6. Effective classroom practices

The following practices and activities are examples which may be used in the classroom to reinforce the four forms of spelling knowledge and encourage students to integrate and use these strategies in the appropriate contexts.

As demonstrated in the pathway on pages 7-15, students at different stages in their spelling development will benefit from an emphasis on different forms of knowledge. Most of these strategies would first be modelled by the teacher, then used in guided practice for groups with similar needs, before students would be expected to use them independently.

Mnemonics

Mnemonics are memory triggers which are useful for learning high frequency words which are difficult to remember, or easily confused with others. Examples of mnemonics are:

> There is **a rat** in sep**arat**e.
> You h**ear** with your **ear**.
> You'll always be my fri**end** to the **end**.
> The Princi**pal** is my main **pal**.

Share some of your favourites with students, encouraging them to use those which help them to remember tricky words. Encourage students to create their own simple mnemonics. Make sure students understand the meaning of the mnemonic, as misunderstanding could cause confusion, especially for ESL students.

Using spell checker software

Model the use of a spell checker with a brief text at the appropriate level. Students can assist in

(a) identifying words which are possible errors

(b) locating and using a spell checker function

(c) discussing the fact that it offers other possible spellings and does not spell the words for you

(d) discussing types of errors which are not "fixed" or recognised by a spell checker, such as:

- words missed because of incorrect grammatical position e.g. *their/ there*
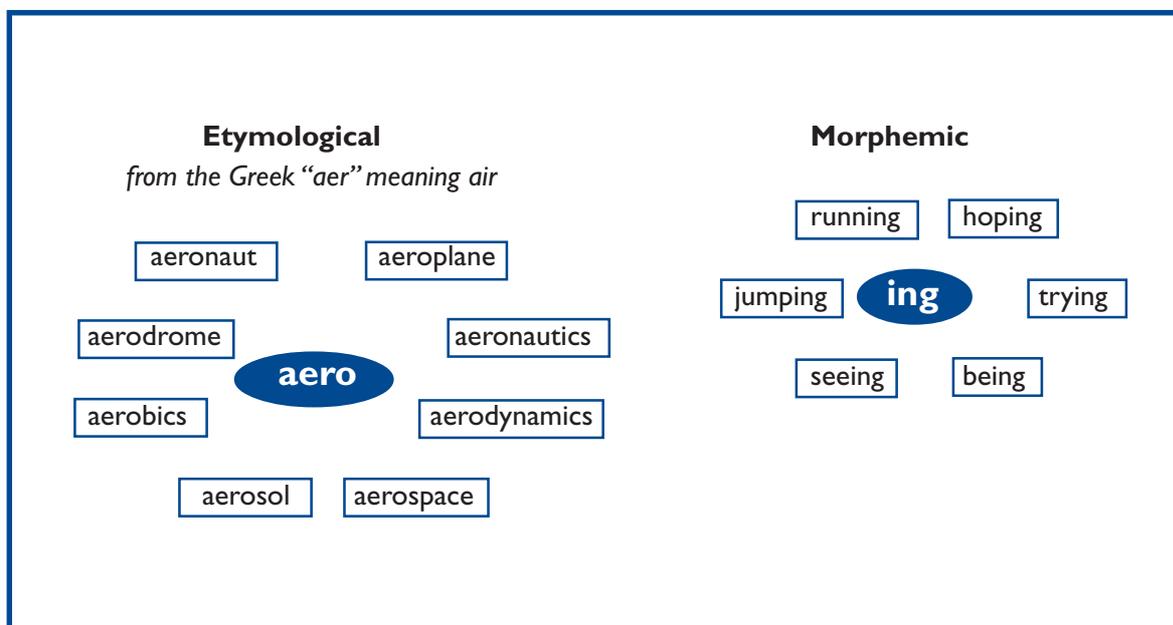
- words not recognised by the computer, so no alternatives are suggested e.g. *Parramatta*

- Americanisations e.g. *center*

- typographical errors e.g. *from/form*.

Emphasise that a spell checker is an extra tool which does not replace the need to have a wide range of spelling knowledge and strategies. Students can then use the spell checker in pairs or individually to assist with editing.

Word webs

Word webs can be constructed around morphemes or topic words, to build up lists of words based on a particular form of spelling knowledge. The webs can be added to over days or weeks, as additional examples are experienced in reading.

For example:

Etymological
from the Greek "aer" meaning air

aeronaut   aeroplane

aerodrome   aeronautics

aero

aerobics   aerodynamics

aerosol   aerospace

Morphemic

running   hoping

jumping   **ing**   trying

seeing   being

This can be adapted at later stages by the use of a dictionary or thesaurus for checking or finding additional words.

Word sort

Use words which have been collected for particular reasons, e.g. KLA topic words, words previously used in guided or independent sessions or high frequency words. Give groups of students a set of word cards to sort into categories, based on the group's negotiated criteria, e.g. number of syllables, initial letter, nouns. All logical criteria are acceptable, and the debate and justification can be added to by the teacher modelling another way that they could be classified.

This strategy can be adapted to reinforce particular forms of knowledge, or left open-ended.

Dictation

Writing a dictation based on previously treated words is one way of assessing memory. It is most beneficial if early feedback is given. The dictation passage can be given when the words are introduced, with the words underlined or in bold, so that meaning within the context of other words can be made explicit.

After writing a dictation, students should be encouraged to proofread their work.

Words to learn

Students can be encouraged to look carefully at a word in order to identify which types of knowledge and strategies would be the most useful in helping them learn to spell the word. This encourages the thoughtful integration of knowledge and strategies.

For example, the following knowledge and strategies would be helpful in learning to spell the following words:

Morphemic understanding of two words making a compound word: **cupboard** = cup + board

Morphemic generalisation of words ending in -y where *y* changes to *i* before an ending is added e.g. happ*iness*, happ*ily*

Phonological knowledge: **kangaroo**

Etymological knowledge from the root "octo" meaning eight: **octopus**

Phonological and visual knowledge to spell *slight*.

WORDS TO LEARN					
Word	Strategies/key features Show date e.g. 12/6/97	1	2	3	T
beginning	double the last letter if they there is vowel before it beginning				
disease	dis/ease it not easy to have a disease				
admittance	ad - mitt - ance				
chocolate	choc o late				

Activities to support phonologic knowledge

The following activities are particularly useful in supporting phonological knowledge.

Alliteration and tongue twisters

Sentences in which all or most words begin with the same sound help students to hear and articulate the sounds in words, for example: *Betty Botter bought some bitter butter*. Old favourites (at an appropriate level) may be used before encouraging students to make up their own. In early stages they may be purely oral.

Rhyming tag

In pairs students take turns to say words which rhyme, e.g. *bear, share, fair, wear*. The player who says the last word is the winner. In later stages discussion could follow as to the different ways in which these rhyming words are spelt, drawing attention to patterns, for example the words *play, stay, weigh, may, gate, train*.

Rimes/digraph matches

Rimes and digraphs are chunks of letters which commonly occur in English words. Familiarity with them supports students in their reading and spelling.

Rimes refer to the last section of single-syllable words, consisting of consonants or consonant blends preceded by a vowel. Many hundreds of words can be built around the most common rimes which include:

ack	*ap*	*ell*	*ink*	*op*
ail	*ash*	*est*	*ip*	*ock*
ain	*at*	*ice*	*ir*	*ug*
ake	*ate*	*ide*	*ight*	*ump*

Digraphs make a single sound from a cluster of two letters. They may include consonants and vowels. Some examples are:

th, sh, qu, ai, au, ay, ea, ie, ei, ph, wh

A game based on making as many words as possible with a particular rime can be modelled by the teacher. Another game involves cards for each rime being shuffled and matched with single letter cards. This assists students to spell by analogy.

For students in later stages, a similar game can be played with digraphs, where students race each other to make up words including a particular digraph, e.g.

th: the, then, there, thick, their, with, froth.

The cards could then be displayed as a class chart of words spelled by using phonological knowledge.

Clapping sounds

Hearing the sounds within words is an important first step for spelling and reading. In early stages, students can be assisted to hear the sounds within words by clapping once for each **syllable** heard, starting with one- and two-syllable words and moving on to three- and four-syllable words, e.g.

pup-py   chil-dren   gar-den   com-pu-ter tel-e-vi-sion

Activities to support visual knowledge

The following activities are particularly useful in supporting visual knowledge.

Compound word snap

Students print components of compound words on cards to be used to play snap in an independent spelling session. Any two words making a compound word can be "snapped". Words should be at an appropriate level and may be from previous modelled or guided sessions. Examples of suitable words are:

back, ground, play, work, home, land, ship, friend.

Playing the game may lead to dictionary checking of those words which are compound and those which are not joined e.g. "home page".

Silent partners

In modelled reading sessions, with text in big books or on an OHP, the teacher masks silent letters in words e.g. *The road si-n was -nocked over*. Students are asked to supply the missing letter or letters that complete the word. Younger students may be given plastic letters to select from in order to complete the words. The teacher can record words on cards for follow-up games in guided and independent sessions.

Crosswords on computer

Using a small number of known words, model how a simple crossword is constructed, including the notion of *down* and *across* words intersecting. Early stages may use pictorial cues; later stages can introduce simple definitions or clues with numbers. Model how to use a simple computer crossword program, built around high frequency words.

In guided sessions, words being treated for a particular form of spelling knowledge can be used by pairs to construct crosswords for other members of the group to solve. Save these on disks as an independent spelling activity for the group.

Have-a-go sheets

These sheets encourage students to take risks but also to reflect on the type of spelling knowledge or strategies useful for particular words. A page is divided into columns as shown in the work sample.

Have-a-go book

The have-a-go book provides a practical link between the student's writing and his or her spelling program.

The first two columns on the page are used by the student and the teacher to attempt the spelling of words and to develop strategies for conventional spelling. The book may be used throughout the day when the student is writing, and when draft copies of writing have been edited and corrections are being made.

After the first attempt the student is encouraged to use the information gained from the spelling conference to write the word with conventional spelling. The third column is used to write the word after checking the conventional spelling with an authoritative source e.g. a book, personal dictionary, dictionary, teacher, peer.

The fourth column is used to record the use of a word in a weekly spelling list.

Example

My first attempt	My second attempt	Spelling checked	Used in LCWC list
thay	they	they	they
sircl_	circl_	circle	
wood	would	would	would.

The teacher may provide support by ticking correct letters or reinforcing useful strategies noted in early attempts. Words may then be included in personal lists.

Look, say, cover, write, check

This approach is useful when particular words need to be learned automatically, e.g. high frequency words, technical terms for a particular topic, or a student's own nominated errors. A folder or pad can be kept with the words on the left-hand side and attempts made on the right side.

The student looks at the word, says it (perhaps s-t-r-e-t-c-h-ing it out to help articulate sounds), covers it up, writes an attempt and then checks carefully against the original. Repeat this process if the word is incorrect the first time.

The "*look, say, cover, write, check*" folder

The left-hand pad of paper is used for the student to enter words to be learnt during the week. The right-hand pad is used for the student's attempts at spelling the words during the week.

The student's writing "errors" (i.e. unconventional attempts) form the basis of the spelling lists. Words from the student's have-a-go-book provide the source of the word bank for making up weekly lists.

Not all errors or words entered in the have-a-go book become spelling words; it is not reasonable always to assume that, because a student wishes to communicate a thought through writing, he or she will also be able to master all the spelling conventions necessary. The degree of difficulty of the words chosen for weekly lists is determined by the student's level of competence and confidence with conventional spelling, not by his or her grade. The teacher and student work together and make decisions about which words to include in weekly lists. A draft list is written out by the student before a conference is held with the teacher.

Patterns

Visualising the shape of a word can help students to remember correct spelling.
First, the teacher explicitly models how box shapes can show the pattern of letters e.g.

letter   happy   birthday

Students can then make up the patterns for words they are currently studying, then match shapes with words in the list.

Activities to support morphemic knowledge

The following activities are particularly useful in supporting morphemic knowledge.

Finding rules

This activity is useful in guided spelling sessions after it has been modelled. Rather than giving students a rule to learn, ask them to attempt a generalisation about a group of words with a similar pattern. Display these generalisations in the classroom and adapt them, as more examples or exceptions are found over time, for example the rule for adding *-ing*: *hope + ing = hoping*.

Compound word race

Pairs or groups race to make up as many compound words as possible from a given base word (noun). Award points for correct words. Discuss compound, hyphenated and separate words and check with authoritative sources. e.g.

> *water: waterfall, backwater, watercourse, watershed, watertight, waterwheel, underwater.*

Activities to support etymological knowledge

The following activities are particularly useful in supporting etymological knowledge.

Mapping words

Students write words related to a topic on small cards and place them on a wall map of the world to indicate their origin. For example, on the topic **food**: *sushi, omelette, quiche, tagliatelle, naan*; or in a discussion of students' names: *Michelle, John, Dimitri, Tran, Kim*.

A dictionary or other reference book, such as a cookbook, could be used as an authoritative source to check spellings.

Derivation charts

After a modelling session where the teacher makes explicit the derivation of words from other languages, set up around the room charts which students may add to as they find suitable words. Words suitable for this activity come particularly from Classical Greek, Latin and French.

For example the Greek root *photo,* meaning *light,* is the base *for photograph, photogenic, photostat, photosynthesis, telephoto.*

The ending -*age* often indicates a French noun e.g. *garage, montage, triage, collage.*

THE GREEK INFLUENCE

GREEK INFLUENCE	MEANING	EXAMPLES
geo	the earth	geology geography geometry
Photo	light	pot phototropism
		photo synthesis
		photo graph
		photometre
		photo sensitive
		photo phobia
		photo copy.

Acronym and abbreviation hunt

The study of acronyms and abbreviations often encourages students' curiosity about the derivation of words.

The teacher can model with traditional examples such as ANZAC, QANTAS and RADAR, then encourage students to look for more current ones such as EFTPOS, VDU, NASA, ASAP and WYSIWYG.

The difference between acronyms and abbreviations, and which are more effective, can be discussed. Look for examples in government departments, media and advertising. Students can make up simple and amusing acronyms for local use.

Students in this Year 1 class use word bank books
and their have-a-go sheets in their writing.