Workshop Material

Transformations and Spelling

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Context for teaching spelling

As part of becoming literate, students have to develop competence in both spelling and decoding. The more automatic these skills become, the more cognitive ‘space’ students have to engage with the meaning of their reading material and the content of their writing.

The spelling segment of the Accelerated Literacy teaching sequence provides the context for teaching these fundamental skills. Spelling follows literate orientation and transformations in the teaching sequence and is therefore taught from familiar text. Spelling competence in turn assists the development of reading through increased competence with decoding. There is also feed back between spelling and writing as increased spelling competence assists with fluent literate writing. Writing also provides a context for practice of spelling skills that leads to further development of spelling competence.
The transitional stage of spelling development

As part of learning to become proficient spellers and decoders, all students pass through a developmental stage that is labelled ‘transitional’. Students in the early years of school have to negotiate this stage as they develop literacy competence while students who are considered to be weak spellers are generally fixed at the transitional stage (eg Gentry, 1984).

**What is a transitional speller?**

Temple, Nathan, Temple and Burris (1993) for example, point out that transitional spellers are ‘moving beyond the intuitive one-sound one-letter spelling’ of earlier developmental stages and attending to the letter patterns they observe in standard spelling. An example, below, shows a student attempting to work through difficulties at this stage of development.

```
Dear Santa,

Can I please have a cabbage patch baby OK, and I want the other present to be a surprise OK? I like surprises. I love you. Have a very happy Christmas. You are the best. I hope you know that Santa. You do? OK. I am going to give you a healthy snack – apple and banana, orange, salad and water. That is yummy, isn’t it. From Erin
```

The text reads: *Dear Santa, Can I please have a cabbage patch baby OK, and I want the other present to be a surprise OK? I like surprises. I love you. Have a very happy Christmas. You are the best. I hope you know that Santa. You do? OK. I am going to give you a healthy snack – apple and banana, orange, salad and water. That is yummy, isn’t it. From Erin.*

Negotiating a pathway from strict attention to letter/sound correspondence in phonetic spelling through the transitional stage to correct spelling requires students to shift their orientation towards the recognition of common visual patterns. As they begin to master these visual patterns they learn to control both correct spelling rules and the exceptions to these rules. They know, for example, that ‘baby’ ends with ‘y’ even though it sounds like ‘e’ and that ‘very’ ends with ‘y’ not ‘ey’, while ‘healthy’ ends with ‘y’ not ‘ie’ despite that letter combination sounding like ‘e’. As they come to control
these patterns students begin to overcome the difficulty of selecting between different sound representations that characterised their attempts as phonic spellers, ie. ‘Why do you spell right this way instead of rit?’

Temple, Nathan, Temple and Burris propose that movement into standard spelling requires the learner to address patterns that are many and complex. They add further that it takes time, curiosity and much exploration for a student to master these patterns. Thus, movement through the transitional stage requires a high level of confidence to fuel the high degree of risk taking and trial and error that the shift away from simple letter sound correspondence inevitably entails. Moreover, underlying the ability to take risks constructively is a requirement that learners have access to an analytic and systematic approach to spelling and retaining knowledge about spelling.

Effective teaching at this stage of spelling development is important for all students, not just those with literacy difficulties.

When the Accelerated Literacy teaching sequence is implemented with students in their first year of school, the approach to spelling uses familiar texts to teach lower order spelling skills while actively and deliberately planning to guide them through the transitional stage of spelling.

However, careful teaching is also particularly critical once students begin to lose confidence in their ability as spellers.

**When things go wrong in the transitional stage**

Unfortunately, weak spellers possess neither the confidence for risk taking nor an analytic approach to support their efforts. Assistance to them therefore requires the building of both confidence and a systematic approach to dealing with higher order patterns in words.

An added problem is that by the time they are identified as weak spellers, they have become confused and bogged down in the midst of this shift away from simple letter sound correspondence. Typically, the strategies they employ are not constructive and do not lead naturally to progression towards competent spelling. Consequently, students who have experienced spelling failure and who have developed an image of themselves as poor spellers require careful ’scaffolding’ to help them reframe their damaged self perception as learners and to encourage them to take risks as they deal with spelling in the future. They also require careful scaffolding to lead them away from limited non-productive strategies to more analytic and constructive approaches.

This set of notes looks particularly at strategies for teaching students to adopt a constructive approach to learning throughout the transitional stage. It takes as its point of departure an assumption that spellers typically need to begin their learning with words taken from familiar and readable text. To teach spelling in context we must do more than put words in sentences or paragraphs. The common activity of making students put words into sentences or of teachers presenting words in sentences offers little help to the student who cannot read them. Words that students have to struggle to decode are virtually impossible to learn because the students have little mental capacity left to deconstruct the word effectively.

When we want to teach a student to spell a word it must be in a strong base (such as a familiar reading text) from which the student can be assured of stability. Weak
spellers are then supported by having the familiar text to return to if they need to check either what the word is or how it is spelt.
How to scaffold spelling

Start with literate orientation and transformations
In order to provide the strong base of familiar reading referred to above, carry out literate orientation before beginning to teach spelling in the teaching sequence.

Transformations then provide an opportunity to discuss the passage of text further and provide an avenue for word recognition activities. Without a reasonable certainty that students recognise the words for spelling out of context, the activities will have limited success.

Identifying words in and out of context
Once students can read a text accurately and fluently and can recognise words in the text both in and out of context, this text becomes a resource for teaching them how to spell the words. This ability to spell these words confidently will then become a necessary resource in teaching the students about writing and assisting them with decoding. If the students have difficulty identifying words from the text out of context you will have to return to Transformations activities and which focus on identifying and discussing literate text features.

However, there maybe some students you wish to check before moving on to spelling. The following suggestions for exploring in context/out of context competence for individual students may prove useful for this.

Checking the word recognition of individual students
Making certain that the student can identify words in the text could include the following activities.

Recognising words in context
Check that the student can identify the words on the page. Point out a suitable sample of words eg. You could say “Can you find the word that says, ‘once’”. Alternatively, point to a word in the text and ask if the student can remember what it is.

If a student cannot recognise a word in context easily or has to read up to it or have the teacher read up to it for them then that word would have limited usefulness as a spelling word.

Students are supported in this activity by being able to check words they are not sure of in the familiar text therefore they are never overloaded. If they are unsure of a word, re-reading the text will provide them with the answer. However this is an indicator that the student needs more preparation so return high order literate orientation and transformations if this occurs.

Recognising words out of context
Write suitable words from the text on cards as for transformations and play ‘My pile, your pile’ with the words until the student can recognise them automatically. ‘My pile, your pile’ involves the student turning over a pile of words one at a time. If he or she knows the word it goes on his/her pile if not it goes on your pile.
NB If the student has difficulty recognising a word out of context, allow him/her to return to the original text and identify it in context. If the student cannot identify the word in context teaching spelling from these words will have limited success.

**Identifying words out of context**

Once the student is able to read the text accurately and fluently and recognise the words in and out of context, the text you have been using can then be employed to teach the student to identify patterns of letters in words.

Teachers may have games they use to foster word recognition. Tic, tac, toe is one such game. Take a selection of words (about 10) and turn them face down on the floor or on a table. A chosen student points to the words at random saying, “Tic, tac, toe, here I go, where I stop I do not know.” At ‘know’ the student turns over the word he or she was pointing to and names it. If he or she does not know the word they can find it in the text and read up to it.

NB: It is not absolutely necessary to check that every student can recognise every word before working on it in class for spelling. However, bear in mind that the activity will be less successful with students who don’t recognise the words out of context.
How to work on spelling in the Accelerated Literacy teaching sequence  

This strategy supports reading as well as spelling competence. Students with literacy difficulties usually possess fundamental knowledge of most basic letter/sound associations taught commonly as ‘phonics’. However, they have difficulty moving beyond this rudimentary knowledge to the more sophisticated relationships between sounds in speech and spelling patterns.

Procedure

From a transformations select one of the words to start spelling work. For example, you might choose ‘teaching’. Write the word on a piece of card which is big enough to cut up and manipulate.

Tell the student you are going to show them a good way to remember the word and begin to ‘chunk’ the word (instructions for deciding on which ‘chunks’ to use in order to segment a word are given at the end of this section). In this instance, (ie. teaching) you would start by cutting off the suffix. If the student does not share previous work on ‘ing’ you would say something like:

‘I’m going to cut off the ‘ing’ because it’s a common letter pattern on many words - give examples, eg. talking, running etc.

Cut off the ‘ing’

\[
\text{teach} \quad \text{ing}
\]

Cut out the ‘t’ to separate the ‘t’ from the frequent pattern ‘each’.

\[
\text{t} \quad \text{each} \quad \text{ing}
\]

Ask the students to tell you, or tell them, what each chunk says. There is room for practice variety here by, for example, turning the cards over and then having the student turn them back face upwards and saying each chunk as they do so. In your discussion you could also employ ‘Glass Analysis’, eg. ‘What sound does this letter pattern make?’ ‘What letter pattern makes this sound?’

If you wish you could separate the ‘ea’ and the ‘ch’ and discuss the sounds they make - but put them together before spelling practice.

Ask the students to write the word on a white or blackboard, and then check it, referring to the pattern as she or he checks. When spelling, the student should be aware of ‘t /each /ing’ not ‘t /e/ a /c /h /i /n /g’.

You might like to introduce the writing in a more supportive way – by covering up individual card ‘chunks’ and asking the students to write those individual chunks before you ask them to write the whole word.
Encourage the student to say the word in chunks as he or she writes it. You may need to show the student how to do this.

You are helping the students to be able to "see" or visualise that word in their minds. Note that many good spellers write a word to check its spelling - they are checking whether it looks right.

**Joint reconstructed writing**

Once the students can confidently write many of the words from the text correctly it is time to put them back into context by using the 'joint reconstructed writing' strategy. Joint reconstructed writing is a strategy where teacher and student jointly reconstruct the text they have just studied together in Transformations. Usually the text will be one you have used for finding patterns of letters in words.

The spelling then becomes a joint co-operative process where the students and teacher work together to reconstruct part of a text. Through this writing process the students become totally familiar with every facet of the text i.e. the complete meaning, the spelling and punctuation. In the absence of overload the students are able to begin to develop decoding competence.

For example, in the Roald Dahl text *Fantastic Mr Fox*, you could use

*Boggis was a chicken farmer. He kept thousands of chickens. He was enormously fat. This was because he ate three boiled chickens smothered in dumplings every day for breakfast, lunch and dinner.*

for one session of joint reconstructed writing. In this session, in addition to spelling, you could focus on how to write a description that influenced the emotions of readers with being enormously fat not being unpleasant as much as the way (or the reason why) Boggis became enormously fat.

**Procedure**

Explain that you are going to work like Roald Dahl on writing about Farmer Boggis, one of the nasty farmers in *Fantastic Mr Fox*. You are going to use his actual words to write about him.

Remind the students that you are going to do this writing together so you want them to wait and work together even if they know the words very well.

The writing would usually be done in books or on paper in preference to whiteboards or blackboards as a record of the students’ work. Because you work together and the passage is well known there is little likelihood of the students making mistakes and losing confidence.

Ask if anyone can remember how Roald Dahl started to write about Boggis. When someone says ‘*Boggis was a chicken farmer.*’ reconceptualise or ask students if they know why he started like that. It is a point where handover of the discourse can take place. You could reconceptualise by saying, ‘Yes, he states who the character was as well as telling us about his job. Let’s write ‘*Boggis*’ first. That’s who the author describes, isn’t it. It’s not a very polite way to talk about Farmer Boggis is it and gives us another hint that he is not very popular. Remember we have to have a capital letter to start the sentence and also for his name. What do we write first? That’s right ‘B’. What is the next chunk? Yes, ‘ogg’. And what is the last chunk? ‘is’ so let’s write it
in its chunks.' Continue with each word. If you know that students are very familiar with a word, give them a short time to write it first. If any student is not sure, then they can wait and do it with you.

Make sure that the text is not where it can be copied letter by letter but that the text is somewhere that you can pick it up and refer to it if anyone forgets the wording. Watch for students attempting to copy words letter by letter and encourage them to work on writing the words in chunks and say it in chunks under their breath as they write.

Proceed to write the whole passage discussing, meaning, author’s purpose, punctuation, writing conventions and spelling as you reconstruct the passage.

At the end of the passage, ask each student to read the passage to you when they show you their work.

Never:

- Allow students to copy letter by letter.
- Spell words for students so they can write them down letter by letter
- Let learning to spell become unmediated rote learning
**Steps for chunking**

1. Consider compound words
   - pigpen → pig - pen
   - playmate → play-mate

2. Next consider syllables
   - complete → com//plete
   - admit → ad//mit
   - appear → app//ear

3. Consider prefixes and suffixes
   - remove → re//move
   - going → go//ing
   - advancement → ad//vance//ment
   - dogs → dog//s

4. Identify onset/rhyme pattern in core elements. The onset/rhyme pattern is identified by cutting the core word element before the first vowel.
   - play → pl/ay
   - mate → m/ate
   - com//plete → c/om//pl/ete
   - a//ppear → a//pp/ear

5. To reduce the letter patterns further you can cut after the vowel unit
   - p/eace → p/ea[ce]
   - Or if you recognise a common consonant combination you can cut out between consonants
     - s/ingle → s/ing[le]
     - f/ierce → f/ier[ce]
Definitions of terms often used in discussions about spelling

**Orthography**
The ways letters represent the sounds of language in a spelling system.
The study of correct spelling as it has come to be established by usage.
The area of language study – letters of words and their sequence.
The English orthography uses an alphabet of only twenty-six letters (graphemes) while there are forty-four distinctive sounds (phonemes) in English oral language.

**Etymology**
The study of the origins of words or parts of words and how they have arrived at their current form or meaning.

**Morphology**
The structure of words in a language including patterns of inflections and derivation.
The study of the structure of words in a language.

**Phoneme**
A speech sound that distinguishes one word from another, eg. The sounds d, and t in ‘kid’ and ‘but’.
A phoneme is the smallest phonetic unit.

**Phonetic**
Representing the sounds of human speech in writing.

**Decoding**
The term decoding is used in its broadest sense to describe the process of translating written text into spoken words.
Assessment

The following example of assessment uses *Rosie’s Walk* by Pat Hutchins.

**Word Recognition**

- Leave the book close at hand and turn to some cards with words from the story written on them eg. Rosie, hen, walk, went, pond, dinner, for, the.
- Place the word cards for the test in a pile face down between you and the child.
- Explain that you are going to play “My Pile, your Pile.” All the words the child knows will be in his/her pile and the rest will be in your pile.
- Ask the child to turn over the first word.
- If they can tell you what it is, tick the column ‘Out of context’ and proceed onto the next word (the child keeps the word they know).
- If the child does not know the word, open the appropriate page of the text and ask him/her to find the word. Ask if they know what the word is now.
- If they know the word after they have found it in the text tick ‘In context’.
- If the child cannot find the word in the text say, ‘I’ll read this sentence here and you see if you can tell me where the word is.’
- If they can identify the word now, tick the ‘Read to’ column.
- If they can’t do this, read the text to the child and point to the words as you read it. You may need to read the sentence more than once and point to the words as you read.

**Spelling**

- Take the words the child could recognise out of context.
- Use a small blackboard or whiteboard and explain that you are going to do some spelling.
- Ask the child to see if they can write the word, eg. Can you remember what this word was? Yes, Rosie. Do you think you could write Rosie?
- If the child says yes say, ‘OK, can you write it on the blackboard (or whiteboard).’
- If the child says no, say, ‘That’s all right, let’s leave that one.’
- Alternatively, if you have time:
  - Explain that you are going to make the word easier to spell and cut it into chunks, eg. R/os/ie. Say each chunk aloud then and look at it carefully. Then see if the child can write the word.
  - With words the child can write, ask some questions about the spelling of the word, eg, with went, say ‘You’ve written that word very well. Can you tell me what this letter says? (point to the w). Then ask, ‘Can you tell me what sound the e n t makes?’
• Repeat this process (Glass analysis) with the next word if there is one. (Only do this with words the child can spell correctly.)
Word recognition and spelling assessment sheet:

Name:

Date: ______________ Year level: ___________

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<th>Words</th>
<th>Out of context</th>
<th>In context</th>
<th>Read to</th>
<th>Spelling</th>
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Books used in this PD session

Details of books used

Passages referred to in sessions

Rosie’s Walk
Rosie the hen went for a walk,

My Mob Going to the Beach
One day the grown-ups said we were going to the beach.
We would take some blankets, a couple of billies and some tea and sugar.
We were going to sleep there too. Just for one night though.
We didn’t have a car so we would have to walk.

The Bad Kangaroo
There was a small kangaroo who was bad in school.
He put thumbtacks on the teacher’s chair.
He threw spitballs across the classroom.
He set off firecrackers in the lavatory and spread glue on the doorknobs.
Fantastic Mr Fox
Boggis was a chicken farmer.
He kept thousands of chickens.
He was enormously fat.
This was because
he ate three boiled chickens
smothered in dumplings every day for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Lockie Leonard Human Torpedo
The first day Lockie Leonard saw this town, it was raining.
The old family Falcon had been loaded down like a refugee boat
as they rolled into this little place fresh from the city.
The whole family tried to be cheerful about it, but the place looked awful.

Island of the Blue Dolphins p. 101
The giant had not moved.
He was floating just below the surface of the water
and I could plainly see his eyes.
They were the size of small stones
and stood out from his head, with black rims and gold centres and in the centres a
black spot,
like the eyes of a spirit I had once seen
on a night that rain fell
and lightning forked in the sky.
References
Gentry, J.R. *Developmental Aspects of Learning to Spell*. Academic Therapy. 1984

Etymology
Many websites, as well as dictionaries and other books, provide etymological information. Two informative websites include http://www.etymonline.com and http://www.thefreedictionary.com.
Discussion questions for activities

Session 1 Transformations

My Mob Going to the Beach
Discuss

1. How does the teacher encourage and ensure the participation of the students?

2. How do the students respond?

3. What metalanguage is used in the discussion about the text?

4. How does the teacher encourage handover?

Rosie’s Walk
Discuss

1. How does the teacher keep very young students engaged in the activity?

2. What information does the teacher keep before the students as the focus of her teaching?
The Bad Kangaroo
Discuss

1. How many ways does the teacher provide opportunities for students to read and re-read the text?

2. What is the point of turning words over and asking students to identify them?

3. What is the point of separating the words of the sentence?

Fantastic Mr Fox
Discuss

1. What was significant about the words the teacher turned over?

2. How many opportunities for participation in the lesson does the teacher provide?

3. What examples of ‘handover’ can you observe?
Lockie Leonard Human Torpedo

Discuss

1. How does the teacher work to engage students in discussion about the meaning of the text?

2. What activities does the teacher use to involve students?

3. What is their response?

Island of the Blue Dolphins

Discuss

1. What do the students know about the passage at this stage of the lesson?

2. How does the teacher engage the students in the activity?

3. How well can the students read and discuss the wording of the text?
# Session 2 Spelling

Identifying stages of spelling

Sample 1

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**Teachers Use Only**

- Use box for correction of words (√ or ×)
- Insert total words correct in this box

3/15
Sample 2

Band 2 | ESL L3-4 Spelling Activity: Oral Dictation

1. who
2. what
3. friend
4. teacher
5. afternoon
6. because
7. together
8. hert
9. again or again
10. Sura
11. Their
12. Tellafon
13. tomrrow
14. Strat
15. betafal

Teachers Use Only
- Use box for correction of words (√ or x)
- Insert total words correct in this box
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<tr>
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**Note:**
- Use box for correction of words (✓ or ✗)
- Insert total words correct in this box: 2/15
### Band 2 | ESL L3-4 Spelling Activity: Oral Dictation

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**Teachers Use Only**
- Use box for correction of words (✓ or x)
- Insert total words correct in this box

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Analysing Year 5 spelling
To analyse the spelling examples (above) try to think about spelling the way the student who produced the spelling may have thought.

1. What stage of spelling did the student appear to be negotiating?

2. What strategy or strategies did the student use when spelling an unknown word?

3. How successful were their strategies?

4. Were the student’s spelling strategies productive or dysfunctional (were these strategies leading to the students becoming a correct speller or not)?

5. At year 5 level are these students progressing well or are they fossilised or stuck in one stage in a dysfunctional way?
**Rosie's Walk**

Watch video clip h/en and observe how the teacher:

1. Discusses features of the word
2. Breaks (or chunks) it
3. Has students carry out the task

Watch video clip *Rosie the Hen* and observe:

- How the teacher revises the spelling of the individual words ‘rosie’ and ‘hen’ as she places them in context
- Notice how she provides extra support for some students

Discuss

1. How does this teacher scaffold students in the semi-phonetic and phonetic stages of spelling?

2. What spelling knowledge is the teacher drawing on (phonetic, semantic, historical or visual)?

3. How does the teacher reduce cognitive overload for her students?

4. What other words and letters might the teacher work on in spelling lessons?
**My Mob Going to the Beach**

Watch the video clip *My Mob Going to the Beach* and observe how the teacher:

1. Identifies the word
2. Discusses how to chunk it
3. Makes sure the students write the word in these chunks
4. Links the spelling of this word to others

**Discuss**

1. How is this teacher encouraging students to progress to the transitional stage of spelling?

2. What spelling knowledge is being taught?

3. How does the teacher reduce cognitive overload for the students?

4. What other words from this text might a teacher choose for teaching spelling?
The Bad Kangaroo

Watch the video The Bad Kangaroo and observe how the teacher:

1. Identifies the word
2. Discusses how to chunk it
3. Identifies the steps the students go through to write the word

Discuss

1. How is this teacher helping these students negotiate the transitional stage of spelling?

2. What spelling knowledge is being taught?

3. How does the teacher reduce cognitive overload for the students?

4. What other words from this text might a teacher choose for teaching spelling?
**Fantastic Mr Fox**

Watch the video clips of *Fantastic Mr Fox* and observe how the teacher:

1. Identifies the word
2. Discusses its origin and how to chunk it
3. The steps the students go through to write the word.

Discuss

1. What spelling knowledge is this teacher teaching? Why?
2. How does the teacher reduce cognitive overload for the students?
3. What other words from this text might a teacher choose for teaching spelling?
**Island of the Blue Dolphins**

Watch the video clips of *Island of the Blue Dolphins* and observe how the teacher:

1. Introduces the three words from the text that illustrate the same spelling feature (surface, centres, once).
2. Discusses the spelling knowledge that they need to be able to spell each word.

Then (Day 2)

1. Revises the words that teach the ‘rule’ that was taught the previous day
2. Ensures that students carry out the spelling methodically
3. Links the spelling to decoding other words that have the same feature

Discuss

1. What spelling knowledge is this teacher teaching? Why?

2. How does the teacher reduce cognitive overload for the students?

3. How does the teacher link spelling knowledge to decoding skills?

4. What other words from this text could the teacher have chosen for spelling?
Joint reconstructed writing

*Rosie’s Walk, Fantastic Mr Fox, Island of the Blue Dolphins*

Discuss

1. The participation of the children

2. The opportunities for involvement and ‘handover’