselves.
  There is one spelling mistake in the second line. Can you find it?
  One of the letters in that word is wrong.
  Which one do you think it might be?
- Children can work in pairs, or in small groups, proofreading each other's work.
- If writing is sometimes to be corrected away from the child, the type of correction may depend on the spelling ability of the writer.

  For the good speller, with only a few mistakes, the teacher may simply indicate with an X the line which contains a spelling mistake, or underline the misspelled words. It is

then the responsibility of the writer to correct the spelling. For the poor spellers, it may be unrealistic to expect all the mistakes to be corrected. The teacher may mark several mistakes of the same type, or choose five or six words which the writer uses frequently, and concentrate on helping the child to learn these. Poor spellers who are faced with the daunting task of correcting large numbers of mistakes will soon learn to limit the amount of writing they do, and they will be unlikely to learn how to spell the words they do manage to correct.

The purpose of the correction should be to help the children to spell the words correctly in their future writing.

Identification of the mistakes is only the first step. Children then have to find the correct spelling from their range of resources, write the words correctly, and try to learn them. For poor spellers, these can be arduous tasks, and they will need help and encouragement if they are to persevere.

A spelling program for spellers at this stage will be focused on their writing, but it will not be limited to this. Developing spellers need a variety of activities which direct their attention to the structure of words, and which help to stimulate their interest in words. The children and the teacher will discuss words, play games with them, manipulate and collect them, and, in the process, the children will learn how to spell many of them. At the same time, they will learn to enjoy using words, and develop the habit of looking closely at their structure, two important aids to good spelling.

Many of these activities will be incidental. An interesting word will occur in reading or writing, and the teacher will grasp the opportunity to discuss its structure or its origin, and other related words.

Some examples:

- When writing the word *sandwich*, discuss its origin — named after the Earl of Sandwich, who once spent twenty-four hours gambling, his only food being a slice of beef inside two slices of bread. Children may then search for other words which have their origins in people's names: cardigan, pavlova, pasteurise. A chart may be displayed and added to as more names are discovered.
- If laser beams are discussed, point out that laser is an acronym — a word formed from the initial letters of other words.

  LASER — *l*ight *a*mplification by *s*timulated *e*mission of *r*adiation.

  Again, children may collect other examples:

  ANZAC — *A*ustralian and *N*ew *Z*ealand *A*rmy *C*orps.

  RADAR — *ra*dio *d*etection and *r*anging.

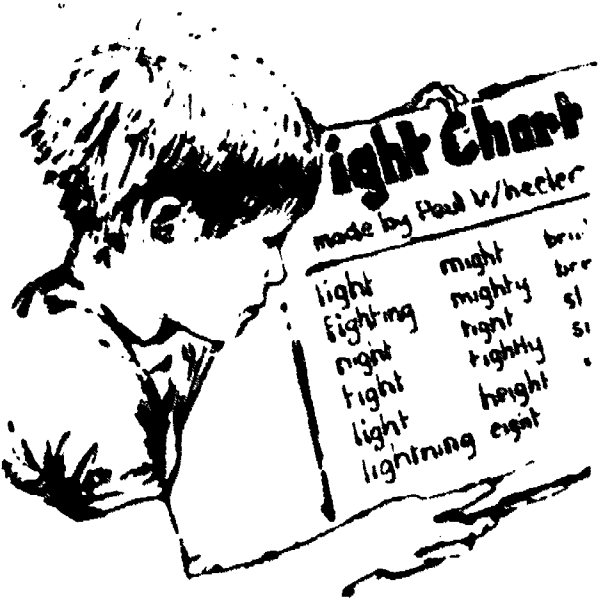
  SCUBA — *s*elf-contained *u*nderwater *b*reathing *a*pparatus.
- Many children do not notice that compound words are made up of separate words, and so may be able to spell the parts of a compound word, but not the whole word, or, in the case of a common word like *birthday*, they may be able to spell the compound word, but not *birth*. So show the children the parts of the word, and discuss the meanings.

  Why is it called birthday?
  breakfast?
  rainbow?
  afternoon?
  anything?

The same applies to words with prefixes. A few minutes spent discussing their structure will help children to spell such words as:

dis/satisfied and dis/appointed
un/necessary and un/usual
im/moral and im/possible.

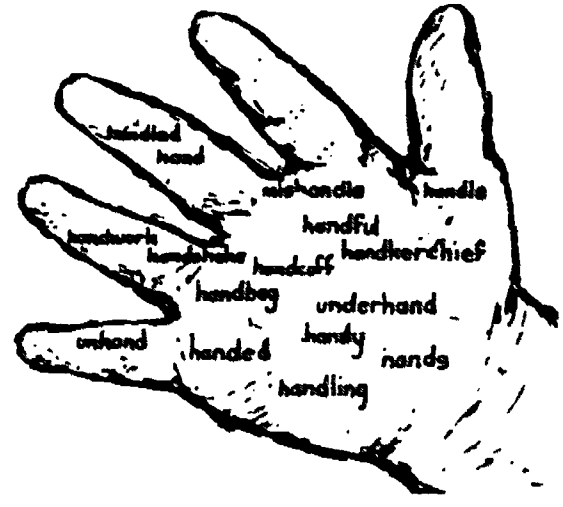
When words such as these occur, a few minutes' discussion can be a valuable spelling lesson. Other activities can also be planned, perhaps in a special time-slot each day. These activities can sometimes be linked to the children's writing, using words collected from mistakes made in the writing, or words likely to be used in a writing topic.



- If some children are having difficulty with a particular letter pattern — *ight*, *tion*, *ough* — they can conduct a word search for words containing that pattern. This can be a class or group activity. If the collection is written on a chart, it can be added to as more words are discovered.
- Words with particular letter patterns can be written on flash cards for the children to sort according to some criteria. For example, if the children are having difficulty adding *ing* to words, three groups of cards can be prepared:
  - Words where *ing* is simply added to the root word.
  - Words which drop the final e before adding *ing*.
  - Words where the final consonant is doubled before adding *ing*.

  When children have sorted the words into the three groups, they may be asked to explain how they chose the words, and from such a discussion, they may arrive at a rule for adding *ing*.

- Children may collect a word "family". Using a word like *hand*, they collect words which contain the word *hand*, and which are related by meaning. This will entail some discussion. Why is it called a handkerchief? underhand? handy? The words can be displayed within the outline of a hand.



Some other interesting family words: house, play, life, sun, head.

- Collect words which are related by meaning to help children spell a difficult word.

  Some examples:
  Show that here, there and where belong together.
  For sign, use signature, signal, signet ring.
  Medical may help children spell medicine.
  Muscle and muscular go together.
  Teach two with twenty, twin, twice.

- Children can be introduced to some Greek and Latin roots.

  For example, *transport*, trans across, port:carry, can lead to: translate, transfer, transform, transfusion,
  and to
  import, deport, porter, portable.

Other activities can be designed to encourage the children to look closely at the structure of words.

- They can find words within another word:

  teacher
  each, ache, he, her, teach, tea.

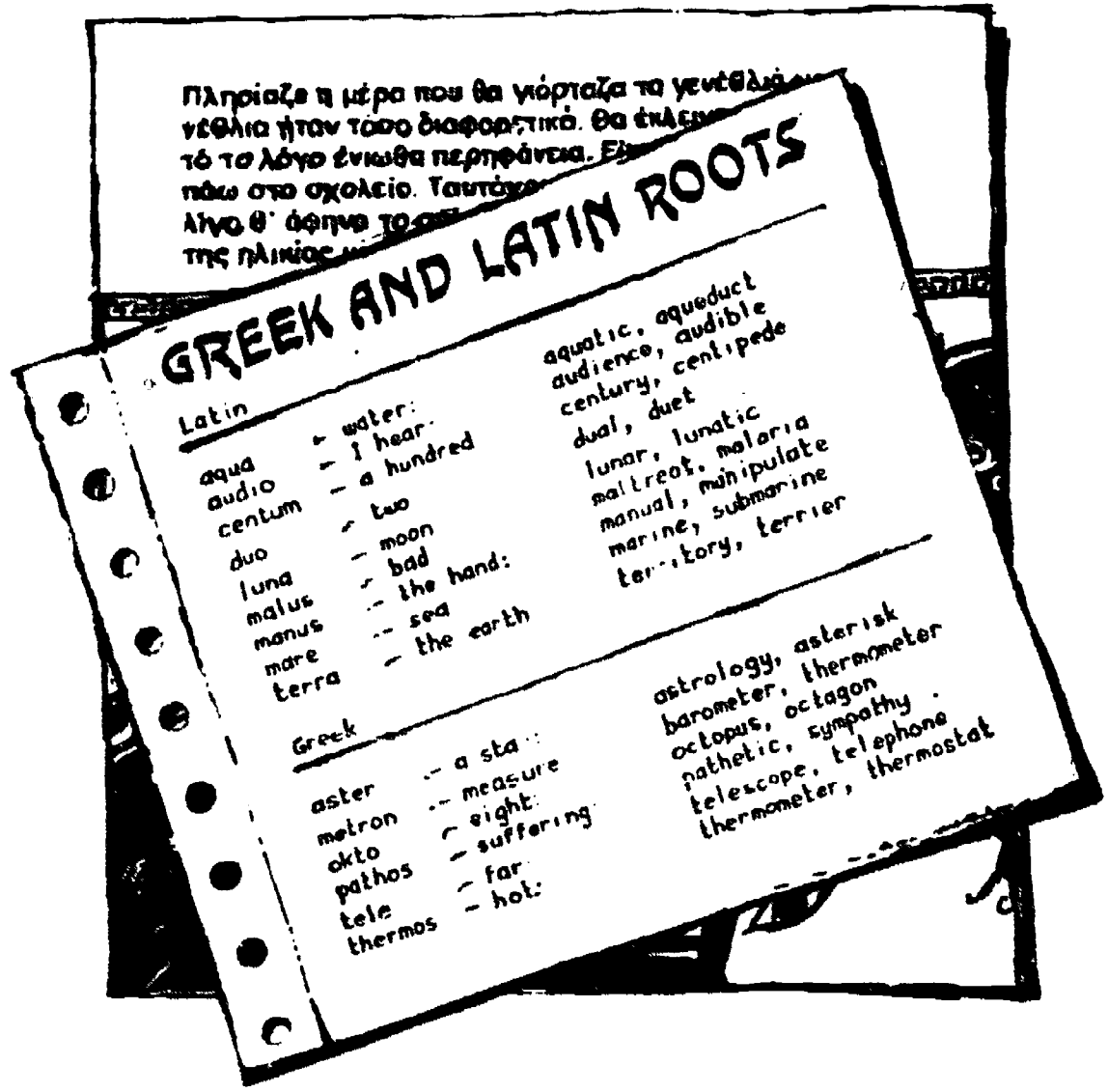
  brother
  broth, other, rot, the, he, her.

  swallow
  allow, all, wall, wallow, low.

- They can rearrange words to make other words:

  star — arts, tars, rats.
  post — tops, pots, spot, stop.
  meat — team, mate, tame.
  least — steal, stale, tales, slate.

This is better than asking children to sort out jumbled words, which present them with letter patterns that do not occur in English, and so can be confusing.



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- A word game like Hangman can be a valuable way of helping children to learn the letters that go together in written English. If you have s-reng-h, what letters could fit in the spaces? The children should be encouraged to try to work out which letters would fit, rather than simply guessing.

In a variation of Hangman, the children have to guess the letters in order. They are given the first letter, and a dash for each missing letter. Count the number of guesses, and discuss the suggestions.

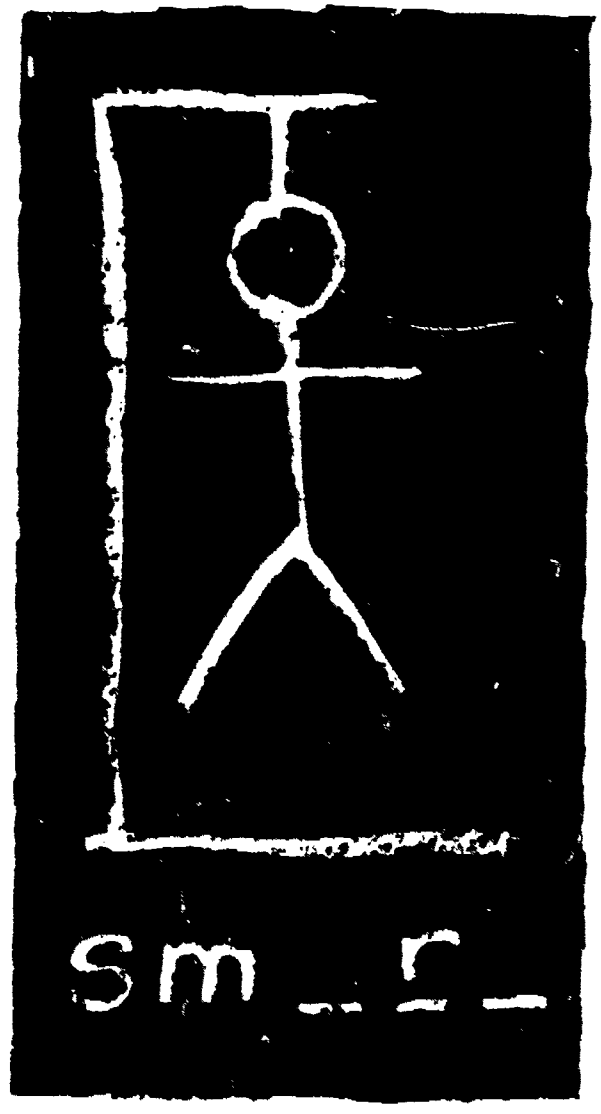
If T is the first letter, what could come next?
After Tr?
After Tre?

Most children will soon begin to learn which letters are possible.

- A mnemonic — an aid to memory — may help a child to remember the spelling of a difficult or unusual word. Some common mnemonics have been helping spellers for many years. However, a mnemonic invented by the child, or by the child and teacher together, may be even more memorable.

Some popular mnemonics:

I like to *eat* meat.
Always smell *a rat* when you spell sep*a*rate.
The princi*pal* is your *pal*.



A *car* is stationary.
Paper is stationery.
A *piece* of *pie*.
I am your friend to the *end*.
You *hear* with your *ear*.

For an extensive collection of activities and games, see *Spelling: A Teacher's Guide* (Hudson, 1983).

When spelling is taught in this way, efficient classroom organisation is essential. Children need time to draft and revise their writing, and to discuss it with the teacher and with other children. There should be opportunities for children to write regularly, and for teachers to work with individual children, and with small groups of children. One way of facilitating this may be to set up activity centres in the classroom, such as a language corner with a class library, storage for writing folders, a writing table with paper, pens and dictionaries and perhaps a blackboard on an easel, with chalk and magnetic letters. This arrangement would enable children to go and work on their writing individually, in pairs or in a small group at any time of the day.

TOWARDS SPELLING COMPETENCE

Children will now:

- have a basic vocabulary of words they know how to spell;
- be able to proofread their own writing, identifying words which may be spelled incorrectly, and correcting any misspellings;
- have the ability to use resources competently to find the correct spelling for those words they want to use in their writing.

These spellers will still make some mistakes in their spelling. But they are able to take responsibility for correcting their spelling, even if they still occasionally need help in finding mistakes and locating irregular words in the dictionary.

Now, in order to progress, these spellers need to extend the vocabulary of words they use when they are writing. This can be done in a variety of ways:

- Through an extension of the range of the children's writing.
- Through games and activities designed to develop the children's interest in words, and to introduce them to new words. These words may then become part of the children's writing vocabulary.
- Through an extension of the resources available to the children, such as a thesaurus, and more complex dictionaries.

Extending the Range of the Children's Writing

Much of the work in this area will be an extension of the writing activities suggested in the previous section: writing which is intended for an audience, and for which it is clearly important that the spelling is correct. However, at this stage the children may also begin to experiment with different styles and forms of writing.

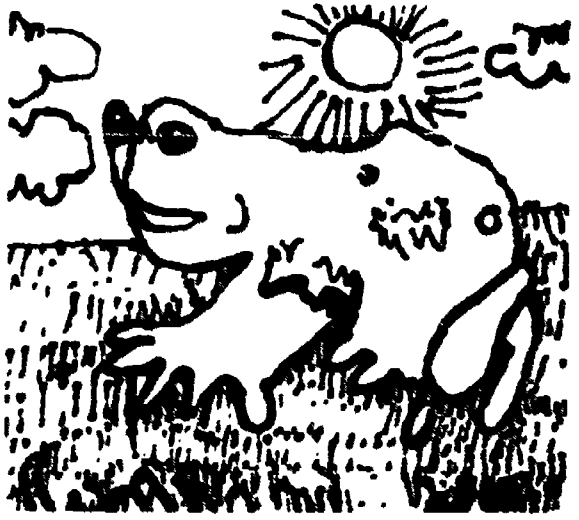
- They can write plays, to be performed to their class or to other classes in the school.
- They can write poetry, using different forms which require concentration on the sounds, shapes and meanings of words.

For example:
The Japanese haiku, a poem of three lines.
First line — five syllables.
Second line — seven syllables.
Third line — five syllables.

Butterfly floating,
above a paddock of gold,
enjoying the scent.

The cinquain, a five-lined poem
First line: one word — what the poem is about.
Second line: two words — describing the first word.
Third line: three words — expressing action.
Fourth line: four words — expressing feeling.
Fifth line: one word — synonym for the first.

Frog,
Green, slimy
Jumping for joy,
Horrible to touch him!
Croaker.



Concrete poetry, where the shape of the poem is significant. In this example, the shape of the poem is the shape of the subject.

The
tree,
so pretty,
its lights all
sparkling brightly
its green needles hidden
by a cloud of silver and gold tinsel
and coloured balls and lighted candles.
Underneath
a big basket
of wonderful
presents for
all the family.

For more ideas on using poetry to extend the children's writing, see *Chalkface*, Vol 3, No. 3 (Education Department of Victoria, 1983),
Writing: R-7 Language Arts (R-7 Language Arts Committee, S.A., 1979), pp.160-8,
and
Every Child Can Write! Learning and Teaching Written Expression in the 1980's (Walshe, 1981), pp.75-84.

When children write poetry like this, and take pride in the finished work as a work of art, the desire to spell the words correctly becomes part of the creative process. The children become aware that spelling mistakes would spoil the poems, and so take care to see that all words are spelled correctly.

- They can write advertisements. Advertisers use words in special ways, and children can examine advertisements for examples of the way words are used to persuade. Children can write their advertisements for school functions or publications, as well as for imaginary products.
- They can write stories in the style of fairy stories,
  legends,
  fables,
  detective stories,
  diaries.

As the children continue to experiment in their writing, and feel the sense of achievement that comes from doing something well, they will learn that correct spelling is one aspect of good writing.

Games and Activities

Spellers at this stage need games and activities which direct their attention to the spelling of words, and which present a challenge.

Some suggestions:

- Children write a sentence, or even a short story, without using a certain letter or letters.

  Without *e*: Two dogs ran wildly along our road, barking furiously.

  Without *a i o u*: There where the creeper grew, the tree seemed greener.
- Commercial games such as Scrabble and Boggle can be useful, as long as the players are of approximately the same ability.
- Crosswords. Competent spellers may be able to create crossword puzzles, as well as solve them.
- More advanced work on collecting words which have unusual origins:

  words which are derived from people's names, places, other languages.

  (See "Further Growth in Spelling", p. 15.)
- Children can collect palindromes — words that are spelled the same way backwards:

  level
  refer
  civic
  noon
  eye
- Some children may be able to supply two-word palindromes — a toyota, or a sentence — Madam I'm Adam.
- They can collect words which make another word when written backwards:

  lived - devil
  drawer - reward

pots - stop
deer - reed
revied - deliver

- Some children may be interested to solve — and create — codes and ciphers.

- Ghosts is an interesting game for good spellers, as the game is played orally, and children have to visualise the words. For poor spellers, Ghosts can be confusing and discouraging. Play in a group. A child thinks of a word, and gives the first letter. The next child thinks of a word, and gives the next letter, and so on, around the group, until a word is made. The player who gives the final letter that makes a word is out. Each child must have a word in mind, and must be able to say it, if challenged.

For example:
First child: C — thinking of *conduct*.
Second child: A — thinking of *castle*.
Third child: N — thinking of *candle*, but making *can*, and so is out.

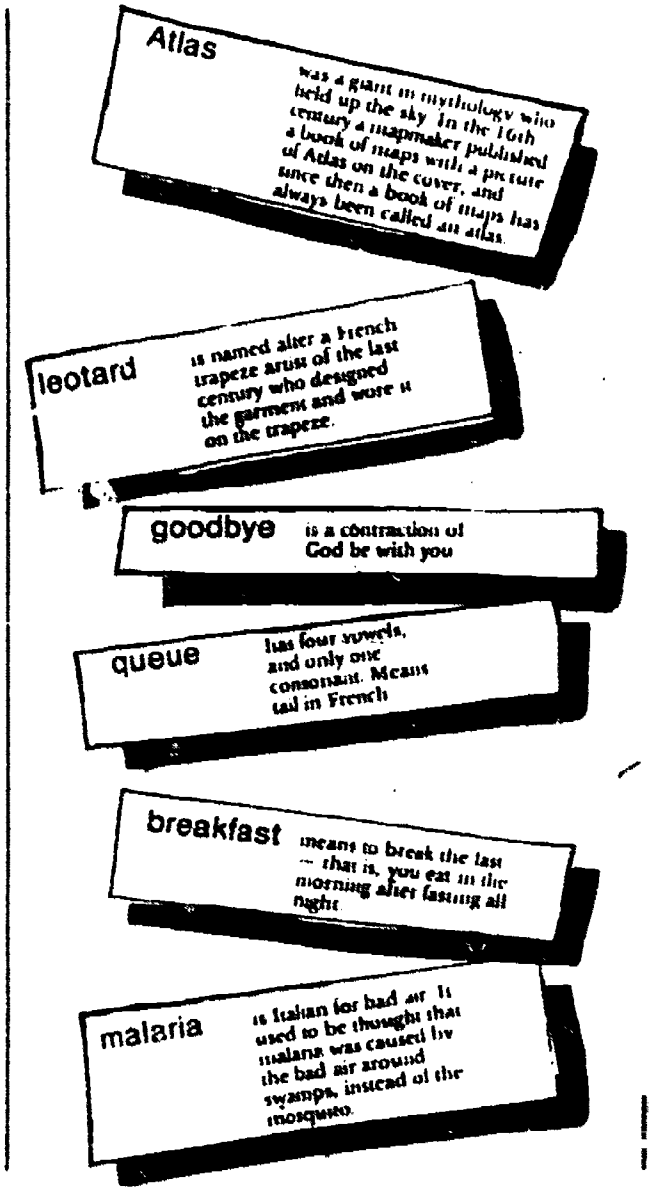
Games and activities such as these, which direct children's attention to the structure of words, also help to stimulate an interest in words. Children who become interested in words, who enjoy using them and manipulating them, are very likely to develop into good spellers.

Extending the Range of Resources

- Self-reliant spellers should be able to use a dictionary competently. At this stage, they can be introduced to more complex dictionaries, and to the various types of information available from a dictionary. (See "*Learning To Use a Dictionary*," p. 31.)

- Children who can use a thesaurus have a useful resource, one which will help extend their vocabularies, as well as supplying the correct spelling. Children who are uncertain about the spelling of a word, but who know its meaning, can be shown how to locate it in a thesaurus by looking up a word of similar meaning.

- Dictionaries of etymology and books which discuss the origins of words can be interesting, as well as a spelling aid. For many words, a knowledge of their derivation makes the spelling appear more logical. See page 34 for a list of useful books.



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EVALUATION

When spelling is taught as part of the writing process, evaluation of children's spelling is most useful if it is based on their spelling within their writing. By observing and classifying the errors the children make, the teacher can draw conclusions about the strategies the children have used in spelling particular words, and can design appropriate teaching activities. However, there is no point in compiling an exhaustive list of categories of spelling mistakes if this information does not lead to conclusions about the type of teaching required.

There can be no hard and fast rules about error analysis. Children's errors may vary from one piece of writing to another, and some mistakes may be due to "slips of the pen". But there are some types of errors which do reveal information about the children's stage of development, and which suggest ways of helping the children to improve their spelling.

For example:

- The child who writes
  wuns - once
  ennee - any
  wot - what
  becos - because
  is relying on one spelling strategy - that of trying to match sounds and letters.

  This child needs to be directed to alternative strategies. In particular, the Look, Say, Cover, Write, Check method could be helpful.
- The child who writes stopt
  movd
  startid
  is also trying to represent the sound of the words, but in this case needs help in learning about the spelling of the past tense ending *ed*.

  But note that the child who writes *keeped* for *kept* or *feeled* for *felt* is in the process of discovering the way to spell the past tense of verbs. This type of error reveals an understanding of the spelling system. The child now has to learn that these words are exceptions to the general rule.
- Errors such as *burgular*, *umberella* and *libary* may be caused by mispronunciation of the words. In this case it may be necessary to discuss the pronunciation as well as the spelling.
- Some apparent spelling errors may arise from a confusion of two similar words:
  there - their
  witch - which
  weather - whether
  Often, simple mnemonic devices can be used to help children remember the correct usage of such words.

  The witch had an itch.

  Teach why? which? where? together. This is helpful for *where-were* confusion, too.
- Errors such as *dissappointed* or *unecessary* indicate that the children have not understood the structure of the words. It may be sufficient to show them *dis/appointed* and *un/necessary*, and discuss the meanings of the prefixes.
- Children who write *grils* for *girls* or *brid* for *bird* have not paid sufficient attention to the letter order. Children who make this type of error may be able to correct the words if they are asked to read what they have written.

When the teacher is discussing a child's writing, it may be helpful to ask the child about the spelling strategy used to produce a particular spelling. The reason for the error may then become apparent to both teacher and child.

ERIC

Writing Folders

A folder containing samples of each child's writing provides a comprehensive record of the development of spelling skills. A representative sample of writing can be selected, the date recorded, and any relevant comments added. This can also be used in discussing teaching methods and the child's progress with parents.

Spelling Check Lists

A check list may also be used to record the children's progress. This notes the strengths and weaknesses of each child, with comments on teaching activities required.

For example, a check list for beginning spellers may record:

- knowledge of the alphabet;
- handwriting ability;
- any words the child knows how to spell;
- attitude to spelling.

For older children:

- common errors, and types of errors;
- ability to use a dictionary;
- areas of progress;
- ability to locate and correct misspellings.

Evaluation techniques such as these provide not only a record of the children's progress, they also reveal information about the strategies the children are using in their spelling, and suggest suitable teaching activities. This type of information is much more useful to the teacher than is 6/10, 87 per cent or 7 years 9 months, the type of score which is often produced by other forms of evaluation.

LIMITATIONS OF STANDARDISED SPELLING TESTS

There are several spelling assessment techniques available for use in the classroom, but the most common is a spelling test, where the teacher reads out a list of words for the children to write. The words may be those taught during the week, a selection of words which contain a particular letter pattern, or even words from a standardised spelling test. Tests like these all result in the children receiving a score, a mark for spelling.

Care must be taken in interpreting these scores.For example, in a test of five words which had been taught during the week, John and Betty received the same score - 0/5.

John	*Betty*
cart - kart	cart - yplo
apple - aple	apple - abin
Monday - Munday	Monday - M
swim - swimm	swim - slaslam
bad - bab	bad - dno

But, although they received the same score, John and Betty are clearly at different stages of spelling development, and require different teaching activities to assist them. The score gives very little information about their progress or their needs.

Standardised spelling tests also produce a score for each child. The 1955 Schonell Graded Word Spelling Tests produce results in the form of a Spelling Age and Spelling Quotient. The Spelling Age is obtained by dividing the number of words correctly spelled by ten, and adding five years. However, there is no explanation of the concepts of Spelling Age or Spelling Quotient, and no suggestions for suitable teaching activities for children who score at particular levels. To discover that a child has a Spelling Age of 8.9 years is of no assistance to a teacher planning a spelling program to cater for the children's spelling needs.

Another standardised test, the ACER Spelling Test Years 3-6 "is designed to measure levels of achievement in spelling" (ACER, 1976, p.1). The child's raw score is converted into a percentile rank. This

means that, for example, a child whose raw score is equivalent to a percentile rank of 49 has performed as well as, or better than, 49 per cent of the sample used to standardise the test.

But such a measurement gives no information about the strategies a child used when attempting to spell the words, nor any indication of appropriate teaching methods.

Another form of spelling assessment is provided by the New Zealand *Proof Reading Tests of Spelling* (PRETOS). In these tests a child reads several paragraphs, underlining the errors and attempting to write the correct spelling. The tests "...are essentially measures of spelling achievement within the context of a proofreading task..." (Croft et al., 1981, p.3). PRETOS has been standardised and class norms are provided for the two tasks tested.

> "Class percentile ranks are provided for both *production* and *recognition* scores. The *production* score is a measure of the child's ability to spell a word correctly after identifying it as incorrect, and also to locate the error-free lines. The *recognition* score is a measure of the ability to recognise misspelt words, irrespective of whether they have been corrected successfully or not." (Croft et al., 1981, p.3.)

Neither production nor recognition percentile ranking scores inform a teacher of the strategies the children used in their individual spelling attempts, or of the teaching they require to progress in spelling. The section of PRETOS where an analysis of responses to the test items is described provides some assistance in these areas. **However, assessment of the children's errors in their own writing will provide more useful information for the teacher.**

LEARNING TO USE A DICTIONARY

Children who are to develop into competent spellers need to be able to use a dictionary. This is a resource that is accessible when teachers and word lists are not available, and is the principal resource of adult writers.

However, learning to use a dictionary entails learning a variety of complex skills, and these require careful teaching if the children are to feel confident of their ability to find their way around a dictionary.

First, they need to understand the concept of alphabetical order, and they must be able to find letters which are arranged in that order.

Some suggestions for helping beginners:

- Have a copy of the alphabet for the children to use as a reference: on the top of their tables, or at eye level around the room.
- Give children alphabet cards, blocks or tiles to arrange in alphabetical order.
- Play a game where the children have to supply the next letter to a given letter, or the one before.
- Children arrange pictures in alphabetical order: cat, dog, horse, lion, monkey, zebra.
- Compile an alphabet with a picture, suggested by the children, for each letter.
- A group of children arrange themselves in alphabetical order, according to their names.

As the children begin to use their personal dictionaries, they will begin to use their knowledge of alphabetical order to find the correct page. At this stage, only the first letter of the words is used for listing them: all words beginning with a particular letter will be written as required on the relevant page.

After becoming accustomed to using their personal dictionaries, the children will be able to begin to use simple commercial dictionaries. Now, they must learn that words are organised according to the alphabetical order of all their letters, not just the first. This concept is best learned through using the dictionary, but many children will need help and encouragement. If the teacher and a group of children look at the dictionary together, the teacher can lead the discussion of the word order:

> Why is *car* before *cat*?
> *Cow* is on this page.
> Will we turn forwards or backwards to find *cup*?

Questions such as these will direct the children's attention to the way the words are arranged, and with practice they will come to understand the system.

However, as well as learning about the way words are listed alphabetically, children need to learn many other techniques to help them use a dictionary.

- They need to learn about the function of the guide words at the top of the pages of the dictionary.
- They need to understand that many words are listed under the root word. If they want to find *painting*, for example, they may have to look under *paint*; *network* may be under *net*.
- Plurals can also be a problem. Some dictionaries give irregular plurals, and children at a more advanced level can be taught to recognise these entries, but a child who is looking for *fairies*, and finds only *fairy*, will need the teacher's help.

Problems such as these are best overcome by regular practice in using a dictionary. Children can be asked to find some words which create a particular problem, and the solution can be discussed. However, it is important that dictionary practice does not concentrate on problems. Children need to feel that they can find most words in the dictionary without too much trouble.

At the early stage of dictionary practice, when children are learning how the dictionary is organised, most of the words they search for should be presented in writing. They are learning how to find a word in the dictionary, and this problem should be separated from the problem of how to find a word when the spelling is unknown.

Once children have understood the system of word order in the dictionary, dictionary practice can concentrate on finding words which are presented orally. When children use a dictionary to check the spelling of a word, they are usually relying on the sound of the word.

> "How can I look it up in the dictionary if I can't spell it?" is a frequent objection, and one that has some validity.
>
> Children need extensive practice in thinking of alternative possible spellings, and this is also a valuable spelling exercise. If *whistle* is not under *wis*, where else might it be?
>
> *If physical* is not under *fis*, where else will we look? Where could we look for *heavy? friend? brother?*

But dictionary practice should not be restricted to irregular words. It is important for children to learn the commonly occurring letter patterns.

When the children have understood the basic principles of using a dictionary, and are handling it with confidence, they can begin to explore the many other types of information it contains.

- The system used to indicate the pronunciation of words can be discussed. These vary from dictionary to dictionary, and some are very complex, but the children should be able to understand the purpose of the pronunciation guide, and apply it to some words : chef (sh-), chorus (k-) (from the *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary*).
- The variety of meanings for a particular word can be interesting, as can the numbers of ways in which the word can be used. A glance at a simple word like *horse*, in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, shows the scope for discussion: look a gift horse in the mouth; horsepower; horse-laugh; horse-radish; put the cart before the horse.
- The information on the origin of words can also be interesting:
  fortnight — from the Old English, fourteen nights.
  muscle — from the Latin mus-mouse (apparently because of its shape).
  panic — from the Greek god Pan, reputed to cause panic.

Children who are competent in using a dictionary, and who are encouraged to use it when they are in doubt about the spelling of a word, have a valuable spelling aid. Children who learn that the dictionary is a source of fascinating and useful information, and who may even read it for pleasure and entertainment, are well on the way to developing that interest in words which is so often the hallmark of a good speller.

For information on dictionaries suitable for use in schools, see *School Library Bulletin: Dictionary Survey* (Library Branch, Victorian Education Department, 1982).

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