

California State University, San Bernardino

**CSUSB ScholarWorks**

---

Theses Digitization Project

John M. Pfau Library

---

1999

## Building spelling concepts through word study

Lisa Kathryn Denham MacDougall

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project>



Part of the [Reading and Language Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

MacDougall, Lisa Kathryn Denham, "Building spelling concepts through word study" (1999). *Theses Digitization Project*. 1518.

<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project/1518>

This Project is brought to you for free and open access by the John M. Pfau Library at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses Digitization Project by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@csusb.edu](mailto:scholarworks@csusb.edu).

BUILDING SPELLING CONCEPTS THROUGH WORD STUDY

---

A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
Education: Reading/Language Arts

---

by  
Lisa Kathryn Denham MacDougall

June 1999

BUILDING SPELLING CONCEPTS THROUGH WORD STUDY


---

A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

---

by  
Lisa Kathryn Denham MacDougall  
June 1999

Approved by:

  
Adria Klein, First Reader

4-25-99  
Date

  
Joe Gray, Second Reader

## ABSTRACT

This project begins with a discussion of current frustrations in teaching spelling and the long-standing practice of teaching spelling through rote-memorization techniques. A review of the literature on spelling gives insight as to how children learn to spell. They learn to spell by constructing knowledge about words. Learning to spell is a developmental process which proceeds through general, yet predictable stages. In response to the findings in the literature, a handbook for teachers is included in this project. The handbook outlines an approach to teaching spelling which is respectful of children's need to develop spelling skills over time, and their need to construct knowledge through extensive interactions with print. Written for teachers of first and second grade, it includes activities in word study to further familiarize children with word patterns.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iii	
CHAPTER ONE: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM		
Introduction.....	1	
Correct Spelling in Perspective.....	1	
Learning to Read: The Whole Picture.....	3	
Learning to Spell: Emphasis on the Process, not the Product.....	7	
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE		
Learning to Spell: Insights from Research.....	10	
Spelling is Language Learning.....	10	
Spelling is Developmental.....	13	
Combining Cognitive and Operant Views of Spelling Acquisition.....	16	
Strategies to Build Concepts in Spelling.....	16	
Strategies for Formal Spelling Instruction.....	19	
Using Spelling Lists to Aid in Spelling Acquisition...	20	
Evaluation of Spelling Ability.....	21	
Conclusion: Support for Curriculum Reform.....	22	
CHAPTER THREE: GOALS AND LIMITATIONS		
Goals.....	24	
Limitations.....	26	
Conclusion.....	28	
APPENDIX A: A Spelling Handbook for Teachers of Grades One and Two: Introduction.....		29
APPENDIX B: Research and Learning to Spell.....	31	

APPENDIX C: The Basics.....	37
APPENDIX D: Word Exploration Activities.....	41
APPENDIX E: Assessment and Evaluation of Spelling.....	59
APPENDIX F: The Parents' Role in Spelling Acquisition.....	60
REFERENCES .....	63

## CHAPTER ONE: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

### Introduction

I once had a second grade student who did not like to write. He struggled to put words on paper because, in his mind, he had to spell each one correctly. Most of his writing time was spent looking and asking for the correct spelling of words. How do children become handicapped and hesitant to write independently with confidence? My guess is that parents and teachers, with good intentions, have placed an unnecessary and even damaging emphasis on correct spelling. For a weekly spelling test, they offer rewards for 100%, and sometimes consequences for a poor grade. Teachers have long struggled with the apparent dichotomy of how to teach children to spell correctly while at the same time encourage them as writers. This project gives teachers options they may need to empower students to be explorers of language and growing, developing, confident writers.

### Correct Spelling in Perspective

Overemphasis on correct spelling at an early stage of development is indicative of traditional views, arguably decades old, of how spelling should be taught. According to this tradition, lists of words are memorized for a weekly spelling test, workbook pages are filled in, and words are practiced, sometimes by writing the words repetitively.

Gentry (1987) writes in Spel...is a Four Letter Word:

Too much that is known about how to teach spelling isn't being put into practice. I can think of no subject we teach more poorly or harbor more myths about than spelling. In spite of volumes of research, teachers still use the same unsubstantiated teaching formulas. The spelling strategies and lessons you remember--whether you were in school one, two, or three generations ago--are still in use. Because of a conspiracy of ignorance, misunderstanding, and poor teaching methods, myths about spelling are lived out daily in thousands of classrooms. (p.7)

Everyone will most certainly agree correct spelling is vitally important to numerous facets of our daily social lives. To be well-respected and to have ideas taken seriously, one must display knowledge of proper spelling. When one is scrutinized by the public, it is more often our spelling knowledge which first becomes evident above all else. The message may be lost for the distraction of misspellings.

The importance of using correct spelling in the public eye is inescapable. The argument, then, comes from how and when to teach people to spell correctly. I do not agree that memorizing a list of words, writing them three times each, putting them in sentences, and then taking a test on them at a young age is the best way to teach people how to spell correctly. I believe many teachers share the same concerns about spelling instruction. Of concern is the lack of information for teachers regarding the research about spelling. In addition, the lack of ideas in the teachers' possession which outlines meaningful spelling instruction



leaves them little choice but to teach the way they were taught or the way they have always taught spelling.

### Learning to Read: The Whole Picture

Fundamental to my philosophy on the teaching of spelling is the assumption that reading and writing, listening and speaking are interrelated; and when they are separated for purposes of instruction for the young learner, they lose their value and meaning in language as a whole. Children lack the experience adults have with written language. As adults, we can look at the 'str' blend and immediately see it's usefulness in written and spoken language. We begin to think of words like: string, stream, strong, street, and so forth. But a six year old does not make that connection so easily because their experience with print is limited. In order for children to understand reading and writing, they need opportunities to build their own experiences with print. In addition, they will need time to read and be read to. They will need opportunities to determine how to read and write their own original pieces.

Too much emphasis on the specific skills of reading and writing detracts from the beauty of real reading and writing. An analogy: when a child is introduced to a bicycle for the first time, it would be ridiculous for the parents to show the child just the pedal, give instruction on how to use it, and make the child practice it; then show the child the handle bar, give instruction on how to use it, and lastly,

make the child practice it. More likely, after presenting the bike, they put the child on the bike and hold the child and the bike up while learning to ride begins. They let go a little at a time as they see confidence building. Someday there will be a perfect time to look at the components of the bicycle: when the child is curious to know how the parts work and how to clean and repair the parts.

It is very natural to talk about and explore sound-letter relationships. They cannot be ignored when learning to read; because even the children themselves will hear sounds and patterns in words and will want to talk about them and learn more about them. This is different from a situation where children must practice phonics in unnatural ways, which may be of little interest. If we introduce the sight words, the sounds of the letters, the digraphs, the blends, the vowels, the spelling rules, and the spelling patterns before or more than children can experience the world of written language through complete stories in real books, then they may not connect those parts to real books and real reading. They might get the idea reading is practicing sounds and writing is spelling words correctly. The real message about reading for the child is: Reading is pleasurable; reading is functional; reading is important. The message about writing which I want my students to understand is they can be writers and express their thoughts and ideas for others to read and

gain pleasure from even before they know things like all the sounds the vowels make.

Approaching reading and writing instruction from a whole language philosophy does not withhold until later the true pleasures of reading and writing. Whole language reading and writing is based on research and observation of how people learn best. As described by Weaver (1994), the learning theories of Holdaway and Cambourne show how the optimal learning situation is one that is highly supportive. In each theory, there is a time of observation and demonstration, where the learner may observe the act in progress. The learner is invited to replicate, or practice with guidance, the skill to be learned. Finally, the learner is confident to try it alone, and eventually perform the skill with a sense of accomplishment. Young readers and writers benefit from the support which is given when their approximations are encouraged. Inventive spelling, less than word-perfect reading, and children being read to are activities that promote a supportive atmosphere for learning to read and write.

In another illustration, Smith (1997) describes optimal conditions for learning to read in terms of a "Literacy Club", where beginning readers are supported and accepted. Their approximations and attempts are embraced and encouraged, just as a baby's attempts to talk are given attention and positive reinforcement. The allowances and

behaviors that accompany the act of nurturing our children to speak the language should also be the same behaviors we exhibit as they learn to read. Just as adults help children to speak by speaking to and with them, they help children read by reading to and with them.

Reading, writing, listening, and speaking are all activities we engage in to make and gain meaning from language. This leads to an additional belief I hold about reading. Because reading is a process of meaning, it is not our eyes, but our brain which searches the text for meaning. Our eyes do not recognize and identify each letter as demonstrated in twelve instances of research cited in Weaver (1994); instead the brain deals with unfamiliar words by relating them to other words with similar and familiar patterns, onsets and rimes, thereby decreasing time spent decoding. Patricia Cunningham's research echoes findings cited by Weaver: Cunningham writes, "The brain, however, is not a rule applier but a pattern detector" (in Robinson, McKenna, and Wedman, 1996). Comprehension can occur even if all the words in a text are not identifiable. Goodman (1996) and Weaver both give illustrations of how we use our other cueing systems to gain meaning from text with unknown words. Children learning to read make use of phonics rules, even when they cannot remember the rules or verbalize them (Weaver, 1994).

### Learning to Spell: Emphasis on the Process, not the Product

It does not make sense to me that learning to spell happens from memorizing weekly lists of words and then having a weekly test. Smith (1997) points out that we know how to spell thousands of words by the time we are adults; and it is more likely that they were learned by repeated exposure through reading and writing activities rather than the memorization of a ten word list somewhere in our past.

Even when words are memorized for the test they are often forgotten, sometimes as soon as the following week. In addition, words learned for the test do not always transfer to the child's writing. Experiencing these frustrations led me to eliminate spelling lists and tests from my spelling program. I implemented Writer's Workshop and theorized my students would learn spelling patterns through daily writing in the workshop. The first year I tried this I was curious to know the effect of such a decision. At the end of the year I gave a spelling test to my class and the class of a colleague. Our classes had a similar distribution of abilities within the students; but the other class had studied spelling lists and had taken weekly tests all year. In the end, my class scored higher on the test. Despite the apparent success of this venture, I was still disheartened when the following year, a girl who had been in that class remarked that her mother (also a teacher) was glad her

daughter was now in a class that had spelling lists. So strong is the spelling list tradition!

I believe Holdaway's (1979) learning theory can be applied to learning how to spell. Children learn to spell as they use spelling in frequent writing opportunities that are meaningful to them. When children see writing as pleasurable, functional, and rewarding, they strive to improve their skills. Approximations toward correct spelling are encouraged and praised. Adults model the conventions of writing, and children imitate those conventions.

I also believe that knowledge of spelling is constructed. When children are encouraged to use inventive spelling in real writing instead of memorizing lists of words, they are empowered and become independent writers (Weaver, 1994). In fact, using the term "constructive spelling" rather than "inventive spelling" is Weaver's preference because it implies knowledge-building as children write and explore patterns of letters in words.

I have a strong conviction, like Calkins (1994), that children must believe that they are writers, capable of communicating with others through their writing. For instance, I did not correct my son's early attempts at writing because I knew how it would affect him. It would have made him stop! He felt important when he could communicate ideas and information through the signs he made and hung around our house. This was not the time to teach him about

correct spelling, although there is a time and a way to teach about conventional spelling. If children do not believe themselves to be capable or worthy of being called a writer, then they will hold back and not take risks in their writing.

Taking a risk in writing helps children to grow as writers. When too much attention is given to correct spelling, content suffers. Children will develop into much stronger writers when conventional spelling is not the emphasis (Graves, 1983; Wilde, 1992). Wilde insists competent spelling takes time; and parents and teachers should trust it will happen. After all, most of the words we know how to spell as adults were never on a list, yet we are competent spellers. Through our experiences in reading and writing we learned spelling patterns and generalizations which allowed us to develop as competent spellers.

Competent spelling happens gradually as parents and teachers encourage children to explore, wonder about, and notice patterns in words on a daily basis (Calkins, 1994). My vision for reform in spelling instruction includes daily ventures into investigation of word patterns, daily opportunities to write for real purposes, emphasis in school and at home on reading and writing instead of memorization of lists of words, and individualized instruction and assessment of spelling skills through writing conferences.

## CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### Learning to Spell: Insights from Research

Classroom activities do not always reflect the complexity of spelling acquisition. Learning to spell is much more complex than memorizing a list of words. Research in spelling has been helpful in illuminating some of the complexities of learning to spell. It has also been fairly conclusive on some of the more successful methods for teaching spelling. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight prominent areas of research in spelling. The first section of this chapter will focus on how children learn to spell. The second section will identify methods which research has determined are the most successful and meaningful ways to facilitate growth in spelling skills. The third section will address the assessment of spelling ability. Finally, the conclusion of this chapter will explore the implications from research for a curriculum reform in spelling instruction.

### Spelling is Language Learning

Language learning is built on imitation, invention, interaction, and risk-taking (Gentry & Gillet, 1993). "Many unsuccessful attempts must come before success" (p.18). Children learn to spell by imitation and approximation, resulting in the invention of their own spelling. Children learn language "by first developing their own rules, which



they refine as they gain more language experience" (Bean & Bouffler, 1987, p.71). It is the act of inventive spelling that leads to internalization of how print works (McCracken & McCracken, 1996).

Learning to spell is learning language (Bean & Bouffler, 1987; Henderson, 1990; Holdaway, 1979; Krashen, 1989; Temple, Nathan, Burris, & Temple, 1988; Wilde, 1992; Zutell, 1996). Researchers have noted the relationship between learning to speak, learning to read, and learning to write. Krashen presents spelling acquisition as consistent with language acquisition. As children make attempts at spelling words, they are making gains in their struggles to read as well. Temple, et al., write, "the concept of a word, and the ability to identify phonemes in words are important prerequisites for reading" (p. 103).

In keeping with the theory that spelling acquisition is language learning researchers have looked at the possibility of spelling knowledge having come from experiences in reading and writing (Henderson, 1990; Horn, 1954; Krashen, 1989). While Krashen did find improved spelling ability with more meaningful writing opportunities, he does not put much faith in the idea that spelling comes from writing. There could not be enough writing, feedback, and attention to the feedback to learn to spell the many thousands of words people learn to spell.

According to Krashen (1989), there is some research to support a reading hypothesis in learning to spell. The results were not overwhelming. In "read and test" studies, subjects were exposed to a word a few times, in an unfocused manner, through reading. Gains in spelling accuracy were minimal. Krashen wonders if gains would be greater with increased exposure to words through reading as was found by Nagy, Herman, and Anderson (1985) in their research on vocabulary development. In a review of previous studies, Krashen (1993) found "little or no relationship between the amount of spelling instruction students receive and their spelling competence" (p. 15). Krashen believes spelling knowledge comes mostly from reading. Smith (1994) too, advocates a reading hypothesis. Support for the reading hypothesis can also be found in the work of Henderson (1990), who believes the theory to be valid only in the beginning stages of reading acquisition. At first, reading provides the exposure necessary for learning to spell a small collection of words. As reading becomes more complex, Henderson believes, it can no longer serve as the only avenue of spelling learning.

Finally, researchers suggest that spelling is also learned through direct or formal instruction, within the context of the language arts program (Gentry & Gillet, 1993; Henderson, 1990; Hodges, 1981; McCracken & McCracken, 1996; Wilde, 1992). According to Henderson, formal instruction

provides a basis on which subsequent informal learning through reading can occur. Direct instruction does not necessarily imply memorizing a list of words. Temple, et al. (1988) caution spelling is not learned through memorization alone. Most of the words adults know how to spell were never on a spelling list. It is through their acquired knowledge of generalizations, patterns, and a few predictable rules that so many words are learned by the time one reaches adulthood.

Spelling is Developmental

Children's spelling is usually not as random as one might suppose. Studies of children's invented spellings have shown they fall into broad categories, which are progressive and developmental in nature. The developmental spellings progress through predictable stages toward correct, or conventional spelling.

Researchers have found spelling to be a developmental process beginning very simply and evolving into extensive knowledge of complex patterns and rules (Beers & Beers, 1981; Henderson & Templeton, 1986; Read, 1971; Templeton, 1979). Wilde (1992) writes, "Spelling development, therefore, is a process that begins globally, perhaps with a scribble intended to represent a message as a whole, and eventually becomes more complex, incorporating increasingly elaborated knowledge of the various linguistic levels represented in spelling" (p. 23). Children proceed through predictable stages which Gentry (1987) has labeled and further described

as: precommunicative, semiphonetic, phonetic, transitional, and correct (conventional).

The precommunicative stage represents strong desire on the part of children to communicate through written language. At this stage of development, there is no letter-to-sound correspondence. Random letters, and sometimes numbers, appear in upper and in lower case and not always in a left-to-right order. The writers are the only ones who can read their spelling, and only immediately after they compose the words.

As understanding of letter to sound correspondence increases, children move into the semiphonetic stage. semiphonetic spellers use letter-sound knowledge to partially spell words, sometimes using the name of the letter itself as representative of that sound. For example, R for are, U for you, and H for ch. At this stage there is usually left-to-right sequencing; and there may or may not be spaces between words.

Children spelling in the phonetic stage are representing every sound they hear with a letter or letter combinations. Words are usually spaced apart. They begin to develop systems for particular spellings, although not always conventionally correct. For example, a phonetic speller might spell uv for of, softr for softer, and wuz for was.

The transitional spellers make good use of spelling patterns and conventions. Vowels are correctly placed in syllables, and not left out, as is often the case in the

phonetic stage. Transitional spellers understand words not only need to sound like they are spelled correctly, but they also need to look right. Children are relying as much or more on visual representation as auditory representation. Many of the words at this stage are spelled correctly.

Conventional or correct stage of spelling reveals children's large repertoire of learned words, patterns, phonetic knowledge, and semantic knowledge. They know when a word does not look right, and can use that strategy in their proofreading. They have knowledge of suffixes, prefixes, contractions, and compound words. Conventional spelling is a road map, a schema, on which to build more spelling knowledge. Building knowledge in this stage continues into adulthood.

The implications from research on spelling as a developmental process are played out in the choices of spelling instruction. If spelling is developmental, researchers theorize, then the implication is to design instruction appropriate to the level of spelling development. To require a child working in the precommunicative or semi-phonetic stage to memorize a list of spelling words for a test is like asking a four-year-old to memorize the sixes multiplication tables. The right answers may appear for the test, but there will be no transfer of the concept to the child's life. Developmentally, the child is not at a stage where the concept of multiplication can be understood or used

effectively. A child who is working at a semi-phonetic stage may spell words correctly for a test, but will not be able to use the "learned" patterns in real writing because those patterns have not yet been internalized or understood. In other words, there would be no transfer of knowledge from memorization to real use.

### Combining Cognitive and Operant Views of Spelling Acquisition

According to Gentry and Gillet (1993) the answer to the question of how to teach children to spell lies in combining cognitive and operant views of learning. They advocate a balanced program which incorporates the best of whole language and more traditional views supported by research. For the purposes of this investigation, cognitive, or conceptual strategies will be explored first, then more systematic (operant) approaches. Most of the experts in spelling research support combining these approaches.

### Strategies to Build Concepts in Spelling

From a conceptual view of learning how to spell, teaching must come through extensive experiences in reading and writing (Gentry, 1987; Gentry & Gillet, 1993; Hodges, 1981; Temple, et al., 1988; Wilde, 1992). Learning spelling is learning language. It should be integrated (Bean & Bouffler, 1987); because "'teaching' spelling is as much about 'teaching' reading and writing as it is about spelling per se" (p.5). Smith (1994) goes a step further, placing the emphasis on learning, not teaching. He writes spelling is

best learned incidentally, effortlessly, through reading experiences. Adds Krashen (1989), even if "conscious learning was as good as acquisition, or even twice as efficient, I would still prefer comprehensible input: an hour of pleasure reading is far preferable to thirty minutes of drill" (p. 454).

Proponents of conceptual learning theories also advocate exploration of word patterns, generalizations, and familiarity with a few reliable rules (Bolton & Snowball, 1993; Gentry, 1987; Henderson, 1990; Hodges, 1981; Temple, et al., 1988). Activities to enhance word study and exploration are chosen at a developmentally appropriate stage (DiStefano & Hagerty, 1985; Temple, et al., 1988). For example, a child in the precommunicative or semiphonetic stage has experiences in learning the alphabet, the concept of wordness, and letter-sound correspondence. In the phonetic stage, students benefit from exploration into word families, patterns, and structures of words (Gentry & Gillet, 1993).

Writing activities are frequent, varied meaningful, and purposeful (Bean & Bouffler, 1987; Bolton & Snowball, 1993; Gentry, 1987; Gentry & Gillet, 1993; Henderson, 1990; Hodges, 1981; Wilde, 1992). "An effective environment in which to learn to spell is one that provides numerous and varied opportunities to master the patterns, generalizations, and anomalies of the writing system" (Hodges, p. 11). Teachers include time for children to observe an experienced writer

compose with conventional spelling. Modeling is important to the development of conventional spelling (Bolton & Snowball, 1993).

One of the most important findings of spelling research, is the value of allowing children to use inventive spelling in their writing. Clark (1988) found children who were encouraged to use inventive spelling developed word analysis skills. They scored significantly better than traditional spellers on spelling tests of regularly and irregularly spelled words, word attack, and word recognition (untimed only; traditional spellers scored better under flash card conditions). "The superior spelling and phonic analysis skill of children using invented spelling suggested that they benefited from the practice of matching sound segments of words to letters as they wrote and from using their own sound sequence analysis" (p. 307).

Inventive (or constructive) spelling is productive, claim DiStefano and Hagerty (1985), because it allows children to test their predictions of how they think words are spelled. Other researchers, as well, support children's invented spelling for its contribution toward a child's development of spelling skills and concept formation (Bean & Bouffler, 1987; Bolton & Snowball, 1993; Gentry, 1987; Hodges, 1981; Smith, 1994; Temple, et al., 1988; Wilde, 1992).



### Strategies for Formal Spelling Instruction

Clearly, the research emphasizes the benefits of approaching spelling learning from a developmental viewpoint. Under that umbrella, most researchers advocate some degree of systematic instruction appropriate to the developmental stages of spelling. Direct, systematic instruction can form a foundation on which incidental learning through reading can continue to occur (Henderson, 1990). In direct, systematic spelling instruction "words are met head on. They are memorized, compared and contrasted. The principles of their structure are exposed, internalized, and made a working part of children's knowledge of written language" (Henderson, p. 167).

Henderson (1990) claims reading at first gives children good spelling abilities, but cannot continue as the source of spelling knowledge because of the increased complexity of the reading. "Reading extends vocabulary knowledge but not exact spelling knowledge" (p. 92). Henderson also believes that some of the words children use in their writing need to be memorized correctly so they may become learned patterns to build upon. Especially for the below average speller, direct instruction is needed (Horn, 1954). "Systematic teachers who give adequate attention to matters of spelling produce better spellers than those who leave learning to chance" (Peters, 1975, as quoted in Bolton & Snowball, 1993, p. 54). Again,

direct instruction may or may not include memorizing a list of words.

### Using Spelling Lists to Aid in Spelling Acquisition

Some researchers advocate memorizing lists of high frequency words which are used in children's writing (Gentry, 1987; Henderson, 1990; Horn, 1954). Others organize lists through patterns and phonics (McCracken & McCracken, 1996). Still others advocate a more individualized approach with children formulating their own lists of words to study (Bolton & Snowball, 1993; Wilde, 1992).

In their summary of the research on the best methods of memorizing word lists, Fitzsimmons and Loomer (1977) highlight those strategies which research in the area of list memorization supports: words should be presented in a list, column style, not in context; a self-corrected pre-test was found to be one of the most valuable indicators of success in learning a list of words; no more than 60-75 minutes per week should be spent on spelling practice; teach a systematic technique for the study of words. The systematic techniques most supported by research are those resembling Fitzgerald's (1951, as cited in Gentry, 1987) method of look, say, see (with eyes closed), cover, write.

Strategies and approaches found not to be helpful in learning how to spell a list of words are: using phonics rules to spell words; writing the words several times each;

practicing them orally; and writing them in the air (as reviewed in Fitzsimmons & Loomer, 1977).

### Evaluation of Spelling Ability

Bolton and Snowball (1993) assert "evaluation of spelling should be according to children's ability to use words in writing rather than to succeed in spelling tests" (p. 56). The degree to which words are learned will be reflected in the student's everyday writing (Bean & Bouffler, 1987; Bolton & Snowball, 1993; Temple, et al., 1988; Wilde, 1992). Writes Temple, et al.:

In order to tell what children's spelling strategies are, we need to have them write words they have not been taught-- words they have not memorized. That is because our object is to see the fruits of their spelling concepts, rather than to test their ability to memorize words. (p.105)

Researchers in spelling maintain that evaluating children's spelling requires an assessment component which guides instruction (Bean & Bouffler, 1987; Bolton & Snowball, 1993; Gentry & Gillet, 1993; Temple, et al., 1988). Gentry devised a developmental spelling test to determine in which stage of development the child is currently working. Once obtained, that information guides instruction appropriate to the level:

Once we know the stage of spelling development in which a child is functioning, what can we do about it? Conceptual learning--and this includes learning how to spell--resists direct teaching. It is not very profitable merely to tell a speller that he is wrong when he makes a mistake. It is not much more effective to require him to memorize the spellings of the words he

will have to write. There are too many of them to memorize; and in any case, what we are after is that the students develop a set concepts about spelling that will enable them to write thousand of words. (Temple, et al., p. 107)

#### Conclusion: Support for Curriculum Reform

The research in spelling acquisition supports a curriculum reform in spelling which recognizes the nature of spelling as conceptual and developmental. Learning spelling is language learning, and should be facilitated as such. It is by nature a developmental process and can be encouraged in its developmental stages. In such a reform, students would have opportunity to learn about spelling through the study of language. Instruction in spelling would reflect the developmental nature of spelling acquisition. Activities and lessons chosen for instruction will be the ones which deal directly at the level where the children are in their understanding and development.

The reading hypothesis, supported by Krashen (1989) and Henderson (1990) necessitates a movement to a language-rich, print-rich environment where there is opportunity for some spelling to be learned incidentally and effortlessly through reading (Smith, 1994). Instead of worksheets and flashcards, a tour of a reading-writing classroom would reveal books being read which are children's favorites, and activities which allow the children to respond to those stories in their own personal ways. Writing activities would prove to have a

purpose, an audience, a reason for writing other than just as a practice exercise.

According to Henderson (1990), reading alone will not carry a child through all the developmental stages of spelling. Additionally, some children need more direct attention in sound-letter relationships in reading and writing. Curriculum reform in spelling would include a study of words integrated into the reading and writing activities of the classroom. Word study and exploration would reflect the needs of the children, appropriate to the developmental stage in which they are learning. Children's attempts at learning to spell, including inventive spelling, would be supported.

A reform in spelling motivated by the research would include children's spelling being assessed and evaluated on the basis of their real writing, not solely on a spelling test of memorized words. Evaluating children's writing gives the teacher information as to the developmental stage of spelling acquisition, and can guide the direction of further instruction in spelling.

When trying to answer the questions how do children learn to spell and what is the best way to facilitate the learning, "the important answers place children, not methods, at the center of the spelling program" (Gentry, 1987, p. 27).

### CHAPTER THREE: GOALS AND LIMITATIONS

This project grows out of frustrations in teaching young children about writing. Specifically, the two major frustrations have been: (1) motivating children to write when they are reluctant to write; because they think every word has to be spelled correctly to be acceptable, and (2) the undeserved value which spelling lists, weekly tests, and other activities which emphasize rote memorization have claimed in spelling programs.

#### Goals

One of the goals of this project is to present teachers with a summary of the literature and research on spelling, which suggests spelling acquisition is constructive and developmental. In the course of presenting a review of the literature, it is my hope that teachers, parents, and other encouragers of children's writing will come to see spelling as more than an acquired skill, separate from writing. They will see spelling as an integral part of language learning, tied to listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Because spelling knowledge is acquired as it is built on other knowledge about spelling (constructive) and acquired slowly over time as the brain learns the patterns of written language (developmental), teachers will agree spelling cannot be learned as effectively through rote memorization alone.

Another goal of this project is to provide alternatives to rote memorization in spelling acquisition. From research in spelling acquisition, we know spelling knowledge is acquired through our experience with letter and sound patterns and generalizations we make from our experience with those patterns. Experience with written language comes most heavily at first through reading. Once children understand the mechanics of written language, they begin to see similarities, patterns, and even words which do not fit patterns.

Consequently, one alternative, and arguably the most important alternative to rote memorization of words, is reading. Not an inconsequential amount of reading, but daily opportunities to hear the print as it is read, see print, and react to print. Another alternative to rote memorization in the early stages of spelling development is word study. Word study gives children opportunities to explore and manipulate letter-sound relationships. More advanced word study involves learning meanings of suffixes and prefixes, word origins, homonyms, and similar activities. Finally, a strong writing program is a powerful alternative to rote memorization techniques such as writing spelling words repetitively. A strong writing program like writer's workshop, which offers independent writing time, gives children the opportunity to write for a purpose. When children write for their own reasons, it is likely to be a more motivating experience.

There is usually an audience involved, which motivates the children to want to learn how to best present their ideas.

Hence, the final goal is for this project to serve as motivation for teachers to examine their reading and writing programs for activities which are encouraging of children's growth in spelling. Children learn best when they are enjoying themselves and the activities they are engaged in hold meaning. It is hoped that teachers will try to incorporate some of the word study activities in the appendix as an alternative to repetitive memorizing techniques. If the pressure of tradition is too great, and it appears elimination of lists and tests will be too upsetting to parents, other teachers, and administrators, then it is hoped teachers will provide word study activities in addition to the existing program.

#### Limitations

What this project does not do is offer day by day instructions for teaching spelling. It does not offer a systematic approach for teaching specific letter-sound relationships at specific times during the development of spelling skills. Although it is hoped teachers will be motivated to build strong reading and writing programs, this project does not give specific suggestions for teaching reading and writing in meaningful ways.

Some experts provide lists of words organized according to blends, digraphs, beginning and ending patterns, and other



similarities. Others list high-frequency words suggested for study. There are no comprehensive lists of words included in this project.

The activities presented in this project are limited in their usefulness to spellers who are not yet spelling conventionally. Therefore, the appendix portion of this project will be more helpful to teachers of first and second grades than the upper grades. Additionally, the project does not meet the needs of special needs learners. It is designed for first and second grade students who are fluent in English. Some of the activities, however, would be helpful to special needs learners and English language learners.

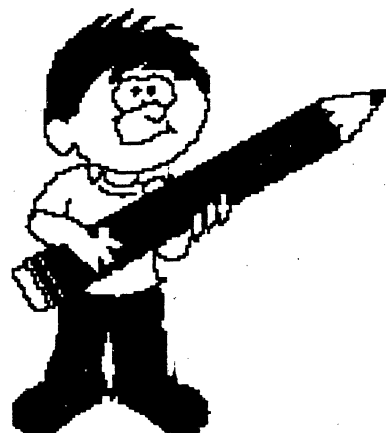
After teachers have used the word study activities from the appendix and have begun to work toward a reading-writing classroom, they will be able to assess the usefulness of this project. On two major points should this project be evaluated: (1) the attitude toward writing the children display, and (2) the developmental growth in the children's spelling. Using their own writing, and using a spelling test of unmemorized words like Gentry and Gillet's (1993) developmental spelling test, strategies the children are using and the stage of development in which they are working can be determined. Using and comparing these measures over time will show the degree of growth in spelling acquisition.

## Conclusion

To summarize, the goal of this project is a re-thinking of how spelling has always been viewed and taught. While this project does not offer a complete spelling program, already packaged for daily lessons, it does give alternatives to the typical spelling programs, which may emphasize memorization and not word study. Spelling can no longer be thought of as a skill to be learned separate from reading and writing.

Children have to be "word detectives" in all their interactions with print, both reading and writing. They must have opportunities to explore the nature of spelling. This project seeks to give children room to do the kind of exploring into spelling that they need in order to develop a concept about spelling, not just activities to help them memorize words.

**A Spelling  
Handbook  
for Teachers of  
Grades One and  
Two:  
Introduction**

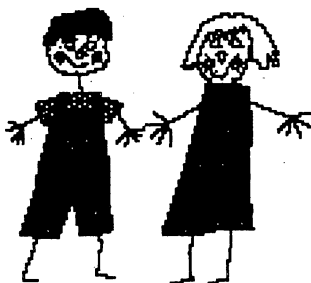


What do the results of the weekly spelling test tell the teacher about each student? They might indicate the amount of parent support a child gets, how well a child reads, how well a child already spells, or how well a child memorizes; but is the weekly spelling test a true indicator of a child's ability to spell? How many times does a child consistently score 100% on the spelling tests, but cannot spell even simple words in a written story? As the child's grade is figured in written language, how is it explained to parents that even though their child gets 100% on the spelling tests, the child did not earn a high mark in writing? What about the children who spend most of the writing time looking for the correct spelling of every word in their story; and at the end of the writing time have two sentences, while others have a whole page written (albeit with some spelling errors)? These are questions which have plagued me as a first and second grade teacher. I have sought to answer these and other questions about spelling through a review of spelling literature. The end result is this handbook, which will provide alternatives to current practices emphasizing rote memorization and weekly spelling tests.

## Why First and Second Grade?

I chose to compile this handbook for first and second grade teachers because teaching spelling to a six-year-old who doesn't know how to read yet is very different from teaching spelling to a nine-year-old who already has a strong background in reading and writing. In the primary grades, the emphasis is on learning to read and write. In contrast, the upper grade students read and write to learn. The differences in spelling instruction at the primary level include: allowance of approximations (often called inventive spelling), heavy emphasis on sound-letter relationships, and exploration of patterns, rules, and generalizations in words. At the upper grade level, there are more tools available to the writer, such as dictionaries and knowledge of word families. Inventive spelling is discouraged at this level. Proofreading skills are taught and practiced regularly. Investigation into word origins becomes a helpful way for the older children to see relationships between words.

Blanket statements are made about how spelling should be taught, seemingly for all age-levels of children. Spelling acquisition is not so simple that it can be taught by the same method for all levels. The children must be considered and how much experience they've had with language. Consider how knowledge of blends like *str* and *gl* and digraphs like *sh* and *ch* help a speller. A new writer in first grade will need experience seeing, hearing, and writing blends. This handbook seeks to give the younger spellers the support they need to develop into strong and confident writers.



## Appendix B

### Research and Learning to Spell

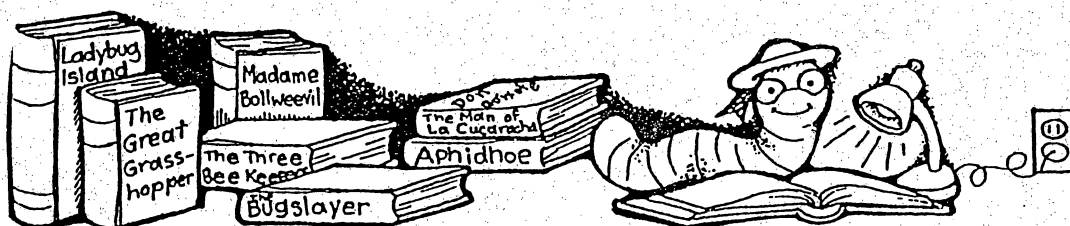
Adults know how to spell about 70,000 words. How are all those words learned? Some from spelling lists; but even learning 20 words a week grades one through six would only yield 1,080 words by the end of elementary school. People learn to spell by learning patterns and generalizations in words, which are then applied to other words. Young children learn to spell some words just by reading. Consider the kindergartner, who never had a single spelling list, but by the end of the year, can spell a handful of words. Where and how were those words learned? Spelling lists and tests are traditional, but the research is showing that not all words are learned from a list.

Research has shown spelling knowledge to come from reading, writing, and direct instruction (Krashen, 1989). It can safely be said spelling does not come from spelling lists alone. While many words can be learned through a list, most of the others will be learned through repeated exposure to print in reading and writing experiences. In addition, as illustrated above, lists may not be necessary or even very useful in the earliest stages (kindergarten and first grade) of writing. What is helpful to those young writers is word study and exploration, a focus of this handbook.

Spelling is a developmental process (Beers & Beers, 1977; Read, 1971; Templeton, 1979) whereby the knowledge of how to spell is acquired slowly over several years. Disturbing to me is the idea that a first grader should be using correct spelling all the time. Considering many first graders come to school either not knowing or barely knowing how to read, it seems unreasonable to expect them to spell with any kind of accuracy.

Spelling is constructed. It is knowledge built on prior knowledge. If young spellers are always supplied with the correct spellings of words, then they miss the opportunities to try spelling on their own. It's the act of constructing spelling which helps children expand their knowledge about how spelling works. They need to know how spelling works in order to apply that knowledge to other words in the future.

It is the nature of the mind to seek patterns in language. When we encounter an unfamiliar word, our brain searches for words with the same or a similar pattern. Children must practice hearing the letter-to-sound relationships in words in order to use them effectively. If children are left to work out some of this knowledge for themselves, then they will begin a path of spelling development, growing as capable and confident writers.



The research has uncovered predictable stages children transition through in their acquisition of spelling knowledge (Beers & Beers, 1981; Gentry, 1993; Read, 1971). They begin to spell by writing letter and number-like figures randomly on a page. Gentry has termed this the **precommunicative** stage of spelling. The writers are the only ones who know what the writing says, because it is not phonetic. As children gain more knowledge about how print works, how sounds and letters are connected, they begin to progress through other stages of development. **Semiphonetic** spellers use letter-sound knowledge to partially spell words, sometimes using the name of the letter itself as representative of that sound. For example, *R* for are, and *U* for you. Children in the **phonetic** stage are representing every sound they hear with a letter or letter combinations. There is usually

appropriate spacing between words. A phonetic speller might spell *uv* for *of*, *softr* for *softer*. **Transitional** spellers are making use of the knowledge of patterns and rules they've acquired so far. They usually place a vowel in each syllable. Transitional spellers make use of visual information, by asking themselves, does this word look like it's spelled right? Many words in the transitional stage are spelled correctly. Finally, the learner will reach **conventional** spelling, which is the correct spelling of words. They have knowledge of suffixes, prefixes, contractions, and compound words. Building knowledge in this stage continues for the rest of their lives.

### Examples of Developmental Spelling

Precommunicative:

WPAELU

Semiphonetic:

DOD MSAPR  
GRDPLES

"Don't mess up our garden please."

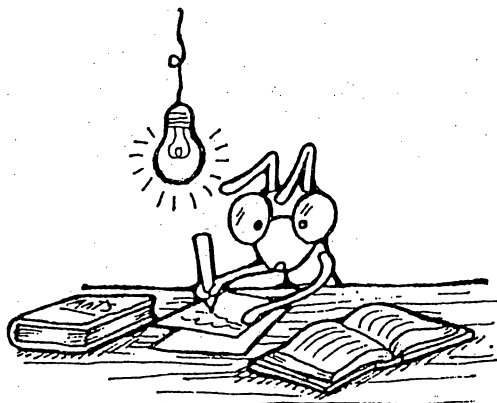
Phonetic:

I Lic The Prt  
Wah Godelaks  
GOS in The  
Hogs.

"I like the part when Goldilocks  
goes in the house."

Transitional:

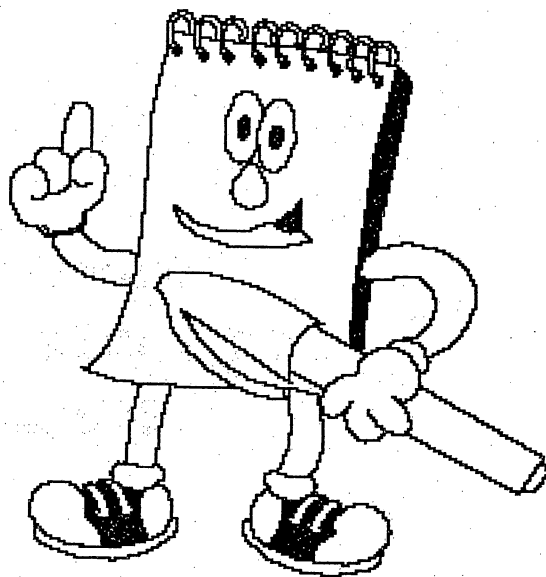
*I went to Lackairoheade.  
And opind presits! I went hicking.  
I saw my aunt!*





These stages are not meant to be so clear cut that a teacher can clearly categorize all of the students. A child may show signs of two or more stages, and is most likely transitioning slowly from one to another. The stages are most helpful as a guide for instruction. In the section on word exploration, each activity has a suggested stage or stages where it would be most beneficial. Knowing the children's stages of spelling development can lead to appropriate instruction to meet their needs.

The research is clear for young writers. Students will be confident, capable writers if the emphasis is on learning how to spell, not which words to spell. Children showered with reading, writing, and word-exploring activities become language learners, observers, and "word detectives," as I call them in my classroom.



### What About Lists and Tests?

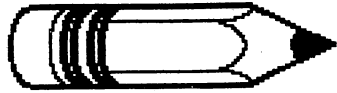
The best kind of spelling list is one which practices a pattern. If a list is used, the words should be of a certain pattern or word family; and the activities accompanying the list should go beyond memorization tasks to the use of word exploration activities reinforcing the pattern being taught. Some experts advocate the use of a personalized spelling list, which are chosen by the child. When they are learned, the words are added to personal dictionaries.

When studying words from a list, there are certain practices which have been supported by research as valid methods of study. Giving a pre-test and having children correct their own pre-test, and using the look-say-cover (the word or eyes)-write-check are spelling list practices supported by research (Fitzsimmons & Loomer, 1977). Gentry and Gillet (1993) suggest using the look-say-cover-write-check method even when using the word wall or dictionary for spelling a word. In this way, there is visual-discrimination practice occurring, instead of merely copying a word. Presenting words to be studied in a paragraph or sentence instead of a list, writing words several times each, and writing words in the air are practices not supported by research (Fitzsimmons & Loomer, 1977).

Teachers should be careful they do not do away hastily with unsupported practices in their spelling programs without replacing them with plenty of practice in word study, reading, and writing activities. Having a spelling list and writing the words five times each may be better than no attention to word study at all. It is advisable for teachers to begin slowly, implementing word study and exploration activities as they are able to gather the materials.



## Appendix C



### **The Basics**

#### **More Than Memorizing Lists**

Good spelling is not the product of lists, tests, and other memorizing techniques. Lists and tests are not harmful; in fact they can be helpful. The problem is they often receive all the credit as the means to good spelling acquisition. Spelling is more complex than just memorizing a compilation of letters. Spelling is uniquely tied and integrated into reading and writing. Write Bean and Bouffler (1987) "'teaching' spelling is as much about 'teaching' reading and writing as it is about spelling per se" (p.5). The stronger the reading and writing program, the stronger the spellers. The foundation for a successful spelling program is a strong reading and writing program where children are engaged in daily, purposeful reading and writing activities.



## **Building a Strong Reading and Writing Program**

It is important to convey to children reading is pleasurable and functional. The same is true for writing. It must be shown children can communicate through written language in unique ways. Teachers read to them as much as possible and try to introduce them to every great children's book ever written. Children are exposed to poetry, newspapers, magazines, letters, journals, ads, plays, commercials, and environmental print. They are encouraged to write stories, plays, poems, in journals, ads, posters, letters, and informational articles. Through extensive reading and writing experiences, students are invited to explore language and experiment with its uses.

The foundation for a strong reading and writing program is student-centered. How can students be convinced reading is fun if worksheets and flashcards are emphasized instead of real stories? How can a love of writing be instilled when they are made to write words five times each and then put them in a sentence? Adults like to write down thoughts and dreams, observations and anecdotes. Children do too. They can be taught how to spell through real reading and writing experiences. One of the best ways I've found to encourage real writing and reading is through Writer's Workshop.



Writer's Workshop is an allotment of time several times each week for students to be in direct control of what they write about. They get to be real writers, publishing and sharing their work!

Learning to read and write can be pleasurable even when children are just learning how to read and write. Even if it took twice as long to learn to spell through reading as opposed to direct instruction in spelling, writes Krashen (1989), "then I would still prefer comprehensible input: an hour of pleasure reading is far preferable to thirty minutes of drill" (p.454).



## **Encouraging Growth in Spelling**

Central to a successful reading and writing program in the early grades is the encouragement of young writers. It is discouraging to have to spell every word correctly in a story (so I will write a shorter story with words in it I already know how to spell). It is discouraging to have to correct every error in spelling when the rough draft of the story is completed (so I will ask my teacher and whoever else is around how to spell the words so I won't have to correct them later). Teachers can encourage young writers by allowing them to invent spellings and help them spell correctly only for publication. Inventive spelling not only encourages children to take risks in their writing, it also helps them to develop auditory discrimination skills useful for spelling and reading words.

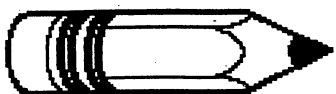
Gentry and Gillet (1993) suggest two ways to introduce and encourage children to invent spellings for words they don't know how to spell. First draw an imperfect picture (to show adults also take risks) and write a sentence underneath it using inventive spelling, sounding out the words as you write. Tell them this is what they should do if they are unsure of the spelling. Write the sentence correctly underneath the invented spelling and explain this is how an adult would write the words, just as they are printed in books. Finally, print the sentence again, this time with a beginning sound or two, and a line to represent the rest of the word. Tell the children this is what writers do when they are unsure how to write the rest of the word.

The other illustration by Gentry and Gillet for introducing inventive spelling involves the whole class trying to spell an unknown word. As the group is thinking of words for a class story, have a child suggest a word

for the story. Have all the children use inventive spelling to try to determine how the word could be spelled. After they have recorded their inventive spelling on a piece of paper, begin to make a partial list of the suggested spellings on the board. Make encouraging remarks about all the invented spellings, and their usefulness when authors are trying to get ideas written down before they're lost. Finally, write the correct spelling above the list.



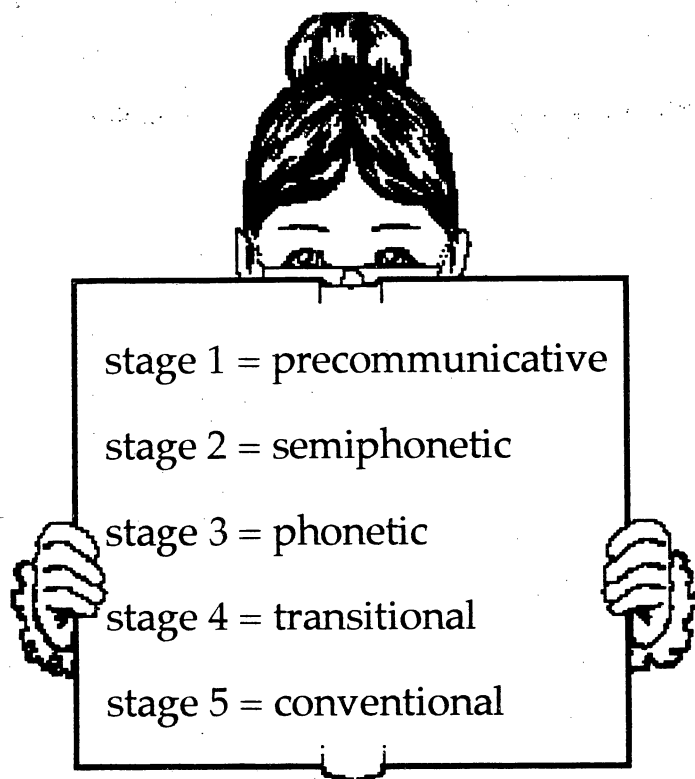
## Appendix D



## Word Exploration Activities

The activities in this section are designed for young children exploring written language. Some are designed to encourage experience with letter and sound relationships, and to develop auditory and visual discrimination. Others are designed to build awareness of word families, patterns, and structures of words. The more opportunities students are given to explore language the more they will know about its structures and patterns. The following activities can be used in small groups (such as a **reading group** working with the teacher); they can be **centers** for individuals or groups; or time can be set aside for a word exploration time a couple to several times a week where children use the activities in a **workshop-type atmosphere**.

Following each activity are the suggested levels of spelling development for whom the activity would be most beneficial. See the introduction section (Appendix B) for an explanation of the different stages.





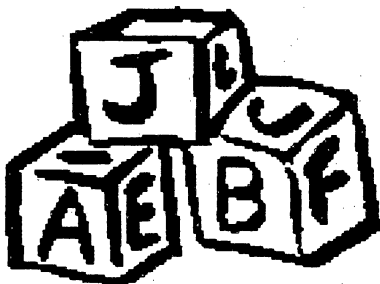
The following activities were adapted from Richard Hodges' Learning to Spell (1981):

**Beginning Sound Rummy:** Using picture cards made from magazine cut-outs, create a game for 2 to 4 players. Make three sets of four cards having the same beginning sound. Deal seven cards to each player. Players draw one card from the face-down pile or the last card to be put down on the discard pile and then discard one card. The object is to collect a set of four cards with the same initial sound. The first player to complete two sets of four cards is the winner.

In another variation, this game could be played as "Go Fish." Five cards are dealt each player. Players can ask one other at a time if they have a card with a particular beginning sound. As long as a player continues to receive cards, his turn continues. When others do not have the cards the player seeks, he is told to "Go Fish." He chooses a card from the face-down pile and play passes to the next person.

small group (2-4 players)

stage:2,3.



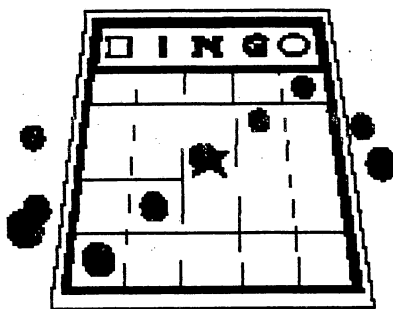


**Beginning Sound Bingo:** Create bingo cards 5 across and 5 down using photocopied arrangements of the cards from the activities above or create bingo cards another way. Make the middle space "free" and pass out markers. Ask children to place markers on the squares according to your direction. For example, "Place your marker on a square which has a picture with the same beginning sound as sun."

There are two other versions of this game to play as students grow in first sound competence. In one, give markers which are little cardboard pieces with the printed beginning letter on them. When they are told, "Put your marker on the picture whose beginning sound is the same as fox," they will be placing a cardboard piece marked with an f on the bingo square. In the other version, consumable versions of the bingo cards are used. The child writes the first letter sound right on the square as the words are called.

whole class, small group

stage: 2,3



**Rhyming Word Sponge Activity:** This rhyming game can be a sponge when there are few extra minutes; or it can be a small group activity. A student thinks of a word and gives clues in the following manner: "I'm thinking of a word that rhymes with rest; and it's something in which a bird lays its eggs." Whoever guesses nest goes next.

whole class, small group, pairs

stage: 2 and up

**Tongue Twisters:** Take time now and then to introduce students to new tongue twisters. Not only will they have fun with this, it also reinforces first letter sounds. Challenge them to write their own tongue twisters. As an extension, publish a book of tongue twisters.

whole class, individuals center activity stage: all

Atlanta, Antarctica, Apple Valley, Yukon, New York, Kentucky, Yellowstone, Edinburg, Georgia, Amsterdam, Maryland, Detroit, Texas, San Antonio, Oregon, Nepal, Louisiana, Annapolis, Seattle, 4

**Endless Chain:** is a good small group activity, and also as a car game on a long trip. It reinforces beginning and ending sounds and reinforces rules like silent e. The first player names a word. The next player must think of a word that begins with the last letter of the first person's word, and so on. In our family, we add a challenge by requiring the word to be a city, state, or country. In the classroom this game can take on many variations including writing the word on the board, restricting the words to a certain subject, or making it competitive with teams, playing until one team cannot think of a word beginning with the required letter.

pairs, small group, whole class stage: 3 and up

**Twice as Nice:** Present students with a rime (ending part of a word) and ask them to form as many words as possible (on paper or orally) using the rime and single consonants or clusters. To make a game, provide a time limit and make teams. Thus, -ace becomes race, lace, space, trace, place, grace, and so on.

individual, small group, whole class stage: 3,4

**Hanky-Panky:** This activity is challenging and should be reserved for those students who are working in the transitional to correct stage, and have the patience to do some thinking! A hanky-panky is a compound word or phrase whose two parts rhyme: *hodgepodge, blackjack, nitwit*. (Gentry and Gillet call them "Hinky Pinkies" if they are two syllable and "Hink Pinks" if they are one syllable.) Students invent their own hanky-pankies and make up questions to help others figure them out. For example, "What is a hanky-panky for a cat who eats too much?" A fat cat. The question can also be reversed, "A reader feeder is found in a library. What's its name?" A book.

whole class

center activity

stage: 4,5

**One Doesn't Fit:** Reinforce beginning, ending, or medial vowel sounds by creating a picture deck of cards of familiar objects cut and pasted from magazines. Group into sets of three and ask children to find the two from the set that share the same beginning sound (or ending sound, or vowel sound). Example : boy, bath, and apple for the initial sound of b.

individual, small group

center activity



stage: 1,2,3

Play **Rummy** using a deck of cards like that in "**Cluster Crazy**" on page 49. Two or more may play by dealing out all the cluster cards and drawing ending cards from the face-down or discard pile. In yet another version, cluster and ending cards can be mixed in together and dealt out together, creating the possibility of making words immediately.

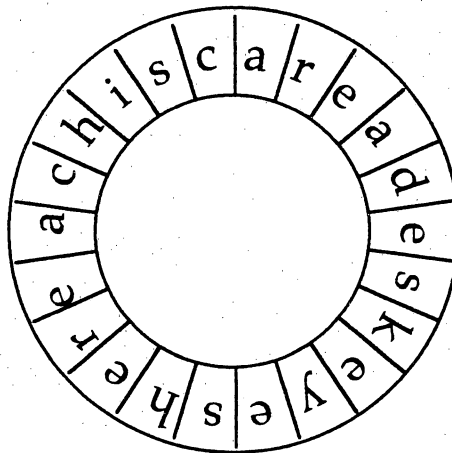
individual, small group (2-4 players)      stage: 3,4

**Around the Word:** Make a circle of words like the one shown below. Students move in a clockwise direction, starting anywhere and making as many words as possible without skipping letters. Words must be two letters or more. Older children might enjoy making their own circles, so have blank ones at a center for them to create.

individual

center activity

stage: 4,5



**Word Trail:** Children are challenged to make new words by changing the vowel sounds in small, three to four-letter words. For instance, *map* becomes *mop*, and *rim* becomes *ram*. Challenge older students to get from one word to another in as few changes as possible. For instance, from *cat* to *dog* is quickest if you go from *cat* to *cot*, and then from *cot* to *dot* to *dog*. Clever word pairs become part of the game, as well:

boy to bay to ban to man

work to pork to port to pert to pest to rest

individuals, whole class center activity stage: 3, 4, 5

**Square Word Hunt:** Create a square divided into nine, sixteen, or twenty-five boxes. Fill the squares with letters as shown below, or make your own. Children find as many words as possible by moving in any direction, but not skipping over boxes. This challenging activity works best with older children, or those who are working in the transitional or conventional stages.

individual, small group, whole class stage: 4, 5

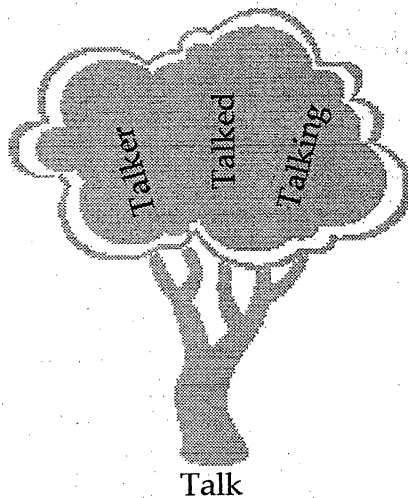
center activity

p	m	r
d	a	e
e	t	t

**Roots and Branches:** This game develops awareness of root words and their endings. Make a deck of cards with root words and three cards with that root word and its endings. For instance, *talk, talking, talked, talker* becomes a family. Make thirteen families of cards. Deal out all the cards to the players. They sort their cards into families and lay them down. A completed family can be called a "book." Taking turns, they ask other players for cards in the families they're collecting. Their turn stops when someone does not have the card they seek. Play then passes to the next person. The game ends when all the families have been completed. The winner is the one who has completed the most families.

small group

stage: 3,4,5



**Cluster Crazy:** Make cards for some or all of the following clusters:

bl	cl	gr	sc	sl	spr	sw	wh
br	dr	gl	sch	sm	squ	thr	
ch	fl	pl	scr	sn	st	tr	
cr	fr	pr	shr	sp	str	th	

Make cards for some or all of the following rimes:  
ack, ain, ake, ale, am, ame, and, ank, ap, at, ate, ave,  
aw, ay, aze, eat, ell, end, est, id, ill, ide, ile, imp,  
ime, ine, ing, ink, ip, ipe, ir, ire, ive, ock, od, ool,  
oop, op, ope, ore, own, ug, um, ump, unk, ur

Make a joker, or wild card to be used anywhere.  
Individuals can play a game of solitaire. Cluster cards (onsets) are placed face-up. The ending cards (rimes) are placed face down and are drawn and placed with any beginning cluster. In order to make as many words as possible, the student may move endings to other beginning clusters.

individual, small group (2-4 players)      stage: 3,4



The following activities were adapted from Learning Phonics and Spelling in a Whole Language Classroom (1993) by Powell and Hornsby.

**Rhyme Reading :** This idea comes from Mary McDonald and is described in Powell and Hornsby's (1993) book. First, make three large copies of a well-known rhyme. Using the first copy, teach the rhyme with movements, clapping, chanting, or whatever is appropriate for the rhyme. Begin each session chorally reading the rhyme together. Track the words of the rhyme with a pointer to build sound-letter correspondence. Cut the second copy of the rhyme apart into sentence strips for the students to rebuild the rhyme later in a center or with the whole class. The third copy can be cut apart into single words for word study. Children can study beginning sounds, ending sounds, clusters, rhyming words, and word families.

At a center, they can sort for any or a number of these criteria. Second grade students can be challenged to write their own versions of the rhyme, using the original as a frame and filling in with their own ideas.

If these activities are done for more than one rhyme, as Mary McDonald does, a rhyme book can be made for each child by pasting a smaller copy of each rhyme in their own book to take home and read to their parents.

whole class

center activity

stage: 3,4,5

**Homophone Pairs:** After noticing, studying, and recording homophones on a wall chart, present this game as a center or small group activity. Homophones are recorded individually on cards. Cards are dealt out to each player. Each player in turn chooses a card from the player on his or her left. Eventually, pairs of homophones will be collected and should be laid down as they are collected. The first player to empty his or her hand is the winner.

small group

center activity

stage: 3,4,5

**Silent Letters:** This awareness activity builds a framework for knowledge of silent letters. Have students look for words with silent letters in books and in their own writing. Have them record their findings, then begin to compile the list on a large class chart according to pattern:

knee	write	comb	sign
know	wrong	lamb	design
knit	wring	bomb	benign
knife	wrinkle	limb	resign

Calling attention to, and discussing origins of these words can help students to remember how to spell these words. Discuss how silent letters can change when more syllables are added (or taken away). For instance, the *g* in *sign* is no longer silent when *sign* becomes *signal* and *signature*.

whole class

stage: 4,5





The following activities were adapted from The Spelling Book: Teaching Children How to Spell, Not What to Spell (1998) by Gladys Rosencrans:

**Cluster Relay:** Divide the class into approximately 4 teams. Give each team a space at the board and write a cluster (rime) at the top of each space. On your signal, the first person on each team writes a word on the board using their cluster. Members of the team each take a turn at the board to write a word using their team's cluster. Help from team members is encouraged. The winning team is the team which finishes first and whose members have each written a word. Examples of cluster relay words:

Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Team 4
<b>eam</b>	<b>ile</b>	<b>ate</b>	<b>ous</b>
beam	file	rate	mouse
stream	mile	plate	adventurous

Choose clusters according to the level of difficulty desired for the students. Easier clusters are recommended for stage 3.

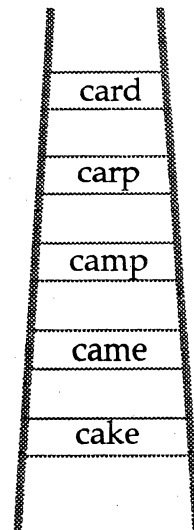
whole class, small group

stage: 3, 4, 5

**Letter Ladder:** This game is similar to Word Trail, but played as a game with the whole class divided into teams. Give each team a four or five letter word and write it above their space on the board. Members then race up to the board and each, on their turn, changes one letter of the previous word. The winning team is the team who finishes first, each of its members having written a word. Example: The word might be cake. Player 1 changes *k* to *m* to make *came*. Player 2 then changes *came* to *camp*, and so on.

whole class,  
pairs in small games

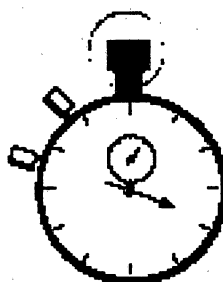
stage: 4, 5



**Make Words:** Teams are given an envelope of small cards on which clusters (onsets and rimes) are written. Given a time limit (say, two minutes), teams must form as many words as possible. This game can be played with the whole class divided into small teams, or within the reading group in pairs, or at a center, using an hourglass sand timer for individuals.

whole class, small groups, individuals stage: 3,4,5

center activity



**Check it Out:** This is a quick activity where students can be "word detectives." Suggest a rule or generalization, or take the observation of a student, and investigate whether or not that rule can be said to be generally true. For example, a student might observe that *c* always says *k* when followed by an *a*. Enlist the help of your students to search through their own writings and books to find words with that pattern. Within the course of sharing what they've found, they may also stumble upon the soft *c* rule (*c* says *s* when followed by an *e, i, or y*).

whole class

stage: all



The following activities were adapted from Gentry and Gillet's (1993) book Teaching Kids to Spell.

**Beginning Sound Brainstorming:** Ask students to think of words which begin with the sound they are currently working on in class. Write the words on an easel or board as they are dictated. Have children underline the letter or letters which make the beginning sound. Say the words, emphasizing the beginning sound.

whole class

stage: 1,2

**Picture Sorts:** Make a deck of picture cards cut from magazines, or purchase picture cards from school supply or toy stores. Begin with only two or three beginning sounds and sort out the cards with those sounds. Distribute the cards among the class. Choose a picture card for each particular beginning sound and place them in the pocket chart or on the wall. Ask students to place their cards under the cards which share the same beginning sound.

whole class, small group

center activity

stage:2,3

**Oral Matching:** Say a word with the beginning sound the students are studying. Ask students to say a word which matches in beginning sound. A variation on this idea is to have the student give a word, the teacher gives a word in response; then the student must decide whether or not the beginning sound matches.

whole class, small group

stage: 1,2

**Same or Different:** As words are said pairs or in threes, have students indicate whether or not the words have the same beginning sound (ending, or medial sounds, depending on what skill is being practiced) by showing a certain colored card (green for same, red for different) or with a simple hand sign.

whole class

stage: 1,2,3

**Syllable Clap:** Help children hear the parts of words by teaching them to clap with the syllables. First say the word in a normal way, then segment the word with a clap on each syllable.

whole class

stage: 1,2



**Hide-a-Word:** Using one or more sentences cut into words, arrange the words in the correct order in a pocket chart. As students cover their eyes, turn one word card over to "hide" it from the class. When they uncover their eyes, they try to guess the hidden word. The one who guessed may be next to "hide" a word.

whole class, small group

stage: 1,2,3

**Sound Clap:** Once they understand parts of words through syllable clap, introduce students to listening for individual sounds. Say the word normally, then slowly with a space between each sound. Clap on each sound. Keep the words short and with easily identified sounds. In another version, use counters on the desk to represent each sound heard.

whole class

stage: 1, 2

**Big Book Sharing:** Choral reading or shared reading helps children put sound sequences with words. Point to the words in a big book as the children read aloud together. As they begin to know the book well, challenge them to read some of the words individually as they are singled out.

whole class, small group

stage: 1,2,3

**Voice Pointing:** This is the same as what some call "tracking." Children have their own copy (in a book, or photocopied version) of the story. As the children hear the story, they point to the words. Another version which really perks their enthusiasm for tracking is to give them each a fake pointy-nailed Halloween finger to put on.

whole class, small group

stage: 1,2,3

**Stand-Up Sentences:** Print a familiar sentence from one of the big books or stories the class has read together on a tagboard sentence strip. With the children watching, cut apart the sentence into words, including one card for the period. Have students put the sentence back together again standing up in front of the class at first, and later at a center, stored in a plastic bag. Be sure to note the important job of the period.

whole class, individuals

center activity

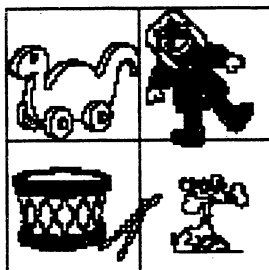
stage: 1,2,3

**Cut, Paste, and Label:** Have children cut out and paste pictures from magazines with the same beginning sound. The pictures could be mounted on individual papers for each child, or on a class poster. As a class, or small group, label each picture.

whole class, small group **center activity** stage: 2,3

**Draw and Label:** Instruct children to fold a piece of paper into fourths to create four boxes in which to draw four pictures, all with the same sound on which the class is currently focusing. Encourage them to label their pictures. Display them for reference.

whole class **center activity** stage: 2,3



**Picture and Word Sort:** This makes a good center. There are some which are commercially made and available for purchase in school supply stores. Using picture cards and matching word cards, have children match the picture with the word. Program the backs of the cards for checking.

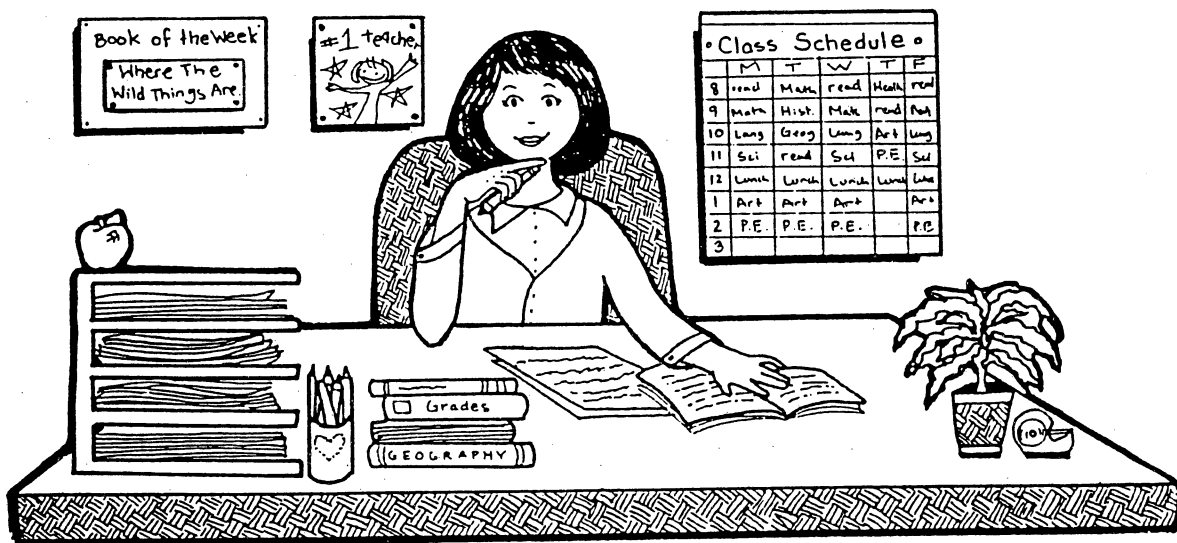
small group, individuals **center activity** stage: 2,3

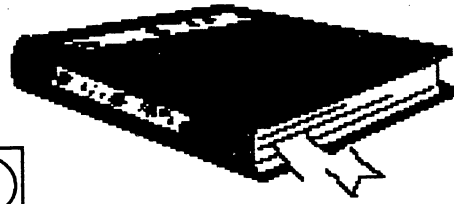
**Rhyming Word Sorts:** Provide children with picture cards of words that rhyme. Hold up a card (or cards) as an example of the rhyme they are to compare to their own. Have children place their picture cards in the pocket chart under the rhyme it matches. This can be a center with cards programmed on the back with matching symbols for correct answers. Commercially-made versions are currently available in school supply stores.

whole class, individuals **center activity** stage: 2,3

**Making Words Tactile:** Have children practice word families and clusters with letters cut from sandpaper, textured wallpaper, or felt; or give them opportunities to work with some of the commercially prepared magnetic, linking, or foam letters. This is a good center activity.

small group, individuals **center activity** stage: 2,3





## DictionaryActivities



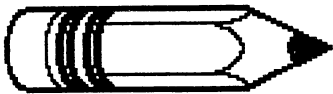
The following alphabetizing activities were adapted from Richard Hodges' Learning to Spell (1981):

The dictionary is the ultimate tool for sound spelling. Therefore, it is beneficial for students to become familiar with the dictionary, beginning with developing the skill of putting words into alphabetical order.

**Alphabetizing Activities:** (1) Have the class alphabetize themselves according to the first letter of their first name. (2) Have students name as many ice cream flavors (toys, car models, flowers, animals, sports, or other categories students suggest) into alphabetical order. (3) Alphabetize concrete objects from around the classroom. (4) Make a set of cards with words which are familiar to the students. Deal five cards to each player. Players lay their cards face up on the table in the order they were dealt. In turn, each player takes a card from the face-down pile and replaces one of the cards on the table. The object is to be the first one to get all five cards in alphabetical order.



## Appendix E

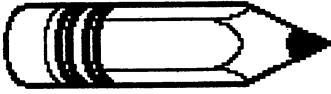


### Assessment and Evaluation of Spelling

In order to assess children's spelling ability, their spelling attempts must be evaluated within the context of real writing, like that of their journal. Spelling is a constructive process. The objective is to know how students are *constructing* words. Do they have knowledge of first sounds, ending sounds? Do they use a vowel in each syllable? A spelling test of unseen, unmemorized words can also be given. This measure would be testing their spelling ability; because they will be using their knowledge of spelling patterns and generalizations learned so far. Some teachers give "dictation" frequently as a tool to build auditory discrimination and sound-letter relationships, and to assess levels of development in spelling.

The most important component of testing students on their ability to spell is what will be done with the information acquired. As the results of a test of unmemorized words or their own writing are studied, it is good to have in mind what is expected of the students at that point in time. If they are expected to have ending sounds, then there should be evidence of ending sounds. If two or three students are consistently not using ending sounds, then that would be an area to focus on with those students. In other words, *the assessment should be guiding future instruction in spelling*. Are they using in their own spelling what has been taught so far? If so, that is an area which does not need more direct instruction, only occasional review.

## Appendix F



### **The Parents' Role in Spelling Acquisition**

Since most teachers still see spelling as a skill to be acquired, separate from writing, it's not surprising that parents do too. Spelling has for so long been separated from writing, that parents expect to see a weekly list of words-to-be-learned. Not surprising, as this is a practice most teachers and parents grew up with. It is often the only area of their child's education in which parents have some partnership. The weekly spelling test has become valued to the point that parents spend the (often little) time they have quizzing their children on the words from the spelling list instead of reading to or with them. If it comes down to a question of not enough time, what will they choose....something that isn't very noticeable (like whether or not they read with their child) or something obvious (like the outcome of the spelling test)? I wager most parents choose to spend their time on the spelling list. What a difference it would make in time spent reading at home if there was a reading passage sent home every week followed at the end of the week by a reading fluency test!



Parents can make a difference in their children's ability to acquire spelling skills, probably more than they realize. By strongly encouraging and praising early attempts at writing; and by accepting approximations toward correct spelling, parents are giving their children the confidence they need to grow as writers. What else can parents do to help with spelling?

1. Instead of always requiring conventional (correct spelling), find ways to praise the children's approximations toward correct spelling.

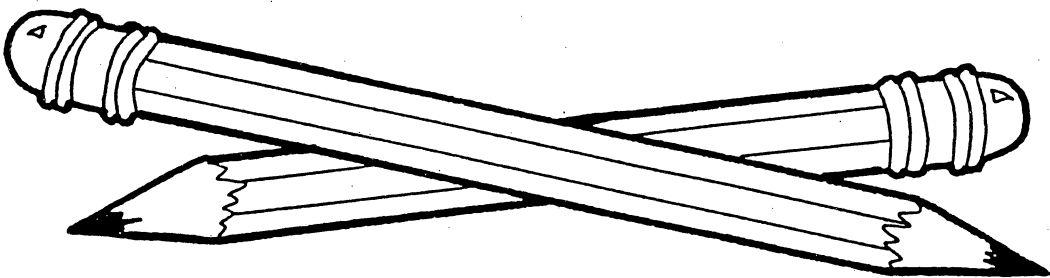
2. Don't always spell words for the children. Encourage their growth in sound-discrimination by occasionally asking, "How do you think *ride* is spelled? That's good, you heard the *r* sound at the beginning of the word. Yes, there is a *d* in *ride*. Great job!"

If what the children are writing requires correct spelling, still have them say the sounds and/or letters they hear, then help them to correctly spell the word. Every bit of practice listening and figuring out what sounds they hear and how to represent them with letters helps!

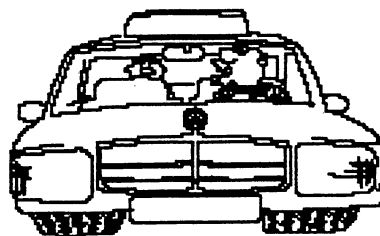
3. Encourage them to write their own thank you notes and letters to friends and relatives. If necessary, translate at the bottom in conventional spelling.

4. Use opportunities like car rides and long lines to play word games. (See following section.)

5. Read to them constantly. Allow them to read or "read" to others. Be supportive of their efforts to learn written language. Point out words they know how to read and/or write. Children are often not aware that they know how to read or spell a word until it is pointed out!



## Alphabet Car Games



**1. Words in Order of the Alphabet:** Taking turns, everyone thinks of a word that begins with the letters of the alphabet, in order of the alphabet. For example, the first person says *apple*, the next says *boat*, the next says *car*, and so on. Playing this game is how my son learned the sound for *ch*. It was my turn and my letter was *c*. I said, "*church*." He said, "*Church* doesn't begin with *c*. That 's not the sound *c* makes." This was a wonderful opportunity for him to learn the sound for *ch*. He thought it was a great trick and never forgot the sound for *ch*. Playing this game, he also learned soft and hard *c*, soft and hard *g*, and some digraphs and silent letters.

**2. Words in the Order of the Alphabet by Categories:** As children grow in proficiency naming words in order of the alphabet, try a category from which all the words must come. Categories I've used and had fun with are: animals, places, Christmas, Halloween, food, and rhyming words (first word begins with the letter of the alphabet and the second word rhymes.)

**3. In this game, called *Endless Chain* by Hodges (1981),** a word is thought of, which could be from a category, like places. Children then must think of a word which begins with the last letter of the word just said, and so on. My husband and I have played this game with our son using cities, states, countries, and continents. (It's amazing how many end with an *a*!)

## References

Bean, W., & Bouffler, C. (1987). Spell by writing. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Beers, C., & Beers, J. (1981). Three assumptions about learning to spell. Language Arts, 58(5), 573-580.

Bolton, F., & Snowball, D. (1993). Ideas for spelling. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Calkins, L. (1994). The art of teaching writing. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Clark, L. (1988). Invented versus traditional spelling in first graders' writings: Effects on learning to spell and read. Research in the Teaching of English, 22(3), 281-309.

Cunningham, P. (1996). What kind of phonics instruction will we have? In R. Robinson, M. McKenna, & J. Wedman (Eds.) Issues and Trends in Literacy Education. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

DiStefano, P., & Hagerty, P. (1985). Teaching spelling at the elementary level: A realistic perspective. The Reading Teacher, 38(4), 373-377.

Fitzsimmons, R., & Loomer, B. (1977). Excerpts from spelling research and practice. Woburn, MA: Curriculum Associates.

Gentry, R. (1987). Spel...is a four letter word. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Gentry, R., & Gillet, J. (1993). Teaching kids to spell. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Goodman, K. (1996). On reading. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Graves, D. (1983). Writing: Teachers and children at work. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Henderson, E. (1990). Teaching spelling. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Henderson, E., & Templeton, S. (1986). A developmental perspective of formal spelling instruction through alphabet, pattern, and meaning. The Elementary School Journal, 86(3), 305-316.

Hodges, R. (1981). Learning to spell. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills and the National Council of Teachers of English.

Holdaway, D. (1979). The foundations of literacy. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Horn, E. (1954). Teaching Spelling. Washington, DC: National Education Associates.

Krashen, S. (1989). We acquire vocabulary and spelling by reading: Additional evidence for the input hypothesis. The Modern Language Journal, 73(4), 440-464.

Krashen, S. (1993). How well do people spell? Reading Improvement, 30(1), 9-20.

McCracken, M., & McCracken, R. (1996). Spelling through phonics. Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada: Peguis.

Nagy, W., Herman, P., & Anderson, R. (1985). Learning words from context. Reading Research Quarterly, 20(2), 233-253.

Powell, D., & Hornsby, D. (1993). Learning phonics in a whole language classroom. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Read, C. (1971). Preschool children's knowledge of English phonology. Harvard Educational Review, 41, 1-34.

Rosencrans, G. (1996). The spelling book: Teaching children how to spell, not what to spell. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Smith, F. (1994). Writing and the writer. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Smith, F. (1997). Reading without nonsense. New York, NY: Teacher's College Press.

Temple, C. Nathan, R., Burris, N., & Temple, F. (1988). The beginnings of writing. Newton, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Templeton, S. (1979). Spelling first, sound later: The relationship between orthography and higher order phonological knowledge in older students. Research in the Teaching of English, 13(3), 255-264.

Weaver, C. (1994). Reading process and practice: From socio-psycholinguistics to whole language. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Wilde, S. (1992). You can read this! Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Zutell, J. (1996). The directed spelling thinking activity (DSTA): Providing an effective balance in word study instruction. The Reading Teacher, 50(2), 98-108.