APPROACHES TO TEAHCING SPELLING

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Language and Spelling:

The basic entity in written language is called 'grapheme' which is defined by Crystal (2003) as 'the smallest unit in the writing system capable of causing a contrast in meaning' (p. 257). writing system is the overall system of written languages in which two distinct meanings has been attributed to the term 'writing system' by Cook and Bassetti (2005), the first general meaning refers to "the terms 'scripts' and 'orthography'" (p. 3). Hence, the writing system can be described in this sense as 'a set of visible or tactile signs used to represent units of language in a systematic way' (Coulmas, 1996, p. 560). Orthography is defined by Cook and Bassetti (2005) as 'the set of rules for using a script in a particular language' (p. 3). In addition script is defined by Coulmas (2003) as 'the graphic form of the units of a writing system' (p.35). In The second meaning, the two terms of 'orthography' and 'writing system' overlap as the former is described as 'the set of rules employed in a particular language for spelling, punctuation etc.,' (Cook and Bassetti, 2005, p. 3). Thus, in this sense the term of 'writing system' refers to a specific language such as 'the English writing system.' Nevertheless, some researchers, for instance, Sampson (1985) and Sproat (2000) state that the two terms of 'orthography' and 'writing system' might be utilised interchangeably.

Languages are written in a variety of scripts, some of them share the same script, whereas, some others use different scripts to represent their writing systems. As Sampson (1985) states that 'one language may be written in different scripts, and the same script may be used to write different languages' (p. 21). Script is not a language itself but it means for visualising examples of a language (ibid). Catach (1988) cited in Perfetti and Charles (1997) defines scripts as a 'sets of discrete, articulated and arbitrary signs, which enable any constructed message to be transmitted without necessarily using natural means' (p. 243). Another term which is used as a unit in language systems is a letter which is related to one of the units of script in which together form 'the elements of various writing systems' (Sampson, 1985, p. 22). Hence alphabetical languages can be written in each other's scripts or letters but not with symbolic languages i.e.English can be written in Arabic or Russian letters but it is unacceptable to be written in Japanese or Chinese scripts as the scripts of the latter two

languages are called 'characters'. According to Baron (2005) and Birch (2007) all languages of the world can be fallen into three categories in terms of their writing systems which are logographic, syllabic and alphabetic systems. An example of the logographic writing system would be the kanji system in Japanese in which 'one symbol represents the concept or meaning of an individual word or part of a word' (Birch, 2007, p. 16). Whereas, syllabic writing exemplifies a system in which the 'symbols represent the syllables of the language' (Lado, 1964, p. 18), however, when one symbol links to one sound, this is known as an alphabetic writing system. English practises alphabetic writing systems according to the above description.

Types of spelling mistakes

Wing and Baddeley (1980) and Cook (2004) identified some types of spelling mistakes which are as follows:

1- **Addition (insertion):** when an extra letter are added to a word such as <verey> for <very> or <caluture> for culture

2- **Omission:** when a letter is deleted or missed from a word such as <diffrent> for <different> and <blak> for <black>

3- **Substitution:** when a letter is replaced by another one, such as<picnik> for <picnic>

4- **Transposition:** when two neighbouring letters transposed, such as <tow> for <two>

5- **Grapheme substitution:** "involving more than two letters but only a single cause, for example when an equivalent according to sound correspondence rules is substituted for the usual form, as in 'thort' for 'thought'" (Cook, 2004, p. 124)

6- **Word space:** when a compound word were separated with a space or where not word space left between words, such as <break fast> for <breakfast> and <alot> for <a lot>.

7- **Capital:** when a letter is capitalised unnecessarily or in a sentence or a when required capital letter is written in lower case for instance, <i> for <I> or <My? for <my> in a sentence.

8- **Other:** when an erroneous word cannot be classified under one particular given category or it has more than one type of spelling mistake in it such as <colegge> for <colleague> or <langueg> for <language> as the latter contains both omission and substitution spelling error in it.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO TEACH to CHECK SPELLING MISTAKES?

Encouragement, enjoyment and understanding are as important in spelling as they are in reading. Encouragement and enjoyment come from success, and a feeling of being in control of the words. Children who feel in control of only a few words may limit their writing to what they think they can spell. Conversely, poor spellers who have something they urgently want to say may find that no-one can read it, not even themselves. Against this background, the teacher's task is more complex than just to tell the child which spellings to learn. In this chapter we shall consider seven aspects of the teaching of spelling:

1. Deciding which words the child needs to learn next.

2. Planning help in spelling.

3. Helping the child to develop a personal strategy for learning spellings.

4. Teaching both regular words and less predictable words in such a way that they are retained.

5. Encouraging the child to take responsibility for making sure spellings are correct.

6. Helping the child to work towards independence in spelling by teaching the use of dictionaries and word lists.

7. Games and activities for learning spelling.

A strategy for learning to spell is not usually acquired incidentally. It is safer to teach it. Traditional methods like copying out the word a set number of times, or spelling out in letter-names, are inefficient for some people. Most good spellers know when a word looks right, but some go by the feel of their hand writing the letters in sequence (the kinaesthetic approach). Others remember some rules, whether conventional or personal. Different combinations of approaches may be used by one person at different times.

A Multisensory Approach

This means that the learner concentrates every possible faculty to imprint the spelling on his memory. It requires an act of will, and a belief that the effort is worthwhile. Because it seems laborious to learn at first, it is important that the teacher praises every small advance in acquiring the technique. It is helpful to the learner if the teacher explains:

"Let's try to learn this word in every way we can possibly think of. You can learn it with your ears, when you listen to yourself pronouncing the parts separately: with your voice, when you spell it out. Your hand can learn it when you write, and your eyes can be a camera to take a

picture of it for your brain to remember. You can look for the bit of the word that tries to trick you, and make sure it doesn't. Let's see what your best way is of learning to spell." (Demonstrate each process.) The following may be followed:

• Look at the word, read it, and pronounce it in syllables or other small bits (re-mem-ber; sh-out).

• Try to listen to yourself doing this.

• Still looking at it, spell it out in letter-names.

• Continue to look, and trace out the letters on the table with your finger as you spell it out again.

• Look at the word for any 'tricky bits'; for example, gh in right. (Different pupils find different parts of a word 'tricky'.)

• Try to get a picture of the word in your mind: take a photograph of it in your head!

• Copy the word, peeping at the end of each syllable or letter-string.

• Highlight the tricky bits in colour (or by some other means).

• Visualise the word again.

• Now cover it up and try to write it, spelling it out in letter-names.

• Does it look right?

• Check with the original.

• Are there some tricky bits you didn't spot (i.e. the parts that went wrong)?

• Repeat as much of the procedure as necessary to learn the word thoroughly.

This is an exceedingly lengthy routine. Encourage those who are having some success to slim the procedure down, so that they use only the parts relevant to themselves. This may take a little time to discover, but by thinking about the procedure, and experimenting to find out which parts are useful, pupils are more likely to develop a learning strategy suitable for themselves.

Testing spellings

Tests can give children an aim and a time limit and, if used supportively, can lead to a real sense of achievement. Of course, the ultimate test of success in learning to spell is when children have occasion to use the target word in spontaneous writing. It is disappointing to teacher and learner alike when, despite conscientious effort, the child fails to remember the

spellings correctly in continuous writing or, worse, does not achieve full marks in the test. There are several ways of approaching this problem.

To test children on their individual spellings arrange for them to dictate the words to each other. The teacher can then spot-check progress or mark the tests. Children may enter the score on their own bar-charts and follow their weekly progress, without undesirable competition. Some children may learn five spellings, and some twenty, but they can all aim to achieve 100% of their target. With this kind of testing, the child and you can personally select the words to be learnt by any individual, with or without reference to a spelling scheme.

Irregular words

Learning to spell cannot follow a completely phonic programme. Children need spellings right from the beginning that are either exceptions to general rules (e.g. they, people) or follow complex rules (knew, brought). It is advisable for children to learn these words as soon as they begin to make much use of them, since they will otherwise be in danger of consolidating wrong spellings. Some teachers like to compose a list of commonly used words which they teach systematically, and have available to the children for quick reference. Where children persistently misspell the same word, or confuse reversible letters like b and d, they can be given a 'search card' as illustrated below. This is stored in a pocket inside the cover of the child's exercise book, or some other handy place. After finishing a piece of writing, the child turns detective, and searches every line to find any examples of these words which have managed to misspell themselves. This approach makes correcting spelling into a game. It shifts the blame for the misspelling from the child to the word. It then becomes more acceptable to the child to try to control the 'uncooperative' word, rather than feel defeated yet again at having committed the same old misspelling.

LEARNING TO USE WORD LISTS AND DICTIONARIES

Independence in spelling is achieved when the writer uses word lists and dictionaries successfully. The irony is that the writer must know enough about the beginning of a word to locate it in the dictionary, and poor spellers find this difficult. Picture dictionaries and topic-based word books are useful in the early stages, but their limitations are obvious. Many of the most difficult spellings are of words that cannot be illustrated. Learning to use a dictionary requires more than knowledge of the alphabet and the ability to put words in alphabetical order. There are many skills to be learnt, but these can be made enjoyable if they are

incorporated into games. The steps in learning how to use a word list or dictionary are set out below.

Learning to use a dictionary

The child can:

1. Recite the alphabet.

2. Read the names of all letters, and write the letter for each name.

3. Locate each initial letter in an alphabetic list quickly, looking for example towards the beginning for D, the end for T and the middle for O.

4. Quickly locate known words in a simple word list; for example, in the 500 Word Book, find you, have, went, going.

5. Put short lists of recognised words into alphabetical order, starting with easy lists with different initial letters.

6. Locate known words in a bigger dictionary.

GAMES AND ACTIVITIES FOR LEARNING SPELLING/CHECKING MISTAKES

Once introduced, many of these activities can be supervised by other adults or children who have already firmly acquired the skill.

A set of small wooden letters, or letters printed on stout card, is needed for many of these games. Some teachers have found it helpful to paint the vowels red, to distinguish them from the consonants.

1. ANALYSING AND BLENDING THE SOUNDS IN WORDS

This is a spelling version of the word building game in Chapter 6 (page 95).

Procedure: 1. Select a limited number of letters according to the words you are going to build. (For the example below, you need a, b, c, g, h, i, m, n, o, p, r, t, u) Check that the child knows all the sounds. If not, teach them with the flip-card alphabet

2. THE MEDIAL VOWEL SOUND GAME

Materials

A set of the five vowels, either plastic letters, or written on cards:

A set of pictures illustrating one-syllable words, each with a medial vowel, for example:

cat, bag, hat, van, bat.

bell, pen, bed, hen, net.

pig, fish, zip, witch, pin.

cot, dog, box, mop, frog,

bun, cup, gun, nut, sun

Procedure

Here are the vowels. Tell me the sound of each one.

Vowels are very important, because each word has to have at least one.

Let's look at the picture cards, and say what each one is.

We are going to say the word for each picture card and put it in the column under the vowel we can hear in the middle. Let's see which vowel can win by getting five pictures first. So hen is made of h-e-n. It has e in the middle, so it goes in the e column, etc.

3. LEARNING ABOUT SYLLABLES

At Stage One Reading, children learn to blend syllables spoken by the teacher into words. For spelling, they need to be able to analyse the words they want to write into syllables. Analysis of words into syllables is a more advanced skill than recognition of words pronounced in syllables by someone else. It may therefore require more preliminary work before the concept is grasped.

2. The procedure is to make a three-letter word like cat, and by changing one letter at a time, make a succession of new three-letter words. Start by varying the first letter, and when you are sure that the child has mastered the process, switch to changing the final letter. Proceed to changing the medial vowel only when the child is fluent with consonant changes, for example:

I am making a word that I think you know. Can you tell me what it says?

Yes, cat. Which letters have I used for cat?

Yes, c-a-t (using sounds, not letter-names). Can you hear that cat is made of c-a-t?

Now I'm going to change the first letter to h, and that will make..?…. Yes, hat.

Tell me the sounds in hat.

Show me how you can change it back to cat.

Now jumble up the letters, and see if you can make cat again.

For syllables, collect a list of names from the class or school with varying numbers of syllables. It is not necessary at this stage to go into technical details about syllable boundaries. Start with a polysyllable, if possible the child's own name, or that of her friend. Show her how to count the parts or beats in the word

4. THE NEWSPAPER GAME

The aim of this game is to raise awareness of grammatical usage and homophones, or difficult letter groups in common words, for example,

1. Grammatical Usage—where/were; there/their.

2. Question words beginning with wh—where, when, why, what, who, whether.

Materials

Sheets from newspapers or newspaper magazines, one for each child.

A highlighter pen or bright fibre tip for each child.

The game is best played in a group of two or three children.

Procedure

1. Decide on your target spelling combination.

2. Make sure that the news-sheets contain at least some examples of the target spellings!

3. Ask the children to highlight as many target examples as they can in a given time. You can give extra credit for reading the words in context at the end.

4. Players then check with each other that all the highlighted words conform to the set target. If you haven't time to discuss their findings with the children they can be asked to write two or three sentences using and spelling them correctly, either copying from the newspaper, or in their own words. The newspaper examples provide a model, so there must be no wrong usages or misspellings of target words.

The **advantages** of the game are:

- Children enjoy being 'detectives'.

- They see the words in context.

- They learn to use print as a resource for correct usage.

- The resources are easily available

5. DICTIONARY GAMES

All the skills of learning to use a dictionary benefit from separate practice, away from the pressure of needing to find a particular word in the middle of writing a sentence. Once introduced, most of the games do not require teacher supervision. As far as possible, materials for the games include the dictionaries and word lists in use in the classroom. This should prevent difficulties with transferring the skills from practice to the real situation.

5. ACTIVITY FOR ACCURATE LOCATION OF INITIAL LETTERS

Materials

Small lower case letters on card or of wood, one of each.

Procedure

1. Two children, or a child and an adult can play.
2. The child arranges the letters, in alphabetical order, in an arc on the table, so that each letter can easily be reached.
3. Each player takes it in turn to name a letter, which the other player has to touch as quickly as possible.

   Variations

   1. The player closes her eyes, and her partner tells her when she is 'warm' (close to the letter).

   2. The partner says a word, not a letter, and the player must find the initial letter.

   Extension

The game is played with a publication such as the 500 Word Book, which has one page for each letter, and a thumb index for easy location. It can be further extended by using a thicker dictionary in which to locate initial letters.

6. LOCATING KNOWN WORDS IN A BIGGER DICTIONARY

Many children would benefit from practice in this skill. It has the advantage, once the procedures have been learnt, of not needing direct teacher supervision. The teacher can introduce the game to large groups. When working without the teacher, two or three children can play together, taking it in turn to be the Question Master.

Materials

- Identical dictionaries for each member of the group.
- Pencil and paper.
- Procedure

First make sure that everyone understands how to find the head words (target words). They are usually printed in bold characters. The Question Master writes down a word for the players to locate. When playing in a group, the players write down the word and the page number. Those who locate it first help the rest to find the word. When only two players are involved, writing down is less necessary.

Progression

If the dictionary has 'catch-words' printed at the top of each page, indicating the first or first and last words on the page, these are a good starting point. Words near the top of the page, and in the first column of a double-column page, are easiest to find.

Variations

Find the first word beginning with….

What word comes after ----?

Find the word beginning ho…meaning an animal you can ride on.

What page is it on?